

THE PROPHET MUḤAMMAD AS SEEN BY TIMOTHY I AND OTHER ARAB CHRISTIAN AUTHORS

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The second part of the title 'other Arab Christian authors' may appear to be over-ambitious, although this chapter will, in fact, only be concerned with six authors in addition to Timothy I. They have been chosen for the different attitudes which they represent towards the Prophet Muḥammad.¹

The Seven Authors

We shall make a very short presentation of the seven authors in chronological order, leaving Timothy for the end because, although by date he should come second, he is the most interesting:²

1. Theodore Bar Kōnī from the beginning of the second/eighth century—we shall only touch on him briefly because he wrote in Syriac rather than Arabic;
2. Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī, a Melkite,³
3. and 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, a Nestorian, both from the period of the caliph al-Ma'mūn in the early third/ninth century;
4. the author of the *Kitāb al-burhān* from the end of the third/ninth century, maybe around 267/880. In the manuscripts the work is often attributed to St Athanasius, and likewise in the earlier edition published in Egypt in 1928. Graf suggested that the author was Eutychius, *alias* Sa'īd Ibn al-Baṭrīq, and the editors of the most recent edition in the *CSCO* series published it under his name. However, in the oldest manuscript (*Sinai Arabic* 75) and in

¹ I am much in debt to my colleagues Dr David Thomas and Fr Joseph Buhagiar-Bianco for their help in correcting the English text.

² He is also the best known, though often misinterpreted. The work in which he expresses views on Muḥammad is most complicated to use because we have three versions, one in Syriac and two in Arabic. I have prepared my own critical edition of the Arabic texts before starting this research, and compared the three texts in a synopsis.

³ G. B. Marcuzzo, *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tébériade avec 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Hāshimī à Jérusalem vers 820 (Textes et Études sur l'Orient Chrétien 3)*, Rome, 1986.

the title of an old manuscript (*Sinai Arabic 441*), the work is clearly attributed to Buṭrus al-Bayt Ra'sī;⁴

5. 'Amr b. Mattā, a Nestorian who probably flourished at the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century⁵ (although Graf⁶ locates him in the eighth/fourteenth century), and the author of the *Kitāb al-mijdal*, the first Arab Christian encyclopaedia, in seven parts
6. Ibn al-'Ibrī, the great Syrian author (d. 685/1286), who may have written his Arabic history between 659/1260 and 669/1270, towards the end of his life;
7. Lastly, Timothy I (d. 208/823), the Nestorian patriarch, who debated with the caliph al-Mahdī in the year 165/781.

1. *A Syriac Author: Theodore Bar Kōnī*

Referring briefly to Theodore Bar Kōnī, he makes two allusions to Muḥammad.⁷

One comes in a dialogue with a follower of Muḥammad concerning baptism, where he professes his conviction that Muḥammad could not have delivered messages from God. He asks:

Did Muḥammad, the one who handed his teaching over to you, get it from God or from his own conscience, that he should speak in this way [against baptism]? If it is from his own mind, we shall not abandon the teaching of the scriptures, to follow him and his ideas. And if you say it is from God, then where has this God who has taught this been, to be misunderstood for more than six hundred years after Christ appeared?⁸

Here Theodore means that Christ delivered authentic teaching from God, so if what Muḥammad proclaimed is also authentic the earlier revelation to the Christians must have disappeared and only reappeared six hundred years later. Since such an idea is implausible, what Muḥammad says about baptism must be wrong, with the consequence that the message of Muḥammad could not have been from God.

⁴ See S. K. Samir, "La littérature melkite sous les premiers abbassides", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 56, 1990, pp. 469–86, esp. pp. 483–5.

⁵ See B. Holmberg, "A reconsideration of the *Kitāb al-mijdal*", in S. K. Samir, *Actes du 4^e congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes (Cambridge, septembre 1992)*, *Parole de l'Orient* 18, 1993, pp. 255–73.

⁶ Cf. G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. II (*Studi e Testi*, 133), Vatican, 1947, pp. 216–18.

⁷ See S. Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the *Scholion*: Theodore Bar Kōnī's apology for Christianity", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47, 1981, pp. 158–88, esp. pp. 182–3.

⁸ A. Scher, *Theodorus Bar Kōnī, Liber Scholiorum (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 55)*, Paris, 1910, p. 246.

Theodore's other allusion occurs at the end of the same dialogue: 'If all that you have said is true, why at a certain time did a teacher arise from among yourselves and denounce it all?'⁹ This 'teacher' is Baḥīrā, who in the Muslim tradition is said to have recognised Muḥammad's prophethood, though in the Christian tradition he is said to have given Muḥammad misleading teachings.¹⁰

These are the two allusions to Muḥammad in Theodore Bar Kōnī.

2. *Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī*

Now we move to the Arabic authors. Leaving Timothy to one side for the moment, the first are Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī and 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, who were contemporaries.

Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī was most probably writing in the period of the caliph al-Ma'mūn in the early third/ninth century, as we can deduce from his own work.¹¹

1. Muḥammad is not a Prophet

On the question whether Muḥammad was a prophet, he provides an answer in a number of steps, beginning with a flat denial: *Wa ammā qawluka fī nabīyyika innahu khātām al-anbiyā'*¹² *fa-laysa huwa nabīyyan abqāka Allāh* ('As for your statement concerning your prophet that he was "the Seal of the Prophets", he was not a prophet (May God prolong your life!)'.¹³ Ibrāhīm's answer here is very clear: not only is Muḥamad not the Seal of the Prophets, but he is not a prophet at all (*laysa huwa nabīyyan*).

He repeats this when he is asked by his opponent: *Arāka tujādilunī bi-Qur'ānī. A-fa-tuqirru anna hādihā al-Qur'ān wahyun min Allāhi, anzalahu 'alā nabīyyihi Muḥammad? Qāla al-rāhib: lā la-'amrī! Mā uqirru shay'an min hādihā, wa-lā uqirru anna nabīyyaka nabīyyun* ('I see that you argue with me from my Qur'an. Will you agree that this Qur'an is a revelation from God, which he sent down on his Prophet Muḥammad?' The monk said: 'No, by my life! I do not agree to any of this, nor that your prophet was a prophet!').¹⁴

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

¹⁰ See *EP*, vol. I, pp. 922–3, art. "Bahīra"; 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.

¹¹ See Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, nos 124–5, pp. 328–9.

¹² See Q 33.40, although it says *khātām al-nabīyyīn* rather than *khātām al-anbiyā'*.

¹³ Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, no. 110, p. 321.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, nos 466–7, p. 485.

2. 'He was Only a King whom God Favoured'

So what does Ibrāhīm think Muḥammad was? The answer is given in both passages, immediately after this negative answer, in the same positive way: *Wa-innamā huwa malikun irtadāhu Allāh*,¹⁵ or *Mā huwa illā malikun irtadāhu Allāh*¹⁶ ('He was only a king whom God favoured').

Therefore, for Ibrāhīm Muḥammad was only (*innamā huwa, mā huwa illā*) a king. But, in fact, he was more than simply a political leader, he was one who had approval or favour from God.

The same idea is expressed elsewhere in Ibrāhīm's works. When our monk asks a Jew whether he has found in his Scriptures something announcing the prophethood of Muḥammad, the Jew answers: *Lā wa-Allāhi! Mā lahu dhikrun fī shay'in min al-kutubi, wa-lā li-aḥadin min zar'ihī, wa-lā wahaba Allāhu lahu ghayra al-mulki wa-al-sulṭān*¹⁷ ('No, by God, there is no mention of him in any of the Scriptures, and no mention of anyone from his offspring. God did not grant him anything but kingdom and power').

So we could suppose that there was a special relation between God and Muḥammad, given that God granted him kingdom. But in fact, in medieval theology this is not so, for God effects everything that occurs on earth. He grants victory and power, and it does not mean that the one who is granted victory is close to God. We see this from the fact that among powerful kings were unbelievers and pagans: *Wa-ammā qawluka fī amīri al-mu'minīn: Inna Allāha qad a'azzahu*¹⁸ . . . *fa-qad a'azza man kāna qablahu min al-kuffāri wa-al-mushrikīn. Fa-unzur ilā mulūki*¹⁹ *al-a'ājimi, wa-ilā kufrihim bi-Allāh! Wa-inna Allāha . . . yahfazuhum, wa-huwa mudabbiru khalqihī kayfa aḥabba!*²⁰

3. God Fulfilled his Promise concerning Ishmael through Muḥammad

Our author goes further. This sentence is followed closely by the third step, in which Ibrāhīm says: *Awfā bi-hi wa-ʿalā yadihi waʿdahu li-Ibrāhīma fī Ismāʿīl*²¹ ('He [God] accomplished by him and through him his promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael'); or *wa-tamma bi-hi waʿdu Ibrāhīma fī Ismāʿīl*²² ('By him was fulfilled the promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael'). This is a reference to Genesis 21.12–13: 'But God said to

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 110, p. 321.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 468, p. 485.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 162, p. 347.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 52, pp. 291–3; *ummati al-mu'minīn* must be corrected to *amīri al-mu'minīn*.

¹⁹ I have corrected *maliki* (translated as 'le roi des Perses') to *mulūki*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 110, p. 321.

²¹ *Ibid.*, nos 122–3, p. 329.

²² *Ibid.*, no. 468, p. 485.

Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the boy Ishmael and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named after you. As for the son of the slave woman, Ishmael, I will make a nation of him also because he is your offspring.”²³

So Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī is acknowledging that God fulfilled his promise through Muḥammad. This can be interpreted in a very positive way: Muḥammad is part of God’s plan of salvation.

4. The Qur’an was Compiled by Many Persons

In the fourth step of his answer he refers to the relationship between Muḥammad and the Qur’an.

When asked about the Qur’an, he answers:

*Wa-ammā qawlaka fī al-Qur’ān, fa-innī ukhbiruka anna hādihā al-Qur’āna jā’a bi-hi Muḥammadun wa-katabahu aṣḥābuhu ba’dā mawtihil; wa-asmā’u ba’dihim Abū Bakr wa-‘Umar wa-‘Uthmān wa-‘Alī wa-‘Abdullāh b. al-‘Abbās wa-Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān kātib [or kataba/kuttāb?] al-wahy. Wa-al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf ba’dā hā’ulā’i allafahu wa-rattabahu*²³ (‘As for what you say about the Qur’an, I can tell you that Muḥammad brought the Qur’an, and his Companions wrote it down after his death; the names of some of them are Abū Bakr,²⁴ ‘Umar,²⁵ ‘Uthmān,²⁶ ‘Alī,²⁷ ‘Abdullāh b. al-‘Abbās²⁸ and Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān,²⁹ the scribes of the revelation, and after these al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf³⁰ compiled it and arranged it’).

He is therefore saying that Muḥammad was the author of the Qur’an, and thereby denying that it came from God. But this also means that the Qur’an was not from Satan, as some Latin or Byzantine authors affirmed.

²³ *Ibid.*, no. 126, p. 331.

²⁴ Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13/634), the first Caliph and Muḥammad’s father-in-law, is regarded as the first who tried to compile the Qur’an with the help of Zayd b. Thābit.

²⁵ ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 24/644), the second Caliph, completed the first redaction of the Qur’an initiated by Abū Bakr.

²⁶ ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (d. 36/656), the third Caliph and Muḥammad’s son-in-law, is the one who had the Qur’an made into a book (*muṣṭaf*).

²⁷ ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib (d. 41/661), the fourth Caliph and Muḥammad’s cousin and son-in-law, was the author of a redaction of the Qur’an very different from the official one, according to the Shī‘ī historian Aḥmad al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 284/897).

²⁸ ‘Abdallāh b. al-‘Abbās (d. 68/687), often called Ibn ‘Abbās, Muḥammad’s cousin, is the most famous Qur’anic exegete; see *ET*², vol. I, pp. 41–2, art. “‘Abd Allāh b. al-‘Abbās”.

²⁹ Mu‘āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), the first Umayyad Caliph.

³⁰ Al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714) is the famous general and governor. It was he who revised and imposed the *muṣṭaf* of ‘Uthmān, adding the dots and other punctuation signs.

5. Muḥammad and Jesus

He goes on:

*Fa-lamma zahara [ʿĪsā] wa-azhara al-ayāt, wa-tammama kutuba al-anbiyāʾ wa-ḥaqqāqa qawlahum, kafartum antum bi-hi wa-lam tarḍū hattā taqāwamū jamīʿa al-muʾminīna bi-hi wa-taẓʿamūna anna Muḥammadan aʿazzu wa-akramu ʿinda Allāhi minhu*³¹ ('When Jesus appeared and performed miracles, and completed the books of the prophets and fulfilled their words, you did not believe in him and you did not accept him even though all believers acknowledge him; you claim that Muḥammad is greater than him and more noble in the sight of God').

The author means that Jesus must be truly from God because he fulfilled the Old Testament prophets; it is difficult to see why Muslims refuse to accept him.

Ibrāhīm's next answer recalls Timothy's:

*Qāla lahu al-amīr: Wayhaka ya rāhib! a-wa-mā taʿlamu anna Muḥammadan aʿazza wa-akrama ʿinda Allāhi min al-Masīḥi wa-min Ādama wa-dhurriyatihi kullihā?*³² ('The Amir said to him: "Now then, monk, do you not know that Muḥammad is greater and more noble before God than the Messiah, Adam and all his descendants?").

He gives the expected answer: *Lā wa-Allāhi mā aʿlamu dhālika* ('By God, I do not know this').

But in his explanation as to why Christ is superior we find something which we also find in Timothy. Ibrāhīm says,

*Wa-lākinni aʿlamu anna al-samāʾa ashrafu wa-akramu ʿinda Allāhi min al-arḍi wa-sukkān al-samāʾi ashrafu wa-akramu ʿinda Allāhi min sukkān al-arḍ.*³³ *Wa-aʿlamu anna al-Masīḥ fi al-samāʾi al-ʿulyā.*³⁴ ('But I do know that heaven is more honoured and noble before God than the earth, and that those dwelling in heaven are more honoured and noble before God than those dwelling on earth. And I know that the Messiah is in the highest heaven').

This is a clear allusion to the Qur'an: *Innī mutawaffika wa rāfiʿuka ilayya.*³⁵

The passage continues:

*Wa-[anna] Muḥammadan wa jamīʿa al-anbiyāʾ taḥta al-tharā wa-anna al-samāʾa kursiyu Allāhi wa-arshuhu wa-anna al-Masīḥ jālisun ʿalā kursiyi al-ʿizzati ʿan yanīni al-ʾAbi fauqa al-malāʾika wa-al-ʾibād. Fa-kayfa yakūna man taḥta al-tharā akramu ʿinda Allāhi min man huwa fi al-samāʾi ʿalā kursiyi al-ʿizz?*³⁶ ('[And I

³¹ Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, nos 305f., p. 403.

³² *Ibid.*, no. 307, p. 405.

³³ In some manuscripts: *min al-ādamiyyīn*.

³⁴ Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, nos 308-9a, p. 405.

³⁵ Q 3.55.

³⁶ Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, nos 309b-10, pp. 405-7.

know that] Muḥammad and all the prophets are beneath the earth, and heaven is the seat and throne of God,³⁷ and the Messiah is seated in majesty on the right hand of the Father,³⁸ above the angels and the believers. How can one who is beneath the earth³⁹ be more noble before God than one who is in heaven and seated in majesty?").

We will see below that for Timothy, as well, the reason why there could be no revelation after the gospel is that the gospel is *samāwī* and any other is *arḍī*.

3. 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī

1. Structure of his Apology

Now we turn to 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, who writes at great length about Muḥammad and is the most aggressive of these authors. This is presumably why he does not use his own name, but a pseudonym. He should, however, not be disregarded because of this attitude, for he gives much significant historical information. He also wrote under al-Ma'mūn, in about the year 210/825.

His long *Risāla* can be divided into four parts, which are unfortunately not clearly indicated in the editions: the first concerns *al-tawḥīd wa-al-tathlīth*, a short treatise on *De Deo uno et trino* which is almost copied from the Syrian Christian theologian Abū Rā'īta Ḥabīb b. Hudhayl al-Takrītī. The second attacks the prophethood of Muḥammad, the third deals with the Qur'an, and the last is a defence of Christianity. The attack on Islam, which corresponds with the second and third parts, is very rare in Arab Christian literature, and probably unique. It is entitled *Radd 'alā al-Islām* rather than the more usual *jawāb*, maybe the only occurrence of this polemical term which is parallel to the Muslim *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*.

2. The Prophethood of Muḥammad

On the question of the prophethood of Muḥammad, 'Abd al-Masīḥ uses two series of arguments: the first is classical in Christian apologetics, while the second is rather new.

'Abd al-Masīḥ argues that Muḥammad cannot be a prophet for reasons that are well known in Christian tradition, namely that he was not announced by *prophecies*, and he did not perform any *miracle*. The

³⁷ Q 2.255 and 23.86.

³⁸ See Mk 16.19; Heb. 1.3; Ps. 109.1; Col. 3.1. See also the Nicene Creed (in Arabic): *wa-jalasa 'an yamīni Allāhi al-Ābi*.

³⁹ He means Muḥammad.

only miracle attributed to him in the Qur'an is the Qur'an itself. This kind of argument is well known in Christian apologetics.

What is new in 'Abd al-Masīḥ's attack on Muḥammad's prophet-hood is the following *historical* part. From a study of the life of Muḥammad, 'Abd al-Masīḥ asserts that he cannot have been chosen as a prophet for a number of reasons.

One is his *ghazawāt*, raids. 'Abd al-Masīḥ shows that Muḥammad was more of a warrior than a prophet. And even as a warrior he sometimes attacked people unfairly. No Arab of nobility would recognise such acts as carried out by an Arab of any worth. 'Abd al-Masīḥ refers to an occasion when Muḥammad ordered an old man to be killed, and also to his relations with the Jews.

Another reason is Muḥammad's sexual behaviour, his wives and concubines, about whom 'Abd al-Masīḥ enumerates a number of details, just as he does for the *ghazawāt*. Of course, the wife to whom he refers in greatest detail is the one referred to in the Qur'an, *imra'at Zayd*, because the circumstances surrounding his marriage to her raised many questions.⁴⁰

'Abd al-Masīḥ concludes from these that Muḥammad cannot be a prophet.

In the third part of his *Risāla* he goes even further when he speaks of the Qur'an. The question is: Is the Qur'an from God, the Muslim position, or from man, so from Muḥammad, the usual position of non-Muslims, or is it from a third origin, namely Satan, *al-shayṭān*?

'Abd al-Masīḥ prefers the last alternative, on which he stands alone in the Arab Christian tradition. Among Latin and Greek authors this is common, but among Arab Christians he is the only one who states unequivocally that the Qur'an comes from *al-shayṭān*. This condemnation sums up 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī's *Risāla*, of which we have only been able to mention the most salient points.

4. *Buṭrus al-Bayt Ra'sī*

We turn next to the *Kitāb al-burhān* of Buṭrus al-Bayt Ra'sī, whose opinion about Muḥammad and Islam are readily understood.

1. The Five Calls are the Five Covenants

Towards the end of the fourth book,⁴¹ there is a very interesting interpretation of Matthew 20.1–16, the parable of the labourers in the vine-

⁴⁰ See Q 33.36–8.

⁴¹ See *Burhān*, paras 361–81.

yard, where the owner makes five calls, the last to workers who come at the eleventh hour but receive the same wage as others hired earlier.⁴²

Butrus interprets this parable according to the Patristic tradition, a tradition found as early as Origen, in which the five calls are explained as the five covenants.⁴³ He says the first covenant was with Adam, the second with Noah, the third with Abraham, the fourth with Moses, and the fifth and last with Christ. Incidentally, this is very interesting, for we also find these five calls in the Qur'an: *inna Allāha aṣṭafā Ādama wa-Nūḥan wa-Āla Ibrāhīma wa-Āla 'Imrāna 'alā al-'ālamīn* (God chose Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham and the family of 'Imrān above all people).⁴⁴ If we understand 'Imrān (who in the Bible is, of course, the father of Moses, Aaron and Miriam), in accordance with Muslim tradition, as the father of Mary as well as of Moses, then we have the five covenants.

Butrus says that the first three of these are natural covenants, in which there was no revelation, and Adam, Noah and Abraham did not proclaim any *sharī'a*: *Wa-hādhihi al-thalāthu al-da'awātu bi-nāmūsi al-ṭabī'a*⁴⁵ ('These three calls were by the law of nature').⁴⁶ The other two, through Moses, who brought the scriptural law of the Torah, and through Christ and his apostles, by means of the law of the gospel, are the two *sharī'as*.

2. Muḥammad has no Covenant

So where does Muḥammad stand in this series? He is not mentioned, because he does not belong to the calls or the covenants. This is a classical Christian way of saying a thing by not saying it.

We find something similar in a Coptic author of the sixth/twelfth century, Abū al-Fakhr Marqus, Ibn al-Shaykh Abū al-Barakāt Mawhūb, al-Ma'rūf bi-Ibn al-Qunbar, known as Marqus Ibn al-Qunbar or Marqus al-Ḍarīr (Mark the Blind).⁴⁷ In his long commentary on the five books of the Torah, when he refers to Abraham and his wives he says that the first son is from Hagar and this is the Old Testament, the second

⁴² For this text and its commentary, see S. K. Samir, "Al-turāth al-'arabī al-masīhī al-gadīm wa-al-Islām", in G. N. Nahhas ed., *Al-Masīhīyya wa-al-Islām: mirāyā mutaḡābila*, Balamand, 1997, pp. 69–118, esp. 108–13.

⁴³ J.-L. Déclais, "Les ouvriers de l'onzième heure ou la parabole du salaire contesté (De l'évangile au midrash et au hadīth)", *Islamochristiana* 21, 1995, pp. 43–63.

⁴⁴ Q 3.33.

⁴⁵ Samir, *Al-turāth al-'arabī al-masīhī al-gadīm*, p. 111, no. 27.

⁴⁶ Eutychiou of Alexandria, *The Book of Demonstration (Kūtāb al-burhān)*, Pt I, trans. W. M. Watt (CSCO 193), Louvain, 1995, pp. 123–58.

⁴⁷ On Marqus, see S. K. Samir, "Vie et oeuvre de Marc Ibn al-Qunbar", in *Christianisme d'Égypte: mélanges René-Georges Coquin (Cahiers de la Bibliothèque Copte 9)*, Louvain, 1995, pp. 123–58.

is from Sarah, and this is the New Testament (an allusion to Paul, who also compares Hagar and Sarah),⁴⁸ while the third from Keturah has no revelation, no angel and no covenant, but he does have great power, and this is Islam.⁴⁹ This text is very interesting to show how even when reading the Old Testament, Christians in the Islamic world were conscious of a possible Muslim significance.

5. Kitāb al-Mijdal (*fifth/eleventh century*)

We now come to two important, though very different, texts from the two historians: the *Kitāb al-mijdal* from ‘Amr ibn Mattā (fifth/eleventh century), and the *Mukhtaṣar tārikh al-duwal* of Ibn al-‘Ibrī (d. 685/1286).

The *Kitāb al-mijdal*, ‘Book of the Tower’, is written largely in *saḡ*. This important encyclopaedia has not yet been published, nor is our beautiful text edited. It is to be found in part II, chapter 2. I have established the text from the oldest manuscript.⁵⁰

1. Why Christianity Did Not Reach the Ḥijāz

‘Amr relates briefly the history of Christianity in the Arab world, as follows:

*Wa-khalat min du‘āti al-Masīḥi arḍu Tihāmata wa-al-Ḥijāz
li-tawaqqufi al-rusuli bi-Najrāna*⁵¹ ‘an al-ijtyāz,
*wa-tashāghulihim bi-man tanaṣṣara min mulūki Kindata wa-salātīni al-Yaman,*⁵²
alladhīna labisū al-tjāna wa-al-aṭwāqa, wa-jalla amruhum wa-ista‘lan.

(There was no one who preached about the Messiah in the country of Tihāma and the Ḥijāz,
because the apostles stopped at Najrān and went no further.
They were preoccupied with the kings of Kinda and the princes of Yemen,
who wore crowns and coronets and who were great and powerful.)

These are the reasons he gives for the whole of Arabia not being converted.

⁴⁸ See Gal. 4.21–31.

⁴⁹ See S. K. Samir, “Marc Ibn al-Qunbar et l’islam, d’après son commentaire de Genèse 25/1–4”, in *Mélanges en l’honneur de Fouad Éphrem al-Bustani*, forthcoming.

⁵⁰ Paris Arabic 190 (written in Iraq, thirteenth century), 538 folios; here ff. 56r.6–56v.5.

⁵¹ Najrān was a Christian kingdom in pre-Islamic times; see *EI*¹, vol. III, pp. 823–5, art. “Nadjrān”; *EI*², vol. VII, pp. 871–2, art. “Nadjrān”; R. Tardy, *Najrān: Chrétiens d’Arabie avant l’Islam*, Beirut, 1999.

⁵² The kings of Kinda were Christians, and many princes of Yemen as well; see *EI*², vol. V, pp. 118–20, art. “Kinda”.

2. The Coming of Muḥammad the Believer

He continues with the coming of Muḥammad:

*Wa-zahara ṣāhibu sharī‘ati al-Islām
Muḥammadun ibn ‘Abdallāh al-‘Arabī (‘alayhi al-salām!),⁵³
Wa-da‘ā ahlhā ilā al-īmāni bi-Allāh
wa-qādahum ilayhi bi-al-ṭaw‘i wa-al-ikrāh.*

(Then the giver of the law of Islam appeared,
Muḥammad b.‘Abdallah the Arab (upon him be peace!).
He called their people to faith in God,
and their response to him was both by free choice and by compulsion.)

This last phrase, *bi-al-ṭaw‘i wa-al-ikrāh*, is impartial. He does not say that they were converted to Islam *bi-al-ikrāh*, by compulsion, but neither does he say the contrary. They were converted both peacefully and through pressure. He continues:

*Wa-aqtala‘a aṣnāma al-jahāla,⁵⁴
wa-nakasa rāyāti al-ḍalāla,
wa-jaddada al-masājida buyūtan li-al-ṣalawāt,
wa-wakkada al-waṣāyā bi-al-ṣiyāmi wa-al-zakawāt,
wa-abtala min fawāḥishi al-kufri wa-al-fujūri mā kāna faẓī‘an shā‘īan,
wa-‘aṭṭala min anṣābi al-ghiwāyāti mā kāna min ittibā‘i al-ḥaqqi māni‘an.*

(He tore down the idols of ignorance,
lowered the banners of error.
He renewed the places of worship as houses for prayer;
he gave firm instructions for fasting and alms-giving.
He put an end to the detestable and widespread abominations of unbelief and dissipation;
He did away with the sinful relationships that hindered the inclination towards truth.)

Here he presents Muḥammad proclaiming the true faith in God as good morality, and instituting prayer and the *zakāt*. This is a positive description, with due reference to morality and *tawḥīd*.

3. Muḥammad proclaimed the beliefs of Christianity

But then he does something typically Christian, when he goes on to employ Islamic concepts to say that Muḥammad was in a way a Christian. He says:

⁵³ He uses this respectful expression for Muḥammad (*‘alayhi al-salām*) for the sake of the *saḥīḥ*, but he nevertheless does use it.

⁵⁴ Our author adopts some Islamic vocabulary and speaks as Muslims do.

*Shahida bi-siḥḥati zuhūri al-Masīh
wa-wakkada amra al-kalimati wa al-rūh.*

(He witnessed truly to the coming of the Messiah,
and gave affirmation to the Word and Spirit.)

In the Qur'an we find that Christ is called *Kalimat Allāh*⁵⁵ and *Rūh min Allāh*,⁵⁶ and three times *mu'ayyad bi-Rūh al-Qudus*.⁵⁷ This is not to be taken in a Christian sense, though Christians when they speak with Muslims frequently do interpret these two terms (*Kalima* and *Rūh*) according to their own beliefs. The same use of these Qur'anic terms is made by Timothy I.

Amr continues:

*Wa-ḥaqqāqa khurūjahu ilā al-ʿālamī min al-ʿAdhrāʾi al-tāhirati bi-lā ab,
wa-ṣuʿūdahu ilā al-samāʾi ḥayyan bāqīyan bi-lā shakkīn wa-lā rayb.
Wa-naṭaqa fī kitābīhi bi-iqāmātihi al-mawtā,⁵⁸
wa-fathīhi ʿayuna al-kumhī⁵⁹ wa-al-aḍīrrā,⁶⁰
wa-inḥādīhi al-marḍā wa-al-zamnā⁶¹ wa-al-muqʿadīn,
wa-naḥkhihi rūḥa al-ḥayāti fī majbūlin min ḥīn;
wa-kalāmīhi li-al-nāsi fī al-mahdi,
wa-waʿdīhi ʿinda al-intihāʾi bi-al-ʿawdi;
wa-ʿazmīhi awṣafa yumnihi wa-barakatīhi,
fī milādīhi wa-mawtīhi wa-qiāmātihi.*

(He confirmed his coming to earth from the pure Virgin without a father,
and his ascension into heaven alive and immortal without doubt or
concealment.

In his book⁶² he related how he [the Messiah] raised the dead,⁶³
opened the eyes of those born blind⁶⁴ and the blind,

⁵⁵ Q 4.171 (and 3.45).

⁵⁶ Q 4.171.

⁵⁷ Q 2.87, 2.253 and 4.171.

⁵⁸ That is *bi-iqāmāti al-Masīh al-mawtā*.

⁵⁹ Plural of *akmah* (born blind).

⁶⁰ Plural of *ḍarīr* (blind).

⁶¹ Plural of *zamīn* (chronically ill).

⁶² He means the Qur'an. This is a descriptive reference, so the Qur'an is logically attributed to Muḥammad, though it has also some theological force for the author.

⁶³ See Q 3.49: *Inni qad jīʿtukum bi-āyatīn min Rabbikum: annī akhluqu la-kum, min al-ḥīni ka-ḥayʾati al-ṭayri, fa-anfukhu fīhi, fa-yakūnu ṭayran, bi-idhni Allāh; wa-ubriʾu al-akmaha wa-al-abraṣa, wa-uḥyī al-mawtā, bi-idhni Allāh; wa-unbiʾukum bi-mā taʿkulūna wa-mā taddakhirūna fī buyūtikum* ('I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird, by God's leave. And I heal those born blind, and the lepers; and I quicken the dead, by God's leave. And I declare to you what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a sign for you, if you believe'); and Q 5.110 (see next footnote).

⁶⁴ See Q 3.49 and 5.110: *Idh qāla Allāhu li-ʿĪsā: Yā ʿĪsā bna Maryama, udhkur nīmatī*

revived the sick, the chronically ill and the invalid,⁶⁵
 and blew the spirit of life into something made of mud;⁶⁶
 how he spoke to the people from the cradle,⁶⁷
 and announced his coming back at the end.⁶⁸
 He magnified the characteristics of his good fortune and of his blessing⁶⁹
 in his birth, his death and his resurrection.)⁷⁰

And so on, the text continues for some pages! The author uses the Qur'an here to say that Muḥammad announced Christ and his ministry, though omitting its negative teachings about him.

On the whole, the attitude of the author is very respectful and positive. Muḥammad is described as having a beautiful personality; he is not a conqueror, as he is for others, but he is the one who brought a *sharī'a*, who 'called the people to faith in God'. Yes, they were sometimes compelled to become Muslims, but not always. He introduced prayer, fasting and alms-giving (*ṣalāt*, *ṣiyām*, *zakāt*). But the author never says that Muḥammad was a prophet.

6. *Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-'Ibrī*

The second historical text is taken from the *Mukhtaṣar Tārīkh al-Duwal* of Ibn al-'Ibrī, a great Syrian bishop who died in 685/1286; he wrote his Arabic history round 670/1270. The book is divided according to

'alayka wa-'alā wālidatika, idh ayyadtuka bi-rūhi al-quḍusi: tukallimu al-nāsa fī al-mahādi wa-kahlan; wa-idh 'allamtuka al-kitāba wa-al-ḥikmata wa-al-Tawrāta wa-al-İnjīla; wa-idh takhlūqu min al-ṭīni ka-hay'ati al-ṭayri, bi-idhnī, tanfukhu fihā, fa-takūnu ṭayran, bi-idhnī; wa-tubri'u al-akmaḥa wa-al-abraṣa, bi-idhnī; wa-idh tukhrijū al-mawtā, bi-idhnī; wa-idh kafaftu Banī Isrā'īla 'anka, idh ji'tahum bi-al-bayyināti, fa-qāla alladhīna kafarū minhum: in ḥadhā illā ṣiḥrun mubīnun' (Then will God say: 'O Jesus son of Mary! Recount my favour to you and to your mother. Behold! I strengthened you with the holy spirit, so that you spoke to the people in childhood and in maturity. Behold! I taught you the Book and the wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel. And behold! You make out of clay as it were the figure of a bird, by my leave. And behold! I did restrain the Children of Israel from (violence to) you, when you showed them the clear signs, and the unbelievers among them said: "This is nothing but evident magic"').

⁶⁵ See Q 3.49 and 5.110 (the Qur'an mentions only the *abraṣ*, leprosy).

⁶⁶ See Q 3.49 and 5.110.

⁶⁷ See Q 3.46; 5.110 and 19.29.

⁶⁸ See Q 43.61: *wa-innahu la-ʿilmun li-al-sā'ati, fa-lā tamtarunna bihā* ('And [Jesus] shall be a sign [for the coming of] the hour [of judgment]; therefore have no doubt about it'); see also Q 4.159.

⁶⁹ See Q 19.31: *wa-ja'alanī mubārakan ayna mā kuntu* ('And he has made me blessed wheresoever I be').

⁷⁰ See Q 19.33: *wa-al-salāmu 'alayya yawma wulidtu, wa-yawma amūtu, wa-yawma ub'athu ḥayyan* ('So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life').

dynasties (*duwal*, pl. of *dawla*). The tenth dynasty, which covers almost a third of the whole History, describes the reign of the Arabs down to the Mongol invasion.

1. Account of Muḥammad's Infancy

Abū al-Faraj starts naturally with Muḥammad. Here is his account of Muḥammad's childhood:

Muḥammadun Ibn 'Abdullāh ('alayhi al-salām): Dhakara al-nassābūna anna nis-batahu tartaqī ilā Ismā'īl Ibn Ibrāhīm al-khalīl, alladhī waladat lahu Hājar amatu Sārata zawjatihi.

(The genealogists say that the family tree of Muḥammad b. 'Abdullāh (peace be upon him!) goes back to Ismā'īl son of Abraham, the friend of God, whom Hajar, his wife Sarah's slave, bore to him.)⁷¹

Wa kāna wilāduhu bi-Makkata sanata 892 li-al-Iskandar. Wa-lammā maḍā min 'umrihi sanatāni bi-al-taqībi, māta 'Abdallāh abūhu. Wa-kāna ma'a ummihi Āminata binti Wahbin sitta sinīnin. Fa-lammā tuwuffiyat, akhadhahu ilayhi jidduhu 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, wa-ḥanna 'alayhi. Fa-lammā ḥaḍarathu al-wafātu, awṣā ibnahu Abā Tālibin bi-ḥiyātihi, fa-ḍammahu ilayhi wa-kafalahu. Thumma kharaja bihi, wa-huwa ibnu tis'i sinīnin, ilā al-Shām.

(He [Muḥammad] was born in Mecca in the year 892 after Alexander.⁷² When he was about two years old, his father 'Abdallāh died. He remained with his mother, Āmina, the daughter of Wahb, for six years. On her death, his grandfather 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib took him and cared for him. When the latter was nearing death he entrusted him to the care of Abū Tālib, his son, and he took him in as his guardian. Then when he was nine⁷³ he accompanied him to Syria.)⁷⁴

2. The Story of the Monk Baḥīrā

In the rest of his account, Ibn al-'Ibrī is as brief, clear and direct as in this infancy narrative. Let us examine some examples, first of all the story of the Monk Baḥīrā:

Fa-lammā nazalū Buṣrā kharaja ilayhim rāhibun 'arifun ismuhu Baḥīrā min ṣawma'atihi, wa-ja'ala yatakhallalu al-qawm ḥattā intahā ilayhi. Fa-akhadhahu bi-yadihi wa-qāla: 'Sayakūnu min hādihā al-ṣabiyyi amrun 'aẓimun, yantashiru dhikruhu fi mashāriqi al-arḍi wa-maghāribihā. Fa-inmahu ḥaythu ashrafa aqbala wa-'alayhi ghamāmatu tuzallaluhu.'

⁷¹ Ibn al-'Ibrī, no. 1 of my sections.

⁷² Rightly the year 882.

⁷³ Ibn Hishām, the famous author of the *Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, gives his age as ten.

⁷⁴ Ibn al-'Ibrī, nos 2-4 of my sections.

(When they came to Bosra a wise monk named Baḥīrā came out from his cell to meet them. He went through the people and stopped at him. He took him by the hand and said: 'Great things will happen to this child, and he will be remembered in the east and the west. Wherever he goes, he will enter, and above him clouds will shade him.')⁷⁵

It is interesting to note that he gives these details as factual history, without any such allusions as 'according to what the Muslims say'. Elsewhere in his work Ibn al-'Ibrī often quotes Ibn al-Qiftī's *Tārīkh al-ḥukamā'* directly without expressing any reserve; here, too, he quotes a Muslim source without any comment. The story of Baḥīrā was well-known in Ibn al-'Ibrī's time among Christians, both in Syriac and in Arabic, though the Christian story, differently from the Muslim, is not favourable to Muḥammad. It is worth noting that our author presents the Muslim version of this story and not the Christian one.

3. The First Raid against Mecca: Badr

Let us take another example, from Ibn al-'Ibrī's account of one of the *ghazawāt*, namely the famous raid at Badr, which took place in the second year of the hijra (2/624), and where Muslims were victorious:

Wa-fī al-sanati al-thāniyati min hijratihi ilā al-Madīna, kharaja bi-nafsi ilā ghazāti Badri wa-ḥiya al-baṭshatu al-kubrā wa-hazama bi-thalāth mi'a wa-thalāthata 'ashar rajulan min al-Muslimīn alfan min ahli Makkata al-mushrikīn.

(In the second year of his Hijra to Medina, he himself went on the raid at Badr, which was a great encounter: with three hundred and thirteen Muslims he routed a thousand Mekkan polytheists.)⁷⁶

First of all, we note the expression *kharaja bi-nafsi ilā ghazāti* . . . (He himself went personally on the raid) which we find twice on this page,⁷⁷ here and in the sixth year (627) against Banū al-Muṣṭaliq. The reason is that our author distinguishes between the *ghazawāt* in which Muḥammad sent his men out and the ones in which he personally led them.

The second remark is that Ibn al-'Ibrī seems content to accept the Muslim interpretation of the events, as can be seen from two characteristics of his account. One is the *Muslimūn/mushrikūn* distinction, in which he recognises *ahl Makka* as *mushrikūn* and by implication *ahl al-Madīna* as *Muslimūn*. He could have said *al-Madaniyyūn wa-al-Makkiyyūn*, in a more neutral geographical description. The other is that he insists that three hundred and thirteen men defeated more than a thousand, to show that God was with Muḥammad.

⁷⁵ Ibn al-'Ibrī, nos 5–6 of my sections.

⁷⁶ Ibn al-'Ibrī, no. 12 of my sections.

⁷⁷ See Ibn al-'Ibrī, nos 12 and 20 of my sections.

The Battle of the *Khandaq*

Ibn al-ʿIbrī shows the same partiality to the Muslim point of view in his account of Battle of the Trench (*al-khandaq*), which took place in Dhū al-Qaʿda of the fifth year (April 627).⁷⁸

In a duel provoked by a Meccan, ʿAlī fought with him and killed him, and then killed another Meccan, which was the cause of the defeat of the *Aḥzāb*, the Meccan Confederation, ‘although they were more numerous and had better equipment’ (*wa-kāna qatluhumā sababa hazīmati al-Aḥzābi, ʿalā kathrati ʿadadihim wa-wafrati ʿudadihim*).⁷⁹

This is typical of many such details in which he relates incidents which cast Muḥammad and his Muslim followers in a favourable light without making any comment, showing that he agrees.

5. Musaylima, the ‘False’ Prophet⁸⁰

We will examine one more example:

Wa-fi al-sanati al-ʿāshirati, ḥajja ḥijjata al-wadāʿi. Wa-fihā tanabbaʿa bi-al-Yamāmati Musaylimatu al-kadhhdhāb. Wa-jaʿala yusajjīʿu, muḍāhiyan li-al-Qurʿāni, fa-yaqūl . . .

(In the tenth year, [Muḥammad] made his last pilgrimage. In this year, Musaylima the Liar made a show of being a prophet in Yamāma. He started to make rhyming verses (*saʿf*), trying to compete with the Qurʿan, saying . . .)⁸¹

Ibn al-ʿIbrī calls him quite unselfconsciously *al-kadhhdhāb*, and he quotes a piece of nonsense from him, supposedly in the *saʿf* form of the Qurʿan, to show that he really was *kadhhdhāb*:

*la-qad anʿama Allāhu ʿalā al-ḥublā,
wa-akhraja minha nasmatan tisaʿa
min bayna sijāqin wa-ḥashā.*

(God was gracious to the pregnant one,
and brought forth from her a being of nine months
From within her flesh and womb.)⁸²

⁷⁸ See *ET*², vol. IV, p. 1020, art. “Khandaq”.

⁷⁹ Ibn al-ʿIbrī, no. 18 of my sections.

⁸⁰ See *ET*¹, vol. III, pp. 745b–746a, art. “Musailima”. Abū Thumāma Maslama ‘began his prophetic career before Muḥammad did’, preaching in the name of Raḥmān to the Banū Ḥanifā in Yamāma. ‘The prophetic utterances attributed to Musailima recall the earliest Meccan *sūras* with their short rhyming sentences and curious oaths and have no resemblance at all to the later Medinan *sūras*.’

⁸¹ Ibn al-ʿIbrī, nos 25–6 of my sections.

⁸² Ibn al-ʿIbrī, no. 26 of my sections.

In all this Ibn al-ʿIbrī follows the Muslim tradition unquestioningly, even though it is evidently forged at many points: he calls him Musaylima (a contemptuous diminutive), instead of Maslama; he uses the epithet 'the Liar' which was invented by his Muslim opponents; he says that he is trying to imitate the Qur'an with his *sajʿ*, while in truth he preceded MuḤammad in claiming prophethood and using *sajʿ*.

6. Conclusion

As we can see from these few examples, Ibn al-ʿIbrī does not attempt to give a negative image of MuḤammad; on the contrary, we are given a very positive impression. As a historian he apparently believes he can relate facts and follow the Muslim tradition without any difficulty; he does not even criticise his Muslim sources, accepting them without discussion. He goes further, adding twice *ʿalayhi al-salām!* (Peace be upon him!) after his name,⁸³ as Muslims do for prophets and in particular for MuḤammad.

Does this mean that the bishop Ibn al-ʿIbrī recognises the prophethood of MuḤammad? This is unlikely. He never affirms this and never himself uses the word *nabī* when speaking of him. Abū al-Faraj goes as far as possible in his appreciation of the human personality of MuḤammad, using very courteous speech, adopting Muslim expressions, and so on. But he does not make any concession to any religious affirmation of the prophethood of MuḤammad. He mentions facts, and the prophetic status of MuḤammad is not a fact but an opinion.

7. Timothy I

At last we come to Timothy, who in many respects is the most interesting of these authors who refer to MuḤammad. He presents a very positive appreciation of MuḤammad, but at the same time gives his reasons for rejecting MuḤammad's prophethood.

1. The Textual Problem

There is a textual problem which is well-known. The debate between the catholicos Timothy and the caliph al-Mahdī took place in the year 781AD, in *Arabic*. Timothy then wrote down a sort of minute of the meeting in *Syriac*, in a letter addressed to a monk friend. This

⁸³ Ibn al-ʿIbrī, nos 1 and 27 of my sections. No. 1 is quoted above; here is no. 27: *wa-fi hādhihi al-sanati waʿika (ʿalayhi al-salām!) wa-marīḍa* ('In this year [10AH] he (peace be upon him!) became indisposed and became ill').

Syriac text is still unedited, but has been published photographically with an English translation by Alphonse Mingana.⁸⁴

There are two extant Arabic reports of this discussion: a Short Version attested in numerous manuscripts, divided into 27 questions, which is also the older, published for the first time with a French translation by Fr Robert Caspar,⁸⁵ and a Long Version, published first by Fr Louis Cheikho,⁸⁶ and then by myself, dividing it into 275 small sections (verses),⁸⁷ with a French translation by my colleague Fr Hans Putman.⁸⁸

The three texts are similar and yet different. No close comparison of the three recensions has ever been made, which means that they are difficult to use. I have prepared a new edition of the two Arabic versions, dividing them into small sections (verses),⁸⁹ and I have also divided the Syriac/English text in the same way, in order to compare the three recensions. It now remains to adopt a continuous numeration for each of them, giving a single number to identical sentences and a special number to sentences which only appear in one recension or two. According to my experience, this is the best and easiest way (if not the only one) to make the right comparison between them.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ A. Mingana, "The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi", *Woodbrooke Studies* 2, Cambridge, 1928, pp. 1-162.

⁸⁵ R. Caspar, "Les versions arabes du dialogue entre le catholicos Timothée I et le calife al-Mahdi (II^e/VIII^e siècle) 'Mohammed a suivi la voie des prophètes'", *Islamochristiana* 3, 1977, pp. 107-75.

⁸⁶ L. Cheikho, "La discussion religieuse entre le calife al-Mahdi et Timothée le catholicos" *Al-Machriq* 21, 1921, pp. 359-74, 408-18, repr. in *Trois traités de polémique et de théologie chrétienne*, Beirut, 1923, pp. 1-26.

⁸⁷ S. K. Samir, in H. Putman, *L'Eglise et l'islam sous Timothée I (780-823)*, Beirut, 1977, pp. 7-57.

⁸⁸ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'islam*, pp. 211-77.

⁸⁹ In my new editions, the Short Arabic Version is divided into 389 verses, and the Long Arabic Version into 745 verses.

⁹⁰ Incidentally, we have the same problem with the three recensions of the Syriac Alexander Romance published by G. J. Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied. Die drei Rezensionen* (CSCO 454 and 455 = Syr. 195 and 196, Leuven, 1983, with a German translation. The editor gives different numbers for each one of the three parallel recensions, so that, if you quote any sentence, you have to say, 'number so-and-so in recension 1, which corresponds to number so-and-so in recension 2, and number so-and-so in recension 3.' Now, with a fourth Arabic recension, the problem is becoming very complicated, making comparison almost impossible.

This kind of problem occurs very often in Oriental Christian literature, when texts were circulated from Church to Church, in different languages and even in the same language. I am proposing here a general rule when dealing with this kind of literature.

2. 'Muḥammad Walked in the Path of the Prophets'

This expression, 'Muḥammad walked in the path of the prophets' or 'followed the way of the prophets' (*salaka fi tariq al-anbiyā'*), has become famous in Muslim-Christian dialogue. But do we understand it correctly? Let us read this page in its context, in English translation.⁹¹

The caliph's question is: 'What do you say about Muḥammad?', in other words: 'Who is Muḥammad for you?' Here is Timothy's answer:

- 1 And our gracious and wise King said to me:
 'What do you say about Muḥammad?'
- 2 And I replied to his Majesty:
 'Muḥammad is worthy of all praise,
 by all reasonable people, O my Sovereign.
- 3 *He walked in the path of the prophets,
 And trod in the track of the lovers of God.*
- 4 All the prophets taught the doctrine of one God,
 and since Muḥammad taught
 the doctrine of the unity of God,
- 5 *he walked, therefore,
 in the path of the prophets.*
- 6 Further, all the prophets drove men
 away from bad works,
- 7 and brought them
 nearer to good works.
- 8 And since Muḥammad drove his people
 away from bad works
- 9 and brought them
 nearer to the good ones,
- 10 *he walked, therefore,
 in the path of the prophets.*
- 11 Again, all the prophets separated men
 from idolatry and polytheism,
- 12 and attached them
 to God and to His cult.
- 13 And since Muḥammad separated his people
 from idolatry and polytheism,

⁹¹ The Arabic text was first published by L. Cheikho in 1921 (see n. 86), then by myself in 1977 with a French translation (see nn. 87 and 88), then by Caspar in 1977 with a French translation (see n. 85), then by me with an English translation in 1997 (see S. K. Samir, *The Significance of Early Arab-Christian Thought for Muslim-Christian Understanding*, Washington, 1997, pp. 33–6) and finally by me again in 1997 (S. K. Samir, "Al-turāth al-ʿarabī al-masīhī al-qadīm wa-al-islām", in G. N. Naḥḥās ed., *Al-Masīḥiyya wa-al-islām*, pp. 31–6).

- 14 and attached them
 to the cult and the knowledge of the one God,
 beside whom there is no other God,
 15 *It is obvious that he walked*
in the path of all the prophets.
 16 Finally Muḥammad taught
 about God, his Word and His Spirit.⁹²
 17 And since all the prophets had prophesied
 about God, His Word and His Spirit,
 18 *Muḥammad walked, therefore,*
In the path of all the prophets.

3. Muḥammad is Similar to Moses and Abraham

a) Muḥammad and Moses

- 19 Who will not praise, honour and exalt
 the one who fought for God,
 20 not only in words, but with the sword
 showed also his zeal for Him?
 21 As Moses did with the Children of Israel,
 when he saw that they had fashioned a golden calf which they
 worshipped,
 22 and killed all of those who were worshipping it,
 23 so also Muḥammad evinced
 an ardent zeal towards God,
 24 and loved and honoured Him
 more than his own soul,
 his people and his relatives.
 25 He praised, honoured and exalted
 those who worshipped God with him,
 26 and promised them kingdom,
 praise and honour from God,
 27 both in this world
 and in the world to come in the Garden.⁹³
 28 But those who worshipped idols and not God
 he fought and opposed,
 29 and showed them
 the torments of hell and of the fire
 30 which is never quenched
 and in which all evildoers burn eternally.

⁹² This is a clear allusion to the Trinity.

⁹³ 'The Paradise of the Qur'an' (Mingana's note).

b) Muḥammad and Abraham

- 31 And what Abraham,
 that friend and beloved of God, did
 32 in (p. 62) turning his face from idols and from his kinsmen,
 and looking only towards the one God,
 33 and becoming the preacher of the one God to other peoples,
 this also Muḥammad did.
 34 He turned his face from idols and their worshippers,
 whether those idols were
 those of his own kinsmen or of strangers,
 35 and he honoured and worshipped
 only the one God.

4. Conclusion: Because of this, God honoured him exceedingly

- 36 Because of this,
 God honoured him exceedingly,
 37 and brought low before his feet two powerful kingdoms
 which roared in the world like a lion,
 38 and made the voice of their authority heard
 like thunder in all the earth that is below heaven,
 39 that is, the Kingdom of the Persians
 and that of the Romans.
 40 The former kingdom,
 that is to say the Kingdom of the Persians,
 worshipped creatures instead of the Creator,
 41 and the latter,
 that is to say the Kingdom of the Romans,
 42 attributed suffering and death in the flesh
 to the one who cannot suffer and die
 in any way and through any process.
 43 He further extended the power of his authority
 through the Commander of the Faithful and his children,
 44 from east to west,
 and from north to south.
 45 Who will not praise, O our victorious King,
 the one whom God has praised,
 46 and who will not weave a crown of glory and majesty
 for the one whom God has glorified and exalted?
 47 These and similar things, I and all God-lovers
 utter about Muḥammad, O my sovereign.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ I am following more or less the translation of Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", pp. 61-2, which I have divided and structured (see Samir, *Significance of Early Arab-Christian Thought*, pp. 33-6).

- 48 And our King said to me:
 'You should, therefore, accept the words of the Prophet.'
 49 And I replied to him:
 'About which words does our King speak?'
 50 And our King said to me:
 'That God is one and that there is no other one besides Him.'
 51 And I replied:
 'This belief in the one God, O my Sovereign,
 I have learned from the Torah,
 from the prophets and from the Gospel.
 52 I stand by it
 and shall die in it.'⁹⁵

This text is a very balanced one. Some Christian scholars have interpreted it as a recognition of the prophethood of Muḥammad. In fact, if we read the whole discussion between Timothy and al-Mahdī, we see that when the question is clearly asked he refuses to answer it positively. He is just saying: Muḥammad, in doing this or that, is walking in the path of the prophets (nos 5, 10, 15, 18). He is quoting certain aspects of Muḥammad's life which are similar to those of the prophets, and is not quoting others when he thinks they are not similar.

5. Not a Single Prophecy in the Scriptures Concerns Muḥammad

a) Why do you accept the testimony of the Bible on Christ and not on Muḥammad?

The Caliph feels that the attitude of the Christians is unjust and illogical: Why do they accept the testimony of the Bible concerning Christ and not that concerning Muḥammad?

'How is it that you accept Christ and the Gospel
 from the testimony of the Torah and of the prophets,
 and you do not accept Muḥammad⁹⁶
 from the testimony of Christ and the Gospel?'

And I replied to his Majesty:

'O our King, we have received concerning Christ
 numerous and distinct testimonies from the Torah and the prophets.'⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 62.

⁹⁶ "That the name of Muḥammad is found in Jewish and Christian Books is the claim made in the Qur'an itself, 7.156: "The *ummi* prophet whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Gospel." See also Q 61.6' (Mingana's note).

⁹⁷ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam*, nos 92-3 (= 237-40) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 32, lines 4-9 (see n. 89 above for an explanation of the numbers in brackets).

b) There is not a single testimony on Muḥammad

And Timothy explains at length the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ, concluding:

‘These and scores of other passages of the prophets
show us Jesus Christ in a clear mirror and point to Him.

So far as Muḥammad is concerned

I have not received a single testimony
either from Jesus Christ or from the Gospel
which would refer to his name or to his works.⁹⁸

And our benevolent and gracious King made a sign
to mean that he was not convinced.

Then he repeated twice to me the question:

“Have you not received any?”

And I replied to him:

‘No, O God-loving King, I have not received any.’

And the King asked me:

‘Who then is the Paraclete?’⁹⁹

At this point, Timothy explains who the Paraclete is, showing that the Paraclete mentioned in the Gospel of John cannot be identified with Muḥammad. He concludes:

‘And since the one who is not the Spirit of God
is by inference not the Paraclete, Muḥammad is not the Paraclete.

If he were mentioned in the Gospel,
this mention would have been marked by a distinct portraiture,
characterizing his coming, his name, his mother, and his people,
as the true portraiture of the coming of Jesus Christ
is found in the Torah and in the prophets.

Since nothing resembling this is found in the Gospel concerning Muḥammad,

it is evident that there is no mention of him in it at all,
and that is the reason why I have not received
a single testimony from the Gospel about him.’¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Putman, *L’Eglise et l’islam*, no. 101 (= 261–3) = Mingana, “Timothy’s Apology”, p. 33, lines 7–11.

⁹⁹ Putman, *L’Eglise et l’islam*, nos 102–4 (= 264–7) = Mingana, “Timothy’s Apology”, p. 33, lines 12–16.

¹⁰⁰ Putman, *L’Eglise et l’islam*, no. 121 (= 306–8) = Mingana, “Timothy’s Apology”, p. 35, lines 7–17. ‘The bulk of Muslim testimony, based on Q 7.156, is to the effect that the name of Muḥammad is found in the Gospel. Almost all the work of [‘Ali] Ibn Rabban [al-Ṭabari] entitled *Kitāb ad-dīn wa-ad-dawla* has been written for the purpose of showing that this name is found in Jewish and Christian scriptures, (see especially pp. 77–146 of my translation) Cf. Ibn Sa‘ad’s *Ṭabaqāt*, I, ii, 89 and I, i, 123, and see the commentator Ṭabari on Q 7.156, and the historians Ibn Hisham and Ṭabari’ (Mingana’s note).

Later on the Caliph quotes from the Old Testament two texts well-known in Muslim apologetics : Deuteronomy 18.15 and Isaiah 21.7. Regarding Dt. 18.15 ('I will raise you up a prophet from among your brethren like unto me'), the Muslim apologetic tradition interprets this text as a prophecy concerning Muḥammad. Timothy analyses the sentence grammatically, showing that the expressions 'from among your brethren' (*min bayni ikhwatikum*) and 'like unto me' (*mithlī*) cannot be applied to Muḥammad.¹⁰¹ As for Is. 21.7, the Muslim tradition interprets the rider of the camel (*rākīb al-jamal*) as being Muḥammad, and the rider of the ass (*rākīb al-ḥimār*) as Jesus, because he entered Jerusalem on an ass. Timothy shows, based on five arguments, that this is historically impossible and that the text is not a prophecy about Muḥammad and Jesus, but about the Medes and the Persians, and specifically that the one riding a camel is Cyrus the Persian and the one riding an ass is Darius the Mede.¹⁰²

c) If there were, I would have moved from the Gospel to the Qur'an
The Caliph accuses the Christians of having refused Muḥammad as the Jews had refused Christ and Timothy answers:

'As for us, we have not accepted Muḥammad
because we have not a single testimony about him in our Books.'
And our King said:
'There were many testimonies,
but the Books have been corrupted, and you have removed them.'¹⁰³

This is the classical Muslim accusation against Jews and Christians of corruption of the Scriptures (*tahrīf* or *tabdīl al-kutub*). Timothy refutes the accusation and concludes:

'To tell the truth, if I had found in the Gospel a [single] prophecy
concerning the coming of Muḥammad,
I would have moved from the Gospel to the Qur'an,
as I have moved from the Torah and the Prophets to the Gospel.'¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam*, nos 228-37 (= 614-39) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 50, line 22—p. 52, line 2.

¹⁰² Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam*, nos 134-49 (= 345-81) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 37, line 8—p. 38, line 23.

¹⁰³ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam*, nos 123-4 (= 313-6) (with a slight addition after the first sentence: *fa-li-dhālika laysa lanā dhanbun fī hādā*, 'that is why there is no blame attached to us in this') = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 35, lines 23-7.

¹⁰⁴ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam*, no. 129 (= 329-31) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 36, lines 18-20.

6. No Prophet after John the Baptist

His reply then leads to the question, 'Do you not recognise that Muḥammad was a prophet?' Timothy introduces some new reasons to explain why he does not.

First of all, he says, because there was no prophet after Jesus Christ, the last being Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyya, John the Baptist. To support this theological affirmation he quotes both the Old and New Testaments, for example, *Inna al-nubuwwata lā tu'damu minhu ilā an ya'tiya alladhī tantaziruhu al-umamu* ('Prophecy will not pass from it until the one comes whom the nations await') (Gen. 49.10, Peshitta version). In all the texts he quotes the key word is 'until' (*ilā an*, or *hattā*) which means that after this the process stops. Here is the first text:¹⁰⁵

'And I replied: "Because the prophet Jacob said:
'The sceptre of the Kingdom shall not depart from Judah,
nor an utterer of prophecy from his seed,
until the Christ come;

because the Kingdom is His,
and He is the expectation of the peoples.'¹⁰⁶

In this he shows that after the coming of the Christ
there will be neither prophet nor prophecy.

And Daniel also concurs in saying that
for putting an end to all vision and prophecy,
and for the coming of Christ, the King,
seven weeks and threescore and two weeks will elapse,
and then the Christ will be killed,
and there will not be any more

Kingdom and prophecy in Jerusalem.¹⁰⁷

In this he showed that visions and prophecies
will come to an end with the Christ.

And the Christ Himself said:

'The prophets and the Torah prophesied *until John*.'¹⁰⁸

Every prophecy, therefore, ended with the time of Christ,
and after Christ there was no prophecy, nor did any prophet rise."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Putman, *L'Église et l'Islam*, nos 151-3 (= 383-93) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 38, line 24—p. 39, line 10.

¹⁰⁶ Gen. 49.10 (Peshitta with slight changes).

¹⁰⁷ Dan. 9.24-5.

¹⁰⁸ Mt. 11.13.

¹⁰⁹ 'The last of the prophets, according to Muslim apologists, is Muhammad: "If the Prophet had not appeared, the prophecies of the prophets about Ishmael and about the Prophet who is the last of prophets would have necessarily become without object." Ibn Rabban's Apology, the *Kitāb ad-Dīn*, p. 77 of my edition *et passim*' (Mingana's note).

Towards the end of the Debate, Timothy turns back to the argument at some length.¹¹⁰ Let us quote the first section of this:

‘And our King said to me:
 “If you accepted Muḥammad as a prophet
 your words would be beautiful and your meanings fine.”
 And I replied to his Majesty:
 “We find that there is only one prophet
 who would come to the world
 after the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven
 and His descent from heaven.¹¹¹
 This we know from the prophet Malachi
 and from the angel Gabriel
 when he announced the birth of John to Zechariah.”
 And our King said:
 “And who is that prophet?”
 And I replied: “The prophet Elijah.”’

Timothy then quotes several biblical texts¹¹² to show that John the Baptist is in fact Elijah, and that John identified Jesus as the Messiah. Two are particularly important, the prophecy of Malachi and the saying of Christ:

‘Know that I am going to send you Elijah the prophet
 before my day comes, that great and terrible day.
 He shall turn the hearts of fathers towards their children
 and the hearts of children towards their fathers,
 lest I come and strike the land with a curse.’¹¹³
 “Because it was towards John
 that all the prophecies of the prophets and of the Law were leading.
 And he, if you will believe me,
 is the Elijah who was to return.
 If anyone has ear to hear,
 let him listen!”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Putman, *L’Eglise et l’Islam*, nos 238–47 (= 640–72) = Mingana, “Timothy’s Apology”, p. 54, line 15—p. 55, line 33. This section is absent from the Short Arabic Text.

¹¹¹ ‘That the line of defence of the Christians against the Muslims of the eighth and ninth centuries was to the effect that no prophet will rise after Christ is borne out by the Muslim apologist, ‘Alī Rabbān Ṭabarī, who in his Apology (*Kūtāb ad-Dīn*, pp. 15, 17–18 of my edition) quotes against the Christians, Acts 11.24 and 13.9, in which St Luke speaks of prophets. On the Christian side it is well emphasised by the apologist Kindī in his *Risālah*, p. 78’ (Mingana’s note).

¹¹² Lk. 1.13–17; Jn 1.29; Mt. 3.11 and Lk. 3.16.

¹¹³ Mal. 3.23–4. This prophecy is quoted by Luke (Lk. 1.17), who applies it to John. See also Ecclesiasticus 48.10.

¹¹⁴ Mt. 11.13–15. Compare Lk. 16.16: Up to the time of John it was the Law and the Prophets. Since then, the kingdom of God has been preached.

And Timothy concludes:¹¹⁵

‘Both messengers, John and Elijah,
are from one power of the Spirit,
with the difference that one already came before Christ
and the other is going to come before Him,
and their coming is similar
and to the same effect.

In the second coming

Christ will appear from heaven in a great glory of angels,
to effect the resurrection of the children of Adam from the graves.
As Word of God, He created everything from the beginning
and He is going to renew everything at the end.
He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords,
and there is no end and no limit to His Kingdom.’

7. Christ Warned Us against Anyone Claiming Prophethood

One more point is to be found only in the Short Arabic Version: *Thumma ḥadhdharanā min qabili al-anbiyā’i wa-al-musaḥā’i al-wāridīna ba’da wurūdihi* (‘Then he warned us against accepting the prophets and christs who may come after his coming’).¹¹⁶ This is a clear allusion to the eschatological discourse of Christ:

‘Many false prophets will arise; they will deceive many. And with the increase of lawlessness, love in most men will grow cold.’¹¹⁷ ‘If anyone says to you then: “Look, here is the Christ”, or “Look, he is there”, do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and produce great signs and portents, enough to deceive even the chosen, if that were possible. You therefore must be on your guard. I have forewarned you of everything!’¹¹⁸

Timothy follows completely the saying of Christ who makes it clear that no prophet and no Christ could come after Him. The catholicos applies this warning to Muḥammad, who cannot therefore be a prophet, even though he claims to be.

8. Christ Brought the Perfection and Culmination of Human Development, so there is no Need for any Other Prophet

This argument can be found in different sections of the Debate, with slight differences in the three versions. It can be divided into four smaller arguments.

¹¹⁵ Putman, *L’Eglise et l’Islam*, nos 246–7 (= 668–72) = Mingana, “Timothy’s Apology”, p. 55, para. 3.

¹¹⁶ Timothy, Short Arabic Version, no. 228.

¹¹⁷ Mt. 24.11–12.

¹¹⁸ Mk 13.21–3 (cf. Mt. 24.23–5).

a) Christ gave us all that was necessary

In the Short Arabic Version, Timothy insists that Christ gave us all that was necessary (for this world and for the next), so that we do not need anything more or anyone else:

*Wa-ayḍan fa-al-Masīḥ lam yadaʿ
 ʿilmān wa-lā ʿamalan, wa-lā waʿdan wa-lā waʿīdan,
 yajibu an yūridahu, illā awradahu.
 Wa-lī-hādhā hadhdhara min qabīli ghayrihi
 la-allā yakhruja binā ʿan al-wājib.*

(‘Further,¹¹⁹ Christ did not leave
 any knowledge or deed, any promise or threat,¹²⁰
 which he should have brought, without bringing it.
 This is why he warned [us] not to accept another than Him,
 lest he should lead us away from what is required.’)¹²¹

b) Christ directed us to divine knowledge, so that human knowledge is not necessary

The second argument is that Christ gave us the highest knowledge, the knowledge of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. So any human and earthly knowledge is unnecessary. Obviously, for Timothy Islam and the Qurʾan are seen as human and earthly. We find this argument in the Long Arabic and in the Syriac Versions:¹²²

*Wa-al-Masīḥ ʿallamanā ʿan malakūti al-samāʾi;
 fa-lam yaʿud yufīdinā an naktasiba maʿrifatan ukhrā
 dāʿira (sic) al-umūri al-bashariyyati wa-al-ardīyyati,
 baʿda iktisābinā maʿrifatan
 ʿan sirri al-lāhūti wa-malakūti al-samāʾ.*

(‘Christ directed us to the Kingdom of Heaven.
 And it is superfluous, after the knowledge that we have
 of God and the Kingdom of Heaven,
 that we should be brought down to the knowledge
 of human and the earthly things.’)

¹¹⁹ In Medieval Arabic texts a sentence beginning with *wa-ayḍan* (corresponding to ‘further’) opens a new argument.

¹²⁰ In Arabic these two pairs of words (*ʿilm/ʿamal*, *waʿd/waʿīd*) include every possible thing in any kind of human action or reflection. In other words, Christ brought everything that was necessary.

¹²¹ Timothy, Short Arabic Version, nos 229–30.

¹²² Putman, *L’Eglise et l’Islam*, no. 154 (= 397–8) = Mingana, “Timothy’s Apology”, p. 39, lines 11–4.

c) Christianity is the climax of human development

Timothy's third argument is that Christianity is 'the climax of human development' (*qimmat al-taṭawwur al-basharī*), as the philosopher Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī said in his treatise on the necessity for the Incarnation. This being so, we do not need to go back to what has been superseded. Here is Timothy's text, which is found in the Syriac and the Long Arabic versions:¹²³

'As for the prophets, they prophesied sometimes
concerning the earthly affairs and kingdom,¹²⁴
and at other times
concerning the adorable Epiphany and Incarnation of the Word-God.
As for Jesus Christ, he did not reveal to us things
dealing with the Law¹²⁵ and earthly affairs,
but he solely taught us things
dealing with the knowledge of God and the Kingdom of Heaven.'

There is a clear distinction here between the Old and the New Testaments: the Old Testament deals with 'earthly affairs' and the coming of the Word; Jesus Christ in the New Testament 'solely taught us things dealing with the knowledge of God and the kingdom of heaven'. But I think that in the third sentence which says, 'Jesus Christ did not reveal to us things dealing with the Law and earthly affairs' there is a clear allusion to Islamic *sharī'a*.

d) The divine economy always goes from human to divine things, not vice-versa

The Syriac text and the Long Arabic Version¹²⁶ present the familiar account of the divine economy (*tadbīr*):

'A good and praiseworthy order of things
is that which takes us up from the bottom to the top,
from human to divine things
and from earthly to heavenly things.
But an order which would lower us
from the top to the bottom,

¹²³ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'islam*, no. 155 (= 399–401) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 38, lines 15–20. This has no equivalent in the Short Arabic Version.

¹²⁴ The Arabic text is clearer: '*an umūri hādihā al-ālamī wa-mamālikihī* ('concerning the affairs of this world and its kingdoms').

¹²⁵ The Arabic text does not have this very important word, which corresponds to *sharī'a*.

¹²⁶ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'islam*, no. 157 (= 405–8) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 39, lines 26–31.

from the divine to the worldly,
from heavenly to earthly things, is bad and blameworthy.’

Timothy says no more, but the meaning is very clear. Christ brought us to the top, and there could be no more upward advance after this: any other step would be a step backwards, as is clearly said in the Short Arabic Version:¹²⁷

*Waʿādatu al-tadbīri al-ilāhi an yaʿada binā
min asfalū ilā fawqu,
min al-arḍiyyāti ilā . . . al-samāʿiyyāt;
lā an yaruddanā ilā khalḥu,
wa-yaḥuttanā min al-samāʿiyyāti ilā al-arḍiyyāt;
ka-hāli al-Tawrāti wa-al-Injīl.*

(‘The ordinary divine economy
is to take us up from the bottom to the top,
from earthly to heavenly things;
and not to bring us backward
and to lower us from heavenly to earthly things;
such is the case with the Torah and the Gospel.’)¹²⁸

9. Which Religion is the True Religion?

ʿAmr Ibn Mattā reported¹²⁹ that Timothy, asked by the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (170/786–193/809) which religion is the true one, answered spontaneously:

The true religion ‘is the one whose laws and commandments are similar to God’s doings in the creation’ (*alladhī sharāʿiḥu wa-waṣāyāhu tushākhilu afʿāla Allāhi fī khalqihī*). And the Caliph admired Timothy, who did not mention any religion, but alluded to the Christian faith which commands: ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven,¹³⁰ for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike.’¹³¹

¹²⁷ Timothy, Short Arabic Version, nos 231–2.

¹²⁸ The author of the Arabic text means to say that, for a Christian, to accept the Qurʾan (which supposedly only speaks of earthly matters) would be a retrograde downhill step, similar to reverting from the Gospel to the Torah.

¹²⁹ See *Maris Amri et Slibae de Patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria*, ex codicibus Vaticanis edidit Henricus Gismondi, SJ, pars altera Amri et Slibae textus (Latin trans.), Rome, 1897, p. 38.6 21; *ibid.* (Arabic text), Rome 1896, p. 65.11–20.

¹³⁰ The Arabic text adapts here this shocking expression ‘be sons of your Father’, by saying *wa-kūnū mutashabbihūna bi-Abīkum* (‘be similar to your Father’).

¹³¹ Mt. 5.44–5.

8. *Conclusion*

We can conclude this short survey by identifying three elements in these Christian accounts.

Good Knowledge of Islam as well as of Christianity

Reading these Arab Christian documents one is struck by the very detailed information these authors had about MuḤammad. The historical account of MuḤammad's life presented by Ibn al-ʿIbrī for instance is based on the best Muslim sources. Arab Christian are usually neutral and objective, and they sometimes speak in a very positive way when dealing with the historical figure of MuḤammad.

Their information about the Qur'an too is solid: not only do they quote the text faithfully and loyally, but they also respect the interpretation usually given by Muslims. Their use of the Qur'an to confirm Christian revelation was normal apologetic practice, but they do not usually distort its sense.

Objectivity and Openness with Theological Discernment

The second characteristic of these texts is the theological discernment shown in their debates. It is clear that none of these Arab Christian authors recognises MuḤammad as a prophet. In this respect the meaning which is sometimes derived today from Timothy's beautiful words *salaka fī sabīl al-anbiyā'* has nothing to do with Timothy's own interpretation. What he himself meant was that MuḤammad, *by doing so and so*, walked after the prophets. Thus, *only in a certain sense* did he walk in the path of the prophets.

So these Christian authors' theological position is very clear, though nuanced. MuḤammad was not a prophet, nor *khātam al-nabiyyīn*, although he did good things for many people by bringing them his religion. This positive estimation is very clear in most texts.

The Importance of Arab Christian Theology for Muslim-Christian Dialogue

Our last remark concerns the pertinence of their reflection for our own time. Let us take an example. They say that the relation between MuḤammad and God was such that God supported him in his conquests. This is an answer pertinent to the question which Christians in the Arab world ask today: 'But why, if Islam is not the true religion, did it spread so widely through the whole world?' Timothy, like Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī and others, provides an oblique answer: MuḤammad

was supported by God. When we read his words, we are tempted to think that he is speaking diplomatically. But he is not, in fact. In his way of thinking, if the Muslims of his own time were stronger than the Rūm, it is because God was with them. So in a way Timothy is allowing that Muḥammad had something from God, but only in a way.

The position reflected in these texts is one which could be very useful today. For the Arab Christian writers were honest with themselves and with their religion. They could not believe about Muḥammad what Muslims believed and be at the same time Christians. They could not say that Muḥammad was a prophet, because in that case he would not only be *a* prophet, but *the* prophet, the seal of the prophets (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*). With the single exception of ‘Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, they never said Muḥammad came from Satan or that he was simply saying what someone else (Baḥīrā for instance) was dictating to him.

They admitted that Muḥammad had done many good things, *humanly and spiritually*, though they made clear that he had also done things that were contrary to Christian revelation. In this they were showing themselves objective and open-minded, very straightforward in their discussions, and faithful to their own convictions.