

Two Studies on Muhammad and Islam in Armenian Literature by Robert Thomson

[Muhammad and the Origin of Islam in Armenian Literary Tradition](#), in 32 pdf pages, from *Armenian Studies in Memoriam Haig Berberian*, Dickran Kouymjian, editor (Lisbon, 1986), pp. 829-858.

[Armenian Variations on the Bahira Legend](#), from Harvard Ukrainian Studies, Vol. 3/4, Part 2. *Eucharisterion: Essays presented to Omeljan Pritsak on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students (1979-1980)*, pp. 884-895, in 13 pdf pages.

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English translations of some Armenian historical sources mentioned by Thomson are available for reading online and/or downloading at Internet Archive: [Armenian Historical Sources\(5th-15th Centuries\)](#).

Also available: [Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III](#), by A. Jeffery, from *Harvard Theological Review* (1944) pp. 269-332. This is an English translation and study of Chapters 13-14, pages 42-98 of the 1887 St. Petersburg edition, of the 8th-century Armenian historian Ghewond/Ghevond's *History*. The correspondence between Umar II and Leo III is regarded as a later interpolation.

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**MUHAMMAD AND THE ORIGIN OF ISLAM
IN ARMENIAN LITERARY TRADITION¹**

The military impact of Muslims was felt in Armenia as early as the 640's, and Islamic influences came to have profound significance for many aspects of Armenian life — political, social, artistic, and literary. But the Armenians were slow to develop any coherent understanding of the nature of Islam as a religion. Not until Gregory of Tat'ev in the fourteenth century was any elaborate and detailed discussion of the beliefs and rituals of Muslims attempted (2). There are, however, accounts of the origin of Islam to be found in earlier Armenian sources. These were polemical in intention, but they are interesting for the light that they shed on the sources available in Armenia. And although many of the stories have their parallel in Greek, Syriac, or Arabic Christian writing, there are also idiosyncratic Armenian elaborations and traditions which are worth bringing together.

(1) I am indebted to Professors Wolfhart Heinrichs and Wheeler Thackston for several helpful references to Islamic literature.

(2) See G. M. De Durand, «Une somme arménienne au XIV^e siècle», *Etudes d'histoire littéraire et doctrinale*, 4^e série, *Publications de l'Institut d'études médiévales*, XIX, Montréal — Paris, 1968, pp. 217-277; and *idem*, «Notes sur deux ouvrages de Grégoire de Tathew», *REArm.*, 5 (1968), pp. 175-197. The article by F. Macler, «L'Islam dans la littérature arménienne d'après la publication récente du 'Livre des Questions' de Tathewatsi», *Revue des études islamiques*, 6 (1932), pp. 493-522, is not what the title might suggest but gives merely a summary of sixteen errors of the Muslims as indicated in the work of B. Kowlēsērean (for which see note 48 below). There is no discussion of the Armenian texts which form the subject of this paper.

What follows is an attempt to survey Armenian traditions concerning Muhammad and the origin of Islam down to the thirteenth century.

The first serious encounter between Armenians and Muslims occurred in 637. Numerous Armenian nobles, fighting in the Iranian army, were slain at the battle of al-Qādisiyah (near Sāmarrā). The first irruption of Muslim armies into Armenia proper took place four years later. Details of the destructive expedition, culminating in the sack of Dvin, are given by the seventh-century historian known as Sebēos. He then describes the final destruction of the Sasanian forces, the defeat and death of Yazkert III in 651, and the agreement between the caliph Mu'āwiyah and Theodore, prince of the Rštunik', preparatory to the caliph's grand expedition against Constantinople.

Some doubt has been thrown on the authorship of the *History* attributed to «Sebēos». The text as we have it is preceded by several sections that have no relevance to the main part, the so-called «History of Heraclius». And this main section is not entirely devoted to Heraclius, but gives a résumé of Iranian history from the mid-fifth century to the 590's, then a detailed account of the wars between Byzantium and her Sasanian and Muslim foes down to the caliphate of Mu'āwiyah. However, there is little doubt that this main part was written in the late seventh century, even if the text is not to be attributed to «Sebēos» (3). This *History* is important for our theme since it is the first Armenian source to mention Muhammad (4): He was an Ismaelite, a descendant of Abraham from the bond-servant Hagar (5), a merchant well versed in the history of Moses. It was by God's command that he appeared to the Ismaelites as a preacher, teaching them to recognise the God of Abraham; since the command «came from above», the Ismaelites immediately abandoned their vain cults and turned to the God of Abraham. But Sebēos has little further to say about the origin of Islam or the person of Muhammad. He is much more interested in

(3) On the question of whether the «History of Heraclius» as now known was written by «Sebēos» or a different author see G. V. Abgaryan, *Sebeosi Patmut'yunə ev Ananuni arekcsvacə*, Erevan, 1965; and *idem*, «Remarques sur l'histoire de Sebēos», *REArm*, 1 (1964), pp. 203-215.

(4) *Patmut'iwn Sebēosi Episkoposi i Herakln*, Tiflis, 1913, Ch. 30; there is a French translation by F. Macler, Paris, 1905.

(5) In this regard Sebēos quotes Gen. 16.12, which refers to Ismael.

the military conquests of the Muslims, whose success he attributes to two factors: the newly found unity among the Arabs, and the urging of the Jews (6).

Sebēos' comments on the early military success of the Muslims are repeated by the later Armenian historian Lewond, writing at the end of the eighth century. Lewond elaborates somewhat on the Jewish alliance, but says nothing about the origin of Islam as a religion or about the person and career of Muhammad (7). However, in his *History* has been interpolated an exchange of letters between the caliph 'Umar II and the emperor Leo III — at least these documents purport to be such. But they do not date to the eighth century and will be discussed below.

Other original Armenian writers of the eighth century do not give information about the person of Muhammad, although they sometimes offer a few generalised comments on Islam as a religion. The catholicos John of Ojun (717-728) may be referring to the Muslims in *Canon 28*; here he exhorts the Christian Armenians not to flinch at martyrdom by the heathen (*het'anosac'*) for worshipping the cross (8). But as so often with theologians, it is the enemies long dead who are the most in mind. For in his treatise against the Paulicians the «heathens» are the ancient pagans, not the Muslims; and John is still concerned with the «obscene» practices of the Mazdaeans. Nonetheless, the later law-codes do legislate on the problems of social relationships between Christians and Muslims (9).

Nor are the accounts of eighth century Armenian martyrs helpful. Vahan of Goł'n was martyred in 717, but in his *Vita* there is no exchange

(6) As this paper is concerned with literary traditions concerning Muhammad, no attempt will be made to comment on the military or political events described by Sebēos or other writers quoted below. For the reaction of Sebēos and other early Christian writers to the Muslim invasions see W. E. Kaegi, «Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest», *Church History*, 38 (1969), pp. 139-149.

(7) *Patmut'iwn Lewondeay meci Vardapeti Hayoc'*, St. Petersburg, 1887, Ch. 1; there is a French translation by G. Šahnazarean, Paris, 1857.

(8) See *Kanonagirk' Hayoc'*, ed. V. Hakobyan, I, Erevan, 1964, p. 533. Armenian text with Latin translation in *Johannis Ozniensis Opera*, Venice, 1834, p. 74.

(9) See in particular: *The Penitential of David of Ganjak*, ed. C. J. F. Dowsett. CSCO 216, 217, Louvain, 1961, §§ 10, 16, 45, 56; Mxit'ar Goš, *Girk' datastani*, Erevan, 1975, Section A Intr. §§ 9, 10, Chs. 101, 161, 163; J. Karst, *Sempadscher Kodex*, Strassburg, 1905, §§ 1, 12, 15, 26, 28, 29, 40, 72, 115, 116, 117, 125, 143, 170.

of views on the nature of Islam (10). Hamazasp and Isaac Arcruni were martyred in 785/6. In their *Vita* we read that their brother Merhujan accepted the Muslim faith (*lit.* legislation — *awrensdrut'-iwn*) (11) and was immediately circumcised, a rite frequently stressed in later Armenian authors (12). But the Muslim faith is merely described as «impious (*amparišt*)», or «fictitious (*karcec'eal*)», or «born of death (*mahacin*)». Nor in the martyrdom of Isaac and Joseph at Karin (Erzerum) ca. 808 do we find anything but opprobrious epithets describing Islam (*molor snoti usmunk'*) (13).

The first Armenian author to give a detailed account of Muhammad's life is Thomas Arcruni, writing at the beginning of the tenth century. He begins with the story of the Jews inviting the Ismaelites to share their inheritance, as in Sebēos, but then continues with a circumstantial description of Muhammad's career and teachings.

(10) *Vahanay Golt'nac'woy vkayabanut'iwn*, in *Sop'erk' Haykakank'*, Vol. 13, Venice, 1854. Cf. also John Catholicos Draxanakertci, *Patmut'iwn Hayoc'*, Tiflis, 1912, p. 99.

(11) It renders the *νομοθεσία* of Rom. 9.4. Used in Etiše (ed. E. Tēr-Minasean, Erevan, 1957), p. 29, for Christianity; it is very frequent in later writers for Islam. Muhammad is often called *awrēnsdir*, as in Thomas Arcruni, III, 6 — the *νομοθέτης* of James, 4.12 or Ps. 9.21. For the use of *awrēnk'* in Armenian as «religion» see R. W. Thomson, «The Maccabees in Early Armenian Historiography», *Journal of Theological Studies*, N. S. 26 (1975); pp. 329-341, esp. pp. 336-7.

(12) *Vkayabanut'iwn srboc' isxanac'n Hamazaspay ew Sahakay*, in *Sop'erk' Haykakank'*, Vol. 12, Venice, 1854, pp. 61-80. For circumcision required of converts to Islam cf. John Catholicos, *Patmut'iwn Hayoc'*, Tiflis, 1912, pp. 129ff., and Thomas Arcruni, *Patmut'iwn Tann Arcrunec'*, Tiflis, 1917, III, 6. Cf. Evodius on the 42 Martyrs of Amorium (V. Vasilevskij and P. Nikitin, «Skazanie o 42 Amoriiskix Myčenikax», *Zapiski Akademii Nauk*, St. Petersburg, 8th series, vol. 7, no. 2 [1905], p. 66), § 17: *περιτεμήθητε καὶ τῷ πρωτοσυμβούλῳ συνεύξασθε, καί...*

(13) *Vkayabanut'iwn srbocyn Sahakay ew Yovsēp'ay*, in *Vark' ew Vkayabanut'iwnk'*, II, Venice, 1874, pp. 266-271. Similar expressions in Thomas Arcruni, III, 6, describing the martyrdom of bishop John, prince Gregory Arcruni, and the priest Gregory.

Thomas Arcruni, II, 4 (14):

How the wicked kingdom of the Persians came to an end and was succeeded by the even more wicked (kingdom) of the Ismaelites

In the time of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius the Persian kingdom reached its end. And at that time there came and gathered in the city of Edessa 12,000 men from all the tribes of Israel. As they had seen that the Persian army had left and abandoned the city, they entered (Edessa), closed the gates, fortified themselves therein, and began to rebel against Roman rule.

But the emperor Heraclius commanded them to be besieged. The king's brother Theodore and the host of the army wished to slaughter them, but the king commanded them to go from his territory. They took the desert road and went to Arabia to the sons of Ismael, to the city called Madiam, which Israel had destroyed on leaving Egypt in its war with Ba'ak, king of Moab. And because the Persian power had become very weak, they fearlessly entered the city of Madiam and dwelt in it.

They sent messengers to the sons of Ismael, indicating their close relationship: «We are sons of Abraham, we and you, brothers. You must come to our help, and we shall take the land of our inheritance». But although the latter were persuaded, yet there was a great division among them, because they were divided by the worship of idols according to each one's desire.

At that time there were some despotic brothers in the regions of Arabia Petraea in the place (called) P'aran, which is now called Mak'a — warlike chieftains, worshippers of the temple of the Ammonites of the image called Samam and K'abar. It happened that one of them, called Abdla, died leaving a son of tender age called Mahmet. His uncle Aputalp took and raised him until he reached puberty. On attaining a sufficient age he dwelt with a certain wealthy man from among their kin. He served him faithfully, pastured camels, and was the steward of his house. When some time had passed, the master of the house died. Seeing that Mahmet was a faithful man and very judicious in all worldly affairs, the wife (widow) married him and turned over to him all the supervision of the house and property. So he became a merchant by trade and skilled in commerce. He undertook distant journeys on mercantile business, to Egypt and the regions of Palestine. And while he was engaged in this business he happened to meet in the regions of Egypt a monk called Sargis Bhira, who had been a disciple of the mania of the Arians. Becoming acquainted with him and in the course of time becoming friendly, he taught (Mahmet) many things, especially concerning the old testaments and that God has by nature no Son. He tried to persuade him to follow the former faith of the Israelites: «For if you accept this, I predict that you will become a great general and the leader of all your race». He reminded him of God's promise to Abraham and of the rites of circumcision and sacrifice and all the other

(14) There is a French translation by F. M. Brosset, *Collection d'historiens arméniens*, I, St. Petersburg, 1874, but this chapter is in complete.

things which it is not necessary to mention here in detail. On these the Ismaelites speculate to the very end (i.e. the n th degree).

It happened one day when he was departing from him that a strange voice, an inspiration fearsome and demonic, fell upon him and drove him out of his senses, as is now appropriate to indicate according to the following example. For they say of the woman from whom Antichrist will be born, that journeying from Egypt to the land of Palestine and desiring to see the column of David's wife, she went and lingered there quietly. And as she dozed, a strange spirit cried out from the mouth of the woman turned into stone: «You will bear a son who (will) conquer the world». And indeed a daughter of the tribe of Dan conceived from fornication. Such things also occurred in his (Mahmet's) time. For when his travelling companions asked why he had lost his wits, he said: «Some fearsome angel's voice fell on me and ordered me to go as a messenger to my nation, to show (them) God the Creator of heaven and earth, to take upon myself the title of leadership and to refute and destroy the false faith in idols». Coming to P'aran he repeated these same words to his uncle called Apjêhr. He said: «What is this new faith which is now being revealed by you? If you say any more you will be responsible for your own safety». Grieved, he went to his own house, for he was continuously oppressed by the demon; perhaps God allowed him to suppose that his loss of reason (was caused) by an angel. And many of them believed him when he said he was a messenger of God.

One day, when he was depressed from his uncle's threats, Ali son of Aputalip came in and said to him: «For what reasons do you sit depressed»? He said: «I preach God the creator of heaven and earth, but they reject me with threats». Now Ali was a valiant man. He said to him: «Arise, let us go out, for there are many men with us. Perhaps there may be some good solution to this matter».

When they had gone outside, Mahmet began to speak the same words publicly. There was a great outcry among them and such a dispute that many of them drew their swords. Mahmet's side was defeated; many on both sides were wounded, and Mahmet and Ali fled with about forty men. They came to the city of Madiam which we mentioned above. On hearing the cause of their flight the Jews, like zealots for God and as sons of Abraham and mutual brothers, were emboldened to unity and to proclaim that his words were true. They joined him and made a pact, gave him a wife from their nation, and made ready to support him in whatever way his wishes might dictate. So one could say that it was by a command of God that this undertaking began. The Jews joined with the Ismaelites, forming a large army. Attacking P'aran, they inflicted a great defeat on their opponents, killed Apjêhr and many of the Ammonite and Moabite troops, destroyed the images of Samam in his temple, and dared say that the temple was the house of Abraham. They subjected all the inhabitants of the neighbouring regions and wiped out by the sword all resistance.

When Mahmet saw the success of this venture and the concord of the Jews, he proclaimed himself head and leader of them all. He appointed as his officers and generals Ali and Apubik'r and 'Amr and Ut'man. He sent a message to Theodore, the brother of Heraclius, in that the Jews had cooperated:

«God promised this land to Abraham and his seed, and it was in their possession for a long time. And if God was disgusted with their wicked deeds and gave it into your hands, let the period you have held it suffice for you. Now we are the sons of Abraham and you know the promise made to Ismael our father. Give to us our land peacefully, otherwise we shall take it by war — and not only that (land) but also many others». He (Theodore) wished to show it to the king, but Heraclius died in those same days. His son Constans did not agree to respond as he (Theodore) had wished, but simply ordered caution and not to wage war against them until he saw the outcome of events. But the army of Ismael was vigorously straining for war. So wishing to defend the country (the Byzantines) went out against them. Leaving their horses, they opposed them on foot. The latter, having been at rest, attacked them. Exhausted by the weight of their arms, the great heat of the sun, the density of the sand which gave no support to the feet, and their tramping on foot, and distressed in every way, they fell into the hands of the enemy who slew them with their swords. Reaching the site of their camp, (the Muslims) seized a great amount of booty, and began fearlessly to spread over the land because they had no worries of any battle.

Then the inhabitants of Jerusalem, seeing the perilous situation with no hope of help, took the divine holy symbol of the Lord with their church ornaments and brought them in flight to the imperial capital to Constans. And Ismael ruled over all Judaea.

Now the Arian monk whom we mentioned above, Mahmet's teacher, on seeing his success rose up and went to Mahmet (to ask for) his kind favour, as if he had attained such things on being instructed by his teacher. But since (Mahmet) said he had a message from an angel and not from a man, he was very vexed at this and killed him secretly.

At this very time there was a certain hermit in the regions of Persia who had a pupil called Salman. At the hour of his death the hermit gave him these instructions: «My son, on my death do not remain in this land lest you lose your faith among the infidels, but go to the regions of Egypt to dwell in the numerous company of brethren (monks) so that you may gain your soul». When the hermit died, Salman intended to carry out his instructions. On his journey he happened to come to the city of Madiam; he had knowledge of the scriptures, though not a perfect one. When Mahmet saw him, he summoned him and attached him to him, and ordered him to write a book of laws for his nation by the hand of Abut'uraba the Ismaelite; for he himself did not know writing or reading. Salman agreed to write for him and composed a fictitious book, some of it from accurate memory, other parts being imaginary sayings. But Mahmet himself, moved by a raving spirit, had him write perverse (things), of which we shall give brief extracts.

He said that he was the Consoler whom the Lord Christ had promised to send to his disciples; he said he was equal to the Saviour, his travelling companion — in the words of Isaiah: «riding one on a donkey, and the other on a camel». All this he applied to himself. Instead of holy baptism (he prescribed) continual washings with water, and reckoned this was sufficient for purification. The heavenly gifts which the Lord has promised for the future, the ineffable and angelic renewal, he said were vast quantities of food

and drink; should one wish to eat insatiably one would find them (already) prepared. And there would be continual and insatiable intercourse with women who remained virgins. It is too long to repeat all his impure sayings, for they are many and opposed to God. And all this he affirmed and set down for his nation, calling it the Kuran.

Now come and I shall tell you with what laments the old author bewails them, saying: «Woe to you, alas for you, nation of Arabs (*Tačik*), men and women of all the cities by the sea, for the impiety of your tongue and filthiness of habits, whereby opening your mouth you spoke impious things, you have come before the mighty God. And now with new and amazing wounds he will judge you more than the whole world for the filthiness of your tongue, which you sharpened against the mighty king. He will slay you with heavy blows. The whole world will see you smoking, and fire will never leave you for ever. Like a potter's furnace will you burn, and you will have no rest».

All these evils he accomplished, and even more laws than these he established for his nation in his multifarious wickedness. Having lived for twenty years in this fashion he died, and appointed Apubak'r to the leadership of the Arabs.

The immediate source of Thomas' account is not clear. Although there are a few parallels with the later account in Mxit'ar of Ani, which is even more elaborate, Mxit'ar took his material more or less word for word from the Armenian version of a document in Karshuni (15); but no such written source for Thomas has yet come to light. Living in Southern Armenia, Thomas was familiar not only with earlier Christian traditions about Islam but also with native Muslim ones as well.

There are parallels between Thomas and some Byzantine writers, notably John of Damascus (675-749?), many of whose works were translated into Armenian (16). John, like Thomas, begins his account of the origin of Islam with the assertion that the Saracens were idolators, worshippers of the idol of Venus called Khabar (17). The Ammonite connection adduced by Thomas is mentioned in Theophanes (early ninth century) (18) and George Hamartolus (late ninth century) (19).

(15) See below, p. 16.

(16) See G. Zarpanalean, *Matenadaran Haykakan T'argmanut'eanc' Naxneac'*, Venice, 1889, pp. 575-580. For a general presentation of the Byzantine evidence see A.-Th. Khoury, *Polémique byzantine contre l'Islam (VIII^e-XIII^e s.)*, Leiden, 1972; and *idem*, *Les théologiens byzantins et l'Islam, Textes et auteurs (VIII^e-XIII^e s.)*, Louvain, Paris, 1969.

(17) *De Haeresibus Compendium*, 101 (*Patrologia Graeca* 94, col. 764). See also the Abjuration (note 20), p. 153.

(18) *Chronographia*, s.v. A.C. 622 (*Patrologia Graeca* 108, col. 685).

(19) *Chronicon*, CCXXXV (*Patrologia Graeca* 110, col. 865).

But in addition to information possibly taken from written sources available in his own time, Thomas also had direct knowledge of Islam. For he knows the name of Muhammad's uncle, information not repeated in Greek until the eleventh/twelfth century in the texts attributed to Bartholomew of Edessa, or in Syriac until the twelfth century historian Michael (20).

Muhammad's mercantile journeys to Palestine and Egypt are known to Theophanes and George Hamartolus, as is his marriage to his master's widow. As early as John of Damascus we hear that Muhammad became acquainted with an Arian monk, but the name Sargis Bhira, which becomes standard, is not known in Greek before «Bartholomew» (21). The story in an elaborate form appears in Arabic in Ibn Ishāq (d. 753 A.D.) (22). The demonic possession which Muhammad attributed to an angel is mentioned frequently in the Greek sources beginning with the Abjuration; they claim that Muhammad persuaded his wife to believe in his mission by asserting that Gabriel had appeared to him.

The support of 'Alī is not mentioned in the Christian sources before Thomas, nor is the alliance with the Jews of Medina following the hegira. Interestingly enough, the Syriac text of Michael's *Chronicle* says nothing about a Jewish wife for Muhammad, but the Armenian translator (or more accurately, adaptor) repeats the story found in Thomas (23). Encouraged by this alliance, says Thomas, Muhammad sent a message to the emperor Heraclius' brother Theodore, warning him to evacuate Palestine. This seems to be a reflection of the famous

(20) Muhammad's father 'Abdullāh is mentioned by name in the Greek abjuration; see E. Montet, «Un rituel d'abjuration des Musulmans dans l'église grecque», *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 53 (1906), pp. 145-163. This has been dated to the late seventh century by F. Cumont, «L'origine de la formule grecque d'abjuration», *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 64 (1911), pp. 143-150. A later date is regarded as more probable by several scholars; see D. J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*. Leiden, 1972, pp. 125-6.

(21) Bartholomaeus Edessenus (anno incerto), *Confutatio Agareni, Patrologia Graeca*, 104, col. 1396 etc. On Bhira see A. Abel, art. «Baḥira», *Encyclopedia of Islam*, New edition, I, Leiden, 1960, pp. 922-923.

(22) A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad, A Translation of Ishāq's Sirat Rasūl Allāh*, Oxford, 1955, pp. 78-81. The Armenian traditions are collected and discussed in R. W. Thomson, «Armenian Variations on the Baḥira Legend», *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 3/4 (1979-80), pp. 884-895.

(23) *Žananakagrut' iwn Tearn Mixayēli*, Jerusalem, 1871, p. 293; French translation by V. Langlois, *Chronique de Michel le grand*, Venice, 1868.

apocryphal letter of Muhammad to Heraclius himself, not found in the early Byzantine chroniclers but attested in Islamic tradition (24). The refusal of the Byzantines to respond led to their defeat on the battlefield, as already described in the *Histories* of Sebēos and Lewond.

Thomas then states that Muhammad killed his teacher, the Arian monk (Bhira), because the latter wished to be acknowledged for what he had taught Muhammad. Quite a different story is found in the late Greek source Euthymius Zigabenus, who ascribes the murder to drink — hence Muhammad's ban on wine (25). The only other Armenian author to mention the murder of Bhira, Moses Daxuranc'i, implies a similar motive as that made explicit in Thomas (26).

Unique to Thomas among early Christian critics of Islam is the attribution of the Qur'ān to a Persian called Salmān. This, however, was an important feature of the Muslim tradition found as early as Ibn Ishāq (27). Again, Thomas shows his familiarity with Muslim tradition in stating that Muhammad claimed he was the rider on the camel mentioned in Isaiah 21.7. This proof-text adduced by Muslims to show that the Old Testament prophets foretold Muhammad's mission does not figure in Greek polemic (28). The carnal delights of Muhammad's paradise are a commonplace of Byzantine writing. But the specific contrast between Muslim ritual washings and Christian baptism is not brought out in Greek writers until well after Thomas, by an imitator of Euthymius Zigabenus (29).

There is as yet no critical text of Thomas Arcruni whereby we could judge the textual reliability of this section on Muhammad and Islam. Several of the stories reported by Thomas have no parallels in foreign sources until much later, nor is there anything comparable in Armenian until the thirteenth century. Even then some of Thomas'

(24) See L. Caetani, *Annali dell' Islam*, I, Milan, 1905, pp. 731-734.

(25) In the Controversy attributed to Euthymius, *Patrologia Graeca*, 131, col. 36.

(26) See below, p. 12.

(27) For details see G. Levi Della Vida, art. «Salmān al-Farīsī», *Encyclopedia of Islam*, IV, Leiden, 1924, pp. 116-117.

(28) But it is known in Syriac; see A. Mingana, *Timothy's Apology for Christianity*, *Woodbrooke Studies*, 2, Cambridge, 1928, p. 37. For further Armenian references see below, pp. 22, 27. Also absent from Greek tradition is the story of Hagar as Pharaoh's daughter; see Max Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sagenkunde*, Leiden, 1893, p. 104.

(29) *Patrologia Graeca*, 131, col. 28.

claims remain unknown — or at least are never repeated. The original text of Thomas' *History* was extended twice by later chroniclers, the latest section being dated to 1303. Whether or not all the apocryphal legends found in Book II, ch. 4 form part of the original text composed at the beginning of the tenth century, Thomas was clearly familiar with material in Arabic as well as Greek. But it is difficult to tell whether he could read the texts in the original or whether he derived his information from oral sources.

Thomas Arcruni (II 4) is the first Armenian writer to refer to correspondence between the caliph 'Umar and the emperor Leo. He does not say that this was included in Lewond's *History*, and indeed the Armenian text of the letters shows evidence of being a much later composition than the time of Lewond (30). Furthermore, Thomas' description of 'Umar's letter as a *t'ult' havatoc'* (letter of faith) is hardly compatible with the cursory rehearsal of questions that had been pre-faced to Leo's long response. Gero's suggestion that it is the work of the Armenian redactor of the Christian apologia is convincing, as is his demonstration that the letter of «Leo» in its Armenian form is the work of an Armenian (31). The correspondence to which Thomas refers is not extant. One is equally unconvinced that Thomas is right in claiming that after receipt of Leo's response 'Umar rejected the most fabulous parts of the Qur'ān.

However, the letter of «Leo» is not particularly helpful in our present enquiry. There is nothing on the life of Muhammad and little on the source of his religious knowledge and inspiration, but a few points are worth noting.

'Umar asks why Leo does not believe the Muslim interpretation of Isaiah's reference to two riders. Leo responds with the fullest explanation of the «real» meaning found in Armenian. This proof-text is first found in Armenian in the account of Thomas Arcruni. Leo also refers to the charge that Salmān the Persian (with 'Umar and Abū Turab) was responsible for the composition of the Qur'ān, but he does not adduce any of the fanciful details found in Thomas. He

(30) Armenian text in Lewond, pp. 42-98. English translation in A. Jeffery, «Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III», *Harvard Theological Review*, 37 (1944), pp. 269-332.

(31) S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III*, CSCO, Sub-sidia, 41. Louvain, 1973, Appendix 2: The Authenticity of the Leo-'Umar Correspondence.

charges that Muslims venerate the pagan altar of sacrifice which they call the house of Abraham, though scripture does not associate Abraham with Mecca, and he mentions the seduction of Zayd's wife by Muhammad. The only other Armenian source to refer to these last two points is Moses Dasxuranc'i, a tenth century author whose work shows signs of retouching as late as the twelfth century (32). But they figure already in John of Damascus (33). And the only Armenian source other than «Leo» to suggest that Muhammad was influenced by Nestorian ideas is Ps. Šapuh Bagratuni (34). However, this claim is found in Greek as early as George Hamartolus (35), and in Arabic in the *Apology* of al-Kindī at the court of the caliph al-Ma'mūn (813-833) (36).

Thomas Arcruni's younger contemporary John Catholicos Drasxanakertc'i has little new to say. His comments about Islam are all opprobrious, but in attenuation one might note that he did suffer personally in the struggle between the Bagratid kings of Armenia and the emirs of Azerbaijan. The only interesting point is the claim that Muhammad was raised or born in servitude (37). But this does not mean more than the statement in Theophanes that Muhammad was a hired servant: *μισθωτός* (38).

The next Armenian historian to interest himself in Muhammad and the origin of Islam is Moses Dasxuranc'i, author of the *History of the Caucasian Albanians* (*Ahuank'*). As noted above, it is not certain whether he wrote in the same century as Thomas Arcruni and John Catholicos; the last hand in the compilation of his *History* dates to the beginning of the twelfth century. Reference has already been made to his agreements with Thomas and «Leo», but many of the details in his account are unparalleled in Armenian. However, since this *History* has recently been translated into English (39), it does not seem necessary to quote the text again here.

(32) See two paragraphs below.

(33) *Patrologia Graeca*, 94, col. 770.

(34) See below, p. 28ff.

(35) *Patrologia Graeca*, 110, col. 868. In Islamic sources the monk is often named «Nestor».

(36) W. Muir, *The Apology of Al-Kindi*, London, 1882, p. 23.

(37) Tiflis ed., p. 81: *cneal* (born); Jerusalem 1867 ed., p. 104: *sneal* (raised).

(38) *Patrologia graeca*, 108, col. 686.

(39) *The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movsēs Dasxuranci*, translated by C. J. F. Dowsett, *London Oriental Series* 8, Oxford, 1961.

The first Armenian to engage in formal correspondence with a Muslim on religious topics was the eleventh century Gregory Magistros, who was unusually well versed in Greek learning for Armenians of his time (40). Gregory composed a verse defense of Christianity (41), but the only document relevant to this study is his *Letter 70*. For the first time we hear in Armenian that what Muhammad wrote in the Qur'ān about the Old Testament prophets is not to be found in the Bible. Muhammad claimed, according to Gregory, that the Jews had altered the scriptures, and also that the Christians altered the Gospel after Christ's ascension. These accusations were familiar to the Byzantine writers, beginning with John of Damascus. Also familiar to these writers is the accusation reported by Gregory that Muhammad said someone other than Christ was crucified. This charge is elaborated in the later Armenian writer Mxit'ar of Ani (*see below*).

The chronicler Samuel of Ani, writing at the end of the twelfth century, introduces a few new points. According to him Muhammad was learned not only in the heresy of Arius, having been instructed by Bhira, but was also versed in the heresy of Cerinthus. This is repeated by the historians Vardan and Kirakos. As Cerinthus was a Jewish gnostic, the introducing of his name may be a curious interpretation of the common statement in Byzantine sources that Muhammad met both Christians and Jews on his journeys to Palestine. But since Cerinthus was not known to Armenian heresiologists for *Jewish* ideas but for his distinction between the heavenly Christ and earthly Jesus (42), it is more likely that he was introduced to explain the Muslim

(40) See M. Leroy, «Grégoire Magistros et les traductions arméniennes d'auteurs grecs», *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire orientales et slaves*, 3 (1935), pp. 263-294. The letters were edited by K. Kostaneanc', *T'it'era*, Alexandropol, 1910. For a summary of their contents see V. Langlois, «Mémoire sur la vie et les écrits du prince Grégoire Magistros», *Journal Asiatique*, 6^e série, tome XIII (1869), pp. 5-64. See also H. Thorossian, «Grigor Magistros et ses rapports avec deux émirs musulmans, Manoutché et Ibrahim», *Revue des études islamiques*, 15 (1941-46), pp. 63-66, which contains a brief summary of Letters 70 and 71.

(41) Printed in his *Talasač'ut'iwnk'*, Venice, 1868. There is nothing in early Armenian literature comparable to the Syriac *Apology* of Timothy (see note 28 above) or the text published by F. Nau, «Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens (AD 639)», *Journal asiatique*, 11^e série, tome VI (1915), pp. 225-267. (Lammens corrects the date of this to 644; see *Journal asiatique*, 11^e série, tome XIII [1919], pp. 97-110).

(42) See R. W. Thomson, «An Armenian List of Heresies», *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S. 16 (1965), pp. 358-367, especially pp. 362, 363, 366.

account of Jesus' crucifixion. Samuel is also the first Armenian writer, save for the undated letter of «Leo», to mention female circumcision, a ritual already known to John of Damascus (43).

Of more local Armenian interest is Samuel's claim that Muhammad himself made a pact with the Armenians, guaranteeing the free observance of Christianity. The claim is repeated by Mxit'ar of Ani, Kirakos, and the Armenian Juanšer. But it is not particularly surprising that Muhammad himself was credited with an arrangement only worked out under his successors.

Samuel of Ani, p. 78 (44)

615. In those days appeared the false prophet of the Saracens, a sectary of Cerinthus and the Arians, called Mahmet, from the race of Ismael, son of Hagar. He was instructed by a solitary called Bxira, of the sect of Arius, in the Sinai desert, where they (the Ismaelites) had settled and multiplied when Sarah expelled the hand-maiden from her sight.

...

618. Some historians say the exodus (*eln* = *hegira*?) of Mahmet the false prophet (occurred) in the sixty-fifth year (= 616), others in the sixty-second, and others in the sixty-eighth.

...

647. ... Now in the days of Constans, son of Heraclius, Dvin was taken by the Arabs, says the historian, and on the day of the holy epiphany in the holy martyrium of saint Sargis 20,000 were killed; the holy altar and font were covered with the blood of the slain. They also took captive more than 30,000 others. Then the patriarch Nersēs gathered the corpses of those who had fallen in the battle and buried them in the same martyrium which he restored for them. Here resides the chief of the race of Ismael whose first name is Kałart', as scripture relates: «The sweet-lipped people shall sate their swords with blood» (Sirach, 12.16 ff, with a pun on *kałe'r*). He lived for eight years then died. After him Amaran (was chief) for twelve years. When Kałert' reached Damascus in Mesopotamia, he ravaged and plundered as far as the city of Amida. Then he sent out three (generals): one to Rome (Constantinople), called Yaz, with Yovēl as advisor; they slaughtered 70,000 of the Romans. To the region of Persia he sent the emir Ot'man and the general Mawiē. They defeated Miwrdat with 20,000 and Mušel the *sparapet* of Armenia with his army. Then they ruled over the whole land of Armenia, Persia, Egypt, Media, Parthia and Palestine.

(43) *Patrologia graeca*, 94, col. 774.

(44) Samuel Anec'i, *Hawak'munk'*, Valašapat, 1893; there is a French translation by F. M. Brosset, *Collection d'historiens arméniens*, II, St. Petersburg, 1876.

Now the reason for their rule is the following. There was a certain prince of the regions of Damascus called Sargis. He used to rob the Ismaelite traders of many possessions. Three times Klerť implored him and he ceased. Then he gathered the cavalry of his own race, and raiding three times, captured his own and theirs. And when he dominated Armenia then he began to circulate their faith, but they did not accept it. So the Ismaelite prince found a certain confidant called Mahmet, the chief of the traders, an Egyptian who knew a little of the laws of Moses but was grounded in the heresy of Arius and Cerinthus, in that he spoke of a bodily kingdom on earth, food for the belly, and marriage after the resurrection. He taught laws opposed to the old and new legislations, with unworthy thoughts and twisted words. Very derisively he corrupted the covenant of Abraham, as it is written: «Every one of your males shall be circumcised on the eighth day». But he (ordered to be circumcised) not only males but even females, thereby detestably mocking the token of the Lord's pact. And with simple water (he said they were) to wash always, instead of the font of baptism. And many other unworthy and erring traditions (he instituted) — and most ridiculous ones. This man he (Klerť) acquired as lawgiver, messenger and general for twenty years. They destroyed Bznunik', Aġiovit and Tarōn.

Then Mahmet stayed the sword, and by the word of his instruction they subjected to themselves the greater part of the universe. With an eternal oath he sealed a deed for the land of Armenia, (that) they could freely observe Christianity. And he sold (*vačareac'*) them their faith, taking from every household four drachmas, three bushels of *xorbal*, one nose-bag, one cord of hair, and one gauntlet (45). But from the priests, nobles and cavalry he ordered no tax to be taken.

To the same period of Samuel's *Chronicle* belongs that of the Syrian Patriarch Michael, which was translated into Armenian in 1248. As noted above, the Armenian text — but not the Syriac original — claims that Muhammad married a Jewish wife following his alliance with the Jews. The Armenian version of Michael also provides for the first time in Armenian an etymology for the term «Saracen», deriving it from the name of Abraham's wife Sarah. This etymology was familiar to Greek writers as early as John of Damascus: ἐκ τῆς Σάρακας κεινός (46). Curiously enough, the only other Armenian text to offer an etymology for «Saracen» is also a translation — the Armenian version of the Georgian chronicler Ĵuanšēr. But here the

(45) On this passage involving taxes paid by the Armenians see H. A. Manandian, *The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade*, trans. N. G. Garsoian, Lisbon, 1965, pp. 130ff.

(46) *Patrologia graeca*, 94, col. 764.

meaning given is quite different: instead of the Georgian «dogs (*dzaglt'a*) of Sarah» the Armenian reads «servants (*spasawork'*) of Sarah» (47).

The most elaborate account by far of Muhammad's life in Armenian is that found in the chronicler Mxit'ar of Ani, writing at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The source for most of Mxit'ar's information was discovered by Babgen Kiwlēsērean and published in 1930 (48). It is an Armenian translation of a Karshuni document which purports to be based on a written account of a converted Muslim who knew an eyewitness of Muhammad's career. The Armenian text is first found in a manuscript dated to 1273 A.D. (Jerusalem MS 1288). An eighteenth century copy (Jerusalem MS 888) associates it with the thirteenth century scholars Vanakan and Vardan. But this is because Jer. 1288 begins with theological works by Vanakan, and because the historian Vardan repeats some of the material found in Mxit'ar (49).

Like most chroniclers, Mxit'ar of Ani culled his information from a variety of sources without indicating what came from where. The long section in chapters 25 and 26 was copied from an Armenian version of the Karshuni text that was very close to but not identical with the text dated to 1273 (though Mxit'ar himself may have been responsible for the minor differences). But later in his chronicle, in ch. 27, Mxit'ar quotes Lewond by name and copies details from him of the early Muslim conquests. On the other hand, Mxit'ar's references to Kałert' and Emran derive from Samuel of Ani. Also based on Samuel is a third section, which was probably an addition to the original chronicle. The author of this attributes the taxes payable

(47) Ĵuanšēr, *Patmut'iwn Vrac'*, Venice, 1884, p. 98. Georgian text in *K'art'lis Tskhovreba*, ed. S. Qaukhchishvili, vol. 1, Tbilisi, 1955, p. 230; French translation in M. F. Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, vol. 1, St. Pétersbourg, 1849, p. 234. The Georgian depends on a misreading of *κενοῦς* as *κίνας*.

The Armenian version of Michael claims that the Midianites are descendants of Abraham's third wife, Ketura, following the biblical text. But earlier Armenian tradition emphasizes that the Parthians are the descendants of Ketura. See Movsēs Xorenac'i, II, 1. For Syriac evidence see Aphrahat, *Demonstrationes* XI 9 (ed. I. Parisot, *Patrologia syriaca*, I, Paris, 1894).

(48) B. Kiwlēsērean, *Islamā Hay matenagrut'ean mēj'*, Vienna, 1930, pp. 189-222. For a précis in English see A. Jeffery, «Gregory of Tathew's 'Contra Mohammedanos'», *The Muslim World*, 32 (1942), pp. 219-235. See also note 2 above.

(49) For a full description of the manuscripts see N. Polarean, *Mayr C'uc'ak jeragrac' srboj Yakobean'*, Vols. III and IV, Jerusalem, 1968, 1969.

in Armenia as described by Samuel to Muhammad's legislation for all Christians, and elaborates on the various ways of dating the Muslim era — an expansion of Samuel *s.v. anno* 618.

There are several unique features in Mxit'ar, which though repeated by later Armenian writers are not found in Greek or Syriac. Although the Muslim association of Mecca with Abraham was known to the Christians from the earliest times, Mxit'ar is the first to give the story of Abraham's visit to Ismael's wife. With some variations it is found in the historians Mas'udi (50) and Ṭabari in Arabic (51). The story of the idol of the Damascene god Raman has no parallel in Christian sources; that it was stolen by Ethiopian traders for its gold, thus sparking war between Ethiopia and Arabia, must be a reflection of that sixth century conflict. Mxit'ar is also the first Armenian to offer any details of the rituals associated with the *haji*. But his account and explanations differ from what is found in the Greek sources. Also for the first time in Armenian Mxit'ar tells of Muhammad's claim that he was snatched by an angel to Mecca and of various miracles worked by the prophet (52). Mxit'ar then expounds the Muslim theory of Christ's crucifixion. The suggestion that Christ was not really crucified had been attacked in earlier Greek and Syriac writers (53). Absent from earlier Armenian tradition is the story of Muhammad affixing a paper to a heifer's horn claiming that it was the Qur'ān. But this, like the story of Muhammad's death, is found in Syriac (54). As the Armenian text of Mxit'ar of Ani has never been translated, I offer here a rendering of the relevant passages into English, noting the major variants in the Armenian version of the Karshuni text.

(50) Mas'ūdi, *Les Prairies d'Or*, trad. Barbier de Meynard et Paret de Cou-teille, revue et corrigée par Charles Pellat, Paris, 1962 —, § 941 (vol. 2, III, 91).

(51) Ṭabari, *Chronique*, trad. H. Zotenberg, Vol. 1, reprint Paris, 1958, I, 51.

(52) Several of these miracles are mentioned by Ibn Sa'd (d. 845 A.D.); see Tor Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds in lehre und glauben seiner gemeinde*, Upsala, 1917, p. 47 (water), p. 49 (tree), p. 56 (poisoned ram). Arabic text ed. E. Sachau, *Biographien Muhammeds*, Leiden, 1905.

(53) E.g. Abjuration, p. 132; John of Damascus (*P.G.* 94), col. 765; Timothy's Apology, pp. 40, 41.

(54) See the texts published and translated by R. Gottheil, «A Christian Bahira Legend», *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, 13 (1899), pp. 189-242, 14 (1900), pp. 203-268. It was also known (via Arabic sources) in the West; see N. Daniel, *Islam and the West*, Edinburgh, 1960, p. 5.

Mxit'ar of Ani, Ch. 25 (55).

Concerning the fables of the impious Mahmet and his falsehood, which his disciple corrupted

Now that we have arrived (at the place) to tell of the impious Mahmet, let us set out the multitude of his error so that you may completely hate and flee his name, O Christ-loving soul. To this very day they still ignorantly go on pilgrimage to Mecca, offer gifts to demons, and thoughtlessly perform the rite of the former idolatrous devil-worship, not knowing what they are doing. Now you can know their deeds, as they ignorantly reckon the worship of demons to be worship of God.

There was at that time, he ^a says, a man called Mahmet from the tribe called Kureš, from the sons of Kedar (Ketura?) of the twelve tribes of Ismael. Coming to the holy mountain of Sinai, he studied with a certain hermit who knew the Ismaelite tongue and also Persian ^b; he was called Bxira ^c. Receiving him, he wished to inform him about everything. Beginning from creation, he read to him in progressive order the book of Genesis and all the others, the New Testament and the book which they call the *Childhood of Jesus* (56).

While he only heard the divinely inspired scriptures and did not comprehend them correctly, he had reason to go to the innermost desert, and thereafter never returned to his teacher. His mind did not love Christianity, but his thoughts were seeking to know what Judaism was. Meeting a certain Jewish merchant, he learned from him their rites and faith. He despised that also. And he began of his own invention to proclaim a new faith, opposed to the truth and false.

Scorning all cults like Antichrist, he decreed (laws for) only his own ^d.

a. I.e. the informant of the author of the Karshuni text which begins:

In the time of Mahmed there came to us a truthful man, who left us in writing (this) account from the beginnings of the faith of Mahmed. For, following many world-histories, he said thus concerning the man who went around after Mahmed (namely that) he reported what he had seen with his own eyes. This I decided to write to you, so that you might learn and not believe their words, or suppose them to be worshippers of God because they always mention God.

b. Ismaelite tongue and Persian] Arabic, *K*

c. Bxira] Sargis, an Arian, *K*

d. decreed ... own] honoured only his own religion (*den*), *K*

(55) *Mxit'ar Anec'i, Patmut'ivn*, St. Petersburg, 1879.

(56) For the Armenian versions of the *Infancy Gospel* see *Ankanon Girk'*, II, Venice, 1898, pp. 1-312. There is a translation of the long recension in P. Peeters, *Evangelies apocryphes*, II, *L'évangile de l'enfance, rédactions syriaques, arabe et arméniennes (Textes et documents pour l'étude du christianisme)*, Paris, 1914.

Coming to the village ^e of Mecca, which is beyond Yathrib (Ep'crip') Medina, their capital, he preached in accordance with his own whim and pleasure, proclaiming the house of their tribal gathering, that is of the cult of snakes, was the house of God and ^f the house of Abraham; he called it *al-K'aaba*. And he said that Ismael married a wife, and this is his house. When Abraham longed to see him, he said to Sarah: «Let me go that I may go and see my son». But Sarah was suspicious that perhaps he might approach the hand-maiden ^g. She imposed an oath by God on him: «Do not descend from your beast to the ground, but remaining on it see your son and return here». When he arrived he did not meet Ismael because he was hunting. So he questioned his wife: «Where has your husband gone»? But she insulted and scorned him, saying: «O mad and tottery old man, for what purpose do you seek my husband»? He replied: «Tell your husband that the doors of your house are not in good shape; change it by making other doors».

When Ismael returned from the hunt, his wife did not tell him, neglecting Abraham's command. But Ismael, perceiving his father's odour, questioned his wife: «Did some stranger (come) here»? She said: «An old man». Ismael asked: «What did he say»? When his wife informed him, Ismael knew that he had referred to his wife. He dismissed her and took another wife. In like fashion, he (Abraham) met the second wife and the third, as far as the seventh. And she said to Abraham: «Welcome father, come down from your beast that I may anoint your head». But he said: «I do not consent». When the wife entreated him, Abraham descended — not to the ground because of the oath to Sarah, but he put one foot on a rock and kept the other astride (the beast). The rock gave way to his foot, showing the imprint.

This he so taught from fables, and he ordered (people) to come from every region to offer worship to that stone and house. And inside the house, he ordered them to worship as they circle the stone ^h, which is the other stone and a hole for their feet ⁱ. Furthermore, he ordered them to circle the outside stone where Abraham's footprint is, skipping on one foot and saying: «*Lbayk', lbayk'*,» as if replying to someone: «*Yay, yay, awas, awas*» (57).

Then crossing the valley which they call *Vodn al haram j*, they slaughter animals there. And riding a beast, they rush without turning back as far as the hill near Mecca. As they flee, if anyone's coat falls or (the horse) throws its rider, they do not turn back to raise him up. After that they run on foot

e. village] ditch, K

f. + he called it, K

g. his hand-maiden Hagar, K.

h. walls, K

i. which ... feet] which, furthermore, (is) a hole for snakes, K (i.e. corruption in Mxit'ar, *ḍdzič'n* > *otič'n*)

j. *Vodn al hamam*, K

(57) Cf. Ibn al-Kalbi, *The Book of Idols*, trans. N. A. Faris, Princeton, 1952, p. 5. n. 16.

between two rocks which they call Safa and Emran; they run from rock to rock seven times without a pause as energetically as they can. Then they run to another place which they call *Mak'a al has*. Seven times they run and throw stones, and it is not clear at whom they throw stones^k. But they merely say that Mahmet did thus. And he gave a command, saying: «Abraham did likewise». This was said imprudently (?) by him, for he said: «He did not descend from his mount», and later he belied it (saying): «He ran and threw stones»^l. And they do not slaughter in that spot reptiles, crawling things or wild beasts because of the snakes which dwell in the house, mingling with the humans but not harming any of those they call *muslims* — that is, «believers». And they cover over the house with seven draperies, and kissing the drapery they place it on their eyes.

Now the erring deceit of their silly nonsense is not obvious to us. For many who do not know all this, see those races of men engaged in all these rituals and assiduous at prayer and continually saying «by God», and they suppose them to be believers. Therefore I considered it important to reveal the secrets of their deceit.

The house which they call Abraham's, neither Abraham nor Ismael ever went to, as the divine histories testify. But it is a house of idols and of the cult of snakes. For the tribal gathering takes place in the house, where they raise snakes up to the present time, as we have said. But the idols were removed by a foray of Egyptians at the time of Trajan. For the statues were of bronze, and with other deities they set them up in Alexandria. Then the Arabs found other idols, that is the idols of *Dimaskos Riman*, in some desert. At the coming of Christianity its priests were afraid that it might fall into the hands of Christians and be broken up, so they took it and fled into the desert. Later the idolatrous Arabs found it and took it to Mecca with its priest to that house, wishing to set it up in the famous site of their first idols. But the snake-worshipping priests did not agree to setting up the idols of foreign priests in their own house and persuaded the crowd that the house was sufficient for the snakes only, on the grounds that the snakes would not like the foreign priests in their own dwelling. On this pretext they set it outside the door on the rock, standing on one foot and holding up the other^m, as if the image of Raman was like the image of Hephaistos or as if this itself was Raman, called Hephaistos by the Damascenesⁿ. Hollowing it out with iron, and bonding it with lead, they set it on one foot on the rock. In the time of Theodosius^o through the neglect of the ministers, since it was standing outside the building, it was stolen by Ethiopian merchants for its gold. Therefore there was a war between the two (countries), (as) they relate in Egypt by tradition down to today. This is the footprint on the rock which Mahmet said was Abraham's — which the

k. + similarly they do not know the other things that they do, K

l. for ... stones] with the second saying he annulled the first, K

m. and holding up the other, om. K.

n. + I do not know, K

o. + the great, K

Arabs circle on one foot, imitating the one-footed Raman. And they worship its demon and cry out, and do not know *p*.

Likewise they do not understand for whom they slaughter animals in the valley *q* or from whom they flee. But after investigating we discovered that Mahmet, going aside from the multitude of people into the valley, sacrificed to all the demons. Rushing to him, the demons appeared to him in human form, and terrified by them Mahmet fled. The same (story) he handed down *r*.

But as for their running between the rocks, the rocks were their cults before the former idols, like that rock which is inside the house. And the demons forced the cult of themselves on Mahmet from the two rocks. For this reason he ran fast hither and yon in his frenzy; and the same he legislated.

Furthermore, as he was going out in haste to the cult of the house, some mad dog followed him in to seize him. But Mahmet escaped by throwing a stone. Thinking this (?) to be strange and obstructive to his worshipping *s*, he handed down the same. But as for their saying that Abraham went there seven times, they greatly lie *t*. And those who do not kill reptiles and creeping things and wild beasts, render honour and reverence to the snakes *u*. Just as did the chief magi in Yazkert's letter to the Armenians (58), the same they legislated: that snakes and lizards and other insects/reptiles are not to be killed, because they were gods and their cults (were observed) among them *v*. All this the blessed man, who was very knowledgeable and came from the island of Crete, believed and revealed and made known *w*.

p. + why Abraham ran or why there was the place of one foot on the rock and not of two, *K*

q. + and throw them out as carrion, *K*

r. + to them. This is why they slaughter animals and flee, *K*

s. thinking ... worshipping (Mxit'ar is corrupt)] it went on foot there and prevented his worship, but through his stone-throwing he got away from it, *K*

t. he handed down ... lie] likewise he handed down in his allegations about Abraham, but from their own sayings they are destroyed and annulled. He says Abraham went there five times; the sixth he did not descend from his beast, the seventh he stood on the stone. But when did Abraham do all this? *K*

u. render ... snakes] the reasons are clear, because of the cult of the snakes which they previously worshipped, *K*

v. just as ... them, *om. K* (Cf. Elišē, p. 53).

w. all ... known] all this one of Mahmed's disciples revealed to us, who had been himself an eye-witness of it all. And terrified by the appearance of the demons, he fled to the island of Crete; and there he became a Christian and believed in Christ, *K*

(58) The letter in short form is found in Łazar P'arpec'i, *Patmut'iwñ Hayoc'*, Tiflis, 1904, pp. 43-4, and in expanded form in Elišē, *Vasn Vardanay ew Hayoc' Paterazmin*, Erevan, 1957, pp. 24-27. Mxit'ar is referring to Elišē's version. The letter was not written by the shah Yazkert II himself, according to the Armenian historians, but by his grand-vizier Mihrnerseh.

Ch. 26. Now we shall tell of his death — truly worthy of derision.⁴

For when Mahmet died, they wrapped him and placed him in his garden; they did not bury him because he had promised that ^y on the third day he would rise, like Christ. And when the guards^z were asleep, dogs entered and ate the face of the corpse (59). Consequently it was prescribed by his disciples to kill dogs in that month. Observing this custom up to the present day, they kill dogs in that month.

And there is more for me to say about his religion and rites and laws, full of folly. He suggested the idea to his followers that just as the prophets had foretold about Christ, so also they had foreseen about Mahmet, indicating the prophetic declaration: Jesus on an ass and he on a camel, taking as their testimony the vision of Isaiah: «I saw, he says, one riding an ass and one riding a camel»^{aa}. This he said in his city Medina while sitting in the crowded square. And while he was speaking he disappeared from sight for a long time, and great astonishment seized them all. Then, while they were talking, he stood among them and greeted them, saying: «Peace (be) with you, and mercy and grace». Awestruck, they were lost in wonder and said: «Where have you come from, and what is this greeting of yours, and from what gods have you brought such a saying of mercy and grace?» He replied: «Behold, while I was speaking with you, I was snatched up by an angel and found myself in Mecca, in the house of our fathers Abraham and Ismael, which they had built as a house of God and as an inheritance for us; just as once the Jews and prophets built Jerusalem as a dwelling for the sons of Israel. For he had heard of the snatching of Ambakum from Jerusalem to Babylon to Daniel, and attributing the same to himself so told them. But his words were never true. He hid from them that he had seen Mecca^{bb} and told them the des-

x. ch. 26 ... derision] but we shall narrate another tale, truly worthy of derision, *K*

y. because ... that] saying that, *K*

z. the guards] the drowsy disciples, *K*

aa. and there is ... camel] I know that I have made you greatly shake with laughter, but there is still more for me to tell you about his religion and judgments and legislation. But now I shall interrupt in order (to tell) the story of the accursed Jews which he put in their mouth, to boast that just as the prophets had foretold about Christ, so also they had foretold about Mahmed, indicating the calling of his prophethood: Jesus on an ass and he on a camel. For they took as their testimony the vision of Isaiah, the passage which says: «I saw two riders, one on an ass, the other on a camel», wickedly and falsely interpreting the vision, *K*

bb. but his ... Mecca] but he had never gone to Mecca (*sic*) nor informed anyone that he had seen it, *K*

(59) This story (repeated by Vardan) is not found in the Greek tradition but was known in Syriac; see ref. in note 54 above. It was also known in the West; see Eulogius, Archbishop of Toledo (martyred 859), *Liber apologeticus martyrum. Patrologia latina*, 115, col. 860. Cf. Daniel, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

cription of the place, of the sites and buildings, and all the distinguishing features of the region he reported to them by magic^{cc} just as he had known them from his youth^{dd}. Therefore they were all astonished and said he was a prophet. When he heard this from their mouths he was emboldened to preach and say: «Bear witness that there is no God save only He, and He has no companion, and Mahmet is his servant and apostle»^{ee}. In such fashion did he reason, announcing one God according to the Jewish (faith)^{ff}. But by saying that He has no companion, he thereby divided the Son and Spirit from the Father. And thus he taught them: «The God whom our fathers and the prophets worshipped, I am preaching to you». Thereby he persuaded the people. And furthermore he distinguished them from the Jews who said that Christ was only a man and the son of Joseph, and crucified by themselves. But he called Jesus the Word of God and the Spirit sent from God to Mary, and he took from her a body in human fashion. And he adduces the word of God as testimony, saying: «Thus said God, that we have sent our Spirit to her, who took the form of a man». And he said that the Jews did not crucify him, but he counterfeited (himself) to them^{gg}. And he did not reckon them able to crucify the Word of God or (for him) to be crucified by them. And he was not subject to death, but remains alive and will come to the world in the latter times^{hh}. And he praised Christians and accepted the gospel and the prophets. And he anathematised the Jews, since they denied Christ and abjured him, and killed the prophetsⁱⁱ.

Now Mahmet made his legislation from the old laws and the gospel, but changed by willing inventiveness what he liked, as laid down by himself and not taken from someone else, whatever he legislated for his people^{jj}. And he performed apparent miracles in front of the people like a present (manifestation of?) the future Antichrist, of whom our Lord Jesus Christ warns.

cc. by magic] in full, *K*

dd. just ... them] as if he had been raised there from his youth and had taken all the details in a moment of time. I do not know if by magical art he arrived there suddenly, or whether by investigation he had stored the others up in his mind, *K*

ee. + and prophet, *K*

ff. + as (scripture) says: «I am God and there is no other God except Me», *K*

gg. + as if he likened someone else to himself, and they crucified him — whom they call Simon Kyrenats'i. And this for the reason that, *K*

hh. and he did not reckon ... times] he did not regard him able to be crucified as the Word of God; and the other was crucified by them. And he was subjected to death, but lives and will come to the world at the last time to judge all nations, *K*

ii. since ... prophets] and said thus: God anathematized the Jews because they denied Christ and rebelled against him and killed the prophets and all the apostles, *K*

jj. now Mahmed ... people] now he took legislation from the gospel, but changed from the two whatever he could in order to establish laws by himself; in his own name and not from other laws he legislated (for) his people, *K*

As the harbinger of Antichrist he prepared a road for him, for *kk* at that time he called trees from the forest by name. And departing from their midst, it came walking and stood before them. Then he ordered it to go back to its place. And he made men think mountains moved. And lifting up his hands, from his five fingers he made a stream flow apparently. A mortal poison, they say, was prepared for him. A kid having been roasted and set before him, he wished to eat. But the kid spoke in the hearing of many: «Do not eat of me, for a mortal poison has been prepared in me for you» *ll* (60).

And when robbers fell on him in a caravan wishing to despoil him... (*lacuna*)... and them *mm*. But they gathered in one place, camped *nn* in the dry plain and made the sea encircle him. The robbers were held at the edge of the sea, and after remaining three days went away empty. And these saw themselves on the dry land, where there was no moisture. This they say his uncle did, and learning from him, he (Mahmet) did likewise. But many of his people did not believe his fabulous nonsense *oo*. They say also that he showed to men the moon divided into four parts distinct from each other, then gathered it back into one full circle. But as for the throwing of stones which we mentioned above, they invent the following story *pp*: when God expelled Adam from Paradise, he settled him in this world. And when he saw Satan in that spot where we throw stones, he recognised that he was the one who had deprived us of life *qq*, and takingst ones he threw them at him *rr*. Therefore we do the same.

Now when he had told them what he had to say and had proclaimed himself a messenger *ss*, then they begged him to lay down laws for themselves. He promised them to ask God the next day what he might command, and

kk. and he performed ... for] but earlier we spoke to you about his miracles. Now I shall tell you again from the beginning further (things), *K*

ll. + now thus they say a miracle was worked by him, which is not confirmed by any of the miracles that were clearly (?) worked later, but seems now to be an apparent semblance, *K*

mm. and when ... them] and he came across violent men in a caravan, wishing to despoil them, *K*

nn. in one place camped, *om.* *K*

oo. but many ... nonsense] now some say many did not believe that it was by magic and in appearance and not really. This has been told us by believers in him, *K*

pp. + which they themselves do not know, but at our insistence those who suppose they know say thus, *K*

qq. who ... life] who had deceived us and expelled us from the garden of life, *K*

rr. + and he fled from him, *K*

ss. now ... messenger] similarly I shall tell another thing. When they had testified that there is no other God save one and Mahmet is God's messenger, then, *K*

dismissed them. He had a heifer that had just given birth brought to that public square and the calf kept at home. And whatever he himself desired he wrote down and fixed to the heifer's horn, then led it to the desert. Then at the time of the assembly, he ordered the heifer to be released. He and the assembly awaited its arrival, as if for some visitation from above. When the heifer appeared making an uproar, he offered up thanks. Taking the writing he read it with veneration and ceremony, as the law that had come from heaven ^{tt}.

All this his disciple revealed to us, unmasking the deceit of those heretical fables. He came and was baptised on the island of Crete by the inspiration of the providential will of God. And we wrote down his fable and obscene deceit for the information and warning of fearers of Christ, that they might flee and detest that hater of God.

tt. then led it to the desert ... heaven] he gave the heifer to trusted servants at night clandestinely, sent it far away and ordered his servants to release the heifer at dawn and themselves to return by another route. He himself at the coming of dawn gathered the people in the place where he had separated the mother and her offspring from each other. While they were talking (the heifer) arrived roaring, dazed and sweating, as if forcibly led by someone, burst into the crowd and came up to Mahmet. He ordered it to be held, and himself took the paper from its horns. Kissing it he placed it on his eyes and said it had been sent from God. They write this down in the Qur'ān as the introduction, which they call *Surat al-Bakara*, that is «discourse of the cow, or laws». Then he opened (the paper) and read it in the hearing of the people. And they supposed that the very cow with the paper had been sent from heaven, K

(The Karshuni text [in its Armenian version] continues from where Mxi'tar ends:)

They write this down in the Qur'ān as the introduction, which they call *Surat al-Bakara*, that is, «discourse of the cow, or, laws». Then he opened (the paper) and read it in the hearing of the people, and they supposed that the very cow with the paper had been sent from heaven.

And he ordered them to perform the ritual of prayer seven times a day, with washing of the hands and feet and face at morning and night. And instead of the Jewish trumpets and lyres at the time of psalm-singing or our bell-ringing (*zamaharut' iwn*), he ordered them to build a tall *mnira* in the middle of the city. He selected someone with a loud voice and called him *modin*, that is, «he who bears (witness to) the faith». And he ordered him to go up, on the grounds that God so ordered the prophets: «Go up to the heights, O evangelist of Sion. Raise up powerfully your voice, O evangelist of Jerusalem». And he ordered him to call out loudly three times.

O honourable readers, when you read the history of the false prophet Mahmed, curse him and loudly praise God. And make a worthy recollection of this unworthy scribe Mxit'ar and my parents, and remember (them) in the eternal day, Amen. (End of K)

The historian Vardan (thirteenth century) repeats in abbreviated form much of Mxit'ar's information. More interestingly, he is familiar at first hand with the same Armenian translation of the Karshuni document. For Mxit'ar names no sura from the Qur'ān, nor does he refer to the daily ablutions or the call to prayer, all of which are mentioned at the end of the Karshuni text and by Vardan. But Vardan does not follow his source so closely as Mxit'ar had. He is also indebted to other Armenian sources: Sebēos for the twelve tribes of Ismael, the Byzantine defeat, and the removal of relics from Jerusalem; Samuel (or Mxit'ar, Ch. 27) for the reference to Kalert'.

Vardan, Ch. 34 (61):

At that time there was a man from among the sons of Ismael whose name was Mahmat', a merchant. He was born in the city of Madina, a two days' journey away from Mak'a, from the tribe called Korēš, the son of Abdlay, who died leaving him an orphan. He joined a certain merchant, and made progress in his house. When the merchant died, he gained control of his master's house, marrying his wife (widow). He used to go with camels to Egypt. And there met him a certain hermit named Sargis, of the sect of Arius and Cerinthus, who taught him (about) God from the old books and (taught him) the book of the *Childhood of Our Lord* (62). On his return home he preached what he had heard. But his family persecuted him. So he went to the desert of P'aran. And when the 12,000 Jews arrived, using them as a pretext, he preached the God of Abraham to the sons of Ismael; and he assured them that if they worshipped him they would inherit the land that God had given to Abraham.

After describing the Muslim success against the Byzantine army, Vardan continues:

It was the year of our era 67 (63). And because the advice of Mahmed had succeeded, they asked him for laws. And he called the site of the temple of the snakes that they worshipped *al-K'ayuba*, which is, «gate of God». And he called the city where he lived «house of Abraham». Because Christianity was strong (there?) they took the idol of Damascus, Rēmana — which is

(61) Vardan Vardapet, *Hawak'umn patmu' ean*, Venice, 1862; there is a more critical text of this section and a French translation in J. Muyltermans, *La domination arabe en Arménie*, Louvain, 1927.

(62) Cf. note 56 above.

(63) I.e. 618 A.D.

bald Hephaistos — and threw it into the desert. Finding it, the Arabs brought it to the temple of snakes. But the priests of the snakes did not wish to place it there; taking it outside, they made a site for one of its feet on a rock and set it there. The Ethiopian merchants stole it for the gold that the Ismaelites had cast it in. So there was a serious war between the two nations until they forgot (the cause?). About it (the site?) he said: It is the footprint of Abraham, when he came to see his son Ismael. And because Ismael was out hunting he asked his wife: «Where is your husband»? She said: «Go away, you, decrepit old man». Then Abraham said: «When he comes home, tell your husband: Change the door of your house». Now when Ismael came (home) and perceived the odour of his father, he questioned his wife, and she told him what she had been instructed. On learning this, Ismael divorced his wife and took another, as far as a seventh. This one begged Abraham to descend from his donkey so she might anoint his feet. He put down one foot, said (Mahmet?), and placed it on the rock, and the rock yielded to his feet (*sic*). The other foot he did not put down from his beast. For he had sworn to Sarah that he would not dismount, as she feared that he might be with Hagar. This is the fable of Mahmet. And he ordered that they should (come) there from every region to worship, and said they should go around the rock on one foot and say: «*Lbayk', lbayk'*», and as if replying to someone: «*Ay, ay, awas, awas*».

Crossing the valley they slaughter an animal, then mounting a beast they flee as far as the hill of Mak'a. And if in their flight some clothing falls or comes out of place (?), no one is allowed to look behind. Running between the two rocks which they call Safa and Emra, they go from rock to rock seven times without pausing, and throw stones. They say Mahmet did so, and so taught. But the running on one foot is because of the single footprint. The slaying of an animal in the valley and the fleeing, they say, (are because) Mahmet offered sacrifice to all the demons so that they might show him visions, but when they appeared to him he fled. The going round the two rocks and throwing stones (are because) their rocks were worshipped before the idols. And while Mahmet was worshipping according to his custom a mad dog attacked him, and he threw stones at it; so he ordered the same thing to be done. Snakes and serpents are not killed because they were worshipped by them. And the slaughter of a dog, they say, is because when Mahmet died they did not wish to bury him, expecting that he would rise up on the third day like our Lord Jesus Christ, and dogs devoured his face. When they realised this, they slew the dogs, and ordered the same to be done on the same month (of each year).

He taught (them) to say God is one and that no one is companion to him, and Mahmet is his servant. As for those who say, on the word of some Jew, that the prophets spoke about Mahmet as they did about Christ — in this regard they say that Isaiah saw two people riding, (one) on a donkey, (the other) on a camel. And one day, suddenly by magic Mahmet disappeared, and a little later reappeared, saying: «Peace be with you and the mercy and grace of God». In astonishment they said: «Whence do you come, and what is this new greeting of yours, and which god's grace did you bring us»? He said: «God took me to Mak'a, to the house of my father Abraham, and explained

his wishes. And tomorrow he will send us laws». Taking a heifer that had given birth, on the public square he separated it from her calf; then he wrote whatever he wished, fixed it to her horns, and sent it out to the desert with trusted (friends). He ordered it to be released the next day, while he himself remained (behind) and gathered the crowd. The cow arrived mooing and sweating, and bursting into the crowd, sought its calf. He ordered it to be seized, and taking the piece of paper, kissed it and said that it came from God.

Up to today it is written about this at the beginning of the Qur'ān: *Surat' al-Bakara*, which is: laws of the cow. And he ordered (them) to pray five times with ablutions, and instead of the trumpets of Israel, to summon (the faithful) from high up, taking as witness (the saying): «Go up on the mountain of Sion, O evangelist». And they call the crier *Modin*, which is «he who bears (witness to) the faith». And the putting of the finger in the ear, they say, is because one hears with the ear, willy-nilly. And he called Christ the Word of God and Spirit. And they say that he performed a miracle: bringing the moon down, they say, he divided it into four parts; then making it whole again, he sent it back to heaven.

Kirakos of Ganĵak, writing in the second half of the thirteenth century, has nothing new to add. He takes his information from various earlier sources, drawing primarily on Thomas Arcruni (for the stories of Muhammad's demonic possession, 'Ali's support, Muhammad's ideas about heaven, female circumcision and the contrast between Muslim ablutions and baptism) and Samuel of Ani (for Cerinthus, Kafert' and the Muslim military campaign and the taxes levied on Armenia). He does not know, or chooses not to use, the material from the Karshuni document in Mxit'ar or Vardan (64).

The final text to be considered here is the most idiosyncratic. It is the «History of the Birth and Upbringing of Anti-Christ Mahamat and His Reign», which appears as a preface to an anonymous work commonly known as the *History* of Pseudo-Šapuh Bagratuni. Although quotations from an historical work by Šapuh Bagratuni dealing with the seventh and eighth centuries do appear in later Armenian historians, his own *History* has been lost. A text published in 1921 and attributed to him bears no relation to what is known of his *History* from other sources (65). In a second edition of 1971 the preface was for

(64) Kirakos Ganĵakec'i, *Patmut'iwn Hayoc'*, Erevan, 1961, pp. 56-60; there is a French translation by F. M. Brosset, St. Petersburg, 1870.

(65) *Patmut'iwn Šaphoy Bagratunwoy*, ed. G. Tēr-Mkrtč'ean and Mesrop Episkopos, Ējmiacin, 1921.

the first time published in full (66). But the earliest manuscript containing this section dates only from the sixteenth century.

The origin and date of the passage dealing with Muhammad remain a mystery. There are two main themes. The first is that the monk Sargis (Baḥira), having cured Muhammad of demon-possession, fraudulently plans to «discover» him as a prophet thus assuring his later acceptance. Parallels exist in other Christian polemical sources, where it is claimed that Muhammad suffered from demon-possession, that the monk was a healer and that as prophet Muhammad was an impostor (67). But that Sargis plotted with Muhammad before «recognizing» him as a prophet seems unique to this Armenian text.

Much more difficult to explain, however, is the assertion that Muhammad was a Persian, born near Rayy, who fled from the last Sasanian king and built the city of Baghdad. That Baghdad was a Sasanian city — rather than a Muslim one built in the eighth century — was supposed by some later chroniclers. The Georgian Ĵuanšēr, for example, claims that Abū-Bakr captured Baghdad on invading Persia (68). (The Armenian version of Ĵuanšēr renders Baghdad as «Babylon» (69).) A clue to the association of Muhammad with Baghdad may lie in the emphasis in Ĵuanšēr and other sources that Baghdad/Babylon was a center of idol-worship and that the Persians were idolators *par excellence*. The preface to Ps.-Šapuh also claims that Muhammad was an idolator and a magus. Furthermore, the epic *Sasunc'i Davit'* opens with a reference to the idolatrous caliph of Baghdad (70), the Muslim who is Armenia's chief enemy. Perhaps the author of the strange preface to Ps.-Šapuh, identifying Baghdad with the idolatrous enemies of his country and recognizing Muhammad as the first leader of these «idolators», assumed that he must have built their capital city. But it is not certain that this text was originally composed by an Armenian, since the last Sasanian king is given his name in its Arabic rather than Armenian form (*Kasre* instead of

(66) *Patmut'wn Ananun zruc'agri (karceċ'eal Šapuh Bagratuni)*, ed. M. H. Darbinyan-Melik'yan, Erevan, 1971. For a translation of the relevant passage see Thomson, ref. in note 22 above.

(67) Cf. Khoury, *Polémique* (as note 16 above), pp. 82-3.

(68) *K'art'lis Tskhovreba* (as note 47 above), p. 230; Brossset, I, p. 234.

(69) Ĵuanšēr, p. 98.

(70) E.g. D. Č'it'uni, *Sasunakan*, Paris, 1942, p. 78: *kar krapašt-t'agawor m' al, Baldat-Məsər kənsətēr*. For a translation of the standard Armenian text published in Erevan see *David de Sassoun*, trad. F. Feydit, Paris, 1964.

Khosrov). In the Armenian popular tradition Muslims and Sasanians became somewhat confused, so Baghdad could be identified with Persia. But that Muhammad himself was a Persian is a conclusion that no other writer on Islam ever seems to have adopted.

In conclusion, it is perhaps strange that the Armenians did not develop a more precise and coherent understanding of the religion of their enemies or engage in dialogue with them as did the Byzantine Greeks and the Syriac speaking Christians. Only Gregory of Tat'ev in the fourteenth century made any elaborate attempt to understand Islam as a religion. Even he has nothing much to say about the person of Muhammad or the origin of Islam. But his work is the closest Armenian equivalent in the Muslim era to the work of Eznik in the Sasanian era.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

It is noteworthy that the Armenian *Ĵuanšēr* [*Ĵamarōt Patmut'iwn Vrac'* Venice 1884, 102] adds the story of Kačert, which is not in the original Georgian. On Bahira see R.W. Thomson, 'Armenian Variations on the Bahira Legend', *Eucharisterion: Essays Presented to Omelyan Pritsak*, [*Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 3/4 (1979–1980)], 884–895.

This article does not tackle the question of Armenian knowledge of Muslim religious practice. There are interesting comments on that in Nersēs Šnorhali, *Ołh Edesioy* [translated by I. Kechichian, *Nersēs Šnorhali: La complainte d'Edesse*, Venise 1984] and in Mxit'ar Goš, *Girk' Datastani*, ed. X. T'orosyan, Erevan 1975, esp. 21–22.



The President and Fellows of Harvard College

Armenian Variations on the Bahira Legend

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Armenian Variations on the Baḥira Legend

ROBERT W. THOMSON

Armenian historians do not hesitate to depict the unpleasant aspects of Muslim rule in the Caucasus. It is only natural that they should dwell on the carnage and extortion caused by these rulers, who were “even more wicked than the Persians,” according to Thomas Artsruni,¹ and that they should see the cause for this scourge in their own sins, as did Լևոն.² But although they describe in detail the initial expansion of Islam and the military successes of the Muslim armies, they have much less to say about Islam as a religious force. Indeed, not until the fourteenth century did Armenian historians attempt a discussion of the Muslim religion that aimed at understanding rather than ridicule.³ However, the earlier polemical accounts of the origin of Islam that occur in Armenian sources are of some literary, if not historical, interest. They contain features that also occur in the other Christian polemical texts — Greek, Syriac or Arabic — as well as specifically Armenian developments. Not the least curious are the Armenian variations on the legend of Baḥira, the heretical Christian

¹ *T'ovmayi Vardapeti Artsrunwoy Patmut'iwñ Tann Artsrunests'* (hereafter Artsruni) (Tbilisi, 1917), in the title to bk. 2, chap. 4; there is a French translation by F. M. Brosset, *Collection d'historiens arméniens*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1874).

² *Patmut'iwñ Lewondeay metsi Vardapeti Hayots'* (hereafter Լևոն) (St. Petersburg, 1887), chap. 1. A French translation by G. Shahnazarian was published in Paris in 1857.

³ See G. M. De Durand, “Une somme arménienne au XIV^e siècle,” in *Études d'histoire littéraire et doctrinale*, ser. 4, Publications de l'Institut d'études médiévales, no. 19 (Montreal and Paris, 1968), pp. 217–77; and idem, “Notes sur deux ouvrages de Grégoire de Tathew,” *Revue des études arméniennes* 5 (1968):175–97. The article by F. Macler, “L'Islam dans la littérature arménienne d'après la publication récente du 'Livre des Questions' de Tathewatsi,” *Revue des études islamiques* 6 (1932):493–522, is not what the title might suggest, but merely gives a summary of sixteen errors of the Muslims as indicated in the work of B. Kiulësërean, *Islamë Hay Matenagrut'ean mēj* (Vienna, 1930).

monk who supposedly recognized Muḥammad as a future prophet and inspired him with many of his doctrines.⁴

Baḥira does not figure in the earliest Armenian accounts of the life of Muḥammad. The late seventh-century source known as Sebēos dwelled at some length on the conquests of the Muslims in Syria and Armenia.⁵ Their early success the author attributed as much to the encouragement of the Jews as to the weakness of the Byzantine army. But of Muḥammad himself he had little to say:

(chap. 30) At that time [lived] a certain man from among the sons of Ismael, whose name was Mahmet, a merchant. As if by the command of God he appeared to them as a preacher [teaching] the road of truth, and he taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was versed and well informed in the history of Moses. Now since the command came from above, at a single order they all joined together in a united religion. Abandoning their vain cults, they turned to the living God who had appeared to their father Abraham. Then Mahmet gave them legislation: not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsely, and not to commit fornication. And he said: "With an oath God promised [that promise] as he said at that time while he loved Israel. Now you are the sons of Abraham, and God will fulfill the promise of Abraham and his seed for you. But only love the God of Abraham, and go and seize your land which God gave to your father Abraham, and no one will be able to oppose you in war, for God is with you." Sebēos went on to describe the defeat of the Byzantine army in the sands, the Muslim expansion into Syria and Egypt, and the collapse of the Persian kingdom.⁶

Levond, writing at the end of the eighth century, elaborated on the Jewish alliance and repeated Sebēos' information about the Byzantine defeat in the desert, but he said nothing about Muḥammad. The only comment relevant to our theme in Levond occurs in the correspondence between the emperor Leo and the caliph 'Umar, where it is suggested that Muḥammad was influenced by "Nestorian" ideas. But the correspondence as it has survived is not authentic; the Armenian version of Leo's

⁴ For a general account of the Islamic traditions concerning Baḥira, see L. Caetani, *Annali dell' Islam*, vol. 1 (Milan, 1905), pp. 160–61; for a more recent bibliography, see s.v. "Baḥirā," by A. Abel, in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 1 (Leiden, 1960), pp. 922–23.

⁵ *Patmut'iwn Sebēosi Episkoposi i Herakln* (hereafter Sebēos) (Tbilisi, 1913); a French translation by F. Macler was published in Paris in 1906. On the question of whether the "History of Heraclius" as it is now known was written by "Sebēos" or a different author, see G. V. Abgaryan, *Sebeosi Patmut'yunē ev Ananuni arel'tsvatsē* (Erevan, 1965).

⁶ For the reaction of Sebēos and other early Christian writers to the Muslim invasions, see W. E. Kaegi, "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest," *Church History* 38 (1969): 139–49.

letter in Լևոնդ is the product of an Armenian pen.⁷ Curiously enough, only one other Armenian source picked up the “Nestorian” theme — the account in Ps.-Shapuh Bagratuni (translated below) — although the theme was known in Greek as early as George Hamartolus (ninth century) and appeared in Arabic in the *Apology* of al-Kindi at the court of the caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–833).⁸

The first Armenian author to give a detailed account of Muḥammad's life was Thomas Artsruni, who wrote at the beginning of the tenth century. He began with the story of the Jews inviting the Ismaelites to share their inheritance, as did Sebēos, but then continued with a circumstantial description of Muḥammad's career and teachings:

(II 4) At that time there were some despotic brothers in the regions of Arabia Patraea in the place [called] P'aran, which is now called Mak'a — warlike chieftains, worshippers of the temple of the Ammonites of the image called Samam and K'abar.⁹ It happened that one of them, called Abdla, died leaving a son of tender age called Mahmet. His uncle Aputalp¹⁰ took and raised him until he reached puberty. On attaining a sufficient age he dwelt with a certain wealthy man

⁷ Լևոնդ, pp. 42–98; an English translation of the correspondence is in A. Jeffery, “Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III,” *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944):269–332. Thomas Artsruni was the first Armenian writer to refer to correspondence between the caliph 'Umar and the emperor Leo (Artsruni, bk. 2, chap. 4). He did not say that this was included in Լևոնդ's history, and indeed the Armenian text of the letters shows evidence of being composed at a much later time than that of Լևոնդ. Furthermore, Thomas's description of 'Umar's letter as a “t'ult' havatots'” (letter of faith) is hardly compatible with the cursory rehearsal of questions that had been prefaced to Leo's long response. Gero's demonstration that the letter of “Leo” in its Armenian form is the work of an Armenian is convincing: S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III*, CSCO, subsidia 41 (Louvain, 1973), Appendix 2: “The Authenticity of the Leo-'Umar Correspondence.”

⁸ Hamartolus in *Patrologia Graeca* (hereafter *PG*), vol. 110, col. 868; W. Muir, *The Apology of Al-Kindi* (London, 1882), p. 23.

⁹ There are parallels between Thomas Artsruni and some Byzantine writers, notably John of Damascus (675–749?), whose works were translated into Armenian. John, like Thomas, began his account of the origin of Islam with the assertion that the Saracens were idolators, worshippers of the idol of Venus called Khabar; *De Haeresibus Compendium*, vol. 101 (*PG*, vol. 94, col. 764). The Ammonite connection adduced by Thomas is mentioned in Theophanes (*PG*, vol. 108, col. 685) and George Hamartolus (*PG*, vol. 110, col. 865).

¹⁰ The name of Muḥammad's uncle is not found in Greek texts until the eleventh-twelfth centuries, in the texts attributed to Bartholomew of Edessa; in Syriac texts it did not occur until the works of the twelfth-century historian Michael. Muḥammad's father Abdullah was mentioned by name in the Greek abjuration; see E. Montet, “Un rituel d'abjuration des Musulmans dans l'église grecque,” *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 53 (1906):145–63. This has been dated to the late seventh century by F. Cumont, “L'origine de la formule grecque d'abjuration,” *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 64 (1911):143–50. A later date is regarded as more probable by several scholars; see D. J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam* (Leiden, 1972), pp. 125–26.

from among their kin. He served him faithfully, pastured camels, and was the steward of his house. When some time had passed, the master of the house died. Seeing that Mahmet was a faithful man and very judicious in all worldly affairs, the wife [widow] married him and turned over to him all the supervision of the house and property. So he became a merchant by trade and skilled in commerce. He undertook distant journeys on mercantile business, to Egypt and the regions of Palestine.¹¹ And while he was engaged in this business he happened to meet in the regions of Egypt a monk called Sargis Bḥira, who had been a disciple of the mania of the Arians.¹² Becoming acquainted with him and in the course of time becoming friendly, he taught [Mahmet] many things, especially concerning the old testaments and that God has by nature no Son. He tried to persuade him to follow the former faith of the Israelites: "For if you accept this, I predict that you will become a great general and the leader of all your race." He reminded him of God's promise to Abraham and of the rites of circumcision and sacrifice and all the other things which it is not necessary to mention here in detail.

Artsruni went on to describe Muḥammad's eventual success, with Jewish support, in becoming leader of the Arabs, and the defeat of the Byzantine forces in Syria. Then he mentioned the death of Baḥira:

Now the Arian monk whom we mentioned above, Mahmet's teacher, on seeing his success rose up and went to Mahmet [to ask for] his kind favour, as if he had attained such things on being instructed by his teacher. But since [Mahmet] said he had a message from an angel and not from a man, he was very vexed at this and killed him secretly.

The only other Armenian author to mention the murder of Baḥira, Moses Daskhurants'i, implied a similar motive as that made explicit by Artsruni:

[When Muḥammad began to preach the doctrines he had learned from Baḥira,] (III 1) The foolish, heathen, self-indulgent race, amazed at such fine talk, asked Mahmet: "Where did you learn this?" Deceiving his ignorant people, Mahmet replied: "An angel spoke to me as to one of the first prophets who spoke of God." They secretly commissioned spies to discover who had really told him these things, however, and how he knew so much, but Mahmet learned of these deceivers and secretly killed his wicked teacher and buried him in the sand; sitting on this very place, he told the spies: "It was here that the angel appeared to me and told me of these great wonders."¹³

¹¹ Muḥammad's mercantile journeys to Palestine and Egypt were known to Theophanes and George Hamartolus, as was his marriage to his master's widow.

¹² As early as from John of Damascus, we learn that Muḥammad became acquainted with an Arian monk, but the name Sargis Bḥira, which becomes standard, is not known in Greek before "Bartholomew": Bartholomaeus Edessenus (anno incerto!), "Confutatio Agareni," *PG*, vol. 104, col. 1396, etc. An elaborate version of the story appears in Arabic in Ibn Ishāq (d. 753 A.D.): A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muḥammad: A Translation of Ishāq's Sirat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 79–81.

¹³ *The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movsēs Dasxurañci*, trans. by C.J.F. Dowsett, London Oriental Series, no. 8 (Oxford, 1961). The last hand in the compilation of this work dates to the beginning of the twelfth century.

But quite a different version of Bahira's death is found in the late Greek source Euthymius Zigabenus and in Syriac (and Arabic?) sources, echoed by the West's William of Tripoli. These writers claimed that Muḥammad killed Bahira under the influence of drink — hence Muḥammad's ban on wine.¹⁴

Thomas Artsruni's reference to Muḥammad's mercantile journeys reflects knowledge common to earlier Greek sources. A curious twist was given to the tradition by the chronicler Samuel of Ani, who wrote at the end of the twelfth century: according to him, Muḥammad was "the chief of the traders, an Egyptian."¹⁵ But this may be nothing more than a confusion in the text, for Samuel's chronicle was revised and re-edited several times in later centuries. The suggestion that Muḥammad was an Egyptian is never repeated in Armenian tradition, though the last document to be discussed in this article is categorical in making him a Persian.

The way in which Muḥammad met Bahira is variously described in the Armenian sources. Moses Daskhurants'i saw the meeting as the work of Satan:

(III 1): With the decline of the Sassanian kingdom of Persia there appeared among the false prophets of whom we heard from the Saviour a man called Mahmet, a diabolical and ferocious archer who dwelt in the desert. One day, Satan, assuming the shape of a wild deer, led him to meet a certain false Arian hermit by the name of Bahira and then vanished. When the well-bent bow of Mahmet was aimed straight at him, the man cried out loudly, and said: "Do not sin, my son, for I am a man like yourself!" And Mahmet said to him: "If you are a man, why are you in that cave?" And calling him to him, Bahira began to teach him from the Old and New Testaments after the manner of Arius who held that the Son of God was a created thing and commanded him to tell the barbarous Tačiks what he had learned from him, his foul teacher, insisting that none should know his whereabouts.¹⁶

According to Ps.-Shapuh Bagratuni, Muḥammad was taken to Bahira (there called Sargis) by his father to be cured of demonic possession.¹⁷ But in general the Armenian sources merely say that Muḥammad "studied with" Bahira, or "was instructed" by him. Somewhat more elaborate are the accounts in Mkhitar of Ani (at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) and Vardan (early thirteenth century). Mkhitar repeated verbatim the information in the Armenian translation of an undated docu-

¹⁴ Euthymius, *PG*, vol. 131, col. 36; William, "Tractatus de statu Saracenorum," in H. Prutz, *Kulturgeschichte der Kreuzzüge* (Berlin, 1883), p. 577.

¹⁵ Samuēl Anets'i, *Hawak'munk'* (hereafter Samuel of Ani) (Vaḷarshapat, 1893), s. anno 647. There is a French translation by F. M. Brosset, *Collection d'historiens arméniens*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1876).

¹⁶ Trans. by C.J.F. Dowsett; see fn. 13 above.

¹⁷ See below, p. 892.

ment in Karshuni,¹⁸ while Vardan added some details that are found in the earlier Samuel.

Mkhitar, chap. 25:¹⁹

There was at that time a man called Mahmet from the tribe called Kuresh, from the sons of Kedar [Ketura] of the twelve tribes of Ismael. Coming to the holy mountain of Sinai, he studied with a certain hermit who knew the Ismaelite tongue and also Persian;²⁰ he was called Bkhira. Receiving him, he wished to inform him about everything. Beginning from creation, he read to him in progressive order the book of Genesis and all the others, the new testament and the book which they call *The Childhood of Jesus*.²¹

While he only heard the divinely inspired scriptures and did not comprehend them correctly, he had reason to go to the innermost desert, and thereafter never returned to his teacher. His mind did not love Christianity, but his thoughts were seeking to know what Judaism was. Meeting a certain Jewish merchant, he learned from him their rites and faith. He despised that also. And he began of his own invention to proclaim a new faith, opposed to the truth and false.

Vardan, chap. 34:²²

At that time there was a man from among the sons of Ismael whose name was Mahmet, a merchant. He was born in the city of Madina, a two days' journey away from Mak'a, from the tribe called Korēsh, the son of Abdla, who died leaving him an orphan. He joined a certain merchant, and made progress in his house. When the merchant died, he gained control of his master's house, marrying his wife [widow]. He used to go with camels to Egypt. And there met him a certain hermit named Sargis, of the sect of Arius and Cerinthus, who taught him (about) God from the old books and [taught him] the book of *The Childhood of our Lord*. On his return home he preached what he had heard. But his family persecuted him. So he went to the desert of P'aran. And when the 12,000 Jews²³ arrived, using them as a pretext, he preached the God of Abraham to the sons of

¹⁸ Published by Kiulēsērean; see fn. 3 above. The Armenian text is first found in a manuscript dated to 1273 A.D. (Jerusalem, 1288). An eighteenth-century copy (Jerusalem, 888) associates it with the thirteenth-century scholars Vanakan and Vardan. But this is because Jer. 1288 begins with theological works by Vanakan, and because the historian Vardan repeated some of the material found in Mkhitar.

¹⁹ Mkhitar Anets'i, *Patmut'iwñ* (hereafter Mkhitar) (St. Petersburg, 1879).

²⁰ The Karshuni text reads "Arabic" for "Ismaelite and Persian." As early as Thomas Artsruni, the Armenian tradition knew of Salman, the hermit from Persia who wrote down the Quran for Muḥammad. Cf. G. Levi Della Vida's article "Salmān al-Farisi," in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 4 (Leiden, 1924), pp. 116–17. For Muḥammad himself as a Persian, see below, p. 892.

²¹ For the Armenian versions of the *Infancy Gospel*, see *Ankanon Girk'*, vol. 2 (Venice, 1898), pp. 1–312. There is a translation of the long recension in P. Peeters, *Evangiles apocryphes*, vol. 2: *L'évangile de l'enfance, rédactions syriaques, arabe et arméniennes: Textes et documents pour l'étude du christianisme* (Paris, 1914).

²² Vardan Vardapet, *Hawak'umn Patmut'ean* (hereafter Vardan) (Venice, 1862); there is a more critical text of this section and a translation in J. Muyltermans, *La domination arabe en Arménie* (Louvain, 1927).

²³ See Sebēos, chap. 30.

Ismael; and he assured them that if they worshipped him they would inherit the land that God had given to Abraham.

The most interesting feature here is the reference to Cerinthus. He first appeared in Armenian in the *Chronicle of Samuel of Ani*:

A.D. 615. In those days appeared the false prophet of the Saracens, a sectary of Cerinthus and the Arians, called Mahmet, from the race of Ismael, son of Hagar. He was instructed by a solitary called Bkhira, of the sect of Arius, in the Sinai desert, where they [the Ismaelites] had settled and multiplied when Sarah expelled the hand-maiden from her sight.

As Cerinthus was a Jewish gnostic, the introduction of his name may be a curious interpretation of the common statement in Byzantine sources that Muḥammad met both Christians and Jews on his journeys to Palestine. But since Cerinthus was known to Armenian heresiologists not for *Jewish* ideas but for his distinction between the heavenly Christ and earthly Jesus,²⁴ it is more likely that he was introduced to explain the Muslim account of Jesus' crucifixion. For the Muslims' claim that someone other than Christ was crucified was known to the eleventh-century writer Gregory Magistros.²⁵ Mkhitar of Ani elaborated on the same theme, though admittedly following his Karshuni source:

(chap. 26) And he said that the Jews did not crucify him, but he counterfeited [himself] to them. And he did not reckon them able to crucify the Word of God or [for him] to be crucified by them. And he was not subject to death, but remains alive and will come to the world in the latter times. And he praised Christians and accepted the gospel and the prophets. And he anathematized the Jews, since they denied Christ and abjured him, and killed the prophets.

The influence of Cerinthus was also claimed by the thirteenth-century historian Kirakos Gandzakets'i and by the translator of Juanshēr. Kirakos²⁶ merely repeated Samuel. But the reference by the Armenian Juanshēr is more interesting because it is not found in the Georgian original.²⁷ (Just as the Armenian version of the *Chronicle* of Michael the

²⁴ Cf. R. W. Thomson, "An Armenian List of Heresies," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 16 (1965):358–67, especially 362, 363, 366.

²⁵ Letter no. 70, in the edition by K'. Kostaneants', *T'lt'erē* (Aleksandropol, 1910). For a summary of their contents, see V. Langlois, "Mémoire sur la vie et les écrits du prince Grégoire Magistros," *Journal Asiatique*, ser. 6, 13 (1869):5–64. See also H. Thorossian, "Grigor Magistros et ses rapports avec deux émirs musulmans, Manoutché et Ibrahim," *Revue des études islamiques* 15 (1941–46):63–66, which contains a brief summary of Letters 70 and 71.

²⁶ Kirakos Gandakets'i, *Patmut'iwn Hayots'* (hereafter Kirakos) (Erevan, 1961), p. 56; a French translation by F. M. Brosset was published in St. Petersburg in 1870.

²⁷ Georgian text in *K'art'lis Tskhovreba*, vol. 1, ed. by S. Qaukhchishvili (Tbilisi, 1955), pp. 139–244; corresponding section in M. Brosset, *Histoire de la Géorgie*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1849), pp. 144–251; Armenian text in Juanshēr, *Hamārōt Patmut'iwn Vrats'* (Venice, 1884).

Syrian²⁸ is in general an abbreviated rendering of the Syriac but with new Armenian material, so the Armenian version of Juanshēr offers a greatly abbreviated text of the Georgian chronicle but with new Armenian material.) The passage in Juanshēr seems to be based on Samuel; it combines the story of Baḥira (s. anno 615) with that of K'āḷart' (s. anno 647).

Armenian Juanshēr, chap. 16:

But no one can describe the afflictions that the Christians suffered from the Saracens, who for a while were also called K'āḷart'ians (*K'āḷrt'akank'*). As divine scripture says: "The tongues of K'āḷart' shall drink the blood of the innocent."²⁹ Now the origin of the power of the race of K'āḷart' was [as follows]. He was the chief of some nomadic Ismaelites. In his days a certain chief of Mesopotamia called Sargis used to rob the Ismaelite traders of their goods. K'āḷrt' earnestly begged him [to restore] what he had taken and asked that he do it no more, but he did not heed him. Becoming angry, he gathered a great crowd of his own people, went and seized their own and theirs' [i.e., the traders'], and became very powerful. At that same time they found Mahmet persecuted by his own people. He had been a pupil of a certain Arian monk and of the sect of Cerinthus; he avowed the resurrection to be one of passion, corporal and of bodily desire. After he attached him to his own people and made him general, they fought against the whole world.³⁰ For the sins of the Christians had reached full measure — of the Greeks and Armenians, Syrians, Albanians, and Georgians. Thereby gaining ascendancy, they also took for themselves the scepter of the Persians, so subjecting all nations.

The most peculiar of all Armenian stories concerning Muḥammad and Baḥira is that in the preface to an anonymous work commonly known as *Pseudo-Shapuh Bagratuni*, first published in 1921 in fragmentary form. Quotations from a historical work by Shapuh Bagratuni which dealt with the seventh and eighth centuries are found in later Armenian historians. But Shapuh's own work has been lost; what was published under his name is more of an epic tale dealing with the period of the emperors Maurice and Heraclius, followed by stories concerning various princes of Vaspurakan down to the tenth century. The text is found in numerous manuscripts, of which the oldest (in the Matenadaran, Erevan, 3777) was written in the years 1185–1188. But only some of the manuscripts contain the separate introductory section dealing with Muḥammad, and the earliest witness to that section dates only from the sixteenth century. The full text was published in 1971;³¹ the relevant passage reads as follows:

²⁸ *Zhamanakagrut'iwn Teairn Mikhayēli* (Jerusalem, 1871); French translation by V. Langlois, *Chronique de Michel le grand* (Venice, 1868).

²⁹ Cf. Sirach, 12:16. *K'āḷart'* here seems to be a pun on *k'āḷts'r* ("sweet").

³⁰ For Muḥammad and the Arab chief K'āḷart' (in Armenian also spelled K'āḷert', K'āḷrt'), cf. Mkhitar of Ani, chap. 27ff.; Vardan, chap. 34; Kirakos, p. 58.

³¹ *Patmut'iwn Ananun Zruyts'agri*, ed. by M. H. Darbinyan-Melik'yan (Erevan, 1971).

History of the Birth and Upbringing of the Servant of
Anti-Christ Mahamat and His Reign

[The chapter begins with a brief description of the abolition of the Armenian monarchy at the beginning of the fifth century A.D.]

... For they lived abominable, foul and execrable lives, like heathens; and they went astray from the paths of God. Therefore God's anger came upon the land of Armenia and our kingdom was abolished and overturned for a long time. Then the harbinger of Anti-Christ appeared, who is Mēhēmēt,³² leader of the Tachiks.³³

There was a certain man from the land of the Persians called Abd-Rahman, son of Abdala, son of Belmikin, from the city of Rueran near the city of Reyy, opposite the castle of Isfahan. He begat a son and named him Mēhēmēt, then he begat a daughter also and called her name Fatima — a very beautiful woman. Now the son of Abd-ar-Rahman, Mahamat, was possessed by a demon and was deranged by the demon day after day. Incensed by the demon,³⁴ he burst his iron chains and bonds, and was driven by the demon into deserts, mountains, and caves. His father spent much money on doctors, but he was not helped and remained in continual anguish. There came a man to him and told him: "Take your son to the land of Syria to a man called Sargis. In accordance with his faith he is dressed in black and wears a cassock, and he will heal your son."³⁵ Abd-Rahman arose, took Mahmet his son, went to the land of Syria, and met a Syrian monk. When they reached the mountain of the monastery, the demon seized (Muḥammad) and struck him to the ground; he raved and foamed greatly. Sargis came up, took hold of Mahmet and raised him. Abd-Rahman said: "If it is possible and you can cure my son, I shall give you many treasures, honorable garments and noble horses." He undertook to cure him. So Abd-Rahman left his son Mahmet with him and went away. The man was Nestorian by faith, devilish and a lover of sorcery, very skilled in the demonic arts of incantations and sorcery; whereas Mahmet was an idolator by religion and a magus. Sargis said to Mahmet: "If you believe in God and turn from idolatry, I shall cure you." He agreed, and was baptized by him. He baptized him according to the Nestorian faith.³⁶ Mahmet lived with him for twenty-three years,³⁷ united with Satan in his body and his soul; he studied the art of sorcery and learned all the magical doctrines and heresies of Nestorius.

³² The spelling of the name in this text is quite inconsistent; *Mahmet* is the usual Armenian form.

³³ In the pre-Islamic Armenian texts *Tachik* refers to the Arabs of Mesopotamia, whose land is called *Tachkastan*. In later times the term was used less explicitly to refer to Muslims in general, and was applied to Arabs, Persians, or Turks.

³⁴ The demonic possession is mentioned frequently in the Greek sources beginning with the abjuration, for which see fn. 10 above.

³⁵ There are parallels to the role of the monk as healer in Greek sources (see A.-Th. Khoury, *Polémique byzantine contre l'Islam* [Leiden, 1972], pp. 82-83), but they claim that Muḥammad was an imposter from the beginning.

³⁶ This is the only Armenian text to claim that Muḥammad was baptized by Bahira. For Greek evidence, cf. Bartholomaeus Edessenus, "Confutatio Agareni," *PG*, vol. 104, col. 1429.

³⁷ Only seven years in Bartholomew; see *PG*, vol. 104, col. 1432.

After this the news reached Mahmet: "Your father Abd-Rahman has died." When Mahmet heard it, he wept. Sargis said: "Do not weep if your father has died, for I shall make you greater than your father and all your family. Now, rise up, visit the house of your father, and return to me." So Mahmet arose, took two of the monks from the monastery and went to his country. He reached Samarra and found his dead father and his sister, the wife of Ali his nephew. He said: "Ali, why did you raid the house of my father and take all my father's treasures and clothes and all my possessions?" Mahmet made a great outcry, took a part from Ali, returned to the land of Syria to the monastery of Demetrius³⁸ to the monk Sargis, and told him what had happened. Sargis said: "Do not fear, Mahmet, as I have a means to make you great. Now arise and go again to your father's house, and there induce some men to go as merchants to the land of Egypt. When you arrive opposite my monastery, pitch camp. But you are not to say: 'I know this monastery, or this place or this region,' or that it marks the site of your camp. And I, taking my deacons, with torches and candles will come to you, and raising our voices to heaven I shall frighten the Persians who will have followed you, and I shall say to them: 'I saw a heavenly vision concerning this young man; for he is a prophet and one must believe him, and whatever he says will surely come about.'"

Mahmet did everything that the sorcerer Sargis had instructed him to do. Mahmet went to the land of Persia, to the city of Samarra, and induced merchants to go to the land of Egypt to the city of Alexandria. Rich and honorable men assembled and journeyed as far as the land of Syria. On the way Mahmet said: "Oh Persian magnates, we are not in the [right] faith and piety, for our idols are vain. Now I have heard from some people that there exists a God in heaven, above the sun which is visible to us." They said: "What is the matter with you, Mahmet? Be quiet and do not speak about that." But he began to expound to them the earliest days, from Abraham and Noah and even from Adam. They were astonished at his wisdom and said: "Oh Mahmet, what is your source for such sayings and all this knowledge?" He replied: "Wisdom, knowledge, and prophecy have been given me from above." And when they had drawn near to the monastery, they camped there opposite the monastery in accordance with his advice.

That night the monk Sargis came out with torches and candles, accompanied by deacons and monks from the monastery. They came to the spot where Mahmet was, and surrounding him they raised a great shout. The merchants, waking with a start, were terrified. Rising up, they went to him and said to the monk: "What is this we hear, Nestor Sargis, about this man?" And he replied: "I saw a heavenly vision concerning him, and a great light and angels who said that he is a great prophet, and that whatever he says, his words are true."

Then the merchants realized: "The words he told us when we were journeying were true." Rising up, they went on their way. When they had returned to their own land and had gone each to his own house, they gave out that Mahmet was a prophet.

³⁸ The name of the monastery does not appear elsewhere in Armenian; the traditional site is Bosra; see Abel's article quoted in fn. 4 above, and R. Kriss and H. Kriss-Heinrich, *Volksglaube im Bereich des Islam*, vol. I (Wiesbaden, 1960), p. 208. For Bahira as an astronomer, see Euthymius Zigabenus, "Disputatio de Fide," *PG*, vol. 131, col. 33.

Chaspasp K'asrē, king of Persia, heard of this and sought to kill Mahmet, saying: "He has learned Syrian heresy and wishes to destroy the cult of our idols." Mahmet and Ali arose, took Fatima, went from their own country, from Persia, and came to dwell in the land of the Babylonians. And it was the beginning of the Armenian year 36 [587 A.D.].

Mahmet began to build the great city of Baghdad on the bank of the river Euphrates. And there was dissension between Ali and Mahmet. Ali held one side of the river, and Mahmet the other . . .³⁹ war between Ali and Mahmet. For [Mahmet] did not permit the practice of prophecy which Ali had. The latter planned to kill Mahmet, but was unable to do so because his sister Fatima was wife to Ali and she would not allow him to kill Mahmet.

The immediate source of this strange tale has not yet come to light. A few expressions in the text point to Arabic. The last Sassanian king, for example, is called K'asrē, which reflects the Arabic form of Khosrov, not the Armenian. The expressions *mlk'ers*, for "my possessions," is derived from the Arabic *mulk* with a medieval Armenian plural ending; but the term was used in medieval Armenian,⁴⁰ so this is not necessarily evidence for the whole text being a translation.

There are two main themes in the text: Baḥira's fraud, and the idea that Muḥammad was a Persian. The fraud of Baḥira, in that it is claimed that Muḥammad was "cured" by him, does have a parallel in Greek sources,⁴¹ though they nowhere suggest that Baḥira's "discovery" of Muḥammad was a prearranged plot. More difficult to explain, however, is the idea that Muḥammad was a Persian, an idolator, and the builder of Baghdad. Can this be merely some fancy of Armenian popular tradition? For the reader is immediately reminded of the opening of the epic commonly known as "David of Sasun," the first cycle of which describes the struggle against the idolatrous (*kṛapasht*) caliph of Baghdad. It was not the caliphs of the first century who were remembered in Armenia, but those of the Abbasid line whose depredations caused so much damage. Thomas Artsruni, for example, passed in four pages from the death of Muḥammad to the reign of Jap'r (i.e., al-Mutawakkil, 847-861).⁴² So it was, perhaps, not too great an effort of the popular imagination to see the founder of Islam as the man originally responsible for the later troubles of

³⁹ The editors of the 1921 and 1971 editions do not specify how many letters are missing.

⁴⁰ See H. Acharean, *Hayerēn Armatakan Baġaran*. 7 vols. (Erevan, 1926-35), s.v. *mulk*, 4:1139 (rev. ed., Erevan, 1971-).

⁴¹ Cf. fn. 35 above.

⁴² Artsruni, pp. 177-81.

Armenia. Just as the tribute demanded by the Abbasids was said to have been set by Muḥammad himself,⁴³ so, too, was Muḥammad the idolator who built Baghdad, the residence of Armenia's arch-enemies.

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⁴³ See Samuel of Ani, s. anno 647; Kirakos, p. 60.