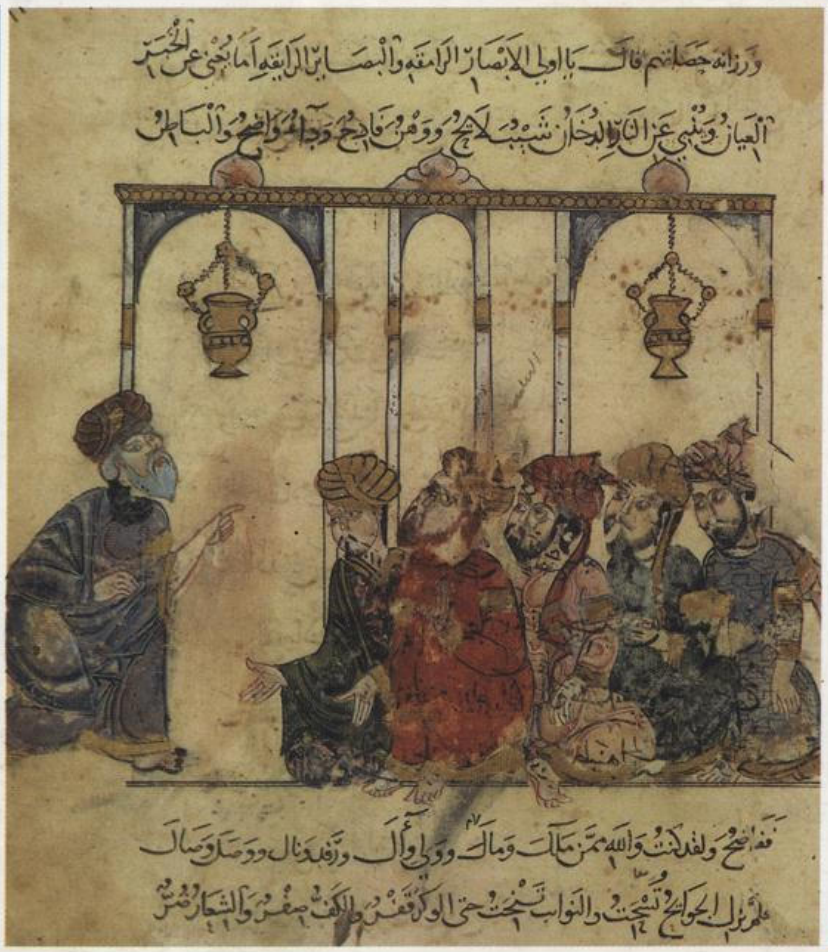
Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages



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From Patriarch Timothy I to Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq: philosophy and Christian apology in Abbasid times; reason, ethics and public policy

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I

So far as we know, the earliest Christian intellectual with a regular entrée to the highest levels of the Abbasid court was Patriarch Timothy I (727-823), who for forty-three years (780-823) served as the major hierarch of the so-called 'Nestorian' Church of the East,[1] first in Seleucia-Ctesiphon and then in Baghdad.[2] While he no doubt spoke Arabic, the patriarch wrote in Syriac. And among the many works ascribed to him, most of which have not survived to modern times, some fifty-nine letters are still extant, of the approximately two-hundred he is known to have written. While they are addressed to friends, mostly church officials, they are more than personal correspondence, being on the order of public letters, or letter-treatises, perhaps best thought of as essays. In them the patriarch discusses a number of liturgical, canonical and theological topics, and several of them have to do with issues of Muslim/Christian interest, including letters in which Timothy describes in some detail the responses he has given to questions put to him by

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[1] Sebastian P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester* 78 (1996), 23-35.

[2] Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam sous Timothée I (780-823): Étude sur l'église nestorienne au temps des premiers 'Abbāsides, avec nouvelle édition et traduction du dialogue entre Timothée et al-Mahdī*, Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq Éditeurs, 1975; Harald Suermann, "Timotheos I, +823," in: Wassilios Klein, ed., *Syrische Kirchenväter*, Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2004, 152-167.

Muslims or inspired by Muslim concerns.[3] By far the most well-known of these is the patriarch's account of his debate with the caliph al-Mahdī (775-785) on the beliefs and practices of the Christians.[4]

Patriarch Timothy's account of his defense of Christian doctrine and practice in the *majlis* of the caliph al-Mahdī, sometimes listed among his works as Letter LIX, was destined to become one of the classics among the Christian apologies of the early Islamic period. It circulated in its original Syriac in a fuller and in an abbreviated form,[5] and it was soon translated into Arabic,[6] in which language the account of Timothy's days in the caliph's court has enjoyed a long popularity, extending well into modern times. But it is not the only one of the patriarch's letters which takes up what we might call Islamic issues. Several others discuss questions which were obviously posed with Muslim challenges in mind. One might mention in this connection, Letter XXXIV, on the proper understanding of the title 'Servant of God' as an epithet for Christ,[7] Letter XXXV, in defense of the doctrine of the Trinity, and Letter XXXVI, against the opinions of those who demean the majesty of Christ.[8]

Letter XL, which the patriarch addressed to his former academic colleague Sergius, director of the school of Bashosh and soon to be the bishop of Elam,[9] presents a somewhat detailed account of Patriarch Timothy's colloquy with an interlocutor whom he met one day at the caliph's court; Timothy says the man was a

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[3] Thomas R. Hurst, *The Syriac Letters of Timothy I (727-823): A Study in Christian Muslim Controversy*, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1986 – University Microfilms International, #8613464; Harald Suermann, "Der nestorianische Patriarch Timotheos I. und seine theologischen Briefe im Kontext des Islam," in: Martin Tamcke and Andreas Heinz, eds. *Zu Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirchen*, Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte, vol. 9; Münster: Lit Verlag, 2000, 217-230.

[4] Alphonse Mingana, "Timothy's Apology for Christianity," in: *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic and Garshuni; Edited and Translated with a Critical Apparatus*, vol. II, Cambridge: Heffer, 1928, 1-162; *idem*, "The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph al-Mahdī," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester* 12 (1928), 137-226.

[5] Albert van Roey, "Un apologie syriaque attribuée à Elie de Nisibe," *Le Muséon* 59 (1946), 381-397.

[6] Putman, *L'église et l'islam*.

[7] Thomas R. Hurst, "The Epistle Treatise: An Apologetic Vehicle: Letter 34 of Timothy I," in: H.J.W. Drijvers *et al.*, eds. *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 229; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987, 367-382.

[8] For brief descriptions of these letters see Hurst, *The Syriac Letters of Timothy I*, esp. 43-68.

[9] Harald Suermann, "Timothy and his Concern for the School of Basos," *The Harp* 10 (1997), 51-58.

devotee of the philosophy of Aristotle.[10] But the course of the conversation which the patriarch reports on the ways to know the one God, on the three persons of the one God and the doctrine of the Incarnation, and on the significance of various Christian religious practices sounds more like the account of a conversation with a Muslim *mutakallim*, rather than a discussion with a philosopher.[11] In a recent study, the present writer has shown how the course of the patriarch's report of his conversation with the Muslim scholar, who wanted to talk with him about God, fairly well replicates what in all probability was the topical outline customarily to be found in the typical Mu'tazilī *Kitāb at-tawḥīd* of the period.[12] As for the Muslim's Aristotelian interests, Patriarch Timothy specifies that the unnamed man "had special training in the thinking (*hawnâ*) of Aristotle. [13] But in the letter, as the patriarch proceeds to disprove his debate partner's positions with flawless logic, it appears that the Muslim was only a *soi disant* Aristotelian. Reading between the lines, it seems that Patriarch Timothy presented his Muslim adversary to Sergius as one who cultivated a fashionable affectation in the matter of the philosophy of Aristotle, at the time when the translation movement was first catching the fancy of the caliphal court. But in fact, both the adversary's idiom and the concerns he voiced were those of the *mutakallimūn*.

The mention of Aristotle and of philosophy calls to mind the fact that Patriarch Timothy was himself called upon by Muslim patrons to provide Arabic translations of Greek logical and scientific texts, often from intermediary translations into Syriac. For example, no less a personage than the caliph himself called upon the patriarch to arrange for a translation of Aristotle's *Topica* into Arabic, and Timothy discussed the undertaking in two very interesting letters which have survived,[14] in which the reader gains a lively sense of the multifaceted processes involved in the enterprise. In this connection, and in connection with the beginnings of Christian involvement in the Abbasid translation project, what John Watt has recently written about Patriarch Timothy's translation is noteworthy. He says,

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[10] Hanna P. J. Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu: Lettre de Timothée I (728-823) à Serge; étude, traduction et édition critique*, Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1983.

[11] Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols.; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991-1997, vol. III, 23.

[12] Sidney H. Griffith, "Patriarch Timothy I and an Aristotelian at the Caliph's Court," in press.

[13] Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu*, at MS Vat. Syr 605, f. 216v.

[14] Sebastian P. Brock, "Two Letters of the Patriarch Timothy from the Late Eighth Century on Translations from Greek," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9 (1999), 233-246.

> "The earliest unambiguous evidence of interest in Aristotelian philosophy in the upper levels of Abbasid Muslim society is the commission of al-Mahdī to the East Syrian Catholicos Timothy I for a translation of Aristotle's *Topics* from Syriac into Arabic."[15]

This interest on the part of the Abbasid elite in Arabic translations of the logical works of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, and in Greek mathematical, scientific and medical texts by other writers, such as Galen (129-c.210), ushered in a whole new era for Christian intellectual life in Baghdad. And since the Abbasid caliph's capital was located in the historical heartland of the Assyrian Church of the East, it is no surprise that so-called 'Nestorian' Christians, including Patriarch Timothy himself, found their way in Baghdad to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new intellectual movement. Some were physicians, some were philosophers, and some were logicians, mathematicians, copyists or translators.[16] All of them contributed something to the newly flowering culture of the early days of the burgeoning classical period of Islamic civilization. But in no society-wide enterprise did these 'Nestorian' Christians take a more prominent role than they did in the famed translation movement. For, as Dimitri Gutas has noted, the vast majority of the translators of Greek and Syriac texts into Arabic were Christians;[17] their names and their undertakings have long been known.[18]

Interest in Greek learning and philosophy, particularly Aristotle's logic, had been widespread in the Syriac-speaking communities already from the sixth century onward,[19] including the 'Nestorian' school system in centers such as

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[15] John W. Watt, "Syriac Translators and Greek Philosophy in Early Abbasid Iraq," *The Canadian Society for Syriac Studies Journal* 4 (2004), 15-26, 17.

[16] Raymond Le Coz, *Les médecins nestoriens au moyen âge: Les maîtres des arabes*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004.

[17] Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, London and New York: Routledge 1998, 136.

[18] Bénédicte Landron, "Les chrétiens arabes et les disciplines philosophiques," Proche Orient Chrétien 36 (1986), 23-45; Ephraem-Isa Yousif, *Les philosophes et traducteurs syriaques; d'Athènes à Bagdad*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997; Mirella Cassarino, *Traduzioni e Traduttori Arabi dall' VIII all' XI Secolo*, Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1998.

[19] John Watt, "Grammar, Rhetoric, and the Enkyklios Paideia in Syriac," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 143 (1993), 45-71; Javier Teixidor, *Aristote en syriaque: Paul le Perse, logicien du Vie siècle*, Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2003; Henri Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d'Aristote du grec au syriaque: Études sur la transmission des textes de l'Organon et leur interprêtation philosophique*, Textes et Traditions, 9; Paris: Librairie Philosophique Vrin, 2004.

Nisibis,[20] al-Ḥīra, the monastery of Dayr Qunnā[21] and Jundīsābūr.[22] In the sixth century, Paul the Persian (fl.531-578), who had ties to the ancient school of Alexandria, was already cultivating Aristotelianism among the east Syrians, albeit that in the end he seems to have become a convert to Zoroastrianism in Persia, at the court of Anūshirwān (531-579).[23] By the mid-eighth century, 'Nestorian' scholars such as the well-known members of the Bukhtīshūʿ family, with their connections to Jundīsābūr, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (808-873), who hailed from the 'Nestorian' capital of the Lakhmids, al-Ḥīra, and Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d.940), from the flourishing monastery of Dayr Qunnā, not far from Baghdad, who became "the founder of the Aristotelian school in Baghdad early in the tenth century, all soon came to be among the dominant Christian scholars in the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in early Abbasid times. In the ninth century, one of them in particular stands out as an early representative of the new breed of Christian intellectuals in Baghdad in the heyday of the translation movement: Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq.

II

Unlike Patriarch Timothy and the other Arabic-speaking, Christian apologists in earlier Abbasid times, who for all their accomplishments as controversialists, or even as translators, were primarily churchmen engaged in ecclesiastical affairs, men like Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq in the ninth century, and Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (c.893-974) in the tenth century, were professional scholars who circulated at the highest levels of Baghdad's learned elite. While they remained dedicated to the task of the systematic defense of the veracity of Christian doctrine and practice, and

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[20] G.J. Reinink, "'Edessa Grew Dim and Nisibis Shone Forth': The School of Nisibis at the Transition of the Sixth-Seventh Century," in: J.W. Drijvers and A.A. MacDonald, eds. *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East*, Studies in Intellectual History, 61; Leiden: Brill, 1995, 77-89.

[21] Louis Massignon, "La politique islamo-chrétienne des scribes nestoriens de Deir Qunna à la cour de Bagdad au IXe siècle de notre ère," *Vivre et Penser* 2 (1942), 7-14, reprinted in: L. Massignon, *Opera Minora*, ed. Y. Moubarac, 3 vols.; Beirut: Dar al-Maaref, 1963, vol. I, 250-257.

[22] Heinz Herbert Schöffler, *Die Akademie von Gondischapur: Aristoteles auf dem Wege in den Orient*, 2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1980.

[23] Dimitri Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Bagdad," *Der Islam* 60 (1983), 231-267.

made major contributions to Christian apologetic literature in Arabic, as we shall see, these scholars also engaged wholeheartedly in the scientific, medical, and philosophical interests of contemporary Muslim intellectuals. Some of them even participated in the debates which roiled the Islamic religious establishment of the time over the proper role, if any, of the 'foreign sciences', such as Aristotelian logic, in Islamic religious discourse. What is more, intellectuals such as Ḥunayn and Yaḥyā vigorously cultivated a new line of Christian thinking in this milieu. They were prompted both by their interest in the Neo-Platonic Aristotelianism of sixth century Alexandria which, with the translation movement, had attained a new life in Baghdad, at the same time as they were also inspired by the works of early Muslim philosophers such as Ya'qūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī (c.800-c.867) and Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (c.870-950). This new line of Christian thinking in Arabic sought to promote a reason-based, social ethic for the world in which the Arabic-speaking Christians and Muslims lived. It would be open both to the claims of the Christian and the Islamic scriptures, and which would also foster the acquisition of personal and public virtues on the part of the leaders of society, whose charge it would be to work for the common good of everyone in the body politic, especially the scholars, ascetics and religious teachers of both the church and the mosque.[24]

The most prominent and earliest of these new Christian intellectuals was Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq.[25] He is well known to historians as the founder and central figure in a ninth-century, Baghdadī school of translators of Greek medical and scientific texts.[26] In his day, he was also celebrated for the doggedness with which he studied Greek and pursued manuscripts from city to city, and perhaps even beyond the borders of the caliphate into the territory of the Romans. As a noted physician, Ḥunayn was a familiar presence in the intellectual circles of

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[24] See, e.g., the program proposed in the tenth century by Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, *The Reformation of Morals*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir, trans. Sidney H. Griffith; Provo, UT: The Brigham Young University Press, 2002.

[25] On Ḥunayn's life and works, see G.C. Anawati, "Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq al-'Ibādī, Abū Zayd," in: Charles Coulton Gillispie, ed. *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, vol. 15, supplement, I; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980, 230-234, and Albert Z. Iskandar, "Ḥunayn the Translator," and "Ḥunayn the Physician," in: Gillispie, *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, 234-249; Bénédicte Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans en Irak: Attitudes Nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l'islam*, Études Chrétiennes Arabes; Paris: Cariscript, 1994, 66-71.

[26] Myriam Salama-Carr, *La traduction à l'époque abbaside: l'école de Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq et son importance pour la tradition*, Paris: Didier, 1990.

the caliphal court from the time of al-Ma'mūn (813-833) to that of al-Mu'tamid (869-892), enjoying a particularly high-profile career during the days of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-861), whose sometime personal physician he was. Unlike earlier and contemporary Christian intellectuals such as Patriarch Timothy or the 'Melkite' Theodore Abū Qurrah (c.755-c.830), both of whom had done some translation work for Muslim patrons, Ḥunayn was one of the first Christians whose stories are widely told in the Arabic annals of Muslim learning in Abbasid times, by both medieval and modern authors.[27] In his day, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq was a public intellectual of record.

Modern scholarship on Ḥunayn and his works has largely focused its attention on his professional activity, his translations of logical, philosophical, medical and scientific texts, and on some of his more colorful, personal exploits, the knowledge of some of which reportedly comes from his own pen.[28] Relatively little attention has been paid to Ḥunayn's own ideas, either in the realm of philosophy or of theology. And yet there is ample evidence that these were of the greatest importance to him. Like his somewhat older, Muslim contemporary, the philosopher al-Kindī (c.800-c.867), of whom Gerhard Endress has said that for al-Kindī "philosophy was to vindicate the pursuit of rational activity as an activity in the service of Islam,"[29] so one might say of Ḥunayn that for him the cultivation of science and philosophy was to promote the claims of reason in service of both religion and public life.

Compared to other contemporary Christian intellectuals, Ḥunayn did not write so much on religious topics that has survived, but what he did write spoke to the major topics of the day, both Christian and Islamic. It is notable that, unlike other Christian writers of his own time and later, he did not engage in the church-dividing, inter-confessional, Christian controversies then currently flourishing. He did not, for example, so far as we know, write polemical tracts

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[27] A case in point is the recent book published by a Muslim scholar in Saudi Arabia: Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh Dubyān, *Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq: Dirāsah tarīkhiyyah walughawiyyah*, Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Wataniyyah, 1993.

[28] For an English translation of portions of Ḥunayn's 'autobiography' see Dwight F. Reynolds et *al.* eds. *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 212ff.

[29] Gerhard Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindī: Early Arabic Translations from the Greek and the Rise of Islamic Philosophy," in Gerhard Endress and Remke Kruk, eds. The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism: Studies on the Transmission of Greek Philosophy and Sciences, Leiden: Research School CNWS, School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies, 1997, 50.

against the doctrinal views of the 'Melkites' or the 'Jacobites', or in support of the Christological teaching of his own, so-called 'Nestorian' church. Rather, in works which we know for the most part only by title, Ḥunayn addressed himself to issues such as why God created man in a state of need (*muḥtājan*), how one grasps the truths of religion, how to understand God's fore-ordainment of the affairs of the world (*al-qadar*) in the light of the profession of monotheism (*at-tawḥīd*), and what are the criteria according to which the true religion might be discerned. The latter was a particularly important topic for both Muslims and Christians in Ḥunayn's lifetime, as we shall see. In addition, in some sources Ḥunayn is said to have composed a history of the world from Adam to the time of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (d.861), including the kings of Israel, the Roman and Persian kings up to the time of Muḥammad, and the Muslim caliphs up to his own time. Unfortunately, this book has not survived. However, one should not underestimate the apologetic and even the polemic agenda of such books of history in the 'Sectarian Milieu' of the time, when Muslim authors from Ibn Isḥāq (d.c.767) and Ibn Hishām (d.834) to al-Yaʿqūbī (d.897) were presenting Muḥammad and his prophetic claims in terms of just such a biblio-historical narrative.[30] Ḥunayn's may well have been the first Christian effort in this vein in the Islamic milieu, a work which would not be taken up again by a Christian writer until the time of the 'Melkite' Eutychios of Alexandria/Saʿīd ibn Baṭrīq (877-940).[31] Later still, Elias of Nisibis (975-1046), like Ḥunayn a member of the so-called 'Nestorian' Church of the East, carried on the historical tradition in his *Chronography* (*Kitāb al-Azminah*).[32]

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[30] Already in the Syriac-speaking tradition, in the context of the doctrinal controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries, historians and chronographers were producing texts in this vein, a development which may well have inspired Muslim authors to buttress their religious claims in the same manner. See, e.g., the studies of Witold Witakowski, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē: A Study in the History of Historiography*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Semitica Upsaliensia, 9; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987; Jan J. van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus: A Monophysite Historian in Sixth-Century Byzantium*, Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1995. This tradition continued among Syriac-speaking Christians well into the Middle Ages, with such works as the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian, the *Chronicon ad annum 1234*, and the Chronicle of Bar Hebraeus.

[31] Sidney H. Griffith, "Apologetics and Historiography in the Annals of Eutychios of Alexandria: Christian Self-Definition in the World of Islam," in: Rifaat Ebied and Herman Teule, eds. *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage: In Honor of Father Prof. Dr. Samir Khalil Samir*, Eastern Christian Studies, 5; Leuven: Peeters, 2004, 65-89.

[32] Samir Khalil Samir, "Élie de Nisibe (Iliyyā al-Naṣībī) (975-1046)," Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien," *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977), 283-284.

Luckily, one of Ḥunayn's principal contributions to Christian apologetics in the Islamic milieu, his discussion of the reasons (*al-asbāb*) why people accept either what is true or what is false in religion, has survived in at least two forms, with some variation between them.[33] In one form, the text was preserved by the medieval Coptic scholar al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl (*fl.* 1230-1260), who included it in his magisterial *Summary of the Principles of Religion*, together with a commentary on it by the twelfth century Coptic writer Yuḥannā ibn Mīnā, who, according to Ibn al-ʿAssāl, gathered his material "from the books of the scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) of the Christian *sharīʿah*."[34] The other form of the text is included in Ḥunayn's contribution to the correspondence between himself and his Muslim friend at the caliph's court, Abū ʿĪsā ibn al-Munajjim (d.888), who had summoned him and their younger 'Melkite' colleague Qusṭā ibn Lūqā (d.c.912), to Islam.[35] It seems to have been the case that contemporary and later Christian apologists made much use of Ḥunayn's discussion of these matters in their own further and rather original elaborations of what they presented as the negative criteria, the absence of which in Christianity, they claimed, is indicative of its unique status as the true religion. These apologists argued that the true religion is that one of the contemporary options which would not be accepted for any or all of the six or seven, unworthy and therefore negative reasons, for which, according to Ḥunayn and the others, people might accept a religion.[36]

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[33] See the discussions of this text in Rachid Haddad, "Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq apologiste Chrétien," and Paul Nwyia, "Actualité du concept de religion chez Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq," in: *Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq: Collection d'articles publiée à l'occasion du onzième centenaire de sa mort*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975, 292-302 & 313-317. See also the chapter on Ḥunayn in Dominique Urvoy, *Les penseurs libres dans l'islam classique*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1996, 67-92. It is interesting to note in passing that Ḥunayn's list of reasons why people adopt a particular religion is comparable in many ways to the reasons presented in the work of the Iranian physician Burzoy, which the Muslim free-thinker Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ translated into Arabic and published as the preface to his celebrated *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*. See Teixidor, *Aristote en syriaque*, 31.

[34] Paul Sbath, ed. *Vingt traits philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens du IXe au XIVe siècle*, Cairo: H. Friedrich et Co., 1929, 186. Ḥunayn's text is republished in a modern, critical edition by Samir Khalil Samir, "Maqālah Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq fī kayfiyyat idrāk ḥaqīqat ad-diyānah," *al-Machriq* 71 (1997), 340-363.

[35] Khalil Samir and Paul Nwyia, eds. and trans. *Une correspondance islamo-chrétienne entre Ibn al-Munaǧǧim, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq et Qusṭā ibn Lūqā*, Patrologia Orientalis, tome 40, fasc., 4, no. 185; Turnhout: Brepols, 1981, 686-701.

[36] Sidney H. Griffith, "Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians," *Proceedings of the PMR Conference: Annual Publication of the Patristic, Mediaeval and Renaissance Conference*, 4 (1979), 63-87.

But perhaps the most significant of Ḥunayn's works from the point of view of highlighting the new element in the intellectual culture of the Christian scholars of Baghdad from the ninth to the eleventh centuries is one which is in fact seldom discussed. The new element was the systematic championship of logical reasoning in the discernment of both religious truth and right social behavior in the body politic. And the seldom studied work is Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah*, or *Nawādir al-falāsifah*, as it is sometimes also called, a composite work in the form in which we have it, transmitted in the abbreviated composition which has survived by a Muslim scholar of the late twelfth century, the otherwise unknown Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Anṣārī, whose name appears as the scribe in the two extant manuscripts of the single recension of the integral text that has come down to us.[37] Most commentators on this work have characterized it as belonging to a well-known and popular genre of the time, the collection of gnomological, aphoristic sayings attributed to the ancient philosophers and wise men, including the likes of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Galen, and the Persian Luqmān. This characterization is certainly true as far as it goes; Ḥunayn's text is one of a number of Greek and Arabic compilations of wisdom sayings attributed to the ancient sages.[38] The individual aphorisms, which in the ensemble have been the focus of most scholarly attention so far, can indeed be traced from one compilation to another and the contents of the several collections can be compared with one another to show a continuing tradition in the collection of gnomological sayings. But each compilation can also be studied in its own right, with attention paid to each compiler's particular interests and concerns. Often the aphorisms are quoted within the context of an overarching narrative framework which expresses the principal concern of the compiler of each individual work. In Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq's *Ādāb al-falāsifah*, the narrative speaks of the founding of philosophy and its social significance, of its various branches, of the coming to be of 'houses of wisdom' among various peoples at the instigation of kings, not only among the ancient Greeks, but also among Jews, Christians and Muslims. It speaks of the sages who transmitted what Ḥunayn consistently calls 'knowledge' (*ʿilm*) or 'wisdom' (*ḥikmah*), and 'disciplinary practice' (*adab*). For him, the

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[37] Abdurrahman Badawi, ed. *Hunain ibn Ishâq: Âdâb al-Falâsifa (Sentences des Philosophes)*, Safat, Koweit: Éditions de l'Institut des Manuscrits Arabes, 1985.

[38] Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation: A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia*, American Oriental Series, vol. 60; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1975.

pursuit of *'ilm* and *adab* constitutes the philosophical way of life; its practice promises happiness and harmony for both individuals and society as a whole.[39]

In the context of the burgeoning Christian intellectual life in Arabic in the ninth century, Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah* gave voice to a new line of thinking for Christians living in the caliphate, which would be developed even further by Christian intellectuals in the next generations. In addition to the customary apologetic concerns of Patriarch Timothy and others, the new turn in Christian thought in Arabic involved the appropriation of the Late Antique ideal of the philosophical way of life, as commended by the Neoplatonic Aristotelians of Athens and Alexandria in the sixth Christian century, as part and parcel of the Christian intellectual agenda in Islamic society. Of course, Syriac-speaking Christians in previous centuries, beginning with Paul the Persian in the sixth century,[40] had adumbrated this development. But now Christian thinkers writing in Arabic would be taking part in a conversation with contemporary Muslim intellectuals who, in addition to heightening the role of reason in religious discourse, were, like their Christian counterparts, developing an interest not only in the improving literature of the old 'mirror for princes' tradition, but in moral development, the acquisition of virtues, and the beginnings of a political philosophy,[41] which would eventually bear fruit in the Islamic instance, in the philosopher al-Fārābī's *Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*,[42] and in the growth in the tenth and eleventh centuries of what modern commentators have come to call Islamic humanism.[43]

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[39] Jean Jolivet, "L'idée de la sagesse et sa function dans la philosophie des 4e et 5e siècles," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 1 (1991), 31-65, esp. 45-47.

[40] Dimitri Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy"; Teixidor, *Aristote en syriaque.*

[41] Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam; Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, 148-196.

[42] Muhsin S. Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001. On the intriguing suggestion that the ninth-century, Christian intellectual Anton of Tagrit could have paved the way for al-Fārābī's work, see John W. Watt, "From Themistius to al-Farabi: Platonic Political Philosophy and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in the East," *Rhetorica* 13 (1995), 17-41.

[43] Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age*, Leiden: Brill, 1986; Lenn E. Goodman, *Islamic Humanism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

III

But for the moment, let us linger with Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah*. It is somewhat startling to realize that to date only one substantive study of the work has appeared, the doctoral dissertation of Karl Merkle, submitted to the University of Munich in 1921.[44] Merkle says that he had already prepared an edition of the Arabic text,[45] but it has never appeared. This, in spite of the fact that the thirteenth century, Andalusian, Hebrew translation of the *Ādāb al-falāsifah* was published in 1896,[46] and scholars have gone on to study it and the work's translation into Latin and other European languages in some detail.[47] It was not until 1985 that Abdurraḥmān Badawī published the original Arabic text.[48] Surprisingly, no study of the work has appeared since then.

Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Anṣārī's presentation of Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah* is simple in outline; it seems to be a compilation of material from an originally much longer philosophy, its branches and the names by which the several schools of thought are called, including the rationale behind the choice of name for each group. Each report begins with some variation of the notice that Abū Zayd Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq has spoken as follows. While much of this material is clearly legendary, and sometimes inscrutable, a very interesting part of it, as we shall see, is Ḥunayn's account of how philosophy came to be among the Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The bulk of the work is the collection of sayings of the sages and philosophers which Ḥunayn transmitted from both ancient and seemingly contemporary, gnomological sources.[49] The series begins with sayings attributed to Socrates, who for Ḥunayn is clearly the dominant figure, followed by the sayings of

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[44] Karl Merkle, *Die Sittensprüche der Philosophen "Kitâb Âdâb al-falâsifa" von Ḥonein ibn Isḥâq in der Überarbeitung des Muḥammad ibn ʿAlî al-Anṣârî*, Diss. München; Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1921; republished in: Fuat Sezgin, ed. *Islamic Philosophy*, vol. 17; Frankfurt: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 1999.

[45] Merkle, *Die Sittensprüche der Philosophen*, 4.

[46] Albert Loewenthal, *Honein ibn Isḥâq, Sinnsprüche der Philosophen. Nach der hebräischen Übersetzung Charisi's ins Deutsche übertragen und erläutert*, Berlin: S. Calvary & Co., 1896, reprinted in Sezgin, *Islamic Philosophy*.

[47] Manuel Alonso Alonso, "Ḥunayn traducido al latín por Ibn Dāwūd Gundisalvo," *al-Andalus* 16 (1951), 37-47; John K. Walsh, "Versiones Peninsulares del "Kitāb Ādāb al-falāsifa" de Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq," *al-Andalus* 41 (1978), 355-384.

[48] Badawi, *Ḥunain ibn Isḥâq, Âdâb al-falâsifah*.

[49] Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation*.

Plato and Aristotle, the latter's famous 'Letter to Alexander' being included at the end of the section. There follows at this point a long dossier of Alexander material, including the famous letter of Alexander to his mother, her own speech following Alexander's death and Aristotle's letter to Alexander's mother. References to this material appear frequently in contemporary and later, Muslim and Christian literature, especially in texts on the art of dispelling sorrow.[50] Following the Alexander dossier in the *Ādāb al-falāsifah*, the collection of sayings continues under the names of the ancient wise men, including Diogenes, Pythagoras, Hippocrates, Galen, Ptolomey, Luqmān, Hermes, Homer, Solon and several more obscure individuals. At the end there are several interesting selections of material, including one entitled, 'The Questions and Answers of the Philosophers', one on the 'Correspondence of the Sages,', and then finally two mini-collections called respectively, '*Ādāb* of the Philosopher Mahādharjīs or Hādharjīs, the Teacher',[51] and the '*Ādāb* of the Philosophers of the Jinn and What They Uttered in the Presence of Solomon, son of David'. While all of this material is intriguing in its own right, the last two mini-collections are particularly fascinating; unfortunately there is neither time nor space to discuss them further here. The Muslim Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Anṣārī's presentation of Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah* ends abruptly at this point; he mentions that he finished writing it in the month of *Dhū l-Qaʿdah*, in the year 594, or 1198 A.D. He asks that God's prayer be upon the prophet Muḥammad.

Questions have arisen about the authenticity of this work as we have it. Merkle, after reviewing the several opinions advanced up to the beginning of the twentieth century, argued in behalf of the authenticity of the whole collection as a compilation of aphorisms put together originally by Ḥunayn, save for the Alexander dossier, which seems to him to have been a later addition.[52] There has been no subsequent text critical study of this work, save for Badawi's preface to

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[50] Sidney H. Griffith, "The Muslim Philosopher al-Kindī and his Christian Readers: Three Arab Christian Texts on 'The Dissipation of Sorrows'," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78 (1996), 111-127.

[51] There has been much speculation about the identity of this otherwise unknown figure, including the speculation that it refers to Ḥunayn himself. Merkle offered the rather unconvincing suggestion that in the course of transmission the letters have become garbled and that originally the text read המתרגים, i.e., 'the translator', which was subsequently mistaken for a proper name. See Merkle, *Die Sittensprüche der Philosophen*, 10.

[52] Merkle, *Die Sittensprüche der Philosophen*, 7-11.

his edition of the text, where he accepts the traditional attribution. For now, given the medieval bibliographical testimony, especially that of Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿah, that Ḥunayn did in fact compose a book of this title, in the present writer's opinion circumstances favor a cautious acceptance of the work's basic authenticity, albeit that over the course of transmission numerous additions and alterations may well have attended the text.

From the point of view of the present inquiry there are two points of particular interest in Ḥunayn's *Kitāb ādāb al-falāsifah*: his remarks about Jews, Christians and Muslims, and their participation in philosophy, in the opening collection of reports, in the context of his account of the beginnings of philosophy and its several schools; and the general character and intellectual tenor of the numerous aphorisms attributed to the ancient sages and philosophers, which are transmitted in the body of the work.

A - Jews, Christians and Muslims in the History of Philosophy

At the beginning of the reports about the origins of philosophy and its several branches, Ḥunayn classifies the various schools under general headings, according to the significance of the names by which they are known. In the case of the Stoics, he lists them among those who got their names from the name of the place where they taught. He says, "They are the ones who are known as 'the members of the porch and portico' (*aṣḥāb al-miẓallah wa l-riwāq*), which was in the city of Elea."[53] He goes on to describe how the portico was made of tarpaulins of canvas stretched over four poles, with side flaps, which, he says, the Arabs would call an 'awning' (*aẓ-ẓulal*). It is at this point that Ḥunayn mentions the Jews, Christians and Muslims, presumably because of the distinctive places where their teachers study and transmit their knowledge.

Ḥunayn says that the Jewish philosophers (*falāsifah al-Yahūd*) imitated the Stoics. They too, he says, occupied a porch/veranda (*al-miẓallah*) made of trees and vine cuttings, where their sages used to gather every year, as on a feast, during a week appointed for consultations and disputations. Ḥunayn says that they used to decorate the place with various kinds of fruit and there their scholars (*ʿulamāʾuhum*) would confer about 'knowledge' (*ʿilm*) and study the prescribed

[53] Badawi, *Ḥunain ibn Iṣḥâq, Âdâb al-falâsifah*, 40.

books of their ancestors.[54] According to Ḥunayn, the meaning of their hanging the fruit in the place was that "these were the original maxims/wise sayings (*al-ḥikam*), the situation (*maqām*) of which was the situation of the fruit, with which souls are pleased and which hearts love."[55]

Ḥunayn goes on to speak of how the Stoics conferred with one another about knowledge and studied their philosophy in their porticoes, all the while going in and out, so as to stir their minds and their ardor by the bodily movement. Similarly, he says,

> "Jews and Christians occupied porticoes in gathering places (*al-kanā'is*); they would gather in them to study the books they had, and to teach the young how to intone the chants and recite them; they would be moving around, both standing and sitting, to enkindle their ardor. The Jews do this to the present day."[56]

Ḥunayn then says that "the source (*aṣl*) of the chants of the Jews and the Christians is 'Music' (*al-mūsīqā*), from which they took the chants."[57] He mentions David and the Psalms and says that to this day the Christians intone the Psalms in the chants of David. Both the Jews and the Christians, he says, build sanctuaries and put pillars in front of them, and so it is that "the Muslims install pillars and porticos in mosques, where the teachers teach the Qur'ān to the youngsters. They recite it in a sing-song way and in chants. "All this," Ḥunayn says, "was taken from Music."[58]

Finally, Ḥunayn offers a description of the church almost as if it were a philosophical academy and its priests and ministers were philosophers and their disciples and their liturgies were conferences of sages. He says,

> "The Christians arrange the seats of the sanctuary (*al-haykal*) one rank above another. The seat of the major, spiritual master, the teacher, is in the center of the sanctuary, while the philosophers are in the highest rank, the

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[54] Ḥunayn seems to be alluding to some of the rites and practices of the Jewish feast of 'Succoth', a term which is usually translated into English as 'booths' or 'huts'.

[55] Badawi, *Ḥunain ibn Isḥâq, Âdâb al-falâsifah*, 40.

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] *Ibid.*, 41.

> lowest of them being the disciples, whose station in rank is according to their level in science and philosophy (*al-ʿilm wa l-falsafah*)."[59]

Having come to the end of his listing of the ancient philosophers, arranged according to the names of their schools, Ḥunayn tells how in antiquity kings provided 'houses of gold' for philosophers and sages as places for them to gather and confer about the sciences in their various languages. He tells how originally philosophy was an oral discipline, which the disciples of the old masters subsequently recorded; a development which, according to Ḥunayn, allowed the teachings to come down to his own time. He then offered an insight into his conception of his own vocation as a transmitter and translator of philosophy. He says,

> "Then God, mighty and exalted be He, conferred a blessing on us and taught us Arabic, so that we might bring it out of Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac into the clear, Arabic language."[60]

In a subsequent report, Ḥunayn tells of his intention in the book that he is writing to transmit reports of the Greek poets and sages and of the philosophers of the 'Romans' (*ar-Rūm*), i.e., the Byzantines, their 'choice sayings' (*nawādir*), their 'disciplines' (*ādāb*), and their 'politics' (*siyāsah*).[61] He says this is what he has set down in this "book of questions and answers."[62] He wants, he says, the book to be an *imām* for philosophers and researchers, and a teacher for anyone who comes after his time who wants to learn wisdom and philosophy, which he characterizes as "the knowledge of a heavenly, greater kingdom, ..., the abode of paradise, along with the ever-living spiritual masters."[63] This is presumably the book from which Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Anṣārī excerpted the text we have before us.

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[59] *Ibid.*

[60] *Ibid.*, 43.

[61] It is worth noting in connection with these terms that at the beginning of the text Ḥunayn says of his work, "These are the 'choice sayings' (*nawādir*) of the words (*al-alfāẓ*) of the wise philosophers and the 'disciplines' (*ādāb*) of the ancient teachers." Badawi, *Ḥunain ibn Isḥâq, Âdâb al-falâsifah*, 37.

[62] Clearly the text which al-Anṣārī presents is not in the form of questions and answers, which was nevertheless a popular literary form among the apologists, both Christian and Muslim, in Ḥunayn's day.

[63] Badawi, *Ḥunain ibn Isḥâq, Âdâb al-falâsifah*, 43.

Clearly, for Ḥunayn philosophy was a realm of discourse in which Jews, Christians and Muslims could all share; he portrays each community as participating, each in its own way, in what he consistently calls the pursuit of wisdom, or knowledge, and the disciplines of the ancient sages. As we shall see, his thought is that dedication to these goals would promote both the good of the individual and the good of society at large.

B - The Aphorisms of the Philosophers

The main body of Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah* as it has come down to us consists of the collection of sayings attributed to the ancient philosophers and sages, which is the only part of the book which scholars usually mention. The list begins with Socrates, the list of whose aphorisms is notably longer than that of any other figure, highlighting the fact that he was considered by both Muslims and Christians of the period as the philosopher and wise man *par excellence.* It is notable that almost all of the sayings which Ḥunayn transmits, including the material in the Alexander dossier, are moral in character. This fact reminds the reader that while the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom is the heart of the matter, for Ḥunayn the cultivation of the appropriate *ādāb*, or 'disciplines', is the principal means of attaining the goal, both personal and societal. In this connection the sense of the polyvalent term *adab* would be more along the line of a suggested attitudinal adjustment and disciplinary practice than it would be simply to designate a gnomological saying, as it has often been interpreted in connection with Ḥunayn's work.[64] In other words, in the ensemble the sayings of the philosophers and sages which Ḥunayn collected from the ancient sources and presented anew in Arabic translation were meant to commend a philosophical way of contemporary life in Abbasid times, characterized by the manners and disciplines which the ancient philosophers had put forward as pertinent spiritual exercises for the promotion of a humane way of life.[65]

In the next generation, Muslim and Christian intellectuals in Baghdad would characterize the enterprise commended by Ḥunayn as the cultivation of a life of

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[64] See, e.g., Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation, passim.*

[65] In this connection one follows the insights of Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy As a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995; *idem, What Is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase; Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2002.

virtue and the suppression of vice, a program designed to promote that 'humaneness' (*al-insāniyyah*) in society of which Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī spoke so engagingly in his *Reformation of Morals*, as did the Muslim Amad ibn Muḥammad Miskawayh (932-1030) in his work of the same title.[66] For both Ḥunayn and Yaḥyā, and for other Christian intellectuals in later generations, such as ʿĪsā ibn Zurʿa (943-1008) and Elias of Nisibis (975-1046), this presentation of Christianity and Islam and their institutions in philosophical dress, so striking in Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah*, seems to have been a bid on the part of the Christian intellectual elite in Abbasid Baghdad to find a shared moral discourse between Christians and Muslims which would leave their mutually incompatible, religious differences safely enshrined within a commonly accepted ethical framework which could then allow them to discuss these same doctrinal differences in philosophical terms which would have the potential to convey clarity of thought if not a shared religious confession. It was, of course, in the end an apologetic undertaking which in its perceived foreignness would eventually alienate both the Muslim and seemingly even the Christian communities at large.

IV

A generation after the time of Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, the Christian logician and translator of the works of Aristotle and his commentators, Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d.940), a fellow 'Nestorian' from the monastery of Dayr Qunnā, became one of al-Fārābī's two Christian teachers of logic, the other one being Yuḥannā ibn Ḥaylān (d.910). Abū Bishr was also the teacher of one of al-Fārābī's own star pupils, the 'Jacobite' Christian, Yaḥyā bin ʿAdī (893-974). Modern scholars claim Abū Bishr as the real "founder of the Aristotelian school in Baghdad early in the tenth century."[67] As such he is often remembered as the defender of philosophy and of the universal validity of Aristotelian logic against the counter claims of contemporary Muslim *mutakallimūn* in a debate with their spokesperson Abū

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[66] Mohammed Arkoun, trans. *Miskawayh (320/1-420, traité d'éthique*, 2nd ed.; Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1988; *idem, L'humanisme arabe au IVe/Xe siècle: Miskawayg, philosophe et historien*, 2nd rev. ed.; Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1982.

[67] Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 14. See also G. Endress, "Mattā b. Yūnus (Yūnān) al-Ḳunnāʾī, Abū Bi<u>sh</u>r," in: EI, new ed., vol. VI, 844-846.

Sa'īd as-Sīrāfī in the *majlis* of the caliph's vizier in the year 937/8.[68] In the tenth century, Abū Bishr's student, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, became for a time Baghdad's most notable Christian intellectual and, like Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq in the previous century, Yaḥyā was one of the major proponents of the philosophical way of life as a guarantor of interreligious harmony and of logic and philosophy as the most important tools for the Christian theologian and apologist in the Islamic milieu. Many of the same ideas can be found in the works of the churchman Elias of Nisibis in the eleventh century.[69] Altogether these Christian writers may be taken as representative of the new Christian intellectuals of Abbasid times, who for a season cultivated a new Christian intellectual culture in the Islamic milieu from the ninth to the eleventh centuries, based on the cultivation of philosophy, particularly in its Aristotelian dress.

V

The new Christian intellectuals of Baghdad in early Abbasid times, like Ḥunayn and the others, who came to prominence in the heyday of the translation movement, made an unprecedented bid to participate in the intellectual life of the larger Islamic society of their day. It was the translation movement itself which provided them with the opportunity. Heretofore, modern scholars have certainly recognized the fact that the opportunity was one which allowed Christians like Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq and his associates to hire out their translation services to Muslim patrons who bought their contributions to Islamic scientific and philosophical interests.[70] But historians have been slower to recognize that these same Christian translators were also scholars in their own right, building on earlier traditions in their own communities. They used their skills not only to translate, but also to employ philosophical and logical thought in support of their faith commitments and to commend the philosophical life itself as a fruitful development which might provide the social possibility for harmony between Christians and Muslims in the caliphate.

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[68] Gerhard Endress, "Grammatik und Logik: Arabische Philologie und griechischer Philosophie in Widerstreit," in: Burkard Mojsisch, ed. *Sprachphilosophie in Antike und Mittelalter*, Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie, 3; Amsterdam: Gruner, 1986, 163-299.

[69] Samir Khalil Samir, *Foi et culture en Irak: Elie de Nisibe et l'Islam*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, 544; Aldershot, Hamps.: Ashgate Publishing, 1996.

[70] Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, esp. 136-141.

According to Gerhard Endress, "The undisputed master of philosophy for the Christian schools of late Hellenism as well as for the Muslim transmitters of this tradition, was Aristotle: founder of the paradigms of rational discourse, and of a coherent system of the world. [71] This was certainly a point of view shared by a medieval Syriac-speaking chronicler from the 'Jacobite' community about the role of Aristotle among his fellow 'Jacobites' long before Islamic times. At the point in the anonymous Syriac *Chronicon ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens* at which the chronicler comes to the discussion of what he calls the 'era of the Greeks', by which he means the time of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) and his Seleucid successors in the Syriac-speaking frontier lands between the Roman and Persian empires, he has this to say about Aristotle and the importance of his works for the Christians:

> "At this time, Aristotle, 'the Philosopher', collected all the scattered kinds of philosophical doctrines and he made of them one great body, thick with powerful opinions and doctrines, since he separated the truth from falsehood. Without the reading of the book of logic [*mlîlūthâ*] that he made it is not possible to understand the knowledge of books, the meaning of doctrines, and the sense of the Holy Scriptures, on which depends the hope of the Christians, unless one is a man to whom, because of the excellence of his [religious] practice, the grace of the Holy Spirit is given directly, the One who makes all wise."[72]

In Abbasid times there were more Christian thinkers interested in the philosophies and sciences of the Greeks than just those Aristotelians among the Jacobites and the 'Nestorians' who took their texts and commentaries from the Alexandrian tradition. And there were more Muslims whose philosophical and scientific interests reached well beyond a single-minded devotion to Aristotle. Nevertheless these were the Christian and Muslim philosophers who shaped the intellectual milieu in which Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and Elias of Nisibis, to name just the most well-known of them, pursued their careers. And just as the

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[71] Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindī," in: Endress and Kruk, *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, 52.

[72] I.-B. Chabot, ed. *Anonymi Auctoris Chronicon ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens*, CSCO, vols. 82 and 109; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1920 & Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1952, vol. 81, 104-105 (Syriac), vol. 109, 82 (Latin).

Muslims among this generation of philosophers wanted "to vindicate the pursuit of rational activity as an activity in the service of Islam," so did Ḥunayn, Yaḥyā and Elias and their associates intend to vindicate with the same philosophy the doctrines and practices of the Christians and the Christology of the 'Nestorians' and the 'Jacobites' respectively.[73]

What one notices as different in the works of Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, and Elias of Nisibis, by comparison with the works of earlier and contemporary Christian apologists and theologians who wrote in Arabic, is their venture beyond the range of the logical works of Aristotle. The *Organon* and Porphyry's *Eisagoge* had long been used by Christians in the explication of the terms of their various doctrinal formulae and the systematic defense of their several theologies. Ḥunayn, Yaḥyā and the others moved beyond the *Organon* into a larger Aristotelian, philosophical frame of reference which put a premium on the philosophical life itself, on the primacy of reason and the pursuit of happiness not only personally and individually but socially and politically as well. This was a new philosophical horizon for Christians in the east, which seems to have opened up in the Baghdadi intellectual milieu with the importation of Neoplatonic thought into the world of Syriac and Arabic Aristotelianism. Perhaps its most eloquent marker is the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, a paraphrase of portions of Plotinus' *Enneads*, which also included some commentary and a collection of wisdom sayings.[74] Its likely origins in its Arabic dress are probably to be sought in the circle of the philosopher al-Kindī and his Syrian Christian translators and associates. But the scholar whose person and works most readily embodied the new intellectual profile was undoubtedly the 'Second Master' (after Aristotle himself), the Muslim, Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (c.870-950).[75] Among Christian intellectuals, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī inherited al-Fārābī's mantle.

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[73] John W. Watt, "The Strategy of the Baghdad Philosophers: The Aristotelian Tradition as a Common Motif in Christian and Islamic Thought," in: J. J. van Ginkel et *al.*, eds., *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 134; Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2005, 151-166.

[74] F. W. Zimmermann, "The Origins of the So-Called *Theology of Aristotle*," in: J. Kraye et al., eds. Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts, XI, Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages; London: Warburg Institute, 1986, 110-240; E.K. Rowson, "The *Theology of Aristotle* and Some Other Pseudo-Aristotelian Texts Reconsidered," Journal of the American Oriental Society 112 (1992), 478-484; Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the Theology of Aristotle*, London: Duckworth, 2002.

[75] I.R. Netton, *Al-Farabi and His School*, Arabic Thought and Culture Series; London & New York: Routledge, 1992.

The Muslim religious establishment came ultimately to distrust the philosophers. In the time frame of our considerations, this distrust was expressed most notably in Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's (1058-1111) *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*,[76] where his contempt for what he perceived to be the arrogant rationalism of the Muslim philosophers in matters of religious belief and practice is abundantly clear.[77] But among Christians as well, not everyone was happy with the new direction in Christian intellectual culture which the Baghdad scholars introduced into their world. Evidence for this displeasure is recorded in a work of the late Muʿtazilī scholar, ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Hamdhānī (d.1025). In the course of his remarks against the influence of the philosophers in Islamic religious discourse, he mentioned by name the Christians Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq and Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, along with the names of several other prominent Christian translators of originally Greek texts into Arabic. He accused them of helping to subvert the faith of the Muslims by the introduction of the books of Plato, Aristotle and others into Islam. He says these Christian translators were few in number and he further says that "they hide under the cover of Christianity, while the Christians themselves do not approve of them."[78] What is more, ʿAbd al-Jabbār names a Christian source for this observation, the otherwise unknown Yuḥānna al-Qass, a lecturer on Euclid and a student of the *Almagest*, who, according to ʿAbd al-Jabbār, offered this criticism of the Christian translators:

> "Those who transmitted these books left out much of their error, and the worst of their coarseness, out of a sense of solidarity with them, and to spare them. They gave them, as it were on loan, Islamic meanings and interpretations which they did not have."[79]

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[76] al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. Michael E. Marmura; Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1997.

[77] Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005, esp. 172-176, 200-208.

[78] ʿAbd al-Jabbār ibn Amad al-Hamdhānī, *Tathbīt dalāʾil an-nubuwwah*, 2 vols., ed. ʿAbd al-Karīm ʿUthmān; Beirut: Dār al-ʿArabiyyah, 1966, vol. I, 76; see also 75-76 and 192-193. For more on ʿAbd al-Jabbār's observations in this vein, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: ʿAbd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins*, Islamic History and Civilization, Studies and Texts, vol. 56; Leiden: Brill, 2004.

[79] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalāʾil an-nubuwwah*, vol. I, 76.

Obviously, Yuḥānna al-Qass did not approve of the solidarity which the Christian philosophers associated with the translation movement felt for Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. How widely this feeling was shared among other Christians of the time is impossible to know at this remove. What we do know is that some modern commentators on the works of the likes of Ḥunayn, Yaḥyā and their colleagues have thought that they simply surrendered their Christian theology to Greek philosophy. For example, Joel Kraemer has written of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī that he was "first and foremost a philosopher." And he goes on to say,

> "In consistency Alfarabi's philosophy of religion, according to which religious motifs are symbols of philosophical truths, Ibn ʿAdī treated theological notions as embodiments of philosophical concepts... He interprets the persons of the Trinity as symbolic representations of Aristotelian ideas: the Father symbolizes the intellect, the Son symbolizes the intellectually cognizing subject, and the Spirit Symbolizes the intellectually cognized object."[80]

Observations such as this one seem to ignore the fact that Yaḥyā, like Ḥunayn in the previous century, were thinking and writing within a tradition that had long since learned to present the claims of their religious convictions in the Greek idiom of Aristotelian logic, even when translated into Syriac or Arabic. What is more, the doctrinal positions that Yaḥyā and other Christians defended in Syriac or Arabic were themselves initially formulated in Greek philosophical and logical terms, as all parties were well aware at the time. They were being defended by a constant appeal to the logical requirements of the proper definitions of these same originally Greek terms, even in their Syriac and Arabic versions. This agenda was still the operative one in the ninth and tenth centuries, in response to the religious claims of Islam, when the challenge for Christians was to develop an appropriately logical and philosophical, not to say theological, vocabulary in Arabic.

But the real question here is the deeper one of the real source of religious truth; is it reason or revelation, or what is the relationship between reason and revelation? In the Muslim community in the ninth and tenth centuries, unlike philosophers such as al-Kindī or al-Fārābī, the *mutakallimūn* and others, like the followers of the jurist Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (780-855), rejected the 'foreign sciences',

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[80] Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986, 107.

while nevertheless being influenced by them in many ways. They adopted the view that divine revelation via prophecy was in the end the fundamental source and criterion of religious truth, and that one should certainly not interpret the Qur'ān in accordance with the rules of Greek speech.[81] In the Syriac-speaking, Christian community, on the other hand, under the influence of Aristotelian Platonism, this issue had already arisen in the sixth century, when Paul the Persian seems to have opted for the primacy of reason over revelation.[82] And in the eleventh century, Yaḥyā's 'Nestorian' student, Abū l-Faraj ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib (d.ca.1055) similarly proposed that a logical demonstration was superior to the evidence of the miracles recorded in the Gospels in affirming the divinity of Christ.[83] But Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī himself, albeit that he was a student of al-Fārābī, clearly rejected this line of thinking. Yaḥyā taught that the Gospel miracles were the primary warrant for the spread of the Christian faith, and he has been quoted as having espoused the view that "ce n'est pas Aristote qui me guide quand il s'agit du christianisme."[84]

As for Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, while he does not say as much, it seems that he was perhaps the first Arabic-speaking Christians to espouse the view that philosophy provides an intellectual space in which Christians and Muslims could enter a realm of common discourse about reason, ethics and public policy.

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[81] On these issues, see the in-depth studies of Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991-1997.

[82] Teixidor, *Aristote en syriaque*, esp. 34-41.

[83] Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans en Irak*, 108-112.

[84] Emilio Platti, *Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, théologien chrétien et philosophe arabe: Sa théologie de l'Incarnation*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 14; Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuvan, Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1983, 78-79.