CHRISTIANS AT THE HEART OF ISLAMIC RULE: Church Life and Scholarship in ‘Abbasid Iraq

David Thomas,
Editor

BRILL

CHRISTIANS AT THE HEART OF ISLAMIC RULE

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VOLUME I

CHRISTIANS AT THE HEART OF ISLAMIC RULE

Church Life and Scholarship in ʿAbbasid Iraq

EDITED BY

DAVID THOMAS

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This series documents the history of encounters between Christians and Muslims. It will include the records of apologetics, controversies and discussions, and also studies arising from them. All editions of texts will include full introductions, the texts in their original language (Arabic, Syriac, Greek, Latin, etc), and annotated translations (normally) into English. They are particularly intended for college students and researchers in the field.

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INTRODUCTION

Iraq in the period of the ʿAbbasid caliphs was an area of surprisingly mixed population, culture and religion. Although it came under Muslim rule within a decade of the Prophet Muḥammad's death, and was made the political and intellectual centre of the Islamic world in the second/eighth century, it remained religiously pluralist for many hundreds of years. At first, the Jews, Christians, Persian dualists and others who had lived there for centuries, and in some cases millennia, hardly seemed aware of any need or requirement to conform to the faith of their Muslim rulers. And it was only after some centuries that many of them felt driven to abandon their *dhimmī* status and inherited faith under the accumulated pressures on people who did not follow Islam. In the intervening centuries, when members of different faiths mixed with some confidence and freedom in the lands along the Tigris and Euphrates, intellectual and religious influences extended in all directions, and relations between scholars, professionals and many of the common populace flourished in ways that prohibit any over-simple account of the ways in which Muslims looked upon their client Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians.

Christianity was long-established in Iraq by the time al-Manṣūr chose the site of Baghdad for his new capital. And Christians quickly became noticed in and around the city, both for their sheer numbers and also for the skills and accomplishments by which they could benefit their rulers. At the top of the social and religious hierarchy the metropolitans and bishops of the various denominations were early recognised as men who commanded respect and deference among their followers, and could thus control them on behalf of the caliph. And so the election of new church leaders became a matter of keen interest to the government and frequently an occasion for direct intervention to ensure the right man was appointed.

It is probable that the best known of the church leaders under early ʿAbbasid rule, the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I, rose to his position through this direct involvement of the caliph. And by virtue of his pre-eminence over all Christians in the empire he enjoyed direct access to the caliph's presence itself. The manner in which he casually begins a letter to his friend Sergius—'One day recently, as I was at the gate of the royal palace, a prominent man exuding power, wealth and grandeur approached'—suggests how normal it was for him to attend at court and how undaunted he was by his *dhimmī* status. Nevertheless, he was never allowed entirely to forget this, and could never feel completely at ease with his Muslim counterparts. In his celebrated dialogue with al-Manṣūr's

son al-Mahdī he is repeatedly put on the defensive and rather than initiate discussion is forced to respond to questions about the legitimacy of his beliefs. Of course, this was not a debate between social equals, but even in the form in which it is self-referentially reported by Timothy himself it bears the features of an interrogation in which the Christian is required to account for and justify the points on which he differs from Islam.

This same ambivalence in is also evident at the level of technical scholarship, where Christians were obviously valued for their knowledge and sophistication but also suspected and even despised for their religious principles. Concerning Muslim esteem for Christians, the prominence of scholars such as Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, his son Isḥāq and their colleague Qusṭā ibn Lūqā in translating texts from the ancient world into Arabic for the caliph and nobles is well-known. And they and countless other less famous Christian translators were paid proper respect and remuneration for their services. Similarly, Muslim philosophers were often the pupils of Christian teachers, as in the case of al-Fārābī and Yūḥannā ibn Ḥaylān and Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus, and even Muslim theologians were occasionally known to consult Christians, as in the case of ʿAbdullāh ibn Saʿīd ibn Kullāb and a certain Pethion who met in a church cloister in the Dār al-Rūm quarter of Baghdad.

Ibn Kullāb was active in the early years of the third/ninth century, in the same period as the first generation of major Arabic-speaking Christian theologians. The best known among these, Theodore Abū Qurra, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī and Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rāʾiṭa, were deeply involved in current circles of Muslim theology, from which they borrowed techniques and concepts to help articulate their doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, and within which they were known for the innovative arguments they set out. Nevertheless, there is almost no sign that Muslims were persuaded by anything that Christians wrote about their faith, but rather a sustained series of refutations that demonstrate in various ways the hollowness and incoherence of all that Christians attempted to prove. And here we see signs of suspicion and disrespect.

The succession of works, both substantial and slight, by Christians and Muslims on aspects of the other's beliefs eloquently illustrates the double theme of engagement and inimicality. From the first decades of the ʿAbbasid period onwards theologians on both sides composed diatribes apparently as a normal part of their activities, and the relatively few that have survived show both extensive knowledge of what the other believed and also a refracted image as that knowledge passed through the prism of the author's own dogmas. This typically resulted in distortion, which gave an opportunity for ridicule.

A prime example can be given from *The Introduction* of the fourth/tenth century Ashʿarī theologian Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, which is a compre-

hensive treatise of systematic theology in Islam, ranging from epistemology to political theory. Part of its author's concerns is to show what is wrong theology as a backdrop to what is right. And so at different points he turns from his exposition of Ashʿarī *kalām* to refute one group or another. Among these are the Christians whom he tackles on the key doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation. He begins his arguments against the first by commenting on the claim that the Trinity is 'substance'. This, he insists, brings the Godhead into the sphere of the material where it can bear the accidental qualities of contingent bodies and by implication undergo change. Such a notion is ridiculous. But what he fails to disclose in this discussion (if he indeed appreciated it properly) is that the common term 'substance' is understood quite differently within the theologies of Arab Christians and Muslims. While the latter apply it exclusively to material, physical things, which by definition are contrary to the divine, the former apply it to self-subsistent entities which do not derive their character from outside themselves. Within Islamic theology the term cannot conceivably be applied to God, but within the Aristotelian thinking of Christian contemporaries it necessarily should.

In this brief argument al-Bāqillānī makes clear by implication that he rejects Christian doctrine because it does not conform to the norms of Islam. And in his approach to Christianity as a whole in this work he reveals his disdainful dismissal of it as a distortion of true belief that is valuable only as an example of how the purity of the oneness of God can be corrupted into tritheism and anthropomorphism.

In order for al-Bāqillānī and other Muslims to have levelled the attacks they composed, they required expert knowledge of Christianity. Some authors gained insights into denominational differences and the detailed metaphors that Christians employed to communicate their teachings, while others became closely acquainted with the Biblical basis of doctrinal constructions. But there are few signs that this knowledge led to understanding, and no indication of sympathy towards Christians or their beliefs. The evident intimacy that this awareness presupposes had no effect upon the hostility that Muslim works on Christianity characteristically show.

The same ambivalence can be seen in social and professional contacts between Christians and Muslims, where Christians were again recognised and respected for their expertise but despised and maybe feared for their manner of applying it. Maybe the most vivid picture of Christian professionals in ʿAbbasid society is given by the Muʿtazilī thinker and literary stylist Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ in the mid third/ninth century. He presents this in a letter which he wrote to some fellow Muslims who had appealed for his help with a set of awkward questions posed by a group of Christians. Before getting down to specific answers al-Jāḥiẓ attempts to explain why Christians enjoy so much freedom in Muslim

urban society, and he explains how they go too far. In one passage he describes them occupying positions as physicians, financiers and personal secretaries in the palaces of nobles, as wearing the same clothes and playing the same games as Muslims, and even of giving Muslim names to their children. Most outrageously they ignore the conditions of their *dhimmī* status by concealing the distinctive markings they were bidden to show on their clothes, by refusing to defer to Muslims, and even by retaliating when hit. Despite all this, al-Jāḥiẓ is dismayed to see Muslims fawning over these people and applauding them and their ways.

Allowing for the exaggeration that the circumstances of writing would encourage, there seems to be here some grain of fact about the relative freedom that Christian professionals enjoyed in Muslim society, and about attempts on their part to assimilate into the social surroundings in which they lived. And they achieved some success, because they were evidently not compelled to remind themselves or Muslim acquaintances of their second-class status as 'protected people'. But there is also a trace of rather self-conscious striving for self-betterment and integration into the dominant ways, as though the Christians described were aware of being outside and tried a little too hard to attain acceptance while taking advantage of Muslim forbearance. They bear the marks of a social group that knows toleration could tip over into ostracism and persecution, as indeed happened when the Caliph al-Mutawakkil imposed anti-*dhimmī* measures in 235/850 and again in 239/853–4, and of a group that uses opportunities afforded by wider society for its own ends.

These are signs that Christians lived in ʿAbbasid society with the aspirations and fears harboured by many minority groups throughout history. They had freedoms and recognition of their worth, but they encountered misunderstanding and rejection for their beliefs. They may rarely have experienced naked aggression, though this did happen from time to time, but in many small ways they were regularly made to see that their place in Muslim society did not confirm them as integral to it. There was always some distance and uncertainty.

In a sketch, this is the background of the papers collected here, each of them dealing with an aspect of the life of Christians under the ʿAbbasid caliphate and sharing both the vigour of that life and its interaction with the wider society in which it was situated.

In the first paper Barbara Roggema plunges straight into the theme of Christians preserving their sense of identity and superiority by suggesting that Islam is a primitive form of monotheism intended to combat the polytheism of Arabia. Thus this faith can be given some recognition, but only as an antidote and never as fully formed as Christianity.

In her paper Hilary Kilpatrick shows how closely Muslims and Christians mingled in ʿAbbasid society, in the cloisters and gardens of the numerous

monasteries dotted throughout Iraq. But she also suggests that the largely lost genre of literature about monasteries points to the central importance of these religious houses in classical Islamic society and culture.

Sandra Keating examines in detail the circumstances in the early third/ninth century in which the Jacobite Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'iṭa wrote his letter against the Melkite explanation of the union of the divine and human in Christ. She argues that while it counters Melkite teachings and supports the Jacobites, it also provides a sustained defence against any Muslim criticisms, thus showing the awareness among Christians of this larger dimension of polemic even when they were arguing amongst themselves.

Mark Beaumont analyses Abū Rā'iṭa's Nestorian contemporary ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī on the Incarnation, to show in a similar way that this important theologian was aware of both the interdenominational and interfaith dimensions of doctrinal dispute. ʿAmmār was acutely aware of the latter, and in his response to perceived objections produced original expositions that may have been particularly comprehensible and even appealing to Muslims.

Whether Muslims ever did convert through reading such authors is not known, but there was a persistent rumour that a person no less than the Caliph al-Ma'mūn himself became a Christian. Mark Swanson examines references to this strange story in some important Christian Arabic texts, and suggests that it originated and survives among Christians by virtue of its power to comfort and encourage them in the vicissitudes of their minority status.

Lucy-Anne Hunt's study is devoted to the influence of ʿAbbasid Iraqi artistry on building decorations as far away as Egypt. She argues that decorative motifs in churches of the Wādī Naṭrūn may have been created by craftsmen from Takrīt, and thereby indicates the cultural borrowing by Christians from Muslims who had come to Egypt to serve the Iraqi Muslim governor.

Sidney Griffith examines in some detail an essay on morality by the Jacobite philosopher Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī. He shows that it fits into the Islamic milieu so well that its character as a Christian work is not immediately evident. But he finally concludes that it is best understood as a work that fosters the espousal of Christian values in the mixed culture in which its author was so prominent.

Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī is also the focus of Emilio Platti's paper, though here the starting point is the philosopher's rejoinder to an Ashʿarī theologian's insistence that human actions are not free but acquired from God. Yaḥyā himself insists that humans are free from divine determination. Platti briefly builds on this difference a case for saying that in the world of today it is imperative for people of religion to assert both human

responsibility and divine involvement in human affairs. Thus there is need for cooperative dialogue on the crucial issue that occupied Christian and Muslim minds in Baghdad in the middle ages.

Bo Holmberg's contribution is a close study of the language employed in one part of the encyclopaedic Christian work the *Kitāb al-majdal*. He first summarises arguments he has made elsewhere about the date and authorship of this work, and then demonstrates the fine style of writing, and the frequent echoes of Qur'anic as well as Biblical phraseology. He shows that this is the work of a Christian who was thoroughly versed in Arabic style and culture.

In his paper Julian Faultless analyses an example of Christian inter-denominational borrowing. He takes the commentary to the Prologue of the Gospel of John by the leading fourth/tenth century scholar and exegete Ibn al-Ṭayyib, and shows how the wording in two recensions is subtly changed. One of these is from the diophysite Church of the East and the other is miaphysite, probably from the Coptic Church, though despite the pronounced differences between these two denominations the two authors responsible for the recensions make far fewer alterations than might be expected. The conclusion is that there were surprisingly extensive borrowings between the two traditions.

Martin Accad examines the use of John 20.17 as a proof text in Christian-Muslim polemics. He first notes its use in intra-Christian debates, and then plots the change in emphasis among Christians who were debating within the Muslim context, before moving to Muslim authors who refer to the verse in order to show the complete equality in humanity between Jesus and his disciples. He concludes that the use of the verse illustrates the typically wilful refusal of both sides to attempt to reach an understanding.

The paper by Gabriel Said Reynolds is a discussion of some references in one of the fourth/tenth century Muʿtazilī ʿAbd al-Jabbār's works. These cast light on beliefs and practices apparently pursued by Christians in the east of the ʿAbbasid empire. But in addition they help show the Muslim author's own attitude towards a religious tradition that he clearly regarded as corrupt.

The last paper, by David Thomas, shows how Muslims generally regarded Christianity and reacted to attempts to sustain its coherence and explain it. Like ʿAbd al-Jabbār, most of them failed to see value in the faith. They found it relatively easy to criticise its central doctrines of the Trinity and divinity of Christ, and to ask new questions that forced their interlocutors to search for answers they had previously not had to consider. Furthermore, they regarded it as a decayed form of the pure faith embodied in Islam, and reflected this structurally in the ways in which they incorporated refutations of it into their theological treatises.

These contributions all originated as papers delivered at the Fourth Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium on Arab Christianity and Islam, held at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, Selly Oak, Birmingham, on 12–16 September 2001. Its theme was *Arab Christianity in Iraq in the ʿAbbasid Period (750–1258)*. This furthers the studies that have become associated with Alphonse Mingana (1878–1937), who worked at Selly Oak and amassed a collection of Syriac and Christian Arabic manuscripts.

The Mingana Symposium, and hence the contents of this book, were made possible by grants from the British Academy, the Edward Cadbury Trust, the Spalding Trust, the Bishop of Birmingham's Charitable Trust and the Altajir World of Islam Trust. It is a great pleasure to acknowledge this and to thank the various trustees for their generosity.

The Fifth Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium will be held in September 2005, but in the meantime the interests of the scholars who attended and of others in this field are furthered by the online Mingana Conversation Group, www.theology.bham.ac.uk/resource/mingana.htm, and also by the creation of the texts and studies series *The History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, of which this is the inaugural volume. Our thanks go to Carol Bebawi for her vigilant assistance in bringing these papers to publication, and for all she does to help further the study and experience of Christian-Muslim relations.

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MUSLIMS AS CRYPTO-IDOLATERS—A THEME IN THE CHRISTIAN PORTRAYAL OF ISLAM IN THE NEAR EAST

Barbara Roggema

Probably the most important objection of Muslims to Christianity is that Christians, contrary to what they themselves claim, are not true monotheists. Because of their belief in the Trinity, Christians have constantly been accused of attributing partners to God, of being 'associators', *mushrikūn*. It is well known that a large part of Christian apologetics vis-à-vis Islam is devoted to the defence against this accusation. The veneration of the cross and of icons was another aspect of Christianity that elicited criticism from Muslims. In their eyes it was idolatry and hence another sign of *shirk*.

This polemic about polytheism and idolatry also went in the opposite direction, as one can see from the numerous Christian writings about Islam in which Islam is dismissed as some sort of idolatry. What jumps to mind are 'Mahomet, Apollo and Tervagant', the so-called gods of Islam according to the *Chanson de Roland*. They became a symbol of Christian misconception and misrepresentation of Islam in Medieval Europe.[1] In the thought world of Christians living in the Islamic empire a similar type of image making can be detected. Because of their linguistic and social proximity to Muslims they would not have been able to present a convincing portrait of Islam as polytheism, as Europeans did. And yet, they were keen to point out that Muslims tended towards idolatry. Various references to supposed idolatrous aspects of the Muslim faith are scattered through a large number of Eastern Christian writings about Islam. It is often suggested that these were the inheritance from pre-Islamic Arabian paganism.

The purpose of this study is to discuss this motif as it is found in Muslim-Christian literary debates, correspondence and apologetic treatises, from the different Christian communities and regions of the *Dār al-Islām*, from

[1] See Appendix A, 'The Imputation of Idolatry to Islam', in Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West. The Making of an Image*, rev. edn, Oxford, 1997, pp. 338–43; John V. Tolan, 'Muslims as Pagan Idolaters in Chronicles of the First Crusade', in Michael Frassetto and David R. Blanks eds, *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Perception of Other*, New York, 1999, pp. 97–117; Jennifer Bray, 'The Mohammetan and Idolatry', in W. J. Sheils ed., *Persecution and Tolerance* (*Studies in Church History* 21), *s.l.*, 1984, pp. 89–98.

Umayyad times through the 'Abbasid era.[2] Some of the examples which I will discuss below have already received attention in modern scholarship for a variety of reasons. They have been studied as aspects of Christian polemic against Islam, but also as possible sources of information about the pre-Islamic religion of the Arabs and about the emergence of Islam. Although these two objectives seem to lie at opposite poles, in reality the pursuit of either one inevitably involves the other, because in either case the material concerned has to be sifted through in order to distinguish willful and/or innocent distortions from the aspects of Islam that Muslims would have recognized as belonging to their religion. In the case of texts from early Islamic times, such an evaluation of the Christian writings about Islam often presents us with an 'equation with two unknowns', because much of what the Islamic sources themselves say about the genesis and early history of the Islamic religion is rejected by modern scholars as non-contemporary and apologetic.[3]

Precisely on the topic of polemic about polytheism, a recent monograph has underlined the difficulty of sifting polemic from historical material. This is Gerald Hawting's *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam. From Polemic to History*,[4] in which the author tries to argue that a large part of the polemic against the 'associators' as found in the Qur'an was targeted at the People of the Book, rather than at idolatrous Arabs in Muḥammad's environment. His thesis is that this Qur'anic polemic was only later interpreted as referring to the pagan Arabs, that is to say by the early exegetes and traditionists who constructed the Jahiliyya and anchored the Rise of Islam in pagan Arabia. Hawting's work heightens our awareness that no consistent picture can yet be drawn of the nature of religion in pre-Islamic Arabia. This partly impedes the evaluation of

[2] Which is to say that I do not restrict the literature to Iraq, the focus of the symposium, because the subject of this paper does not justify such a restriction. As I hope the discussion will show, the texts concerned from different regions have much in common. The manuscript traditions of several of these show that not only ideas floated from one Christian community to the next, but also the texts themselves. See Sidney Griffith, 'The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*: Reflections on a Popular Genre of Christian Literary Apologetics in Arabic in the Early Islamic Period', in Hava Lazarus Yafeh *et al.* eds, *The* Majlis. *Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam* (*Studies in Arabic Language and Literature* 4), Wiesbaden, 1999, pp. 13–65.

[3] That very fact, however, is also the main driving force behind the study and use of the non-Muslim sources for the history of early Islam, the best known example of which is Patricia Crone and Michael Cook's *Hagarism; The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge, 1977. In response to this trend Robert Hoyland collected a vast number of non-Muslim sources in his *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (*Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* 13), Princeton, 1997, and on the basis of his evaluation of some of these he dismisses the 'either/or approach' and proposes a careful comparison of the Muslim and non-Muslim sources.

[4] Cambridge, 1999.

some the earliest writings that I will discuss here, because we cannot safely conclude what supposed aspect of Islam the Christian author is reacting against.[5] In certain cases this prevents us from understanding exactly how sharp the polemicist's pen was. When, for example, a Christian author writes, 'You Muslims are worshippers of Venus really', it is hard to judge whether there is any basis for this in what the author thought he observed, and therefore we miss part of the essence of his polemic. We can nevertheless often understand the rationale of the polemics in our sources, and that is what I attempt do in this paper. To begin with, I shall review the different idolatry motifs and investigate how, if at all, they exploit aspects of Islamic doctrines and acts of worship.[6] Secondly, in a more general manner, I will discuss why the idea of Islam as a faith with idolatrous traits has been perpetuated and how it meshes with the more favourable descriptions of Islam as a monotheist faith that are central to many of the Eastern Christian apologetic texts.

The Kaʿba Cult

The veneration of the Kaʿba and its surrounding holy sites in Mecca is one of the aspects of Islam frequently criticized by Christian polemicists. Seeing that they often occur in the context of discussions about the veneration of the cross, one notices that such criticisms of Muslim rituals constitute a case of repaying in kind. In one of the popular Christian Muslim debates, the third/ninth century *Dialogue of Abraham of Tiberias with ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Hāshimī*, the Christian protagonist challenges his Muslim interlocutors by contending that the cross can work miracles and has healing powers whereas 'the *Rukn* and the *Maqām*', cannot. One of the Muslim participants in this debate feels affronted and begs the monk to travel with him to Mecca to prove the contrary. Then the monk asks: Is God's power not present everywhere? He claims that with the sign of the cross he can perform a miracle and that he does not have to go all the way to Constantinople for it—to the actual wood of the cross.[7] This reply is of course highly polemical: it insinuates that the Muslims worship things that have no relation to the Divine being.

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[5] This is especially the case with some of the examples discussed under the heading *Aphrodite-al-ʿUzzā-ʿAkbar*' below.

[6] A few of these are mentioned by Hawting in chapter 3 of his book mentioned above, pp. 83–5. This chapter appears in almost the same form as an article: '*Shirk* and Idolatry in Monotheist Polemic', *Israel Oriental Studies* 17, 1997, pp. 107–26.

[7] Giacinto Būlus Marcuzzo, *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī à Jerusalem vers 820. Étude, édition critique et traduction annotée d'un texte théologique chrétien de la littérature arabe* (*Textes et Études sur l'Orient Chrétien* 3), Rome, 1986, pp. 506–12.

In the apologetic treatise *Kitāb al-burhān* of the third/ninth century Nestorian ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī the imaginary opponent in the discussion is not identified as a Muslim, but it is clear whom the author has in mind when he writes ʿAs for those who speak with disdain about our kissing of the cross, we reply to them with the argument: more remarkable than that is their kissing of a stone which the associators used to venerate and kiss.'[8] This brings us to another aspect of this polemical theme: the Kaʿba represents a cult which is pagan in origin. It is that aspect on which the Christian author of the *Correspondence of al-Hāshimī and al-Kindī* focuses when he criticizes the Muslim rites connected with the Kaʿba and other parts of the sacred area in Mecca. To him it is a purely pagan affair and he compares the rites of the pilgrimage, the circumambulation and the casting of stones, with the Brahmans and Indian sunworshippers.[9] The *Correspondence*, which is clearly a purely Christian product, is well known for its vehement polemic against Islam, but it is also remarkable for its display of extensive knowledge of Muslim traditions. In connection with the Kaʿba, the author adds force to his rejection of these pilgrimage rituals by adducing a saying of the Caliph ʿUmar I who claimed that he only performed these rites because he had seen the Prophet himself do it. According to canonical Muslim tradition, ʿUmar addressed the Black Stone and the *Maqām* of Abraham and said: 'By God, I know well that you are nothing but two stones that can do neither good nor bad, but as I have seen the Prophet kiss you, I will do the same.'[10] The author undoubtedly not only wants to demonstrate that even ʿUmar was critical of these rituals, but also that if a caliph cannot think of other grounds on which to perform this ritual than imitation of the Prophet, the Muslim claim that the Kaʿba cult goes back to Abraham is not convincing.

There are other Christian sources which try to make the Kaʿba cult look as though it lacked foundation. For example, in the supposed correspondence of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III with ʿUmar II, the former wants to show that the sanctity of Mecca has nothing to do with Abraham and is a place governed by the demons who 'draw you, by occult machinations, to the loss of your souls, for example, by a stone that is called *rukn*, that you adore without knowing why'.[11]

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[8] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, *Kitāb al-burhān*, in Michel Hayek ed., *ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, apologie et controverses*, Beirut, 1977, p. 87.

[9] A. Tien ed., *Risālat ʿAbd Allāh b. Ismāʿīl al-Hāshimī ilā ʿAbd al-Masīḥ b. Isḥāq al-Kindī yadʿūhu bihā ilā al-Islām wa-Risālat ʿAbd al-Masīḥ ilā al-Hāshimī yaruddu bihā ʿalayhi wa-yadʿūhu ilā al-Naṣrāniyya*, London, 1880, pp. 103–4; Georges Tartar trans., *Dialogue Islamo-Chrétien sous le calife Al-Ma'mūn (813–834), les épitres d'Al-Hāshimī et d'Al-Kindī*, Paris, 1985, pp. 213–14.

[10] Tien, *Risāla*, p. 104; Tartar, *Dialogue Islamo-Chrétien*, p. 214.

[11] A. Jeffery, 'Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III',

In a later, immensely popular, Christian-Muslim debate, the *Disputation of George the Monk with three Muslims in the year 1207*, one of the Muslim notables tries to convince the old monk, the hero of this debate, to travel with him to Mecca for the pilgrimage.[12] The old monk asks what he could expect of such a trip, and this encourages the Muslim to list all the delights of the Hajj, including the attractive women of the Ḥijāz who never fail to please men.[13] This scandalous manner of depicting the pilgrimage and the motives of Muslims to undertake it is part of the author's attempt to portray Christianity and Islam as diametrically opposed faiths. It constitutes the main message of this debate: Christianity is the religion of the spiritual and Islam is the religion of the material and sensual. After listing all the ceremonies at Minā and ʿArafāt, one of the Muslims describes the supposed pilgrimage sights of Mecca: 'the Black Stone, the Well of Zamzam, al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā, the Green Dome, the Kaʿba, the Back of the Camel, and the Grave of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn'.[14] In all likelihood the author makes a point of listing so many different sights to overemphasize the resemblance with idolatrous cults. By referring to the sights relating to Muḥammad's family he touches on the sensitive issue of grave visitation, and probably replies indirectly to the Muslim criticism of Christians' veneration of relics. But none of this is made explicit—the monk simply exclaims that he is stunned by these wonderful things. The Emir who leads the session, and who is presented as favouring the monk, laughs and ridicules the Muslim participants in the disputation, because they fail to notice that the monk is being sarcastic.

Harvard Theological Review 37, 1944, pp. 269–332; p. 323. For the caliph's letter see J.-M. Gaudeul, 'The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar. 'Umar's Letter Re-discovered?', *Islamochristiana* 10, 1984, pp. 109–57. This partly reconstructed correspondence is third/ninth-century in its present form but probably contains some second/eighth-century material; R. Hoyland, 'The Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III', *Aram* 4, 1993, pp. 165–77.

[12] Edited by Paul Carali and published under the title *Le Christianisme et l'Islam. Controverse attribuée au moine Georges du Couvent de St. Siméon (Séleucie) soutenue devant le Prince El-Mouchammar fils de Saladin en 1207*, Beit Chebab, 1933. English translation: Alex Nicoll, 'Account of a Disputation between a Christian Monk and Three Learned Mohammedans on the Subject of Religion', *Edinburgh Annual Register, ad annum* 1816, 9, 1820, pp. ccccv–ccccxliii. The popularity of this debate can be judged from the large number of manuscripts of it. Khalil Samir has traced 89 manuscripts which he lists in 'Bibliographie du Dialogue Islamo-Chrétien (septième partie). Auteurs arabes chrétiens du XIII^{e} siècle', *Islamochristiana* 7, 1981, pp. 299–307.

[13] Carali, *Le Christianisme et l'Islam*, pp. 141–2; Nicoll, 'Account of a Disputation', pp. ccccxli–ccccxlii.

[14] Carali, *Le Christianisme et l'Islam*, p. 142; Nicoll, 'Account of a disputation', pp. cc–cxlii.

Aphrodite-al-ʿUzzā-ʿAkbar'

Another instance of a comparison of the worship of the cross and the Kaʿba is to be found in one of the earliest and best known Christian discussions of Islam, the chapter on the 'Heresy of the "Ishmaelites"' in John of Damascus' *De Haeresibus*.[15] In his description of this 'heresy' he also refers to the former polytheism of the Arabs. The Muslim claim that the Kaʿba is being venerated because it was the place of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael, is counteracted by the argument that Muslims tell different stories about what exactly Abraham's relation to the Black Stone was. He comments:

> They also defame us as being idolaters because we venerate the cross, which they despise; and we respond: 'How is it that you rub yourselves against a stone by your *Habathan*, and you express your adoration to the stone by kissing it?' And some of them answer that (because) Abraham had intercourse with Hagar on it; others, because he tied the camel around it when he was about to sacrifice Isaac.'[16]

According to John of Damascus, the Biblical account of the sacrifice of Isaac precludes its taking place in the desert. He prefers to trace back the veneration of the Black Stone to the cult of Aphrodite:

> This, then, which they call 'stone' is the head of Aphrodite, whom they used to venerate (and) whom they called Haber, on which those who can understand it exactly can see, even until now, traces of an engraving.[17]

This reference by John to Aphrodite and her alleged local name 'Haber' has caught the attention of numerous scholars, who have tried to understand what this statement is based on and whether it could add anything to the still relatively shadowy picture of religion in pre-Islamic Arabia. A number of late antique sources describe the Arabs as worshippers of Aphrodite, and it has been often been suggested, but never clearly proven, that this refers to the cult of al-ʿUzzā, who was worshipped by many Arabian tribes, and whose name features in the Qur'an alongside Allāt and Manāt.[18] Equally problematic is the name 'Haber'. If one is willing to assume that the words of John of Damascus are to some extent descriptive, the name 'Haber' has to be elucidated. At the

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[15] The authorship, and therewith the dating, of chapter 101 of *De Haeresibus* has often been contested, but as there exists a third/ninth century manuscript, and an even older fragment, it is still one of the earliest Christian discussions of Islam. See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 485. I will refer to the edition and translation in Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam. The 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'*, Leiden, 1972.

[16] Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 136–7.

[17] Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 136–7.

[18] See below p. 10 and n. 34.

beginning of the chapter on the Ishmaelites John already indicates that this means 'great',[19] and therefore it is reasonable to assume that the name has something to do with the root *k.b.r*, 'to be great', in Arabic.

This is the assumption of Gernot Rotter, who has tried to show that the epithet refers to the adjective al-Kubrā, which, on the basis of some fragmentary evidence, can be shown to be an epithet of Venus.[20] He rejects the idea proposed by several scholars that John of Damascus alludes to the Islamic expression '*Allāhu akbar*' and interprets it as 'Allāh *and* Akbar'. According to Rotter this does not make sense, because John of Damascus refers explicitly to the pre-Islamic Arabs. However, John may actually be trying to make a link between their belief and that of the Muslims. That, at least, is the case in another Greek text from the same period, an epistle of Patriarch Germanus in defence of the worship of icons, which also mentions the invocation the Saracens make to a stone called 'Chobar', 'even to this day'.[21]

Later sources leave no doubt that many Christian ears wanted to hear 'God and Akbar' when they heard the muezzin. The various comments of Byzantine writers who pointed out that this is what '*Allāhu akbar*' means have been documented.[22] Less well known are the Syriac and Arabic sources, which also suggest that 'Akbar' is worshipped next to God. In all likelihood it was Syriac and Arabic speakers who invented the idea of 'God and Akbar', since to their ears the *takbīr* could sound like that. One of the Syriac texts containing this motif is the Nestorian version of the legend of Sergius-Baḥīrā.[23] This legend, which describes the supposed teaching of a Christian monk to Muḥammad, ends with a note about how these teachings were ruined by the activities of the Jew Kaʿb, who gained influence in the Islamic community after the death of Muḥammad, taught the people the Old Testament after Baḥīrā had preached the Gospel, and 'confounded and corrupted everything which

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[19] Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 132–3.

[20] Gernot Rotter, 'Der *veneris dies* im vorislamischen Mekka, eine neue Deutung des Namens "Europa" und eine Erklärung für *kobar* = Venus', *Der Islam* 70, 1993, pp. 112–32, pp. 126–8.

[21] Germanus, *Ep. ad Thomam episcopum Claudiopoleos*, *PG*, vol. XCVIII, pp. 136–221, 168 A–D.

[22] John Meyendorff, 'Byzantine Views of Islam', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18, 1964, pp. 113–32, pp. 118–19; Adel T. Khoury, *Polémique Byzantine contre l'Islam*, Leiden, 1972, pp. 240–1, and for a summary of all the comments on the cult of the Kaʿba in Byzantine sources pp. 275–81.

[23] This legend, which can be partly traced back to the third/ninth century, is extant in four different recensions, two Syriac and two Arabic. All four refer to supposed idolatrous aspects of Islam, albeit in different ways. Because the editions by Richard Gottheil (published as a series of articles under the title 'A Christian Bahira Legend' in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13, 1898, pp. 189–242, 14, 1899, pp. 203–68, 15, 1900, pp. 56–102 and 17, 1903, pp. 125–66) contain many errors I will refer to the various manuscripts, which I have used for my new forthcoming editions.

Sergius had written originally'.[24] The explanation for why the Muslims chose to adhere to Kaʿb's words rather than Baḥīrā's is given in the following, rather tendentious, passage:

> For the Sons of Ishmael were uncivilised pagans, like horses without a bridle. They bowed to the idol of al-Kabar, who is Iblīs. The names of the demons are these: Bahram, the god of the Persians, and Anahid goddess of the Aramaeans, ʿUddi of the Hittites—these are the children of Hormizd—and Ukabar of the Ishmaelites, and [Bel of the] Babylonians, Artemis goddess of the Ephesians, those are the Sons of the South. And they fixed the names of the demons on the stars and bow to them until this day. After the erring of the demons had been in every place, they worshipped Ukabar and the Stone and the well which is called Zamzam, and the grave of Jannes and Jambres, the magicians of Egypt. And in their days there was the division and the erring of demons among the people. And about Hormizd and Ahriman they say that Hormizd gave birth to the light and Ahriman to the darkness, and that Hormizd gave birth to good and Ahriman to evil. Bahram, ʿUddi and Anahid are the children of Hormizd, whose names are high in heaven. Bel and Ukabar and Artemis [are the children of] Ahriman: their names are down on the earth. And the Sons of Ishmael, lo and behold, they provoke the anger of God every day of their lives by associating with Ukabar, without knowing Him. And the name of Ukabar is proclaimed by them shamelessly with a loud voice, and, lo and behold, they sacrifice to him year after year, until our day.[25]

This passage is remarkable for its portrayal of Islam as a dualist belief of some sort. Not all of the references are clear (for example "Uddi, *ʿwdy*, of the Hittites, *ḥytya*'), but its intent can nevertheless be clearly understood. The passage is meant to hammer at the fact that Islam is directly related to known forms of paganism and that the religious practices of the Muslims have their roots there. Presumably al-Kabar (*alkbr*) and Ukabar (*awkbr*) come down to the same, i.e. 'Akbar' in its Christian polemical reading—here God's counterpart is, however, not Aphrodite but Iblīs. I presume that the word that I translate as 'associating', *shwtpwta*, is meant as the Syriac equivalent of the Arabic *shirk*. The proclamation of Ukabar's name in a loud voice refers undoubtedly to the *takbīr*.

In another anti-Muslim text, the *Disputation of George the Monk with three Muslims in the year 1207*, to which I have already referred above, there is also a reference to the Arabs' supposed belief in 'Akbar'. The old monk is asked by one of the Muslims in the debate to give his view on

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[24] For the Kaʿb motif in anti-Muslim polemics, see S. H. Griffith, 'Jews and Muslims in Christian Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century', *Jewish History* 3, 1988, pp. 65–94, pp. 80–2.

[25] MS Mingana Syr. 604, f. 20a–21a. The words between the square brackets are emendations on the basis of MS Charfeh 122.

Muḥammad and Islam. He gives an account of Muḥammad's youth, focusing on the role of his teacher Baḥīrā. When portraying the audience of Muḥammad's early preaching, the monk comments:

> Their worship was to an idol called 'Akbar' and their prayers before him were poems on the subject of desire and love, which they used to write on tablets and which they would hang above that idol. They prayed to them and called them 'the suspended seven', *al-sabʿa al-muʿallaqa*.[26]

When, according to the old monk, Muḥammad began to preach the belief in one God, the Creator, and some of the people responded by expressing their fear of Akbar, Muḥammad told them: 'Worship God and reverence Akbar.'[27]

In the most extensive discussion of Islam in Syriac, composed by the sixth/twelfth century Jacobite bishop Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī, we encounter a similar description of the original belief of the Arabs: 'They used to worship the idol of Akbar and also the star al-ʿUzzā, that is to say, Aphrodite.'[28] According to Dionysius, Muḥammad induced these people to forsake their original form of worship and to convert to the belief in one God, by telling them that they would be given the land of milk and honey as a reward, as the Jews had for their belief in one God. The sharp polemical edges of Dionysius' words leap to the eye. He suggests that Muḥammad did not intend to do more than imitate the Jews and that the conversion of Muḥammad's first followers was not based on religious conviction, with which he counteracts the Muslim argument that the rapid spread of Islam and its great political power were given by God.[29]

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[26] Carali, *Le Christianisme et l'Islam*, p. 52.

[27] Ibid., p. 53. The version of the debate which Nicoll translated into English must have been different, since he gives: 'Mohammed said to them, Worship God, and reverence him. Who is *Acbar*?' Perhaps this is meant to suggest that the word 'Akbar', being an elative, implies a comparison and therefore a multiplicity. Nicoll, 'Account of a Disputation', p. ccccxiii.

[28] MS Mingana Syriac 89, f. 39a. For an introduction to this work, see S. H. Griffith, 'Dionysius bar Ṣalībī on the Muslims', in H. J. W. Drijvers *et al.* eds, *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984, Literary Genres in Syriac Literature (Groningen—Oosterhesselen 10–12 September)* (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 229), Rome, 1987. For a facsimile of the relevant chapters in MS Mingana Syriac 89, see A. Mingana, 'An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Kurʾān Exhibiting New Verses and Variants', *BJRL* 9, 1925, pp. 188–235. An edition of this work is being prepared by Prof. Joseph Amar.

[29] Several Syriac chronicles give a similar account of Muḥammad's attempts to persuade his people by telling them about the land of milk and honey. See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 129–30. That Islam could not be the true religion, *because* there were many reasons, apart from belief, for which people converted to it, is suggested by many Christian apologists. See Sidney Griffith, 'Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians', *Proceedings of the Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Conference* 4, 1979, pp. 63–86.

The Jacobite Syriac recension of the Baḥīrā legend also mentions the belief of the 'Sons of Ishmael' in al-ʿUzzā. Before going into the story proper of the monk teaching Muḥammad, the legend digresses to the history of the Lakhmid kingdom of al-Ḥīra.[30] It is related how in the sixth century King Nuʿmān and his subjects were converted from the worship of al-ʿUzzā to Christianity by the Catholicos Sabrīshuʿ—a historical note that may have been included to give a Nestorian *couleur locale* to the legend.[31] This historical note ends with the narrator's comment:

> Before they were baptised they worshipped the star al-ʿUzzā, that is Aphrodite Venus, *prddyty zhrh*, about whom even these days they say, when they swear, 'No, by the Father of al-ʿUzzā!'. I said to them, 'Who is it by whom you swear?' and they told me, 'That is God the Mighty, *alha hw ʿzyza*', adhering to this old tradition.

The explanation that the 'Father of al-ʿUzzā' is God accords with the notion of al-ʿUzzā as one of the 'daughters of God', *banāt Allāh*.[32] Swearing by al-ʿUzzā, and the Lord of al-ʿUzzā, does indeed seem to have been a custom in pre-Islamic times, but whether this account is really based on an observation of a practice that persisted in Islamic times cannot be known for sure.[33] Perhaps the intent is simply to associate the common expressions '*Allāh al-ʿAzīz*' and '*Rabb al-ʿIzza*' with the pre-Islamic oath swearing by al-ʿUzzā.

Both this example and the one of Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī confront us with the disparity between Muslim and non-Muslim sources on this issue. As I have already indicated above in the discussion of John of Damascus' passage, the identification of al-ʿUzzā with Aphrodite and the planet Venus is considered doubtful, because Islamic sources do not tell us anything of the kind.[34] According to Macdonald and Nehmé, 'The only unequivocal equation of al-ʿUzzā with the planet Venus is in the 10th-century Syriac-Arabic dictionary of Bar Bahlūl (ed. R. Duval, s.v. *estʿrā*); while the only explicit equation of al-ʿUzzā with Aphrodite, is in a 1st century BC to AD Nabataean-Greek inscription from the Greek island of Cos (F. Rosenthal, *Die aramaistische Forschung*, Leiden, 1964, 86 and 91 n. 4)'.[35] We should ask ourselves whether we could add to that the sources

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[30] MS Sachau Syr. 87, f. 49a.

[31] As suggested by Sidney Griffith in his article 'Muḥammad and the Monk Baḥīrā: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times', *Oriens Christianus* 79, 1995, pp. 146–74, p. 158.

[32] For a discussion of what *banāt Allāh* may or may not have been, see Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, pp. 130–49.

[33] See M. A. C. Macdonald and Laila Nehmé, *EI*[2], vol. X, art. '*Al-ʿUzzā*'.

[34] Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, p. 142. For an inventory of sources about al-ʿUzzā, see John. F. Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans. A Conspectus*, Leiden, 2001, pp. 114–19 and *passim*.

[35] Art. '*Al-ʿUzzā*', *EI*[2], vol. X, p. 968a.

discussed here. The question is of course what their value is in this respect, bearing in mind their polemical purpose. One could argue that there is no reason to portray the cult of al-ʿUzzā as an astral cult as part of the polemics here, unless one assumes that there is a subtext that is trying to connect pre-Islamic beliefs with the cultivation of astrology and astronomy amongst Muslims.

A solid inanimate God

Nothing expresses the absolute monotheism of Islam more clearly than *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*:

> Say: 'He is God, One,
> God, the Everlasting Refuge,
> Who has not begotten, and has not been begotten,
> And equal to Him is not any one.'

One will easily recognize how the third verse can be interpreted as a message addressed to Christians. They themselves, however, focused on this *sūra* to show what, according to them, is the implication of rejecting the Trinity. In the long Arabic version of the Baḥīrā Legend, it is explained that *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* was one of the writings which the monk wrote for Muḥammad as a concession to the needs of his primitive audience. That is why the monk invented the term '*ṣamad*' for God (the epithet of God translated above as 'the Everlasting Refuge'). In the Baḥīrā Legend the monk comments: 'I likened Him to that which they were accustomed to serve and I made Him *ṣamad*, detached, not hearing or seeing, like a stone.'[36]

The question of how Christian polemical thinking about Islam could espouse such an interpretation of *al-Ṣamad* and make it into a 'lithic God' brings us to the history of this word in Muslim exegesis.[37] It has been shown that in pre-Islam it was already used for 'the one to whom one turns in devotion'. Early traditionists, however, liked to read it as an expression of absolute oneness and immutability, perhaps as an attempt to distance the term from this pre-Islamic connotation.[38] The terms with

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[36] MS Par. Ar. 215, f. 172b. See also B. Roggema, 'A Christian Reading of the Qurʾan: the Legend of Sergius-Baḥīrā and its Use of Qurʾan and Sīra', in D. Thomas ed., *Syrian Christians under Islam. The First Thousand Years*, Leiden, 2001, pp. 57–73, p. 61.

[37] The development of the *tafsīr* of this *sūra* has been meticulously analysed by Uri Rubin in his article '*Al-Ṣamad* and the High God. An Interpretation of *sūra* CXII', *Der Islam* 61, 1984, pp. 197–217. For all its different connotations, see also D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam, exégèse lexicographique et théologique*, Paris, 1988, pp. 320–3.

[38] Rubin, '*Al-Ṣamad*', pp. 210–12.

which they circumscribed those qualities are, however, physical and material. Al-Ṭabarī links it to *muṣmaṭ*, 'solid' and records numerous traditionists who interpret it as 'something which is not hollow and from which nothing goes out', or 'someone who does not eat or drink'.[39] While these descriptions are undoubtedly meant as anti-anthropomorphic and 'anti-material' expressions, it is not difficult to see how a non-Muslim could turn this into a material, 'monolithic' conception of God.[40]

John of Damascus does not refer to *al-Ṣamad* in his discussion of Islam, but he does insinuate that Muslims believe in a material God. As a reply to the accusation that Christians are 'associators' he remarks that people who regard God as being without Word and Spirit are 'mutilators (*koptas*) of God' and 'introduce him as if he were a stone, or wood, or any of the inanimate objects'.[41] Remarkably similar are the words of Patriarch Timothy in the Syriac version of his famous debate with the Caliph al-Mahdī. In a more circumspect, but no less polemical, manner he also replies to the Muslim rejection of the Trinity by suggesting that whoever does not believe in it believes in an inanimate God. The caliph claims that Christians believe in three 'heads', but Timothy argues that God's Word and his Spirit cannot be separated from him, and says:

> The Word and the Spirit are eternally from the single nature of God, who is not one person divested of Word and Spirit as the weakness of the Jewish belief has it. He shines and emits rays eternally with the light of His Word and the radiation of His Spirit and He is one head with His Word and His Spirit. I do not believe in God as stripped of His Word and Spirit, in the case of the former without mind and reason, and in the case of the latter, without spirit and life. It is only the idolaters, who believe in false gods or idols who have neither reason nor life.[42]

Then the caliph continues the debate by remarking, 'It seems to me that you believe in a vacuous, *ḥlyla*, God, since you believe that He has a child.' Timothy answers, 'I do not believe that God is either vacuous or solid, *ṭmyma*, because both of these adjectives denote bodies.' But the caliph insists and asks, 'What then do you believe if He is neither vac-

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[39] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, Cairo, 1905–12, vol. XXX, pp. 222–3.

[40] The idea of a 'solid God' being preached by Muḥammad suited the Byzantine polemicists well and they used it for centuries to depict Islam as idolatry. See Meyendorff, 'Byzantine Views of Islam', pp. 122, 124–5 and especially Daniel Sahas, '"Holosphyros?" A Byzantine Perception of "The God of Muḥammad"', in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad eds, *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, Gainsville, etc., 1995, pp. 109–25. Sahas assumes that the whole of this polemic can be traced back to what he regards as Theodore Abū Qurra's mis-translation of *al-Ṣamad* in Greek in *Opusculum* 20, but since we know that Christian Arabs interpreted the term in the same way as the Byzantines, it is more likely that Theodore was deliberately transmitting this polemical interpretation.

[41] Sahas, *John of Damascus*, pp. 136–7.

[42] A. Mingana, 'The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph al-Mahdi', (*Woodbrooke Studies* 2), *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 12, 1928, pp. 137–298, p. 214.

uous nor solid?'[43] The caliph's questions are telling; they are, without doubt, made to suit the apologetic purposes of his opponent. At first sight they look out of place, since the caliph is the one who frequently criticizes the patriarch for using material terms to describe God. The point is, however, that it is the caliph himself who resorts to material terms when conceptualizing God.

The 'new pagans'

Finally, we should draw attention to another way in which the Syriac and Christian-Arabic writings suggest that Muslims are some kind of pagans, that is: by simply calling them so. In many Syriac and Christian-Arabic texts which deal with Islam, Muslims are referred to by a term that originally meant 'pagan'. In Syriac the term is *ḥnpa* and in Arabic *ḥanīf* (pl. *ḥunafā'*). Sometimes one finds 'the new pagans' as a designation for Muslims, as with Nonnus of Nisibis.[44]

In Muslim eyes 'Hanifism' constitutes something positive. In the Qur'an it is used for Abraham's faith and refers to his monotheism, which by Muslims was seen as a pristine form of Islam. In the Prophet's time there were still a few *ḥunafā'* according to Muslim tradition. Whether Christians initially used this term for Muslims somewhat innocently we cannot know for sure, but there is no doubt that through the centuries it has become a pejorative term, which was kept in use in order to associate Islam closely with paganism.[45]

The polemical aspect of its usage can be clearly recognized in a work by Severus ibn al-Muqaffa', the *Kītāb al-īḍāḥ*. In his introduction to the first chapter, 'The Clarification of the Trinity and Unity of the Persons of God', this fourth/tenth century Coptic theologian motivates his writing by drawing attention to the poor understanding of the mystery of the Trinity amongst the Christians of his time, which is due to their 'mingling with the *ḥunafā'*':

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[43] Mingana, 'Apology of Timothy', p. 214.

[44] A. van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe: traité apologétique* (*Bibliothèque du Muséon* 21), Louvain, 1948, p. 12*.

[45] For a discussion of the ways in which this term was used by Christians, see Sidney Griffith, 'The Prophet Muḥammad, his Scripture and his Message according to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the first Abbasid century', in T. Fahd ed., *La vie du Prophète Mahomet, Colloque de Strasbourg (octobre 1980)*, Paris, 1983, pp. 99–146, pp. 118–21 (repr. in Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*, Aldershot, 1992). In some early Syriac writings it is difficult to determine whether real pagans or Muslims are meant when there is mention of '*ḥnpa*'. See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 146, 148–9, 162, 193–4, and Gerrit Reinink, 'Die Muslime in einer Sammlung von Dämonengeschichten des Klosters von Qennešrīn', in René Lavenant ed., *Symposium Syriacum VI 1992* (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 247), Rome, 1994, pp. 335–46.

> I shall begin with its clarification by first saying that the clear exposition of this mystery is undisclosed to the believers, *mu'minūn*, in the present age as a result of their mingling with the *ḥunafā'* and of their having lost their language by means of which they may understand the truth of their religion. They do not hear the Trinity mentioned often anymore, and the Son of God is not mentioned among them except by way of metaphor. Ever so often they hear that God, exalted be His name, is *ṣamad* and the rest of these words which the *ḥunafā'* utter.[46]

There is no doubt that these *ḥunafā'* are the Muslims, in contradistinction to the Christians for whom Severus uses a term which Muslims also reserve for themselves, namely *mu'minūn*, 'believers'.

Discussion

Some of the functions of the type of writing about Islam of which I have given examples reveal themselves immediately, while others are more indirect. In many cases we see first of all the straightforward polemical aim of questioning Islam's claim to *tawḥīd* and *tanzīh*, as a reply to the criticism which Christians had to endure from Muslims on the issue of *shirk*. The urge to repay in kind is immediately clear from the passages where the veneration of the cross evokes criticism of the veneration of the Kaʿba.

But there is more than this simple outright confrontational aspect. One can also see how the writings concerned are not only meant to challenge Muslim dogmas but also Muslim apologetics. The supposed link between the Kaʿba and the cult of Aphrodite are undoubtedly meant to undercut Islam's claim to having its roots in the pristine monotheism of Abraham. Another ground for which the perpetuation of the idolatry motif was attractive was that it could counteract the argument that Islam spread miraculously. Muslims considered it miraculous that a whole nation left their pagan beliefs behind so readily and converted to belief in the one God. In the *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa* literature the Muslim apologists showed that the veracity of Muḥammad's prophethood was supported by the fact that his religion had spread so quickly in a milieu that was deeply idolatrous. For example, in the third/ninth century debate between Ibn al-Munajjim and Qusṭā ibn Luqā, the former uses this rapid spread to prove Muḥammad's supernatural intelligence, which in consequence proves his prophethood.[47] One could argue that the dis-

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[46] R. Y. Ebied and M. J. L. Young, 'A Theological Work by Severus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ from Istanbul: MS Aya Sofia 2360', *Oriens Christianus* 61, 1977, pp. 78–85, pp. 80–1.

[47] S. K. Samir and P. Nwyia, 'Une correspondance islamo-chrétienne entre Ibn al-Munaǧǧim, Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq et Qustā ibn Lūqā, *Patrologia Orientalis* 40, 1981, pp.

course about Islam's proximity to pre-Islamic paganism forms an indirect reply to this claim.[48]

However, when we go on to ask how the idolatry motif fits in with Christian apologetics, we find a considerable dissonance with the mood of the numerous historical and apologetic texts that originate in the same Christian communities as the texts we have discussed, for the latter seem to regard Islam and its prophet in a more favourable light and speak well of its monotheism. How do such more sympathetic and faithful Christian portraits of Islam mesh with the polemical passages that we have discussed above? Does the idea of Islam as a somehow pagan polytheistic belief predate these texts? On the basis of some of the earliest Christian references to Islam we can conclude that this is not the case.[49] For example, in one of the oldest known Christian-Muslim disputations, the Syriac *Dialogue of the Monk of Bet Hale with an Arab Notable*, the monk shows that he is aware of Islam's call to monotheism.[50] The Muslim asks him, 'How is the prophet Muḥammad regarded in your eyes?' The monk

519–722, pp. 568–75. Qusṭā ibn Lūqā replies by contesting the argumentation in favour of Muḥammad's supernatural intelligence, but does not refer to his idolatrous milieu. It is interesting to note that an elaborate reply to this 'proof of prophethood' is to be found in what is undoubtedly the most enlightened and most critical interreligious discussion in Arabic, the thirteenth century *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāth li-al-milal al-thalāth*, by the Jew Ibn Kammūna. In this work of 'comparative religion' this physician and philosopher discusses the apologetics of each of the three monotheistic religions. The chapter on Islam is largely a response to the apologetic works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who uses the arguments of the rapid spread of Islam and the eradication of the idolatry in which the Arabs were deeply rooted to prove Muḥammad's superiority to all prophets. Ibn Kammūna puts forward a number of different points in reply. First he draws attention to the fact that even though the Islamic community is large, there are still vast communities of polytheists all over the world (not knowing that a few years later the Mongol rulers would convert to Islam). Then he concedes that idolatry disappeared in Arabia when Muḥammad appeared, but he goes on to point out that the differences between Islam and the old Arabian religion are not great. Here we find again the claim that the cult of the Kaʿba is a reduced form of the old Arabian idolatry. However, Ibn Kammūna's argument is not that Islam is close to idolatry, but rather that the idolaters were close to monotheism. He claims that they did not believe in another Creator than God, but had their idols to bring them closer to Him. For this he even adduces the Qur'an (Q 39.4)! Ibn Kammūna, *Saʿd b. Manṣūr b. Kammūna's Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths. A Thirteenth-Century Essay in Comparative Religion*, ed. Moshe Perlmann, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967, pp. 98–101; *Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Three Faiths. A Thirteenth-Century Essay in the Comparative Study of Religion*, trans. and ann. Moshe Perlmann, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, pp. 143–9.

[48] Another way in which Christians tried to reply to that claim was by arguing that many people converted to Islam for other reasons than belief in the truth of its message, as for example in the fragment of Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī above.

[49] See Gerrit Reinink, 'The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam', *Oriens Christianus* 77, 1993, pp. 165–87; Robert G. Hoyland, 'The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: an Appraisal', in Harald Motzki ed., *The Biography of Muḥammad. The Issue of the Sources*, Leiden, 2000; pp. 276–97, esp. pp. 283–4.

[50] This text has been edited by Gerrit Reinink and will be published soon, together with a new edition of the Dialogue of Patriarch John with an Arab Commander, under the title: *Early Syriac Dispute Texts in Response to Nascent Islam*. I would like to thank him

answers, 'A wise and God fearing man, who has liberated you from the worship of demons and has brought you to the knowledge of the one True God.'[51]

So are there two very different strands in the literary responses of Christians to Islam? Perhaps not.

Let us look again at Patriarch Timothy's *Apology*, which is another example of a Christian text which expresses its approval of Muḥammad and calls him someone who 'walked in the path of the prophets'. The Patriarch gives two main reasons why the Prophet deserves this description, in what has been called a 'very balanced' text. Firstly, he states that Muḥammad taught the doctrine of one God, and separated his people from idolatry and polytheism, as all the prophets have done. This is why god 'honoured him exceedingly' and gave him victory in the world. Then secondly, again like all the prophets, Muḥammad taught about God and his Word and his Spirit.[52] This concise statement, in my opinion, represents the core of Eastern Christian apologetics vis-à-vis Islam. For its twin aspects demonstrate that Muḥammad's message had two layers: he preached monotheism to his people and at the same time his scripture mentioned the Trinity. This second aspect of Islam is a covert message, which is covered by its thick monotheistic outer layer. The notion is central to Timothy's thinking about Islam and to that of many of his coreligionists. This is shown by the fact that from the various Christian communities in the Near East through the centuries, we possess writings that aim at demonstrating the corroboration of Christian beliefs in the Qurʾan.[53]

To prove his point, Patriarch Timothy mentions, amongst other things, that the three secret letters at the beginning of some of the *sūra*s of the Qurʾan are in fact references to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.[54] For the Caliph al-Mahdī this was not very convincing. Why would Muḥammad have to conceal his true message? We are made to believe that it is the caliph who asks this question, but in reality it reflects the Christians' own questioning about God's design behind the rise of Islam.

The force of Christian apologetics vis-à-vis Judaism was that simple monotheism was a phase in human history that had passed. It had been

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for making the edition of the *Dialogue of the Monk of Bet Hale with an Arab Notable* available to me before publication.

[51] MS Diyarbakir 95, f. 5r.

[52] Mingana, 'Apology of Timothy', p. 197. See also Samir K. Samir, 'The Prophet Muḥammad as Seen by Timothy I and Some Other Arab Christian Authors', in Thomas, *Syrian Christians*, pp. 75–106, pp. 93–6, for a translation and discussion of this passage in the different recensions of the Apology.

[53] Paul Khoury describes this phenomenon in 'Exégèse chrétienne du Coran', which is the fifth chapter of his *Matériaux pour servir à l'étude de la controverse théologique islamo-chrétienne de langue arabe du VIII^e^ au XII^e^ siècle*, Würzburg/Altenberge, 1999.

[54] Ibid., pp. 203–4.

only a step towards the full revelation of the mystery of the Trinity. Even though the Old Testament had foreshadowed the coming of Christ and the revelation of God as triune, that first phase of revelation placed a necessary emphasis on monotheism on account of the Jews' tendency towards idolatry and the possibility that they would interpret the Divine being as a multiplicity of Gods. From the early apologetic writings that have come down to us it is clear that the necessity of having to reconsider this construction in the face of a new powerful monotheistic religion was turned into a virtue. The interpretation of Judaic monotheism was extended to Islam—it had its function as a clear-cut message to the idolatrous pagans. Some of the apologists, calling to mind the Apostle Paul who spoke of the Jews as children, and Christians as those of 'mature manhood' (Eph. 4.13–15), simply say that babies need blander food than adults.[55]

The Jews *needed* their simple monotheistic message, and the same could also be said about the Muslims. Muḥammad's role came to be regarded as that of the preacher of monotheism to the pagan Arabs. Allotting this role to Islam was convenient for the Christian apologists, as it counteracted Islam's claim to be a universal religion and explained, from a *heilsgeschichtliche* point of view, why it existed alongside Christianity. Muḥammad could be safely and endlessly praised for his mission as 'a step in the right direction' for his people, because he did not address himself to Christians, to whose existing beliefs the Qur'an did not add anything. That is why Patriarch Timothy declines the caliph's invitation to follow the words of the Prophet Muḥammad and believe in one God, as follows: 'This belief in one God, O my sovereign, I have learned from the Torah, from the Prophets and from the Gospel. I stand by it and shall die in it.'[56]

To reinforce this view, Christians set out to prove it by the very words of the Qur'an itself—not only by uncovering the veiled Christian message of the Qur'an (as seen in Patriarch Timothy's reference to the secret letters at the beginning of certain *sūras*), but also by showing that the Qur'an itself endorses a diversity of faiths in the world, and states explicitly that is only directed at a specific group of people. According to the sixth/twelfth century Melkite bishop, Paul of Antioch, the Qur'an is addressed only to the Arabs of the Jāhiliyya, who had not received a 'warner', *nadhīr*, before.[57] The same is said by the seventh/thirteenth century Coptic theologian al-Ṣafī ibn al-'Assāl who believes that the Qur'anic

[55] In the *Dialogue of the Monk of Bet Hale*, MS Diyarbakr f. 5r. In the shorter Arabic version of the Baḥīrā legend the physical pleasures of the Islamic paradise are compared with baby food; MS Bodleian Or., p. 26.

[56] Mingana, 'Apology of Timothy', p. 198.

[57] Paul Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche. Évêque melkite de Sidon (XII^e s.). Introduction, édition critique,*

message was intended for the Arabs of the Ḥijāz, who were *ummiyyūn* and who had previously been in obvious error, *fī ḍalāl mubīn*.[58] At the same time, both these theologians show the confirmation of their own beliefs on the basis of verses from the Qur'an.

The apologetic structure that Christians built with this interpretation of the Qur'an and the function of Islam is extremely solid. It allowed them to praise Islam's monotheism and use it as an explanation of Islam's success in the world, and also simultaneously to disregard that monotheism. It goes without saying that it was therefore attractive to sustain the persuasive power of the portrayal of the Islamic message as 'two-layered'. This is where we see another function of the idolatry motif emerging. If the issues of polytheism and idolatry had lost their relevance, which was the case at a certain point in time of course, then the Christian apologists would have had to address the call to *tawḥīd* in a more serious way. Instead, they insisted on focusing on Islam's 'historical' role and its intrinsic idolatrous aspects. Although the authors of our earliest sources deserve the benefit of the doubt, I would dare to assume that no one who wrote that Muslims believe in both Allah and in Akbar, or in a stone God, believed that this was true. These kinds of statements, nevertheless, buttress the more earnest view of Islam which I have outlined above.

In other words, we should regard the frequent and far-fetched references to pre-Islamic Arabian idolatry and the remarks about supposed traces of idolatry in Islamic religious observances as a propaganda device used to maintain the apologetic attractiveness of the concept of Islam as primitive monotheism. The apologists portrayed Islam's strict monotheism as an antidote to latent polytheism. The 'outer layer', as I have called it, functions as an antidote, but in order for this to remain convincing, the polytheistic tendencies of the people who followed it had to be shown to be somehow still current. This is how we can explain the references to supposed traces of idolatry in Islam. It has to be recognized that whenever Muḥammad is mentioned in a positive way as a monotheist converter, it automatically evokes the memory of the paganism that he counteracted—underscoring thereby his specific and limited role. The paradox is that within this apologetic framework the existence of Muslims, or in the language of our sources '*ḥunafā*'', explains the need for the existence of Islam in the world.

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traduction, Beirut, 1965, p. 61 (Arabic), p. 170 (French trans.). For a discussion of this aspect of Paul of Antioch's thinking about Islam, see D. Thomas, 'Paul of Antioch's Letter to a Muslim Friend and The Letter from Cyprus', in Thomas, *Syrian Christians*, pp. 203–21, esp. 206–10.

[58] Khalil Samir, 'La réponse d'al-Ṣafī Ibn al-'Assāl à la Réfutation des chrétiens de 'Alī al-Ṭabarī', *Parole de l'Orient* 11, 1983, pp. 281–328, pp. 313–15.

MONASTERIES THROUGH MUSLIM EYES: THE *DIYĀRĀT* BOOKS

Hilary Kilpatrick

It is rare for members of the dominant religion in a society to write about aspects of a subordinate religion in the same society in a non-polemical spirit. Yet the *diyārāt* works, books about monasteries compiled in Iraq and Egypt in the fourth/tenth century, reflect an attitude on their Muslim authors' part of remarkable openness towards Christian customs and institutions; they exemplify such a non-polemical approach. For this reason they deserve to be taken account of in any discussion of Arab Christianity during the ʿAbbasid period.

This discussion will first present the *diyārāt* books and outline their contents. It will then examine what light they throw on Muslim attitudes to Christianity under the ʿAbbasids and suggest why they appeared when they did.

In his catalogue of Arabic books available at the end of the fourth/tenth century, the *Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadīm lists five books with titles referring to monasteries. In chronological order they are: Abū Mikhnaf's *Kitāb dayr al-jamājim wa-khalʿ ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ashʿath* (The book about the Monastery of the Skulls and the destitution of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ashʿath);[1] Hishām ibn al-Kalbī's *Kitāb al-Ḥīra wa-tasmiyyat al-biyaʿ wa-al-diyārāt wa-nasab al-ʿIbād* (The book about al-Ḥīra, the names of its churches and monasteries and the origin of the ʿIbādī people);[2] Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's *Kitāb al-diyārāt* (Book of monasteries);[3] al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad al-Naḥwī's *Kitāb al-diyara* (Book of monasteries),[4] and al-Shimshāṭī's *Kitāb*

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[1] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. M. Riḍā Tajaddud, 3rd edn, Beirut, 1988, p. 105. Abū Mikhnaf Lūṭ ibn Yaḥyā al-Azdī (d. 157/774) was a Shīʿī historian from Kūfa concerned chiefly with the Umayyad period. This work of his has not survived; see Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (= *GAS*) vol. I: *Qur'ānwissenschaften, Ḥadīṯ, Geschichte, Fiqh, Dogmatik, Mystik bis ca 430 H.*, Leiden, 1967, p. 308.

[2] Ibid., p. 109. This work has not survived. Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī (120/737–*ca* 204/819), a scholar from Kūfa patronised by al-Mahdī, was an authority on genealogy, pre-Islamic antiquities and poetry; see *EI*², vol. IV, art. 'al-Kalbī' (W. Atallah).

[3] Ibid., p. 128. Quotations from this lost book in later works have been collected and published: Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, *Al-diyārāt*, coll. and ed. Jalīl al-ʿAṭiyya, London, 1991. Abū l-Faraj ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Iṣbahānī (284/897–*ca* 363/972) was a courtier, secretary, historian and musicologist best known for his monumental *Kitāb al-aghānī* (Book of Songs); see my *Making the Great Book of Songs. Compilation and the Author's Craft in Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's Kitāb al-aghānī*, London, 2003, pp. 14–23, 25.

[4] Ibid., p. 92, where the title has been corrupted into *Kitāb al-dabara* and the author's

al-diyārāt (Book of monasteries).[5] Other books on monasteries were compiled by the poet al-Sarī al-Raffā'[6] and his rivals the Khālidī brothers,[7] and by al-Shābushtī.[8] If the works of the second/eighth century authors Abū Mikhnaf and Ibn al-Kalbī are disregarded, six compilations about monasteries remain, all of them dating from the fourth/tenth century. But only one of them has survived.[9]

Thanks to later scholars. especially those who worked to preserve the ʿAbbasid cultural heritage after Baghdad fell to the Mongols, the five lost *diyārāt* books have not disappeared without trace. The Mamluk encyclopedist Ibn Faḍlallāh al-ʿUmarī quotes extensively from them in the section of the first volume of his *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār* which he devotes to monasteries.[10] This seems to be the only example of monasteries having a chapter to themselves in a later work by a Muslim author. The geographers al-Bakrī, Yāqūt, al-Qazwīnī and Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq all quote from *diyārāt* books in their entries on place-names including the word '*dayr*'.[11] And there are scattered passages from *diyārāt* books in *adab* compilations.

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name is given as Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan. For this obscure grammarian of the mid fourth/tenth century, see Sezgin, *GAS*, vol. VIII: *Lexikographie*, Leiden 1982, p. 109.

[5] Ibid., p. 172. This book has not survived. ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Shimshāṭī (fl. end fourth/tenth century) was a poet from Mosul who worked in Baghdad (Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Shābushtī, *Al-diyārāt*, ed. Kūrkīs ʿAwwād, 2nd edn, Baghdad, 1386/1966, editor's intro., p. 42).

[6] Al-Sarī ibn Aḥmad ibn al-Sarī al-Raffā' al-Kindī (d. *ca* 362/972) was a poet and anthologist from Mosul who for a time found patrons in Aleppo and Baghdad. He engaged in a long-running feud with the Khālidī brothers about plagiarism; see *EI*[2], vol. VIII, art. 'al-Sarī al-Raffā'' (W. Heinrichs).

[7] Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Hāshim al-Khālidī (d. 380/990) and Abū ʿUthmān Saʿīd (d. *ca* 390/1000) were poets and anthologists who became Sayf al-Dawla's librarians in Aleppo; see *EI*[2], vol. IV, art. 'al-Khālidiyyān' (Ch. Pellat).

[8] ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad (or Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq) al-Shābushtī (d. *ca* 388/988), a poet and man of letters, served as librarian to the Fatimid caliph al-ʿAzīz; see *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* s.v. (E. K. Rowson). His name is explained as of Daylamite origin, and it may well be that he was from Iraq; he was certainly better informed about Iraqi monasteries than about Egyptian ones. His *Diyārāt* (for which see n. 5 above) is the only book on monasteries to have survived, though not in its complete form. The editor reckons that perhaps even a third of it is lost (Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, editor's intro., p. 5).

[9] In the list of books on monasteries which ʿAwwād included in his introduction there is a break after the fourth/tenth century. Subsequent books on monasteries, from the twelfth century on, were the work of Christian authors (Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, editor's intro., pp. 43–4).

[10] Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Faḍlallāh al-ʿUmarī (700/1301–749/1349) was a government official in Damascus and Cairo and an expert on matters connected with politics and administration. The *Masālik al-abṣār* was considered an authoritative work in the Mamluk period; see *EI*[2], vol. III, art. 'Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī' (K. S. Salibi). Vol. I was edited by Aḥmad Zakī Pāshā, Cairo, 1924, and the whole of the *Masālik al-abṣār* is now available in a facsimile edition by Fuat Sezgin *et al.*, Frankfurt, 1988.

[11] Abū ʿUbayd ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Bakrī (d. 487/1094) was a leading Andalusian geographer and author of the *Muʿjam mā istaʿjam*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, 4 vols, Cairo, 1945–9; see *EI*[2], vol. I, art. 'Abū ʿUbayd al-Bakrī' (E. Lévi-Provençal).

When the quotations in these works are combined with al-Shābushtī's *diyārāt* one can construct what may be called an identikit picture of monasteries in Arabic literature. This has been undertaken by Gérard Troupeau in a short article entitled 'Les couvents chrétiens dans la littérature arabe',[12] which I have used as a starting-point. Drawing on the most extensive sources, al-Shābushtī, Ibn Faḍlallāh al-'Umarī and Yāqūt, Troupeau indicates the historical and sociological interest of the *diyārāt* books. They are important from the point of view of the history of Arab Christianity because they provide the names of monasteries in Iraq, Syria and Egypt, and because they sometimes document the disappearance of a monastery.[13] Moreover, they may shed light on the internal organisation of monasteries, such as the custom of a prospective monk buying his own cell.[14] Exceptionally they indicate the community to which the monastery belongs; most interesting in this connection is the reference to mixed allegiances in Dayr Mār Yuḥannā near Takrit, a Nestorian monastery with an Orthodox in charge.[15] It should be remembered, though, that the Muslim authors were not interested in the history of Arab

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Yāqūt ibn 'Abdallāh al-Ḥamawī al-Rūmī (575/1179–626/1229), a freed slave, was a bookseller in Baghdad who fled to Syria after the first Mongol incursion. He is the author of an invaluable biographical dictionary of literary figures and of a compilation of toponyms, the *Mu'jam al-buldān*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, 6 vols, Göttingen, 1866–73; see *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, vol. II, s.v. (D. S. Richards).

Zakariyyā' ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī (*ca* 600/1203–682/1283) worked as a judge in Iraq and travelled in Syria and Iran. He compiled a cosmography and a geographical dictionary, *Āthār al-bilād wa-akhbār al-'ibād*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen, 1848, which draws extensively on Yāqūt's work while rearranging the material according to the seven Ptolemaic climes; see *EI*[2], vol. IV, art. 'al-Ḳazwīnī' (T. Lewicki).

Ṣafī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Mu'min ibn 'Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Baghdādī (658/1260–739/1338) was an Iraqi scholar of traditions and jurist with wide interests in the natural sciences and humanities; see 'Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *Mu'jam al-mu'allifīn*, Beirut, n.d., vol. VI, pp. 197–8. His *Marāṣid al-iṭṭilā' 'alā asmā' al-amākin wa-al-biqā'*, ed. Th. Juynboll, Leiden, 1855, is essentially an abridgement of Yāqūt's *Mu'jam al-buldān*.

[12] Gérard Troupeau, 'Les couvents chrétiens dans la littérature arabe', *La Nouvelle Revue du Caire* 1, 1975, pp. 265–79, reprinted in *idem*, *Etudes sur le christianisme arabe au Moyen Age*, Aldershot, 1995. A similar discussion of al-Shābushtī's work may be found in André Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du 11^e siècle*. IV: *Les travaux et les jours*, Paris, 1988, pp. 86–90. See also the presentation of *diyārāt* works in my 'Representations of Social Intercourse between Muslims and Non-Muslims in Some Medieval *Adab* Works', in Jacques Waardenburg ed., *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions; a Historical Survey*, New York, 1999, pp. 217–19.

[13] Troupeau does not give references in this article. The instance he cites (p. 269) is of Dayr Qunnā, which in al-Shābushtī's time was flourishing (*Diyārāt*, p. 265) but of which Yāqūt saw only the ruins (*Mu'jam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 687). Al-Shābushtī himself notes one example of this phenomenon, Dayr Sarjisat Ṭīzanābādh, whose delights Abū Nuwās had sung over a century before. To al-Shābushtī's contemporaries the ruins were known as Abū Nuwās's Winepress (*Diyārāt*, p. 233).

[14] Troupeau, 'Les couvents', pp. 269–70, in connection with Dayr Qunnā and 'Umr Kaskar (al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, pp. 265, 274).

[15] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, p. 171. Dayr al-Qayyāra belonged to the Syrian Orthodox (ibid., p. 302). Dayr al-Rūm in Baghdad was in fact two monasteries, one belonging to

Christianity as such; in mapping the distribution of monasteries, they were contributing to knowledge of the geography of the Muslim world.[16]

The second interest of the *diyārāt* books which Troupeau points out is the information they provide about the place of monasteries in ʿAbbasid society. Not only Christians but also Muslims frequently visited them for a variety of reasons. As Troupeau observes, the texts pay most attention to caliphs, high officials, courtiers, poets and musicians, but it is clear that large numbers of less eminent Muslims also found their way to them, at least on special occasions. The monasteries' wide appeal becomes easily understandable when the various motives for visits to them are examined. On the secular level, they were ideal destinations for outings from the city.[17] Almost every entry on a monastery starts with an indication of its geographical location and then a description of its natural setting, and this is sketched in glowing terms. Monasteries have carefully tended orchards, gardens and vineyards, many of them are built close to a river or canal, a few have a spring. They are particularly attractive in spring when the wild flowers bloom in the meadows. They emanate a sense of harmony; as emerges from the many poems describing their natural beauty, their surroundings possess some of the features of Paradise mentioned in the Qur'an, even though this is implied rather than clearly stated.[18] Given that Islamic religious architecture is essentially urban,[19] and that even the loveliest and most peaceful mosque courtyard in the middle of a city has no space for orchards and gardens, Muslims could find no equivalent to the rural settings of monasteries in the buildings of their own tradition.

Apart from offering visitors the innocent enjoyment of nature, monasteries attracted them because they were the centres of wine production.[20] Despite the prohibition in Islam on the production, sale and consumption of intoxicating drinks, wine was widely drunk at the ʿAbbasid court and among different classes of society. Monasteries were important sup-

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the Assyrians and the other to the Syrian Orthodox (Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 662). The information about allegiance is not mentioned by Troupeau.

[16] The connection between *diyārāt* books and geography appears already in the *Fihrist*, where Ibn al-Nadīm assigns Ibn al-Kalbī's *Kitāb al-Ḥīra* to the section of his bibliography on *akhbār al-buldān* (*Fihrist*, p. 109). And it is significant that the later works which have preserved substantial extracts of the *diyārāt* books are geographical dictionaries, apart from Ibn Faḍlallāh's *Masālik al-abṣār*. Cf. also André Miquel's characterisation of al-Shābushtī's *Diyārāt* earlier in his *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du 11 siècle*, vol. I, Paris, 1967, pp. 149–50, which emphasises the secular character of the Muslims' interest.

[17] Troupeau, 'Les couvents', pp. 270–1. Monasteries are popular destinations for outings even today among Christians in, for instance, Lebanon and Syria.

[18] André Miquel, *La géographie humaine*, vol. IV, p. 87.

[19] Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, Edinburgh, 1994, pp. 20–1.

[20] Troupeau, 'Les couvents', pp. 271–2.

pliers of it, and often drinkers liked to savour their beverage in its place of origin. Both anecdotes and *khamriyyāt*, songs celebrating the delights of wine-drinking and an important genre of ʿAbbasid poetry,[21] contain many and varied illustrations of the habit of poets and their friends of installing themselves in a monastery garden or a tavern close by and abandoning themselves to the pleasures of wine, often served by an attractive young boy or girl and accompanied by music and singing.

Not only did monasteries provide wine, but they could also be the setting for amorous adventures. As emerges from the *diyārāt* books and other texts, the Christians who visited monasteries included unveiled women and girls, which provided a rare and welcome occasion for mixing between the sexes.[22] Sometimes it was an inhabitant of the monastery who was the object of a visitor's passion; a particularly scandalous case was that of the dissolute secretary ʿAbbāda who, banished by al-Mutawakkil to Mosul, took to visiting Dayr al-Shayāṭīn, where he became infatuated with a young monk. He employed all his wiles to seduce him and finally succeeded. But hearing of the enraged monks' plan to throw him from the top of the monastery to the valley below, he fled never to return.[23]

Monasteries also continued to play more traditional roles. One was to offer hospitality. Many monasteries possessed a guest house independent of the other buildings.[24] Especially those far from towns provided travellers with a rare possibility of board and lodging. And the frequent description of monastery food as *nazīf*, clean, or *ṭayyib*, wholesome, is not only a compliment to monastic cooks; it suggests the relief of their guests at escaping the much less appetising fare of peasants or bedouin which they might otherwise have had to fall back on. Visitors, for instance hunters, who were just passing by were equally welcome. When the caliph al-Muʿtazz felt thirsty out hunting, one of his companions suggested they should visit a good friend of his, a monk at the Mār Mārī monastery, and when they arrived they were given cool water to drink, a meal, and entertaining conversation.[25] One even forms the impression

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[21] See the detailed survey in *EI*², vol. IV, art 'Khamriyya' (J. E. Bencheikh), and Philip E. Kennedy, *The Winesong in Classical Arabic Poetry. Abū Nuwās and the Literary Tradition*, Oxford, 1997 (references to Christians are discussed on pp. 71, 113–14, 221, 224).

[22] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, p. 66, gives a poem of ʿAbdallāh ibn al-ʿAbbās al-Rabīʿī about his falling in love with a Christian girl he saw in church. Ibn Faḍlallāh, *Masālik al-abṣār*, (Dayr Zakkā) quotes a certain al-Ḥusayn ibn Yaʿqūb's account of his visit to Dayr Zakkā on the eve of the Feast of the Veneration of the Cross where he saw the unveiled Christian women dressed in all their finery. Cf. the anecdote about the meeting between Abū al-Fatḥ Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm and a beautiful Christian girl in Dayr al-Thaʿālib, recounted in Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, *Kītāb adab al-ghurabā'*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, Beirut, 1972, pp. 34–6.

[23] Ibid., p. 185.

[24] Troupeau, 'Les couvents', p. 273.

[25] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, pp. 164–5.

from the list of game in the neighbourhood of Dayr Zakkā—gazelles, rabbits, waterfowl, bustards and so on—that a monastery might serve as a hunting lodge.[26]

Another traditional service provided by monasteries was caring for the sick, and the *diyārāt* books reflect this. Dayr al-Kalab near Mosul was specialised in healing people bitten by rabid dogs. The monastery of Abbā Hūr in Egypt treated sufferers from scrofula.[27] Monasteries had taken responsibility for the mentally ill in the pre-Islamic period, and they continued to do so later on.[28] This aspect of monastic activity may be glimpsed from the reports of the grammarian al-Mubarrad visiting Dayr Hizqil and Dayr Murrān and talking to deranged but eloquent inmates, whose replies in prose and poetry he carefully records.[29]

Finally monasteries might possess something amazing, like the stone door at Dayr Bāṭā which remained closed if more than seven people tried to open it together, the roof at Dayr al-Jūdī which altered its dimensions each time someone tried to measure it, or the door in the church at Mount Sinai with its protecting stone which hid it when necessary.[30] Or a miraculous event was connected with it, such as the appearance of the white dove each year at the Egyptian monastery of Bīʿat Atrīb's patronal feast, or the hornbills congregating at the feast of the monastery at Akhmīm.[31]

According to Troupeau, Muslims also had religious motives for going to monasteries. The first he mentions is attending Christian festivals, the Christian calendar being better provided with feasts than the Muslim one.[32] Al-Shābushtī, however, gives the impression that while the Christians celebrated a particular liturgical occasion, the Muslims went along to have a good time; for instance, at the festival of Dayr al-Khawāt on the

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[26] Ibid., p. 218. Cf. Muḥammad ibn ʿĀṣim's poem recalling his visits to Dayr Quṣayr in the Muqaṭṭam hills during hunting trips; ibid., pp. 285–6.

[27] Dayr al-Kalab: Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, p. 301; Ibn Faḍlallāh, *Masālik al-abṣār*, p. 254. Abbā Hūr: Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, p. 311. Water and earth from Dayr Saʿīd were effective in keeping scorpions away from a house: Ibn Faḍlallāh, *Masālik al-abṣār*, p. 290.

[28] Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: the Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, ed. Diana E. Immisch, Oxford, 1992, p. 203.

[29] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 706 (Dayr Hizqil); Ibn Faḍlallāh, *Masālik al-abṣār*, pp. 353–4 (Dayr Murrān). Cf. Dols, *Majnūn*, pp. 390–1. Sometimes this service of monasteries was abused; a visitor to Dayr Ḥizqiyāl found graffiti in prose and poetry by a man complaining of being separated from his beloved and imprisoned. When he enquired about them, he was told that the unhappy lover had been consigned to the monastery by his uncle, the father of his beloved. Fortunately the uncle died quite soon, the relatives released the young man and he could marry his cousin (Ibn Faḍlallāh, *Masālik al-abṣār*, pp. 270–1; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 654, quoting Abū al-Faraj, probably from his *Diyārāt*).

[30] Ibid., p. 646; al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, pp. 309–10.

[31] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, pp. 313–15.

[32] Troupeau, 'Les couvents', pp. 275–6.

first Sunday of Lent, the Christians went to celebrate the feast while the Muslims treated it as an enjoyable outing. The procession from al-Shakūra to the Qubbat al-Shatīq in al-Ḥīra was an impressive ceremony with priests, deacons, incense and chanting, which attracted a large number of Muslims who liked making music, and people with time on their hands.[33] As is clear from the many positive references in poems to Christian chanting and singing, Muslims generally appreciated liturgical music, one of the expressions of the Near Eastern musical tradition to which court music and Islamic music also belonged.[34] But whether Muslims were moved by religious sentiments on such occasions is a moot point. Many of them were indeed descended from Christians who had celebrated these feasts, and if they were converts to Islam they may earlier have celebrated them themselves. In al-Shābushtī's circle of cultivated men of letters, popular forms of Islam were not taken account of, so even if Muslims took an active part in festivals he probably would not have mentioned it.[35] Yet Troupeau's assertion that they were attracted to them by religious motives needs to be qualified; the texts do not justify such a confident affirmation.

Another motive for visiting monasteries where religious sentiment may have played a part was to see the icons, frescoes and other beautiful objects in the churches. Dayr al-Bāʿūth had an ancient icon whose colours had not dimmed with the passage of time.[36] A monastery near Jūsiya on the road from Homs to Damascus possessed carved reliefs of the prophets and an icon of the Mother of God whose eyes always looked at the beholder, wherever he stood.[37] In Dayr al-Quṣayr there was an icon of the Mother of God with Christ which people came specially to see. The Ṭūlūnid ruler Khumārawayh liked it so much that he used to

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[33] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, p. 93 (Dayr al-Khawāt); p. 241 (Qubbat al-Shatīq: '*yatbaʿuhum khalqun kathīrun min mutaṭarribī al-muslimīna wa-ahl al-baṭāla*').

[34] The Syrian Orthodox Church still possesses a modal system analoguous to the Byzantine *oktōēchos*; the Assyrian Church had such a system in the past, though whether it was derived from the Byzantine system or from an older Persian one is not clear (Heinrich Husmann, 'Syrian Church Music, para. 3 Modal system', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie, New York, 2001). The early Arabic modal system was related to the Syro-Byzantine one, and there are instances of Arabic texts being set to Greek melodies (Eckhard Neubauer, 'Die acht "Wege" der arabischen Musiktheorie und der Oktoechos', *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 9, 1994, pp. 373–84.

[35] Al-Masʿūdī, who is a more systematic and open-minded observer, notes that in Egypt Muslims took part with Christians in celebrating Epiphany, not only with merry-making but also plunging into the Nile, which was believed to have prophylactic qualities; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar*, ed. C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, rev. Charles Pellat, vol. II, Beirut, 1966, p. 70.

[36] Ibn Faḍlallāh, *Masālik al-abṣār*, pp. 261–2.

[37] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. II, pp. 645–6. The monastery's name is given as Bāʿanatul (?).

install himself in the monastery in a room from where he could look at it while he was drinking. Dayr al-Aʿlā was famous for its rich collection of Bibles and religious objects.[38]

Monasteries in Syria and Iraq, associated as they were with pre-Islamic or other by-gone rulers, also served as reminders to visitors that no-one is safe from the vicissitudes of time. Stopping at al-Ḥīra on his way back from the pilgrimage, Jaʿfar ibn Yaḥyā al-Barmakī visited al-Sadīr, a complex of monasteries on the site of the palaces of the Lakhmids, and he discovered there a short poem on the '*Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuere*' theme. A similar message was delivered *viva voce* by Hind, the daughter of al-Nuʿmān, the last king of al-Ḥīra, to al-Ḥajjāj Ibn Yūsuf when he arrived in Kūfa and visited her monastery, and she added the explicit warning: 'Don't be led astray by this world.'[39] The verses al-Mutawakkil discovered at Dayr al-Ruṣāfa beside Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik's palace struck a somewhat provocative note, for they recalled the Umayyads' time in power and their fall, but also expressed the hope that they would return.[40] In these instances an inhabitant of a monastery or else the building itself, speaking through a poem, warns the visitor of the transitoriness of everything in this world and, at least by implication, of the Judgement to come, a theme common to spirituality and moral reflection in Christianity and Islam. If Muslims visited monasteries in order to remind themselves of this ascetic truth, or if, having heard it perhaps unexpectedly, they took it to heart, one can certainly speak of a religious motivation.

Thanks to the shared spiritual heritage of Christianity and Islam, certain monasteries held religious associations for Muslims. As a prophet, Jesus is venerated by Muslims. It was said that Dayr Fīq near the Sea of Galilee was the first Christian monastery, that Jesus had often visited it and that he had called the disciples from it; at all events it possessed a stone which he was believed to have sat on, and everyone who visited the monastery chipped off a piece and kept it to obtain blessings. Dayr al-Ṭūr was situated at Mount Tabor, the site of the Transfiguration—hence its other name, Dayr al-Tajallī; the connection with Jesus will have given it a special place in Muslim eyes.[41] Mary, too, is honoured

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[38] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, pp. 284, 176. Cf. Ibn Faḍlallāh, *Masālik al-abṣār*, p. 272, for a lighthearted poem where one of al-Muʿtaṣim's courtiers describes his fascination with an icon (presumably of the Mother of God) in Dayr Māsarjis.

[39] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, pp. 238, 244.

[40] Ibn Faḍlallāh, *Masālik al-abṣār*, p. 244.

[41] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, pp. 204, 207. Al-Shābushtī, followed by Ibn Faḍlallāh (*Masālik al-abṣār*) thinks that in Christian belief the Transfiguration took place after the Resurrection; he evidently confuses it with Jesus's appearances to his disciples after he rose from the dead. '*Al-tajallī*' is the normal term for Transfiguration (Georg Graf, *Verzeichnis arabischer kirchlicher Termini*, 2nd edn, Louvain, 1954, p. 35) *pace* Moshe Gil (*A History of Palestine 634–1099*, Cambridge, 1997, p. 444), who renders it 'Revelation'.

by Muslims, and monasteries linked to her, such as Dayr al-Batūl in Upper Egypt, which she was said to have visited, will have attracted Muslims among their visitors.[42] Monasteries connected with the Old Testament prophets also had a religious signifiance for Muslims. Dayr al-Jūdī, not far from the modern Cizre, was built on the mountain where Noah's ark came to rest, and Noah's tomb was in Dayr Abiyyūn not far away. Dayr Yūnus ibn Mattā near Nineveh was dedicated to the Prophet Jonah.[43] Dayr al-Quṣayr overlooked the village of Shahrān, where Moses was born and his mother cast him into the Nile in a basket, and Dayr al-Sīq was said to contain his tomb.[44]

Some monasteries were known for medicinal qualities or for miracles of healing which took place in them. Dayr al-Qayyāra and Dayr Mār Shimʿūn had springs to which sufferers from skin complaints came for relief. The earth at Dayr Saʿīd was reputed as a protection against scorpions, which it killed if it was strewn in the house where they lived.[45] Al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir used to visit Dayr al-Lujj not only for religious feasts but to be healed of his (unspecified) illness. Visitors to Dayr Yūnus bathed in the spring beneath the monastery in order to acquire blessings.[46] Another miraculous power associated with certain monasteries was to fulfil requests made by those who vowed something in return.

The identikit picture of monasteries as it is derived from various sources which treat *diyārāt* undoubtedly reflects the attitude of many mediaeval Muslims towards these institutions. But it is far from accounting for all the material included in al-Shābushtī's work on the subject. One scholar has concluded that al-Shābushtī used the monasteries simply as a frame or occasion for spicy anecdotes about poets, singers and members of the highest circles of society, which he put together to entertain his master, the Fāṭimid caliph, while another has described it as 'not so much a work of church history, more a guide to night-life in Iraq and Egypt'.[47]

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[42] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 646.

[43] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, pp. 309, 181; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 640. The Jabal al-Jūdī is the traditional location where Noah's ark ran aground; it was only supplanted by Mount Ararat from the fifth/eleventh century on; *EI*², vol. II, art. 'Djūdī' (M. Streck).

[44] Ibid., p. 284; Ibn Faḍlallāh, *Masālik al-abṣār*, p. 363. A '*sīq*' is a lavra (Graf, *Verzeichnis*, p. 64), and several monasteries in Palestine bore this name. Although the most famous one is the St Saba Lavra southeast of Jerusalem, the one apparently meant here is the Monastery of St George the Khozebite in the Wādī Qilt, where, as Ibn Faḍlallāh adds (*Masālik al-abṣār*, p. 341), the Mamluk Sultan Baybars built a small mausoleum for Moses. There are of course other places in Palestine and across the Jordan at Mount Nebo which also claim to possess the tomb of Moses.

[45] Ibid., pp. 302, 307; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 669.

[46] Ibn Faḍlallāh, *Masālik al-abṣār*, p. 239; al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, p. 181.

[47] Ernst Bloch, *Harawīs Schrift über die muhammedanischen Wallfahrtsorte, eine der Quellen des Jāqūts*, Bonn, 1929, p. 11; Ewald Wagner, *Grundzüge der klassischen arabischen Dichtung*, vol. II: *Die arabische Dichtung in islamischer Zeit*, Darmstadt, 1988, p. 43.

But these characterisations do not explain the existence of sections on, for instance, Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Muṣʿabī, the grim, self-disciplined police chief of Baghdad under al-Maʾmūn and his successors, Hind bint al-Nuʿmān and her confrontations with successive early Muslim governors of Iraq, and the history of the Ṭāhirid family, this last running to forty pages.[48] And since the preface to *Al-diyārāt* belongs to the lost part of the manuscript, nothing can be said about why or for whom al-Shābushtī wrote his book.

As already mentioned, the two earliest known books referring to monasteries are Ibn al-Kalbī's work on the monasteries of al-Ḥīra and its Christian community, which is geographically oriented, and Abū Mikhnaf's work on Dayr al-Jamājim and the defeat of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ashʿath, evidently a historical account.[49] Many of the passages in al-Shābushtī's *Diyārāt* which do not conform to the identikit picture also treat historical subjects.

Diyārāt al-Asāqif at Najaf was close to palaces and other buildings of the Lakhmids, the remains of which had been turned into monks' cells and churches. One had belonged to ʿAbd al-Masīḥ ibn Buqayla al-Ghassānī, nephew of the soothsayer Saṭīḥ, who lived to see Khālid ibn al-Walīd arrive in al-Ḥīra and to engage in a riddle-like dialogue with the Muslim commander.[50] Dayr Hind was called after the daughter of al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir, last king of al-Ḥīra. Hind bint al-Nuʿmān retired to it after her husband's death and lived to a great age, long enough, according to al-Shābushtī, to meet al-Ḥajjāj and warn him not to yield to the temptations of this world, as has already been mentioned. Her earlier reported encounters were with Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ (around 16/637) and al-Mughīra ibn Shuʿba (41/661). Part of her exchange with al-Mughīra neatly sums up the momentous change in composition of the Iraqi ruling class after the conquest. When he asked to see her, she had her servants enquire: 'Are you a descendant of Jabala ibn al-Ayham?' 'No.' 'Or a descendant of al-Mundhir ibn Māʾ al-Samāʾ?' 'No.' 'Then who are you?'[51]

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[48] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, pp. 34–5, 37–45 (Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Muṣʿabī); pp. 244–6 (Hind bint al-Nuʿmān); pp. 109–148 (the Ṭāhirids).

[49] The battle at Dayr al-Jamājim (82/701), where al-Ḥajjāj defeated Ibn al-Ashʿath, put an end to the latter's revolt in Iraq and was followed by the establishment of much firmer control from Damascus (Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates. The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*, London, 1986, pp. 101–2).

[50] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, pp. 238–40. ʿAbd al-Masīḥ is a figure around whom legends collected; he was believed to have lived for over three centuries. See further *EI*[2], vol. III, art 'Ibn Buḳayla' (Ch. Pellat).

[51] Ibid., pp. 244–6. Al-Nuʿmān died in 602, so Hind's meeting with Saʿd is conceivable, as would be her exchange with al-Mughīra if it had taken place during his first governorship of Kūfa under ʿUmar (23/644). But the text states that it was Muʿāwiya who had appointed him. What is important where a book like the *Diyārāt* is concerned,

Connections between monasteries and historical events did not end with the Muslim conquest. Beside Dayr al-Aʿlā near Mosul was the tomb of ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥamiq al-Khuzāʿī, one of the Companions of the Prophet and an unwavering supporter of ʿAlī, who was killed on Muʿāwiya's orders. His head was sent to Damascus, but his body was buried by the monastery, and the Banū Ḥamdān built a mosque next to it.[52] Dayr Mīkhāʾīl near Damascus came to be known as Dayr al-Bukht because ʿAbd al-Malik kept Bactrian camels by it. It was also linked indirectly with the ʿAbbasids, because ʿAlī ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn al-ʿAbbās had a garden close to it, where his adopted brother Salīṭ was killed. ʿAlī was accused of the murder, but ʿUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād ibn Abīh and Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik interceded with al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik and he was only imprisoned. After al-Walīd's death he sold the garden and settled in al-Ḥumayma. Salīṭ did not disappear entirely from history, for Abū Muslim, the leader of the ʿAbbasid movement, claimed to be a son of his, a claim refuted by al-Manṣūr.[53] The final reference to early Islamic history comes in the section on Dayr al-Ṭūr in Palestine, and it is introduced in a roundabout way. The fourth/tenth century poet Muhalhil ibn Yamūt ibn al-Muzarraʿ composed a poem on a party he organised for his friends at that monastery, and the section continues with other poems of his. It concludes with an account of his ancestor Ḥakīm ibn Jabala al-ʿAbdī, who died a martyr's death in Baṣra preventing ʿĀʾisha, Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr from entering the town.[54]

In the ʿAbbasid period links between monasteries and historical figures do not disappear. Hārūn al-Rashīd composed lines of poetry on Dayr Zakkā, and these introduce a short section quoting the verses he addressed to slave-girls he loved, and concluding with the dates of his birth, accession and death.[55] The connections between monasteries and the history of the ʿAbbasid period tend to be of this indirect kind: a monastery is mentioned by, or in connection with, a person who in turn provides the occasion for evoking some memorable happening, or who himself played an important political role. For instance, Dayr Mudyān was a favourite haunt of Abū ʿAlī ibn al-Rashīd, who behaved in such a wild fashion that the people living nearby complained. When Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm

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however, is not whether these meetings are historical but what they symbolise, in this case the passing of one order and the establishment of another.

[52] Ibid., 179. ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥamiq was among the caliph ʿUthmān's murderers.

[53] Ibid., pp. 214–17. For al-Ḥumayma, see *EI*², vol. III, s.v. (D. Sourdel), according to which ʿAlī took up residence there earlier.

[54] Ibid., pp. 211–13, where the conflict is called the Lesser Battle of the Camel. Abū Naḍla Muhalhil ibn Yamūt was a fourth/tenth century poet; Sezgin, *GAS*, vol. II. *Poesie bis ca 430. H.*, Leiden, 1975, p. 477.

[55] Ibid., pp. 224–7. Al-Shābushtī mentions al-Rashīd as the second poet connected with Dayr Zakkā, after the early fourth/tenth century al-Ṣanawbarī.

al-Muṣʿabī heard of it, he descended on the monastery, seized Abū ʿAlī, who was drunk, and had him given twenty lashes for bringing the caliphate into disrepute—an action which the caliph al-Muʿtaṣim approved of. The section continues with an account of al-Maʾmūn's attempt to reconcile Abū ʿAlī, who was his half-brother, with their half-sister Umm Abīhā, and then with a series of anecdotes illustrating Isḥāq al-Muṣʿabī's self-discipline and control of affairs. Perhaps the most revealing of these is the experience, related by the singer ʿAmr ibn Bāna, of being summoned to Isḥāq's palace overlooking the Tigris on a beautiful moonlit evening, where he found the other musicians assembled before him. They sat there till the dawn prayer and were then told to go home. ʿAmr invited his colleagues to his house and they spent a pleasant day, eating, drinking and singing, though it was overshadowed by their disappointment at having wasted such an ideal night at Isḥāq's. Later on ʿAmr learned from the cantatrice Badhl that Isḥāq had wanted to enjoy such a night for a year but had been fighting this desire. When finally all the conditions for a perfect session of drinking and singing were united he decided to prove his self-control and his capacity not to give in to his inclinations by behaving as he did. With his consciousness of the dignity of the caliphate, his loyalty to the caliph, and his severity (or brutality), Isḥāq emerges as a memorable servant of the ʿAbbasid caliphs from al-Maʾmūn to al-Mutawakkil.[56]

As the example of Isḥāq shows, in the portraits of personalities of the ʿAbbasid era events receive less attention than in sections on earlier periods; instead, the focus is on the subjects' characters, as revealed in their words and deeds. And the closer al-Shābushtī comes to his own time, the more obvious this is. The treatment of the Ṭāhirids well illustrates it. It comes in the section on Dayr al-ʿAdhārā, which starts with a folkloristic story about a group of bandits taking refuge in the convent of that name north of Baghdad and discovering that its inhabitants were not virgins, as its name had led them to expect. After the mention of another Dayr al-ʿAdhārā in Baghdad there follow verses by Ibn al-Muʿtazz, an anonymous poet and ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿAbdallāh Ibn Ṭāhir. The subsequent pages illustrate ʿUbaydallāh's love and knowledge of music and his lifelong attachment to his wife, the singer Shājī, with whom he had a large family. His elegy on her when she died, Ibn al-Muʿtazz's letter of condolence and his reply, are followed by an account of her singing before the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid and the texts of the songs she performed. An anecdote about ʿUbaydallāh receiving an unexpected reward for poetry, quotations from his poems and the mention of his

[56] Ibid., pp. 34–45. For Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Muṣʿab, see Mongi Kaabi, *Les Ṭāhirides au Ḫurasān et en Iraq (III*ème *H./IX*ème *J.-C.)*, Tunis, [1983], pp. 315–23.

date of death complete this presentation. ʿUbaydallāh's brother Muḥammad is the next subject treated; al-Shābushtī emphasises his generosity and tolerance, strikingly illustrated by a contrast between his behaviour when a cook bringing in a special dish to a banquet tripped and spilled the contents over him, and that of Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Muṣʿabī finding a hair in food he was about to eat. Whereas Isḥāq had his negligent cook's hand cut off and brought in to show the guests, Muḥammad changed his clothes, summoned the terrified servant, freed him, married him off to a slave-girl and gave him some money. Elegies on Muḥammad are quoted and then two other brothers, Sulaymān and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, are treated briefly. Next the section moves back in time to ʿAbdallāh ibn Ṭāhir. After a youthful indiscretion committed while he was drunk, he is shown overcoming the Qaysī rebel Naṣr ibn Shabath in northern Syria, bringing Egypt back under the ʿAbbasid government's control and preparing to campaign against Bābak, a task from which he is diverted to deal with unrest in Khurasān, where he stays until he dies. Letters exchanged between him and the caliph make up much of the rest of his presentation. The final treatment is reserved for Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn, founder of the family fortunes. The explanation of his nickname Dhū al-Yamīnayn is the first subject. Then he is shown winning the decisive battle with ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā ibn Māhān, al-Amīn's general. His role in al-Amīn's death is only hinted at in connection with the reason for his seeking to be appointed governor of Khurasān, his desire to escape al-Maʾmūn's vengeance. His apparent rejection of allegiance to the caliph proves fatal to him, for the official who had arranged his appointment as governor now has him poisoned.[57]

This lengthy summary is necessary to show the change of emphasis in the presentation of the three most important members of the Ṭāhirid family. Ṭāhir is shown at turning points of his career, revealing himself to be a man of action and a brave general skilful in manoeuvring in court intrigues, until finally his success goes to his head. ʿAbdallāh's portrayal is divided between important moments in his life and typical situations; he emerges as brave, a highly competent and honest administrator but also a master of chancery prose and, as a man of culture, in need of refined relaxation. In ʿUbaydallāh's case the emphasis is on him possessing a most refined literary culture and being an accomplished musician; he is also unusual in his profound attachment to his wife. Al-Shābushtī says almost nothing about his political career, which was far

[57] Ibid., pp. 107–48; the main parts are pp. 109–22 (ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Ṭāhir), pp. 132–41 (ʿAbdallāh ibn Ṭāhir), pp. 142–8 (Ṭāhir). Al-Shābushtī's version of some of these events is not the only one, but the value of the *Diyārāt* as a source for ʿAbbasid political history lies outside the purview of this paper.

less glorious than that of his predecessors, only making clear that he suffered from grave financial problems in later life.[58]

Al-Shābushtī's section on the Ṭāhirids, organised as it is in reverse chronological order, also illustrates the compiler's indifference to conventional historiography. Instead, his portrayal of ʿAbbasid caliphs and dignitaries concentrates on certain themes, chief among them the acquisition, exercise and loss of power. Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Muṣʿabī's severity but also his self-discipline and commitment to a certain ideal of the caliphate have already been mentioned. Al-Mutawakkil could be heartless, for instance when he forced Farīda, his recently deceased brother al-Wāthiq's singing-girl, to perform at court, or brutal, as when he punished the courtier Abū ʿAbdallāh ibn Ḥamdūn by having the cartilage of his ear cut off. He was also a lavish spender, the circumcision feast he organised for al-Muʿtazz being remembered, along with Hārūn al-Rashīd's marriage to Zubayda and al-Maʾmūn's marriage to Būrān, as one of the three most memorable celebrations in Islamic history, and his love of building expressing itself in numerous palaces.[59] His murder is mentioned not in the section on Dayr al-Sūsī, which pays most attention to him, but in the subsequent one on Dayr Mār Mārī, which centres on his son al-Muʿtazz. After the anecdote about al-Muʿtazz's visit to a monastery while out hunting which has already been referred to, his qualities are sketched, in particular his gifts as a poet and his obsessive passion for Yūnus ibn Bughā. The final information concerns his seizure of power; his mother had incited him to take revenge for al-Mutawakkil, and one day at a banquet a dish was brought in which, when uncovered, was shown to contain al-Mustaʿīn's head. This ruined the atmosphere and the party broke up, to sounds in the background of one woman lamenting and another cursing her and beating her about the head with a lute; the mourner turned out to be a concubine of al-Mustaʿīn and the other al-Muʿtazz's mother. The narrator of the ancedote recalls that not long afterwards the courtiers were invited to view al-Muʿtazz's corpse, laid out in the same room.[60]

The last caliph to be portrayed in some detail in the *Diyārāt* is al-Muʿtamid, an uneven poet, some of whose verses were good, others very poor and even unmetrical. Though caliph, he lacked power, wealth and authority, having been out-manoeuvred by his brother al-Muwaffaq, who had the support of the Turkish military, and especially in the latter half of his reign he was little more than a puppet. His impotence is illus-

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[58] See Kaabi, *Les Ṭāhirides*, pp. 357–63. ʿUbaydallāh occupied no official position for the last twenty years of his life.

[59] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, p. 7 (Dayr Durmālus); pp. 150–6 and 159–62 (Dayr al-Sūsī).

[60] Ibid., pp. 164–70 (Dayr Mar Mār, corrected by the editor to Mar Mārī). In fact al-Muʿtazz's caliphate lasted from 252/866 to 255/869.

trated in the anecdote where the general Mufliḥ, a slave, demanded that he give him a singing-girl and a servant he had taken a fancy to; al-Muʿtamid, realising he could not refuse, sent the singing-girl but asked to keep the servant. Mufliḥ, who was leaving to fight the Zanj, intended to requisition the servant on his return, but he was killed while campaigning. Al-Muʾtamid's sense of powerlessness comes out in several of his poems quoted in the *Diyārāt*.[61]

The portraits of caliphs and dignitaries in the *Diyārāt* do not only encourage reflection on the abstract themes of power, its exercise, its corrupting nature and its transitoriness. For al-Shābushtī's contemporary readers, many of them *kuttāb*, the situations portrayed in the anecdotes will have provided useful models of behaviour, particularly in critical situations. For instance, when al-Mustaʿīn's head was served up, Aḥmad ibn Ḥamdūn wept, at which al-Muʿtazz rounded on him and said, 'What's this? You seem to feel sorry for him.' Pulling himself together, Aḥmad replied, 'Oh no! I was just reminded of death.' The first section in the *Diyārāt* as it has survived, on Dayr Durmālus, presents scenes from the life of members of the Banū Ḥamdūn family, Abū ʿAbdallāh Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥamdūn, his father Ibrāhīm, and his grandson Ibrāhīm ibn Abī al-ʿUbays: Aḥmad's being exiled and mutilated by al-Mutawakkil, his return to favour, which al-Mutawakkil marked by giving him a slave-girl, and his poetry addressed to fellow secretaries; Ibrāhīm's showing his sorrow at al-Wāthiq's death when the grieving Farīda sang a sad song to al-Mutawakkil, and his imprudent mockery of Jaḥẓa al-Barmakī, who repaid him in kind; and the jealousy which Ibrāhīm ibn Abī al-ʿUbays, a singer, aroused because of his fine voice.[62] These pages and other anecdotes in the book reflect the uncertainties of the life of the courtier, required at all times to behave in an appropriate fashion, exposed to the intrigues of his rivals and dependent on a sometimes savage ruler's whims.

Given this, quite apart from the distractions they offered, monasteries must have been especially attractive to secretaries, Muslim and Christian, in the later third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, since they provided an atmosphere free of stress and intrigues, a temporary haven of safety from the dangers and violence of court life which, according to the *Diyārāt*, seem to have been prevalent at least from the time of al-Mutawakkil on. And they could even offer a permanent refuge. Ṣāʿid ibn Makhlad was a Christian secretary who became al-Muwaffaq's assistant and converted to Islam. Himself hard-working and competent, he

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[61] Ibid., pp. 97–106 (Dayr al-ʿAlth). For al-Muʿtamid's life, see *EI*², vol. VII. s.v. (H. Kennedy).

[62] Ibid., p. 107 (on Aḥmad ibn Ḥamdūn), 4–13. The various members of the Banū Ḥamdūn are listed in Pellat's indices to al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, vol. VI, Beirut 1977, pp. 285–6; cf. *EI*², vol. III, art. 'Ibn Ḥamdūn' (J.-C. Vadet).

ensured that his much less gifted brother ʿAbdūn, who had remained a Christian, also received advancement. When he was disgraced and imprisoned ʿAbdūn shared his fate, but after he died ʿAbdūn was released and moved to Dayr Qunnā, where he spent the rest of his life as a monk.[63] Less eminent Christian secretaries, too, may have chosen to retire from the administration to the calm of a monastery, where they may have had their early education.[64]

Al-Shābushtī's *Diyārāt* documents a connection between monasteries and Arab history, a connection which changes and becomes less direct with the passage of time. And his book has another dimension which the identikit picture does not reveal; it contains samples of a great variety of literary genres. These start with the pronouncements in rhymed prose of the *kāhin* Saṭīḥ and the obscure answers of his nephew ʿAbd al-Masīḥ. The mention of ʿAmr ibn al-Ḥamiq leads to an account of his wife Āmina bint al-Sharīd's confrontation with Muʿāwiya after her husband's severed head has been presented to her, a powerful example of *balāghat al-nisāʾ*. To unite the Baṣrans behind him in opposing ʿĀʾisha and Ṭalḥa, Ḥakīm ibn Jabala al-ʿAbdī addresses them in a short but effective *khuṭba*. The portrait of the ʿAbbasid poet and man of letters Abū al-ʿAynāʾ includes many humorous anecdotes, *nawādir*, and examples of *ajwiba muskita*, witty replies which silenced his interlocutors.[65] Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn and his son ʿAbdallāh were masters of the lapidary prose used by Umayyad and early ʿAbbasid caliphs and governors in letters and *tawqīʿāt*, announcements of decisions, while a more elaborate style, adapted to the expression of refined sentiments and complex ideas, is found in the letters ibn al-Muʿtazz and ʿUbaydallah ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Ṭāhir exchanged after the death of ʿUbaydallāh's wife.[66] Abū al-ʿAynāʾ's refutation of the accusation of slander and heresy is a nice example of dialectic, while one passage in the *Diyārāt* could have been taken from a book of *maʿānī*, poetic themes and motifs, with its quotations of verses by four different poets, Muṭīʿ ibn Iyās, Abū Nuwās, Sulaymān ibn Muḥammad al-Umawī and Abū al-Baṣīr, on setting out on the pilgrimage and then changing their minds, preferring to spend the time drinking at a monastery and then to rejoin the pilgrims on their way home.[67]

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[63] Ibid., pp. 270–3. Al-Shābushtī may have portrayed ʿAbdūn as more incompetent than he was; cf. Jean Maurice Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbassides surtout à Baghdad (749–1258)*, Louvain, 1980, pp. 114–15, ʿAbdūn appears as an influential member of the Christian community.

[64] Bo Holmberg, 'Christian scribes in the Arabic empire' in Heikki Palva and Knut S. Vikør eds, *The Middle East—Unity and Diversity: papers from the Second Nordic Conference on Middle Eastern Studies, Copenhagen, 22–25 October, 1992*, Copenhagen, 1993, pp. 107–10, concentrating on the role of Dayr Qunnā.

[65] Al-Shābushtī, *Diyārāt*, pp. 239–40, 179–80, 212, 81–92.

[66] Ibid., pp. 144, 138, 113–15.

[67] Ibid., pp. 88–9, 248–50.

The poetry, too, is much more varied than would be guessed from the standard description of the *diyārāt* books. Al-Muʿtamid's complaints of his powerlessness have already been mentioned. Among the elegies quoted from are those by ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿAbdallāh on his wife, one of his sons and his brother Muḥammad, and by al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk on the caliph al-Amīn—a poem which caused his exclusion from court during al-Maʾmūn's reign.[68] Panegyric is not common, but there are a few examples, al-Lubādī's praise of Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Mādharāʾī and Muḥammad ibn Ḥāzim al-Bāhilī's unconventional *madīḥ* of al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl.[69] Occasional poetry includes ibn Abī Fanan's request to Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Ṭāhir to restrain his over-zealous tax-collector, and Sulaymān ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Ṭāhir's appeals from prison to his brother ʿUbaydallāh. The poems exchanged by ibn al-Muʿtazz and al-Numayrī represent the genre of *ikhwāniyyāt*, widespread in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. Muḥammad ibn Ḥāzim's verses express an unusual attitude of dignified independence, their author preferring to subsist with little rather than conform to the demands of court life.[70]

Although it is true that the best represented genres in al-Shābushtī's *Diyārāt* are love and wine songs and descriptions of nature, here too there is much variety. Khālid al-Kātib's *ghazal*, with its sensitive evocation of the feelings of the lover, exhausted, abandoned, unconsolable or close to death, is poles apart from al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Ḍaḥḥāk's no-nonsense invitation to a servant, or from Muṣʿab al-Kātib's description of his approaching boys in the guise of a pious shaykh—a seduction technique he had perfected.[71] Songs celebrating wine may dwell on the poet's drinking-companions and their noble qualities, the wine itself and its origin, the gradual effects of intoxication, the music accompanying the party—either that of a singer, or the background sound of Christian services—and the appearance of the cup-bearer and other attendants.[72] One extended image may be applied to the whole course of the visit to a monastery to drink, as in Abū al-Shibl al-Burjumī's poem which starts by likening the visitors arriving at Dayr Ashmūnī by boat and on horse to two armies in search not of combat but of pleasure.[73] Descriptions of nature usually focus on flowers and meadows in bloom; they allow the poet free rein to develop a myriad images: anemones likened to glasses

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[68] Ibid., pp. 112, 127, 55.

[69] Ibid., pp. 200–1, 277–8. *Hijāʾ* is represented by two lines of Muṭīʿ ibn Iyās celebrating his victory over five fellow poets in the presence of a governor (p. 252).

[70] Ibid., pp. 125, 131, 72–8, 277–82.

[71] Ibid., pp. 17–21, 56–7, 193–7.

[72] Ibid., pp. 25, 27–8, 275–6, 285 (drinking-companions); 70–1, 97 (wine); 15, 17 (effects of intoxication); 94–5, 292–3 (a singer); 48–9, 258 (chanting); 63, 265–6, 287–8 (a cupbearer).

[73] Ibid., pp. 50–1.

of wine, the violet wearing the black clothes of the bereaved without being in mourning, the rose looking at its companions, demurely casting down its eyes as the beloved does.[74] Unusual subjects like the waterfowl near the Egyptian monastery of Dayr Mār Ḥannā are also encountered. And some descriptions leave the realm of nature altogether, like the poems on musical instruments by Kushājim, a master of the genre.[75] Themes which belong to the stock of Arabic poetry can be related in unexpected and original ways to the tradition, as for instance in al-Ḥimmānī's adaptation of the motifs of the halt at the deserted encampment to a visit to *Diyārāt* al-Asāqif.[76]

From this sketchy inventory of themes and genres in poetry and prose, it will be clear that the *Diyārāt* is a far richer anthology of Arabic literature, and in particular the urban literature of the *kuttāb*, than has been generally recognised. I would suggest that this is not arbitrary or even surprising. Many *kuttāb* were Christian and had had their training in monasteries, and to point up a connection between monasteries and *adab* as al-Shābushtī does is to recognise indirectly the place of the Christian *kuttāb* in ʿAbbasid literary culture.[77] Thus, with its historical and literary dimensions, the *Diyārāt* demonstrates that al-Shābushtī's approach to monasteries goes beyond the recording of direct contacts between Muslims and these Christian institutions.[78] It conveys obliquely a sense of the monasteries' place in pre-Islamic and Islamic Arabic history and in Arabic culture. And in his day that place was still noteworthy.

The question why the fourth/tenth century saw the sudden appearance of books on monasteries cannot be answered on the basis of the one incomplete text which has survived. But two points should be made.

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[74] Ibid., pp. 299, 293, 292.

[75] Ibid., pp. 291–2, 261–3.

[76] Ibid., p. 237. The reworking in this poem of conventional motifs has been demonstrated by Gregor Schoeler, *Arabische Naturdichtung. Die Ẓahriyyāt, Rabīʿiyyat und Raudiyyāt von ihren Anfängen bis aṣ-ṣanaubarī*, Beirut, 1974, p. 127. Many other poems in the *Diyārāt* would also repay a close analysis for which there is no space here.

[77] This place is shown more explicitly in Ibn Faḍlallāh's *Masālik al-abṣār*. For instance, it quotes part of al-Buḥturī's panegyric of the vizier ibn al-Fayyāḍ from Dayr Qunnā (p. 257) and the same poet's praise of the *kātib* ʿAbdūn, referred to above (p. 264). Al-Ma'mūn's secretary Abū ʿAbbād Thābit ibn Yaḥyā earns a less prestigious place in it as the butt of Diʿbil's satire, portrayed as a madman having escaped from Dayr Hizqil and still dragging his chains behind him (Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 706). A native of Rayy, Abū ʿAbbād's full name was Thābit ibn Yaḥyā (D. Sourdel, *Le vizirat abbāside de 749 à 936 (132 à 324 de l'Hégire)*, Damascus, 1959, pp. 231–2, 733). Al-Ma'mūn held him in high esteem, as this passage in Yāqūt, quoted from al-Ṣūlī, makes clear.

[78] It is interesting that the *Diyārāt* gives no information about events concerning Christians in general, not even the discriminatory measures imposed on them by caliphs such as al-Mutawakkil. While some Muslim authors quoted by al-Shābushtī express a sense of superiority towards invidual Christians, they apparently regard monasteries themselves as a fact of life.

First, most of the material in the *diyārāt* books is older; literary interest in monasteries did not start in the fourth/tenth century. What is new at that time is the urge to collect the existing texts on the subject and make them available in compilations. Second, like other literary forms, the compilation existed in different degrees of complexity; in its simplest version it brought together the available information about a given subject in no particular order, whereas more sophisticated authors exploited the possibilities of arrangement and juxtaposition of material, and of the inclusion of *akhbār* illustrative of more than one theme, to create works which could be read on several levels.[79] The fourth/tenth century saw the appearance of probably the most intricate compilation in classical Arabic literature, Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's *Kitāb al-aghānī*, which in a single book combines music and poetry with cultural, political and social history, ethical themes and reflection on methods of scholarship.[80] Al-Shābushtī's *Diyārāt*, though much more modest in scale, shares with the *Aghānī* a plurality of purposes. It provides factual information about, for instance, the location of monasteries and their feast days, lists their attractions for visitors, quotes samples of poetry and anecdotes mentioning them. It also traces the connections between monasteries and pre-Islamic and Islamic rulers, suggesting how they gradually loosened after the Muslim conquests. It affirms a link between monasteries and the humanist literary culture of the *kuttāb*. And it encourages reflection on perhaps unexpected but related subjects, such as the exercise of power, by including references to them in different sections.[81] In its many-sidedness the *Diyārāt* is a typical product of fourth/tenth century *adab*. One can only regret that the other books on the subject, which would undoubtedly have illuminated different aspects of the subject, have not survived.

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[79] An example of the simplest type is Ibn al-Kalbī's *Ansab al-khayl*, ed. Nūrī Ḥammūdī al-Qaysī and Ḥātim Ṣāliḥ al-Ḍāmin, Beirut, 1407/1987 (together with Ibn al-ʿArābī's *Asmāʾ khayl al-ʿarab wa-fursānihā*). A more developed form can be seen in al-Jahshiyārī's *Kitāb al-wuzarāʾ wa-al-kuttāb*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyarī and ʿAbd al-Ḥafīẓ Shalabī, 2nd edn, Cairo, 1401/1980, which traces the history of the vizierate and the evolution of various types of administrative text, as well as offering instructive examples of secretaries' behaviour in decisive situations, such as when their patron had fallen from favour or there had been a change of ruler.

[80] See my *Making the Great Book of Songs*, mentioned in n. 3.

[81] Among other subjects is the role of women, as it emerges from both poetry and anecdotes. Together with the attractive girls serving wine and the singers, al-Shābushtī has included portraits of a variety of types: the princess (Hind bint al-Nuʿmān; pp. 244–6), the notable's eloquent and fearless widow (Āmina bint al-Sharīd; p. 179), the intellectual (Umm Abīhā, of whom al-Maʾmūn remarked that had she been a man she would have been better qualified for the caliphate than many caliphs; pp. 35–7), the ambitious and ruthless mother (Qabīḥa; p. 170) and the beloved wife of a lifetime, who was also a fine singer (Shājī; pp. 111–13, 116–17).

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ḤABĪB IBN KHIDMA ABŪ RĀ'IṬA AL-TAKRĪTĪ'S 'THE REFUTATION OF THE MELKITES CONCERNING THE UNION [OF THE DIVINITY AND HUMANITY IN CHRIST]' (III)

Sandra Toenies Keating

Sometime around the year 200/816 a remarkable exchange took place at the court of the Armenian *ishxan* Abū al-ʿAbbās Ashot ibn Smbāt Msaker (d. 210/826). Shortly before that meeting, a man who is arguably the best known Christian controversialist of the first ʿAbbasid century, the deposed Melkite Bishop of Ḥarrān Theodore Abū Qurra, (*fl.* 168/785–214/829), had arrived with the mission of converting the monophysite Armenians to the Chalcedonian faith.[1] His visit prompted the *ishxan* to contact his Jacobite neighbours to the south for advice and invite an expert to debate with Abū Qurra before making a decision to transfer his allegiance. In response, Cyriacus, Patriarch of the Jacobite church (177/793–201/817), delegated the future archdeacon Nonnus of Nisibis (*ca* 173/790–*ca* 256/870) to engage Abū Qurra and, as Michael the Syrian later records, 'unmask his heretical ideas'.[2] However, Nonnus was young and inexperienced and in need of aid from a skilled veteran. This he found in the person of his close relative who himself had been the original object of Ashot's invitation, Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'iṭa al-Takrītī (*ca* 153/770–*ca* 220/835). For some unknown reason Abū Rā'iṭa refused this request, and instead chose to assist Nonnus with advice and a letter of introduction containing a concise refutation of Abū Qurra's claims.[3] The aim of this study is to examine the context of this encounter

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[1] For the most recent biographical information on Theodore Abū Qurra, see S. H. Griffith, 'Reflections on the Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah', *Parole de l'Orient* 18, 1993, pp. 143–70, and 'Theodore Abū Qurrah, the Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian Writer of the First Abbasid Century', *The Dr. Irene Halmos Chair of Arabic Literature Annual Lecture,* Tel Aviv, 1992.

[2] *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)*, 4 vols, ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot (vols I–III, French trans., vol. IV, Syriac text), Paris, 1899–1910, vol. III, pp. 32–4, vol. IV, pp. 495–6, as translated in Griffith, 'Theodore Abū Qurra', p. 15.

[3] Abū Rā'iṭa also wrote a second, follow-up letter responding directly to issues raised by Abū Qurra in the ensuing discussion which focuses primarily on disagreements surrounding the *Trishagion*, 'Evidence for the Threefold Praise of the Crucified One' (IV). Since this letter does not include material of interest on Islam, it will not be examined here.

in Armenia, a letter written by Abū Qurra for the occasion and Abū Rā'iṭa's subsequent response to it.

Abū Rā'iṭa, a native of the ancient city of Takrīt, is one of first Christians to have written on theological topics in Arabic whose name is known. Each of the nine extant texts that can be directly attributed to him exhibits a carefully constructed set of arguments intended to convince both Muslims and Christians of the validity of Christian beliefs, and employs every available resource. Abū Rā'iṭa's writings can be divided into two general groups: refutations of the theological positions of other Christians (III, IV, V, VII), and letters to members of the Jacobite community, advising them on how to construct an effective reply to the concerns of their Muslim neighbours about Christian doctrines (I, II, VI, VIII, IX, X).[4] However, at least one of his writings is unusual in its direct attempt to reach both Muslims and Christians. This is the text he composed to introduce Nonnus to Ashot Msaker and respond to Abū Qurra's missionary efforts. Entitled 'The Refutation of the Melkites Concerning the Union' (III) in Graf's edition, it is very possibly the earliest text in Abū Rā'iṭa's extant corpus.

Like many of his other writings, 'The Refutation of the Melkites' reveals the ongoing bitter struggle among the various Christian churches that resulted from clashes over the ecumenical councils. As the churches in the East were slowly being cut off from those in the West, the Jacobites, Melkites and Nestorians continued their polemics against one another as they had for centuries. Even so, Abū Rā'iṭa and many of his co-religionists were becoming aware of the tremendous challenge that Islam presented and the degree to which these inter-confessional squabbles put Christians at a disadvantage in dealing with the difficulties arising out of their new social, political and religious context. One of the consequences of this situation was the rising tide of converts to Islam that began during Abū Rā'iṭa's lifetime. Thus, he devotes a great deal of energy to convincing his readers that Christian doctrine is neither absurd nor an illegitimate fabrication, by giving coherent answers to the questions of both Muslims and Christians. These carefully constructed arguments are clearly designed to allay the fears and doubts of Christians being called upon to defend their faith against Muslim criticisms.

Ashot Msaker's request to Abū Rā'iṭa for a response to Abū Qurra's visit was itself a unique occurrence in the relations between the Armenian and Syrian Jacobite churches, and it is unfortunate that so little is known of it. Like the Jacobites, the Armenians had opposed the Council of

[4] Currently, the only complete edition of Abū Rā'iṭa's writings is *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb Ibn Ḥhidma Abū Rā'iṭa* (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 130 and 131, ed. and trans. Georg Graf, Louvain, 1951. The Roman numerals assigned to the texts in Graf's edition are used in this chapter.

Chalcedon on the grounds that it furthered Nestorianism. At the same time they had always rejected extreme Eutychian Monophysitism and accepted Cyril's formula of 'one nature of the incarnate Logos'.[5] But disagreements between the Jacobites and Armenians, especially over liturgical differences, had brought about a disintegration of their relations over the centuries.

At the time of Abū Qurra's arrival, the Armenians were deep in a struggle to wrest control over their lands from the foreign rule of the Islamic caliphate. As *ishxan* of Armenia from 188/804 to 211/826, Ashot Msaker was able to regain a level of power and autonomy through his policy of loyalty to the caliphate.[6] Simultaneously, however, the Arab population was growing and the pressure on Armenian Christians to convert to Islam increased. This was felt by the indigenous population most acutely in the requirement to pay the *jizya* (poll tax), which at times was so burdensome that families chose to abandon their entire holdings and seek refuge in Byzantium.[7]

It was in the midst of this confusing and tense situation that Abū Qurra arrived in Armenia. In the decade during which Abū Qurra and Nonnus are believed to have been guests of the *ishxan*, Ashot was engaged in a series of battles with the local *ostikans* and, by implication, the caliphate. Despite the fact that he was ultimately successful, doubtless at this time he was looking for allies in the struggle against Arab domination. For even though the strained historical relationship with their neighbours had led the Armenian leaders effectively to abandon any expectation of Byzantine aid against the Arabs, it is possible that Ashot's initial interest in Abū Qurra's visit was tied to a desire to improve relations with the empire lying to the west in hope of assistance from it.

Theodore Abū Qurra himself was a prolific writer, an avid missionary for the Chalcedonian cause, and a known participant in debates with

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[5] E. Ter-Minassiantz, *Die armenische Kirche in ihren Beziehungen zu den syrischen Kirchen bis zum Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts* (*Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, Neue Folge*, Bd. 11, Heft 4), Leipzig, 1904, p. 51, and N. G. Garsoïan, 'Armenian Church', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3 vols, ed. A. P. Kazhdan, A.-M. Talbot *et al.*, New York and Oxford, 1991, vol. I, p. 179. The development of Monophysitism in Armenia and the consequent elimination of Nestorianism are laid out in detail by Ter-Minassiantz in *Die armenische Kirche*, esp. pp. 58–95.

[6] N. G. Garsoïan, 'The Arab Invasions and the Rise of the Bagratuni (640–884)', in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. I, *The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, ed. R. G. Hovannisian, New York, 1997, pp. 117–42, esp. pp. 136–8, and R. Grousset, *Histoire de l'Arménie des origines à 1071*, Paris, 1947, pp. 314–53, esp. pp. 337–53.

[7] A. Ter-Ghewondyan, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, trans. N. G. Garsoïan, Lisbon, 1976, esp. pp. 29–33, 45–50, 125–35. Eventually the Arab influence in Armenia all but disappeared after the Byzantine conquests in the fifth/eleventh century. After this time the Arab population was replaced by Persian tribes of Kurds who began to migrate from the south.

Muslims.[8] In spite of his fame, however, only two dates can be established relative to his life, one of which is found in Michael the Syrian's account of the meeting with Nonnus.[9] After being deposed as bishop of Ḥarrān by the Melkite Patriarch of Antioch, Theodoret (*ca* 168/785–183/799), Abū Qurra had set out on a missionary journey to win converts to the Diophysite views of Maximus the Confessor,[10] travelling from Alexandria to Armenia, a journey which lasted from 197/813 to 201/817.[11]

The reason for his decision to travel to Armenia may be found in the 'Letter to the Armenians'[12] sent to 'the heretics in Armenia' from the Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem (191/807–205/821).[13] The letter states that Theodore Abū Qurra wrote it for the Patriarch in Arabic, and it was translated into Greek by Michael, the Presbyter and Synkellos of Jerusalem (*ca* 144/761–231/846).[14] The obvious temporal coincidence of the composition of Abū Qurra's letter, his arrival in Armenia, and *ishxan* Ashot Msaker's subsequent request that Abū Rā'iṭa journey to Armenia, raises the question of whether Abū Rā'iṭa was aware of the contents of Abū Qurra's letter, necessitating a brief overview of its basic themes.

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[8] Griffith, 'Theodore Abū Qurra', esp. pp. 15–18.

[9] *Chronique*, vol. III, pp. 32–4, vol. IV, pp. 495–6, Griffith, 'Theodore Abū Qurra', p. 15.

[10] The Byzantine theologian St Maximus the Confessor (580–662) was a prolific writer and strong opponent of monotheletism. His theandric anthropology, influenced primarily by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, emphasized the perfect human nature in Christ as the basis for the deification of human beings. Through the will, Maximus argued, the person is able to overcome vice and achieve virtue, rising through the image of God to become more like God and be reintegrated with Christ. Although Maximus is known primarily for his theandric anthropology, Abū Rā'iṭa was especially concerned with his differentiation between the *ousia* and *hypostaseis* of the Trinity, the former being abstract and unknowable, and the latter understood as concrete, accessible manifestations. Abū Rā'iṭa takes up this issue directly in his 'Refutation of the Melkites' (VII); see A. P. Kazhdan, 'Maximos the Confessor', *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. II, pp. 1323–4, L. Thunberg, *Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St Maximus the Confessor*, Crestwood, NY, 1985, esp. pp. 71–4, and G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 2nd ed., London, 1952, repr. 1975, pp. 278–9.

[11] Griffith, 'Theodore Abū Qurra', p. 16, and 'Reflections', p. 146.

[12] The opening address begins: 'A letter containing the true and untainted faith, sent by the Blessed Pope Thomas, Patriarch of Jerusalem, to the heretics of Armenia, dictated in Arabic by Theodore, surnamed Aboucara, Bishop of Karon [Ḥarrān], and translated by Michael the Presbyter and Synkellos of the Apostolic See [of Jerusalem], through whom it was sent' (*Patrologia Graeca*, vol. XCVII, col. 1504D).

[13] *PG*, vol. XCVII, cols 1503–22. See also J. C. Lamoreaux, 'An Unedited Tract Against the Armenians by Theodore Abū Qurra', *Le Muséon* 105, 1992, pp. 327–41.

[14] Michael was probably only in Jerusalem for a single year before 198/814, after which he left, charged with delivering the letter to Armenia. His task was to discuss various theological and political problems, and ask for money from the Armenians, but he was arrested and persecuted in Constantinople because he was an iconophile; R. Browning and A. P. Kazhdan, 'Michael Synkellos', *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. II, pp. 1369–70. The treatise is only available today in a Greek version, apparently that prepared by Michael. A Latin translation is has been provided in Migne (*PG*, vol. XCVII, cols 1503–22).

Although Abū Qurra does not mention the beliefs of those to whom the letter is written (the current title is a later addition), it is clear that his objective is to convince Christians who have rejected the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon of the validity of its claims. One can identify a two-pronged approach in his endeavour, focusing first on the legitimacy of the Council itself and then on the actual teachings of Chalcedon, and the subsequent second and third Councils of Constantinople (553 and 681). The primary concern of the treatise is to establish the continuity between the definition of Chalcedon and the teachings of the Apostles, the topic with which Abū Qurra begins and ends his letter. Emphasizing Jesus' promise to Peter that 'the fires of Hell will not prevail against it', he underscores the guarantee that the Church founded on Peter (implicitly connected to the church in Rome) will not go astray, so that the truth of its formulations concerning the humanity and divinity of Christ are preserved from error and can be trusted. This can be known with certainty based on Peter's confession of Jesus as the Son of God (Matt 16.18).[15] Since the Monophysite churches, including the Armenians, rejected Chalcedon on the grounds that it had illegitimately added to the definition that had been accepted at Ephesus, this was an important argument to make if Abū Qurra was to convince the Armenians.[16]

After demonstrating the authenticity of Chalcedon and the following two councils, Abū Qurra's second interest is to summarize their teachings as clearly and succinctly as possible.[17] He begins with the heart of the matter: after the Incarnation Jesus Christ was one *hypostasis* consisting of two natures. Because these two natures, human and divine, were perfectly preserved in the union without confusion or mixing, their individual properties and operations remained intact and unchanged.[18] To

[15] *PG*, vol. XCVII, cols 1503–6.

[16] Abū Qurra also wrote a longer treatise, having Muslims rather than Monophysites in mind, in which he addresses two central topics—the justification of the Christian Bible, and a defence of Chalcedonian orthodoxy as found in the first six ecumenical councils. In this treatise, 'On Orthodoxy', he outlines a lengthier and more complex view of the successors of the Apostles meeting in council to decide matters of the church and faith, and of the role of the successor of Peter in affirming their decisions; S. H. Griffith, 'Muslims and Church Councils: the Apology of Theodore Abū Qurra', *Studia Patristica* 25, Leuven, 1993, esp. pp. 285–93.

[17] *PG*, vol. XCVII, cols 1505C–10A.

[18] One hears a clear echo of the doctrine of Constantinople III in Abū Qurra's letter: after the Incarnation 'the difference of natures in that same and unique hypostasis is recognized by the fact that each of the two natures wills and performs what is proper to it in communion with the other . . .'; J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, rev. edn, New York, 1982, p. 637; H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, Barcelona, Freiburg and Rome, 1976, p. 558.

bolster his argument, Abū Qurra adds examples[19] and opinions of Gregory of Nazianzus, Athanasius, and Cyril of Alexandria.[20]

The 'Letter to the Armenians' is a compact treatise aimed at defending the legitimacy of Chalcedon and showing the logic of its doctrine and the teachings of subsequent councils. Abū Qurra chooses the issues he believes are central to the theological dispute between the Chalcedonian and Monophysite churches, and addresses them in the way that he thinks will be convincing. But the situation was more complicated than he expected.

Shortly after Abū Qurra arrived in Armenia and presented his proposal, Nonnus arrived at the court armed with Abū Rā'iṭa's instructions and letter of introduction, probably between the years 199/815 and 201/817. Although there is no record that Abū Rā'iṭa had ever personally met Abū Qurra, 'The Refutation of the Melkites' indicates that he was fully aware of his opponent's reputation and views, and seems to have respected him as an intellectual.[21] Nonetheless, he believed Abū Qurra was seriously misguided and used deceit to hide his Nestorian tendencies.[22]

Theodore Abū Qurra personified for Abū Rā'iṭa those Christian opponents whom he viewed as responsible for sowing confusion in the Jacobite community.[23] Abū Rā'iṭa was greatly concerned about the influence that the Islamic critique of Christianity was having on the church, and his belief that Nestorian christology and its Melkite expression made Christian faith vulnerable to such criticism led him to focus much of his energy on refuting the conclusions of Chalcedon. Abū Rā'iṭa's responses to Abū Qurra are a defence against Melkite claims that it was the proponents of Monophysitism who encouraged Islamic disapproval. The Melkites charged that, when taken literally, Jacobite christological formulae seemed to imply a belief that the divine nature was changed and limited in the Incarnation: suffering, dying, and bound by creaturely constraints.[24] Abū Rā'iṭa challenges this allegation, arguing that on the contrary Chalcedon's

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[19] These include gold and coal which remain themselves when placed together in fire, and a single person who has many different actions (*PG*, vol. XCVII, cols 1507C–13B).

[20] *PG*, vol. XCVII, cols 1509BC, 1514C–16C.

[21] Griffith, 'Reflections', p. 154.

[22] Graf, *Abū Rā'iṭa*, (Arabic text), pp. 65–6, 73–4, 79, 86.

[23] Theodore Abū Qurra is referred to in texts III, IV, and IX, often as 'the Melkite bishop', and is probably the person Abū Rā'iṭa has in mind in his refutation of the Melkites in texts V and VII.

[24] This mirrors exactly the shocked account of Christian faith given by the Muslim writer Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāḥiẓ (158/775–254/868) in the decades shortly after Abū Rā'iṭa's death. C. Pellat, 'Al-Ǧāḥiẓ: les nations civilisées et les croyances religieuses', *Journal Asiatique* 260, 1967, pp. 99–100. See also Griffith, 'Muslims and Church Councils', pp. 297–8, and I. Dick, 'Deux écrits inédits de Theodore Abuqurra', *Le Muséon* 72, 1959, p. 59.

assertion that in Christ a human nature and a divine nature continue to exist distinctly *after* the Incarnation implies that the Divine remained untouched by humanity. Consequently, God did not truly become human.[25] Thus, Muslims could claim that Jesus was only a prophet, inspired by God, and even born of the Holy Spirit. Abū Rā'iṭa believes this is the most critical problem facing Christians of his day and it is for this reason he perceives Abū Qurra as a primary adversary to be defeated soundly.

The rather brief 'Refutation of the Melkites' begins with the usual greetings to *ishxan* Ashot Msaker and an introduction for Nonnus (para. 1), then immediately states its primary thesis: the 'old and new Books of God', i.e. the Old and New Testaments, reveal the 'authentic faith and the just and upright religion' which is available to everyone 'in plain speech'. As the true revelation, they provide the ultimate criteria for orthodox faith. Further, although revelation is not always adequate for gaining a full understanding of the essence of religion, since the intellect is weak and not able to grasp completely the necessary distinctions, human beings should be confident that the Scriptures can be relied upon for the understanding needed for true faith (para. 2). Abū Rā'iṭa argues that the 'proof' of this is clear in God's gradual revelation of himself as one God and of the simple command to serve him in the 'first call', i.e. the first Covenant, followed by the New Covenant which clarifies the first, and reveals the one God as Trinity. The New Covenant does not replace the old, but rather confirms and concurs with it, abrogating earlier divine precepts with something which is immeasurably better (para. 3).

After laying out his basic premise, Abū Rā'iṭa presents an apology aimed at showing the continuity between the teachings of Jesus and their doctrinal formulation in later conciliar decisions. He begins by affirming the first three ecumenical councils (Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus), and arguing that the fourth at Chalcedon was not legitimate because it was tainted by Nestorianism. Abū Rā'iṭa's defence of the councils is not, however, primarily based on their theological content or an explanation of the conciliar decisions as one would expect, it is instead an endorsement of the emperors who called them, especially of Constantine.

Initially, it may appear odd that Abū Rā'iṭa spends nearly one fifth of this brief letter (only eight pages of Arabic in Graf's edition) defending Constantine as a just man who protected the church from the lies

[25] Abū Rā'iṭa did not think that the Chalcedonian definition had sufficiently answered the question of *how* the union in the Incarnation had occurred and that it did not adequately express the biblical truth that 'the Word became flesh'. It is important to note here that Abū Rā'iṭa understands *physis* as nearly synonymous (although not identical) with *hypostasis*, as did most Cyrillians. The Chalcedonian definition employed it differently, which was the source of much of the confusion.

of heretics. He presents the emperor as following the 'right path' which the prophets and then the Apostles had set down before him. By using his wealth and influence Constantine was able to guard against error and provide the opportunity for the Council Fathers to discuss the issues and define the true faith (para. 4). In the same way, the second (Constantinople in 381) and third (Ephesus in 431)[26] councils were called by God through the emperors. Each emperor in his own way acted according to the will of God as 'warriors for God's church', furnishing the bishops with all of the necessities required for such an assembly. The three councils were instruments through which the Holy Spirit inspired the Fathers to formulate doctrines, passing the faith received by the first Apostles on to all believers of the 'sublime call' (para. 5).[27]

Abū Rā'iṭa's approach would be strange if he were only speaking to other Christians who had accepted the legitimacy of the first three ecumenical councils and did not dispute the role of the emperors in convening them. All the religious communities, Nestorian, Jacobite, Melkite and Maronite, were at great pains to show that their own doctrines could be traced directly to the Apostles through the councils they acknowledged as legitimate. The disagreement among the denominations rested on which of the later councils had deviated from the original teachings, not whether such assemblies had the right to define dogma.[28]

Careful reading, however, reveals that Abū Rā'iṭa's strategy of establishing the progression of divine instruction from the first Covenant with Abraham through the Council of Ephesus has another purpose, one directed at the challenge of Islam. He is fully aware that Muslims have

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[26] Abū Rā'iṭa does not mention the Synod of Ephesus (called by Pope Leo the Latrocinium, or 'Robber Synod') of 449 in any of his writings. As a result of the complicated proceedings of the synod, Eutyches was rehabilitated and Flavian, Eusebius of Dorylaeum, Theodoret, and other diophysite leaders were deposed. Presumably, Abū Rā'iṭa does not recognize this synod because of the strong anti-Eutychian views of his own church, in spite of Eutyches' claim to orthodox Cyrillian doctrine.

[27] It is notable in this context that Abū Rā'iṭa's partner in debate, Theodore Abū Qurra, also wrote a treatise entitled 'On Orthodoxy' defending the legitimacy of the first six ecumenical councils (he was apparently unaware of the seventh) on the basis of their having been called under the auspices of the successors of St Peter and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In his apology he intentionally shifts the emphasis away from the role of the emperors. According to Abū Qurra the councils are properly based on the model given in the New Testament (Acts 15), and are the appropriate forum for settling ecclesiastical affairs because they were conducted under the supervision of the bishops of Rome. He seems to have offered this as a counter to the Muslim argument that the emperors had used the councils for their own political advantage; Griffith, 'Muslims and Church Councils', pp. 270–99, esp. pp. 281–90.

[28] Abū Rā'iṭa's argument is also unusual and striking for another reason. Generally it was the Jacobites who levelled accusations against the Melkites for holding an 'emperor-based faith', while men such as Abū Qurra wrote tracts countering the charges with evidence of the role of the bishop of Rome in the councils and the basis for conciliar conclusions in Scripture; Griffith, 'Muslims and Church Councils', pp. 296–7.

rejected this continuity, maintaining that the Christian Scriptures were distorted by Jesus' disciples very early on; they viewed the controversies surrounding the ecclesiastical councils as proof that Christians had deviated from the message of Jesus: the formulae and definitions of the councils could not be found *verbatim* in the Scriptures, and therefore should not be accepted as authentic.[29] The undercurrent of anti-Islamic polemic suggests that Abū Rā'iṭa expected his letter would be heard by Muslims as well as Christians, and perhaps even by those Christians who were being swayed by the message of Islam.[30]

Throughout his carefully constructed arguments, Abū Rā'iṭa attempts to balance two objectives—affirming Christian doctrine and responding to Muslim objections to it. This can be seen in his brief outline of faith which would have been immediately recognizable to his Christian hearers, whereas Muslims would have identified this synopsis as a tailored refutation of the Qur'anic understanding of God's revelation. Evidence for this secondary aim of Abū Rā'iṭa's letter can be seen in his choice of terminology. One cannot help but notice the ubiquity of words and phrases reminiscent of the Qur'an throughout the opening paragraphs, obviously intended to evoke issues raised by Islam. Abū Rā'iṭa's hidden agenda makes itself especially apparent in his reference to the 'proof', *burhān*, a term which is found frequently in his writings. In the Qur'an it often appears in the context of a demand on the part of God to those who would speak falsely of Him,[31] and more specifically that God will command Christians to 'produce your proof' on the Day of Judgment about their teachings on the Trinity and divinity of Christ. Abū Rā'iṭa's use of *burhān* here is certainly intended to alert his listeners that his summary of salvation history is the 'proof' in response to this demand.

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[29] Griffith, 'Muslims and Church Councils', p. 274.

[30] The opening lines of the letter lend support to this hypothesis. Abū Rā'iṭa mentions that the invitation to the court outlined the format of the debate, which was to have begun with a discussion between Abū Qurra and himself, followed by an exchange between Abū Rā'iṭa and some other wise intellectuals who would be present (para. 1). The wording of the text implies that the latter would have included Muslim officials at the court. In addition, one can assume from Abū Rā'iṭa's choice of Arabic that he expected his text to be made accessible to interested Muslim readers. In any case, it is very unlikely that his use of expressions that were generally associated with specific Islamic doctrines and debates in his day is accidental. Finally, several of Abū Rā'iṭa's other letters (especially I, II, and VIII) give evidence that he was informed about the significant number of Christians who were converting to Islam in Iraq, Persia, and Syria, a trend which would increase during the next two centuries. Although ultimately Armenia remained predominantly Christian, Abū Rā'iṭa could not have foreseen that, and probably assumed the situation there was similar to his own. Consequently, he has taken this opportunity to respond to some points being made by those involved in persuading Christians to adopt the new faith.

[31] E.g. Q 2.111, 21.24, and 28.75.

Likewise, his use of the term 'abrogation', *naskh,* would call to mind the Islamic exegetical principle, based in the Qur'an,[32] by which certain verses given to Muḥammad are modified or revoked by others, often through the later revelation of a more specific directive.[33] Abū Rā'iṭa, however, presents the Christian understanding of abrogation as a process of continuity, not of repudiation. Through his explanation of God's gradual revelation of the divine will to humanity, he is making a subtle argument that salvation history is a continuous unfolding of God's plan culminating in Jesus Christ. Elements of the revelation which were intended to teach and form God's people may now have become obsolete (such as dietary laws), but this does not imply a discontinuity: God's revelation 'builds' on what came before it until the Resurrection of Christ, when the divine plan was fully disclosed.

Abū Rā'iṭa applies this idea to the relationship between the revelations of the Old and New Covenants and the first three ecumenical councils. Here, he presents salvation history as the unfolding of God's plan, or 'call', *daʿwā*, which is continuous and interconnected, providing deeper knowledge of previous teachings, and preparing for what is to come in the following generations (para. 3). Similar to the principle of divine pedagogy found in the Fathers, he explains that in each stage further revelation is guided by the Triune God, and so can be trusted, even when the divine threeness had not yet been fully disclosed (para. 3).[34] This continuity of divine action extends to the conclusions of the three ecumenical councils which truly express truths already present in the very first revelations of God to humanity.

Abū Rā'iṭa's presentation of the gradual unfolding of God's plan indicates that he is fully aware that it stands in direct contradiction to the Qur'an's conception of revelation. The Qur'an presents God's Word as a single, complete revelation which has been sent down previously in

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[32] The basis for this principle is found in Q 2.106, 22.52, 17.86, 13.39, 57.6–7 and 16.101.

[33] J. Burton, 'Naskh', *EI*², vol. VII, pp. 1009–12.

[34] The idea of divine pedagogy appears first in the writings of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus concerning the role of Greek philosophy as preparation for the Gospel, and is clearly developed in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* 1 (*PG*, vol. VII, cols 685ff.) and 7 (*PG*, vol. IX, col. 416B), as well as his *Paedagogus* (*PG*, vol. VIII, cols 247ff.); C. Saldanha, *Divine Pedagogy: A Patristic View of Non-Christian Religions,* Rome, 1984, esp. pp. 39–149. Later, Cyril of Alexandria in *De adoratione in spiritu et veritate* 13 (*PG*, vol. LXVIII, col. 133), *Commentarius in Is.* 1 and 3 (*PG*, vol. LXX), and *Explanatio in Psalmos* 24.4 (*PG*, vol. LXIX, col. 848B) and Gregory of Nyssa in his *Homiliae in orationem dominicam* 5 (*PG*, vol. XLIV, col. 1181C) and *De vita Mosis* (*PG*, vol. XLIV, col. 321A) take up the theme of God's instruction and preparation for Christ through Mosaic Law. Both Cyril and Gregory were highly regarded by the Jacobite community, and are the writers most often referred to directly in Abū Rā'iṭa's own writings, suggesting that he was familiar with the ideas through these works.

numerous discrete instances to various chosen prophets.[35] What is contained in the single revelation eternally present on the Preserved Tablet (Q 85.22 and 43.4) has been given in the Qur'an and is the sum total of God's communication to humanity—no more and no less is needed. Contradictions between this revelation and the Torah and Gospels are identified as distortions and corruptions of the original revelation, called *taḥrīf* in the Qur'an. Hence, where the Qur'an contradicts other scriptures (especially in the case of the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation), it acts as a corrective, and, as the final revelation, replaces everything that has come before it. According to the Qur'an, it is exactly the discontinuity between the Torah, the Gospels, and itself that is proof that the revelation has been tampered with.[36] Usually this was attributed to the followers of the prophets, including the Byzantine emperors acting through councils.[37]

An equally significant aspect of the argument against Christianity was the Islamic idea that God's revelation to each of the prophets is a 'clear Book' (Q 43.2) which is accessible to everyone without the need for outside sources to understand it. According to traditional Islamic scholars, the self-evidence of God's revelation meant that only a minimal amount of interpretation is necessary for a proper understanding of the revelation received by the prophets. Consequently, one could argue that gatherings like the Christian councils are neither necessary nor desirable, since they place undue trust in the ability of unguided human reason to arrive at knowledge of the truth.

The special concentration on the reliability of the Scriptures and of the preaching of the Apostles concerning the Trinity found at the beginning of the letter reveals Abū Rā'iṭa's attention to this latter criticism.[38]

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[35] See, for example, references to the revelation first to Moses (Q 23.49, 25.35, 37.117), then Jesus (19.30), and finally to Muhammad as an 'Arabic Qur'an' which is a 'clear Book' (43.2–3).

[36] Especially relevant here are the Qur'an verses that warn against belief in the Trinity (4.171, 5.73), record Jesus' own denial of his divinity (4.171–2, 5.17,72), and disapprove of monasticism (57.27).

[37] Griffith, 'Muslims and Church Councils', pp. 282–3. A systematic account of Islamic views on this can be found in *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, ed. 'A.-K. 'Uthmān, 2 vols, Beirut, 1966–1969, by 'Abd al-Jabbār Ibn Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī (d. 415/1025). In particular, he points to the first council reported in Acts 15 as evidence that the disciples turned from Jesus' revelations to the teachings of the Gentiles. Although his summary dates nearly two centuries after Abū Rā'iṭa, 'Abd al-Jabbār intends to describe faithfully traditional Islamic teachings. Further, his account accurately coincides with information found in other writers of Abū Rā'iṭa's day. See also S. M. Stern, 'Quotations from Apocryphal Gospels in 'Abd al-Jabbār', *Journal of Theological Studies* new series 18, 1967, pp. 34–57, and ''Abd al-Jabbār's Account of How Christ's Religion was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs', *Journal of Theological Studies* new series 19, 1968, pp. 128–85.

[38] Throughout this letter Abū Rā'iṭa refers to the Apostles of Jesus by the Islamic title *rusul*, instead of the Qur'anic (and commonly Christian) term *ḥawāriyyūn* (i.e. 5.112). Similarly, the related participle *mursalīn* appears frequently in reference to those who

In his brief opening statements, Abū Rā'iṭa offers an explanation of the Christian faith which seeks to make sense of gradual revelation and of apparent deviations from Judaism and controversies over church doctrine through his use of the idea of divine pedagogy. His purpose is to challenge any view of revelation that would deny or overturn what is given in the Old and New Testaments. As counter-evidence, he substantiates the validity of trinitarian teachings with Christ's command to preach that the God of the Old Covenant is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and asserts that the seeds of this teaching are found in the Old Testament, to be fully understood only in light of the Incarnation.

The centerpiece of the 'Refutation of the Melkites' is a summary of the credal statements of the first three ecumenical councils, which Abū Rā'iṭa attributes to the 'first Apostles'. He divides the statement into two parts, focusing first on the unity and trinity of God followed by an explanation of contested interpretations, and then turning to the divine and human nature of Christ and a refutation of errors concerning it (para. 5, 7). There is no evidence that Abū Rā'iṭa is reproducing in Arabic a complete *symbolum* he has before him.[39] Rather, his description of orthodox faith reflects the thought of the Cappadocians,[40] drawing especially on Basil's definition of the proper use of *ousia* and *hypostasis* with regard to the Trinity.[41] Yet he avoids using too many technical terms, leaning toward Biblical terminology, as even his summary of the conciliar statements on the nature of the Trinity and of Christ show. This is in keeping with his initial thesis, that what is necessary for true faith can be found clearly in the Scriptures—one does not need to understand the complications of scholarly explanations.

Abū Rā'iṭa's summary of the faith expressed by previous councils forms a segue into the second part of his argument: a demonstration that the Persons of the Trinity are not separate from the *ousia* (*jawhar*) of God as such, which itself must be the *basis* for the unity of the individual persons of the Trinity. He asserts the necessity of the three Persons being the same as the *ousia*, otherwise one must admit that the God revealed in the Old Testament is not the same as the God revealed in the New. Further, each of the Persons of the Trinity, endowed as they are with

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were sent by God with his message. In light of the general thrust of his argument, it appears he intends to convey the idea that Jesus Christ, as truly God, has sent the Apostles into the world with the message he has given to them.

[39] Graf, *Abū Rā'iṭa*, p. 86, n. 3.

[40] See, for example, Basil, *Ep.* 38 (on the distinction between Person and *ousia*); *Ep.* 214 (on the distinctions of the Persons); and *Ep.* 236 (the relationship between Substance and Person is like that between general, *koinon*, and particular, *to kath' ekaston*), as well as Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 25; 26; and 29 (on the characteristics of the individual Persons).

[41] *PG*, vol. XXXII, cols 326–40.

divinity and lordship, reveals the One God. They are not to be regarded as individual gods, apart from God's being.[42] On the contrary, the being of God is truly characterized by three and one, predicates that are eternal properties.[43]

The presentation of the Incarnation also exhibits Abū Rā'iṭa's primary objective of establishing the credibility of Jacobite doctrine by showing its indisputable adherence to traditional teachings that can be traced back to such authorities as Basil and Gregory. Emphasizing that it is truly God who has been incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ, revealing the second Person of the Trinity, he argues that the Word becoming human does not threaten the divine unity. Christ himself is one in his Incarnation, without change or alteration, and remains one both divine and human, echoing the Monophysite teaching of 'from two natures', *ek duo physeis*.[44] Significantly, however, Abū Rā'iṭa does not use the word 'nature', *ṭabīʿa*, in the sense of *physis* in this letter, instead preferring to describe what is meant in other terms, usually Biblical. He concludes this section with an explanation of the union in the Incarnation that draws specifically on Cyril of Alexandria, emphasizing that the union of human and divine might be understood as two elements inseparably joined in one *hypostasis*, a single concrete being in which the natural qualities of each element continue to exist unchanged yet indivisible.[45]

The final point which Abū Rā'iṭa makes is to counter the claim that Christ is not perfectly God or even a perfect being, since he is only one of three *hypostaseis*, making the son of Mary only a third of the *ousia* and incomplete in himself. Once again, this is an argument which appears to have its origin in the Qur'an, where Christians are commanded to cease saying 'Allah is the third of three' (Q 5.73), because it implies both polytheism and a limitation in God. Abū Rā'iṭa charges that this is

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[42] Abū Rā'iṭa includes his favourite analogy of the three lamps shedding light in a church to explain how the unity of the *ousia* does not preclude the individuality of the *hypostaseis*. One sees that there is no division in the light, yet the three lamps are individuals (para. 6). This and similar examples portraying the relationship between the Father and the Son as analogous to that between a ray and its source (e.g. the sun) are common in the Fathers. Abū Rā'iṭa would have most likely known the comparison through the works of Tatian, Athanasius, and Basil; Prestige, *God*, p. 102 (Tatian), pp. 194, 230, 257 (Athanasius), pp. 228–9 (Basil).

[43] One sees a striking resemblance between Abū Rā'iṭa's description here and that found in Basil's *Ep.* 38: '. . . there is found in [the persons of the Trinity] a certain inexpressible and incomprehensible union and distinction, since neither the difference of the person breaks the continuity of the nature, nor the common attribute of substance dissolves the individual character of their distinctive marks'; *Letters*, trans. A. C. Way in *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. R. J. Deferrari, New York, 1951–5, vol. I, p. 90.

[44] Abū Rā'iṭa uses the phrase 'one from two', *wāḥid min ithnayn*, in numerous places, following Cyril.

[45] Abū Rā'iṭa here offers his listeners one of Cyril's favourite examples, that of the body and soul in one human being, to explain the manner of the union. See Cyril, *Scholia de Incarnatione Unigeniti* 10, *PG*, vol. LXXVII, col. 1380CD.

nonsense and demonstrates that 'perfection', *kamāl*, can be understood in ways which do not require limitation and are not a threat to divine unity (para. 8).[46] He closes his letter with an admonition to the *ishxan* to beware of being misled and to continue to search for the truth.

When one compares the two letters, Abū Rā'iṭa appears to have followed Abū Qurra's letter structurally, choosing to respond to general themes instead of particular points. The main bodies of both Abū Rā'iṭa's and Abū Qurra's synopses are occupied with explaining the unity of God and the individual persons of the Trinity, concentrating on the Incarnation of the Son and its characteristic properties. The major portion of Abū Qurra's letter is concerned with the Incarnation, although he also provides relevant material on the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity and the unity of God. Abū Rā'iṭa, on the other hand, commences his exposition with the unity of God, followed by the Monophysite teaching on the Incarnation.

However, what is immediately striking to the reader of Abū Rā'iṭa letter to Ashot is that it goes beyond the issues raised by Abū Qurra in his own letter to the Armenians, offering responses written with very different purposes and concerns in mind. Whereas there is no evidence of attention to Islam in Abū Qurra's treatise, Abū Rā'iṭa has crafted his refutation to counter both Melkite and Islamic criticisms, repeatedly turning to problems raised explicitly by the Qur'an. Taking advantage of the questions Ashot raises within the context of Abū Qurra's visit to Armenia, he uses the opportunity to confront Islamic charges of polytheism in an interesting and unique way. This is clear from the outset when Abū Rā'iṭa begins his letter by underscoring the reliability of the Old and New Testaments for what is necessary to faith, a particular issue for Muslims but not a matter of debate for Christians. In answer to Abū Qurra's appeal to continuity between Chalcedon and the fidelity of St Peter to the true faith, Abū Rā'iṭa emphasizes a kind of divine pedagogy of the Trinity in which the will of God has been gradually revealed through the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit from the First Covenant to the Council of Ephesus. This strategy is intended to counter the Muslim concept of revelation as a single, unchanging body sent down to various prophets throughout history.

Although Abū Rā'iṭa firmly believes that disagreements over Christology are a central issue that bears continued debate, he has identified the real pitfall facing Christians living in Muslim-dominated areas during the

[46] The first is the perfection of quiddity, *māhiyya*, and existence, *wujūd*. In this sense both the one and the three are perfectly divine so that the three *hypostaseis* are not less divine than the one *ousia*. However, a second way to understand perfection is as a perfect or complete number. In this sense, one of the *hypostaseis* is not the total number, who are three (para. 8).

ʿAbbāsid period as their inability to defend their faith from the accusations of polytheism and limitation of God. His letter to Ashot attempts to address this problem by providing clear answers to both Muslims and Christians through an indirect refutation of the charges. Consequently, he is especially careful to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is credibly grounded in the revelation of the One God who is proclaimed in the scriptures and taught by the councils. Simultaneously, Abū Rāʾiṭa sets out to demolish any suggestion of Nestorianism in Christian doctrine (which he maintains is at the root of Chalcedon), partly because of his suspicion that it gives credence to the Muslim teaching that Jesus was only a prophet, and not an individual Person of the Trinity. Underlying his argument is his conviction that the Cyrillian christological formulation is less vulnerable to Islamic critique than that of Chalcedon.

In conclusion, the evidence shows that Abū Rāʾiṭa either had seen a copy of the letter sent by Abū Qurra to Ashot Msaker, or he had a very detailed outline available to him. What remains unique about Abū Rāʾiṭa's first letter is his intertwining of answers to issues of concern to Muslims and to Monophysite and Chalcedonian Christians in a genuine attempt to respond both theologically and pastorally to the problems of his day. Although he had been charged with providing an exposition of the Jacobite faith to counter Abū Qurra's propositions, Abū Rāʾiṭa was also aware that the situation in Armenia was similar to his own where the increasing presence of Muslims in areas formerly dominated by Christians was presenting various problems for the church. Motivated by this knowledge he set about formulating his arguments against Chalcedon and Abū Qurra, all the while employing a vocabulary accessible to Muslim intellectuals.

Abū Rāʾiṭa's efforts were apparently successful. Ashot did not turn to the Melkite church (and the Armenian church ultimately resisted conversion to Islam), and Nonnus remained a while in Armenia where he was befriended by several people at the court. However, before the conclusion of the story Nonnus appears to have run into a problem that he could not answer. This necessitated a second letter from Abū Rāʾiṭa addressing the particular issue of the *Trishagion*. But this topic must wait for another day.

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ʿAMMĀR AL-BAṢRĪ ON THE INCARNATION

Mark Beaumont

ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī as a systematic theologian in Arabic

The early third/ninth century Nestorian, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī offered two of the first known Arabic defences of the incarnation in his only surviving works, *The Book of the Proof* and *The Book of Questions and Answers*. ʿAmmār's birth and death dates are unknown, but he appears to have been a contemporary of the Muslim scholar Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf who died around 225/840 and who, according to the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm, wrote 'a book against ʿAmmār the Christian in refutation of the Christians'.[1]

Michel Hayek, ʿAmmār's modern editor, claims that ʿAmmār produced the first systematic theology in the Arabic language.[2] This judgement seems justified within the Nestorian community if comparison is made with the writings of the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I from the second half of the second/eighth century. For while Timothy's answers to the Caliph al-Mahdī's questions could certainly be described as systematic, the lengthy audience with the caliph in 165/781–2 was written up in Syriac, and only later translated into Arabic, some time in the last decade of the second/eighth century.[3]

Another candidate for the title of first Christian systematic theologian in Arabic could be the Jacobite Abū Rā'iṭa, who wrote on the same theological issues that occupied ʿAmmār. Although the dates of his birth and death are unknown, he seems to have been active in the same period as ʿAmmār, for his *Reply to the Melkites on the Union* (of the divine and human in Christ) opens with a reference to a face to face debate with Theodore Abū Qurra, the Melkite theologian, who died around 214/829.[4] In Hayek's opinion, however, 'neither Abū Rā'iṭa nor Abū Qurra had

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[1] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. M. Riḍā-Tajaddud, Tehran, 1971, p. 204, trans. B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, New York, 1970, vol. I, p. 388.

[2] See M. Hayek, "Ammār al-Baṣrī. La première somme de Théologie Chrétienne en langue arabe, ou deux apologies du Christianisme', *Islamochristiana* 2, 1976, pp. 69–113.

[3] The Syriac text is edited and translated into English by A. Mingana as 'The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi', (*Woodbrooke Studies* 2) *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 12, 1928, pp. 137–298. The Arabic text is edited by L. Cheikho in *Al-Machriq* 19, 1921, pp. 359–74, which is reproduced and translated into French by H. Putman, in *L'Église sous Timothée I*, Beirut, 1975.

[4] Abū Rā'iṭa, '*Al-radd ʿalā al-Malkiya fī al-ittiḥād*', in *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb Ibn Ḫidma Abū Rā'iṭa*, ed. G. Graf (*CSCO* 130) Louvain, 1951, pp. 65–72.

the rigour or creativity of ʿAmmār.'[5] To be sure, Abū Rāʾiṭa wrote treatises of an occasional nature on individual topics, whereas ʿAmmār's two books both cover the main theological issues discussed at the time in an orderly fashion. In that sense ʿAmmār is more systematic than Abū Rāʾiṭa. Nevertheless, Abū Rāʾiṭa's writing on the incarnation is as rigorous as that of ʿAmmār, so on this particular topic both men could share the title of first Christian systematic theologian in the Arabic language.

Two contexts for Christology in early third/ninth century theology in Arabic

Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians had been divided over how to understand the union between the divine and human in Christ long before the third/ninth century. The three communities defined themselves in terms of their view of the Incarnation, so it is not surprising to find treatises by Abū Qurra and Abū Rāʾiṭa defending their respective Christologies against what they regard as the inadequate views of other Christian communities.[6] This intensity of disagreement between Christians over how to articulate the Incarnation provided one of the contexts for third/ninth century theologians.

The other context was the fact of Islamic rule. Just as the Patriarch Timothy had attempted to answer questions posed by the Caliph al-Mahdī in the late second/eighth century, so Abū Qurra, Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār tried to answer questions posed by Muslims. This second context of Islam provoked sustained work by Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār on the Incarnation. Abū Rāʾiṭa's *Letter on the Incarnation* consists of forty-four answers to questions posed by the type of person who doubts the validity of the whole idea.[7] ʿAmmār's *Book of Questions and Answers* treats in four sections questions about the existence of God and his creation, the four Gospels, the Trinity and the Incarnation, the main topics of dispute between Muslims and Christians. The section on the Incarnation answers fifty-one questions, and is almost three times as long as Abū Rāʾiṭa's *Letter*.[8]

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[5] M. Hayek, 'Première somme', p. 81.

[6] Abū Qurra wrote a 'Confession of the Orthodox Faith' in which he expounds the definition of the Council of Chalcedon and criticises several faulty Christologies, including those of the Jacobites and the Nestorians. See I. Dick, 'Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra', *Le Muséon* 72, 1959, pp. 53–67. Abū Rāʾiṭa produced more than one treatise defending Jacobite Christology before Melkites in particular. See his 'Replies to the Melkites', in Graf, *Schriften*, pp. 65–72, and 105–30.

[7] Abū Rāʾiṭa, '*Al-risāla fī al-tajassud*', in Graf, *Schriften*, pp. 25–64.

[8] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, '*Kitāb al-masāʾil wa-al-ajwiba: al-maqāla al-rābiʿa*', ed. M. Hayek in *ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, Apologie et Controverses*, Beirut, 1977, pp. 178–265.

Not all of these questions may actually have been asked by Muslims in the third/ninth century, but Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār were using a method of presenting theology that had become established by the time they were writing. For, as Sydney Griffith has pointed out, books of questions and answers were already conventional in Syriac theological writing, and ʿAmmār's *Book of Questions and Answers* 'must be seen against the background of a long intellectual tradition, transmitted to ʿAmmār through the well developed Nestorian school system, as well as in the context of the intellectual concerns of the Islamic, Arabic *ʿilm al-kalām*.'[9] Abū Rāʾiṭa and ʿAmmār were evidently attempting to adapt a traditional style of writing that had been used in a Christian teacher-pupil relationship in order to meet the new challenge of Muslims who were basically sceptical of the Christian theological enterprise as such. They tried to combine an exposition of the Incarnation for Christians with a defence of the truth of the Incarnation for Muslims.

The apologetic for the Incarnation in the Book of Questions and Answers

In his *Book of Questions and Answers* ʿAmmār deals with nine issues concerning the Incarnation: questions 1–10, the union between the divine and human in Christ;[10] 11–14, whether God is embodied; 15–20, the way God is affected by the Incarnation; 21–26, why the choice of Mary's son; 27–31, how the Incarnation affects other humans; 32–35, why Christ suffered; 36–42, the crucifixion and resurrection; 43–46, the relationship of Christ and the Trinity; and 47–51, the salvation secured by Christ.[11] In this ordered progression, ʿAmmār begins with a Nestorian definition of the union of divine and human natures, and moves on to tackle the basic Muslim objections to the idea of the Incarnation. Then he turns to the purposes of the Incarnation, how it relates to a Trinitarian understanding of God, and finally the ultimate salvation that the Incarnation provides. This is a comprehensive treatment of the doctrine that combines detailed exposition of Christian teaching for fellow Nestorians with

[9] S. H. Griffith, 'ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burhān*: Christian *Kalām* in the first Abbasid century', *Le Muséon* 96, 1983, p. 154.

[10] See the discussion of this issue among early Arab Christians and Muslims in D. Thomas' chapter in this volume, pp. 236–9.

[11] Abū Rāʾiṭa covers most of these topics in a different order. Three additional issues discussed by Abū Rāʾiṭa but not by ʿAmmār are, whether the human body of the incarnate one is an additional attribute of God, whether use of father/son language is appropriate, and how the death of Christ could be willed by God. Issues discussed by ʿAmmār that are not mentioned by Abū Rāʾiṭa are, the choice of Mary's son, how the Incarnation affects other humans, the resurrection of Christ, and the salvation Christ brought.

an apology designed to commend the Incarnation to Muslims. We will now examine in detail how ʿAmmār develops his apology for this central Christian belief.

The Muslim rejection of the idea of the Incarnation is based on the threat to the transcendence of God posed by a union of divine and human natures. Question 11 from the section devoted to the union between the divine and human in Christ raises the issue for the first time: How is it possible for the divine nature to clothe itself with human nature without becoming limited by it? In his answer, ʿAmmār uses the analogy of the sun giving light to the earth without being limited to that space, in order to support the belief that God the Word 'took human nature as a temple to dwell in' but is not confined to the temple.[12] The analogy of the light from the sun is also used by Abū Rāʾiṭa to make the same point.[13]

This leads to a question about whether it is appropriate to talk of God having a human body if he is transcendent.[14] ʿAmmār distinguishes between God and his Word so that he can avoid saying that God as such became embodied: 'We do not speak of God's body. God the Word became human' (*Allāh al-kalima ta'annasa*).[15] In making this distinction, ʿAmmār thinks that his own Nestorian understanding of the union of divine and human natures in Christ safeguards the transcendence of God in a way that Jacobite and Melkite definitions do not. For the Jacobites fail to distinguish the divine and human in Christ by speaking of 'one nature and one hypostasis' (*jawhar wāḥid wa-qunūm wāḥid*), which results in the body of Christ being the body of God, and the Melkite insistence that Mary is the mother of God implies that God has a human body, as if Mary gave birth to God. However, the Gospel writers Matthew and Luke speak of the birth of Christ not the birth of God. Therefore, only Nestorian Christology maintains the transcendence of God.[16] Here, ʿAmmār appeals to Muslims to recognise that only Nestorians have rightly understood the truth about how God relates to the world. It is ironic that a Nestorian theologian can call on Muslims to authenticate a Christology that was regarded as heresy by the great Councils of the Church.[17]

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[12] ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, '*Kitāb al-masā'il wa-al-ajwiba*', p. 194.
[13] Abū Rāʾiṭa, '*Al-risāla fī al-tajassud*', pp. 34–5.
[14] The text of the question is missing but the answer reveals its nature.
[15] '*Kitab al-masā'il*', p. 196.
[16] Ibid., pp. 197–8.
[17] Nestorius had been anathematized by the Council of Ephesus in 431 for refusing to confess that Mary was mother of God. His followers refused to accept the definition of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which stated that there was a union of two natures in one hypostasis, preferring to think of the two natures as two hypostases. Nestorians thrived outside the Roman Empire after their expulsion by Emperor Zeno between 474 and 491; see A. S. Atiya, *A History of Eastern Christianity*, London, 1968, p. 252, also

The objection follows that even if God does not have a body, the notion of a union between the divine and human natures must mean that the human adversely affects the divine nature. In reply, ʿAmmār concedes that some things cannot be known for certain, and we do not know how the divine united with the human. It is analogous to the creative activity of God, since we do not know how God creates: 'If we Christians were to ask you Muslims how God creates, you would say that you do not know . . . Likewise, there is no reply to a question about how the divine united with the human nature.'[18] Here ʿAmmār uses the 'without knowing how' principle of God's actions that becomes familiar in Muslim theology to support an appropriate agnosticism in Christian theology.[19] The limits of theological discourse are reached at this point, but ʿAmmār is able to contend that Christians and Muslims equally are driven to silence over the way to describe the creative actions of God.

Nevertheless, Christians claim that Christ suffered and died, so how can they say that the divine nature in Christ remains unaffected by pain and death? ʿAmmār's opening exposition of Nestorian Christology had already stated that Christ suffered pain in his human nature only, in such a way that his divine nature was untouched.[20] This concern to isolate the divinity of Christ from suffering was shared by the Melkite Abū Qurra, and the Jacobite Abū Rāʾiṭa. Abū Qurra, in a brief apologetic treatise entitled *A reply to the one who refuses to attribute the Incarnation to God*, holds that 'the eternal Son condescended to our need of salvation by coming in the body which he took from the pure virgin Mary, in which he experienced pain and suffering.'[21] Put this way, Abū Qurra is confident that 'God is not effaced or limited or cancelled out' by the suffering of the human body.[22] For his part, Abū Rāʾiṭa distinguishes two attributes in Christ rather than two natures, in his treatise entitled *Demonstration of Christianity and the Holy Trinity*. The eternal Word united with the human body so that they became one nature (*jawhar*), which retains the functions of the original divinity and humanity. 'Christ is truly divine and truly human; he retains these two attributes (*ṣifatayn*). In his divinity he always lives and does not die or even feel pain; but in his humanity he does die and feel pain.'[23]

A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. I, London, 1975, p. 451, and vol. II/4, London, 1996, p. 504.

[18] '*Kitāb al-masāʾil*', pp. 214–15.

[19] See also Abū Rāʾiṭa, '*Al-risāla fī al-tajassud*', pp. 47–8, who uses a similar argument, though without explicit reference to Islamic thought.

[20] '*Kitāb al-masāʾil*', p. 188.

[21] Abū Qurra, '*Maymar fī al-radd ʿalā man yankaru li-Allāh al-tajassud*', in C. Bacha, *Les Oeuvres arabes de Théodore Aboucarra Évêque d'Harran*, Beirut, 1904, p. 182.

[22] Ibid., p. 180.

[23] Abū Rāʾiṭa, '*Ithbāt dīn al-naṣrāniyya wa-ithbāt al-thalāthi al-muqaddas*', in Graf, *Schriften*, p. 151.

This attempt to separate the divine and human elements of Christ leaves Christians open to the charge that they undermine the unity of divine and human. Question 29 in ʿAmmār's *Book of Questions and Answers* asks, 'How can you claim that there is no separation between the two natures when only the human nature experiences pain and death?'[24] ʿAmmār denies that the unity between the two natures is broken. Divine power and authority are truly united with human weakness, and there is no separation or distance between them.[25] However, ʿAmmār goes on to consider the possibility that there could have been a split between the two natures though, in fact, this did not happen. Just as a son who inherits from his father needs to prove his faithfulness to his father throughout his life, so the human nature of Christ had to prove by action that it was worthy of the union with the divine nature. Scripture supports this idea of testing. Only after the resurrection is Christ given all authority in heaven and earth, as Matthew 28.18 attests. Christ had to be faithful even to death in order to be able to pass on his divine authority to those who trusted in him. But while Matthew 28.18 might be thought to imply that Christ was only given divine authority after his death and resurrection and not before, Matthew 11.27 shows that Christ claimed that his Father had given him divine power and authority beforehand, though the full exercise of that authority had to wait for the outcome of his obedience to death.[26] This lengthy discussion of Christ's life and death is a demonstration by ʿAmmār that the human nature could have failed the test of obedience but did not. The human nature remained on probation until full obedience to the will of the Father had been completed, and while the union between the divine and human natures was a reality from the beginning of Christ's life, it had to be actualised under extreme conditions. That the human nature of Christ passed the test means that he has become qualified to grant others a share in his victory over death.

Abū Rāʾiṭa also answers a question about a separation between divinity and humanity at the point of Christ's death. When Christ died, his human body perished but his divinity was still alive. He died a human death, which did not affect his divine state, and therefore the union of the Word with the flesh remained unaffected when the flesh died.[27] Abū Rāʾiṭa gives the impression that the divine Word was always in control of the human body, thus preserving the union in the death of the body. ʿAmmār, on the other hand, argues that the human nature had the potential to disrupt the union, for there is a genuine dialectic between

[24] '*Kitāb al-masāʾil*', p. 224.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., pp. 225–8.
[27] Abū Rāʾiṭa, '*Al-risāla fī-al-tajassud*', pp. 39–40.

the two natures. In his answer to Question 18, whether the union resulted in a new kind of human being, ʿAmmār earlier states that the Word gave to the human nature his authority but not his eternity.[28] Applying this differentiation to the death of Christ means that the eternal nature of Christ is unaffected by death, but his divine authority is reduced to impotence before being restored at the resurrection.

The ultimate challenge to the Incarnation comes in Question 32, 'why did Christ suffer and die if he possessed divine glory and authority?'[29] From a Muslim perspective, the sheer pointlessness of the idea of Incarnation is exposed in the death of Christ. ʿAmmār answers that Christ chose to rescue humanity by submitting to death so that those subject to death would be raised to life. He has two illustrations. Christ is like a prizefighter who uses up all his strength to defeat an opponent, or a doctor who wants to show his ability to heal by swallowing some poisonous medicine before giving it to his patient.[30] ʿAmmār goes on to argue that by dying and rising from death, Christ offered visible proof that death can be overcome. Human beings needed help with their tendency to doubt, so Christ died and rose again to 'place firmly in their hearts the promise of their resurrection'.[31]

The argument that the Incarnation alleviates human doubt is also found in ʿAmmār's shorter treatment of the Incarnation in his *Book of the Proof*. Here he argues that it was God's ultimate plan to reveal himself in Christ so that no one should be in any doubt about the character of God. 'He appeared to human beings in human flesh and spoke to them about himself, revealing his authority and power to them.'[32] God condescends to the human desire to see the divine nature, and since people will one day meet him for judgement is it not proper for them to see their judge? Yet, because God cannot be seen directly he 'veiled himself in human nature' through the Incarnation.[33]

In summary, 'Ammar's apology for the incarnation can be described in Michel Hayek's terms as both rigorous and also creative. The rigour is seen in his careful handling of the supposed separation of the two natures in the death of Christ, and the creativity in his illustrations for the purpose of the incarnation. The death of Christ is not the dismemberment of the union of divinity and humanity, since the authority of the divine nature does suffer eclipse though not its eternal character, a

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[28] '*Kītāb al-masā'il*', p. 213.
[29] Ibid., p. 229.
[30] Ibid., p. 233.
[31] Ibid.
[32] 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, '*Kītāb al-Burhān*', in M. Hayek, *ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, Apologie et Controverses*, p. 62.
[33] Ibid., p. 69.

more suggestive approach to the suffering of the divine in Christ than Jacobite or Melkite alternatives that protected the divine altogether from loss. His illustrations for the purpose of the incarnation make a meaningful case for the condescension of God towards needy humans. As a result of his careful exposition of his beliefs, some Muslims might have been able to overcome their misgivings about the Incarnation and reconsider it as a worthy action in which God overcame human doubt through appearing in human form and abolishing death for others.

THE CHRISTIAN AL-MA'MŪN TRADITION

Mark N. Swanson

Introduction

This study grows out of some remarks that I made almost in passing ten years ago in the first chapter of my doctoral dissertation.[1] There I commented on the ambivalence found in early Arabic Christian literature about the age of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198/813–218/833). On the one hand, the chaos of the civil war between him and his brother al-Amīn (r. 193/809–198/813) appears to have left its mark on Arabic Christian apocalyptic literature, notably one recension of *The Wisdom of Sibylle*.[2] On the other hand, the caliph's reputation for religious openness and his encouragement of inter-confessional debate left its mark on another set of texts. 'In fact', I commented, 'one may speak of a Christian 'al-Ma'mūn tradition', one trajectory of which has him converting to Christianity. . . .'

After ten years, I wish to look a bit more closely at this Christian al-Ma'mūn tradition. This look is unlikely to yield much that is new in the way of historical information. Yet, I am encouraged in this research by the recent appearance of several studies that do not merely attempt to establish historical facts, but look carefully at the literary means by which the medieval sources for the life of al-Ma'mūn treated controversial issues, reinforced confessional identity, or attempted to point out lessons about God's mysterious workings in human affairs. In his *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, Tayeb El-Hibri is attentive to elements of intertextuality and symbolism in the standard Sunnī Muslim narratives of al-Ma'mūn's caliphate.[3] David Wasserstein's study of "The Majlis of al-Riḍā" examines the ambiguous portrait of al-Ma'mūn in an important Shī'ī source, and goes so far as to suggest that the figure of al-Ma'mūn found there

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[1] M. N. Swanson, 'Folly to the *Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian-Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D.', doctoral dissertation, Rome, PISAI, 1992. The remarks discussed here are from Chapter 1, section C.

[2] J. Schleifer, *Die Erzählung der Sibylle: Ein Apokryph* (*Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, philosophisch-historisch Klasse* LIII, 1), Vienna, 1908. The recension in question is that which Schleifer labelled Arab. III. This will be discussed in greater detail later.

[3] T. El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Hārūn al-Rashīd and the Narrative of the 'Abbāsid Caliphate*, Cambridge, 1999. Also, see M. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma'mūn*, Cambridge, 2000, Chapter 2.

might fruitfully be compared to that of Pontius Pilate in the Christian traditions that made him into a saint and martyr![4] Finally, in his studies of 'the monk in the emir's *majlis*', Sidney Griffith has identified and described the apologetic *genre* of one of the most important of the 'Christian al-Ma'mūn' texts, the account of Theodore Abū Qurra's debate with Muslim scholars in the presence of the caliph.[5] It is with this text that we must begin this survey.

Theodore Abū Qurra in the majlis *of al-Ma'mūn*

The account of the debate of Theodore Abū Qurra with a number of Muslim *mutakallimūn* in the presence of the caliph al-Ma'mūn is known in a variety of recensions from a large number of manuscripts.[6] According to the Syriac *Chronicle of AD 1234*, this debate took place at Ḥarrān in 214/829.[7] Griffith's recent studies of this account[8] as well as the publication (if not the wide distribution) of a preliminary edition by Fr Ignace Dick[9] absolve me of the necessity of describing the debate and the witnesses to it in detail. Suffice to say here that accounts of the debate were widely known in the Christian East from at least the seventh/thirteenth century on,[10] and perhaps much earlier.

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[4] D. J. Wasserstein, 'The Majlis of al-Riḍā: A Religious Debate in the Court of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn as Represented in a Shī'ī Hagiographical Work about the Eighth Imām 'Alī ibn Mūsā Al-Riḍā', in H. Lazarus-Yafeh, M. R. Cohen, S. Somekh and S. H. Griffith eds, *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam* (*Studies in Arabic Language and Literature* 4), Wiesbaden, 1999, pp. 108–19.

[5] S. H. Griffith, 'The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*: Reflections on a Popular Genre of Christian Literary Apologetics in Arabic in the Early Islamic Period', in Lazarus-Yafeh, *The Majlis*, pp. 13–65.

[6] The main division is between 'Melkite' and 'Jacobite' recensions, although comparison of manuscripts of the Melkite recension shows different stages in the development of the text. For lists of manuscripts, see G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, 5 vols (*Studi e Testi* 118, 133, 146, 147, 172), Vatican City, 1944–1953, vol. II, pp. 21–2 and J. Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'église melchite du V^e^ au XX^e^ siècle*, vol. II, tome 2, *750–X^e^ S.*, Louvain and Paris, 1988, pp. 124–5. Graf and Nasrallah list between them 15 copies of the Melkite recension and 10 copies of the Jacobite.

[7] I.-B. Chabot, *Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens* (*CSCO* 15), Paris, 1916, p. 23. As is well known, this work made extensive use of the *History* of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, Jacobite patriarch from AD 818 to 845.

[8] In addition to the study mentioned above, see S. H. Griffith, 'The Qur'ān in Arab Christian Texts; The Development of an Apologetical Argument: Abū Qurrah in the *Mağlis* of al-Ma'mūn', *Parole de l'Orient* 24, 1999, pp. 203–33.

[9] I. Dick, *La discussion d'Abū Qurra avec les ulémas musulmans devant le Calife al-Ma'mūn*, [Aleppo], 1999. See the review by J. Grand'Henry in *Le Muséon* 113, 2000, pp. 229–30.

[10] In addition to the evidence of *The Chronicle of AD 1234*, the oldest manuscript that I know of is Vatican Borgia Arabic 135 of AD 1308. Soon afterwards Abū al-Barakāt Ibn Kabar testified in his ecclesiastical encyclopedia *Miṣbāḥ al-zulma fī īḍāḥ al-khidma* that the text of the debate was well-known (*maʿrūfa*); [Samir Khalil, ed.], *Miṣbāḥ al-zulma fī*

To summarize the account drastically: the great Melkite bishop-theologian Theodore Abū Qurra is summoned into the *majlis* of the caliph al-Ma'mūn, who immediately begins to ask him questions. Over the course of successive days, one Muslim interlocutor after another comes forward to debate with him. In the end, all are reduced to silence by the Christian controversialist, who adroitly uses the Qur'an in order to make his arguments.[11] In the end, Abū Qurra is left in command of the field—and the admiring caliph rewards him richly.

What is important for this paper is the image of the caliph al-Ma'mūn that emerges from this text. In the first place, the caliph is portrayed as energetic, intelligent and engaged. It is he who takes the initiative in summoning Abū Qurra and in asking the first question of the debate, and he is very much a presence throughout the text, following the arguments attentively, revelling in well-scored debating points and making sure that participants debate according to the rules.

In the second place, al-Ma'mūn is well-disposed towards the brilliant Christian controversialist, appearing to be far more interested in the quality of argument than in the victory of any given position. Although al-Ma'mūn is a Muslim, the report is full of expressions of the pleasure that he takes in Abū Qurra's debating prowess and the discomfiture of his opponents. Thus, we read that after some of Abū Qurra's mouth-stopping sallies al-Ma'mūn 'laughed for a long time',[12] or 'smiled and was very pleased',[13] or 'was filled with happiness and extreme joy'.[14] He does not hesitate to make this pleasure known in outbursts such as 'By God you're right, Abū Qurra!',[15] or 'By God you've done well, Abū Qurra, and have put your opponents to shame!'[16]

In the third place, as Griffith has stressed, al-Ma'mūn is portrayed as scrupulously fair. Near the beginning of the debate he sets the ground-rules:

> This is a *majlis* characterized by justice and fairness. No one will commit excesses in it. So present your argument and answer without dread. There is nothing here 'except by that which is better'. . . .[17]

The words 'except by that which is better' come, of course, from the Qur'an: 'Do not argue with the People of the Book except by that which

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īḍāḥ al-khidma li-l-qass Shams al-Ri'āsa Abū al-Barakāt al-ma'rūf bi-Ibn Kabar, Cairo, 1971, p. 301.

[11] This Christian use of the Qur'an is the focus of Griffith, 'The Qur'ān in Arab Christian Texts'.

[12] Paris Arabic 70, ff. 148v, 180v.

[13] Ibid., f. 170v.

[14] Ibid., f. 212r.

[15] Ibid., f. 189v. A group of people in attendance responds in the same way at 176r.

[16] Ibid., f. 214r.

[17] Ibid., f. 152r. These 'ground-rules' are restated at f. 166r.

is better . . .' (29.46). As Griffith points out, the phrase recurs frequently throughout the debate, as al-Ma'mūn repeatedly reminds Muslim debaters of the rules and encourages Abū Qurra to speak his mind without fear of reprisal.[18] The caliph not only states the rules; he enforces them. When the hot-tempered Sullām b. Muʿāwiya al-Hamdānī launches into an *ad hominem* attack against Abū Qurra, the caliph minces no words in his rebuke:

> Shut up, and may God put you to shame! You have spoken in a way that is stupid, foolish and ignorant. . . .[19]

Sullām is ignominiously expelled from the *majlis*; then Abū Qurra is dismissed for the day, with the caliph's blessing.[20]

At the very end of the debate, al-Ma'mūn expresses his disappointment that the Muslims have not done better against this Christian controversialist; but this disappointment does not translate into lack of honour or affection for the victor:

> Al-Ma'mūn said, 'How I wish that I had never seen this day, nor seen the failure of the Muslims and their lack of argument on behalf of their religion!' Then he ordered a robe of honour and annual gifts for Abū Qurra, and made him his companion in the *majlis*.[21]

How might Abū Qurra have responded to such a show of honour? We pass on to our second text.

Abū Qurra: Praise and petition for the caliph al-Ma'mūn

One of the manuscripts of the monastery of St Catherine at Mount Sinai which contains works attributed to Theodore Abū Qurra is Sinai Arabic 447, a codex of the seventh/thirteenth century. Its contents are best described as 'miscellaneous',[22] although the Genesis commentary of St John Chrysostom, the epistle of St Ephraem the Syrian to John the Monk, and the Catholic Epistles and the Apocalypse occupy the majority of its pages. One of several short pieces found in the manuscript is Abū Qurra's brief *Apology* for the Christian faith which Fr Ignace Dick published in 1959.[23]

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[18] Griffith, 'The Monk in the Emir's Majlis', p. 42.
[19] Ibid., f. 164v.
[20] Ibid., f. 165r.
[21] Ibid., ff. 214r–v.
[22] So A. S. Atiya, *The Arabic Manuscripts of Mount Sinai: A Hand-List of the Arabic Manuscripts and Scrolls Microfilmed at the Library of the Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai*, Baltimore, 1955, p. 14.
[23] The *Apology* is found at ff. 128v–131r. Edition and French translation in I. Dick, 'Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra', *Le Muséon* 72, 1959, pp. 62–7.

The same Sinai manuscript contains another piece attributed to Abū Qurra: about seven pages of text that Aziz Suryal Atiya in his *Hand-List* described as 'a curious prayer for the Caliph al-Ma'mūn by Abū-Qurra Bishop of Ḥarrān'.[24] As Dick has pointed out, the actual text does not conform to the odd title that introduces it: 'From the fast, to be said in the desert to the congregation. Abū Qurra, Bishop of Ḥarrān, said it.'[25] At this point in the manuscript, the reader has just read two anonymous homilies and therefore is *expecting* another homily appropriate to a particular season in the church's calendar. Instead, what the reader finds is an exercise in panegyric, culminating in petitions for the caliph. It begins as follows:[26]

> May God strengthen the Commander of the Faithful,
> the *imām* al-Ma'mūn, the victorious leader, the fortunate caliph,
> the beloved master, whose assault is terrible,
> the one who is gracious to the one rejected,
> and counsel of the one assisted,
> possessor of remarkable compassion,
> courage granted, and a community sought. . . .

The virtues of the caliph are expressed in pithy phrases: one-, two- or three-word attributes are grouped in twos or threes according to rhyme or grammatical structure. This pattern extends over more than three pages of text before the thought units lengthen into full sentences for nearly two more pages. The final two pages of text are taken up with a prayer for the well-being of the caliph and, through him, of all who dwell in his domains. (See Appendix I.)

The panegyric holds few surprises. The caliph is praised for his strength and military prowess, but also for his efforts to keep the peace and effect reconciliation. He is 'severe in justice',[27] ripping apart the schemes of evil-doers and showing himself the enemy of hypocrisy and corruption. He is merciful to the poor, widows, the blind and otherwise afflicted, and is the champion of victims of wrongdoing and oppression. He is a pious servant of God:

> his concern is divine, his desire is spiritual, his goal is heavenly.[28]

In addition, he is endowed with great wisdom, and dazzles the philosophers of this world:

> When the renowned philosopher converses with al-Ma'mūn,
> incapacity of speech dries up his tongue,

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[24] Atiya, *Hand-List*, p. 14.
[25] Dick, 'Deux écrits', p. 54.
[26] Sinai Arabic 447, f. 179r.
[27] *ṣārim al-'adl*; Sinai Arabic 447, f. 180r.
[28] Sinai Arabic 447, ff. 180v–181r.

as he passes from what is designated 'philosophy'
to true insight and wisdom.[29]

The caliph's gifts and virtues are in such harmony that he provides a model of human wholeness:

His character is appropriate to his intellect;
his heart is an indicator of his thought;
and all is in agreement with his Lord.[30]

In the end, the panegyrist is left bewailing the inadequacy of his praise:

If I were to delve into all the genres of panegyric,
what al-Ma'mūn deserves would be greater than that![31]

Contained within this remarkable exercise are several statements about the duties of the caliph with regard to his *raʿiyya*, his 'flock' or subjects. For example, at one point praise of the caliph's piety leads directly into a reminder of his responsibilities:

[He is] a fearer of his Lord,
a worshipper of his Creator,
obedient to his God;
compassionate to his subjects,
gentle to his community;
faithful to his covenant,
one who makes good on his promises.[32]

Some lines later (when two-word attributes have finally given way to sentences) the word *raʿiyya* reappears:

His good pleasure is that security should encompass all his subjects . . .[33]

And finally, one of the petitions of Abū Qurra's prayer is:

May God inspire in him patience, mercy and justice for all his subjects![34]

In such a short work, this triple mention of al-Ma'mūn's *raʿiyya* is not without significance. The Christian panegyrist seems to go as far as he can to remind the caliph not only of the virtues of mercy and justice, but also of his obligations as an Islamic ruler towards *all* his subjects, including the *ahl al-dhimma* under his authority.

What shall we make of this strange work? In the first place, although it could readily be adapted for *any* Muslim ruler, it is not impossible that the author had the historical al-Ma'mūn in mind. The statement

[29] Ibid., f. 181r.
[30] Ibid., f. 181r.
[31] Ibid., f. 181v.
[32] Ibid., f. 180r.
[33] Ibid., f. 181r.
[34] Ibid., f. 182r.

that he silenced the philosophers seems especially suited for the patron of the Bayt al-Ḥikma. Furthermore, the description of al-Ma'mūn as *rātiq al-futūq wa-wāṣil al-shuqūq*, 'the one who sews up what is torn and brings together what has been split',[35] seems especially pertinent, if somewhat ironic, in the aftermath of the civil war that brought him to power.

In his article of 1959, Dick expressed his opinion that Abū Qurra was not really the author of this piece, but that his name was introduced in the title because of 'the more or less legendary contests of our author with the celebrated caliph'.[36] Indeed, the panegyric and prayer of Abū Qurra may be seen as a fitting pendant to the debate report. There, we noted, the caliph al-Ma'mūn is characterized by intelligence and initiative, by his favourable disposition towards his Christian subject and, above all, by fairness. In the panegyric, al-Ma'mūn is praised for qualities just such as these—and is subtly encouraged not to forget his 'patience, mercy and justice for *all* his subjects', including the Christians. Therefore I think it not unlikely that the piece was composed by someone who was familiar with a recension of the report of Abū Qurra's debate in the *majlis* of al-Ma'mūn. Why it was composed is not at all clear, although it may have been intended as a thought experiment in, or even a model of, how a Christian leader might speak of and pray for a high Muslim official. The result is a piece in which literate flattery is laid on thickly, but which does not fail to remind the virtuous official of his God-given responsibilities towards *all* his subjects, including the weakest of them.

The Life of Theodore of Edessa

Introduction

The next text to be considered is the Arabic recension of *The Life of Theodore of Edessa*, according to which al-Ma'mūn, after being healed by the saintly bishop of Edessa, converts to Christianity, is baptized in the Tigris, and eventually makes public profession of his faith and dies a martyr's death.

The Arabic recension has never been published, although it is available in a number of manuscripts. J. Nasrallah has provided a list of six, including two seventh/thirteenth-century manuscripts at Mt Sinai, ninth/fifteenth-century manuscripts in Paris and in Jerusalem, and two more recent manuscripts at Balamand.[37] Nearly sixty years ago Vasiliev

[35] Ibid., f. 179v.
[36] Dick, 'Deux écrits', p. 54.
[37] Nasrallah, *Histoire*, p. 162. The claim that there is a copy in Sinai Arabic 452 appears to be a mistake.

published a study of the *Life* which included some comments on what he called the 'Arabian version' and a translation of some paragraphs from the copy in Paris Arabic 147.[38] Much more recently, the archimandrite Ṭūmā Biṭār has included a full summary of the Arabic *Life* in his volume of *Forgotten Saints in the Antiochian Heritage*, based on the early nineteenth-century copy in Balamand 155.[39] My comments below will be based on Sinai Arabic 538, a Palestinian manuscript one piece of which is dated 14 May *anno mundi* 6719, or 607/1211.[40]

While we are still waiting for an edition of the Arabic *Life*, the Greek recension of the text has long been available: Ivan Vasilevich Pomialovskii published an edition of the Greek text at St Petersburg in 1892[41] based on two parchment manuscripts, the older of which is dated to 19 June *anno mundi* 6531, or 414/1023.[42] The Greek recension is much longer than the Arabic, although the two correspond closely one to the other. The author of the Greek is said to be Theodore's nephew Basil, bishop of Emesa; in the Arabic, the author Basil is Theodore's disciple and bishop of Manbij. There are other differences between the two recensions in various details of the story, the most obvious of which—and the most relevant to our inquiry—is the name of the caliph who converted to Christianity. This caliph is identified as al-Ma'mūn only in the Arabic recension. In Greek, he is called Mauias—which probably reflects the Arabic Mu'āwiya. Clearly, this difference, together with the broader issue of the relationship of the Arabic to the Greek recension, is one to which we must return.

The Story

But first, it may be useful to give a précis of the *Life* based on the Arabic text in Sinai Arabic 538. (See Appendix II for an outline of the story, with reference to the folio numbers in Sinai Arabic 538 and to the chapters of Pomialovskii's edition of the Greek text.)

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[38] A. Vasiliev, 'The Life of St Theodore of Edessa', *Byzantion* 16, 1942–3, pp. 165–225. For the 'Arabian Version' see pp. 192–8.

[39] Ṭūmā Biṭār, *Al-qiddīsūn al-mansiyyūn fī al-turāth al-Anṭākī*, Beirut, 1995, pp. 449–62, 468–76.

[40] Text of the *vita*: Sinai Arabic 538, ff. 120r–160r. The dated colophon comes earlier (at f. 98v) and may give the date of just the first piece out of which the present manuscript is assembled.

[41] I. V. Pomialovskii, *Zhitie izhe vo sviatykh ottsa nashego Feodora archiepiskopa Edesskago*, St Petersburg, 1892 [henceforth cited as Pomialovskii, *Theodore*].

[42] Moscow Synodal Library 15 (381), originally from the Georgian monastery (Iviron) on Mount Athos. For more information about the Greek manuscripts see Pomialovskii, *Theodore*, pp. I–VII.

Birth, childhood and call

The story of Theodore's birth is told in terms reminiscent of the Biblical stories of the birth of Samuel or John the Baptist: after much pleading to be granted a son (they already had daughters), the pious couple Simeon and Miriam were granted their desire through the mediation of Saints Paul and Theodore. The child turned out to be rather naughty and a slow learner, but one day while hiding under the altar during the sacred liturgy he fell asleep and had a vision of a beautiful, shining youngster who came to him, described the monastic life and filled him with desire for the divine priesthood. The seven-year-old Theodore understood that this was the Son of God who had appeared to him. Emerging from his hiding place, he described his vision to the priests, was ordained reader, and thenceforth became an avid student and practitioner of the ascetic life.

Theodore, monk of Mar Sabas

At the age of twenty, Theodore traveled to Jerusalem, and after visiting the holy places went to the *laura* of Mar Sabas, where he was soon admitted as a monk. After five years of ascetic accomplishment he was appointed manager of the monastery's affairs, a capacity in which he served for twelve years. At the end of this period the superior of the monastery lay dying, and Theodore asked for and received his permission and blessing to adopt the anchoritic life.

As an anchorite, we are told, Theodore attracted disciples and demonstrated the gift of teaching. Among his disciples was a young relative from Edessa named Michael . . . and at this point we are told the familiar story of the martyrdom of Michael of Mar Sabas, of which Monica Blanchard and Sidney Griffith have recently given us an English translation and study of the Georgian version.[43] Michael had gone to Jerusalem to sell the monks' handiwork at a time when the king was in the city—the king identified in the Georgian *Passion of Michael* and the Greek *Life of Theodore* as 'Abd al-Malik,[44] but in the Arabic *Life* only as 'the King of the Persians', i.e., the 'Abbasid caliph. The king's wife was taken with the comely youth and attempted to seduce him. Michael brusquely rebuffed her advances, which led her in a rage to turn the monk over

[43] M. J. Blanchard, 'The Georgian Version of the Martyrdom of Saint Michael, Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery', *Aram* 6, 1994, pp. 149–63 (translation); and S. H. Griffith, 'Michael, the Martyr and Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery, at the Court of the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik: Christian Apologetics and Martyrology in the Early Islamic Period', *Aram* 6, 1994, pp. 115–48 (study).

[44] The Greek *Life* distorts the name slightly as Ἀδραμέλεχ.

to her husband for punishment. The king, sceptical of his wife's claims, was deeply impressed with the monk, and tried to win him for his service, although this, of course, would necessitate his conversion to Islam. A lengthy discussion ensued, in which one of the king's ministers who had converted to Islam from Judaism also participated. Michael boldly confessed his faith in the Holy Trinity and did not hesitate to denounce Muḥammad in the sharpest terms.[45] He came through trials by fire and poison unscathed, but the king, following the urging of the outraged crowd, ordered him put to death by beheading. The king himself resolved the ensuing squabble between the Christian inhabitants of Jerusalem and the monks of Mar Sabas over who would get the body in favour of the latter, and Michael was buried with great honour among the earlier martyrs of Mar Sabas, although not before his friend, the lame monk Jirjis, was healed through his intercession. Later, Michael appeared to the grieving Theodore in a night vision to bless and cheer him.

The story of Theodore, now an anchorite and ascetic master of Mar Sabas, resumes with a sermon that he gave to the monks on the Feast of the Annunciation. We are also told that Theodore composed 'one hundred chapters spurring on their hearer to the benefit of the soul and its salvation'.[46]

Theodore, metropolitan of Edessa

Theodore, however, was not allowed to continue his anchoritic existence. The Melkite metropolitan of Edessa had died, and a delegation from that city came to Jerusalem where the patriarch of Antioch happened to be meeting with his fellow patriarch. The church of Edessa was in special need of strong leadership because of the spread of 'heretics and opponents holding the doctrine of Severus and Eutychius'.[47] Everyone was delighted when the patriarch of Jerusalem suggested Theodore's name. He was summoned under another pretext and, despite his strong protests, consecrated metropolitan of Edessa. After a return to Mar Sabas and a visit to the holy sites in Jerusalem, he made his way to Mesopotamia accompanied by his biographer Basil, two other disciples, and the delegation from Edessa. Reaching the banks of the Euphrates, he was seized by the desire to flee back to Palestine, but a heavenly voice urged him

[45] Sinai Arabic 538, f. 129v. The name 'Muḥammad' appears to have been blotted out of the manuscript.

[46] Many of the Greek manuscripts of the *Life* also include this *Century*, which was published in the seventeenth century. Gouillard argues that it is assembled out of Evagrian works: J. Gouillard, 'Supercheries et méprises littéraires: l'œuvre de Saint Théodore d'Édesse', *Revue des Études Byzantines* 5, 1947, pp. 137–57, here pp. 143–9.

[47] Sinai Arabic 538, f. 133r.

onwards. He was warmly welcomed in Edessa and immediately made the rounds of the churches. Saddened by what he saw of tares growing up among the wheat in the Edessan church, he dedicated his first Sunday sermon (six pages in the Arabic text) to an exposition of Orthodox doctrine and a denunciation of heresy. This gladdened the hearts of the believers, but led the heretics to take counsel against him.

Going out from the city one day, Theodore was impressed by the number of monastic buildings and cells that could be seen. Inquiring about these, he learned that there was but one solitary monk remaining in the region: Theodosios, who had followed this manner of life for some fifty years. Naturally, Theodore sought him out and was well received by the blessed hermit, who greeted him with the prophecy that the 'King of the Persians' would become a Christian and be baptized by his hand! Theodosios then related two stories to the new metropolitan, one of an Edessan businessman (called Ader in the Greek recension) who had given up everything for the ascetic life, including his wife and three sons. They were disposed of as follows: the two older sons died, the wife entered a convent and the youngest son was saved from death through the intercession of a penitent prostitute. This son was raised in the ascetic life by his mother, later followed his father to the *laura* of Mar Sabas, and eventually became Patriarch of Jerusalem. Having completed this edifying tale, Theodosios related his own story. He and his brother had followed the ascetic life together in 'the wilderness of Baghdad', but one day they were confronted with a great quantity of gold strewn on the ground. The brother fled from it 'like a bird which had been delivered from a trap', but Theodosios gathered it up and used the money to build a splendid monastery. Having done this, however, an evil *logismos*—a 'thought of haughtiness'—overcame him. For this he was rebuked by his guardian angel and sent away to Edessa to live out his life seeking the mercy of the Lord. Only after forty years did the angel reappear to Theodosios, speaking words of peace and salvation, and assuring him that his brother was alive and continually praying for him.

Theodore returned to the city and devoted himself to teaching and works of mercy. However, his opponents were filled with rage against him. Having failed in a direct physical assault on the principal church because of divine intervention, they bribed Muslim officials to increase the *kharāj* tax on the church and to confiscate church property. The embattled metropolitan decided that his only recourse was to go to Baghdad and make a direct appeal to the king.

Theodore in Baghdad

In Baghdad, Theodore discovered that al-Ma'mūn—the king is now named[48]—was gravely ill. Theodore was introduced to the king by his Christian physician and was able to cure him, using dust from the Holy Sepulchre as his only medication. The grateful king responded to Theodore's plea for the relief of the church in Edessa by replacing the governor there and commanding the heretics to return to the church of metropolitan Theodore. Peace in Edessa was soon reestablished. Theodore, however, remained in Baghdad; he took advantage of his stay to seek out Theodosios' brother, John the anchorite, who like his brother prophesied that al-Ma'mūn would be saved at the hands of the bishop. And so it came to pass: Theodore seized an opportunity to preach an impassioned evangelistic sermon to the king, and after days spent in reading and interpreting the Gospels al-Ma'mūn confessed his faith in the Triune God. After further days of instruction Theodore secretly baptized him and three servants in the Tigris, and gave them their first communion.

Al-Ma'mūn, now secretly a Christian (with the baptismal name John), sent Theodore on an embassy to Constantinople to request a fragment of the True Cross. Michael and Theodora, who ruled jointly at that time, received Theodore warmly—especially so when Theodore was able to cure Theodora's eye ailment with a preparation of dust from the Holy Sepulchre. Having received the holy relic and other gifts, Theodore returned to Baghdad, visiting Edessa and his friend Theodosios along the way.

The recent good fortune of the Christians in Baghdad had provoked the jealousy of others; a Jewish controversialist persuaded the chief *qāḍī* to call for a public debate which would provide an opportunity to put the Christians in their place. However, at the debate Theodore acted as spokesman for the Christians and silenced the Jew, who later converted to Christianity.

Afterwards, Theodore went again to visit John the anchorite, but this time with al-Ma'mūn and his three servants. John, when asked for an edifying address for the benefit of the king, complied with an exhortation to martyrdom.

Homecomings

The king, concerned that he might be found unfruitful in his life, one day gave Theodore a vast sum of money and sent him off to distribute it to churches, monasteries, anchorites and the poor. Having exhorted

[48] Ibid., f. 144r.

the king to remain firm in the faith, even unto death, Theodore travelled to Edessa and then on to Jerusalem, Mar Sabas, Antioch and the monastery of Simeon Stylites. He then returned to Edessa.

In the meantime, al-Ma'mūn had decided to reveal his faith publicly. He commanded an assembly of all the people and before them confessed his faith in the Triune God, bowing to the cross. The angry crowd killed him with swords; the date was 13 May. Al-Ma'mūn the martyr then appeared in dreams to both Theodore and Theodosios after first appearing to the officials of the city, directing them to allow the Christians to remove and bury his body in honour.

Soon afterwards Theodosios died. Theodore continued his fruitful ministry in Edessa for another three years, after which time al-Ma'mūn appeared to him again, this time to inform him of his impending death. Theodore took his leave of the faithful in Edessa and returned by way of Jerusalem to the *laura* of Mar Sabas, where he soon died. His body was placed in the grave of the fathers alongside that of his disciple Michael.

Observations

Let us now turn to a few observations about this text.

Composition

The Life of Theodore of Edessa is a composite work. For example, the *Martyrdom of Michael* was clearly an independently existing work that was grafted into the story, while Gouillard concluded that the Greek recension of Theodore's inaugural dogmatic sermon in Edessa is 'nothing but an extract' from other Greek texts.[49] For all the conglomerate character of the work, however, it does display a certain logic and balance. Many events in the first half of the story are paralleled by events in the second half (see Appendix II). For example, the martyrdom of Michael matches the later martyrdom of the king; a detailed list of parallels between the two martyrdoms can be constructed.[50] Michael's debate with the king and his formerly Jewish minister parallels the later debate in

[49] In particular, the survey of heresies is taken from the second part of Theodore of Raithou's Προπαρασκευὴ, according to Gouillard, 'Supercheries', pp. 139–42. For a list of texts that either were incorporated into the *vita* or were extracted from it, see *BHG* 1744: F. Halkin, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* (*Subsidia Hagiographica* 8a), third edn, Brussels, 1957, pp. 274–5; and idem, *Novum Auctarium: Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* (*Subsidia Hagiographica* 65), Brussels, 1984, pp. 202–3.

[50] These include: Trinitarian confession, final prayer, death by the sword, the king's intervention with respect to the burial of the body, miracles in the aftermath of the martyrdom, and the appearance of the martyr to Theodore (and others) in a dream.

Baghdad, in which Theodore matched wits with a Jew in the presence of the king. In Edessa, Theodore sought out Theodosios the hermit, *al-ḥabīs*; in Baghdad, he sought out Theodosios' brother John the anchorite, *al-sā'iḥ*.[51]

The work displays a number of other unifying features. Visions in dreams are common throughout.[52] Places are visited and revisited: according to the *Life*, Theodore traversed the distance between Edessa and Palestine five times, and that between Edessa and Baghdad four times. The story is both bracketed and punctuated by pilgrimages to Jerusalem in order to receive the blessing of the holy places there.[53] Furthermore, it is dust from the Holy Sepulchre that Theodore uses to heal both the ʿAbbasid caliph and the Byzantine empress, and it is in order to obtain a fragment of the True Cross that he journeys to Constantinople. If, as Nasrallah suggests, *The Life of Theodore* is nothing but a *roman hagiographique*,[54] it is a skillfully constructed one.

The Arabic and Greek recensions

Which recension came first, the Greek or the Arabic? A number of scholars have offered opinions on the matter, although not much in the way of evidence has been given. Early in the last century a number of scholars at one time or another gave the opinion that the Arabic recension was the original[55] and Nasrallah has more recently (1988) made the same assertion.[56] However, the majority of scholars writing in the past sixty years, including Vasiliev,[57] Graf,[58] Griffith[59] and Zanetti,[60] have assigned priority to the Greek, seeing the Arabic as a later abridgement. We still

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[51] The Arabic text regularly refers to Theodosios as *al-ḥabīs*, the 'enclosed' or 'secluded' monk (e.g. Sinai Arabic 538, ff. 144r, 158v) and to John as *al-sā'iḥ*, the 'itinerant' monk (e.g. Sinai Arabic 538, ff. 146v, 153r).

[52] Among the visions and theophanies in the text: St Paul and St Theodore appear to Simeon and Miriam; the boy Christ appears to Theodore; the martyr Michael appears to Theodore; a voice from heaven encourages Theodore; the rich man of Edessa (Ader) appears to his wife and to Theodosios; an angel appears to Theodosios; the martyred caliph appears to the Muslim officials of Edessa; the martyred caliph appears to Theodore and to Theodosios; the martyred caliph appears again to Theodore, shortly before his death.

[53] Theodore visits the holy places during his first pilgrimage; before his departure for Edessa as metropolitan; when sent by the caliph to distribute wealth to the churches and monasteries; and shortly before his death.

[54] Nasrallah, *Histoire*, p. 161.

[55] Vasiliev, 'Theodore', pp. 197–8, surveys this older literature.

[56] Nasrallah, *Histoire*, p. 161.

[57] Vasiliev, 'Theodore', p. 198.

[58] Graf, *GCAL*, vol. II, pp. 24–5.

[59] Griffith, 'Michael', pp. 130–5. See n. 80 below for an unpublished work by Griffith that will surely take up this issue in considerable detail.

[60] U. Zanetti, 'Theodoros v. Edessa', *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, third edn, Freiburg, 1993–2001, vol. IX, cols 1410–11.

need a thorough comparative study of the two recensions to settle the matter, but there are strong indications that the Greek text is indeed the original. As Gouillard pointed out, Theodore's inaugural doctrinal sermon in the Greek recension is probably an extract from other Greek works.[61] I would add instances of awkward Arabic translations of Greek phrases[62] and inconsistent Arabic spellings of Greek names.[63] One clear indication that the Arabic text is translated from Greek appears when Theodore is making the rounds of the churches of Edessa and visits 'the sanctuary of the martyrs and confessors Ghūriyā, Ṣāmūnā and Afīfus'.[64] The reference, of course, is to the three Edessan martyrs of the Great Persecution: Guryā, Shmōnā and Ḥabīb.[65] But now, it is hard to imagine how the Semitic name Ḥabīb could come to be rendered in an Arabic text as Afīfus *except* by way of the Greek transliteration Ἄβιβος, and then only by a translator who was not familiar with Edessan Christian tradition.

Date and purpose

If one allows that the *Life* was originally written in Greek and later abridged in Arabic, what can be said about the date and the purpose of these recensions?

Both Peeters and, recently, Griffith, have dated the Greek *Life* to the second half of the fourth/tenth century, when Byzantine power reasserted itself in the East under the emperors Nicephorus II Phocas (r. 352/963–359/969) and John I Tzimisces (r. 359/969–365/976).[66] This fits perfectly well with the fact that the *Life* never mentions the celebrated *mandylion* or *acheiropoiētos* image of Christ, which suggests that the *Life* was written after the image was taken away from Edessa to Constantinople in 332/944. Furthermore, the text was written before 414/1023, the date of the earliest known manuscript. One can well imagine that Byzantine church and political leaders in the fourth/tenth century felt a need for

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[61] See Gouillard, 'Supercheries', pp. 139–42.

[62] For example, after Miriam conceived a son συνετήρει ἑαυτὴν ὥσπερ τι θεῖον ἐν ἑαυτῇ φέρουσα σκεῦος, 'she preserved herself as a vessel bearing in herself something divine' (Pomialovskii, *Theodore*, p. 4 (III)). In Arabic this has become *wa-ṣārat ḥāfiẓa li-nafsihā ḥifẓ al-awānī' al-ilāhiyya*, 'she came to preserve herself as one preserves divine vessels' (Sinai Arabic 538, f. 121v)—which is not quite right: it is the content of the vessel, not the vessel itself, which is in some sense divine.

[63] E.g., Sabellius is rendered SBLYWS at Sinai Arabic 538, f. 136r, and SFYLS at f. 138r.

[64] Sinai Arabic 538, f. 135r.

[65] P. Peeters, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis* (*Subsidia Hagiographica* 10), Brussels, 1910, pp. 84–5. The story of their martyrdom is conveniently presented in J. B. Segal, *Edessa 'the Blessed City'*, Oxford, 1970, pp. 83–6.

[66] P. Peeters, 'La passion de S. Michel le Sabaïte', *Analecta Bollandiana* 48, 1930, pp. 65–98, here p. 91; and Griffith, 'Michael', p. 130.

materials imparting the Chalcedonian faith and reinforcing Chalcedonian identity, especially in the newly reconquered areas, where communities of Nestorians and Jacobites, not to mention Manichaeans and Muslims, were to be found.[67] The Greek *Life of Theodore of Edessa* may be seen as just such a work, with its long doctrinal excursuses and its stories of how, under the saintly shepherd Theodore, Manichaeans and Muslims accepted baptism, and followers of Nestorius on the one hand, and of Severus and Eutyches on the other, returned to the catholic Church. It should not be forgotten that the *laura* of Mar Sabas plays a central role in the story, which lends plausibility to Griffith's suggestion (in 1986) that the Greek *Life of Theodore of Edessa* was 'assembled in Byzantium, probably at the hands of the émigré monks from Palestine'.[68]

When we compare the Arabic recension with the Greek, we note some interesting differences.[69] One of the most notable is that the powerful Chalcedonian emphasis of the Greek *Life* is considerably muted in the Arabic. While the presence of (so-called) monophysites in Edessa is clear from the Arabic recension, since the delegation from Edessa that asks for a new metropolitan reports the presence of those who hold the doctrine of Severus and Eutyches,[70] for the most part the Arabic text is vague in its description of the Edessan heretics: they are simply *al-arāṭiqa* or *al-arāṭiqa al-mukhālifūn*,[71] 'the heretics' or 'the heretical opponents', once expanded to 'the opponents from Manichaeism and Arianism'.[72] When heresy is overcome in Edessa, the Greek text distinguishes between the Manichaeans who are baptized and the followers of Nestorius and Eutyches who are reconciled to the catholic Church.[73] The Arabic text simply mentions those 'heretical opponents' who now ask for baptism.[74]

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[67] See Griffith, 'Michael', pp. 134–5. Abel has made a similar point, although he was working only with the Arabic *Life*; A. Abel, 'La portée apologétique de la «Vie» de St Théodore d'Édesse', *Byzantinoslavica* 10, 1949, pp. 229–40, here p. 239.

[68] S. H. Griffith, 'Greek into Arabic: Life and Letters in the Monasteries of Palestine in the Ninth Century: The Example of the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*', *Byzantion* 56, 1986, pp. 117–38, here p. 132.

[69] One curious difference is the Arabic text's lack of reference to stylites. In the Greek *Life*, Theodore goes out from Edessa and is impressed by the number of pillars he sees, and eventually he meets and befriends Theodosios the Stylite; Pomialovskii, *Theodore*, pp. 52–4 (LIV–LV). In Arabic, however, Theodore sees monastic *abniya* and *athārāt*, 'buildings and remains', and befriends Theodosios *al-ḥabīs*, that is, one who does not leave his *ṣawmaʿa* or cell (Sinai Arabic 538, f. 138v). In the Arabic *Life*, the Byzantine fascination with pillar saints seems to have fallen away, and the monastic landscape around Edessa has come to resemble that of Palestine, with its cave hermitages and small chapels built of stone. See Y. Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period*, New Haven, 1992, pp. 213–22.

[70] Sinai Arabic 538, f. 133r.

[71] E.g., Sinai Arabic 538, ff. 135v, 138v, 143v, 144v, 146v, 147r.

[72] Sinai Arabic 538, f. 146r.

[73] Pomialovskii, *Theodore*, p. 78 (LXXIV).

[74] Sinai Arabic 538, f. 146v.

This dulling of the Chalcedonian polemical edge of the text can also be seen in Theodore's inaugural sermon in Edessa. The Greek version is a major doctrinal presentation and history of heresy.[75] The Arabic follows the outline of the Greek, but summarizes drastically.[76] One would expect that a Chalcedonian bishop giving a doctrinal address in Edessa would devote much attention to the 'monophysite' opposition, and in the Greek sermon Eutyches is mentioned by name five times, Dioscoros twice, and Severus of Antioch once. In Arabic, there is a single mention of Eutyches. The Arabic sermon, while clearly reflecting the faith of the Church of the seven ecumenical councils, is far too brief and superficial to be of any use in real doctrinal discussions with anti-Chalcedonians.

Finally, in the Greek *Life* the caliph is expressly converted to Chalcedonian faith, and is made to say: 'I also confess the incarnate Lord in two natures, complete God and man, in two wills and two energies.'[77] Among the prayers he is taught is the *Trisagion* in its specifically Chalcedonian form.[78] But none of this is found in the Arabic text.

For the Greek *Life* there is a great divide between Chalcedonian faith and all other, but in the Arabic *Life*, the line has shifted. While the existence of Christian heresy is not denied, the principal divide is between those who confess the Holy Trinity and those who do not, between those who are baptized and those who are not. While the Greek *Life* with its Chalcedonian polemical edge may have served as a tool in a region experiencing the projection of Byzantine power, the Arabic *Life*, it seems to me, is a work of edification for Melkite Christians in the *Dār al-Islām* for whom intra-confessional polemic is not very high on the agenda. Instead, the emphasis of the Arabic *Life* is on a number of other themes important to Melkite Christians, including: the importance of bold confession of Christian faith, even unto death; the possibility of holiness of life, on the model of Theodore 'who underwent martyrdom every day'[79] through his ascetic endeavour; the hope that some measure of peace and justice could be enjoyed in this life, if necessary by tactful appeal to the highest Muslim authority; and the continued existence of a Christian world within the *Dār al-Islām*, in which a network centred on Jerusalem and the monasteries about it, but including Antioch, Edessa and even Baghdad, could boast of churches, monasteries and convents, of a unifying hierarchy, and of holy men and women for whom physical distance was no great obstacle and for whom the boundary between heaven and earth had become transparent.

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[75] Pomialovskii, *Theodore*, pp. 41–52 (XLVI–LII).
[76] Sinai Arabic 538, ff. 135v–138r.
[77] Pomialovskii, *Theodore*, p. 88 (LXXIV).
[78] Ibid., *Theodore*, p. 85 (LXXI).
[79] *Kāna yastashhidu fī kulli yawmin*; Sinai Arabic 538, f. 131r.

Are we able to say anything about where or when the Arabic *Life* was made? It is difficult *not* to look to the *laura* of Mar Sabas, where the remains of Saints Michael and Theodore were preserved and were visited by pilgrims such as Daniel the Russian around 499/1106.[80] The oldest manuscript of the Arabic *Life* in our possession comes from the monastery of St Euthymius just north of Mar Sabas, and contains the date 607/1211. If the Arabic *Life* reflects Palestinian Christian life within the *Dār al-Islām*, then one might think of a fifth/eleventh-century (i.e. pre-Crusader) date for its production. At this point, however, I regard this as only a very tentative suggestion.

A historical Theodore?

A question that has been raised by a number of scholars concerning *The Life of Theodore of Edessa* is that of the historicity of the text's hero. The sharpest rejection of this historicity is still that of Paulus Peeters, who in 1930 could speak rather acidly of the *intention frauduleuse*[81] of the text, and who was the first to advance the important argument that Theodore of Edessa is simply a 'double' of Theodore Abū Qurra[82]—who like our story's hero, it will be remembered, hailed from Edessa, became a monk of Mar Sabas, was appointed bishop in Mesopotamia, and participated in a religious debate before an 'Abbasid caliph. According to Peeters, there is no historical value to *The Life of Theodore of Edessa*; we are simply given a 'false Abū Qurrah'[83] wrapped in all manner of *fantasmagorie*.[84]

In his study of 1943, Vasiliev sharply disputed Peeters' conclusions, claiming that the text of the *Life* allows us to date Theodore's consecration as metropolitan of Edessa to 221/836, when the three eastern patriarchs are reported to have gathered in Jerusalem,[85] and his journey

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[80] See Vasiliev, 'Theodore', pp. 188–9 and the literature cited there. The connection between the *Life of Theodore* and the *laura* of Mar Sabas is clearly a theme of a yet unpublished study of which I have just become aware: S. H. Griffith, 'The *Life of Theodore of Edessa*: History, Hagiography and Religious Apologetics in Mar Saba Monastery in Early Abbasid Times', to appear in the *acta* of the International Symposium, 'The Sabaite Heritage, the Sabaite Factor in the Orthodox Church, Monastic Life, Liturgy, Theology, Literature, Art and Archaeology (5th Century to the Present)', Jerusalem, Yad Yizhak Ben Zvi, 24–30 May, 1998.

[81] Peeters, 'Michel', p. 82. Gouillard, 'Supercheries', p. 137, expresses himself equally sharply, opening his study as follows: 'La "Vie de saint Théodore le Sabaïte, éveque d'Édesse, par Basile d'Émèse" est, sans contredit, l'un des meilleurs échantillons du mensonge hagiographique, sous sa forme la plus effrontée'. Gouillard is especially affronted by the repeated claims that the (fictitious) author, Basil of Emesa, was an eyewitness of the events reported.

[82] Peeters, 'Michel', p. 82.

[83] Ibid., p. 85.

[84] Ibid., p. 82.

[85] According to a Greek document claiming to be a letter sent by the three patriarchs to the emperor Theophilus, although this may be an iconophile fiction; see Griffith, 'Greek into Arabic', pp. 131–2 and the literature cited there.

to Constantinople to the years when Michael III and his mother Theodora ruled jointly, between 227/842 and 241/856.[86] Furthermore, he suggests the identification of the Greek recension's convert-king Mauias with al-Mu'ayyad (d. 252/866), son of the caliph al-Mutawakkil.[87] And thus, according to Vasiliev, we can see, if only faintly, the historical lineaments of a bishop of the mid-third/ninth century, one who is clearly distinguishable from the celebrated bishop-theologian of the previous generation.

Few scholars today would pose the question of historicity in quite the same way that Peeters did in 1930, or would be as impressed as was Vasiliev with the possibilities of mid-third/ninth century identifications of persons and events in the text.[88] Already in 1949 Abel read the Arabic *Life* more as a work of propaganda and/or edification than as one of history, and happily attempted to trace the history of apologetic and literary *motifs* without much worry about the historical Theodore.[89] However, the question of the influence of the figure of Theodore Abū Qurra on the *Life* of Theodore of Edessa continues to be interesting. Many scholars since Peeters, including Abel,[90] Griffith[91] and Zanetti,[92] have been open to admitting some degree of influence.

Certainly, a comparison between the Greek *Life of Theodore of Edessa*, which claims to be written by Basil of Emesa and which tells of the monk Theodore of Mar Sabas and his martyred disciple Michael, with the Georgian *Passion of Michael of Mar Sabas*, which claims to be written by Basil and which has the monk Theodore Abū Qurra of Mar Sabas tell the story of the martyrdom of Michael,[93] gives one the sense that the two Theodores blur into one another. Indeed, the *Passion*'s description of Theodore Abū Qurra as 'the new one of Saint Saba, the shepherd and priest-leader of Assyria, *the miracle worker of Babylonia*'[94] nearly requires the exploits of Theodore of Edessa in Baghdad in order to make sense!

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[86] Vasiliev, 'Theodore', pp. 177, 202.
[87] Ibid., pp. 199–210.
[88] With regard to these identifications: on the meeting of the three eastern patriarchs, see note 85 above. On the identification of Mauias with al-Mu'ayyad, see the remark of A. Kazhdan, 'Theodore of Edessa', *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, New York and Oxford, 1991, p. 2043.
[89] Abel, 'La portée apologétique'.
[90] Ibid., pp. 236–7. For Abel, the story of Theodore of Edessa is compounded out of those of Theodore Abū Qurra and of Abraham of Tiberias.
[91] Griffith, 'Greek into Arabic', p. 132.
[92] Zanetti, 'Theodoros v. Edessa'.
[93] See Blanchard, 'Georgian Version'. The Georgian appears to be translated from an Arabic original, now lost. This *Passion*, whether in the original Arabic or in a version, is clearly the source for the story of Michael as found in the Greek *Life*.
[94] Ibid., p. 158 (no. 15). Emphasis added.

But if Theodore Abū Qurra is already somehow in the background of the Greek *Life*, he is even more clearly in the background of the Arabic version. I would contend that the change in the name of the converting caliph from Mauias to al-Maʾmūn suggests that the Melkite circles where the Arabic translation was made preserved a vivid memory of the mutual admiration that once existed between a Sabaite bishop Theodore—Abū Qurra that is—and the caliph al-Maʾmūn. There is a trajectory that runs from the report of Abū Qurra's debate at the court of al-Maʾmūn, perhaps through Abū Qurra's prayer for al-Maʾmūn as well, to the Arabic recension of *The Life of Theodore of Edessa*. It is a Bishop Theodore who impresses al-Maʾmūn and blesses him, and it is a Bishop Theodore to whom he confesses his Christian faith.

The portrait of al-Maʾmūn

I have already argued that *The Life of Theodore of Edessa*, in either recension, is a balanced, carefully-constructed work. On the whole, however, the unity of the work is plainer in the Arabic abridgement than it was in the original Greek. In particular, the two martyrdoms are better balanced in the Arabic *Life*, due in large part to the change of names. We have mentioned the change in the name of the converting king from Mauias to al-Maʾmūn. In addition to this, while the Greek *Life* gives Adramelekh (ʿAbd al-Malik) as the name of the king by whose order Michael was beheaded, in the Arabic *Life* the name of this king is omitted altogether; he is simply 'the king of the Persians', which we may understand to refer to the ʿAbbasid caliph. But precisely through this omission, the reader of the Arabic text is at least permitted to wonder whether it is *one and the same* ʿAbbasid caliph, later identified as al-Maʾmūn, who is *both* the one responsible for Michael's martyrdom *and* the one who himself became a confessor and martyr.

I should pause here. This suggestion that the king who gave the order for Michael to be beheaded might have been al-Maʾmūn is strange for those who have read the Georgian *Passion* or the Greek *Life* and who therefore 'know' that the responsible king is 'really' ʿAbd al-Malik. However, if we put that 'knowledge' aside, in reading the Arabic *Life* it is not unnatural to assume that the king is a single, complex character. This observation is not new. Already in 1949 Armand Abel, having read the Paris copy of the Arabic *Life*, asked how the gentle and humane prince later converted by Theodore could have had the young Michael put to death![95]

[95] 'C'est à Théodore lui même que reviendra la gloire de convertir le prince, homme

Indeed, the initial portrait of the king in the Arabic *Life* is of a humane prince who has much in common with al-Ma'mūn as he is portrayed in the Abū Qurra debate, or in Abū Qurra's panegyric. When we first meet him we learn that he is curious, coming to Jerusalem with his wife because of the news of wonders occurring there.[96] We are told that 'the king was a humble man, who in the days of his reign did not harm any of the Christians'.[97] He is perceptive and fair, and immediately realizes that his spurned wife's claims about Michael are false.[98] Although his wrath flares up when the young monk insolently remains standing before him, it is calmed when Michael reminds him that the duty of a king is always to act in accordance with the fear of God, mercy, patience and just judgment.[99] The king recognizes the exceptional quality of this young man, and desires to win him to his service.[100]

It is this desire, ironically, that leads to Michael's death, since the path to the king's service leads through conversion, which Michael rejects in the sharpest possible terms, enraging everyone. But now we see how intimately bound together are the two martyrdoms of the Arabic *Life*. When the king offers Michael the choice of conversion or death, Michael responds by redefining the choice: 'Either release me, and I will go to my master; or kill me, and I will go to my Christ; *or you will become a Christian like me*.'[101] Michael was killed and he did go to his Christ; but at the same time, in the Arabic *Life* his word becomes the first intimation—later to become prophecy on the lips of both Theodosios the hermit[102] and John the anchorite[103]—that the king himself would become a Christian. According to the Arabic *Life*, that is precisely what happened. The king did become a Christian 'like Michael': one who was put to death by the sword while confessing his faith in the Holy Trinity.

Earlier I mentioned Wasserstein's suggestion that the figure of al-Ma'mūn presented in Shīʿī historiography bears comparison with the Pontius Pilate of Coptic Christian legend, who delivered Jesus to death, but later became

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d'ailleurs doux et humain, sous lequel les chrétiens eurent le moins à souffrir, et si conforme en celà à l'image de Ma'mūn, auquel Théodore Abû Qurra était si cher, qu'on se demande comment ce prince aurait pu faire périr le jeune Michel. . . .'; Abel, 'La portée apologétique', p. 237.

[96] Sinai Arabic 538, f. 125v.

[97] Ibid., f. 125v.

[98] Ibid., f. 127r.

[99] Ibid., f. 127v.

[100] Ibid., ff. 127v–128r.

[101] Emphasis added. The leaf on which this speech is found is missing from Sinai Arabic 538. The text here is reproduced from Biṭār, *Al-qiddīsūn al-mansiyyūn*, p. 461. We find the same speeches in the Georgian *Passion*; Blanchard, 'Georgian Version', p. 155 (no. 10).

[102] Sinai Arabic 538, f. 139r.

[103] Ibid., f. 147r.

a Christian and a martyr.[104] The Arabic *Life of Theodore of Edessa* presents an image of al-Ma'mūn that is even closer to this legendary Pontius Pilate.

Echoes

The 'Christian al-Ma'mūn' trajectory I have been describing is not without echoes or parallels elsewhere in the tradition. One clear echo is heard in *The Wisdom of Sibylle*,[105] a Christian apocalypse that has come down to us in a variety of recensions in different languages, and that was clearly circulating in Arabic by the third/ninth or fourth/tenth century.[106] Some recensions clearly refer to Hārūn al-Rashīd, his sons al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn, and the civil war between them. Most clearly, in the recension that Schleifer designated 'Arab. III', we read:

> There reigned over [the East] a king who completed twenty-three years, but not the twenty-fourth. Gifts came to him from the islands of the sea and from the lands of the Franks. . . . In his days, Syria experienced prosperity; but when he died, desolation. He left behind him two sons. The name of the first was the same as the one who came from the South [*al-Ṭayman*], and he ruled Syria. Many misfortunes came from him.[107]

This clearly refers to Hārūn (r. 170/786–193/809) and his sons, the first of whom was named Muḥammad ('the same as the one who came from the south') al-Amīn. Nothing further is said about al-Ma'mūn; in fact, there are no more historical references at all, as the text moves into a description of the woes that will precede the End. One suspects that this particular recension dates from the time of the civil war between al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn, and that it aims to give its Christian readers hope by interpreting the chaos of the time in apocalyptic terms.

The recension that Schleifer called the 'karshūnī version'[108] adds a comment about the other son at this same point:

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[104] Wasserstein, 'Majlis', pp. 118–19. For a recent study of the 'St Pontius Pilate' dossier, see Philippe Luisier, 'De Pilate chez les Coptes', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 62, 1996, pp. 411–25.

[105] For orientation, see Graf, *GCAL*, vol. I, p. 294 and the literature cited there, especially Schleifer, *Erzählung der Sibylle*, and R. Basset, *Les apocryphes éthiopiens*, vol. X, *La sagesse de Sibylle*, Paris, 1900.

[106] This is proved by its presence in manuscripts of St Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai: Sinai Arabic 461 (ninth–tenth centuries AD), f. 34; Sinai Arabic NF pap. 34 (AD 1002).

[107] Schleifer, *Erzählung der Sibylle*, p. 33 (Arab. III, no. 16).

[108] Schleifer's witnesses are Oxford, Bodleian Huntington 199, ff. 413–17; and Paris, Colbert 4535 (sixteenth century), ff. 195v–202v. Schleifer incorrectly designates the latter as Ancien fonds 158.

> The name of the one son was as the name of the one who came from the south. *And the other believed in the one who was crucified*, and made him known to the nations. And those who worshipped him became many people.[109]

That is all there is: there is no further elaboration. There is no mention of martyrdom; rather, the believing son is portrayed in terms similar to the apocalypse's description of the emperor Constantine![110] The 'Christian al-Ma'mūn' trajectory continues to work itself out in surprising ways, as the St Pontius Pilate—like figure now becomes a kind of Arab Constantine.

Other texts could be added. Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala has recently published a copy of the very popular Copto-Arabic account of the wonder performed by the Blessed Virgin Mary in preserving her church in Atrīb during the reign of al-Ma'mūn.[111] While this story does not lie on the Melkite trajectory we have been examining, it shows that the sort of stories that Melkites told about al-Ma'mūn would not have been considered strange when heard in a Coptic environment, which had its own tradition of how the great caliph had come to know the power and blessing that lay in the Christian religion.

A Closing Word

Anyone who has the experience of being part of a Christian minority, especially one that sees itself as under threat, will know something of the thrill that is felt as stories are related, often in hushed tones, about non-Christian officials who have somehow, unexpectedly, experienced something of the power of the Christian religion. Occasionally, even in our own day, stories circulate about how such-and-such a non-Christian leader has secretly converted to Christianity. These stories, so easy to dismiss by the sceptical visitor, are greatly encouraging to many Christians, reminding them that the Christian faith has power even when their particular Christian community has little.

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[109] Schleifer, *Erzählung der Sibylle*, p. 32 (Karschunish, no. 14). Emphasis added.

[110] With regard to Constantine, the 'karshūnī version' reads: 'As for the seventh generation, a king shall arise from Constantinople, and his mother the queen shall come to the city of Jerusalem, and the people shall adhere to the faith in the one who was crucified upon the wood of the cross.' Schleifer, *Erzählung der Sibylle*, p. 26 (Karschunish, no. 8a).

[111] J. P. Monferrer Sala, '*U'ŷūbat Marta Maryam* según un manuscrito árabe copto', *Alfinge* 10, 1998, pp. 209–34. For the manuscripts of the work, see Graf, *GCAL*, vol. I, p. 255. To Graf's already extensive list of manuscripts, an additional 26 located in Egypt may be added from the listing of Nabih Kamel Daoud, 'The Old Church of the Holy Virgin in Atrīb according to the Historians' Writings' [in Arabic], in *Usbū' al-qibtiyyāt*

At the first Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium in 1990, Johannes den Heijer related the story of the conversion of the Fāṭimid caliph al-Muʿizz, a story which continues to be very much alive among the Copts.[112] In this paper I have tried to trace the steps by which the caliph al-Maʾmūn became a Christian convert and martyr. Apparently these stories of al-Maʾmūn, like the stories of al-Muʿizz in Egypt, continue to circulate. In his recent collection of *Forgotten Saints of the Antiochian Heritage*, the archimandrite Ṭūmā Biṭār comments:

> Now, the *Life* of St Theodore is the only one that mentions that al-Maʾmūn became a Christian and died as a martyr for the sake of Christ Many completely deny this, but the question would appear to be raised, if in diffident fashion, in literary and academic circles. It has been said that Dr Jibrail Jabbur, for example, used to affirm to his students at the American University in Beirut that al-Maʾmūn became a Christian.[113]

Whatever the truth of this suggestion about Dr Jabbur's teaching, it appears that the 'Christian al-Maʾmūn tradition' is not merely a curiosity of the past. It still exists on the edges of Middle Eastern Christian memory, and some would like to find in it reason to marvel at the mysterious workings of God.[114]

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al-thāmin, 1998/1715, Cairo, 1999, pp. 145–9. The oldest manuscript he lists is Abū Sarjā 107/Lāhūt 4 (AD 1428).

[112] J. den Heijer, 'Apologetic Elements in Coptic-Arabic Historiography: The Life of Afrahām ibn Zurʿah, 62nd Patriarch of Alexandria', in Samir Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen eds, *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)*, Leiden, 1994, pp. 192–202.

[113] Biṭār, *Al-qiddīsūn al-mansiyyūn*, p. 471.

[114] Just before the publication of this paper I found that I had overlooked a copy of the Arabic *Life of Theodore of Edessa* in Sinai Arabic 551, ff. 59r–142v, dated 3 September *anno mundi* 6577 = 460/1068. This is undoubtedly the second Sinai copy of which Nasrallah was aware (see note 37 above), and certainly supports my suggestion of a pre-Crusader date for the production of the Arabic *Life* (see p. 80 above).

Appendix I

Abū Qurra's prayer for al-Ma'mūn, Sinai Arabic 447, *ff. 181v–182v*
(In what follows, I have inserted *hamza* without indicating, unless this involves a change in the consonantal skeleton of the word. It will be clear from the number of question marks in the notes that this is still a preliminary edition.)

1 حفظ اللّٰه سيّدَنا أمير المؤمنين،
وأطال بقاءَه،
وأتمّ عليه نعمتَه،
وأوصله إلى غايّة أُمنيّته،
وأحسن به وإليه،
وألبسه العافية،
وأسعده بالغبطة،
ورزقه الصحّةَ في بدنه،
ودفع الأدواءَ عنه والآفات،
وجنّبه المكارهَ كلَّها،
وأقصى[1] عنه كلَّ أذًى وقذًى،
وجعله أبدًا ناعمَ الحال،
رخيَّ البال،

f. 182r وصيّر تقلُّبَ حياته تنقُّلاً[2] * من سرور إلى سرور،
وقلّب عليه الدهرَ بالبَهْجة والجَذَل .

2 عاجله اللّٰه في الدنيا ما يُضاهي سرورَ الجنّة،
وصيّر ما تقدّم له عربونًا[3] لِما يُعَدُّ هناك له.
3 ألبسه اللّٰه جُنَّةً تُوقّيه المساوئ كلَّها.
4 ألهمه اللّٰه الصبر والرأفة والعدل على الرعية كلِّها.
5 حبّب اللّٰه إليه العفوَ عن مَن رجع إليه من المُسيئين[4]،
وأخضع له قلوبَ أهل الشقاق
وردَّهم إلى طاعته.
6 أشرب اللّٰه أفئدةَ أهل بيته حبَّه،
وأغراهم[5] بِيُمْنه عليهم،
وأراهم ما هو دامياؤُهم[6] في دولته.

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[1] مخطوط: وأقصا
[2] مخطوط: تنقل
[3] مخطوط: عربون
[4] مخطوط: المُسيين
[5] مخطوط: واغرهم
[6] ؟ مخطوط: دامامهم (؟)

7 صرف اللّٰه أراء قوّاده وأجناده إلى ثقته[7]،
وأقنعهم أنّ سَعْيَهم[8] في موافقته عبادة ربّهم.
8 ألهمهم اللّٰه نيّةً صحيحةً في مُناصحته،
وأظفرهم بجميع أعدائه.
9 أقصى اللّٰه عن جميع سلطاته الحربَ،
ومَنَّ عليهم بالأمن السابغ،
وحَفَّه أُلْفَةَ الجميع بسياسته،
ورفأ تشتُّتَ المُتنابذين بعنايته.
10 أوضح اللّٰه بركةَ مُلكه للناس أجمعين
في تقلُّبهم كلّه.
11 أمطر اللّٰه عليهم في سَبَبه الأمطارَ الغزيرة المعتدلة،
وأزكى[9] زَرْعَهم،
ووفّر غلاّتَهم،
وأربح متاجرَهم،
f. 182v *وأرخص أسعارَهم،
ومهّد لهم الأرض يأكلون منها[10] رغدًا.
12 جعل اللّٰه الأحياء يتمنّون الأموات الحياة في دهره، قائلين:
"ماذا فاتَكم من الأمن والعدل والألفة والوصية[11]!"
13 فطر اللّٰه الأولادَ على حبّه
و حب ذرّيّته.
14 أنعم اللّٰه على حَشَمه وخاصّته وعامّته
باغارة[12] حياته وسلامته من العاهات والآفات،
وفاض عدله الأقرباء والأبعداء[13]؛
15 بصلوات مادحه،
ومارتمريم أمّ المسيح إلاهنا وسيّدنا،
وصلوات القدّ يسين،
وكلّ من أخلص من عبادة اللّٰه و كلّ مرضاته،
آمين!

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[7] ؟ مخطوط: مقته
[8] ؟ مخطوط: سعته
[9] مخطوط: وازكا
[10] مخطوط: يأكلونها
[11] ؟ مخطوط: والوصله (؟)
[12] ؟ كذا في المخطوط
[13] كذا في المخطوط

Translation

1 May God preserve our master, the Commander of the Believers,
make his life long,
and complete His favour towards him;
lead him to the farthest limit of his aspiration,
and do what is beautiful through him and for him;
clothe him in vitality,
and gladden him with beatitude;
bestow health upon him in his body,
and drive diseases and ills away from him;
avert all loathsome things from him,
and send every harm and annoyance far from him;
make him always to enjoy a state of comfort
and a mind at ease;
make the vicissitudes of his life a transport
from happiness to happiness,
and roll time over him in delight and gladness.
2 May God grant him already in this world
what compares with the happiness of the Garden,
and make what has already come to him
a pledge of what is prepared for him there.
3 May God equip him with a shield that protects him from all evil deeds.
4 May God inspire in him patience, gentleness
and justice for all his subjects.
5 May God make him a lover of pardon
for any of the evil-doers who return to him,
subject to him the hearts of the people of dissension,
and return them to his obedience.
6 May God grant the hearts of the people of his house
to drink of his love,
make them desire his felicitous influence on them,
and show them that which is their well-being (?) in his empire.
7 May God direct the opinions of his generals and armies
to trust (?) in him,
and convince them that their striving (?) in agreement with him
is worship of their Lord.
8 May God inspire in them a sound intention in giving him counsel,
and give them victory over all his enemies.
9 May God keep war far away from all his dominions,
bestow upon them ample security,
preoccupy him with the amity of all through his rule,
and mend the division of feuding parties through his care.
10 May God make plain to all the people the blessing of his reign
in all the vicissitudes of their lives.

11 May God send down upon them, on his account,
plentiful and gentle rains,
and make their crops grow,
their harvests abundant,
their commerce gainful,
and their prices low;
and may He prepare for them the land,
that they may eat [from] it in plenty.
12 May God make those who are alive
wish life in his time for those who have died, saying:
'What security, justice, amity and counsel (?) have you missed!'
13 May God fashion children disposed to love him
and to love his progeny.
14 May God bestow favour upon his retinue,
his private and public servants,
by providing succour (?) for his life and his safety
from maladies and ills,
and may his justice inundate those who are near
and those who are far;
15 through the prayers of the one who offers praise,
and of St. Mary, mother of Christ, our God and Master,
and the prayers of the saints
and all who sincerely devote themselves to the worship of God
and all that serves His good pleasure. Amen!

Appendix II

The Life of Theodore of Edessa (An outline based on the Arabic recension)	Arabic (SA 538)	Greek (Pomialovskii)
Title and Introduction	120r–v	I
A. Theodore's birth, childhood and call		
Conception and birth	121r–v	II–III
Childhood and call (age 7), embraces the ascetic life	121v–122v*	IV–VI
Pilgrimage to Jerusalem (age 20)		VII–VIII
B. Theodore, monk of Mar Sabas		
Becomes a monk (5 years)	123r	IX–XI
Serves as steward (12 years); death of superior	123r–124r	XII–XIV
Theodore the anchorite; disciples, teaching	124r–133r	XIV–XL
The martyrdom of Michael of Mar Sabas (cf. Georgian version)	*124v–131r**	*XIX–XXXIV*
(includes a debate with a Jew in the presence of the King)	*(128r–129v)*	*(XXV–XXVIII)*
Theodore's address to the monks (*BHG* 1744i)	*131v–133r*	*XXXVIII–XXXIX*
C. Theodore, Bishop of Edessa		
Election and consecration as bishop	133r–135v	XLI–XLV
Ministry in Edessa, friendship with Theodosios *al-ḥabīs*	135v–143v	XLVI–LXVIII
Theodore's inaugural (doctrinal) sermon (*BHG* 1744fg)	*135v–138r*	*XLVI–LII*
Theodosios tells the story of [Ader] (*BHG* 1744de)	*139r–142r*	*LVI–LXI*
Theodosios tells the story of himself and his brother	*142r–143v*	*LXII–LXVII*
Opposition in Edessa, decision to appeal to the King	143v–144r	LXVIII–LXX
D. Theodore in Baghdad		
Theodore heals the King, who restores peace in Edessa	144r–146v	LXX–LXXV
A visit to John *al-sā'iḥ*	146v–147v	LXXVI–LXXVIII
The King's conversion to Christianity	147v–150r	LXXVIII–LXXXIII
To Constantinople: heals Theodora, gets fragment of Cross	150r–151v	LXXXIV–LXXXVI
A debate with a Jew in the presence of the King	151v–153r	LXXXVI–XCI
Another visit, with the King, to John *al-sā'iḥ*	153r–155r	XCII–XCIX
John's exhortation to martyrdom	*154r–v*	*XCV–XCVII*

* Two leaves are missing from the story in Sinai Arabic 538: after f. 122 and after f. 130.

Appendix II *(cont.)*

The Life of Theodore of Edessa (An outline based on the Arabic recension)	Arabic (SA 538)	Greek (Pomialovskii)
E. Homecomings		
Theodore's journey to Holy Land, return to Edessa	155r–156v	C–CV
Theodore's farewell exhortation to the King	*155v–156r*	*CI*
The martyrdom of the King (John)	156v–158v	CVI–CXII
The death of Theodosios	158v	CXII
Theodore's late ministry in Edessa (for 3 years), leave-taking	158v–159v	CXIII–CXV
Theodore's farewell sermon in Edessa	*159r–v*	*CXV*
Final journey to Jerusalem, death at Mar Sabas	159v	CXV
Conclusion	159v–160r	CXV

STUCCOWORK AT THE MONASTERY OF THE SYRIANS IN THE WĀDĪ NAṬRŪN: IRAQI-EGYPTIAN ARTISTIC CONTACT IN THE ʿABBASID PERIOD

Lucy-Anne Hunt

Introduction

This communication concentrates on an aspect of Syrian Orthodox (i.e. miaphysite) church decoration, carved stucco, in its relation to wood and stonework in the third/ninth-fourth/tenth centuries. Discussion of this particular art form elucidates the impact of artistic and cultural contacts beyond Iraq, in particular to Egypt. Alongside that in Muslim buildings, the stuccowork of the church of al-ʿAdhrāʾ in the Monastery of the Syrians (Dayr al-Sūryān) in the Wādī Naṭrūn, near Alexandria persuasively shows the extent of the influence of Iraqi art in the ʿAbbasid period. Although it is generally assumed to date to the period of Moses of Nisibis' abbacy in the early fourth/tenth century, I here reattribute the stucco to the later third/ninth century, and propose a key role for Takritans as intermediaries in the transfer of artistic and cultural ideas from Iraq to Egypt in the ʿAbbasid period.

Stuccowork at the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn, and Iraqi-Egyptian Contacts

The issue of the stuccowork at the church of al-ʿAdhrāʾ should first be discussed outside the world of Christian art in the wider context of cultural contacts between Iraq and Egypt. Iraqi-Egyptian relations were well-established in the Ṭūlūnid period (254/868–292/906), as can be seen from the Iraqi influences on the architecture of Egypt. The debt to the ʿAbbasid architecture of Iraq is recognized in the Friday mosque in Cairo, completed in 265/879, which is the only surviving part of the garrison city built by Ibn Ṭūlūn at al-Qaṭāʾiʿ, north of Fusṭāṭ.[1] Its stucco and woodwork are very close in design to those of the buildings of the

[1] Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn: K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, vol. II *Early ʿAbbāsids, Umayyads of Cordova, Aghlabids, Ṭūlūnids and Samānids, AD 751–905*, Oxford, 1940 (rpt. New York, 1979), pp. 332–59; R. Ettinghausen and O. Grabar, *The Art and*

ʿAbbasid city of Samarra, dating between 221/836 and 269/885. To take a general example, the stucco (gypsum) panelling of the underside (intrados) of one of the arches of the outer arcade of the sanctuary of the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn, with its stylized naturalistic motifs laid out within geometric fields contained within a beaded border (Fig. 1), can be compared with a stucco panel from a room excavated at Samarra (Fig. 2).[2] Although the Samarra example here was designated the second of three types that the excavator Ernst Herzfeld originally proposed at Samarra, it has been recognized that these stylistic shifts are not fixed.[3] Herzfeld himself acknowledged overlaps in the appearance of the Samarra styles in Egypt, not least in the light of K. A. C. Creswell's work at the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn.[4] It is important, therefore, to view ornamental style within the wider context of cultural contacts between Iraq and Egypt, in which other factors, including developments in secular culture and the contribution by Christians, can be shown to play as vital a role.

There is no real contradiction between the adoption of ʿAbbasid building traditions in the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn and Ibn Ṭūlūn's assertion of military and political independence from Baghdad. Prosperity, especially through the development of trade between Iraq and Egypt, stimulated the movement of communities, of individuals and of a diversity of forms of art and culture that accompanied this phenomenon. Cultural influence went well beyond that of religious architecture. To take a secular example, singers were brought to Egypt from Iraq to enhance the life of the court, as Dr Hilary Kilpatrick has pointed out.[5] A passage in Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's *Kītāb al-aghānī* mentions an Iraqi singer called al-Dayzanī, nicknamed Nubayka, who achieved success and prosperity in Egypt, and adds:

> This Nubayka was a highly skilled, outstanding singer who had performed for al-Muʿtamid before he went to Egypt and sang for Khumārawayh ibn Aḥmad [Ibn Ṭūlūn]. Later he came to Baghdad, during al-Muqtadir's reign, and we saw and heard him. He possessed a considerable fortune,

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Architecture of Islam 650–1250, New Haven and London, new impression 1994, pp. 92–4 with illusts. 66–70; R. Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*: Form, function and meaning. Edinburgh, 1994, pp. 145–56.

[2] The Ibn Ṭūlūn example from the second arch from the north east wall is reproduced by Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, vol. II, Pl. 107 (a). For the Samarra example, from House II room 41, see E. Herzfeld, *Die Ausgrabungen von Samarra*, vol. I, *Der Wandschmuck der Bauten von Samarra und seine Ornamentik*, Berlin, 1923, pp. 155–60, Taf. LXXVI, Orn. 219 upper.

[3] Creswell designated the styles A, B and C, reversing the order of Herzfeld's I, II and III. For recent summaries of the Samarra issue, see Ettinghausen and Grabar, *Art and Architecture of Islam*, pp. 102–5; Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, pp. 398–408.

[4] See Herzfeld's comments in *Wandschmuck*, pp. 7–8.

[5] I owe the following information on singers and slave girls to Dr Hilary Kilpatrick (personal letter, 8 November 2001).

thanks to the Ṭūlūnid's generosity, and so he was financially independent for the rest of his life.[6]

The Fāṭimid musician Ibn al-Ṭaḥḥān (died after 449/1057) in his *Ḥāwī al-funūn wa-salwat al-maḥzūn* includes among a list of singers from the reign of al-Ikhshīd a number whose names suggest Iraqi origin, among them Abū al-Qāsim al-Fāriṣ, al-Wāsīṭī, and Nuʿm al-Mādharā'iyya.[7] The last of these was presumably a slave girl who belonged to the Mādharā'ī family of high officials of Iraqi origin. The member of this family contemporary with al-Ikhshīd was Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad, who first went to Egypt in 272/885 as deputy director of finances, remaining there twenty years until the fall of the Ṭūlūnids. He was brought back to Baghdad but returned to Egypt as director of finances in 301/913. Although he resisted al-Ikhshīd at first and was imprisoned, he later regained influence.[8] Nuʿm's presence suggests that he acquired his own musicians from his country of origin. As with those who provided secular forms of entertainment, architects and craftsmen would have been brought from Iraq to Egypt to produce buildings to the taste of the ruler and prominent Iraqi emigrés and their families.

Stucco at the Church of al-ʿAdhrā'

The issue to be considered here, through discussion of the stucco ornament of the Church of al-ʿAdhrā' at Dayr al-Sūryān (plan, Fig. 3), is the participation of Christians in this Iraqi-Egyptian cultural shift.

The main location of stucco in this church is the square central eastern sanctuary, or haikal, where it extends across two registers, occupying both the lower and the upper parts of the wall space. These can be briefly described. In the lower part, the eastern apse niche (now painted with a recent painting of Christ flanked by the four beasts of the apocalypse) is framed with stucco decoration (Figs 4B and 5), including stucco colonettes with capitals below a vase of globular flowers on either side. Beyond, on either side are two vertical bands of ornament within leaf scrolls. To the upper right and left of the niche arch are disks, now blank, which were probably inlaid or painted, perhaps with crosses. The disk shape is repeated in the stuccoed spandrels of the doorways to north and south of the main apse niche, while a foliage design meanders around

[6] Dār al-Kutub, Cairo, 1927–74, vol. II, p. 233.

[7] Facsimile ed. E. Neubauer, Frankfurt am Main, 1990, p. 112. For the Fāṭimid period he cites Zahwa al-Baghdādiya, al-Bābaliyya and Dhakūr Jāriyat al-Ra'īs al-Baghdādiya (p. 14).

[8] See Bernard Lewis, 'Egypt and Syria', in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. I, *The Central Islamic Lands*, ed. P. Holt, A. K. S. Lambton and B. Lewis, Cambridge, 1970, p. 180.

the arches (Figs 4A and C). Also repeated is the framing design of interlocking parallel lines punctuated by pairs of beads. The main recesses of the north and south walls are also ornately decorated with stucco, with larger projecting motifs in the spandrels and beaded borders (Fig. 6). These features relate the recesses to the stuccowork of the upper register in which the ornamental motifs are more moulded and three-dimensional, in contrast with most of those in the lower level, which are flatter, finer and more dense in appearance.

A continuous stucco band separates the lower from the upper register. It extends around the east (Fig. 5 drawing), north and south walls (Figs 7A and B) of the haikal, and contains large fleshy projecting motifs banded by a beaded border. Above it on the east side are rectangular panels with palmette trees and crosses, against a background of vine scrolls, imagery surely symbolising the eucharist.[9] On the north and south sides are rectangular panels with even larger motifs alternating with blocked tracery windows. Narrower horizontal panels complete the design at the ends of the north and south walls (top right sides of Figs 7A and B). There are sections of replaced stuccowork in the upper western section of the north wall, and in the centre and two outer rectangular panels of the upper east wall (not illustrated here). These were probably undertaken in the eighteenth century, when much of the choir (khurus) and nave of the church was coated with plaster. As a whole, to the modern eye the stuccowork gives the haikal a somewhat top-heavy and claustrophobic, if compellingly atmospheric, character, accentuated by the light filtering down from the windows in the drum and cupola above the stucco (Fig. 8), which is reduced by the presence of the added high altar canopy.

Features of both the lower and upper registers are combined in the stuccowork to be found in the chapel attached to the north side of church, to the east of the north porch entrance (Fig. 3). This chapel, now dedicated to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, was known as the Chapel of the Forty-Nine Martyrs when H. G. Evelyn White studied the church. Here the decoration over the southern niche of the east wall (Fig. 9) (the niche itself was painted, or repainted, with the standing figure of St Mark in the seventh/thirteenth century) combines the fleshy amorphous motifs of the upper register of the haikal with the more compact foliage scroll work, carved capitals and line and bead frame ornament of the area around the main apse of the church.[10]

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[9] The eucharistic symbolism was noted by Prince Johann Georg: Johann Georg, Herzog zu Sachsen, *Streifzüge durch die Kirchen und Klöster Ägyptens*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1914, p. 35. The bronze cross shown suspended from the crown of the apse arch in W. J. Palmer-Jones' drawing (here Fig. 5) is now in the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo. See H. G. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of the Wādi 'n Natrūn*, ed. W. Hauser, Part III, *The Architecture and Archaeology*, New York, 1933, p. 205 with Pls LXCII (reproduced here) and Pl. XCI (b).

[10] For this chapel see Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part III, pp. 208–9 with Pl. LXXI

Elements of the stucco of both the main haikal and the Chapel of the Forty-Nine Martyrs can be directly compared with that of the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn. Both the main apse (Figs 4B, 5), and the niche containing St Mark (Fig. 9) comprise columns with capitals and ornamental surrounds, as in the stucco mihrab at the mosque (Fig. 10), one of two located on the second arcade of the *qibla* wall.[11] The large curving leaves of the arch spandrels of St Mark's niche are particularly close to those in the same position on the mihrab. What this demonstrates is that Christian craftsmen in Iraq were quick to assimilate this Iraqi-style ornament into one of their major monastic church buildings. But how quickly?

The current consensus concerning the stuccowork at the Church of al-'Adhrā' and Moses of Nisibis

The general agreement until now has been to attribute the stuccowork in the church of al-'Adhrā' to the time of Abbot Moses of Nisibis in the early fourth/tenth century, thereby accepting that there was a considerable time-lag before Christians chose to take up this distinctive form of stuccowork. Josef Strzygowki in 1901 pointed to the similarity between it and the stuccowork in the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn, but nevertheless attributed it to the time of Moses before the erection of the main haikal doors (Fig. 11), which are inscribed on the lintel and left jamb with the date 1225 of the Greeks, equivalent to 913–14 AD.[12] The only difference he saw from the work in the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn was that the latter was flatter and richer in its ornamental repertoire. He raised the question as to whether the workmanship was undertaken by a Copt or a Syrian, or whether it reflected Moses' Iraqi background.[13] Soon after Strzygowski wrote, the German exploration of Samarra commenced, in 1907–8.[14]

In 1916 the approach taken by S. Flury was to analyse particular motifs in detail, drawing comparisons with Samarra and the mosque of

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b. For the present dedication to the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste see the recent guidebook published by the monastery, *As-Syryan: Coptic Orthodox Monastery of the Virgin St. Mary, Wadi Natrun, Egypt*, n.d., pp. 11–12. The painting was uncovered in 1993; and restored in 1994 by the Institut François d'Archéologie Orientale (Cairo), see G. J. M. van Loon, *The Gate of Heaven: Wall Paintings with Old Testament Scenes in the Altar Room and the Ḥūrus of Coptic Churches* (Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Institute Istanbul), Leiden, 1999, pp. 3, n. 16, and 198 with note 900, and Pl. 87.

[11] Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, vol. II, p. 349, Pl. 123 (a).

[12] See below, notes 32–3.

[13] J. Strzygowski, 'Der Schmuck der älteren el-Hadrakirche im syrischen Kloster der Sketischen Wüste', *Oriens Christianus* 1, 1901, pp. 356–72, esp. pp. 357–8, 371.

[14] F. Sarre and E. Herzfeld, *Archäologische Reise im Euphrat- und Tigris-gebiet*, vol. IV, Berlin, 1911, pp. 52–109.

Ibn Ṭūlūn, but also further afield. He proposed antecedents in the sculpture of monasteries in Syria and the sculptural façade of the late Umayyad palace of Mshattā, and pointed to work of the ʿAbbasid period such as the carved woodwork of the minbar of the mosque at Qayrawān.[15] He viewed the stucco as a precursor of the ornamental work in the mosque of al-Azhar and the mosque of al-Ḥākim of the later fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries, in its absorption of the ornamental elements of vine leaves and palmettes into a new arabesque, an ʿAbbasid synthesis, which was to form the basis for art of the early Fāṭimid period. This approach viewed the stuccowork at al-ʿAdhrāʾ as integral to developments in Islamic art. It interpreted the ornamental work at the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn as pivotal, in that here this form of ornamental repertoire became 'naturalized' to Egypt. Flury had no doubt that the craftsmanship at al ʿAdhrāʾ was Egyptian. He attributed the work to *ca* 900 during the abbacy of either Moses of Nisibis or his predecessor (John I).[16] Prince Johann Georg of Saxony, writing in 1914, departed from this norm in expressing the view, in a single phrase without substantiation, that the stuccowork might date to the second/eighth century.[17] But in coupling the al-ʿAdhrāʾ stucco with the ornament of the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn as 'the two most westerly examples of the art of the ʿAbbāsid Empire', K. A. C. Creswell, in his major work on early Muslim architecture published between 1932 and 1940, simply assumed its date to be 914, contemporary with the haikal doors, without question.[18]

H. G. Evelyn White, in his work published in 1933, provided the most detailed description of the stucco, and attributed it to the time of Moses of Nisibis.[19] His grounds were that the Chapel of the Forty-Nine Martyrs was an addition to the structure and probably dateable to the time of Moses. Furthermore, he considered the work to be fourth/tenth century on stylistic grounds, and pointed to the presence of stucco on the facings on either side of the haikal doors of 913–14 (Fig. 11). The architecture of al-ʿAdhrāʾ, cannot, however, be taken as a firm measure of the date of the stucco, as its phasing is not entirely clear. It is true that the Chapel of the Forty-Nine Martyrs has been attributed to the fourth/tenth century, but the grounds are not stated.[20] The square east end of the church is also an undated later addition to the main structure of the

[15] S. Flury, 'Die Gipsornamente des Dēr es-Sūrjānī', *Der Islam* 6, 1916, pp. 71–87.
[16] Ibid., p. 86 with note 1.
[17] Johann Georg, *Streifzüge*, p. 35.
[18] Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, vol. II, p. 356. See also K. A. C. Creswell, revised and supplemented by J. W. Allen, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, Aldershot, 1989, p. 406.
[19] Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part III, pp. 204–7 with Pls LXVI–LXXII (a).
[20] P. Grossmann, *Mittelalterliche Langhauskuppelkirchen und vervandte Typen in Oberägypten*, Glückstadt, 1982, plan, p. 113, Abb 47.

church, which was built between late 646/7 and 665.[21] Furthermore, Evelyn White himself pointed to the architectural similarities of the central haikal of al-'Adhrā' and the haikal of Benjamin at the monastery of St Macarius, Dayr Abū Maqār, also in the Wādī Naṭrūn, which is dated to the third/ninth century, 210/825–215/830, during the abbacy of Abba James, following the destruction of 202/817.[22] Both haikals are covered with an octagon which rests on wooden sleeper timbers, in place of squinches, at the point of transition to the square below. They also share very similar traceried windows. The southern sanctuary in the church of St Macarius also preserves a remnant of stuccowork at the lower left side of the north door of the southern sanctuary, which was uncovered during restoration work at the monastery during the 1970s (Fig. 15). This is very similar to some of the more abstract vertical panels at either end of the upper north and south walls in the al-'Adhrā' sanctuary (Figs 7A and B) and can be argued to date from the same time. Both are also very similar to the abstract style of carving employed in woodwork in Egypt in the later third/ninth century, an example of which (Fig. 16) was found in the excavations at Fusṭāṭ.[23] Finally, while it is true that the haikal doors of 913–14 are embedded in stucco, the bordering is not closely comparable to that in the main haikal or the Chapel of the Forty-Nine Martyrs, and could have been set at the time the doors were themselves erected.[24]

In again associating Moses of Nisibis with the stuccowork, Abbé Jules Leroy in 1972 attempted to define Moses' personality as a patron of the arts as well as an abbot and collector of books for the library of Dayr al-Sūryān.[25] Unlike earlier commentators, he restricted his attribution to Moses of only the earlier phases of painting which was then either concealed by later wallpainting or coated with the eighteenth-century plaster that covers much of the church.[26] These earlier phases are being uncovered by the team led by Dr K. Innemée of Leiden University.[27] The

[21] P. Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten*, Leiden, 2002, p. 503.

[22] Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part III, pp. 35, 98–9, 200–1, 207, with Pl. XXIV (b) and Fig. 7 (Sanctuary of Benjamin, Dayr Abū Maqār) and Pl. LXX (a) and (b) (al-'Adhrā').

[23] E. Pauty, *Catalogue Général du Musée arabe du Caire: Les bois sculptés jusqu'à l'époque ayyoubide*, Cairo, 1931, p. 18 with Pl. XIV, no. 3379.

[24] Alterations in sections of stuccowork in the church are not without precedent. K. C. Innemée, 'Deir al-Surian (Egypt): conservation work of Autumn 2000', *Hugoye* (http://syrcom.cua.edu/hugoye/) 4, 2001, p. 4 points out that there has been disruption to the stucco footing to the doorway from the khurus to the southern haikal chapel (pastophoria) on two occasions and speculates as to the dates of these changes.

[25] J. Leroy, 'Moïse de Nisibe', *Symposium Syriacum* 1972 (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 197), 1972, pp. 457–70.

[26] Leroy, 'Moïse de Nisibe', pp. 469–70.

[27] For which see the articles and reports in the journal *Hugoye*, the most recent being Innemée, 'Deir al-Surian', pp. 1–6.

stuccowork has, in addition, received recent comment by M. Immerzeel, again in the context of an early fourth/tenth century dating.[28]

While the attribution of the stuccowork to Abbot Moses of Nisibis has become accepted without question in the scholarly literature on Dayr al-Sūryān, there is actually no direct evidence for it either in the written sources, manuscript colophons or elsewhere. It is true that as a high-profile abbot Moses had ambitions for the monastery. Born at Nisibis in the second half of the third/ninth century, he must have entered the monastery of the Syrians before the end of that century and gradually risen to the position of abbot. His name appears for the first time in the monastery in 906/7, in a manuscript now in the British Library.[29] It is mentioned again, certainly in his capacity as abbot, in manuscripts of 914 and 928 which are still in the monastery, and the last mention occurs in a manuscript of 943.[30] His visit to Baghdad in 315/927 to entreat the caliph to abolish taxes imposed on monks, bishops and the infirm, indicates his status and the authority which he held. This visit also provided him with the opportunity to undertake his five-year round tour to the monasteries of Mesopotamia to collect the 250 manuscripts which he brought back to Dayr al-Sūryān. Of these, approximately 60 are preserved in European libraries, particularly the British Library and the Vatican library.[31] Above all it was he who commissioned the double wooden central haikal doors (Fig. 11) and those of the choir of the church, dated respectively 913/4 and 926/7 and newly-uncovered paintings in the choir are attributed to him.[32] The Syriac inscription of the

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[28] M. Immerzeel, 'The Crowned Altar: The Stuccoes of Deir al-Surian and their historical background', *Essays on Christian Art and Culture in the Middle East* 3, 2000, pp. 40–62 (an article which reached me after the present article was written), mentions the Takritans but again attributes the stucco to Moses of Nisibis. The same view was expressed in a paper presented to the Wādī Naṭrūn Symposium in February 2002, to be published in the conference proceedings in the journal *Coptica*.

[29] B.L. Add 12,142, f. 73b; W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum, acquired since the year 1838*, 3 vols, London, 1870–2, vol. I, pp. 97b–98a; Leroy, 'Moïse de Nisibe, p. 464; K. Innemée and L. van Rompay, 'La Présence des Syriens dans le Wadi al-Natrun (Égypte). À propos des découvertes récentes de peintures et de texts muraux dans l'Église de la Vierge du Couvent des Syriens', *Parole de l'Orient*, 23, 1998, p. 187, though he may not necessarily have been abbot yet.

[30] Leroy, 'Moïse de Nisibe', p. 464.

[31] For Moses' travels, see H. G. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of the Wādi 'an Natrūn*, ed. W. Hauser, Part II, *The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and of Scetis*, New York, 1932, p. 337 and n. 11, with reference to al-Maqrīzī's *Khiṭaṭ*. Evelyn White gives a list of the books still extant brought to the Syrian monastery by Moses of Nisibis in 932 that are still extant, pp. 443–5; see also Leroy, 'Moïse de Nisibe', pp. 465–6; Innemée and van Rompay, 'La présence des Syriens', p. 187 point out that the manuscripts came mostly from Takrīt, Resh 'Ayna and Ḥarrān. They raise (p. 188 and n. 57) the interesting question as to what effect this stripping of Iraqi monasteries of books had on Mesopotamian monastic culture.

[32] Strzygowski, 'Der Schmuck', pp. 64–8, was the first to study the doors' inscriptions. For the attribution of the khurus wallpaintings to Moses, see Innemée, 'Deir al-Surian', p. 4.

lintel and left jamb of the sanctuary screen doors states that Moses as abbot 'took pains and built and raised up this altar of the Church of the Mother of God' during the reigns of Gabriel I (909–20) and John IV (910–23) as Patriarchs respectively of Alexandria and Antioch.[33] The choir doors were also made 'through the pains and at the charges' (presumably both on the orders and at the expense) of Abbot Moses.[34]

Leroy's interpretation of the word 'altar', *madbḥo*, in the inscription accompanying the main haikal doors as denoting not only the altar itself but also the main sanctuary as a whole, provided an argument for attributing the stucco decoration to Moses.[35] However, the actual altar here is no ordinary one and would have called for special commemoration. For while the base itself is a hollowed masonry cube, the altar slab is exceptional amongst the monastery churches in the Wādī Naṭrūn. Instead of being of white marble this is of black marble, 'thickly studded with sections of fossil remains, and was probably imported' according to Evelyn White.[36] It is possible that Moses brought the slab back from Iraq, with the books, and installed it at the same time as the sanctuary doors were put in place. Moreover, as has been suggested above, the main sanctuary was more likely to have been erected with the haikal of Benjamin at Dayr Abū Maqār shortly before 830 and before the time of Moses. This prompts us to explore in more depth the third/ninth-century parallels for the stucco, taking into account the events affecting the Wādī Naṭrūn monasteries, including the influx of other individuals and groups with Iraqi connections, especially the Takritan community.

The stucco viewed in the light of stuccowork in religious monuments, the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn and Christian churches

The similarities of the al-'Adhrā' stucco to that of the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn have already been asserted. There are also, however, differences. The mosque is more restrained in its decoration, while the extent and density of the stucco is much greater in the al-'Adhrā' work. In the mosque the stuccowork is concentrated around the arcades, piers and mihrabs, in such a way that it follows, rather than competes with, the structure of the architecture. This restraint is characteristic of 'Abbasid

[33] Sanctuary doors: Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part III, pp. 197–200 with Pls XCI (f) and LXIV–LXV. Innemée and van Rompay, 'La présence des syriens', p. 187, translate '*bna w-taqqen*' as '*aménagea*', i.e. 'arranged', or 'fitted out'.

[34] Choir doors: Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part III, pp. 187–190 with Pls XCI (f) and LVIII–LX.

[35] Leroy, 'Moïse de Nisibis', pp. 467–8.

[36] Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part III, p. 203.

mosques as a whole, including those in Iraq.[37] It is also, in general, a feature of the use of stucco and stone carving in Christian churches.

The usual tendency of Christian artists working in stone carving within the areas of Greater Syria, the Ṭūr ʿAbdīn and Mesopotamia, was also to decorate around architectural features, especially cornices, architraves and capitals, sometimes with crosses in the apse conch. An example is the sculpture of the Syrian Orthodox church of Mār Azizael at Kefre Ze in Turkey.[38] Another is the sculptural decoration of the cathedral of Nisibis, Mār Yaʿqūb, of which the north church is dateable to 713–47.[39] The churches of Ḥīra, in Iraq were refurbished in the early second/eighth century and coated with plaster which formed part of the thick layer (five coatings in one church), with paintings and crosses in the apse and crosses on plaster plaques in the nave.[40] This stuccowork was undertaken at the same time as that in other buildings of the early second/eighth century in Ḥīra, in which elaborate carved work was used for door jambs and cornices in particular.[41] The use of white plaster was common in Nestorian and Chalcedonian churches, albeit with a greater interest there in figural art.[42] Particularly interesting for the ʿAbbasid period is the reference to the Armenian Katholikos John (d. 929) who referred to those who 'built stone churches . . . and covered them heavily in whitewash'.[43] Commenting on this phrase, Marlia Mundell has said, 'it is reasonable to suppose . . . that the whitewashing of the side walls of a church was the frugal counterpart of the monochrome gold mosaic' covering more lavish churches such as St Sophia in Edessa.[44] There may be some truth in this as far as the convenience and economy of using plaster rather than gold or mosaic is concerned. However, the extent of the wall cov-

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[37] This point is made by Ettinghausen and Grabar, *Art and Architecture*, p. 102: 'by and large Abbasid mosques were decorated very soberly.'

[38] Marlia Mundell, 'Monophysite Church Decoration', in Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin eds, *Iconoclasm, papers given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, Birmingham, 1977, p. 66 with Fig. 10 and nn. 77–8.

[39] G. Bell, with an introduction by M. Mundell Mango, *The Churches and Monasteries of the Ṭur ʿAbdin*, London 1982, pp. 70–3 with Figs 46–7 and Pls 70–83.

[40] D. Talbot Rice, 'The Oxford Excavations at Hira, 1931', *Antiquity* 6, 1932, pp. 279–82, esp. pp. 280 and 282 with Figs 3–4. Interestingly, Talbot Rice suggests, p. 288, that 'In Egypt the ninth century stuccos [*sic*] of Deir es Suryani illustrate a parallel development.' See D. Talbot Rice, 'The Oxford Excavations at Ḥīra', *Ars Islamica* 1, 1934, pp. 57 and 58, for the churches excavated on mounds V and XI; Mundell, 'Monophysite Church Decoration', p. 72 with Fig. 11 (1).

[41] Talbot Rice, 'Oxford Excavations', pp. 61–5 with, especially, Figs 9–15. Talbot Rice (p. 65) considers the Ḥīra stuccowork to belong to 'a different line of development' from that of Samarra, though 'to a great extent derived from the same originals'. For further reproductions of this stuccowork at Ḥīra see Talbot Rice 'Oxford Excavations', Fig. 8, Pls V–VI, VIII.

[42] Mundell, 'Monophysite Church Decoration', pp. 60–2 with Fig. 8.

[43] Ibid., pp. 72–3.

[44] Ibid., p. 73.

ering, as well as the elaborate and very deliberately chosen intricate motifs at the church of al-ʿAdhrāʾ, suggests to me that the particular nature of the intricate design of the stuccowork must have been undertaken not just within a Christian artistic tradition, but also with a knowledge of the secular work of the day, especially that of the cities of Iraq and other places within its sphere of cultural influence, including Egypt itself.

Links with secular art

Links with secular art could partly have to do with the interest of ʿAbbasid and Ṭūlūnid rulers in and their visits to monasteries. One may cite, for the Wādī Naṭrūn, the interest of Ibn Ṭūlūn's second son Khumārawayh who succeeded his father in 270/884. He visited the church of St Macarius, and saw the body of the saint and an icon of St Theodore.[45] Furthermore, depictions of monks formed a genre in ʿAbbasid secular art. A complete painted pottery wine vessel and fragments of others were found under the floor during the excavations of the Jausaq al-Khaqānī palace at Samarra.[46] This is related to the fact that, as D. S. Rice has pointed out, the best wines available in the ʿAbbasid period were those to be drunk in taverns attached to monasteries.[47] Other ceramics too were decorated with illustrations of monks, including a jar attributed to fourth/tenth century Iraq which is now in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington.[48]

Direct parallels with Samarra

The main parallel for this type of rich stuccowork is in the secular art of Samarra. Indeed, representatives of all three Samarra styles are found in the stuccowork at the church of al-ʿAdhrāʾ. The grape vine design, reproduced here framing the apse niche (Figs 4B and 5), as well as providing a backdrop elsewhere (Figs 4A and C, 7A and B), and in the lower arch spandrel of the north wall recess niche (Fig. 6), contains a motif of a hanging bunch of grapes accompanied by an elongated vine leaf which is drilled with holes. The same design is found at Samarra

[45] Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part II, 335–6, quoting the *History of the Patriarchs*.
[46] D. S. Rice, 'Deacon or Drink: Some paintings from Samarra re-examined', *Arabica: Revue d'études arabes* 1, 1958, pp. 15–33, with Pls I and II b, c, e for representations of monks.
[47] Ibid., p. 32.
[48] Ettinghausen and Grabar, *Art and Architecture*, p. 115 with Fig. 96.

(Style A, Fig. 12, right side).[49] The textured honeycombing on the projecting motifs which stand out from the spandrels on the north wall recess niche decoration (Fig. 6) as well as the central motifs of the friezes on the north and south walls of the haikal (Figs 7A and B) also appear at Samarra (Style B) at the Bāb al-ʿĀmma at the Jausaq palace (Fig. 13).[50] This type of design also appears at the Qaṣr al-ʿAshīq at Samarra, dated 265/878– 269/885.[51] The vertical panels at the ends of the north and south haikal walls (Figs 7A and B) display similar abstract designs of simply cut curved shapes to those of Samarra style C (Fig. 14).[52]

These close similarities with Samarra work would suggest a date in the second half of the third/ninth century for the stuccowork at the church of al-ʿAdhrā'. They also point more to direct contact with Iraqi work than that gained indirectly by way of the stuccowork in the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn. There are historical reasons why there was sustained contact between Iraq and Egypt, which preceded the period of Ibn Ṭūlūn. Ibn al-Dāya recounts how in about 247/861 a fugitive from Iraq, a partisan of al-Muntaṣir, found refuge amongst people from Baghdad in Fusṭāṭ and felt safe from the likelihood of capture there.[53]

Stuccowork at the Church of St Macarius, Dayr Abū Maqār, and that of al-ʿAdhrā'

At Samarra the abstract style C stuccowork (Fig. 14) displays incised dots, or groups of dots, forming 'eyes'. This abstract pattern is very similar to the design on the stuccowork fragment preserved on the western door jamb of the north doorway of the southern haikal of the church of St Macarius, Dayr Abū Maqār, also in the Wādī Naṭrūn (Fig. 15).[54] This came to light during the archaeological and restoration work at the church in the 1970s, under fragments of wallpainting. It occurs at the lowest level on the north wall, at the entry way to the small chamber linking the south chapel to the central sanctuary. This kind of third/ninth century abstract work is found elsewhere in Egypt, including a later

[49] Ornament 274: Herzfeld, *Wandschmuck*, pp. 214–16 with Taf. XCII. For ornament 266 to the left of it, see p. 205. The parallel was noted by Flury, 'Gipsornamente', pp. 75–6, with Abb. 1–2.

[50] Ornament 260: Herzfeld, *Wandschmuck*, p. 200 with Taf. XCI and Abb. 285.

[51] Ornaments 256 and 257: Herzfeld, *Wandschmuck*, p. 198.

[52] Ornament 94: Herzfeld, *Wandschmuck*, p. 69, no. 96 with Taf. XXXIII.

[53] Quoted by Creswell, *Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, p. 406 and n. 18.

[54] For a restored plan of the church of St Macarius at Dayr Abū Maqār see Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part III, p. 42 with Fig. 3. I hope to return to issues in the decoration of the church of St Macarius in an article for the Proceedings of the Wādī Naṭrūn Symposium, February 2002, forthcoming in *Coptica*.

third/ninth-century panel excavated at Fusṭāṭ (Fig. 16).[55] Although we can only speculate, it is surely likely that the prosperous Takritan community in Fusṭāṭ at this time would have had a church or churches with woodwork such as this, and even stuccowork, and that carvers from Iraq might have worked there.

In the early third/ninth century there was destruction in Scetis, as a result of a Bedouin attack in about 202/817 and the Church of St Macarius was destroyed. The *History of the Patriarchs* records that some time after 210/825 and probably in about 215/830 the Patriarch James set about restoring it telling how he 'rebuilt the church which was named after St Macarius, and is the sanctuary of Benjamin, for it was in a state of decay; but Abba James decorated it with every kind of ornament . . . and this edifice became a monument to the patriarch, and a glory to the Lord'.[56] The relics of St Macarius were installed in the new church in 830. The similarity of stuccowork between that at the church of St Macarius and that of al-'Adhrā' can be explained by the likely presence of the same craftsmen and the same Takritan monks. The monks themselves may even have undertaken the work.

It is entirely plausible that building campaigns took place at both monasteries at the same time, with the stuccowork undertaken at a time between the mid-century and the 270s/880s. This points to a more widespread use of stucco, and reinforces the connections between Iraq, Syria and Egypt. It further implies that the process could well have been two-way, for in originally developing this special type of stuccowork Iraqi artists drew on late Umayyad work from Syria. It is highly likely that sites in Syria, particularly the palace of Raqqa, with its stuccowork of the period of Hārūn al-Rashīd (170/786–193/809) played a crucial role in the later development of the stuccowork at Samarra.[57] This gives greater prominence to the role of emigré Christians of Iraq and the Takritan community in Fusṭāṭ.

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[55] E. Pauty, *Catalogue general du Musée arabe du Caire; les bois sculptés jusqu'à l'époque Ayyoubide*, Cairo, 1931, p. 18, no. 3379 with Pl. XIV.

[56] Severus of Ashmūnayn *et al.*, *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, ed. and trans. B. Evetts, vol. I, Paris, 1904, p. 574; Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part II, p. 35, n. 3, mentions the Coptic account of the translation of the relics of St Macarius in 830, probably written to be read when the relics were installed in the new church.

[57] See the comments of M. Meineke, 'From Mschattā to Sāmarrā': The architecture of Ar-Raqqa and its Decoration', in P. Gayraud ed., *Colloque international d'archéologie Islamique, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Cairo 3–7 February 1993*, Cairo 1998, pp. 146–8.

Other direct parallels with carving from Iraq

Other contacts with the art of Iraq can be deduced from surviving carved woodwork. Carved panels within a frame, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Fig. 17, detail, Fig. 18), which probably came originally from a door, are comparable.[58] As with the church of al-ʿAdhrāʾ stuccowork (Figs 4A and C, 5, 6, 7A and B, lower panels), the circular vine scrolls here contain the pairing of leaves with hanging bunches of grapes. The attitude to carving is equally to cover the whole available space. The New York panels, with others, were originally thought to have been found at Takrīt,[59] though it has also been proposed that they form part of a larger group which includes a carved wooden door now in the Benaki Museum in Athens (Fig. 19) which was found near Baghdad.[60] It need not be assumed, however, that the distinction between Takrīt and Baghdad in terms of carving style was a significant one. Beyond Iraq, similar woodcarving is also found in the carved wooden panels on the minbar of the mosque of Qayrawān.[61]

It has also been suggested that Iraqi carvers were directly working in Egypt, through comparison between a different wooden panel from the Iraqi group which is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 20) and a panel from the cemetery of ʿAyn al-Sīra in Cairo (Fig. 21).[62] Both display the arched design and winged palmette motif, the latter in the centre of the main rectangular panel on the New York piece. This winged palmette motif also appears in the al-ʿAdhrāʾ stuccowork (Figs 4A and C, 5), where it occupies the base of the palmette tree of the upper rectangular panels to left and right of the main apse.

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[58] M. S. Dimand, 'Studies in Islamic Ornament. 1. Some Aspects of Omaiyad and Early 'Abbāsid Ornament', *Ars Islamica* 4, 1937, esp. pp. 294–9; Ettinghausen and Grabar, *Art and Architecture*, p. 108 with Fig. 84.

[59] Ibid., p. 293.

[60] E. Pauty, 'Sur une porte en bois sculpté provenant de Bagdad', *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 30, 1931, pp. 77 and 81, Pl. IV. See now M. Moraitou, 'Umayyad Ornament on Early Islamic Woodwork: a Pair of Doors in the Benaki Museum', *Μουσειο Μπενακη* 1, 2001, pp. 159–72.

[61] Dimand, 'Studies', p. 308. Dimand stresses the Umayyad origin, with its background in the Christian art in Syria and Egypt, of the naturalistic qualities of the work. He also discusses it in the light of similar carving on the minbar at Qayrawān, attributed by him to the time of Hārūn al-Rashīd, but to *ca* 862 by Ettinghausen and Grabar, *Art and Architecture*, p. 105 with Figs 81–3. Ettinghausen and Grabar, p. 108 and n. 49, p. 393, deduce that the Qayrawān minbar was carved locally under orders from the Aghlabid emir, from teak imported from Baghdad. They place the Baghdad panels 'a few decades earlier' in the early third/ninth century. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, p. 319, cites Ibn Nājī as saying that the Qayrawān minbar panels were brought from Baghdad by Abū Ibrāhīm Aḥmad in 242/856. His view is that they were brought already carved.

[62] Ibid., pp. 299–300, reproduces both the New York panel (Fig. 5) and the ʿAyn al-Sīra panel (Fig. 6). For the latter, see also Pauty, *Musée arabe du Caire*, p. 12 with Pl. IX [no. 2462].

Takrīt and Dayr al-Sūryān

The population of Takrīt, situated on the right bank of the Tigris, north of Samarra and a hundred miles from Baghdad, was recorded in the fourth/tenth century by Ibn Ḥawkal as being predominantly Christian. He also remarked that there was a great monastery there.[63] It was a centre of Christian Arab and Syrian scholarship, particularly during the third/ninth to fourth/eleventh centuries.[64] It was also renowned at various times as a prosperous agricultural and wool-working town,[65] situated on main communication and trade routes, including that linking Baghdad with Syria and elsewhere.[66] Christians participated in this profitable trade, and the population of Takrīt included wealthy Syriac-speaking Christians.[67] Above all, since 629 it had been the seat of the Maphrian, the Primate of the Eastern Syrian Orthodox (miaphysite) Church.[68]

In the light of this, it is not surprising to find a community of Takritan merchants prospering in Fusṭāṭ and Takritan monks populating Egyptian monasteries, especially the Monastery of the Syrians, during the early-to-mid third/ninth century. The later claims that the Takritan community bought the monastery from the Copts soon after 710 has been finally discredited by L. Van Rompay.[69] Instead, Takritans became integrated into Egyptian monastic life and contributed to the development of Dayr al-Sūryān as a cultural centre. Of particular importance were a group of five brothers, some related by blood, others spiritually, who entered the monastery and donated manuscripts, and were instrumental in the donation of manuscripts by other Takritans.[70] Four of the brothers were

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[63] G. le Strange, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, Cambridge, 1905, p. 57. Le Strange, p. 25, puts Takrīt on the border of the geographers' definition of Iraq.

[64] J. M. Fiey, 'Tagrīt. Esquisse d'histoire chrétienne', *L'Orient Syrien* 8, 1963, pp. 316–19.

[65] Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, p. 57.

[66] Ibid., pp. 82, 84–5.

[67] A. Harrak, 'Recent Archaeological Excavations in Takrit and the Discovery of Syriac Inscriptions', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies*, 1, 2001, pp. 26–7, notes the find of funerary inscriptions of four members of the Saliq family in the Syriac cemetery, testimony to the commemoration of a wealthy family.

[68] J. M. Fiey, *Mossoul Chrétienne* (*Recherches publiées sous la direction de l'Institut de Lettres Orientales de Beyrouth* 12), Beirut, 1959, p. 16.

[69] For this claim, that the purchase was masterminded by the Takritan monk Marutha, the son of a government official in Egypt, see Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part II, pp. 317–18. See now Innemée and van Rompay, 'La présence des syriens', pp. 191–3; L. van Rompay and A. B. Schmidt, 'Takritans in the Egyptian Desert: the Monastery of the Syrians in the Ninth Century', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 1, 2001, pp. 41–2.

[70] For the foundation and early period of the library see Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part II, pp. 439–41. Innemée and van Rompay, 'La présence des syriens', pp. 182–4, note that of the manuscripts brought by the brothers to Dayr al-Sūryān, thirteen are in

also responsible for restoring the monastery, according to a colophon in one manuscript and a mural inscription uncovered during the recent cleaning and conservation work at the church. The colophon, dated to between 819 and 830, refers to the brothers having 'built and constructed the holy place'.[71] And the inscription, on the northern wall of the church, narrows down the building work to 818–19, in stating that Mattay and Jacob jointly built and constructed this monastery.[72] It is possible, therefore, that it is the Takritans who were responsible for the contruction of the haikal. The stuccowork could have been done at the same time, or more likely, given the arguments here, later in the century. The Takritans retained their influence throughout the third/ninth century: around the middle of this century the monastery gained its name of Dayr al-Sūryān, and from then until the end of the century (894) the abbots were all Takritans.[73] Furthermore, books continued to be presented to the library by Takritans at various times up to the turn of the fourth/tenth century, including a donation in 906–7, by which time Moses of Nisibis was already in the monastery.[74]

It can be suggested, then, that the role of the Takritans may have gone beyond that of sponsors and donors of manuscripts to a more instrumental one, of putting the stuccowork in place in the main haikal of the church of al-'Adhrā'. After all, it is now known from the inscription on the north wall that the Takritan monks participated directly in the building work of 818–19. This would explain another anomaly at the church of al-'Adhrā', the square east end. This square shape is known as a feature of the east end of the single sanctuaries of the *qaṣr*s in the Wādī Naṭrūn monasteries.[75] But it is are also a feature of the Iraqi churches of Ḥīra and the rectangular churches of Takrīt.[76] It is also

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European libraries while three remain in the monastery library. Innemée and van Rompay, p. 185, suggest as reasons for the diaspora of Christians from Takrīt the ecclesiastical conflicts of the late second/eighth to early third/ninth centuries.

[71] MS London, BL Add. 14,648: Wright, *Catalogue*, vol. III, 1091a–1092b; Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part II, pp. 311, 441 n. 10; van Rompay and Schmidt, 'Takritans in the Egyptian Desert', p. 46.

[72] Van Rompay and Schmidt, 'Takritans in the Egyptian Desert', pp. 50–1, inscription no. D.3.

[73] Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part II, p. 462 (Abbots of the Syrian monastery).

[74] Ibid., pp. 442–3. Evelyn White suggests, on p. 337 with nn. 5–7, that Moses had arrived in the monastery during the latter part of the third/ninth century and not 907, as a literal reading of the manuscripts (e.g. Wright, *Catalogue*, p. 668, No. DCCXXXVIII) might suggest.

[75] With one exception; see C. C. Walters, *Monastic Archaeology in Egypt*, Warminster, 1974, p. 25.

[76] See Talbot Rice, 'The Oxford Excavations at Hira', p. 279, Figs 1–2, for the churches excavated in mounds V and XI. For Takrīt see Harrak, 'Recent Archaeological Excavations at Takrit', p. 16 with plans 2 and 3, for the church at the site of al-Chenisa, which was adapted at the east end to form a square apse, and p. 20 with plan 4 for the church of the Citadel.

likely that Christian monuments of Takrīt were decorated with stucco. Two vaulted chambers with stuccowork remain at the site of the Muslim sanctuary of al-Arbaʿī to the west of the old town of Takrīt, thought once to be the site of a Christian building.[77] It will be recalled that it was in the middle of the third/ninth century that the monastery of the Syrians started to be known as Dayr al-Sūryān. It can be suggested that the Takritans were alive to the associations of this imported style of stucco, and used it deliberately to assert a new identity for the church of al-ʿAdhrāʾ, one that was to be abandoned in favour a more appropriate bipartisan Copto-Syrian approach during the abbacy of Moses of Nisibis.

Moses of Nisibis' concerns were with the library and with diplomacy. The sanctuary screen doors (Fig. 11) show the hallmarks of the taste of an intellectual, a bookman and a diplomat. The inscription tactfully mentions the heads of both Coptic and Syrian Churches in stating that Moses erected the doors during the time of Gabriel I (909–20) patriarch of Alexandria and John IV (910–923) patriarch of Antioch. This Copto-Syrian approach is reinforced by the inclusion, to left and right of the central figures of Christ Emmanuel and the Virgin, of the Coptic Dioscoros and the Syrian Severus.[78] The carved figures, inlaid with ivory, are iconic and the decoration is restrained. This is a completely different approach from the clearly eastern-style non-figural stucco decoration of the apse, which had been undertaken some thirty to fifty years earlier.

The style proved tenacious in Iraq itself. A lectionary now in the Vatican library (Vat. Syr. 559), completed by the scribe Mubārak on 2 May 1220 at the monastery of Mar Mattaï near Mosul, includes illustrations framed with an ornamental design which translates, as it were, stucco designs onto paper.[79] In a description of a mosque in Mosul, Ḥamdallah al-Mustawfī al-Qazwīnī, writing in the eighth/fourteenth century, referred to carved stonework that seemed to be imitating wood carving in its intricacy.[80]

I have suggested that the influence of ʿAbbasid artists may well have been widespread, and that this affected both Christian and Muslim artistic production. There is no doubt that the significance of a figure such as Moses of Nisibis in the early fourth/tenth century was considerable, particularly for his contribution to the building up of the library, and

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[77] *EI*², vol. X, art. 'Takrīt'.

[78] Evelyn White, *Monasteries*, Part III, pp. 197–9.

[79] See, for example, the frames surrounding the portraits of Matthew and Mark and the Descent into Hell, reproduced in J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits syriaques conservés dans les bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient* (*Institut Français d'archéologie de Beyrouth, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique* 77), Paris, 1964, p. 281, with Pl. 70 (1).

[80] Le Strange, *Eastern Caliphate*, p. 89; for bibliographical reference to al-Mustawfī's Persian *Geography* and *Secret History*, see p. 16, n. 2.

his work undertaken on the church, including its haikal and choir doors. However, I suggest here that the stuccowork in the main haikal predates Moses. The haikal itself was arguably rebuilt, together with the sanctuary of Benjamin at Dayr Abū Maqār, before the mid-third/ninth century. Then the stuccowork was added in the later third/ninth century, taking direct note of work in Baghdad as well as ʿAbbasid-style carving in Egypt itself, at the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn and in woodwork from Fusṭāṭ, which was significant for its Iraqi community from earlier in the century. This gives greater prominence, and identity, to the artistic contribution of the Takritans at Dayr al-Sūryān.

Fig. 1. *Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn, Cairo: outer arcade of sanctuary, second arch from N.E. wall. (Photo: L.-A. Hunt)*

Fig. 2. *Stuccowork, Samarra (Style B): ornament 219. (Photo: after Herzfeld)*

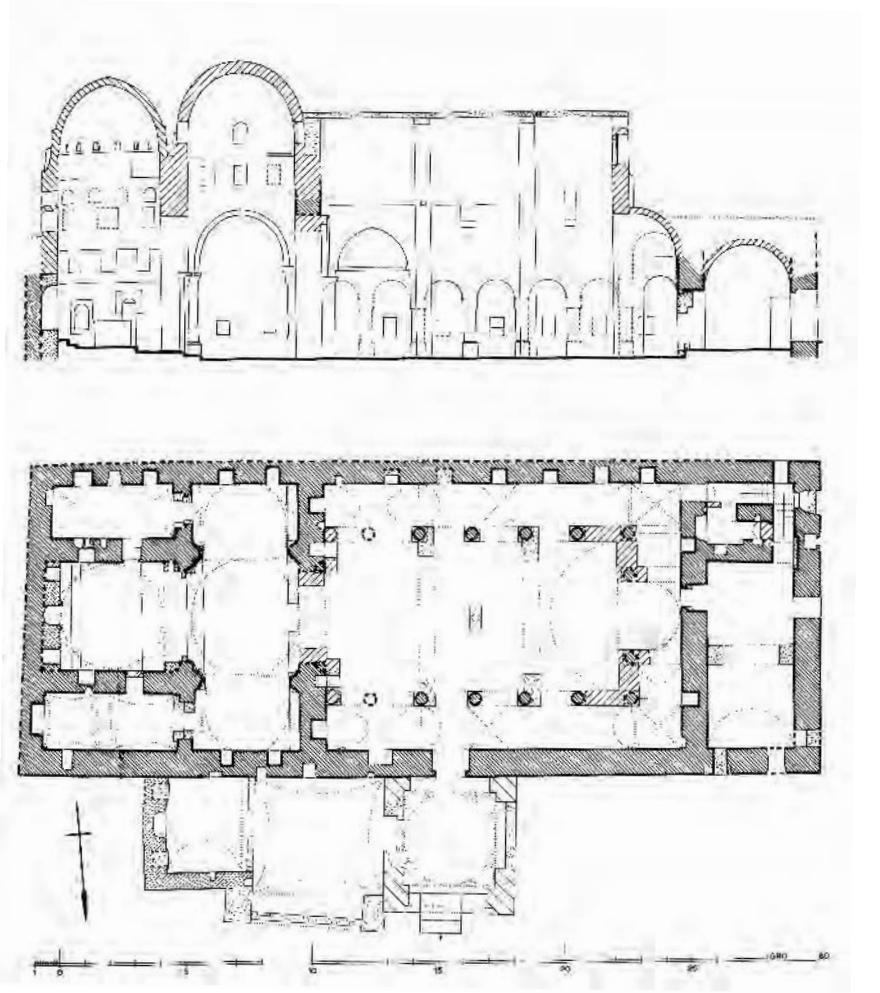

Fig. 3. *Church of al-'Adhrā', Dayr al-Sūryān: plan and cross-section. (Plan: after Grossmann)*

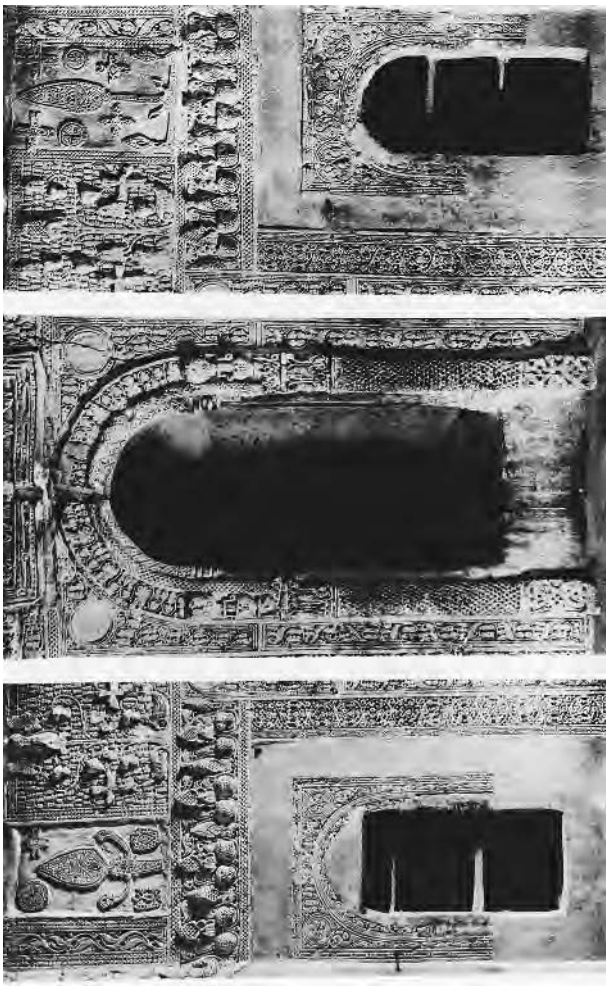

Fig. 4. *Church of al-ʿAdhrā', Dayr al-Sūryān: stucco, east wall. (Photo: after Evelyn White)*

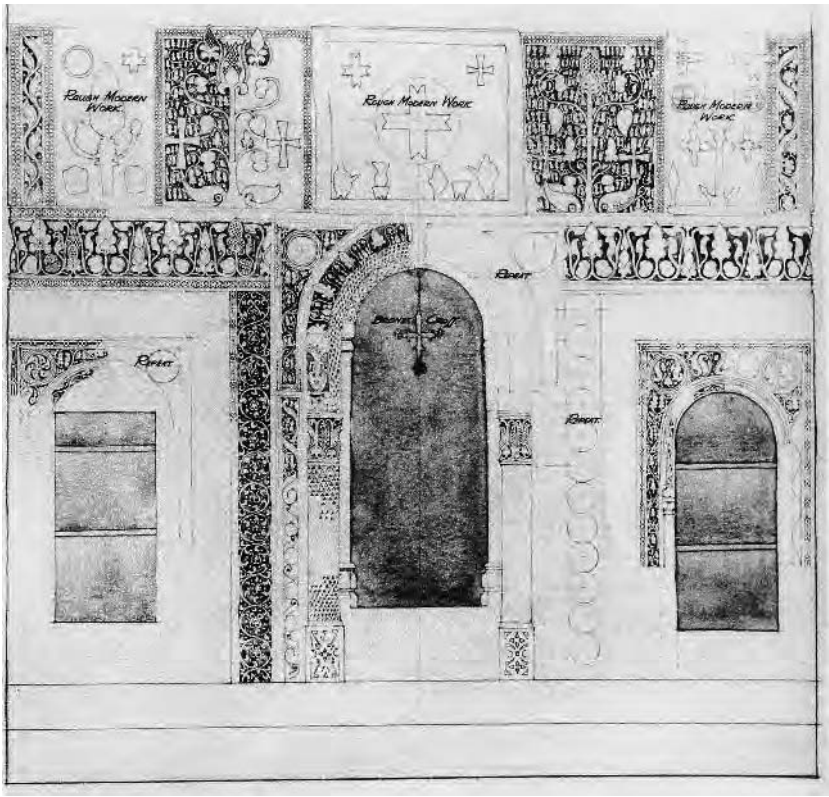

Fig. 5. *Church of al-'Adhrā', Dayr al-Sūryān: drawing of East wall. (Drawing: W. J. Palmer-Jones, after Evelyn White)*

Fig. 6. *Church of al-'Adhrā', Dayr al-Sūryān: stuccoed recess, north wall. (Photo: L.-A. Hunt)*

Fig. 7. *Church of al-'Adhrā', Dayr al-Sūryān: stucco decoration, A. north wall; B. south wall. (Photos: after Evelyn White)*

Fig. 8. *Church of al-'Adhrā', Dayr al-Sūryān: main haikal, drum and cupola. (Photo: L.-A. Hunt)*

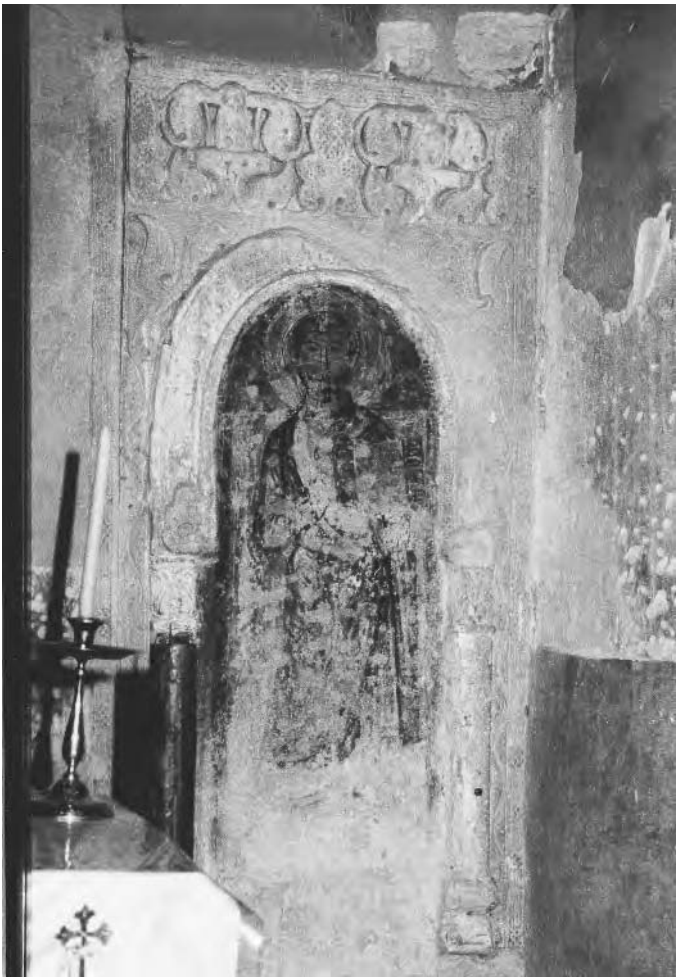

Fig. 9. *Church of al-'Adhrā', Dayr al-Sūryān: stuccoed niche, Chapel of the Forty Martyrs (formerly Forty-Nine Martyrs). (Photo: L.-A. Hunt)*

Fig. 10. *Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn, Cairo: supplementary stucco mihrab. (Photo: L.-A. Hunt)*

Fig. 11. *Sanctuary doors. Church of al-'Adhrā', Dayr al-Suryan. (Photo: after Evelyn White)*

Fig. 12. *Stucco, Samarra (style A). (Photo: after Herzfeld)*

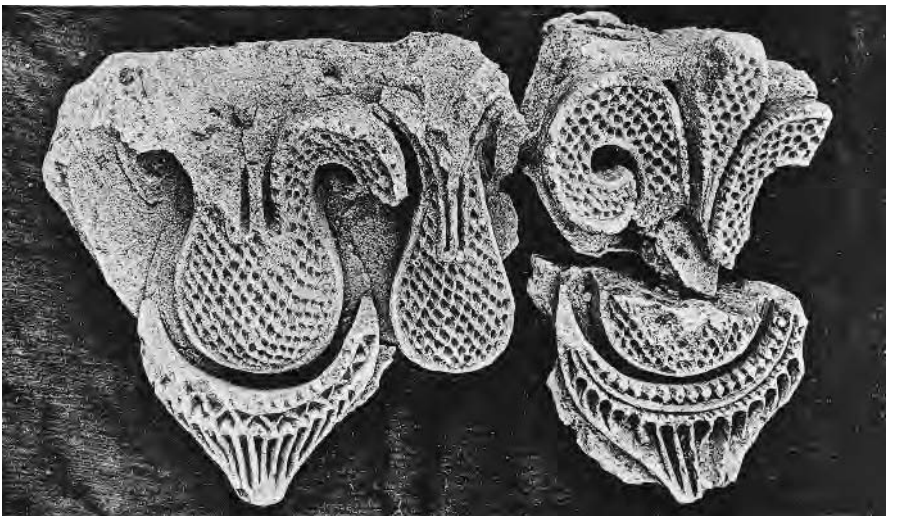

Fig. 13. *Stucco from Bāb al-Amma, Djausaq Palace, Samarra (Style B). (Photo: after Herzfeld)*

Fig. 14. *Stucco from Samarra (Style C), Ornament 94. (Photo: after Herzfeld)*

Fig. 15. *Stucco detail, western door jamb, north door, southern chapel. Church of St. Macarius, Dayr Abu Makar, Wadi Natrun. (Photo: L.-A. Hunt)*

Fig. 16. *Carved wooden panel from excavations at Fustāṭ, Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo. (Photo: after Pauty)*

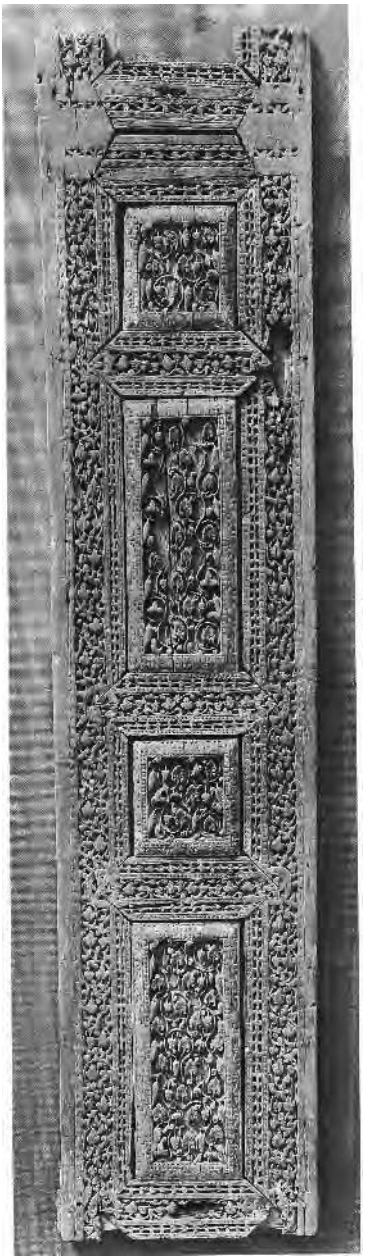

Fig. 17. *Fragmentary Pinewood Door (179.7 × 39.4 cm). ʿAbbasid period, A.D. 800. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1931. (31.63). (Photo: Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)*

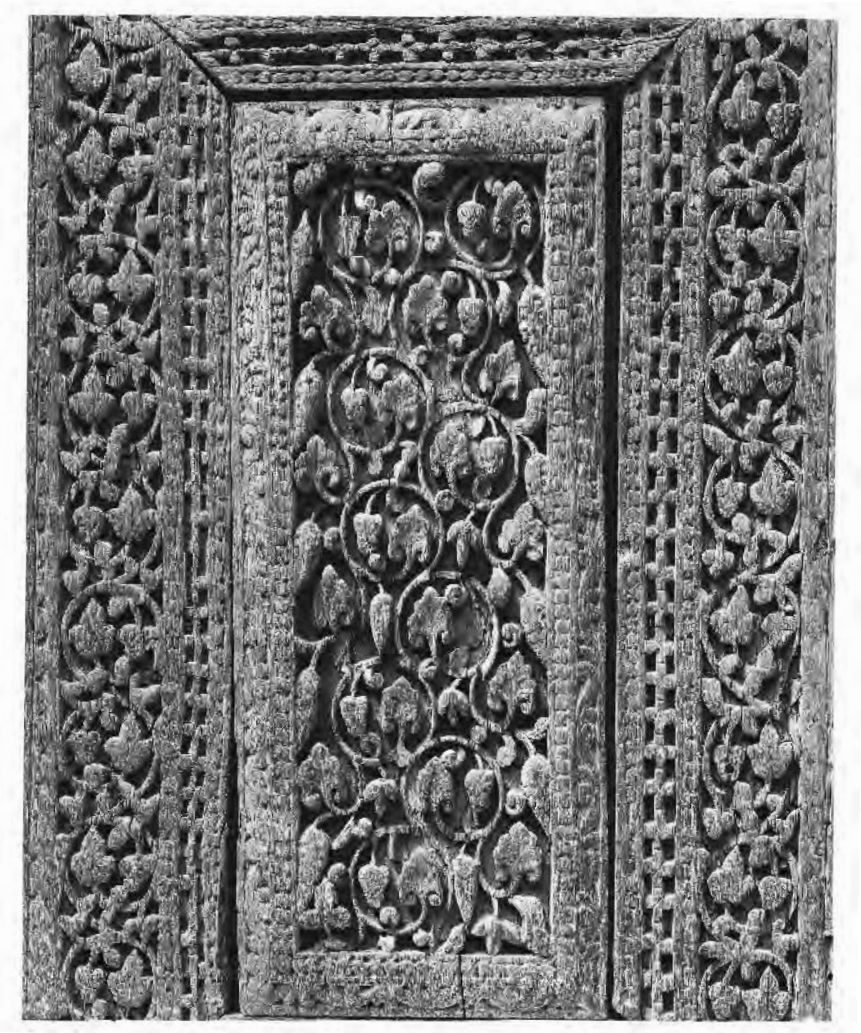

Fig. 18. *Fragmentary Pinewood Door (179.9 × 39.4 cm). Detail. 'Abbasid period, A.D. 800. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1931. (31.63). (Photo: Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)*

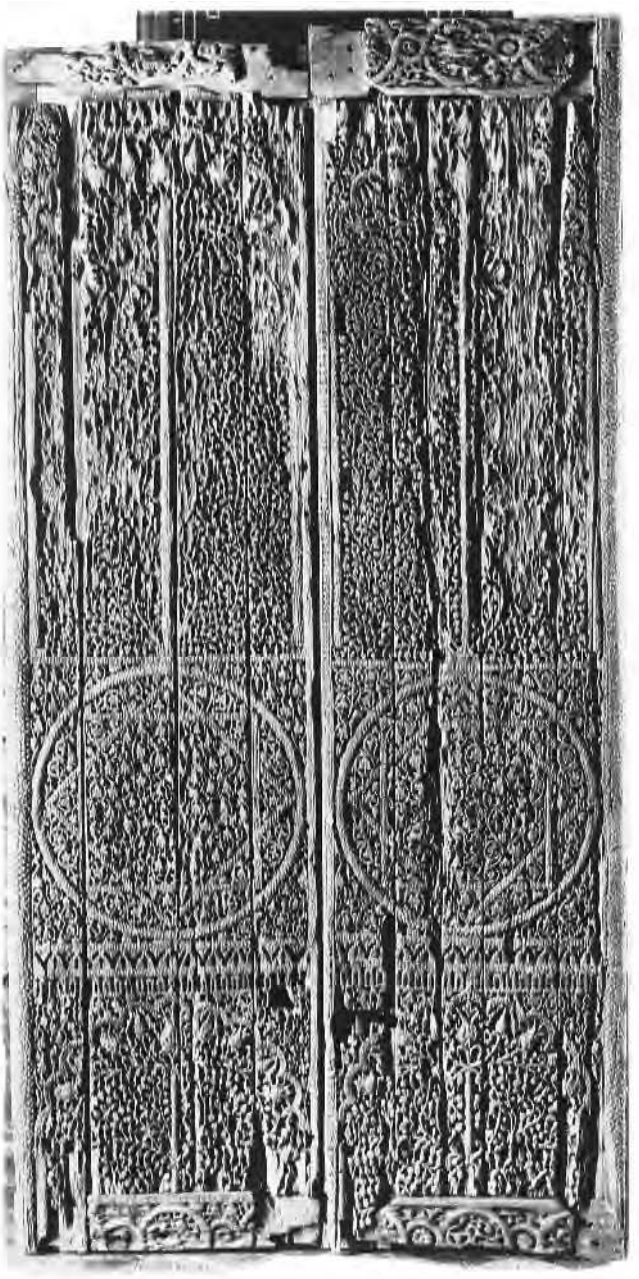

Fig. 19. *Carved door fragment, wood, found in the vicinity of Baghdad, second half of the 8th century (2,55 × 1,23 m). Athens, Benaki Museum, Inv. No. 9121.*
(Photo: Courtesy of The Benaki Museum, Athens)

Fig. 20. *Carved wooden panel. Islamic, second half of the eighth century A.D. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1933. (33.41.14). (Photo: Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)*

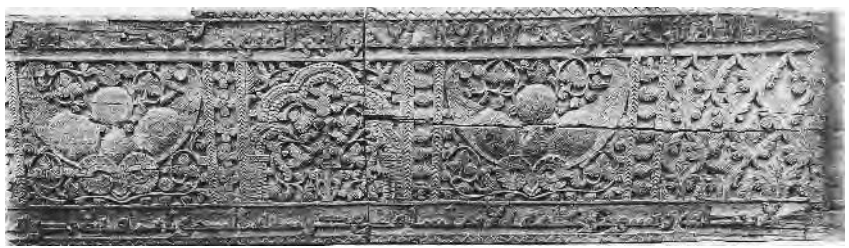

Fig. 21. *Carved wooden panel from the Cemetery of ʿAin al-Ṣīra, Cairo. (Photo: after Pauty)*

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THE 'PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE' IN TENTH CENTURY BAGHDAD: THE CONTRIBUTION OF YAḤYĀ IBN 'ADĪ'S *KITĀB TAHDHĪB AL-AKHLĀQ*

Sidney Griffith

Many Christians enjoyed a high public profile in early 'Abbasid Baghdad. Some were physicians, some were philosophers, some were logicians, mathematicians, copyists or translators. Some were Christian apologists and theologians. All of them contributed something to the burgeoning culture of the classical period of Islamic civilization. But in no enterprise did Christians take a more prominent role than they did in the translation movement of the second/eighth to the fourth/tenth centuries, when philosophical and scientific texts of the Hellenistic world were systematically being translated from Greek and Syriac into Arabic. This enterprise not only brought the learning of ancient Greece to the new world of Islam, but also became the impetus for new developments in philosophy itself in the Arab world, and for a new appreciation of the philosophical way of life. And no individual Christian, with the possible exception of Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq (193/809–260/873) in the third/ninth century,[1] could match in prominence the role played by Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī in the public, intellectual life of Baghdad in the fourth/tenth century. His essay on the reformation of morals, the *Kītāb tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, provides a blueprint for that virtuous behaviour in terms of which kings and aristocrats are called upon to do everything in their power to maximize the social conditions in their realms requisite for following the philosophical way of life. It is the purpose of the present study to review Yaḥyā's important essay in the context of his place in the Islamic society of his day, and to make some suggestions about his purposes in writing the treatise.

[1] See Emilio Platti, 'Sagesse et révélation: théologiens arabes chrétiens à Bagdad (IX^{e}–X^{e} siècles)', in R. Lebrun ed., *Sagesses de l'Orient ancien et chrétien: la voie de vie et la conduite spirituelle chez les peuples et dans les littératures de l'orient chrétien* (Conférences IROC 1991–1992), Paris, 1993, pp. 169–92. See also Dominique Urvoy, *Les penseurs libres dans l'Islam classique; l'interrogation sur la religion chez les penseurs arabes indépendants*, Paris, 1996, pp. 67–92.

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Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (280/893–363/974),[2] whose full name is Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī ibn Ḥamīd ibn Zakariyyā al-Takrītī al-Manṭiqī, was a 'Jacobite' or 'Syrian Orthodox' Christian who was born in the city of Takrīt in Iraq. As a young man he moved to Baghdad, where he studied with Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (*ca* 256/870–*ca* 328/940), the philosopher from the 'Church of the East',[3] and with the famous Muslim philosopher Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (*ca* 256/870–339/950). By the mid-330/940s Yaḥyā had become a major figure in a new generation of intellectuals in Baghdad. While he earned his living as a professional scribe, he was also for a while one of the leading exponents of the 'Peripatetic' school of thought in the caliph's capital city.[4] He attracted numerous disciples, both Christian and Muslim, not a few of whom went on to become eminent scholars in their own turn. Because of this obviously successful scholarly career, Yaḥyā and his circle of intellectual associates came to be seen by later historians as important participants in the cultural revival during the Buyid age that Joel Kraemer has described as the humanistic renaissance of Islam in its fourth century.[5] And it is for this reason as well that bibliographers both medieval and modern have made every effort to keep track of Yaḥyā's works. In the fourth/tenth century his friend the Muslim bio-bibliographer Muḥammad b. Isḥāq Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 385/995) recorded his accomplishments in his famous *Fihrist*, and in 1977 Gerhard Endress published an analytical inventory of all the known works of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī.[6]

In addition to his work as a translator, and as a philosopher and logician, who translated many Greek works of Aristotle and his commentators from Greek and Syriac into Arabic,[7] Yaḥyā was also a prolific writer

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[2] See Georg Graf, *Die Philosophie und Gotteslehre des Jaḥjâ ibn ʿAdî und späterer Autoren; Skizzen nach meist ungedruckten Quellen*, Münster, 1910; Augustin Périer, *Yaḥyā ben ʿAdī, un philosophe arabe chrétien du X^e siècle*, Paris, 1920; Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. II (*Studi e Testi* 133), Vatican City, 1947, pp. 233–49.

[3] Abū Bishr is normally described as a 'Nestorian', an adjective of opprobrium used in his own day by the theological adversaries of his community as well as by Muslim writers. It seems best to avoid it in modern scholarly discussion. See S. P. Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church: a lamentable misnomer', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78, 1996, pp. 23–35.

[4] See F. E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: the Aristotelian Tradition in Islam*, New York, 1968, pp. 160–3.

[5] See Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: the cultural revival during the Buyid age*, Leiden, 1986, pp. 104–39. For a brief survey of the Christian participants in this earlier renaissance in the world of Islam, see Khalil Samir, 'Rôle des chrétiens dans les renaissances arabes', *Annales de Philosophie de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 6, 1985, pp. 1–31.

[6] See Bayard Dodge ed. and trans., *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm; a Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, 2 vols, New York, 1970, vol. II, pp. 631–2, and *sub nomine*; Gerhard Endress, *The Works of Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī; an Analytical Inventory*, Wiesbaden, 1977.

[7] For the significance of the translation movement in which Yaḥyā played an impor-

in the area of Christian theology and apologetics.[8] In this connection, his concerns were not limited to the customary topics of the Christian *kalām* developed in the previous century, but extended to issues of public morality, the ethical value of celibacy,[9] and the larger question of the human pursuit of happiness and the avoidance of sorrow.[10]

II

One of the more interesting essays to come from the pen of Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī is the remarkable text *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, a treatise on the improvement of morals in which he teaches that virtue itself suffices to attain the happiness of which human nature is capable. For centuries this work has circulated in the Arabic-speaking world of Islam. It represents such a high degree of cultural integration on the part of a Christian writer in the Islamic milieu that a Muslim scholar of modern times, Naji al-Takriti, has written about the treatise, properly attributed, and without any apparent sense of irony, that 'perhaps the most important feature of *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* is that it was one of the earliest books on Islamic (*sic*) ethical philosophy.'[11] At the very least one may be able to regard it as a concrete instance on the part of an Arab Christian writer of that 'extremely fertile exchange of ideas with Muslim philosophers' of which Franz Rosenthal spoke in his study of the classical heritage in Islam.[12] As such it may also be seen as a Christian contribution to the burgeoning Arabic, Islamic, intellectual culture of the early ʿAbbasid period.

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tant role see Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture; the Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbāsid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)*, London and New York, 1998.

[8] In this connection see the numerous studies of Emilio Platti, in particular E. Platti, 'Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī, philosophe et théologien', *MIDEO* 14, 1980, pp. 167–84; *idem*, 'Une cosmologie chrétienne', *MIDEO* 15, 1982, pp. 75–118; *idem*, *Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī: théologien chrétien et philosophe arabe; sa théologie de l'Incarnation* (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 14), Leuven, 1983; *idem*, *Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī; de l'incarnation* (*CSCO*, 490 and 491), Louvain, 1987.

[9] See Vincent Mistrih, 'Traité sur la Continence de Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī, édition critique', *Collectanea* 16, Études-Documents, Cairo, 1981.

[10] On this topic and its context in Muslim-Christian interaction, see Sidney H. Griffith, 'The Muslim Philosopher al-Kindi and his Christian Readers: Three Arab Christian Texts on "The Dissipation of Sorrows"', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78, 1996, pp. 111–27. For purposes of comparison, see also Thérèse-Anne Druart, 'Philosophical Consolation in Christianity and Islam: Boethius and al-Kindi', *Topoi* 19, 2000, pp. 25–34.

[11] Naji al-Takriti, *Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī, a Critical Edition and Study of his Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, Beirut, 1978, p. 222. In this same connection one might note that al-Shahrastānī, in his *Kitāb al-milal wa-al-niḥal*, was happy to list Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī among the philosophers of Islam; see Gérard Troupeau, 'Quelle était la *nisba* de Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī?' *Arabica* 41, 1994, pp. 416–18.

[12] Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, London, 1975, p. 9.

By now some twenty manuscript copies of all or part of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's *Kītāb tahdhīb al-akhlāq* are known, and Samir Khalil Kussaim not so long ago published a critical edition of the Arabic text that he says in the introduction is, by his count, the twentieth printed edition of the work.[13] Over the long course of its textual history, the work has sometimes been attributed by Muslim scribes and editors to such lofty figures as al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868), Ibn al-Haytham (d. 432/1041), and Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), to name only the most famous of them. In modern scholarship Samir Khalil Samir has forcefully argued on behalf of the work's authenticity as Yaḥyā's composition, noting that over the centuries Christian scribes have consistently attributed the text to him.[14] Gerhard Endress simply concludes, 'There is no intrinsic evidence against the authorship of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī.'[15]

The problem has been not so much that there are actual reasons to attribute the work to anyone else, but that the title as we now have it does not appear in the earliest list of Yaḥyā's works. Instead, a work entitled *Siyāsat al-nafs* appears there, repeating a phrase that in fact often appears in the text itself. But another phrase also appears in the text: *tahdhīb al-akhlāq*. In the course of the transmission of the text over the centuries, it seems that the latter phrase eventually came to be used as the work's title, perhaps under the influence of the titles of similar works of other authors in the wider culture. An example of such another work would be the somewhat more philosophical *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* of the Muslim author, and younger contemporary of Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Miskawayh (320/932–421/1030), who, like Yaḥyā, spent much of his scholarly life in Baghdad.[16] The currency of works of similar titles, in fact, might well have been the reason for the attribution by some Muslim scribes and editors of Yaḥyā's always popular work to Arabic writers with more immediate name recognition and higher credentials in Islamic circles, who were known to have written works with comparable titles. In any case, subsequent to Samir Khalil Samir's exhaustive studies of more than twenty years ago, no recent scholar, Muslim

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[13] Samir Khalil Kussaim, *Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī (893–974); Tahdhīb al-aḫlāq*, Beirut and Cairo, 1994, p. 5.

[14] K. Samir, 'Le *Tahdhīb al-aḫlāq* de Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī (m. 974) attribué à Jāḥiẓ et à Ibn al-ʿArabī', *Arabica* 21, 1974, pp. 111–38; Samir Khalil, 'Nouveaux renseignements sur le *Tahdhīb al-aḫlāq* de Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī et sur le "*Taymūr aḫlāq* 290"', *Arabica* 26, 1979, pp. 158–78.

[15] Endress, *The Works of Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī*, p. 84.

[16] See Constantine K. Zurayk, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq li-Abī ʿAlī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Miskawayh*, Beirut, 1966; *idem* trans., *Miskawayh, The Refinement of Character*, Beirut, 1968. See also Mohammed Arkoun trans., *Miskawayh (320/21–420), Traité d'éthique*, 2nd edn, Damascus, 1988.

or otherwise,[17] now questions Yaḥyā's authorship of the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* that is attributed to him.

While a number of scholarly studies of particular issues raised in Yaḥyā's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* have been published in recent decades,[18] only two monographs have been devoted to the work. One is the Cambridge PhD dissertation of Dr Naji al-Takriti, which includes a critical edition of the text, together with a study of the sources of Yaḥyā's ideas and modes of expression, as well as a comparison of his thought with that of his contemporaries and with the Islamic intellectual tradition more generally.[19] The other monograph, by Marie-Thérèse Urvoy, includes, in addition to a critical edition of the text, a thoroughgoing introductory study, and a French translation of the whole work, heretofore the only translation of it into a Western language.[20]

Both al-Takriti and Urvoy concentrate their analyses of the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* on an examination of the sources of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's ethical ideas, highlighting in particular what they consider to be the three predominant frames of reference behind the work: pre-Islamic Arabic tradition as refracted in early Islamic discourse, the Persian tradition of 'mirrors for princes' and, principally, the Greek philosophical tradition, so major a part of Yaḥyā's own scholarly concerns. Given the undoubtedly Hellenistic flavour of the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* as a whole, and its debts to the early Arabic expressions of views usually attributed to Plato, Aristotle, Galen and Yaḥyā's own master al-Fārābī, it is nevertheless clear that in the ensemble the work is not simply a conventional re-presentation of already familiar doctrines. On the one hand, the recognition of this fact prompted Richard Walzer, ever the reductive source critic, to say of the structure of Yaḥyā's composition that 'this scheme probably depends ultimately on some lost pre-neoplatonic Greek original.'[21] On the other hand, Urvoy speaks of the 'syncretism of Ibn 'Adī' that goes much farther than just the sum of the ideas of his sources.[22]

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[17] Dr Naji al-Takriti independently came to the same conclusion in al-Takriti, *A Critical Edition and Study*, pp. 11–20.

[18] In two places Majid Fakhry has furnished a general sketch of the contents of the work: M. Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2nd edn (*Studies in Asian Culture* 5), New York, 1983, pp. 192–6; *idem*, 'Aspects de la pensée morale de Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī', *Annales de Philosophie de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 6, 1985, pp. 121–30.

[19] Al-Takriti, *A Critical Edition and Study* (see n. 11 above).

[20] Marie-Thérèse Urvoy, *Traité d'éthique d'Abū Zakariyyā' Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adi: introduction, texte et traduction* (*Études Chrétiennes Arabes*), Paris, 1991. See the English translation by the present writer, based on the critical edition of Samir Khalil Kussaim (see n. 13 above), S. H. Griffith, *Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, the reformation of morals*, Provo, UT, 2002.

[21] R. Walzer, 'Akhlāḳ', in *EI*[2], vol. I, p. 328.

[22] See Marie-Thérèse Urvoy, *Traité d'éthique*, p. 43.

And the same author goes on to say that Yaḥyā's work has a markedly different character from the ethical compositions of later Muslim writers who never mention Yaḥyā's work, not even Miskawayh who wrote his own *Kītāb tahdhīb al-akhlāq* in the same city not fifty years later.[23] In other words, one might just as well say that Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, writing in the idiom of his own day and using the scholarly resources available to him, composed an original work with its own purposes in view of the social dimensions of his own time and place.

But first a brief outline of the work is in order. The *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* is short; it is really no more than a pamphlet of fifty-some pages in most editions. The topical outline features five principal sections.[24]

The Definition of Human Moral Qualities

Yaḥyā begins from the premise that human fulfillment and perfection, which he believes one can use the discerning mind to achieve, requires one to become well trained in good moral qualities and to extirpate evil ones. So first of all he must define what he means by a 'moral quality', *khulq, khuluq*, pl. *akhlāq*.[25] Following Galen, he says, 'A "moral quality", *al-khuluq*, is a state, *ḥāl*, proper to the soul, in which a man performs his actions without deliberation or study.'[26]

The problem, according to Yaḥyā, is that while moral qualities may be good or bad, inborn or acquired, in fact evil overcomes most people in the world, and so there is a need in society for kings, laws and

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[23] Mohammed Arkoun, the modern scholar who has most intensively studied Miskawayh's work, says that he was trained by students of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī and must have known his works. See Mohammed Arkoun, *L'humanisme arabe au IV^e/X^e siècle; Miskawayh, philosophe et historien* (*Études Musulmanes* 12), 2nd edn, Paris, 1982, pp. 97–8.

[24] See Endress, *The Works of Yaḥyā*, p. 85.

[25] It is difficult to find *le mot juste* in English for this Arabic term, which was used by the early Arab translators of philosophical texts to translate the Greek term ἦθος (pl. ἤθη). Customarily, in English, the word 'character' is used to render the Greek word. See e.g. F. E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms; a Historical Lexicon*, New York, 1967, p. 66. But it hardly seems to be an appropriate equivalent in the present context. Urvoy uses 'caractère' in French and al-Takriti uses 'character' in English, but the usage is awkward. The phrase 'moral quality' seems more apt; one might also speak of a 'moral disposition' or a 'trait of character', or, in the plural, simply of 'morals', or 'ethics'.

[26] Kussaim, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, p. 22. Both Urvoy, *Traité d'éthique*, p. 25, and al-Takriti, *A Critical Edition and Study*, p. 203, point out that Yaḥyā has borrowed this definition of the 'moral quality' from the Arabic translation of Galen's treatise, Περὶ ἠθῶν, now lost in the original Greek. See P. Kraus ed., *Kītāb al-akhlāq li-Gālīnūs*, *Majallat Kulliyat al-Ādāb*, vol. V (*Dirāsāt fī tārīkh al-tarjama fī al-islām* 1), Cairo, 1937, p. 25. For the English translation of the relevant passage see J. N. Mattock, 'A Translation of the Arabic Epitome of Galen's Book ΠΕΡΙ ΗΘΩΝ', in S. M. Stern *et al.* eds, *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition; Essays Presented by his Friends and Pupils to Richard Walzer on his Seventieth Birthday*, Columbia SC, 1972, p. 236: 'A trait of character is a state of the soul that induces a man to perform the actions of the soul without consideration or precise knowledge.'

systems of ethics to encourage the acquisition and practice of the good moral qualities and the extirpation of the bad ones. Consequently, Yaḥyā gives the reader to understand that the person who can aptly be described as 'someone of reformed morals, *al-muhadhdhab al-akhlāq*' would be the most appreciative reader of his book, because when such a person 'finds his own moral qualities listed in books, and described as good, this summons him to persevere in his good behaviour and to carry on in his way'.[27] But by definition, moral qualities are states proper to the soul, so one must first consider how they relate to the soul.

The Tripartite Soul

Following the Platonic tradition he inherited, Yaḥyā distinguishes three 'powers', *quwā*, in the soul, and he maintains that the soul, with these 'powers', is 'the necessary cause for the differentiation of the moral qualities'. He goes on to say, 'The soul has three powers, and they are also named souls: the appetitive soul, the irascible soul, and the rational soul. All of the moral qualities emanate from these powers.'[28]

From this point, Yaḥyā proceeds to give a brief characterization of the inclinations and instincts of each of the three 'souls' or 'powers'. Along the way one learns that the moral qualities, *al-akhlāq*, inhere in the souls as 'habits', *al-ʿādāt*, and that 'the necessary cause for the differentiation of people's habits' is 'the differentiation of the states, *aḥwāl*, of the soul',[29] that is to say, the differentiation of the moral qualities as characterized by each of the three powers of the soul, since moral qualities are themselves states of the soul. Just as the powers of the soul are 'appetitive', 'irascible' and 'rational', so the moral qualities and their corresponding habits, as states of the soul, are characterized as 'appetitive', 'irascible' and 'rational'. Some of these moral qualities and habits are good and commendable, and some of them are evil and to be avoided; the good ones are 'virtues', *faḍā'il*, the evil ones are 'vices', *radhā'il.*

According to Yaḥyā, the rational soul, which distinguishes man from the animals, is also the power 'by which he deems good deeds to be good and bad deeds to be bad'. Furthermore, 'by means of it a man has the ability to reform, *yuhadhdhib*, the remaining two powers (i.e. the appetitive and the irascible), to control them and to restrain them.'[30] So

[27] Ibid., p. 21. Yaḥyā also puts the phrases 'complete man (*al-insān al-tāmm*)', and 'someone of reformed morals (*al-muhadhdhab al-akhlāq*)' in apposition with one another; see ibid., p. 19.
[28] Ibid., p. 30.
[29] Ibid., p. 35.
[30] Ibid., pp. 42–3.

the 'reformation of morals, *tahdhīb al-akhlāq*', is the work of the rational soul. This 'reformation', *tahdhīb*, itself, according to Yaḥyā, is a process of 'discipline', *ta'dīb*; he uses the two terms in apposition to one another[31] and in parallel phrases. He says, for example, that 'it is necessary for a man to discipline, *yu'addib*, his appetitive soul and to reform it, *yuhadhdhibahā*.'[32] This process of 'reformation' and 'discipline' under the guidance of the rational soul is what allows the one who practises it to become 'someone of reformed morals, *al-muhadhdhab al-akhlāq*'.[33] Such a person can then aptly be described as 'someone confirmed in humanity, *insāniyya*, someone who is deservedly a natural aristocrat'.[34] Later in the treatise, as we shall see, Yaḥyā will speak of such a person as the 'perfect man', *al-insān al-kāmil*, the 'complete man', *al-insān al-tāmm*. But first he reviews the particular virtues and vices that are the principal moral qualities which he thinks call for attention in the context of his discussion of the reformation of morals.

Virtues and Vices

Yaḥyā provides a list of twenty virtues and twenty vices, each of which he defines and describes in some detail. The virtues are: 'abstinence', 'contentment', 'self-control', 'forbearance', 'modesty', 'friendship', 'compassion', 'fidelity', 'honesty', 'keeping secrets', 'humility', 'joy', 'truthfulness', 'benevolence', 'generosity', 'courage', 'emulation', 'perseverance in difficulties', 'high ambition' and 'justice'. The vices are: 'debauchery', 'greed', 'profligacy', 'folly', 'levity' (including 'impudence'), 'passion', 'harshness', 'perfidy', 'dishonesty', 'divulging secrets' (including 'character defamation'), 'arrogance', 'sullenness', 'lying', 'malevolence' (including 'resentment'), 'niggardliness', 'cowardice', 'envy', 'anxiety in the face of adversity', 'lack of ambition' and 'injustice'.[35]

From the perspective of the historian, perhaps the first thing that strikes the reader of this list is its idiosyncratic character. On the one hand, it does not correspond exactly to any earlier scholar's list of virtues and vices; it does not follow the Greek philosophical practice of listing the virtues under the headings of the four cardinal virtues, which is followed, for example, by Miskawayh, whose treatise named *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* is otherwise in a number of respects comparable to the one bearing

[31] Ibid., pp. 35, 42.
[32] Ibid., p. 36.
[33] Ibid., pp. 19, 21, 99.
[34] Ibid., p. 48.
[35] Ibid., pp. 49–84.

the same name composed by his older contemporary Yaḥyā.[36] On the other hand, the virtues and vices on Yaḥyā's list can also be found discussed in much the same terms by other writers to whom he clearly owes a debt, such as Galen, al-Fārābī, perhaps al-Rāzī, not to mention Aristotle and the Platonic tradition. There are also parallels to be found with Persian ethical traditions and even the lore of the ancient Arabs.[37] But when all is said and done, the fact remains that Yaḥyā's list is singular, reflecting the requirements of his own purposes and the distinctive profile of his own thought, whatever may have been his intellectual debts to his predecessors.

One notable feature of Yaḥyā's discussion of the virtues and vices is his practice, after having defined each one of them as a 'moral quality', of making distinctions in terms of their commendability and/or abhorrence and repugnance by reference to the social status of the persons who might possess them. In this connection he distinguishes in particular between kings and 'aristocrats', *al-ru'asā'*, or 'prominent people', *al-uẓamā'* on the one hand, and ordinary people, or even lower class people, on the other. In some instances he makes similar distinctions between men and women, young and old. According to Yaḥyā, a moral quality may be more or less commendable according to the social rank of the person who acquires it, and more or less reprehensible on the basis of the same consideration. A good example of this relativistic point of view may be seen in his discussion of the vice of 'niggardliness', *al-bukhl*. He says,

> 'Niggardliness' is refusing to come to the aid of someone who asks for it, when one has the capacity to aid him.
>
> This moral quality is abhorrent for everyone, but it is less abhorrent for women. As for the rest of the people, niggardliness disgraces them, especially kings and aristocrats. Niggardliness is loathsome for them much more than it is for their subjects; it is degrading in the exercise of their kingship because for them it cuts off ambition and makes them loathsome to their subjects.[38]

Yaḥyā's preoccupying concern for the ruling classes is evident in this quotation, along with other social considerations in the assessment of the degree of abhorrence to be assigned to the moral quality. The same considerations are taken into account in assessing the commendability of virtues, as may be seen in the discussion of the virtue of 'forbearance', *al-ḥilm*. Yaḥyā says,

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[36] See Zurayk, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, pp. 16–30; *The Refinement of Character*, pp. 15–26.

[37] These parallels and their sources have been discussed by Marie-Thérèse Urvoy, *Traité d'éthique*, pp. 27–38; al-Takriti, *A Critical Edition and Study*, pp. 234–9.

[38] Kussaim, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, pp. 81–2.

> 'Forbearance' is abstention from taking vengeance in the heat of anger, in spite of having the capacity for it.
>
> This situation is commendable as long as it does not lead to a breach of honour, or bad policy. It is especially good for aristocrats and kings because they are the ones most capable of taking revenge on those who anger them. The forbearance of a lower class person towards someone of a higher class is not to be reckoned as a virtue, assuming he is in a position actually to encounter him. For even if he holds back, it will only be reckoned as fear and not as forbearance.[39]

Social considerations also prompted Yaḥyā to distinguish four moral qualities that cannot be included in either the list of virtues or the list of vices because in some people they are virtues, but in others they are vices. These moral qualities are: 'love of honour', 'love of pomp and splendour', 'over-compensation for praise', and 'renunciation'.[40] It will be instructive to quote his discussion of 'renunciation', *al-zuhd*, because it includes references to two classes of people for whom Yaḥyā has a high regard. He says,

> 'Renunciation' is diminishing the desire for money and goods, for accumulation and acquisition. It is choosing to be satisfied with what supports bare life, making light of this world and its goods and pleasures. It is diminishing the attention paid to the higher social orders, deeming kings and their kingdoms of small importance, along with the owners of money and their money.
>
> This moral quality is to be considered very good, but it is for scholars, monks, religious leaders, sermon-givers, preachers, and whoever gives people an interest in the life to come and in survival after death. It is not to be deemed good for kings and aristocrats, nor is it appropriate for them. For when a king makes his practice of renunciation public, he becomes deficient. The reason is that his reign only achieves its full purpose with the collection of money and goods, and the accumulation of them, so that he might defend his realm with them, conserve its assets, and come to the aid of his subjects. This is contrary to the practice of renunciation. So if he abandons the accumulation [of goods], his reign becomes futile, and he will summarily be numbered among the most inadequate of the kings who deviate from the way of right government.[41]

In this passage not only can social considerations be seen to play a determining role in Yaḥyā's thinking about a particular moral quality, but his concern for the right conduct of the ruling class is evident, as well as his concern for a meaningful place in society for scholars and religious leaders. We shall return to this theme below. First we must con-

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[39] Ibid., pp. 53–4.
[40] Ibid., pp. 85–91.
[41] Ibid., pp. 89–91.

sider the programme Yaḥyā puts forward for instilling virtues and extirpating vices.

The Way of Reformation

Yaḥyā has a definite programme to commend for the reformation of morals. Having discussed the virtues and vices, he then advises the reader that 'whoever does not take the trouble to control himself and to examine his faults, is not free of many faults, even if he does not perceive them and does not advert to them.'[42] So the obvious requirement is to find a way to acquire the virtues and to extirpate the vices. But first Yaḥyā calls attention to the fact that the ordinary person is wont to think that people surpass one another in worth only in terms of money and possessions, rather than in terms of virtue. He points out that on the contrary money only provides social status and economic power, and he claims that so far is it from enhancing virtue, it may even play a role in exposing and promoting one's vices by providing the means for indulging them.[43] So what is really wanted is a programme of training in good morals and of making their practice habitual. Consistent with the earlier teaching in the treatise, Yaḥyā then reminds the reader that such a programme consists in subjecting the appetitive and the irascible souls and their powers to the control of the rational soul.

The programmes Yaḥyā commends for the rational control of each of the three souls and their powers have some common elements.[44] For the subjection of the appetitive and the irascible souls he recommends keeping the objective of the virtue-to-be-acquired constantly in mind, as well as the repulsive quality of the vices that would otherwise characterize a person's habitual conduct. He suggests that one should frequent the *majālis* of the best and brightest people so as to emulate their practice. He counsels against intoxication, gossip and gluttony at some length. He commends constant vigilance and mindfulness of the virtuous goal to be achieved. In the end, for Yaḥyā, 'the basis of the enterprise to reform morals, and to control appetitive and irascible souls, is the rational soul. All the personal management capabilities, *al-siyāsāt*, are in this soul.'[45]

Several times in the course of his discussion Yaḥyā recommends reading books as a significant part of the process of acquiring virtue. After speaking of the importance of keeping good company he says, 'One must

[42] Ibid., p. 93.
[43] Ibid., pp. 93–9.
[44] Ibid., pp. 101–27.
[45] Ibid., p. 117.

also be continually studying books on morality and deportment, as well as accounts of ascetics, monks, hermits and pious people.'[46] This, for Yaḥyā, is an indispensable part of advancing in the 'rational sciences', *al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya*, which he thinks are necessary for the strengthening of the rational soul. He says,

> When one studies the rational sciences, refines his study of them, examines the books on morality and deportment and lingers over them, his soul will awaken, take cognizance of its appetites, recover from its indolence, perceive its virtues, and reject its vices.[47]

Finally, in connection with reading books, Yaḥyā says, 'Someone who has a love for his own morals must start with the study of the books on morals and deportment, then with putting the knowledge of the truth into practice.'[48] In the end, the programme for acquiring virtues and extirpating vices, for making the virtues habitual, and for suppressing the troubling powers of appetitive and irascible souls, is 'to mend the rational soul, to empower it, to embellish it with virtues, discipline, and good deeds.'[49] He calls this programme 'a management device, *ālat al-siyāsa*', and a workable 'vehicle of practice, *markab al-riyāḍa*'.[50] Its purpose is to provide that 'discernment' (*tamyīz*) of good and bad habits that is based on the acquisition of the 'rational sciences' and the 'refinement of one's critical thinking', *tadqīq al-fikr*.[51] The end product is the perfect man.

The Perfect Man

Yaḥyā says, 'The complete man, *al-insān al-tāmm*, is one whom no virtue eludes and no vice disfigures.'[52] He thinks that only rarely does a man actually fulfil this definition, but he believes it is possible for him to do so. And when it happens he says that such a man 'more resembles the angels than he does mankind'.[53] He can be characterized, says Yaḥyā, as one who 'longs passionately for the form of perfection, *li-ṣūrat al-kamāl*'.[54] For Yaḥyā, the terms 'completeness' or 'fulfillment', *al-tamām*, and 'perfection', *al-kamāl*, together express the hoped-for moral condition of the complete/fulfilled man. And he says that the way to achieve it is to cultivate a solicitude for what the modern reader can only call

[46] Ibid., p. 104.
[47] Ibid., p. 118.
[48] Ibid., p. 119.
[49] Ibid., p. 121.
[50] Ibid., p. 121.
[51] Ibid., p. 122.
[52] Ibid., p. 128.
[53] Ibid., p. 129.
[54] Ibid., p. 130.

the 'philosophical life' as it was practised in Late Antiquity.[55] Yaḥyā himself does not use this expression. Rather, he says that the way for the 'complete man' to arrive at perfection is for him to adopt the following programme of action:

> To direct his attention to the study of the 'positive sciences', *al-ʿulūm al-ḥaqīqiyya*; to make it his goal to grasp the quiddities of existing things, to disclose their causes and occasions, and to search out their final ends and purposes. He will not pause in his labour at any particular end without giving some consideration to what is beyond that end. He will make it his badge of honour, night and day, to read books on morals, to scrutinize books of biographies, and of political policies, and to devote himself to implementing what virtuous people have bidden to be implemented, and what the sages who have gone before have advised to be made habitual. He will also acquire a modicum of the discipline of grammar and rhetoric, and be endowed with a measure of eloquence and oratorical felicity. He will always frequent the sessions, *majālis*, of scholars and sages, and continually associate with modest and abstinent people.[56]

Yaḥyā goes on immediately to say that this profile of the perfect man fits only subjects and commoners. Kings and aristocrats, who for Yaḥyā are not always or even often perfect men,[57] have additional responsibilities. They are charged with seeking the company and the counsel of scholars and sages, and also with supporting them and encouraging them. For the rest, whoever would be perfect must 'establish a rule, *qānūn*, according to which he would be restricted'[58] in response to the pressures of the appetitive and irascible powers of his soul. Yaḥyā gives special attention to the need to control the appetite for food and drink. And he speaks at considerable length about money and its dangers. He says, 'Money is only to be wanted for the sake of something else; it is not to be sought for its own sake.'[59] And the something else he has in mind, at least for the money of kings and aristocrats, is the support of scholars, ascetics and the poor. But he teaches that even the poor should be generous with what little they have.

Positively, Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī teaches that the lover of perfection must habitually love all people. And he bases this obligation on his teaching about the rational soul. He says,

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[55] See the provocative discussion in Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Oxford, 1995. More on this below.

[56] Kussaim, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, pp. 131–2.

[57] See Jad Hatem, 'Que le roi ne peut être un homme parfait selon Yāḥyā Ibn 'Adī', *Annales de Philosophie de l'Université* 6, 1985, pp. 89–104; *idem*, *'Fī anna al-malika lā yastaṭīʿu an yakūna insānan tāmman'*, *Al-Machriq* 76, 1992, pp. 161–77.

[58] Kussaim, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāk*, p. 137.

[59] Ibid., p. 139.

> Men are a single tribe, *qabīl*, related to one another; humanity unites them. The adornment of the divine power is in all of them and in each one of them, and it is the rational soul. By means of this soul man becomes man. It is the noblest of the two parts of man, which are the soul and the body. So man in actual fact is the rational soul, and it is a single substance, *jawhar*, in all men. All men in actual fact are a single thing, *shay' wāḥid*, but they are many in persons, *ashkhāṣ*. Since their souls are one, and love is only in the soul, all of them must then show affection for one another and love one another. This is a natural disposition, *ṭabīʿa*, in men as long as the irascible soul does not lead them on.[60]

From this point Yaḥyā goes on to mention the dangers inherent in the exercise of political or military power and he promotes a commendable openness about faults and failings, especially among kings and aristocrats. He warns that such things can never really be kept secret. Finally, he counsels the reader never to be content with any degree of perfection he thinks he may possess; there is always one beyond it. Yaḥyā says, 'The man farthest from perfection is the one who is content with the deficiency his soul possesses.'[61]

Throughout this portion of the text, as earlier, there is a considerable amount of attention paid to kings and aristocrats, detailing how they of all people stand to profit from the reformation of their morals. While they have all the inducements to pleasure and vice in this world, Yaḥyā says,

> The most successful of them, when his soul aspires to human completeness and yearns for genuine aristocracy, knows that the king is the most worthy to become the most complete person of his time, more virtuous than his officers and subjects. So it should be easy for him to disengage from evil appetites and to forego vile pleasures.[62]

In another place Yaḥyā says,

> The perfect man is an aristocrat by nature. If a king is perfect, embodying good moral actions, including all virtuous traits, he is a king by nature. If he is deficient, he is a king by force.[63]

In Yaḥyā's day, the Buyid period of Islamic history,[64] rulers were not noticeably 'perfect' or 'complete' in any moral sense of the words. Nevertheless, Yaḥyā envisioned a definite role in society for kings and

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[60] Ibid., pp. 147–8.
[61] Ibid., p. 159.
[62] Ibid., p. 136.
[63] Ibid., p. 158.
[64] See Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, rev. edn, London and New York, 2001.

aristocrats. More specifically, he saw it as an important part of their responsibility to raise money. After consolidating their power, he said,

> They should give to the scholars according to their classes, they should assign them salaries from their own private monies, and they should reward anyone who perseveres in knowledge and discipline. They should deal kindly with the weak and the poor, and they should search out the strangers and the alienated. They should be solicitous for the ascetics and the devout, and they should allot them proportionately a share of their goods and their flocks.[65]

III

Having reviewed the contents of Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī's *Kitāb tahdhīb al-akhlāq* in its five clearly distinguishable sections, one is finally in a position to consider its broader dimensions. What is it about Yaḥyā's own circumstances, and those of his time, that prompted him to write this somewhat uncharacteristic work, that goes much further, to paraphrase Marie-Thérèse Urvoy again, than just the sum of the ideas of his sources?[66] Yaḥyā himself did not clearly spell out his purposes, but perhaps we can discern them in part by trying, as it were, to read between the lines.

In spite of the constant mention of kings and aristocrats, it seems clear that Yaḥyā did not think of himself as writing in the 'mirror for princes' tradition after the manner of the Persian convert to Islam Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 140/757), to whose works he may nevertheless have been somewhat indebted.[67] Rather, given his manifest preference for scholars, monks and ascetics in society, and his own devotion to philosophy, it makes better sense to think that Yaḥyā wrote the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* for the instruction of prospective students more generally, be they Christians or Muslims, in order to inculcate in them the requisite moral attitude for the practice of the philosophical way of life. In this connection one might recall the likely influence on Yaḥyā of his master al-Fārābī's concern for character training, based on a consideration of the powers of the soul, as a requisite preparation for the study of logic and philosophy. Indeed, from this perspective, it is tempting to think of Yaḥyā's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* as practically a textbook for the programme called for in the *Epistle on what ought to precede the Study of Philosophy*, often attributed to al-Fārābī. There one finds the following paragraph, virtually a brief description of the work Yaḥyā actually wrote:

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[65] Kussaim, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, pp. 143–4.
[66] See n. 22 above.
[67] In this connection see the remarks of Urvoy, *Traité d'Éthique*, pp. 16–19.

> Before studying philosophy one must reform the character traits of the appetitive soul in order that there will only be truly virtuous appetite, rather than a desire which is falsely believed to be virtuous, such as pleasure or the love of domination. This is obtained by means of character reformation not only in words but also in deeds. Then, one will reform one's rational soul in order that it may understand the way of truth by means of which one is safe from error and from being deceived. This is obtained by schooling in the science of demonstration.[68]

From an entirely different perspective, one modern commentator, Jad Hatem, thinks that what Yaḥyā has to say about kings and aristocrats in the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* can fairly well be described as '*foncièrement polémique*'.[69] That is to say, he proposes that Yaḥyā is protesting against the actual behaviour of the ruling classes in the Islamic society of his day. Therefore, says Hatem, one should not think, as some have surmised, that in this work Yaḥyā is putting forward the ideas of his master al-Fārābī about the philosopher king.[70] Rather, one should conclude that Yaḥyā's real purpose was the practical one of moral education in a multi-religious society. This purpose would then explain the very down-to-earth quality of the work, with its unusual sensitivity to the different ethical requirements of people in different roles in society. According to Hatem, it is not a highly theoretical work, not even as much so as Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*. On this reading, one might suppose that Yaḥyā intended to present a *dhimmī*'s plea for justice in an Islamic society—a feature of the work that may help explain the publication of its many new editions in modern times, largely under Christian auspices, while Muslim scholars, often labouring under similarly oppressive conditions, are themselves quick to credit the work's significance.

Yaḥyā's heroes are not in fact kings and aristocrats but scholars, *ahl al-ʿilm*, monks, *al-ruhbān*, and ascetics, *al-zuhhād*. He says that 'what is to be considered good for them is clothing of hair and coarse material, going on foot, obscurity, attendance at churches and mosques and so forth, and an abhorrence for luxurious living.'[71] One notes the almost 'ecumenical' character of this last remark, invoking, as it does, both churches and mosques. In another place Yaḥyā says of the scholars, monks and ascetics that it is their task to 'give people an interest in the life to come and in survival after death'.[72] This is just about as close as he

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[68] Quoted from Thérèse-Anne Druart, 'Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles', *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 7, 1997, p. 410. See also ibid., p. 411, n. 29.

[69] Hatem, 'Que le roi ne peut être un homme parfait', p. 94.

[70] Ibid., p. 90.

[71] Kussaim, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, p. 87.

[72] Ibid., p. 90.

comes to an overtly religious theme in this whole treatise. It is true that he does speak of the rational soul as 'the adornment of the divine power'[73] in a man and that he ends the work with the prayer, 'Praise be to the giver of reason forever and ever. Amen.'[74] But in the end, Yaḥyā, who in other works was a formidable apologist for Christian doctrines and practices, is here content to commend virtue and human perfection for its own sake, with reason as its arbiter. While this point of view does echo the philosophical tradition in the Islamic world of which he was a part, one need not go further to claim that Yaḥyā was a champion of the doctrine of two orders of truth, the rational and the religious, of the sort that one finds espoused by some of his predecessors and contemporaries among the other philosophers in the Islamic world. Rather, he promoted what he himself calls 'humanity', *al-insāniyya*,[75] which is to say, a humane attitude in the social sphere that he must have thought was a pre-requisite for the well-being of both philosophy and religion.

To translate Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's Arabic term *al-insāniyya* by the English word 'humanism', with all its modern political and philosophical connotations, would be to go too far. Doubtless he used the term in much the same meaning as did his master al-Fārābī. The latter spoke of *al-insāniyya* 'in the sense of the quality that human beings have in common, or human nature; [for him] it also signifies being truly human, in the sense of realizing the end or perfection of man *qua* man, often synonymous with the exercise of reason.'[76] Hence the preoccupation of the philosophers in the Arabic-speaking world of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's day to promote the claims of reason and philosophy. They presented them in the terms of the translated, universal (so they claimed) sciences of the Greeks, in the intellectual and cultural life of their times, especially over against the claims of the more traditional religious teachers of the Islamic world. Modern scholars have made much of this opposition. And indeed there are some grounds for it in the Islamic texts of the period, where one finds accounts of debates between the partisans of Aristotelian logic and the Muslim *mutakallimūn*, who had built their systems of thought on the rules of Arabic grammar.[77] In this connection one thinks in particular of Yaḥyā's teacher Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus and his celebrated debate, reported by Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, with the theologian and jurist Abū Sa'īd al-Sīrāfī.[78] And there has been a tendency in

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[73] Ibid., p. 148.
[74] Ibid., p. 165.
[75] See the term used in two places, Kussaim, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, pp. 48 and 147.
[76] Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, p. 10, n. 14.
[77] See, for example, the Mu'tazilī system described by Richard M. Frank, *Beings and their Attributes; the Teaching of the Basrian School of the Mu'tazila in the Classical Period*, Albany NY, 1978.
[78] See D. Margoliouth, 'The Discussion between Abū Bishr Mattā and Abū Sa'īd

recent Western scholarship to envision Yaḥyā in a similar relationship with his own Christian theological tradition, often on the basis of a reading of the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*.

Joel Kraemer, for example, who has closely studied the 'humanism' of the renaissance of Islam in the Buyid period, says that 'the overriding objective of the Islamic humanists was to revive the ancient *philosophic* legacy as formative of mind and character.'[79] He then goes on to say that 'the chief architects of this [Islamic?] philosophic humanism in our period were the Christian philosopher Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī and his immediate disciples.'[80] Kraemer further specifies that 'the relationship between philosophy and religious doctrine was a major intellectual preoccupation of theirs.'[81] In the light of the tenor of these remarks, it is not surprising then to find Dimitri Gutas saying, 'Just as logic is superior to grammar in that it is universal and supralingual—so Abū Bishr Mattā's and Yaḥyā's argument in defence of logic ran—so also is philosophy, the use of reason, superior to religion in that it is universal and supranational (since each nation has its own religion).'[82] Within this same general frame of reference, Joel Kraemer goes so far as to say that Yaḥyā was 'first and foremost a philosopher'. And he says:

> In consistency with Alfarabi's philosophy of religion, according to which religious motifs are symbols of philosophical truths, Ibn ʿAdi 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.[83]

Here is not the place to discuss Yaḥyā's defence of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity or the (in)adequacy of Kraemer's interpretation of it, nor even to recall the old concern of Graf and Perier about whether Yaḥyā was primarily a theologian as Graf thought, or a philosopher as Perier said.[84] Rather, the issue here is whether or not Yaḥyā's perceived

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al-Sīrāfī', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1905, pp. 79–129; Muhsin Mahdi, 'Language and Logic in Classical Islam', in G. E. von Grunebaum ed., *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, Wiesbaden, 1970, pp. 51–3; G. Endress, 'The Debate between Arabic Grammar and Greek Logic in Classical Islamic Thought', *Journal for the History of Arabic Science* [Aleppo] 1, 1977, pp. 339–49; *idem*, 'Grammatik und Logik; arabische Philologie und griechische Philosophie im Widerstreit', in Burkhard Mojsisch ed., *Sprachphilosophie un Antike und Mittelalter* (*Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie* 3), Amsterdam, 1986, pp. 163–299.

[79] Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, p. 6.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., p. 7.

[82] Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 103.

[83] Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, p. 107.

[84] See Graf, *Die Philosophie und Gotteslehre des Jaḥjā Ibn ʿAdī*, p. 8, and Perier, *Yaḥyā ben ʿAdī, un philosophe arabe chrétien*, p. 82.

'humanism' in fact led him to subject his religious beliefs to the claims of a universal logic and philosophy, in the way that is claimed for al-Fārābī and other Arab philosophers of the period, vis-à-vis the traditional, Islamic, religious sciences. The answer to this question, from the present writer's point of view, should rest on the recognition of the important distinction between the position of Christian theology in relationship to Aristotelian logic and philosophy, versus the position of the Islamic religious sciences in relationship to these same Greek disciplines, newly translated into Arabic in early 'Abbasid times. The fact of the matter is that Yaḥyā and the other Christian apologists of the era, like Ḥunayn Ibn Isḥāq in the preceding 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.[85] 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 third/ninth and fourth/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. And it is for this reason that a thinker like Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī would have found the categories of the philosophers far more congenial for his apologetic purposes in Arabic than the methods of the Islamic *mutakallimūn*, although some of his fellow Arab Christian apologists did develop what can plausibly be called a Christian *'ilm al-kalām*, to meet the same challenges.[86] Therefore, no reading of Yaḥyā's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* which highlights the text's presumed 'humanism' can plausibly be used to claim that his devotion to philosophy supplanted his religious convictions in the ways that some modern scholars claim was the case with the Muslim philosophers in their reaction to the traditional Islamic religious sciences.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Yaḥyā himself did participate in the debates of his day on the relationship between the partisans of Arabic grammar, the preserve of the Muslim *mutakallimūn*, and Aristotelian logic, the métier of the philosophers. He wrote a treatise on the subject that upheld the views of the philosophers.[87] Furthermore, Yaḥyā

[85] In this connection, see the important study be Benedicte Landron, 'Les chrétiens arabes et les disciplines philosophiques', *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 36, 1986, pp. 23–45.

[86] See the volume of collected studies: S. H. Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic*, Aldershot, 2002.

[87] See the treatise published by G. Endress in the *Journal for the History of Arabic Science* [Aleppo] 2, 1978, pp. 38–50/181–93.

sometimes wrote on topics of interest to the Muslim *mutakallimūn*; an example is a text in which he refutes the position of an Ashʿarite theologian on the subject of *al-iktisāb*, a theory elaborated by some thinkers of this school in an effort to escape between the horns of the dilemma posed by the partisans of free will versus predestination.[88] But the point to be made in the present study is that Muslim thinkers faced a fundamentally different problem with regard to the claims of the partisans of Greek logic and philosophy in the Islamic community from that faced by Christian thinkers like Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī. Until the period of the translation movement in ʿAbbasid times, philosophical and logical considerations of the kind entertained by the Aristotelians had played no role as such in the elaboration of classical, Islamic thought; the vacancy had been filled by the exigencies of Arabic, theoretical grammar. It is for this reason that conflict arose between the philosophers who wrote in Arabic and the traditional, Muslim religious thinkers in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. Contrariwise, the Christians had long since brought logical and philosophical considerations into the service of the clear expression of their doctrinal positions. Therefore, it is a mistake to suppose that Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī espoused a position regarding philosophy and religion comparable to the one adopted by some Muslim philosophers of the period, just because in the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, like them, he proposed a view of 'humanity', *al-insāniyya*, that champions the use of reason in the search for human happiness.

It is interesting in this connection to read the views of Moses Maimonides (1138–1204) on the influence of Christian thinkers on Muslim thinkers, specifically in regard to the successful integration of philosophy and religious thought. He explicitly, albeit anachronistically, names Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī as having played a part in it. In *The Guide of the Perplexed*, on the subject of the origins of the 'science of *kalām*', Maimonides wrote:

> They [i.e., the Christians] started to establish premises that would be useful to them with regard to their belief and to refute those opinions that ruined the foundations of their law. When thereupon the community of Islam arrived and the books of the philosophers were transmitted to it, then were also transmitted to it those refutations composed against the books of the philosophers. Thus they found the kalam of John Philoponus, of Ibn ʿAdī, and of others with regard to these notions, held on to it, and were victorious in their own opinion in a great task that they sought to accomplish.[89]

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[88] See Shlomo Pines and Michael Schwarz, 'Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī's Refutation of the Doctrine of Acquisition (*iktisāb*)', in *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D. H. Baneth Dedicata*, Jerusalem, 1979, pp. 49–94, esp. pp. 62–8; also Emilio Platti's study in the present volume.

[89] Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines, 2 vols, Chicago, 1963, vol. I, pp. 177–8.

It remains only briefly to say a word about Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* from the perspective of its place in the development of ethical thought in the Arabic-speaking world of Islam. One hardly need think that its author had a larger, political scenario in mind, on the order of al-Fārābī's *Virtuous City*, or Plato's *Republic*. There is scarcely even any influence of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* in the work. Nor is there much concern for the development of a systematic ethics, of the order of the concerns of earlier Arab philosophers such as al-Kindī, al-Rāzī, or even al-Fārābī.[90] Rather, Thérèse-Anne Druart, pointing to the rhetorical flourishes and to the effort to persuade so obvious in the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, thinks that Yaḥyā's work, like the work of the same name by Miskawayh, fits better in the category of *adab* literature.[91] This conclusion then brings one back to the original question about Yaḥyā's purposes in composing the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* in the first place. The answer may well be that his intention was not only to commend a reformation of morals that would maximize an individual's potential for the philosophical life, along the lines espoused by his master al-Fārābī, as was suggested above, but even as a propaedeutic to the Christian way of life. After all, in the Islamic milieu in which he lived, Yaḥyā used his own considerable philosophical and logical skills primarily in the defence of Christian teachings. This conclusion follows even more readily if one considers the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* in conjunction with Yaḥyā's other work with an ethical dimension, the *Treatise on Continence*.[92] In that work, written more in Yaḥyā's customary syllogistic style, he considers how the Christian practices of celibacy and sexual continence foster the lifestyles of both philosophers and prophets, monks and scholars. He cites the example of both Socrates and Jesus, and appeals to the works of earlier Arab philosophers. But the examination of this fascinating work will have to wait for another opportunity. Suffice it for the present concern to say that a consideration of its basic themes bolsters one's view of the *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* as Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's effort to use his academic standing in fourth/tenth century Baghdad to promote an environment conducive to the interests of Arab Christianity in Iraq, in one of the most interreligiously integrated eras of the whole ʿAbbasid period.

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[90] See Thérèse-Anne Druart, 'Al-Kindi's Ethics', *The Review of Metaphysics* 67, 1993, pp. 329–57; *eadem*, 'The Ethics of al-Razi (865–925?)', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 6, 1997, pp. 47–71; *eadem*, 'Al-Fārābī, Ethics, and First Intelligibles', pp. 403–23; *eadem*, 'Philosophical Consolation in Christianity and Islam: Boethius and al-Kindi', *Topoi* 19, 2000, pp. 25–34.

[91] See Thérèse-Anne Druart, 'La Philosophie morale arabe et l'antiquité tardive', *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 48, 1996, p. 185.

[92] See n. 9 above.

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YAḤYĀ IBN ʿADĪ AND THE THEORY OF *IKTISĀB*

Emilio Platti

As is well known, Christians and Muslims have fought over questions of Incarnation, Redemption and Trinity since the rise of Islam. But both Muslims and Christians have long been confronted with a question of immense importance that troubles both faiths together. It was recognised in the earliest days of *kalām*, but in present times it has risen to a level of unprecedented urgency.

This question concerns the relationship between the secular sphere, in which personal and social freedom is assumed and natural processes continue free of any higher influence, and the religious sphere. The latter is steadily losing ground, not only in the West but also in Islamic countries, to such an extent that this theological dimension, which was the cornerstone of all societies until the last century, is rapidly declining, if not vanishing altogether from daily life. There is a serious and pressing need to reconsider the relationship between the two, in order to demonstrate that it still exists, and that they both continue to be interdependent.

Some people will say that our contemporary society has not lost this religious dimension but that it has simply been transformed, that Christian theology has become incarnated in the secular city. Even if this is so, the clash of civilizations between Islam and Christianity, between Islam and the West, is still a clash of theologies[1] (which, as I see it, is the correct way to put the question). For while the affirmation that nature and human activity are autonomous is the foundation of Western civilization, certain forms of traditional Islamic thinking take the exact opposite view.[2] The German scholar Tilman Nagel says in his *History of Islamic Theology*:

> Usually we hear . . . that Islam simply has no difficulties with science and technology, but in view of the disputes over the question of where the border is between divine and human determination of actions, and of the tendency of Islamic theology to draw this border very much in favor of God, this is a rather implausible claim.[3]

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[1] Emilio Platti, 'Islam et Occident: Choc de théologies?' *MIDEO* 24, 2000, pp. 347–79.

[2] '*Imitatio Dei* becomes what might be termed an *arrogatio Dei*': Alfons Teipen, 'Islam and the Question of Modernity: a brief Observation on Encyclopedia Britannica's Understanding of Science', *Islamic Studies* 39, 2000, pp. 681–4.

[3] T. Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology. From Muhammad to the Present*, Princeton, 2000, p. 260.

Professor Nagel's formulation of the question: 'Where is the border between divine and human determination of actions?' puts the central problem in a nutshell. While the West believes that Islamic theology more or less denies the reality of human action in favour of God's intervention, and devalues the reality of created things, traditionalist Muslim theologians criticize the West for its lack of belief in God's rule over the universe and his intervention in everyday human existence.

In a talk given at the Thirteenth General Conference on Renewal in Islamic Thought, *Al-tajdīd fī al-fikr al-Islāmī*, Muḥammad ʿImāra stresses this opposition between the Western and Islamic views, even though 'the Islamic view is in accordance with that of believers in the West, that man is created by God'.[4] The reason as he sees it is that the West stops short of affirming God's deep involvement in the world's affairs, while Muslims confess 'that the Creator is not only Creator, but also Protector, *al-Rāʿī*, Guide, *al-Hādī*, Ruler, *al-Mudabbir*, of existence', humankind included.

This assumed attitude of the West is now so commonly accepted by traditionalist Muslim thinkers that it is no surprise to find Abū al-Aʿlā Mawdūdī repeating it. In his commentary on *Sūrat al-Kāfirūn*, he states that the God who only gave the world an initial impulse, and is not at every moment the Ruler, Disposer, Administrator and Master of the universe but 'stood in need of rest on the seventh day after having created the world in six days', is utterly different from Muḥammad's God, 'who has not only set the system of the universe, but is running and controlling it by Himself every moment'. People who hold such a view 'are not worshipping the real and true God but the God who is their self-invented, imaginary God';[5] *Lā aʿbudu mā taʿbudūna* (Q 99.2).

John of Damascus' *Disputatio Saraceni et Musulmani* on this point is well known. In answer to the question from the Muslim, 'Who forms the unborn child in the womb of the mother?' the Christian answers, 'We in no wise find the Scripture saying that after the first week [of world-creation] God formed or created anything. . . . For all the visible creation was made in the first week. . . . And behold I, as indeed I said at the start, since I am of free will, whether I sow, whether unto my own wife or unto one belonging to another, I use my own free will, and she brings forth and it comes to pass in response to the first command of God; not that even now God fashions each day and (creatively) works; since in the first day God made the heaven and the earth, and all the

[4] M. ʿImāra, '*Mustaqbalunā bayna al-tajdīd al-Islāmī*', in *Al-tajdīd fī al-fikr al-Islāmī* (*Qaḍāyā Islāmiyya*, 75), Cairo, 1422/2001, pp. 135–70.

[5] S. Abū al-Aʿlā Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qurān*, vol. XIV, Lahore, 1988, p. 297.

world in six days, and on the seventh day ceased from all his (creative) works which He had begun to do. . . .'[6] What John of Damascus says is very much the sense of what Mawdūdī attributes to the West: that God only acted to create at the start, and commanded the world to bring forth and to develop by itself.

In his critique of Western thought, Muḥammad ʿImāra refers to Aristotle: '*Fa-Allāh fī al-turāth al-ighrīqī, huwa mujarrad khāliq li-al-ʿālam wa-al-wujūd, khalaqahu thumma dafaʿahu li-al-ḥaraka fa-taḥarraka.*' As he sees it, God in Aristotelian thinking is nothing more than Initiator of the world; he created it, and gave it its first impulsion, and it now moves spontaneously, driven by its own internal capability. This Aristotelian vision is for Mawdūdī as for Muḥammad ʿImāra 'the vision of paganism and the period of Ignorance [*al-Jāhiliyya*]'; 'these pagans did in fact believe in a Creator God, but attributed the ruling [*al-tadbīr*] to the idols and the companions of God.'

In this context, it seems appropriate to turn to Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's *Refutation of the Doctrine of Acquisition, al-Iktisāb*, in which exactly this relationship between divine and human determination of actions is the central theme. This work is directed against the Muslim champion of acquisition, Abū ʿUmar Saʿd al-Zaynabī and, as he usually does, Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī quotes his opponent's views extensively.[7]

We can summarize al-Zaynabī's arguments in defence of acquisition as follows:

1. All human actions 'came into being', *muḥdath*.
2. Everything 'brought into being' is a 'creation', *khalq*, which is the case with Iblīs, with human actions, and with every other 'thing', *ʿayn*.
3. God is transcendent and unlike everything other than himself is not a 'thing'; he alone is Creator, and everything else is created.
4. Only God is able to 'bring into existence', *ījād*, human actions; for he alone can initiate and bring back into existence, *al-ibtidāʾ wa-al-iʿāda*.
5. Thus humans do not create their actions but only acquire them, *muktasib*.

Even from this short summary we can see that the Muslim theologian refuses to ascribe any real 'creativity' to man, reserving the action of

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[6] J. W. Voorhis, 'The Discussion of a Christian and a Saracen, by John of Damascus', *The Muslim World* 25, 1935, pp. 266–73; D. J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'*, Leiden, 1972, pp. 144–5.

[7] S. Khalifat, *Maqālāt Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī al-falsafiyya*, Amman, 1988, pp. 303–13; S. Pines, *Studies in the History of Arabic Philosophy* (*The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines*, III), ed. Sarah Stroumsa, Jerusalem, 1996, pp. 79–99 and 110–55; S. Pines and M. Schwarz, 'Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī's Refutation of the Doctrine of Acquisition (*Iktisāb*)', *Studia Orientalia Memoriae D. H. Baneth dedicata*, Jerusalem, 1979, pp. 49–94.

'bringing into existence' of something such as human actions for God alone, who is the only being with power for this. Furthermore, God is not a 'thing' and is not comparable to anything created but is absolutely transcendent. As Daniel Gimaret says, it has always been difficult for Muslims to apply the term *khāliq* to a being other than God, because the Qur'an uses the expression *Khāliq kull shay'* four times about him (Q 6.102; 13.16; 39.62; 40.62): 'Toute argumentation de type muʿtazilite butera toujours là-dessus: il n'est pas imaginable de mettre une limite à la puissance de Dieu[8] . . . il ressort sans équivoque que Dieu crée tout ce qui existe, et donc les actes de l'homme comme le reste.'[9]

In addition, we know from other sources that Muslim theologians were extremely reluctant to apply the term *jawhar*, substance, to God, because they always considered a substance or a 'thing', *ʿayn*, to be part of the material world. Some theologians went so far as to refuse any kind of *analogia entis*, insisting that we can only know about God what he has revealed.

Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's contrary position can be summarized as follows:

1. Human action, *fiʿl*, is something 'brought into existence', *ījād*, and 'brought into being', *iḥdāth*. 'To bring into existence' is synonymous with 'to create' in the case of an accident, for in the case of an accident there is no difference between 'making', *fiʿl*, 'bringing into existence', *ījād*, and 'creating', *khalq*. Now, all human actions are in fact accidents.
2. The statement that only *al-Qadīm*, the Pre-eternal God (*eternal a parte ante*), can bring something into being is false, because an agent who was himself brought into being can bring into being something such as an action. A certain thing 'brought into being' thus brings into being something else 'brought into being' itself.[10]
3. On the other hand, God did not create evil. Snakes, vipers and similar things are not essentially but only accidentally evil, and similarly God brought the essence of Iblīs into existence but not his disobedience. Likewise, it is their sins that make sinners suffer the pains of hell, things brought into being that were not created by God.
4. The opponent's statement that God cannot be a 'thing', *ʿayn*, is false, for God is a thing, but only in the sense of 'substance', *jawhar*; he is not an accident, as human actions are.
5. It is untrue to affirm that it is impossible for humans to bring actions into existence, or to create them. A person acquires, *muktasib*, the con-

[8] Cf. Q 9.51: 'Nothing will happen to us except what God has decreed.'

[9] D. Gimaret, *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie musulmane*, Paris, 1980, pp. 394–5.

[10] Cf. L. Gardet, *Dieu et la Destinée de l'homme* (*Études Musulmanes* 9), Paris, 1967, p. 63: 'Pour Zwingli non plus il ne saurait y avoir de causes secondes efficaces', while for Yaḥyā the efficacity of the human agent is clearly to be affirmed.

> sequences of his action: thus the thief has his hand cut off because of the existence of his theft.

It is clear that Yaḥyā's position is quite different from that of his opponent, with far-reaching consequences. On the one hand, he insists that something created can bring something else into existence, and on the other, he accepts that there is an analogy between God and what is created because both are 'substance'. But here is a fundamental divergence and misunderstanding between the Christian philosopher and the Muslim theologians, for whereas Yaḥyā defines 'substance' as something which is *in se* unlike accidents, the theologians understand 'substance' as something material.

This radical difference maybe explains why, from the beginning of this text, Yaḥyā does not hide his extreme reluctance to deal with this subject, not because it is too difficult but because 'he has something else to do'! We are reminded of what Ibn al-Qifṭī tells us about Yaḥyā's reluctance to discuss with Muslim *mutakallimūn*, because they did not share his Aristotelian concepts.[11] The evident difference over 'substance' is a case in point.

Turning now to al-Zaynabī's argument about acquisition, Yaḥyā's analysis does not admit any need for a doctrine of humans 'acquiring' an action that has in reality been created by God. He refuses to acknowledge any distinction between 'action' and 'creation' with respect to human action, and so dispenses with the need insisted upon by the Muslim upholders of *iktisāb* for God to be directly involved as sole Creator of actions 'acquired' and performed by humans.

The contrast between the Christian and Muslim positions seems stark. However, as both Richard Frank and Christian van Nispen have shown in their interpretations of the Muslim analysis of human action, when Muslim theologians say that it is God alone who creates, they do not in fact deny real consistency to the human act, because they always insist upon the reality of human responsibility. Likewise, Josef van Ess refers to 'Synergie', '*das Mitwerken Gottes*', suggesting that among the earliest Muslim thinkers the idea was probably that when human actions come into being they are not only the consequence of a human's ability to act, but also of a creation by God. It is something like 'the interplay and concausality of God's grace and man's cooperation' as found in the Christian tradition.[12]

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[11] E. Platti, *Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī, Théologien chrétien et Philosophe arabe*, Louvain, 1983, p. 6, and n. 25 (referring to Ibn al-Qifṭī).

[12] J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, vol. IV, Berlin-New York, 1997, pp. 503–4; cf. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. XIII, p. 884, 'Synergism'.

This 'interplay' between God and man is clearly affirmed elsewhere in Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's works, and in particular in his treatise *On the Necessity of Incarnation*.[13] And the Qur'an itself certainly does not rule out human spontaneity. In fact, its performative language and call for 'submission' can only be significant if man has the capacity to act freely.

Even so, it seems that in their heated polemics about the status of human action in relation to God's creative action Muslim theologians from very early in Islam favoured a deterministic interpretation of their sacred text, and this became the dominant mode of understanding the relationship between the divine and human in later times. Let us quote Tilman Nagel's *History of Islamic Theology* once again. Concerning human actions, he finds that 'the differentiation between *khāliq* and *makhlūq* was derived from the Koran. If one thinks this concept out and turns it into a general ontological statement, its logical conclusion is that creatures cannot perform creative acts.'[14] This tendency, he continues, which implies a fundamental ontological devaluation of creation, has always been evident throughout the history of Islam, even if the Qadariyya, Muʿtazila and other *mutakallimūn* tried to resist the conclusions of the deterministic Jahmiyya that 'the nature of physical bodies do not contain a cause of movement or activity. Therefore, human beings have no strength or activity whatsoever within themselves. Neither . . . can they be described as beings who have the faculty (*istiṭāʿa*) of acting. In fact, they have no power (*qudra*), no will (*irāda*), no freedom of choice (*ikhtiyār*) at all. It is God who creates actions in people, the same way He can create in all other bodies actions that are metaphorically ascribed to them.'[15]

Conclusion

Since present-day conservative Islamic thinking is very much in line with this classical vision, it is understandable why Muḥammad ʿImāra and Mawdūdī should favour the same theology of divine determination of human actions that has been expressed from the first century of Islam.

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[13] Cf. Platti, *Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī*, p. 133. Interaction between God and man is certainly the case in Yaḥyā's thinking, and in particular through the intellect: 'C'est par l'intellect que Dieu peut être informé par la nature humaine et s'unir à elle. Cette information est d'ailleurs tout autant que de l'Incarnation la base de la Prophétie et de l'intelligence des sages.' What attracted our attention is precisely Yaḥyā's intellectual solution: '. . . la lumière intellectuelle venant de Dieu, source de la Prophétie, de la Révélation . . . et de l'inspiration du Sage', A. Périer, *Petits Traités apologétiques de Yaḥyā Ben ʿAdī*, Paris, 1920, Traité VI, pp. 74–6 and 83–4.

[14] Nagel, *History of Islamic Theology*, p. 109.

[15] Ibid., p. 111. Cf. p. 271, where Nagel observes that even the reformist Egyptian theologian Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) 'was not able to leave the idea behind that God's power [is] the origin of everything that is'.

Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's *Refutation of the Doctrine of Acquisition, al-Iktisāb* bears witness to its hold upon Islamic theology in the fourth/tenth century.

On the Christian side, John of Damascus could not imagine God interfering in what he had once created, while Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī could not imagine the negation of human creative potential. Their answer to present-day Muslims would be that it is only by re-asserting authentic creaturely power that religions can find their place in our contemporary world. On the other hand, it is also clear that religion cannot survive if there is to be a complete negation of divine involvement in creation and human life, which is precisely what Muslim theologians have always rejected. So a kind of interplay and concausality must be affirmed.

There is much here for believing people to consider and explore together, and this question of the relations between divine and human action has claim to urgent attention in the continuing dialogue between Christianity and Islam.

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LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT IN *KITĀB AL-MAǰDAL, BĀB* 2, *FAṢL* 1, *AL-DHURWA*

Bo Holmberg

Some of the great Arabic works of compilation produced by Oriental Christians during the latter part of the golden age of Christian Arabic literature (*ca* 200/800–700/1300) have long been known from published editions. Among these are such works as the Maronites' *Kitāb al-hudā* compiled by Dāwūd al-Muṭrān, which was edited by Pierre Fahed in Aleppo in 1935,[1] or the Copts' *Miṣbāḥ al-ẓulma* by Abū al-Barakāt Ibn Kabar, the first part of which, at least, was published by Samir Khalil in Cairo in 1971.[2] And, of course, for the Copts we now also have the very important *Maǰmūʿ uṣūl al-dīn* by Mu'taman Ibn al-ʿAssāl, edited a few years ago by Waḍīʿ Abullif.[3]

The corresponding East Syrian encyclopaedic work in Arabic, *Kitāb al-maǰdal li-al-istibṣār wa-al-jadal* (*The Book of the Castle [or Tower] for Observation and Battle*), still remains unedited except for a portion in the fifth *faṣl* of the fifth *bāb*, containing the history of the East Syrian patriarchs, and a couple of other minor passages. Hopefully, this important work will not remain unedited for much longer, since there is currently a project to edit it, though the scholars involved in this project have been busy with other matters and the edition of the *Kitāb al-maǰdal* has been delayed.

In its outline, *Kitāb al-maǰdal* is symbolically constructed as a kind of castle or tower, as the title of the work indicates. Each of the seven chapters (called *bāb* in the Arabic text) symbolically represents a part of the castle. The first chapter is called *al-Bayān*, 'the statement' or 'the explanation' (i.e. of the plan, presumably) and consists of only one section (*faṣl* in Arabic) dealing with the proofs for the existence of God. The second chapter, *al-Binyān*, 'the structure' (of the building), is made up of three sections, *al-Dhurwa*, 'the summit', *al-Asās*, 'the foundation' and *al-Tashyīd*, 'the construction', expounding the doctrines of divine unity and trinity as well as christology. In the four sections of the third

[1] Pierre Fahed ed., *Kitâb al-Hudâ ou Livre de la Direction. Code Maronite du Haut Moyen Age*, Aleppo, 1935.

[2] Abū al-Barakāt Ibn Kabar, *Miṣbāḥ al-ẓulma fī īḍāḥ al-khidma*, ed. Khalil Samir, Cairo, 1971.

[3] Mu'taman Ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Summa dei principi della religione; Summa theologica Coptorum*, ed. A. Wadi, trans. Bartolomeo Pirone, Cairo-Jerusalem, 1996.

chapter, which is called *al-Arkān*, 'the corners', the sacraments of baptism, *al-Maʿmūdiyya*, and eucharist, *Fī jalālat al-qurbān*, are dealt with together with matters concerning the Gospel, *Dalāʾil al-inǰīl*, and the cross, *al-Ṣalīb*. Then follows a fourth chapter, *al-Maṣābīḥ*, 'the candles', with seven sections dealing with various virtues such as piety, *al-Taqwā*, love, *al-Maḥabba*, compassion, *al-Raḥma*, humility, *al-Tawāduʿ*, and purity, *al-Ṭahāra*, but also with ritual practices such as prayer, *al-Ṣalāt*, and fasting, *al-Ṣawm*.

The fifth chapter of *Kitāb al-majdal* is the historical one in which we find, among other things, the history of the East Syrian patriarchs, published by Gismondi in 1899.[4] This chapter is called *al-ʿAmad*, 'the pillars', and consists of seven sections. In the ensuing chapter, the sixth, which is called *al-Ǯadāwil*, 'the canals', and made up of four sections, the author discusses cultic matters such as the practice of turning to the east in prayer. Finally, *al-Ḥadāʾiq*, 'the gardens', with its four sections, is dedicated to Christian liberty in relation to the Mosaic law and contains a discussion on the character of this liberty.

This brief outline of the contents of *Kitāb al-majdal* reveals the variety of theological, ethical, church historical and practical subjects the book covers. The author seems to have had the intention to discuss everything worth knowing in these matters. This, of course, explains why the work is so voluminous. To illustrate this, one could mention the manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, no. 190,[5] in which the text occupies no fewer than 538 folios, or 1076 pages with about twenty lines to the page. It is an old manuscript dating to the seventh/thirteenth century, but nonetheless well preserved. To judge from the other manuscripts, there seems to have been a tendency, due to the extensiveness of the work, to divide the book into two volumes. This is, for instance, the case with MSS Paris Ar. 191 and 192 from the eighth/fourteenth century.[6]

At the same time one gets the impression of an author who intended (and I think he succeeded) to make his message enjoyable and easy to appreciate by expressing himself in beautiful rhymed prose, and by giving the whole work an artistic and metaphorical dimension by clothing his exposition in the symbolism of the castle. I will presently return to the artistic aspects of the work.

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[4] Henricus Gismondi, *Maris Amri et Slibae de partriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria: pars prior. Maris Textus arabicus*, Rome, 1896, *Versio latina*, Rome, 1897.

[5] Henceforth call MS Paris Ar. 190. See Gérard Troupeau, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes. Première partie. Manuscrits chrétiens. Tome I. Nos. 1–323*, Paris, 1972, pp. 161–2.

[6] See Troupeau, *Catalogue*, pp. 162ff.

Before turning to the language and thought in the section called *al-Dhurwa* in the second chapter of *Kitāb al-majdal*, I wish to restate some of the theses I have already presented elsewhere.[7]

According to Georg Graf,[8] a certain Mārī ibn Sulaymān composed, in the middle of the sixth/twelfth century, a work in seven chapters called *Kitāb al-majdal li-al-istibṣār wa-al-jadal*. Two hundred years later (in about 750/1350) ʿAmr ibn Mattā from Ṭirhān is supposed to have written a book on the pattern of Mārī's work, with the same title but divided into five chapters instead of seven. The whole work was saved, according to Graf, as the result of plagiarism by a contemporary of the author, the priest Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā from Mosul. Ṣalībā is supposed to have committed literary larceny by producing, in his own name, a new edition of ʿAmr ibn Mattā's *Kitāb al-majdal* with minor changes and certain additions, giving the book the new title *Asfār al-asrār*. To strengthen his claims to authorship Ṣalībā is supposed to have antedated the work to the year 732–3/1332. Graf summarises the views of three earlier scholars: Assemani,[9] Gismondi[10] and Westphal.[11]

My scepticism towards these traditional, and so far generally accepted, theories grew out of acquaintance with the manuscripts, and with the contradictions between the attributions of the texts to Mārī, ʿAmr and Ṣalībā made by Graf, and the attributions found in the manuscripts themselves. In the following I will summarise the main arguments against the traditional view epitomised by Graf.

1. The dating of ʿAmr ibn Mattā's literary activity to a time shortly after 750/1349[12] is very unlikely.

At least three writers who died before that date mention ʿAmr ibn Mattā as the author of *Kitāb al-majdal*. These are Abū al-Barakāt,[13] who died in 724/1324,[14] ʿAbdīshūʿ, who died in 1318, and al-Muʾtaman Ibn al-ʿAssāl,[15] who wrote his *Majmūʿ uṣūl al-dīn* before 1260.[16]

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[7] See Bo Holmberg, 'A Reconsideration of the Kitāb al-Magdal', *Parole de l'Orient* 18, 1993, pp. 255–73.

[8] See Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, 5 vols (*Studi e Testi* 118, 133, 146, 147, 172) [= *GCAL* 1–5], Città del Vaticano, 1944–52, vol. II, pp. 200–2, 216–18.

[9] See Joseph Simonius Assemani, *Bibliotheca orientalis*, 3 vols, Rome, 1719–28, vol. III/1, pp. 554–5, 580, 586–9.

[10] See Gismondi, *Commentaria*, text pp. v–vii, trans. pp. v–vii.

[11] See Gustav Westphal, *Untersuchungen über die Quellen und die Glaubwürdigkeit der Patriarchenkroniken des Mari ibn Sulayman, Amr ibn Matai und Saliba ibn Johannan*, Kirchhain N.-L., 1901, pp. 1–21.

[12] See Graf, *GCAL*, vol. II, p. 217.

[13] See Abū al-Barakāt, *Miṣbāḥ*, pp. 298–300. Cf. Assemani, *BO*, vol. III/1, pp. 580–1.

[14] According to Assemani, *BO*, vol. III/1, p. 580.

[15] According to Graf, *GCAL*, vol. II, pp. 201–2.

[16] See Graf, *GCAL*, vol. II, p. 409. Cf. Khalil Samir, 'Date de composition de la

2. There is actually no reason to regard Ṣalībā's work as plagiarism. In MS Vat. Neof. 54 we find both the statement that Ṣalībā started writing the work in the year 1332 and the statement that 650 years had elapsed since the death of Ḥnānīshūʿ, which seems to point to the year 750/1349. As Westphal[17] has remarked, it is strange that Ṣalībā should have left these two incompatible dates side by side (unless he actually spent eighteen years writing the book, which is extremely unlikely). If Ṣalībā had consciously antedated his work to 1332 he would of course have been able to touch up the statement about the 650 years in order to eliminate the disharmony. Evidently Ṣalībā did not regard the two statements as incompatible with one another, so he must have used the 650 years as a round number not intended for arithmetical calculations. The statement about the work being written in 1332 is most probably to be relied on.

3. There are good reasons not to regard the sixth/twelfth century Mārī ibn Sulaymān as the author of the seven-chapter work *Kītāb al-majdal*.

Firstly, none of the manuscripts containing the seven-chapter work which I have consulted attributes it to Mārī ibn Sulaymān. The only two occurrences of an attribution to him are those in MSS Vat. Ar. 110 and 687. But here the name is clearly connected with the five-chapter work.

Secondly, in all the manuscripts containing the seven-chapter work, the work is either anonymous or attributed to ʿAmr ibn Mattā. The attribution to ʿAmr ibn Mattā is also corroborated by Abū al-Barakāt, ʿAbdīshūʿ and al-Muʾtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, as we have observed above.

Thirdly, there are indications that *Kītāb al-majdal* was written at an earlier date than the middle of the sixth/twelfth century, when Mārī ibn Sulaymān, flourished.

In his work the author of *Kītāb al-majdal* often paraphrases or quotes passages from other theologians. Unfortunately he seldom mentions names, but refers to them by means of vague expressions such as *wa-qāla baʿḍ al-muʾminīn*[18] or *wa-li-al-falāsifa kalām kathīr fī*[19] or *wa-qāla baʿḍ ahl zamāninā*.[20] Such vague expressions of course make it difficult to identify the sources of these passages. Sometimes, however, the sources are possible to identify. I will now give three examples were the author refers to contemporary writers by using the expression *wa-qāla baʿḍ ahl zamāninā* and

Somme Théologique d'al-Muʾtaman Ibn al-ʿAssāl', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 50, 1984, pp. 94–106.

[17] See Westphal, *Untersuchungen*, p. 17.

[18] E.g. MS Paris Ar. 190, f. 79b.10.

[19] Ibid., f. 72a.1.

[20] Ibid., 190, ff. 36b.12f., 66a.14, 77a.8.

then quotes or paraphrases passages from writers who lived very much earlier than the middle of the sixth/twelfth century, the time when Mārī ibn Sulaymān flourished.

In *bāb* 2, *faṣl* 3, *al-Tashyīd*, the author refers to a contemporary[21] and then partly quotes and partly paraphrases a passage found in ʿĪsā Ibn Zurʿa's letter to the Jew Bishr ibn Finḥās ibn Shuʿayb al-Ḥāsib[22] which was written in the year 387/997.[23] It seems strange that someone writing in the middle of the sixth/twelfth century should call Ibn Zurʿa who had died in 398/1008 his contemporary.

In the same *faṣl*, the author again attributes to a contemporary[24] an obvious paraphrase of a passage which was written in the fourth/tenth century by none other than Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (d. 363/974) in his *Maqāla fī ṣiḥḥat iʿtiqād al-Naṣārā*.[25]

In fact *Kitāb al-majdal* often paraphrases passages from Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī without mentioning his name but referring to him as a contemporary. In *bāb* 2, *faṣl* 1, *al-Dhurwa*,[26] we find *verbatim* quotations from Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's *Maqāla fī al-tawḥīd* introduced by the formula *wa-qāla baʿḍ ahl zamāninā*.[27]

However, if *Kitāb al-majdal* was composed in the early fifth/eleventh century, how do we explain the two instances at the end of the historical section on the East Syrian patriarchs where a certain Mārī ibn Sulaymān presents himself as having personally met eye-witnesses to events that took place under the patriarchs Makkīkhā (485/1092-503/1109)[28] and Barṣawmā (517/1123-530/1136),[29] and the fact that the last patriarch described in the work is ʿAbdīshūʿ III[30] who died in 542/1147?

In order to answer this question we have to remind ourselves that *Kitāb al-majdal* is a large encyclopaedic work on theology in which the historical part on the East Syrian patriarchs only constitutes a single section in one of the seven chapters. This part on ecclesiastical history is

[21] Ibid., 190, f. 77a.8.

[22] See Paul Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens du IX^e au XIV^e siècle*, Cairo, 1929, pp. 42.1ff.

[23] See Graf, *GCAL*, vol. II, p. 255.

[24] See MS Paris Ar. 190, f. 66a.14.

[25] See Augustin Périer, *Petits traités apologétiques de Yaḥyâ ibn ʿAdî*, Paris,1920, p. 15.1ff.

[26] Compare MS Paris Ar. 190, f. 36b.14–16, 37a.3, 37a.12ff., with Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī, *Maqāla fī al-tawḥīd*, ed. Khalil Samir (*Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien* 2), Jounieh, 1980, paras 21, 112, 148ff.

[27] See MS Paris Ar. 190, f. 36b.12–13.

[28] See Gismondi, *Commentaria*, text pp. 146.2ff. (= MS Paris Ar. 190, f. 450b.1ff.). Cf. Assemani, *BO*, vol. III/1, p. 554.

[29] See Gismondi, *Commentaria*, text pp. 156.12ff. (= MS Paris Ar. 190, f. 457b.1ff.) Cf. Assemani, *BO*, vol. III/1, p. 555.

[30] Ibid.

no novel creation but depends on earlier sources of which the *Chronicle of Seʿert*, according to Graf,[31] is the principal one. It is a typical feature of historical chronicles of this kind that subsequent users, readers and copyists tend to up-date them and continue the report up to their own time. The *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* is a good example of this.[32] And, as a matter of fact, some of the manuscripts containing *Kitāb al-majdal* do have additional material on the patriarchs after ʿAbdīshūʿ III. In both MS Paris Ar. 190[33] and MS Vat. Ar. 109[34] accounts on Īshūʿyāb, Elia III and Yahballāha II have been added. It is, therefore, quite possible that Mārī ibn Sulaymān is not the author of the entire *Kitāb al-majdal* but only a continuator of the historical account in *bāb* 5, *faṣl* 5.

If Mārī Ibn Sulaymān is not the author of *Kitāb al-majdal*, because of the indications pointing to an earlier date for the composition of the work (perhaps the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century) and the probability that Mārī ibn Sulaymān is no more than a continuator of the history of the patriarchs, who then is its author?

In view of the fact that several manuscripts, some of them among the earliest extant, do not mention any author, there is always the possibility that he preferred anonymity and also succeeded in remaining anonymous. But perhaps we should trust the witnesses of the majority of manuscripts and of Abū al-Barakāt, ʿAbdīshūʿ and al-Muʾtaman Ibn al-ʿAssāl who explicitly attribute the work to ʿAmr ibn Mattā. The traditional dating of ʿAmr ibn Mattā's life to the middle of the eighth/fourteenth century is quite unfounded, depending as it does on Assemani's gratuitous attribution of the five-chapter work to ʿAmr ibn Mattā. If he is the author of *Kitāb al-majdal* and if *Kitāb al-majdal* was composed early in the fifth/eleventh century, we naturally have to date ʿAmr ibn Mattā's activity to the beginning of that century. As far as I know there are no historical documents that contradict this assumption.

I will now turn to the language and thought in the section called *al-Dhurwa* in the second chapter of *Kitāb al-majdal*, and share some observations I have made from a close reading of it. It is the first of three sections in the second chapter, and it deals, one could say, with the first article in the Creed, that God is one and that he is the Creator of the world. To these basic statements are added fundamental reflections on how we as humans know this to be true.

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[31] See Graf, *GCAL*, vol. II, p. 196.

[32] See Johannes den Heijer, *Mawhūb ibn Manṣūr ibn Mufarrig et l'historiographie copto-arabe. Étude sur la composition de l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie* (*CSCO* 513, Subs. 83), Louvain, 1989.

[33] See MS Paris Ar. 190, ff. 459–64.

[34] See MS Vat. Ar. 109, ff. 256ff.

It has already been said that the author of *Kitāb al-majdal* renders his message enjoyable and easy to appreciate by expressing himself in beautiful rhymed prose and by giving the whole work an artistic and metaphorical dimension. In fact, he reveals an awareness of the beauty of the Arabic language and shows that he knows how to put the science of rhetorical figures, *ʿilm al-badīʿ*, into practice. This is an important aspect of the style of *Kitāb al-majdal*, and it is an aspect to which I wish to give some stress.

In all human communication there are two sides to language, or to systems of signification in a general sense, namely form and meaning. Since the days of Saussure we have learnt that the relationship between form and meaning is arbitrary. And this is, of course, true in a fundamental sense. But in more recent linguistic theory there is a tendency to emphasise the inseparability of form and meaning. Of course, this is no new theory. It reaches back at least as far as the Romantic tradition and its notion of the uniqueness of languages and its sceptical attitude towards the possibility of translation from one language to another.

As a matter of fact, translation theory is a rewarding field to enter into if one is interested in the relationship between form and meaning in linguistic expression. To simplify, since it is not my purpose here to go too deeply into this matter, one could say that there are two extremes with regard to the question whether of translation is possible or not.

At one extreme we find the view that perfect translation is indeed possible. This view reaches back to the Enlightenment tradition, at least, and presupposes a clear and neat distinction between form and meaning. Behind the accidental forms of language there are universal meanings which guarantee identity in an absolute and sure way. The identity is reached by means of a reduction of individual characteristics until you arrive at symbolic language. The endeavour to create a universal grammar is an example of this kind of thought.

At the other extreme is the belief that translation is in principle impossible. This view goes back to the Romantic tradition and is often restated by post-modern authors with a constructivist inclination. It presupposes an indissoluble relation between form and meaning, or perhaps, rather, no distinction between form and meaning at all. This truly renders translation between languages impossible.

Of course, both these two extreme views are invalidated by common everyday experience. Lots of texts are in fact translated, and we have the ability to distinguish between successful and less successful translations, or at least discuss the matter. The only point I wish to make here is that we have something to learn from the Romantic tradition[35] and

[35] For the importance of the Romantic tradition, see Isaiah Berlin, 'The Romantic

its emphasis on the close relation between form and meaning. One cannot truly understand the thought or the meaning of a text such as *Kītāb al-majdal* without giving due attention to the language or form, even on such basic levels as phonetics, prosody, morphology and syntax.

The author of *Kītāb al-majdal* exhibits a great feeling for the euphony of language, and this, naturally, is especially true when he uses his own words; when he quotes Scripture or other authorities he is, of course, confined to the wordings that have been handed down to him. Examples of his sense for rhythm and rhyme can be found anywhere in the section *al-Dhurwa* where he uses his own words. This is how the section opens:

> *dhurwatu al-īmāni tawḥīd Allāh al-mawjūd al-ḥayy al-nāṭiq*
> *bāriʾi al-samawāti wa-al-arḍi wa-mubdiʿi sāʾir al-khalāʾiq*[36]
>
> The summit of the faith is the unity of God, the existing, the living, the intelligent,
> Creator of heaven and earth, the Producer of all creatures.

This is a good example of *sajʿ*, or rhymed prose, where the word *al-khalāʾiq* rhymes with *al-nāṭiq*.

In the words following these we have rhyme but different numbers of syllables in the two lines:

> *Munshiʾ al-barāyā bi-al-niʿmati wa-al-faḍl*
> *mubdiʾ al-ashyāʾi bi-al-ḥikmati wa-al-ʿadl*[37]
>
> . . . the Generator of creatures in grace and kindness,
> the Producer of things in wisdom and justice . . .

Here *wa-al-ʿadl* rhymes with *wa-al-faḍl*. In addition to this, both lines have twelve syllables when read aloud, a correspondence only met occasionally and not a distinctive feature of *sajʿ*. We may also observe another feature in these two lines, namely parallelism, since the second line repeats the meaning of the first line. In this sense the parallelism is synonymous. But there is more to the parallelism of these two lines. They both share the same syntactic pattern, with an initial *iḍāfa* followed by a prepositional phrase. Even in morphology the parallelism is almost complete. With the exception of *al-barāyā* and *al-ashyāʾ*, all the remaining three words in the first line are morphologically echoed in the second line: *mubdiʾ* corresponds to *munshiʾ*, *bi-al-ḥikma* to *bi-al-niʿma* and *wa-al-ʿadl* to *wa-al-faḍl*.

Revolution. A Crisis in the History of Modern Thought', in Isaiah Berlin, *The Sense of Reality: studies in ideas and their history*, ed. Henry Hardy, London, 1996, pp. 168–93.

[36] MS Paris Ar. 191, f. 25b.15f.

[37] Ibid., f. 25b.16f.

In the next example we have the same kind of synonymous parallelism, coupled with complete correspondence in syntax and near to complete correspondence in morphology:

jalla bi-ʿuzmat al-rubūbiyyati ʿan sharīkin wa-nazīr
wa-ʿalā bi-sulṭān al-waḥdāniyyati ʿan muʿīnin wa-ẓahīr[38]

In mighty lordship he is far above [having] an equal and a partner,
in powerful unity he is too great [to have] a helper and an assistant.

The parallelisms found here are too obvious to need any further commentary. Let us instead turn to another feature that shows that our author has profited by the science of rhetorical figures, *ʿilm al-badīʿ*. A popular figure among the rhetoricians is *jināṣ*, or *tajnīs*, which consists in using in close proximity two words having the same, or almost the same, root letters. Among the numerous varieties of *jināṣ*, the one called *al-muḍāriʿ* is well represented in our section of *Kitāb al-majdal*. In this particular variety of *jināṣ*, the two words differ only in respect of a single letter. Speaking of God's transcendence, our author states:

lā yubṣaru bi-laḥẓin wa-lā yuḥṣaru bi-lafẓ
wa-lā yuʿaddu bi-waṣf wa-lā yuḥaddu bi-raṣf[39]

He is not seen by any eye and he is not confined by any word,
he is not defined by any description and he is not counted by any *raṣf*.

Here the words *yubṣar* and *yuḥṣar* share nearly the same root letters, except the *bāʾ* in *yubṣar* and the *ḥāʾ* in *yuḥṣar*. The same applies to *yuʿadd* and *yuḥadd* and to *bi-waṣf* and *bi-raṣf*, the first root letter in the first of each pair of words has been altered in the second. Furthermore, in the two words *bi-laḥẓ* and *bi-lafẓ*, the middle radical has been changed. Besides being a fine example of *jināṣ*, these two lines illustrate the parallelism in syntax and morphology already mentioned.

The same applies to the following example:

lā tuʿwizuhu qudratun wa-lā tuʿjizuhu nuṣra[40]

no power makes him needy and no help makes him weak
(i.e. he is not in need of anyone else's power or anyone's help).

Here the two words *tuʿwizuhu* and *tuʿjizuhu* differ only with regard to the middle root letter, and the syntactic and morphological parallelism is complete.

Sometimes the language seems almost formulaic, with individual words or sets of words repeatedly occurring in close proximity. One such pair

[38] Ibid., f. 26a.8f.
[39] Ibid., f. 26a.10. The exact meaning of *raṣf* in this context is obscure.
[40] Ibid., f. 26a.13.

of words is *al-raghba wa-al-rahba*, 'desire and fear';[41] this also falls under the rhetorical figure of *al-jināṣ al-muḍāriʿ*. This particular pair of words is, of course, not restricted to *Kitāb al-majdal*. On the contrary, it is a common word pair in Arabic poetry as well as prose, and in Muslim as well as Christian texts. In the following example it occurs in a slightly varied form, as verbal nouns in the second form, and in a passage which exhibits syntactic and morphological parallelism in addition to rhyme. It tells us that God may reveal himself:

> *ikhbāran wa-taʿrīfan wa-indhāran wa-tawqīfan*
> *wa-tabṣīran wa-targhīban wa-taḥdī ran wa-tarhīban*[42]
>
> by way of informing and instructing, warning and arresting,
> clarifying and attracting, cautioning and intimidating.

There is another set of words which recurs and seems to be a kind of standard phrase—whether peculiar to our author or of general usage I dare not say. Again, it has to do with the ways in which God may reveal himself, i.e.:

> *bi-waḥyin wa-ilhāmin wa-fī ruʾy al-manām*[43]
>
> by revelation and inspiration and dreams.

In this instance there is no *jināṣ* and no parallelism, but there is a certain rhythm caused by the rhyme on *alif-mīm*.

Examples of a formulistic language such as this, and a style replete with rhyme and rhetorical figures could be multiplied. But the ones given so far will have to suffice. I believe I have made my point clear with these.

As already mentioned, the section *al-Dhurwa* in the second chapter of *Kitāb al-majdal* deals with the first article in the Creed, that God is one and that he is the Creator of the world. Let us now take a close look at the language used in order to convey belief in God as a creative force. What words are used and how are these words construed?

The material may be divided into nominal expressions and verbal expressions. The nominal phrases are usually active participles used either independently in an absolute sense or as the first part of an *iḍāfa* with the object as the second part. The most frequent active participle used in this way is *bāriʾ*, 'Creator', e.g. *bāriʾ al-samawāt wa-al-arḍ*, 'the Creator of heaven and earth',[44] *bāriʾ jamīʿ al-khalāʾiq*, 'the Creator of all creatures',[45] *bāriʾ kull alladhī yurā wa-mā lā yurā*, 'the Creator of everything

[41] Ibid., f. 26b.16.
[42] Ibid., f. 26b.12.
[43] Ibid., f. 32a.16.
[44] Ibid., f. 25b.15.
[45] Ibid., f. 26b.6.

seen and unseen',[46] *bāriʾ kull al-quwā*, 'the Creator of all powers',[47] or simply *bāriʾ al-kull*, 'the Creator of all'.[48]

Other active participles employed in this fashion appear in the following constructions: *mubdiʿ sāʾir al-khalāʾiq*, 'the Originator of all creatures',[49] *munshiʾ al-barāyā*, 'the Author of creatures',[50] *mubdiʾ al-ashyāʾ*, 'the First producer of things',[51] *khāliq kull al-aḥyāʾ*, 'the Creator of all living beings',[52] *muʿṭī kull al-ḥikam*, 'the Donor of all wisdom'.[53] In one instance a word for Creator is modified by a verbal phrase: *Ṣāniʿ lā yaʿab*, '[he is] a Producer who does not get weary'.[54]

Even though the active participles are modified either by a *muḍāf ilayhi* or a verbal phrase, these instances are less informative than the instances when God's creative power is described by means of pure verbal phrases. Let me present a few examples.

In reference to the Biblical creation narrative in the book of Genesis, our author says that God *khalaqa Ādam bi-yadihi*, 'created Adam with his hand';[55] that he *ṣawwara al-insān ʿalā mithālihi*, 'fashioned man in his image';[56] and that he *nafakha fī Ādam min rūḥihi*, 'breathed into Adam'.[57]

More interesting are perhaps the phrases which are less obviously Biblical. In one passage the verb *ikhtaraʿa* is used to describe God's creative activity: *ikhtaraʿa [al-ashyāʾ] min ghayr shibh yuqaddimuhā*, 'he invented [things] without any prototype'.[58] A similar point is made in another passage where the belief in a *creatio ex nihilo* is hinted at: *akhraja al-makhlūqāt ilā al-wujūd min al-ʿadam*, 'he brought out created beings from non-existence into existence'.[59]

Several other passages picture God as discriminating between various things in the world: *jaʿala al-ashyāʾ aḍdādan*, 'he made the things in opposites';[60] *wa-khālafa bayn al-alwān wa-al-ṭibāʿ wa-al-ṣuwar wa-al-ashkāl wa-al-mansha' wa-al-masʿā wa-al-quwā wa-al-qawām*, 'and he discriminated between kinds and natures, forms and shapes, origin and goal, faculties and strength';[61] *wa-farraqa bayn al-mutadāniyāt*, 'and he made a difference between

[46] Ibid., f. 29a.3.
[47] Ibid., f. 29a.5.
[48] Ibid., f. 29a.9.
[49] Ibid., f. 25b.16.
[50] Ibid., f. 25b.16.
[51] Ibid., f. 25b.16.
[52] Ibid., f. 29a.5.
[53] Ibid., f. 29a.6.
[54] Ibid., f. 29a.14.
[55] Ibid., f. 32a.9.
[56] Ibid., f. 32a.9f.
[57] Ibid., f. 32a.10.
[58] Ibid., f. 26a.5.
[59] Ibid., f. 26a.1f.
[60] Ibid., f. 26a.4.
[61] Ibid., f. 26a.2f.

close things'.[62] But the opposite is also true of God: *allafa bayn al-mutaʿādiyāt*, 'he combined hostile things'.[63]

In addition to the active participles and the pure verbal phrases employed to picture God as the Creator, we quite often find the word *ʿilla*, 'cause' in nominal phrases. God is simply, in an absolute sense, *al-ʿilla*, 'the Cause';[64] he is *ʿillat kull*, 'the Cause of all';[65] he is *ʿillat kull al-ashyāʾ*, 'the Cause of all things';[66] he is *ʿillat kull jawhar*, 'the Cause of every substance';[67] he is *ʿillat wujūd kull mawjūd*, 'the Cause of the existence of every existing thing',[68] and even *ʿillat kull maʿlūl*, 'the Cause of everything caused'.[69]

Not all the divine names or epithets refer to the creative activity of God. Some are neutral designations, such as *ilāh*, 'god', sometimes *ilāh al-āliha*, 'the God of gods'.[70] More commonly he is, of course, *Allāh*, 'God', or *al-rabb*, 'the Lord', sometimes *rabb al-arbāb*, 'the Lord of lords'.[71] In one passage God is referred to as the Saviour in a free rendering of a passage from the prophet Hosea. Here the manuscripts have different readings. Most of those I have consulted have the word *mukhalliṣ*, but MS Paris 191 from the seventh/thirteenth century adds *fārūq* in the margin, and MS Vat. Ar. 108, copied in AD 1401, has *fārūq* in the text and *mukhalliṣ* above the line. I assume the *fārūq* is the *lectio difficilior* here and that it should be preferred to *mukhalliṣ*.

Over and above the divine designations already mentioned, we have a category of divine attributes which to a certain extant coincides with what in Muslim tradition is called *al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*, 'the most beautiful names'. As a matter of fact, this very expression, *al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*, is found in our section in reference to the divine attributes.[72] God is *al-qawī*, 'the Mighty',[73] *al-malik*, 'the King',[74] *al-dāʾim*, 'the Lasting',[75] *al-bāqī*, 'the Remaining',[76] *al-ḥayy*, 'the Living',[77] *al-ḥakīm*, 'the Wise',[78] *al-ʿalīm*,

[62] Ibid., f. 26a.7.
[63] Ibid., f. 26a.6.
[64] Ibid., f. 31b.15.
[65] Ibid., f. 29a.9.
[66] Ibid., f. 29a.16.
[67] Ibid., f. 29a.12f.
[68] Ibid., f. 26b.5.
[69] Ibid., f. 29a.7.
[70] Ibid., f. 27a.4.
[71] Ibid., f. 27b.5.
[72] Ibid., f. 32b.10f.
[73] Ibid., ff. 28b.16; 30a.15.
[74] Ibid., f. 28b.16 (twice).
[75] Ibid., ff. 28b.17; 29a.13, 16.
[76] Ibid., f. 28b.17.
[77] Ibid., f. 29a.5, 15, 16.
[78] Ibid., ff. 29a,6, 16; 31b.15.

'the Knowing',[79] *al-ghanī*, 'the Rich',[80] *al-qādir*, 'the Powerful',[81] *al-raḥmān*, 'the Beneficent',[82] *al-raḥīm*, 'the Merciful',[83] *al-jawād*, 'the Generous',[84] *al-karīm*, 'the Munificent',[85] *al-jabbār*, 'the Omnipotent',[86] *al-ʿazīm*, 'the Mighty',[87] *al-ṣādiq*, 'the Sincere',[88] *al-samīʿ*, 'the Listener',[89] *al-baṣīr*, 'the Seer',[90] *al-qarīb*, 'the Near',[91] *al-mujīb*, 'the One who answers prayers'.[92]

The divine attributes are also expressed through verbal phrases. Here are a few examples (many more could be added). God *yasmaʿ al-najwā*, 'hears confidential talk',[93] *yadfaʿ al-balwā*, 'removes disaster',[94] *yusannā al-ʿaṭāyā*, 'distributes gifts',[95] *yaghfir al-khaṭāyā*, 'pardons sins',[96] *yujīb al-duʿā'*, 'answers prayers',[97] *yuqarrib al-masʿā*, 'fulfils endeavours',[98] *yaqbal al-tawba*, 'accepts repentance',[99] *yujzil al-mathwaba*, 'grants generous reward'.[100]

The most important affirmation about God made in our section of *Kitāb al-majdal* is the affirmation that he is one, *wāḥid*. As we have seen, the section opens with the words *dhurwat al-īmān tawḥīd Allāh*, 'the summit of the faith is the unity of God'.[101] This is stressed throughout the section in various ways. Although one part[102] is devoted to differing opinions about the meaning of the concept of *wāḥid*, 'one', ending with the opinion the author subscribes to, this is not the part I wish to dwell on at the moment. Suffice to say that the exposé of differing opinions about *wāḥid* includes a *verbatim* quotation from Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī's *Maqāla fī al-tawḥīd*[103] and an account of Yaḥyā's six categories of *wāḥid*[104] into *jins*,

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[79] Ibid., ff. 29a.13; 30a.15.
[80] Ibid., f. 29a.14.
[81] Ibid., ff. 29a.17; 31b.15.
[82] Ibid., f. 31b.15.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., f. 31b.16.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., f. 32a.2.
[94] Ibid., f. 32a.3.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., f. 32a.4.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., f. 25b.15.
[102] Ibid., f. 30b.7ff.
[103] Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī, *Maqāla fī al-tawḥīd*, paras 148–9.
[104] Ibid., paras 150ff.

naw‘, *nisba*, *muttaṣil*, *‘add* and *ghayr munqasim*.[105] Yaḥyā is not mentioned by name but is included in the rather vague expression *qāla ba‘ḍ ahl zamāninā*, ‘someone in our time has said’.[106] Anyway, our author seems to agree with Yaḥyā in stating that something, in this particular case ‘the Cause’, *al-‘illa*, can be one in a certain aspect, and more than one in another aspect:

> *an takūn al-‘illa wāḥida min jiha mā*
> *wa-akthar min wāḥid min jiha ukhrā*[107]
>
> the Cause may be one from a certain point of view
> but more than one from another point of view.

Our author also states that God is one in substance (*tawḥīd jawhar Allāh*)[108] and that he is three in his properties (*tathlīth makhṣūṣātihi*),[109] or that his hypostases are three (*al-aqānīm al-thalātha*).[110] He further investigates the concept of substance (*jawhar*) in a fairly elaborate way.[111]

But in this present chapter, I do not wish to go into more detail about this. Instead, I would prefer to highlight some other wordings through which our author gives emphasis to his belief in divine unity, namely certain formulas which are repeated again and again as if they were a mantra. I have in mind negatively formulated wordings of the type *lā sharīka lahu*, ‘he has no partner’.[112] These expressions belong to a class of utterances which is very prominent in our section of *Kītāb al-majdal*, i.e. negative statements about God. I will presently return to this manner of talking about God that is, of course, part of a long tradition of negative theology.

Let us first have a look at the wordings of the type *lā sharīka lahu*. They are all construed with the *lā li-nafy al-jins*, ‘the *lā* of absolute negation’ and they are all employed in order to stress the oneness of God and his self-sufficiency. To this particular type of construction I also wish to add grammatical constructions with other negations than the *lā li-nafy al-jins*, such as *bi-lā*, *ghayr* and *laysa*, as well as constructions of the type *jalla ‘an sharīk*, ‘he is above having a partner’,[113] with various alternatives to *jalla*, such as *‘alā*, *ta‘ālā*, and so forth.

The two concepts mentioned, oneness and self-sufficiency, clearly belong together, as we may gather from the parallel use of the nouns convey-

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[105] MS Paris Ar. 191, f. 31a.12f.
[106] Ibid., f. 30b.14.
[107] Ibid., f. 30b.12.
[108] Ibid., f. 29a.15.
[109] Ibid., f. 29a.16.
[110] Ibid., f. 31b.6f.
[111] Ibid., f. 31a.17ff.
[112] Ibid., f. 26a.5.
[113] Ibid., f. 26a.8f.

ing one or other of the two concepts. Actually, and perhaps contrary to what one would expect, it is the idea of self-sufficiency which is more prominent. Some of the words are synonyms with the meaning of 'helper' or 'assistant', e.g. *muʿīn*, *ẓahīr* and *muwāzir* in *ʿalā [. . .] ʿan muʿīn wa-ẓahīr*, 'he is above helper and assistant',[114] *bi-lā ẓahīr muwāzir*, 'without a helping assistant'[115] and *wa-lā muwāzir [lahu]*, 'he has no helper'.[116] Other words mean 'partner' and 'colleague' and they are actually almost synonymous with the words just mentioned, that is, they imply the idea of someone co-operating with God. Such words are *sharīk* and *rasīl* in *lā sharīka lahu*, 'he has no partner[117] and *lā rasīla [lahu]*, 'he has no colleague'.[118]

By the way, this last word *rasīl* is very rare, as I have pointed out elsewhere.[119] Actually, I have only found it in three texts, all of them of East Syrian provenance, and it is rarely found in dictionaries.

The remaining words applied in this context all have the meaning 'equal' with a connotation in the direction of 'antagonist', e.g. *kufū'*, 'equal',[120] *mithl* or *mathīl*, 'likeness',[121] *shakl* or *shakīl*, 'resemblance',[122] *naẓīr*, 'equivalent',[123] *ʿadīl*, 'on a par',[124] *ḍidd*, 'antagonist'[125] and *nidd*, 'peer', 'rival'.[126] When we view these latter words in the light of the ones meaning 'helper', 'assistant' etc. with which they are generally paralleled, we are inevitably drawn to the conclusion that the most prominent idea conveyed in them is not the uniqueness of God, but his self-sufficiency.

These formulas belong to a class of utterances which is very prominent in our section of *Kitāb al-majdal*, i.e. negative statements about God. Besides the ones already mentioned, there are numerous negative statements about God, either in the form of negated nouns or negated verbs. From the long list of such negative expressions, I will merely present a few samples.

In all the following examples the author aims at showing that God is not a part of this world but is totally transcendent. He is *ghayr makhlūq*,

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[114] Ibid., f. 26a.9.
[115] Ibid., f. 29a.17.
[116] Ibid., f. 26a.10.
[117] Ibid., f. 26a.5.
[118] Ibid., f. 26a.10.
[119] Cf. Bo Holmberg, *A Treatise on the Unity and Trinity of God by Israel of Kashkar (d. 872): introduction, edition and word index* (*Lund Studies in African and Asian Religions* 3), Lund, 1989, pp. 89f., 100, 112, 123; and Holmberg, 'A Reconsideration', p. 267.
[120] MS Paris Ar. 191, f. 26a.9.
[121] Ibid., f. 26a.10.
[122] Ibid., f. 26a.10.
[123] Ibid., ff. 26a.9; 30b.9.
[124] Ibid., f. 26a.10.
[125] Ibid., ff. 26a.5, 10; 29a.17.
[126] Ibid., f. 26a.10.

'not created',[127] *lā murakkab*, 'not composite',[128] *lā mutajassam*, 'not embodied',[129] *lā ibtidāʾa lahu wa-lā intihāʾ*, 'he has no beginning or end',[130] *wa-lā qabl wa-lā baʿd*, 'he has no before or after',[131] *lā maʿdūd*, 'he is not limited',[132] *lā muḥtāj*, 'he has no need',[133] *lā ḥāʾil*, 'he does not change',[134] *lā mutaʾallim*, 'he does not suffer',[135] *lā māʾit*, 'he is not mortal';[136] and with verbal phrases: *lā tudrak māhiyyatuhu*, 'his essence cannot be understood',[137] *lā yaḥwī makān*, 'no place can contain him',[138] *lā tarāhu al-abṣār*, the eyes do not see him',[139] *lā tuḥītu bihi al-afkār*, 'the minds do not grasp him',[140] and so on.

If we can only say what God is not, how can we then know anything about God that is affirmative and positive? A key passage in this respect is the following one:

> *wa-al-bāriʾ tabāraka wa-taʿālā khafī al-jawhar ẓāhir al-āthār*
> *wa-lā sabīla fī taṣḥīḥ ṣifa lahu ʿazza ismuhu*
> *wa-lā nafyihā illā min talaqqī atharihi*[141]
>
> The Creator [. . .] is hidden in substance, visible with regard to his traces. There is no way to affirm any attribute to him (great is his name) or to deny any except by learning from his tracks.

This is an important statement which may be found, of course, not only in *Kitāb al-majdal* but in many of the Christian authors writing in Arabic, not to mention the Syrian theologians or Patristic authors in general. What we know about the Creator we gather from what we observe in nature, since the creation and all creatures are signs telling us something about the One who created all this.

When we speak positively about God and apply to him the most beautiful names, we only use these names as a loan, *bi-al-ʿāra*,[142] and by derivation, *bi-al-ishtiqāq*.[143] A name, *ism*, applied to God is only a sign,

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[127] Ibid., f. 29a.10.
[128] Ibid., f. 291.6.
[129] Ibid., f. 29a.7, 8.
[130] Ibid., ff. 26a.12; 29a.5, 12.
[131] Ibid., f. 26a.12f.
[132] Ibid., f. 29a.10.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., f. 29a.9.
[135] Ibid., f. 29a.10.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid., f. 31b.2.
[138] Ibid., f. 32b.8.
[139] Ibid., f. 32b.9.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid., ff. 31a.17–31b.2.
[142] Ibid., f. 32b.11.
[143] Ibid.

ishāra, and an interpretation, *taʿbīr*.[144] Describing him (i.e. his attributes, *awṣāf*) is only an indication, *dalāla*, and a clarification, *tabṣīr*.[145] His words in the Scriptures are information, *taʿrīf*, and message, *ikhbār*, and his deeds, *afʿāl*, and proclamations are warnings, *indhār*.[146]

Our author has a few things to say about God revealing himself in nature and through created beings, though relatively speaking he puts more emphasis on what we may learn from those people to whom God has revealed himself and who are mentioned in the Bible. In the section *al-Dhurwa* there are numerous quotations from Christian scripture, most of which are given in order to prove the oneness of God. But they are not always easy to identify, and it seems that they are quoted from memory, and different passages are often combined into one saying.

In this study I have restated my scepticism with regard to Graf's picture of *Kitāb al-majdal*. According to my reinterpretation, this seven-chapter work was written in the first half of the fifth/eleventh century, presumably by a man called ʿAmr ibn Mattā. The five-chapter work *Asfār al-asrār* is no plagiarism, but an original work by Ṣalībā ibn Yuḥannā. The person called Mārī ibn Sulaymān is probably only a continuator in the historical part of the book.

But my main topic has been the first section, called *al-Dhurwa*, of the second chapter of the *Kitāb al-majdal*. My intention has been to emphasise the language and style of this section, since without studying the language, we cannot possibly know anything about the thoughts of our author. The language of the section is elevated and sophisticated. Large parts of it are written in rhymed prose, and rhetorical figures are numerous, especially the kind of *jināS* which is called *al-muḍāriʿ*.

The section *al-Dhurwa* deals with the unity of God and his creative power. But it also deals with the issue of how we can know anything about God who is absolutely transcendent. In relating to all these issues, I have chosen to emphasise the formulas and the wordings in Arabic actually used by the author. Trivial as it may seem, this is the only way to come to grips with the theology and philosophy of our author.

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[144] Ibid., f. 32b.11f.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.

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THE TWO RECENSIONS OF THE PROLOGUE TO JOHN IN IBN AL-ṬAYYIB'S *COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPELS*

Julian Faultless

This study[1] offers an analysis of the major divergences between the two recensions, the Eastern original, and the miaphysite revision which is probably of Coptic origin,[2] in the section on the Prologue to John in Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *Commentary on the Gospels*. Recension here should not be taken to imply that there are two thoroughly different versions of the text, because the alterations in the miaphysite version are infrequent and small-scale, albeit crucial. In addition, conclusions reached about the text are based on an analysis of the Prologue alone, which is hardly long enough to be a representative portion of the Gospels, although its Christological significance gives it considerable interest in the present context.

Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib[3] (*ca* 436/1043),[4] a contemporary of Elias of Nisibis and Ibn Sīnā, is one of the major figures in

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[1] This article is based on a chapter of the author's unpublished doctoral thesis for the University of Oxford, which was supervised by Dr Sebastian Brock, whose advice throughout was invaluable. He kindly read a draft version of the present text.

[2] 'Eastern' here refers to the Church of the East (existing mainly in Iraq and Persia), often erroneously referred to as Nestorian. This Church follows the Christological doctrine of Theodore of Mopsuestia above all, and rejects the doctrine of 'two persons' attributed (possibly unfairly) to Nestorius. See S. P. Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church: a lamentable misnomer', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78, 1996, *passim*.

The Oriental Orthodox churches including the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobite), Armenian, Ethiopian and Coptic Churches are better referred to as miaphysite (implying 'one nature') rather than monophysite (implying 'one and only nature') since they do not deny that Christ was 'from two natures' (before the union). This was indeed denied by Eutyches, who is therefore justifiably referred to as a monophysite. See, for example, Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church', p. 26.

[3] His name is Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib according to MS Paris ar. 85 (f. 164v, l. 6f.). When he is referred to as Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī ʿĪsā al-Shammās al-ʿIbādī, this is an error resulting from the conflation, which appears in the later BL MS (BL Or. 3201, f. 371v), of the author's name with that of the scribe referred to in the colophon of Paris ar. 85. The Paris MS (f. 164v, l. 9f.) gives the name of the scribe (possibly even Ibn al-Ṭayyib's secretary) of a copy dating from 409/1018 as ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī ʿĪsā al-Shammās al-ʿIbādī. This error is found in G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. II (*Studi e Testi* 133), Vatican, 1947, p. 160, n. 1; R. Caspar *et al.*, 'Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien', *Islamochristiana* 2, 1976, p. 203; and B. Landron, *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak: attitudes nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l'Islam*, Paris, 1994, p. 108.

[4] The sources for the date of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's death are contradictory.

Christian Arabic literature. He was extraordinarily active and prolific in the fields of religion, medicine and philosophy, while in the sphere of Christian Arabic literature he is above all renowned as an exegete. He made extended commentaries on the Psalms and the Gospels (the latter, the subject of this article). At some time later in his career he assembled his various exegetical works together, forming *Firdaws al-naṣrāniyya* (The Paradise of Christianity),[5] which brought together his previously independent commentaries on the Psalms and the Gospels.[6]

The *Commentary on the Gospels* is the most influential work of Gospel exegesis in Arabic. It was widely copied for close on a millennium[7] and, as Macomber has noted, it 'enjoyed great popularity outside of [its author's] church.'[8] Brock has also pointed out that 'through Ibn al-Ṭayyib's Arabic commentaries, the East-Syrian exegetical tradition reaches the later Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox traditions.'[9] Indeed, Cowley described Ibn al-Ṭayyib's influence on the Ethiopian exegetical tradition as 'very pervasive'.[10]

In *Firdaws al-naṣrāniyya* Ibn al-Ṭayyib refers to the *Commentary on the Gospels* as 'my commentary on the Gospels', *tafsīrī al-injīl*.[11] It is referred

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Ibn al-Qifṭī says 'He lived at least until 420/Jan. 1029–Jan. 1030 and it is said he died in 435/Aug. 1043–Jul. 1044', *Ta'rīkh al-ḥukamā' von Ibn al-Qifṭī*, ed. J. Lippert, Leipzig, 1903, p. 223, l. 19f.

Bar Hebraeus is less equivocal about the date of his death, giving the end of Teshrīn I 1355 in the Greek (i.e. Seleucid) calendar (see *Bar Hebraeus Chronicon Syriacum*, ed. P. Bedjan, Paris, 1890, p. 226; *Chronography of Bar Hebraeus*, trans. E. A. W. Budge, London, 1932, p. 203), which is 435/October 1043 (Budge is wrong in this respect).

Ṣalībā Ibn Yūḥannā, however, informs us that Ibn al-Ṭayyib was buried in 434/Aug. 1042–Aug. 1043. See Ṣalībā Ibn Yūḥannā (falsely attributed to 'Amr Ibn Mattā), *Maris Amri et Slibae. De Patriarchis Nestorianorum*, ed. H. Gismondi, *pars altera, Amri et Slibae textus*, Rome, 1896, p. 99, l. 2. This work is the eighth/fourteenth century 'five chapter' *Kitāb al-majdal* (not the fifth/eleventh 'seven chapter' work of the same name by 'Amr Ibn Mattā). For the confusion over the authorship of this work see B. Holmberg, 'A reconsideration of the *Kitāb al-magdal*' in *Actes du 4e Congrès International d'Études Arabes Chrétiennes*, vol.I, *Parole de l'Orient* 18, 1993, pp. 255–73, and also his discussion in the present volume.

[5] For the fullest description of this work see P. Féghali, 'Ibn at-Tayyib et son commentaire sur la Genèse', *Parole de l'Orient* 16, 1990–1, pp. 151f. The section on Genesis has been edited and translated by J. C. J. Sanders, *Ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib. Commentaire sur la Genèse*, 2 vols (*CSCO* 274, 275), Louvain, 1967.

[6] Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Commentaire*, text, p. 2.

[7] See Graf, *Geschichte*, vol. II, pp. 167–9, for the fullest current list of MSS.

[8] W. F. Macomber, 'Newly Discovered Fragments of the Gospel Commentaries of Theodore of Mopsuestia', *Le Muséon* 81, 1968, pp. 444f.

[9] S. P. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (*Mōrān 'Eth'ō* 9), Kottayam, 1997, p. 94.

[10] R. W. Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation, a study in exegetical tradition and hermeneutics*, Cambridge, 1988, p. 378. With regard to further study of the traditional (originally largely oral) Ethiopian commentary corpus (the so-called *Andemta*), Cowley states, 'the major *desideratum* is a critical edition, translation, and comparative source-critical study of the *exegetica* of Ibn al-Ṭayyib', p. 7.

[11] Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Commentaire*, text, p. 2.

to as 'commentary on the Gospels', *sharḥ al-injīl*, by Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa[12] and 'collection of commentary on the Holy Gospels', *majmūʿ sharḥ al-anājīl al-muqaddasa*, by Abū al-Barakāt.[13] The note on authorship in the colophon of Paris ar. 85 confirms that it is by Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib.[14] It is also stated that it is a copy of a MS executed by ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī ʿĪsā al-Shammās al-ʿIbādī and finished in Aylūl in the year 1329 of Alexander (i.e. Seleucid calendar) or Jumādā I 409 of the Arabs', which is September 1018.[15] This is thus the *terminus ante quem* for the work's composition. In his *Introduction to the Commentary on the Gospels*[16] the author tells us that he wrote it after *al-Uṣūl al-dīniyya*.[17]

In the *Commentary on the Gospels*,[18] sections of the Gospel text ranging in length from one phrase to four verses alternate with commentary introduced by the formulaic rubric, 'the Exegete said', *qāla al-mufassir*, which phrase should not necessarily be taken as referring to Theodore of Mopsuestia.[19] In all the sections from the end of John 1.1 onwards, following the commentary attributed to 'the Exegete', comes a generally longer portion where Mār Yuwānīs (i.e. Chrysostom) is cited. In most cases this material attributed to Chrysostom is followed by shorter portions where most often Ishōʿdād is named (amongst other exegetes), or an interpretation is introduced by a phrase such as 'we say' or 'some, *qawm*, say'.[20]

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[12] See Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbāʾ*, ed. N. Riḍā, Beirut, no date, p. 325, l. 23.

[13] See Abū al-Barakāt, *Abū'l Barakāt's Katalog der christlichen Schriften in arabischer Sprache*, ed. and trans. (often inaccurately, see Graf, *Geschichte*, vol. II, p. 441) K. Riedel, Göttingen, 1902, pp. 653/684f. This work is the seventh chapter of *Miṣbāḥ al-zulma wa-īḍāḥ al-khidma* (see Graf, *Geschichte*, vol. II, pp. 438–42).

[14] See Paris ar. 85 (f. 164v, l. 6f.).

[15] Ibid. (f. 164v, ll. 9–12).

[16] The *Introduction to the Commentary* (referred to from now on as *Introduction*) has been published in a rather unreliable edition by Y. Manqariyūs, *Tafsīr al-Mashriqī*, Cairo, 1908. An excellent critical edition and French translation of the first part of the work was published in two parts by S. K. Samir, 'Nécessité de la science: texte de ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Ṭayyib', *Parole de l'Orient* 3, 1972, pp. 241–59; and 'Nécessité de l'exégèse scientifique: texte de ʿAbdallāh Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib', *Parole de l'Orient* 5, 1974, pp. 243–79.

[17] See Ibn al-Ṭayyib, MS BL Or. 3201, f. 9v, l. 1f.; (*Tafsīr*, ed. Manqariyūs, pp. 36f.).

[18] Referred to from now on as *Commentary*.

[19] The present author's research on John confirms Reinink's thesis concerning the section of the *Commentary* on Luke that the phrase *qāla al-mufassir* is a formulaic rubric and does not necessarily refer to Theodore of Mopsuestia as has sometimes been assumed (see, for example, Macomber, 'Newly discovered fragments', p. 445). See G. J. Reinink, *Studien zur Quellen- und Traditionsgeschichte des Evangelienkommentars der Gannat Bussame* (*CSCO* 414, *subsidia* 57), Louvain, 1979, p. 160.

[20] By contrast, 'in the case of the Synoptics, [the commentary sections are] introduced by the rubric "The Interpreter [*al-mufassir*] has said"', but there is no further division of the comments. See Macomber, 'Newly discovered fragments', p. 445, where the author also writes the following concerning the Synoptics: 'Even in Nestorian manuscripts the particular source of individual comments is never identified. Indeed, the only differentiation

Generally speaking, Ibn al-Ṭayyib apportions the same amount of coverage to each verse, with the unsurprising exceptions of verses 1 and 14. In this respect, his is a methodical commentary, never excessively detailed but with every phrase covered. This is in stark contrast to Chrysostom and Ishōʿdād, two of the *Commentary's* principal sources (whether anterior or proximate). Chrysostom, it should be borne in mind, is a homilist not an exegete proper and so is not constrained by the necessity to restrict himself to analysing the Biblical text. His coverage of the Prologue spans some sixty pages in Migne's edition of the Greek, with around thirty dedicated to the first verse alone.[21] Whilst Ishōʿdād's work, on the other hand, is a true commentary, his coverage is by no means systematic, with for example verses 6 to 11 (and 22 to 28 beyond the Prologue) being completely overlooked. Theodore of Mopsuestia's commentary is the closest in style to Ibn al-Ṭayyib's but the latter's is less discursive and expansive. Indeed, given that Theodore observes in the introduction to his commentary on John that the job of the exegete is to 'explain difficult expressions in the Biblical text, without superfluous digressions, which are permitted, even required, of the preacher',[22] Ibn al-Ṭayyib could be said to have fulfilled Theodore's own stipulation even better than he did himself.

In the conclusion to the *Introduction* we find a crucial passage in which Ibn al-Ṭayyib reveals his working method in writing the *Commentary*:

> I intend to quote what [the unquestionable masters such as Mār Yūḥannā Golden-mouth, Mār Ephrem and others] said, except that I abbreviate and abridge, and do my utmost to clarify and add my own [material to] solve any doubtful matters and refine the expressions, to the full extent of my ability.[23]

The *Commentary* is then, above all, a work of compilation. As Coakley has pointed out regarding the development of Syriac exegesis (out of which tradition the *Commentary* arises): 'It [is] clear that after Mōshē Bar Kēphā [*ca* 218/833–290/903] scholars preferred not to discuss alternative solutions to problems but to choose from, or combine, the exegetical possibilities already available.'[24]

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of sources is simply implied by vague introductory phrases. In most cases this is merely, "And the saying that . . .", referring to particular words of the evangelist that are to be commented on, but often, by contrast, comments are introduced by "And some say . . .", or "The commentators inquire into the reason for . . .".'

[21] See Chrysostom in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne, vol. LIX, Paris, 1862, pp. 23–86.

[22] Theodore quoted by M. Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, English trans., Edinburgh, 1994, pp. 71f.

[23] Ibn al-Ṭayyib, MS BL Or. 3201, ff. 9r–9v; (*Tafsīr*, ed. Manqariyūs, pp. 36–7). All translations are by the present author unless stated otherwise.

[24] J. F. Coakley, 'The Old Man Simeon (Luke 2.25) in Syriac Tradition', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47, 1981, p. 211.

Based on the present author's research, three (but not necessarily only three) proximate sources have been established for the Prologue: 1. Ishōʿdād of Merv (or a reliable intermediary); 2. a source in common with Ishōʿdād; 3. an intermediary in common with Mōshē Bar Kēphā ultimately deriving from Chrysostom. Ibn al-Ṭayyib may, of course, have had a source to hand which combined the above in any combination, 1 and 2 being the most likely amalgam,[25] though Ephrem, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Chrysostom and Mōshē can be excluded as proximate sources for the Prologue.[26] Given that none of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's proximate sources is known for certain, it is impossible to judge to what extent he may have adapted them. However, his text is an intelligent, finely crafted work, the stylistic homogeneity of which is surely evidence of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's great skill.

It has been claimed by some scholars that Ibn al-Ṭayyib wrote a 'draft' version of the *Commentary* in Syriac,[27] though Graf is surely correct in regarding this assumption as mistaken.[28] The source of it is no doubt a passage in the colophon of the manuscripts of the *Commentary* which says: 'The shaykh, the virtuous priest Abū al-Faraj ʿAbdallāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib collected the explanation[s] of [the Gospel's] interpretation and translated it from Syriac into the Arabic language.'[29] However, this is surely the work of a scribe who misinterprets the similar phrase in Ibn al-Ṭayyib's own *Introduction*: 'Necessity has led me . . . to collect, *an ajmaʿa*, what the unquestionable masters such as Mār Yūḥannā Golden-mouth, Mār Ephrem and others said . . . in the Arabic language, since it holds

[25] Two texts which should certainly be investigated for possible connections with the *Commentary* are the New Testament portion of the *Anonymous Commentary* (Diyarbakir MS; for an explanation of the complex relationship between the so-called *Diyarbakir* and *Anonymous Commentaries* see L. van Rompay, 'Development of Biblical Interpretation in the Syrian Churches of the Middle Ages', in M. Sæbø ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: the history of its interpretation*, vol. I, Göttingen, 2000, p. 568); and likewise the *Gannat Bussāmē*, particularly those interpretations attributed to Mar Aba in the latter (see J. C. J. Sanders, 'Moses bar Kepha bei Ibn at-Tayyib', in R. Lavenant ed., *III Symposium Syriacum 1980* (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 221), Rome, 1983, p. 256). Incidentally, the *Anonymous Commentary* is probably, and the *Gannat* almost certainly, too late to be the common sources shared with Ishōʿdād and Mōshē. Another unpublished work which needs to be investigated is Isho' Bar Nun's *Select Questions on the Old and New Testament.*

[26] These conclusions on the sources for the Prologue are based on research carried out by the author for his doctoral thesis.

[27] See, for example, de Slane, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris, 1883–95, p. 21. De Slane is quoted by R. W. Cowley, 'Scholia of Ahob of Qatar on St. John's Gospel and the Pauline Epistles', *Le Muséon* 93, 1980, p. 331, n. 6, who refers to this Syriac 'draft' throughout his oeuvre. Tisserant is presumably following de Slane in É. Amman ed., *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol. XI, Paris, 1930–2, col. 276.

[28] See Graf, *Geschichte*, vol. II, pp. 167f.

[29] Paris ar. 85, f. 164v, ll. 6–8; BL Or. 3201, f. 317v, ll. 12–14 (corresponding to BL Or. 732, f. 366r in the Geʿez translation; see Cowley, 'Scholia', p. 331, n. 6).

sway over this country, I mean Iraq, and people lack an understanding of Syriac.'[30]

So, while there was no Syriac draft version, Ibn al-Ṭayyib's explicit aim in assembling the *Commentary* was to preserve the Syriac tradition in Arabic at a time when knowledge of the former language must have been fading in and around Baghdad.

The two recensions of the Commentary

Anyone observing the widespread diffusion of manuscripts of the *Commentary* over the Christian Middle East (including Coptic foundations), as well as the work's substantial penetration of the Ethiopian tradition, may wonder how it is that a commentary originating from the Church of the East could have achieved such an extensive reach. The answer, at least in the case of two out of the three Arabic manuscripts used in this study (along with the Geʿez translation), is that at some time during or before 646/1248 Ibn al-Ṭayyib's original work was tailored to fit miaphysite Christology.

The existence of this recension was already noted by the Cairene Copt Shams al-Riʾāsa Abū al-Barakāt (d. 726/1324) in *Miṣbāḥ al-ẓulma wa-īḍāḥ al-khidma*:

> There is to [Ibn al-Ṭayyib's name] a collection of commentaries on the holy Gospels, which a certain Jacobite, *baʿḍ al-Yaʿāqiba*,[31] revised and from which he removed phrases which were in accordance with the beliefs of the Nestorians. After that, a number of copies were made of it for the sake of the excellent passages in it, and the meanings which its compiler laboured over.[32]

In more recent times, the existence of this recension seems to have been noticed only by Macomber, who appears to be unaware of Abū al-Barakāt.[33] Neither Graf nor even Troupeau in his catalogue of the Paris library makes mention of it.

This study offers an analysis of the major divergences between the two recensions. Since most of these pertain to Christology, a brief outline is offered of the origins of the Christological differences between the Oriental Orthodox (miaphysite) Churches and the Church of the East.

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[30] Ibn al-Ṭayyib, MS BL Or. 3201, f. 9r, ll. 16–21; (*Tafsīr*, ed. Manqariyūs, p. 36, ll. 16–19).

[31] The fact that Abū al-Barakāt refers to a Jacobite should not be taken to imply that it was not revised by a Copt. The two traditions were extremely close at this time and the term does not exclude Copts.

[32] Abū al-Barakāt, *Katalog*, pp. 653/684f. The editor misreads and so mis-translates the last phrase.

[33] See Macomber, 'Newly discovered fragments', pp. 444f.

Chalcedon

At the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) the main dogmatic pronouncements were as follows:

> Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human, 'like us in all things apart from sin'. He is acknowledged 'in two natures, without confusion, ἀσυγχύτως, without change, ἀτρέπτως,[34] without division, ἀδιαιρέτως, without separation, ἀχωρίστως;[35] the difference of the natures in no way abolished by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved, and concurring into one Person and one ὑπόστασις.'[36]

Elucidating the Patristic Greek Chalcedonian understanding of the terms, Kallistos Ware has explained that πρόσωπον and ὑπόστασις answer the question 'who?' (emphasising unity), whilst φύσις answers the question 'what?' (emphasising diversity).[37]

The Formulary of Reunion of 433 AD that Christ is ὁμοούσιος (i.e. consubstantial, or of the same essence/being) with us as well as the Father[38] was admitted by all sides except the Eutychians.

The Antiochene Christology of the Church of the East

The Church of the East, existing as it did within the Sasanian Empire, was not part of the *oikumene* of the Roman Empire and so was not present at Chalcedon, an 'ecumenical' council (not a universal one) convened by the Emperor. It could, though, if it chose, recognize a council retrospectively, as happened in the case of Nicaea, eighty-five years after the council had sat.[39] This Church was, to all intents and purposes, already independent from the other Churches, not only by lying outside the Roman Empire but also by having objected ('not without some good reason')[40] to the irregular procedure of the Council of Ephesus of 431 AD.[41]

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[34] These two directed against Eutyches.
[35] These two directed against Nestorius.
[36] See Parry and Melling, 'Ecumenical councils', in K. Parry *et al.* eds, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*, Oxford, 1999, p. 171.
[37] Lecture delivered in Oxford.
[38] See A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. I, *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon*, English trans., London, rev. 1975, pp. 497–501.
[39] Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church', p. 25.
[40] Ibid., p. 24.
[41] See Mar Aprem, *The Council of Ephesus of 431*, Trichur, 1978 and A. de Halleux, 'La première session du Concile d'Éphèse (22 juin 431)', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 59, 1993, pp. 48–87. Nestorius had been deposed at this council but it was the procedure not the deposition to which the Church in the Persian Empire objected.

It is essential to understand that the rejection of the Chalcedonian Definition by the Church of the East resulted from its understanding of the key Christological terms. The Antiochenes held that the two natures of the Chalcedonian Definition implied two *qnōmē*. They reached this conclusion because of their understanding of *qnōmā*, as Brock has explained: 'The Greek term ὑπόστασις is represented in Syriac by the word *qnōmā*, which has a much wider range of meanings than the Greek has. When the Church of the East uses *qnōmā* in connection with 'nature' it usually speaks of 'the two natures and their *qnōmās*', where *qnōmā* means something like 'individual manifestation'.[42] The kernel of Brock's interpretation of the Eastern usage of the term follows: 'A *qnōmā* is an individual instance or example of a *kyānā* (which is understood as always abstract),[43] but this individual manifestation is not necessarily a self-existent instance of a *kyānā*.'

In the joint communiqué of the second non-official consultation on dialogue within the Syriac tradition we find the following:

> . . . It is always essential to realize that, in the context of Christology (as opposed to the situation in Trinitarian theology), there is a clear and important difference between the understanding in the Church of the East of the term *qnōmā* (i.e. individuated, but not personalized nature) and that of the other Syriac Churches where *qnōmā* is regularly understood as the equivalent of *hypostasis* in the sense of person.
>
> Thus the following explanation of the term '*Qnōmā*' has been presented by the Assyrian, Chaldean and Syro-Malabar delegations of the Church of the East:
>
> 'In Christology, as expressed in the synodical and liturgical sources of the Church of the East, the term *qnōmā* does not mean *hypostasis* as understood in Alexandrine Tradition, but instead individuated nature. Accordingly, the human nature which the Holy Spirit fashioned and the Logos assumed and united to himself without any separation, was personalized in the Person of the Son of God. When we speak of the two natures and their *qnōmē*, we understand this very much in the same sense as two natures and their particular properties, *dīlāyātā*.'[44]

It was this very understanding of *qnōmā* (not necessarily self-existent, precisely the meaning of ὑπόστασις) as a manifestation of a *kyānā* that led to the Church's rejection of the Chalcedonian formula of one ὑπόστασις but two φύσεις on the grounds of illogicality, as we learn from Isho'yabh II (d. 27/646):

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[42] Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church', p. 28. Also the subsequent quote.

[43] Brock has written in an unpublished text that the term means 'set of characteristics'. G. Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai the Great*, Kottayam, 1982, has explained: 'The *qnōmā* is the concretization of the abstract *kiyānā* such as this or that', p. 89.

[44] A. Stirnemann and G. Wilflinger eds, *Syriac Dialogue (2), Second Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition*, Vienna, 1996, p. 193.

> Although, in accordance with the opinion of their own minds, they preserved the true faith with the confession of the two natures, yet by their formula of one *qnōmā* (= ὑπόστασις), it seems, they tempted weak minds. As an outcome of the affair a contradiction occurred, for with the formula 'one *qnōmā*' they corrupted the confession of 'two natures'; while with the 'two natures' they rebuked and refuted the 'one *qnōmā*' . . . On what side we should number them [i.e. as orthodox or heretical] I do not know, for their terminology cannot stand up, as Nature and Scripture testify: for in these, many *qnōmē* can be found in a single 'nature', but that there should be various 'natures' in a single *qnōmā* has never been the case and has not been heard of.[45]

The doctrine of the Church of the East is then, the union of two natures and their two *qnōmē* in one *parsōpā*.

Alexandrine miaphysite Christology

The Definition of Faith laid down at Chalcedon eventually led to the establishment of the independent Oriental Orthodox Churches. The theologians of the Alexandrine tradition such as Severus held the Chalcedonian formula to be illogical, but for different reasons from those of the Antiochenes. Once again, the understanding of the terms is the cause of the rejection of the Definition. The miaphysites regarded φύσις as being close in meaning to ὑπόστασις,[46] hence the one φύσις following logically from the one ὑπόστασις.[47] For Severus, one ὑπόστασις implied one nature:

> It is obvious to all who have just a modicum of training in the teachings of true religion that it is contradictory to speak of two natures with reference to one Christ, he being one ὑπόστασις. For whenever one speaks of one ὑπόστασις, one must necessarily also speak of one nature.[48]

Their doctrine of 'a single incarnate nature of God the Word' (μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη) but 'from two natures' (before the Incarnation), and their assertion of Christ's twofold consubstantiality not only with the

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[45] Isho'yabh II, *Lettre christologique du patriarche syro-orientale Isho'yabh II de Gdala*, ed. and trans. L. R. M. Sako, Rome, 1983, p. 42; English trans. Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church', p. 24.

[46] For the Church of the East *kyānā*/φύσις is close in meaning to οὐσία.

[47] See Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church', pp. 27f. Compare the Cappadocians, for whom the terms φύσις and οὐσία in a Trinitarian context were more or less interchangeable. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th edn, London, 1977, pp. 263–9.

[48] Severus, *Severi Antiocheni orationes ad Nephalium*, ed. and trans. J. Lebon (*CSCO* 119), Louvain, 1949, p. 16; English trans. Brock, 'The "Nestorian" Church', p. 25, n. 3.

Father but also with us, is evidence that their opponents were misguided or disingenuous in accusing them of denying Christ's humanity.

The Christological formulae of the three Churches can be represented in diagrammatic form:

	φύσις/ *kyānā*		ὑπόστασις/ *qnōmā*	πρόσωπον/ *parsōpā*
Oriental Orthodox:	1	<<<<	1	1
Chalcedonians:	2		1	1
Church of the East:	2	>>>>	2	1

The MSS used in this study

The printed edition of the *Commentary*, edited by an Egyptian Copt at the turn of the last century, is of little use for serious study.[49] Not only is it not a critical edition (based on the miaphysite recension, in fact) but also the editor did not hesitate to 'improve' the language (not just the orthography) of the manuscripts, as he openly confesses in his introduction.[50] Moreover, the editor replaced the original Gospel quotations with ones taken from the thirteenth/nineteenth-century Protestant version produced in Beirut. Even more problematic is the fact that the editor interpolated whole passages of his own with no indication of doing so.[51]

Three MSS were employed for the critical edition which formed the basis of the present study,[52] all of Egyptian provenance: Paris ar. 85 and 86, and British Library Or. 3201. The MSS fall into two recensions, with Paris ar. 85 representing Ibn al-Ṭayyib's original (Eastern) version and the other two representing the miaphysite revision. Graf's is still the fullest list of MSS,[53] but now needs to be supplemented by the information in Samir's edition of the *Introduction*[54] and by Macomber's knowledge of the MSS which were transferred from Diyarbakir to Mardin, most of which are now likely to be in Baghdad.[55]

Paris ar. 86 is dated 646/1248 and Paris ar. 85 is also most likely seventh/thirteenth-century, so both MSS were copied some two centuries after the composition of the *Commentary* and are amongst the earliest

[49] Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Tafsīr*, ed. Manqariyūs (2 vols).
[50] See Samir, 'Nécessité de la Science', p. 245.
[51] See, for example, the second half of p. 380 amongst many others.
[52] A critical edition of the Prologue forms a chapter of the unpublished thesis.
[53] See Graf, *Geschichte*, vol. II, pp. 167–9.
[54] See Samir, 'Nécessité de la science', pp. 243f., and 'Nécessité de l'exégèse Scientifique', pp. 244–6.
[55] See Macomber, 'Newly discovered fragments', pp. 444f.

known MSS of the work. Paris ar. 85 is valuable as a witness to the original Eastern recension, since most of the other examples are probably largely inaccessible in Iraq or Turkey. British Library Or. 3201, dated 1220/1805, was used here mainly owing to its accessibility, but was also very useful in being the only one of the three MSS to contain Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *Introduction*.

Apart from the relatively few and not very extensive (although important) alterations in the miaphysite recension, the lack of many serious textual difficulties in the MSS, or of serious divergences between them, suggests that they may be reasonably close to Ibn al-Ṭayyib's original.

MS A – Paris ar. 85:[56] Undated. Written in an Egyptian script (oriental) by an anonymous copyist. The MS is seventh/thirteenth century according to Troupeau, but Macomber says fifth/eleventh century (probably taking the date from the colophon, which is a copy).[57] The colophon (f. 164v) is copied from a MS produced by ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī ʿĪsā al-Shammās ('deacon') al-ʿIbādī in Aylūl 1329 in the Alexandrian (i.e. Seleucid) calendar or Jumādā I 409, that is September 1018. The first folio or so of the commentary on John is unfortunately missing and there are also some serious problems with the ordering of the folios beyond the Prologue. A witness of the original Eastern version.

MS B – Paris ar. 86: Dated Kīhak, year of the Martyrs 964 (646/1248). Written in an Egyptian script (oriental) by an anonymous copyist. It has the same colophon (f. 302v) as Paris ar. 85. Troupeau incorrectly states that this MS is a copy of Paris ar. 85. A witness of the miaphysite recension.

MS C – British Library Or. 3201, MS no. 15:[58] Dated Suyūṭ, Wednesday, 2 Mesuri, year of the Martyrs 1521 (1220/1805). Written in a large but rather indistinct *naskhī* script by a named copyist. A witness of the miaphysite recension.

Given that Paris ar. 86 and the BL MS are both witnesses of the miaphysite recension, the only important question to be answered concerning the relationship of the MSS is whether the BL MS is ultimately derived from Paris ar. 86. This can best be deduced by assessing whether Paris ar. 86 has substantial departures from Paris ar. 85 that are not shared by the BL MS, and this is in fact the case. In some ways the

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[56] See G. Troupeau, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes (Bibliothèque Nationale), Première partie—manuscrits chrétiens*, 2 vols, Paris 1972–4.

[57] See Macomber, 'Newly discovered fragments', p. 444, n. 17.

[58] See C. Rieu, *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London, 1894, pp. 12f.

BL MS, despite having been copied five and a half centuries later than Paris ar. 86, could be said to be a more reliable MS than Paris ar. 86.

A MS of the Ge'ez (Ethiopic) translation (BL Or. 732)[59] was employed as a further witness to the miaphysite recension. It seems to be in the tradition of the BL MS, rather than that of Paris ar. 86. The translation into Ge'ez was accomplished in the fifteenth year of the reign of the emperor Lebnä Dengel (930/1522–23), whilst the date of the MS is the sixth year of the reign of Susenyos (1021/1612–13).[60]

Analysis of the two recensions of the Commentary

In the following, the phrase in bold type is the phrase in the original Eastern recension (MS A) which is replaced in the miaphysite recension (MSS B, C and the Ethiopic translation) by the phrase in italics, while phrases in normal type are shared by both recensions. Minor departures from the miaphysite Arabic recension in the Ge'ez translation ('Eth.') are not noted here.

The alterations have been numbered for ease of cross-reference, although folio references are also given (the second figure in references to the Eth. MS being the column number).

1. Alteration of 'qunūm':

1. [f. 80v, l. 19] So he [i.e. Matthew] teaches us about
   His human qunūm (***qunūmihi al-insānī***)
   the bodily birth (*al-wilāda al-jusmāniyya*)
   (B f. 170r, l. 9; C f. 299r, l. 6; Eth. f. 289r, 1.8–9).
2. [f. 81r, l. 1] So he teaches us about
   His divine qunūm (***qunūmihi al-ilāhī***)
   the divine birth (*al-wilāda al-ilāhiyya*)
   (B f. 170r, l. 11; C f. 299r, l. 8; Eth. f. 289r, 1.13).
3. [f. 82r, l. 18] When he has finished speaking of the
   divine qunūm (***al-qunūm al-ilāhī***)
   eternity of the Son (*azaliyyat al-ibn*)
   (B f. 171v, l. 17; C f. 300r, l. 5; Eth. f. 290r, 1.19–20).

Of the occurrences of *qunūm* in the Prologue, only those at nos. 1, 2 and 3 are in a Christological context. It is notable that it is precisely

[59] See W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London, 1877, p. 200, also Cowley, 'Scholia', p. 330, n. 6.

[60] See f. 366r for the date of the translation and f. 366v for the date of the copy.

only in these instances that the miaphysite recension deletes mention of *qunūm*.[61]

Miaphysite Christology recognizes only one *qunūm* or ὑπόστασις in Christ. And so, while the instances of *qunūm* referring to Christ as one of the *qunūm(s)* of the Trinity remain in the miaphysite recension, those instances which imply a distinction between the human and divine *qunūm(s)* in Christ himself are expunged. However, not only is the miaphysite reviser well able to distinguish between the Christological and the Trinitarian, but his substitutions of 'divine *qunūm*' with 'divine birth' at 2 and 'eternity of the Son' at 3 show that he is only to be satisfied with a substitution which suits each individual context.

2. Alteration of 'humanity':

4. [f. 85v, l. 8] Most of what they [i.e. the other Evangelists] say concerns His
humanity (***al-nāsūt***)
Incarnation (*al-tajassud*)
(B f. 176r, l. 9; C f. 302r, l. 25; Eth. f. 292v, 1.19–20).
5. [f. 86v, l. 15] It means the
humanity (***nāsūt***)
becoming human (*ta'annus*)
of Jesus Christ (B f. 177v, l. 10; C f. 303r, l. 19; Eth. f. 293r, 3.11).

Once again, the author of the miaphysite recension exhibits a high level of theological awareness of the context in which the Christologically crucial terms occur. Mention of Christ's humanity is not in itself unacceptable,[62] it is only when such mention implies divisibility of the φύσις or ὑπόστασις that it becomes inadmissible. It is only at the very points in the Prologue where such divisibility is suggested, namely 4 and 5, that other terms are substituted for 'humanity'.

At 4 the commentator states that most of what the Evangelists other than John say regarding Christ's birth 'concerns His humanity', thus implying a contrast with John, who, we are to understand, is concerned more with Christ's divinity. This, therefore, might be taken to suggest the existence of two distinct ὑποστάσεις or φύσεις, one human and one divine. Again at 5, the subtlety of the miaphysite recension is revealed

[61] There are nine remaining instances, correctly identified in the miaphysite recension as not being Christological.

[62] Cyril himself, for example, wrote: 'Christ exists as one and only Son, one and the same is God and man, as perfect in divinity as perfect in humanity.' *Ep. ad Succensum*, quoted by A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. II, part 4, *The Church of Alexandria with Nubia and Ethiopia after 451*, English trans., London, rev. 1996, pp. 30f.

by the fact that here again the divisibility of the nature is only implicit. We are told that we receive the gifts of 'truth and grace' through Christ's humanity. The reviser presumably takes this to mean that the commentator is suggesting that the supposedly distinct divinity is not directly involved in this process of giving. At 4, 'humanity' is substituted by 'Incarnation', and at 5 'becoming human'—these two concepts obviously considered less liable of being seen to imply two ὑποστάσεις or φύσεις.

In another instance, on the other hand, the *Commentary* is explicit in stating the unity of the divinity and the humanity, so mention of the latter is allowed to remain. In yet another, the implication would seem to be not a contrast between the humanity and the divinity but a contrast between Christ's humanity, which is superior to the Baptist's, and his existence as a human, in which regard the Baptist had temporal precedence. A third instance in which the miaphysite recension permits mention of the humanity is, ironically, in an interpretation correctly attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia no less, the arch-Antiochene. Theodore interprets the phrase 'the Word became flesh' as confirming Christ's humanity. The miaphysite reviser correctly, and fairly, takes this as implying not that Christ was not divine, but that he was not only divine.

3. Alteration of 'dressing' or 'dwelling in the body':

6. [f. 83r, l. 19] **by his dressing in the body** (***bi-labsihi al-jism***)
   by his taking the body (*bi-akhdhihi* (*bi-*)*al-jasad*)
   (B f. 173r, l. 9; C f. 300v, l. 17; Eth. f. 290v, 3.17).
7. [f. 87v, l. 3] **He dressed in** (***labisa***)
   He took (*akhadha*)
   a body from us. (B f. 178v, l. 4; C f. 303v, l. 19; Eth. f. 293v, 3.4).
8. [f. 82r, ll. 13–14] **And some say that the darkness** (***al-ẓalām***) **refers to the body in which He lived** (***al-jism alladhī sakana fīhi***)
   (omitted in B f. 171v, l. 13; C f. 300r, l. 2; Eth. f. 290r.1.9).
9. [f. 84r, l. 12] He took the flesh
   in which He dwelt (***ḥalla fīhi***)
   in which He became incarnate (*tajassada fīhi*)
   (B f. 174r, l. 10; C f. 301r, l. 22; Eth. f. 291v, 1.7).

Early examples of the interpretation of the Incarnation using the language of 'dressing' or 'dwelling' can be found in Hebrews 5.7 of the Peshitta and in Theodore of Mopsuestia's *Catechetical Homilies*:

> 'He became man,'[63] they [i.e. the fathers at Nicaea] said. And it was not through a simple providence that he lowered himself, nor was it through the gift of powerful help, as he has done so often and still [does]. Rather did he take our very nature; he clothed[64] himself with it, came into being in it and dwelt[65] in it so as to make it perfect through sufferings; and he united himself with it.[66]

The miaphysite objection to the language of dressing used to describe the Incarnation (not in fact universal in the West-Syrian tradition) was discussed by Philoxenus in his commentary to the Prologue (written shortly after 508 AD):[67]

> Take what the Apostle said . . .: his words were, 'He who, in the days of His flesh . . .' [Heb. 5.7]. Instead of this the [Syriac translators of the Peshitta] interpreted (as follows): 'When he was clothed in flesh',[68] and instead of [following] Paul, they concurred with the position of Nestorius, who cast the body onto the Word, like a garment on anyone's body, and like purple [robes] on the bodies of the emperors,—so that another beside him might be thought of, in the same way that every garment is something other apart from the person who wears it.
> And again, with the passage where the Son said to the Father 'You have established me with a body'[69] [Heb. 10.5],—indicating the inhomination by means of which [the Son] fulfilled the Father's will and became a sacrifice on behalf of all: this too they interpreted as 'You clothed me in a body'.[70] Thus it can be recognized everywhere that it is not the words of the Apostle that they have interpreted, but they have put [instead] their own opinion in their renderings.[71]

4. Alteration of 'associated with the body which exists':

10. [f. 84v, ll. 1–2] For the sake of His being **associated with the body that exists** (***muqāranatihi al-jism al-kā'in***)

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[63] Sy. *hwā bar nāshā*. This comes from the Nicene Creed.
[64] Sy. *lbesh*.
[65] Sy. *'mar*.
[66] Theodore of Mopsuestia, facsimile and trans. R. Tonneau and R. Devresse, *Les homélies catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste* (*Studi e Testi* 145), Vatican, 1949, f. 41r. English trans., Grillmeier, *Christ*, vol. I, p. 429, although the phrase 'came into being in it' is omitted by mistake.
[67] See Brock, *Brief Outline*, pp. 39f.
[68] Sy. *kad besrā lbīsh*.
[69] Sy. *pagrā dēyn tqant lī*.
[70] Sy. *pagrā dēyn albeshtānī*.
[71] Philoxenus, *Philoxène de Mabbog, commentaire du prologue johannique*, ed. and trans. A. de Halleux (*CSCO* 380, 381), Louvain, 1978, text, pp. 53, l. 18–54, l. 5; unpublished English trans. by Brock.

united with the body (*ittiḥādihi bi-al-jism*)
(B f. 174v, l. 2; C f. 301v, l. 4; Eth. f. 291v, 2.7–8).

At 10, the miaphysite recension prefers Christ's being 'united with the body' to his being 'associated with the body that exists'. This concept of Christ's being 'associated' with the body may be an allusion to Heb. 2.14:[72] 'Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same.'[73]

It must be admitted that this correlation of Arabic *muqārana* with *eshtawtap* of Peshitta Hebrews is only conjectural, since we cannot know if either Ibn al-Ṭayyib or the scholar responsible for the miaphysite revision would have made this connection. But if it is correct, the fact that the concept of Christ's 'associating' with flesh and blood has Biblical precedence would indicate that 'association' is not necessarily the issue here. Rather, the miaphysite reviser's objection is to *kā'in*. Although Ibn al-Ṭayyib's intention in using this word was almost certainly to indicate that the body was not an apparition (this is made explicit elsewhere in the text), the reviser may have taken it to imply that the body was pre-existent.

5. Alteration of 'uniting with a human':

11. [f. 80v, l. 18] For Matthew says that the Holy Spirit prepared (*aʿadda*)
a human to unite with (***insān li-ittiḥād***)
the body in which was united (*al-jasad al-muttaḥad bihi*)
the eternal Son of God.[74] (B f. 170r, l. 8; C f. 299r, l. 6; Eth. f. 289r, 1.6–7).

The replacement of the phrase 'a human to unite with' by 'the body in which was united' (cf. revision no. 10 above) is to be expected since the original phrase, as at 10, might be taken to imply a pre-existing human.

6. Apparently anomalous alterations:

12. [f. 83v, l. 18] And the eternal Son of God
became a human (***ṣāra insān***)
prepared a human person and (*aʿadda shakhṣ insān wa-ittaḥada*

[72] This verse is, incidentally, discussed by Philoxenus at the beginning of his commentary on the Prologue; Philoxenus, *Commentaire*, text, pp. 1–4.

[73] The Greek of this verse has κεκοινώνηκε (from κοινωνέω), 'associated' ('are sharers') and μετέσχε (from μετέχω), 'partook', thus using different verbs for the children and Christ. In the Peshitta, however, both κεκοινώνηκε and μετέσχε are translated by *eshtawtap*, 'share', 'partake'.

[74] Cf. Matt. 1.18, 20, 'she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.'

united with it from the beginning of its being *bihi mundhu ibtidāʾ kawnih*)
(B f. 173v, ll. 11–12; C f. 301r, ll. 8–9; Eth. f. 291r, 2.17–19).

A number of aspects of this particular alteration are puzzling. First and foremost is the fact that the miaphysite reviser felt that revision was necessary at all, since the phrase, 'became a human', is part of the Nicene Creed.[75] There is, then, certainly no conventional Cyrilline objection to it. Secondly, the alteration seems to exemplify Antiochene Christology. Thirdly, the alteration seems to assert the very thing which at 11 was itself deemed worthy of alteration, namely, 'the Holy Spirit prepared a human to unite with the eternal Son of God.'

The obvious conclusion to draw from this evidence is that an error has crept into the manuscript tradition—maybe a scribe confused the alteration with the original. However, there is evidence which strongly suggests that this neat solution is not the answer to the problem.

First, we might compare the different recensions at 13:

13. [f. 85v, ll. 12–13] The Son of God
united with a human (***ittaḥada . . . bi-insān***)
took a human person (*ittakhadha . . . shakḥṣ insān*)
(B f. 176r, l. 15; C f. 302v, l. 4; Eth. f. 292v, 2.4–6).

Although *ittaḥada* and *ittakhadha* would be more expected in each other's recensions, they are orthographically far too close (although only the former is employed with a preposition) for any reliable conclusion to be drawn from this anomaly. The alteration, however, from *insān* to *shakḥṣ insān* is highly significant because not only is this paralleled exactly at 12 but it also brings the text into line with a phrase, *ittaḥada shakḥṣ insān*, occurring between these two alterations, which is left untouched by the reviser. Moreover, if the recensions at 11 are examined more closely, the apparent contradiction, already noted, between 11 and 12 is not absolute, since at 11 the Eastern text has *aʿadda insānan* whilst the miaphysite revision of 12 has *aʿadda shakḥṣ insān*. So, the miaphysite recension is, for whatever reason, absolutely consistent in rejecting the concept of the Word uniting with an *insān* or the latter being prepared for the Word, whilst preferring *shakḥṣ insān* in its place—there are no counter examples in the Prologue. It must therefore be considered highly unlikely that scribal error is a factor at all in the apparently puzzling nature of these revisions.

The issue here is what exactly the miaphysite reviser understands by *shakḥṣ insān*. This could only be answered accurately if there were sufficient examples of the usage of the phrase within the miaphysite recension for

[75] See, for example, Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Les homélies catéchétiques*, f. 41r, l. 17.

a reliable conclusion to be drawn based on context, and there are very few examples. Otherwise, we would need to know the identity of the reviser in order to look for examples in his other works, but he is anonymous.

However, the answer to the problem may lie in an observation made by Holmberg concerning the avoidance by many Christian Arabic writers of *shakhṣ* as a term for the persons of the Trinity.[76] He writes, '. . . the word was felt to imply very strongly sensual perception and so was less suitable to designate the divine persons.'[77] Holmberg cites two authorities for his thesis: first, Lane's *Lexicon*: '*Shakhṣ*—the body, or bodily or corporeal form or figure or substance of a man, or some other object or thing, which one sees from a distance';[78] secondly, Israel of Kashkar: 'We say that *shakhṣ* is a noun by which recognition happens according to the properties, *khawāṣṣ*, of bodies, *ajrām*, of one species or another upon which perception falls, *laḥiqahu al-ḥass*.'[79]

In other words, the *shakhṣ* is not so much the man himself but only the thing perceived by the senses. It is precisely this sensual connotation, making it unsuitable for reference to the persons of the Trinity, that is attractive for the miaphysite revision, thus avoiding the idea of a fully individual human existing independently before the Incarnation.

7. Citations of Theodore and 'the Exegete':

14. [f. 83v, l. 19] **Mār Tāwadrūs says**
Another Exegete (mufassir) said
(B f. 173v, l. 13; C f. 301r, l. 9; Eth. 291r, 2.22).

15. [f. 86v, l. 1] **Mār Tāwadrūs interprets this section in the following manner, saying**
(omitted in B f. 177r, l. 11; C f. 303r, l. 6; Eth. 293r, 1.27).

16. [f. 87r, l. 17] **Mār Tāwadrūs says the Exegete**
The Exegete
(B f. 178r, l. 15; C f. 303v, l. 14; Eth. 293v, 2.11–12).

All mention of Tāwadrūs, meaning Theodore of Mopsuestia, is excised in the miaphysite recension. This is no surprise, since his Christology

[76] B. Holmberg, '"Person" in the Trinitarian doctrine of Christian Arabic apologetics and its background in the Syriac Church Fathers', *Studia Patristica* 25, 1993, pp. 303f. I would like to thank Bo Holmberg himself and Mark Beaumont for suggesting the solution to this puzzle at the Mingana Symposium.

[77] Holmberg, '"Person" in the Trinitarian doctrine', p. 304.

[78] E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, London, 1863–93, p. 1517.

[79] Israel of Kashkar, *A Treatise on the Unity and Trinity of God by Israel of Kashkar (d. 872)*, ed. B. Holmberg, Lund, 1989, section 148.

was perceived as being diametrically opposed to the miaphysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria.[80] What is surprising, though, is that the interpretations following citations of Tāwadrūs remain intact. So the interpretations of the Antiochene Exegete *par excellence* are acceptable, but only when anonymous. Whether these excisions were made for the sake of the laity, for whom Theodore may have been a known heretic, or to avoid censure by the church authorities, is not clear.

The names of two other Eastern exegetes, on the other hand, remain untouched in the Prologue. Ishōʿdād's name is retained in all five of its occurrences, as is Ahob's one and only. Is this because they are not recognized by the reviser as being Eastern, or is it that the reviser knows that they will not be recognized as being such by others?

The miaphysite recension is inconsistent with regard to mention of 'the Exegete', *al-mufassir*. In two instances[81] 'the Exegete' is excised in favour of 'another', but all the remaining references to 'the Exegete' are retained. What is notable here is that these two instances are the only ones where 'the Exegete' is cited other than to introduce sections of commentary. It is remarkable that the reviser appears to recognize that the formula, 'the Exegete said', which begins every commentary section, does not refer to Theodore, but that the two references within commentary sections may do.

8. Incipits:

17. [B f. 168v] *In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, from whom we seek succour.*
    The Gospel of John, son of Zebedee.
    The consummation of the Gospels.
18. [C f. 298r] *In the name of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the one God. The Gospel of John the apostle, the consummation of the accepted and pure Gospels.*
    May our Lord Jesus Christ respond to his prayer. Let Him be with us for ever. Amen.
    The first Syriac chapter.
    John, the blessed Apostle says.

The manuscript of the original recension of the *Commentary* being acephalous, comparison can only be made between the two manuscripts representing the miaphysite recension. The first (B) is dated 646/1248, the second (C) is early thirteenth/nineteenth century.

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[80] Of course, the condemnation of Theodore's works in 553 AD at the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople would have applied only to Chalcedonians.

[81] MS A, f. 80v, ll. 1 and 7; and MS B, f. 169v, ll. 6 and 12.

The *basmala* at the beginning of B, if it is original (the handwriting appears to be different), is replaced by the specifically Christian incipit in C. In both manuscripts John's is described as the consummation of the Gospels. In C, the chapter is introduced as the first Syriac chapter, presumably because, as we discover later, the chapter divisions of the *Commentary* follow the Peshitta.

9. Miscellaneous additions:

There are three phrases or passages which appear only in the miaphysite recension but which do not replace phrases in the original.

19. [f. 85r, l. 13] In order to indicate that the seeing was of the deeds not the Essence (*al-dhāt*)
And the uniting was in the qunūm and the Substance, al-jawhar
(added in B f. 175v, l. 8; C f. 302r, l. 11; Eth. f. 292r, 3.3–4).

This first addition is an affirmation of miaphysite doctrine which serves to confirm the unity of the *qnōmā* and *kyānā* following a phrase which could be taken to imply divisibility between them.

20. [f. 87v, l. 8] *And Daniel and others have seen Him. The Gospel says, 'Their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven' [Matt. 18.10]. And also it says, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' [Matt. 5:8]*
(added in B f. 178v, ll. 10–12; C f. 303v, l. 24–f. 304r, l. 2; Eth. f. 293v, 3.19–25).

21. [f. 87v, l. 12] *And the pure in heart see Him by seeing His lofty deeds. And this is the one whom the angels, prophets and righteous see*
(added in B f. 178v, ll. 16–18; C f. 304r, ll. 5–6; Eth. f. 294r, 1.9–13).

With regard to the former of these two further additions, it is striking that Chrysostom, who is the ultimate source for this section of the original recension, also quotes Daniel and Matt. 18.10.[82] It should not, however, necessarily be assumed that the coincidences of reference to Daniel and Matthew indicate Chrysostom as source for this miaphysite addition, for it is just as likely that the reviser had a sufficient knowledge of Scripture to enable him to cite relevant parallel passages. But the motivation behind both these additions is not clear, since neither of them

[82] John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, ed. P. Schaff (*A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 14), New York, 1898, taken from the trans. of G. T. Stupart in *A Library of the Fathers* 28, Oxford, 1848, p. 51. There is, incidentally, no reference in Chrysostom's homily to the pure in heart, although mention is made of the 'pure and sleepless nature' of the angels (p. 52).

serves any obvious exegetical purpose. They are also, notably, the only examples of substantial additions throughout the Prologue.

Conclusion

The scholar responsible for the miaphysite recension is a theologian of some subtlety. *Qunūm*, for example, is excised only in Christological contexts, not Trinitarian, though the distinction between the two contexts is not always obvious. Likewise, 'humanity', *nāsūt*, is expunged only when it implies divisibility. Another impressive feature is the reviser's recognition that 'the Exegete', *al-mufassir*, is a reference to Theodore of Mopsuestia only beyond its position in the formulae that begin each commentary section of the text.

The author of the miaphysite revisions is not named in the earliest known MS witness (Paris ar. 86) nor by Abū al-Barakāt in his mention of the existence of the recension. The MS is dated 646/1248, however, which is therefore the *terminus ante quem* for the recension. Although there is no evidence in the MS to indicate authorship, the consistency and intellectual level of the revisions would lead one to expect that they are unlikely to have been undertaken by an unknown theologian. Thus the Ibn al-ʿAssāl brothers[83] must be prime candidates even though there is nothing pointing in their direction other than the Egyptian provenance of the manuscript and its miaphysite Christology. Also, the fact that Abū al-Barakāt, a Cairene, was aware of the existence of the recension might suggest that it was the work of an Egyptian. Given the date of the manuscript, it is an exciting possibility that it could be their very own handiwork, or at least that of their immediate circle.

Although the East and West-Syrian traditions are often presumed to exemplify the frequently touted dichotomy between the Alexandrine and Antiochene schools of exegesis, there was in fact, as Brock has pointed out, 'considerable interaction between the East and West-Syrian exegetical traditions'.[84] Further, van Rompay has remarked that the narrowing

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[83] The three important writers from this family (presumably bee-keepers originally) are al-Ṣāfī Abū al-Faḍā'il ibn al-ʿAssāl (d. before 660/1260 and probably the eldest), al-Asʿad Abū al-Faraj Hibat Allāh ibn al-ʿAssāl (d. 648/1250) and al-Mu'taman Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn al-ʿAssāl (d. after 665/1265). See Graf, *Geschichte*, vol. II, pp. 388–403, 403–7 and 407–14, respectively.

[84] Brock, *Brief Outline*, p. 94. Two important articles dealing with this issue of the interaction between the East and West-Syrian traditions are: L. van Rompay, 'La littérature exégétique syriaque et la rapprochement des traditions syrienne-occidentale et syrienne-orientale', *Parole de l'Orient* 20, 1995, pp. 221–35; and C. Molenberg, 'The Silence of the Sources: the sixth century and East-Syrian "Antiochene" exegesis', in Pauline Allen and E. Jeffreys eds, *The Sixth Century: end or beginning?*, Brisbane, 1996, pp. 145–62.

of the gap between the Eastern and Western traditions 'becomes even more clearly visible in the literature of the Islamic period.'[85] Elsewhere he explains this phenomenon as resulting, paradoxically, precisely from the cessation of Christian rule in the region: '[With the advent of Arab rule, both] Monophysites and Nestorians were freed from the harassment of the Chalcedonian authorities, and contacts between the various groups were intensified.'[86]

For Molenberg, Mōshē Bar Kēphā can be seen as exemplifying this interaction in the West-Syrian tradition: 'Moses bar Kepha did not use only the works of John Chrysostom; he also drew on the commentaries of Theodore of Mopsuestia[87] and used Syriac dyophysite interpretations.[88] Part of these interpretations were probably taken from a source identical either to Ishōʿdād or Theodore Bar Koni or closely related to both of them. His work displays a tendency in Syriac monophysite exegesis to combine the features of early monophysite exegesis with its Alexandrian ferment with those of Antiochene origin . . .'[89]

Operating in the other direction, in the Eastern tradition of the same period Molenberg notes spiritual interpretative tendencies of an Alexandrian hue in Theodore Bar Koni and Ishoʿ Bar Nun, contrary to the Antiochene standards laid down by the sixth-century AD synods. Chrysostom, for example, begins to be cited around the end of the second/eighth century by Ishoʿ Bar Nun, and Ishōʿdād not only borrows from Ishoʿ Bar Nun, but also uses extracts of Chrysostom not found in the earlier author.[90]

We can see Ibn al-Ṭayyib as exemplifying this interaction between the East and West-Syrian exegetical traditions in two ways. First, he seems to have shared a source with Mōshē Bar Kēphā, while Theodore of Mopsuestia is less the foundation of the Prologue, quantitatively speaking, than is Chrysostom.[91] Secondly, this Eastern *Commentary* had wide currency in Coptic Egypt and Ethiopia, if only in the modified form illustrated in this article. East-Syrian may be East and West-Syrian may be West, but the twain do meet in scriptural exegesis.

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[85] L. van Rompay, 'The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation', in M. Sæbø ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: the history of its interpretation*, vol. I, part 1, Göttingen, 1996, p. 641.

[86] Van Rompay, 'Development', p. 559.

[87] See e.g. J. Reller, *Mose bar Kepha und seine Paulinenauslegung: nebst Edition und Übersetzung des Kommentars zum Römerbrief* (*Göttinger Orientforschungen, Syriaca* 35), Wiesbaden, 1994, pp. 161ff.

[88] Cf. e.g. Reller, *Mose bar Kepha*, pp. 169ff. and Reinink, *Studien*, pp. 90–113.

[89] Molenberg, 'The Silence', p. 148.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Chrysostom is, of course, an Antiochene exegete, but as has been noted, from around the second/eighth century, he came to be regarded as the seminal exegete of the West-Syrian tradition.

THE ULTIMATE PROOF-TEXT: THE INTERPRETATION OF JOHN 20.17 IN MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE (SECOND/EIGHTH-EIGHTH/FOURTEENTH CENTURIES)

Martin Accad

Introduction

Sometime around the year 164–5/781 the famous encounter took place between Patriarch Timothy I of the Church of the East and the Caliph al-Mahdī. In the course of the discussion, the Caliph was attempting to force the Patriarch into recognising that his complex dyophysite Christology inevitably implied a sort of schizophrenic duality in the person of Christ. Timothy insisted:

> Though Christ is (in some sense) two, he is not two sons. Rather, Christ is one (entity) and one Son, with two natures, *ṭabīʿatayn*, divine and human, from the fact that the Word of God took up a human body and became a human person.[1]

This neat exposition opens into several rounds of circular argumentation, where both parties reiterate the same accusations and the same replies to each other. Timothy speaks of two natures, *ṭabīʿatayn*, while insisting on 'one human being', 'one Christ', 'one Son', and in his final statement 'one Person', *waḥdāniyyat shakhṣihi*. Finally, in his attempt to make his point about Christ's mere humanity, the Caliph al-Mahdī quotes a part of Jn 20.17: 'Did not *ʿĪsā* (peace be upon him!) say: "I am going to my God and your God"?' By this, of course, the Caliph wants to show that Christ placed himself on the same level as his disciples by calling God his God. The Patriarch obligingly replies by pointing out that these words of Christ are preceded by other words: 'He said first "My Father and your Father", and then "My God and your God".' After the Caliph suggests that there might be something of a contradiction in these words, Timothy is quick to offer a two-nature explanation of the verse: God is Christ's God according to his human nature, but he is his natural Father according to his Divine nature. 'Christ is

[1] H. Putman, *L'église et l'Islam sous Timothée I (780–823)*, Beirut, 1975, p. 10, v. 24 (Arabic); A. Mingana, 'The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi' (*Woodbrooke Studies* 3), *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 12, 1928, p. 155.

therefore one, and he has two begetters: one of them is eternal, and the other is temporal.'[2] This is the end of the issue.

John 20.17: The ultimate proof-text

Let us turn our attention to this passage of Jn 20.17, which turns out to be the most extensively used Gospel verse in the whole Islamic exegetical discourse of the second/eighth to the eighth/fourteenth centuries, appearing in twelve out of some twenty-four treatises that I have examined. The next most popular passages, such as some parts of the Matthean genealogy or the temptation account, only appear in half as many treatises.

The context of Jn 20.17 is the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene in the Garden of Gethsemane, and his utterance to her of a statement which has occupied a central place in the theological discourse both of the 'orthodox' and the 'less orthodox' alike, throughout the history of Christian doctrine.

> λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς· μή μου ἅπτου, οὔπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα· πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου καὶ εἰπὲ αὐτοῖς· ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεόν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν.[3]
>
> Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." ' (NRSV)

The verse is usually treated by exegetes as two separate statements. The first, where Jesus prohibits Mary from touching him, and the second, where he sends her to his disciples to announce to them the Christologically-loaded statement: 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' The potential implications of the latter statement for both sides of the discourse are immediately obvious. It is true that, at first sight, the fact that Jesus spoke of God as his God, and of his Father as his disciples' Father, apparently on equal terms, would have been quite an exegetical challenge for the defenders of the Nicene faith. Let us therefore examine the place that this verse occupied both before and during the time of Islam. In order to discern the particular exegetical focus of various exegetes at different periods, we will compare a few of the most influential pre-Islamic exegetes with exegetes from the Islamic period. For the first group, we will look into three works: the *Commentary*

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[2] Ibid., p. 12 (Arabic); Mingana, 'The Apology of Timothy', p. 156.

[3] E. Nestlé and K. Aland, *Greek-English New Testament*, 26th edition, 7th printing, Stuttgart, 1981–92.

on the Diatessaron, which must in a large part originate from Ephrem, and has influenced both later East and West Syriac traditions; John Chrysostom's *Homilies on John's Gospel*, which considerably influenced later West Syriac exegesis; Theodore of Mopsuestia's *Commentary on John's Gospel*, which survives in Syriac thanks to its immense popularity in the Church of the East.

Pre-Islamic Greek and Syriac exegetes

First, it is quite striking that although Ephrem, Chrysostom and Theodore do pay some attention to the latter part of Jn 20.17, their main focus is on the first part of the verse. Christ's first statement offers them ample opportunity to develop their favourite Antiochene theme of 'Christ the Pedagogue', who spoke the difficult command to Mary not to touch him, only to lead her to a better understanding about himself. He thus removed his disciples from their 'human' thinking about his death and resurrection, and led them to a 'higher' understanding of his ascension. There is in their interpretation of this prohibition a development from Ephrem, through Chrysostom, to Theodore, where the basic focus on the importance of Christ's ascension in Ephrem develops into a fully-fledged dyophysite Christology in Theodore of Mopsuestia, for whom the ascension represents the final fulfillment of the incarnational act.[4]

I will not provide a full demonstration of this elaboration here, since it would remove us from the main purpose of the present paper. Suffice to note the emphasis on the first part of this verse in the early period, in contrast with the shift of emphasis in the later period. Let us immediately turn our attention to the second part of the verse, which is more interesting for our purpose.

Of our three pre-Islamic exegetes, Ephrem is most explicitly aware of the importance of the interpretation of the latter part of Jn 20.17. Among other exegetical comments, he notes that Jesus did not say that he was going to '*our* Father and *our* God'. Such words would have implied

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[4] Ephrem's exegesis of Jn 20.17 is found in L. Leloir ed. and trans., *S. Ephrem: commentaire de l'évangile concordant. Texte syriaque (Manuscrit Chester Beatty 709)* (*Chester Beatty Monographs* 8), Dublin, 1963, pp. 222–30 (paras 26–9). See also C. McCarthy trans., *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron, an English Translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709 with Introduction and Notes* (*Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement* 2), Oxford, 1993, pp. 328–32.

For John Chrysostom, see J.-P. Migne ed., *Homiliae in Joannem, PG* LIX, p. 469. For an English translation, see Sister Goggin trans., *Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist (Homilies 48–88)* (*The Fathers of the Church*), New York, 1960, pp. 450–1.

And for Theodore of Mopsuestia's exegesis, see J.-M. Vosté ed., *Theodori Mopsuesteni commentarius in evangelium Iohannis Apostoli* (*CSCO* 115, Series 4, Syr. 3), Louvain, 1940, pp. 348–50.

equality between him and his disciples. But he was careful to separate between 'my Father' and 'your Father', and 'my God' and 'your God'. It is clear here that Ephrem is addressing the polemical arguments of real objectors, for in this connection he adds: 'If he had given the response in an equal manner (i.e. '*our* Father and *our* God'), perhaps there would have been grounds for *their* objection.' There is little doubt that this is a reference to the Arians of the city of Edessa.

On the other hand, Theodore seems least worried about the difficulty of Christ's second statement. I would conjecture that this is due to his dyophysite Christology that allowed for a quick *formulaic* resolution of such ambiguous verses. He simply concludes fairly casually:

> No one, as a result, would say that (these words) belong to any other but the temple of God the Word, that man who was assumed for our salvation, who also was both killed and resurrected, and was about to ascend to heaven.

In any case, all three authors quickly mitigate the difficulty by attributing the claim of sonship ('my Father and your Father') to the incarnate Logos, and the claim of servanthood ('my God and your God') to 'the body', 'the Incarnation' (in Ephrem and Chrysostom), or 'the man who was assumed' (Theodore). Although I have mainly focused on the interpretation of Christ's second statement in this verse, it is important to point out again that the primary focus of the pre-Islamic exegetes was the first part of the verse: 'Do not hold on to me.' The second part, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God', presented no major exegetical difficulty, but was quickly resolved through a rather formulaic Christology.

Syriac and Arab Christian exegetes

We observe quite the opposite when we come to the Syriac and Arab exegetes of the Islamic period. As early as Lazarus of Beit-Qandāsā, who otherwise is mainly a conservative transmitter of Chrysostomic traditions, it is clear that the interpretation of the nature of Christ's sonship to the Father and of his brotherhood to the disciples becomes the chief issue of concern in his exegesis of Jn 20.17. From a colophon in the manuscript of a Pauline commentary by Lazarus, it can be inferred that he was active at the time of the Caliph al-Mahdī near the end of the second/eighth century.[5] This period also happens to be the one that witnessed the most prolific and the most direct exchange between

[5] W. Wright, *A Short History of Syriac Literature*, London, 1894, p. 162.

representatives of the Christian and Muslim communities. If we place his exegesis of Jn 20.17 in his commentary on the Gospel beside the relevant portion in Chrysostom's Homily, we notice a more or less exact correspondence, though with a difference at the beginning. Whereas Chrysostom introduces his exegesis with a rejection of the interpretation of some people that Jesus spoke as he did to Mary because she was seeking to receive from him the gift of the Spirit ahead of time, Lazarus prefaces the exegesis taken over from Chrysostom with another tradition, beginning with the question: 'In what sense did our Lord call his disciples "his brothers", and when?' It is immediately obvious that although Lazarus will indeed transmit most of the Chrysostomic material, his primary focus is no longer on the first of Christ's commands but has now shifted to the difficult Christological statement: 'My Father and your Father, my God and your God', in which he sees the inauguration of a new 'brotherhood' between Jesus and his disciples.

Lazarus' exegetical key is quite correct, since he draws it from the immediate context of the verse, namely Christ's resurrection. He explains that Christ became our brother through 'birth' by becoming a perfect/complete, *mshalmānā*, human being. 'For he became equal, *shāwē*, to us by nature through birth', while we have become true 'sons of the Father' through baptism, 'which is a type of the resurrection from the dead'. For by his resurrection, Lazarus explains, Christ became 'the firstfruit of the life to come', *rīshītā d-ḥayē da-ʿtīdīn*. Since this latter tradition will be encountered again only in Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī in the sixth/twelfth century, and since there is little evidence that any relationship existed between the two authors, it is likely not to be original to Lazarus of Beit Qandāsā. Its original author would have been someone who wanted deliberately to emphasise Chalcedonian language, and who was at the same time strongly influenced by Ephrem, someone such as Philoxenus (d. 523), maybe, especially since he is known to have been the author of a Johannine commentary, of which only the exegesis of the Prologue survives.[6]

Ishōʿdād of Merv's commentary on John's Gospel is where we encounter a particular exegetical tradition that will become by far the most influential in the history of Muslim-Christian dialogue from the second/eighth to the eighth/fourteenth century. Of course, he begins by dealing with Christ's first statement in the verse, explaining why Jesus prohibited Mary from touching him, very much in the line of Theodore of Mopsuestia. But when he comes to Christ's second statement, this is clearly the more important for him: 'This statement is an Atlantic ocean,' he exclaims.

[6] See A. de Halleux ed., *Philoxène de Mabbog, commentaire du prologue johannique (Ms. Br. Mus. Add. 14, 534)* (*CSCO* 380), Louvain, 1977.

But after declaring that he has already expounded it elsewhere, he uses it as a springboard to expound a very clear dyophysite statement of faith. His concluding statement will be the main focus in the remainder of this paper. He attributes it to 'Mār Nestorius':

> God is both Father and God at the same time. Now he is *Father, to me* on the one hand *by nature*, and *to you* on the other *by grace*. But he is *God, to me* on the one hand *by grace*, and *to you* on the other *by nature*. However, it is both by grace and by nature that there is one *parṣūpā*, one Lord, one Christ, and one Son.[7]

This tradition attributed to Nestorius turns out to be of enormous negative significance for the history of interpretation of Jn 20.17 in the Islamic context, both for Christians and Muslims. Moreover, it even passes over to the West Syriac authors. It is first found in Mōshē Bar Kēphā who, after adopting some of Chrysostom's exegesis of the first part of Jn 20.17, spends on Christ's second statement more time than any other Syriac exegete. Bar Kēphā even repeats the tradition twice, each time with a different wording.

In the first occurrence, he explains that though God is Christ's Father 'naturally', *kyānā'īth*, because the Logos 'was born of him mystically before the world', he is our Father only by grace, *b-ṭaybūthā*, thanks to the Incarnation that bestowed rich blessings on us by his taking on our poverty. In the same way, though Christ calls God 'his God' because of the grace of the Incarnation and because of the flesh, *besrā*, to which he joined himself, we on the other hand call the Father 'our God' because he is Lord and Creator and we are created servants, and hence he is our God 'naturally'.[8]

In the second occurrence of the tradition, Bar Kēphā asserts that 'my Father and your Father' demonstrates their inequality in sonship, since God is Christ's Father by nature and the disciples' Father by grace. On the other hand, the distinction between 'my God and your God' also shows that God is the disciples' God by nature, while he is Christ's God by grace.[9]

It is doubtful whether Ishōʿdād was Bar Kēphā's source on this exegetical tradition, for at least two reasons. First, both authors were proba-

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[7] Note here my disagreement with Gibson's awkward translation, which reads: '*Mar Nestorius* says He is *God*, and *Father* at the same time and *God*; but *Father* to Me on the one hand by nature, to you on the other hand by Grace; but *God*, to Me on the one hand by Grace, to you on the other hand by Nature; nevertheless one Person and one Lord and one Christ, and one Son in both of them', in M. D. Gibson trans., *The Commentaries of Ishoʿdad of Merv*, vol. I, Cambridge, 1911, p. 284. The Syriac text is found in vol. III, p. 220.

[8] L. Schlimme ed., *Der Johanneskommentar des Moses bar Kepha*, Wiesbaden, 1978–81, vol. III, p. 230.

[9] Ibid., p. 232.

bly too close in time for the one to have influenced the other (Ishōʿdād *ca* 230s/840s–50; Bar Kēphā mid-third/latter ninth century). And secondly, although Bar Kēphā might have been willing to adopt some East Syriac exegetical traditions in his own work, it is doubtful whether he would have had anything to do with a tradition explicitly attributed to Nestorius, the arch enemy of his West Syriac tradition. It is more likely, therefore, that the tradition had already been used by an earlier East Syriac commentary from which he drew, and which had not mentioned the name of Nestorius explicitly in connection with this exegesis.

By the sixth/twelfth century, however, the tradition is established and common enough for Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī to reproduce it in his commentary in a form almost identical with the one found in Ishōʿdād, though with no explicit mention of Nestorius' name.[10] Again, this author's material is much more focused on Christ's latter statement than on the first part of Jn 20.17.

Our last Syriac author, Bar ʿEbrāyā (seventh/thirteenth century), reproduces again the same tradition in a format too brief to discern whether it is taken over from Bar Kēphā or Bar Ṣalībī. But there is no doubt that it is this same tradition that originated with Nestorius. He affirms in his *Horreum Mysteriorum*:

> My Father by nature and your Father by grace, my God by grace and your God by nature.[11]

Finally, we must also examine our only surviving Arabic Gospel commentary, that of ʿAbdallāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib. Interestingly, the original dyophysite text reflected in MS Paris Ar. 85 is not very revealing, since Ibn al-Ṭayyib simply repeats Theodoran traditions in summary form. But when we come to the miaphysite revision reflected in Paris Ar. 86 or BM Or. 3201, we find that the reviser replaces some of the typically dyophysite language with West Syriac traditions traceable back either to Mōshē Bar Kēphā or to an earlier common source. The main ingredient of this revision is the tradition that had originated with Nestorius, repeated twice in two differently worded versions.

When we consider these exegetical remarks, there is little doubt that the sudden shift of emphasis from Christ's first to his second statement in the interpretation of Jn 20.17 in the Christian commentaries of the Islamic period is due to the new hermeneutical context in which the exegetes found themselves. Islam had posed new challenges to the church, different from the ones that the most influential Greek and Syriac

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[10] R. Lejoly ed., *Dionysii Bar Salibi Enarratio in Ioannem*, 4 vols (vols I–III Text, vol. IV notes and tables), Dison, 1975, vol. III, p. 318.

[11] W. E. W. Carr ed. and trans., *Commentary on the Gospels from the Horreum Mysteriorum*, London, 1925, p. 206 (Syr.), pp. 158–9 (Eng. trans.).

pre-Islamic exegetes had had to deal with. These new challenges had to be dealt with in a new way as well. There are also some more explicit indicators of this hermeneutical motive in Mōshē Bar Kēphā and in Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī. Bar Kēphā asserts:

> Because many people are ignorant, lacking in understanding, and uneducated, they stumble, *metbal'īn*, with this statement that he said: 'I am going to my Father and your Father, my God and your God'.[12]

He explains that these people infer from this verse equality, *shawyūthā*, between Christ and his disciples. Bar Ṣalībī repeats this accusation and rejects the interpretation of the 'heretics,' *'ereṭīqū*, according to whom Christ called his disciples 'brothers' because he was human 'by nature', *ba-kyānā*. In either author, it is difficult to imagine who, apart from Muslims, could be the target of such a refutation.

Another point that has come out from our brief survey is that the exegetical tradition that became most popular for the interpretation of Jn 20.17 in the context of Islam had originated with Nestorius. Interestingly, though Ishō'dād was the only author to mention 'Mār Nestorius' explicitly, the tradition itself became extremely popular among the Syrian Orthodox as well. So much so that it even managed to find its way into the *Penqīthā* (Breviary) of the West Syriac Church, in a *Sedrā* for the third Sunday after the Resurrection. Its wording there is almost identical with the statement attributed to Nestorius, the main alteration being the word *mdabrānā'īth*, which stands in place of *b-ṭaybūthā*, when it comes to Christ's appellation of God 'my God'. This is more specifically *West* Syriac language, with a clear precedent in John Chrysostom. The *Penqīthā* passage reads as follows:

> And he taught about his likeness, *baytāyūthā* (lit. familiarity), in power with his Father in that he said: 'I am going to my Father, by nature, *kyānā'īth*, and your Father, by grace, *b-ṭaybūthā*, and my God, with respect to the economy/Incarnation, *mdabrānā'īth*, (cf. above in Chrysostom the similar use of the expression τῆς οἰκονομὶας ἐστὶ, taken over by Mōshē Bar Kēphā [cf. below] as *da-mdabranūthā hāy da-b-paqrā 'ītheyh*), and your God by nature, *kyānā'īth*'.[13]

One might ask: Why this new emphasis? Why so much repetition of a formulaic *mantra* instead of developing the traditional pre-Islamic, and indeed more dynamic, exegesis of the verse? The answer, I believe, lies precisely in the way that Muslim writers were making use of the Johannine

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[12] Schlimme, *Moses bar Kepha*, vol. III, p. 229.

[13] Breviary (with preface by Ignatius Jirjis Shalḥat, Patriarch of Antioch), *Penqīthā da-Ṣlawwāthā 'Īdhtānāyāthā d-Laylay Īmām akh Takhsā d-'Īdhtā Antīyūkhāytā d-Sūryāyē*, Mosul, 1886–96, vol. VI, pp. 102–3.

verse during that same period. If one turns to those authors, it becomes immediately obvious that Jn 20.17 was the most extensively used proof-text in Islamic polemics against Christianity. And the interpretation they made of it triggered the sort of response that we find in the Christian exegetes.

Islamic exegesis of Jn 20.17 and immediate Christian reactions

We have introduced our study by noting the way that the Caliph al-Mahdī made use of Jn 20.17, together with Patriarch Timothy I's response. When one examines the Islamic literature of the six centuries separating al-Mahdī from Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya in the eighth/fourteenth century, we find that the last author still offers us a very similar treatment of the verse to the one we had encountered in the Patriarch's interlocutor. It is simply an attempt to re-interpret the verse in such a way that the opposite conclusions from the ones arrived at by Christians can be drawn about Christ's nature, namely: *Christ was no more than a human servant*, in no way different from the rest of his disciples in his relationship of sonship to God. The first literary occurrence of Jn 20.17, in Timothy I's dialogue with al-Mahdī, basically represents the archetype of the shape that the Muslim-Christian discourse would adopt for centuries to follow. The same verse is used to demonstrate diametrically opposed points, depending on the underlying agenda of its user. Thus, while the Caliph al-Mahdī makes use of the verse in order to demonstrate that Christ was no more than God's human servant, Patriarch Timothy, with his dyophysite Christology coming in particularly handy, manages to use the same verse as the clearest testimony of the double nature in Christ. Looking at Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's polemical treatise *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā fī ajwibat al-Yahūd wa-al-Naṣārā*, one notices that there is no progress in the argument after nearly six centuries. In this work, two occurrences of Jn 20.17 appear under a sub-heading entitled: 'The claims of the donkey-like, *ashbāh al-ḥamīr*, concerning Mary and her son!' They reflect an age in which polemical discourse had become an internal Muslim exercise rather than the reflection of a real dialogue. One feature of that era is that the Biblical citations were often used in total dissociation from their original context, resulting in an extreme form of *eisegesis* rather than exegesis. Ibn Qayyim's first citation of Jn 20.17 is one such example.[14] After violently abusing all the lofty claims made by Christians concerning Christ, the polemicist charges that though

[14] Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqā ed., *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā fī ajwibat al-Yahūd wa-al-Naṣārā*, Cairo, 1980, p. 272.

Christians claim to be merely confirming what Jesus said about himself, the fact is that they contradict him in all his statements. 'For Christ told them,' he writes: '"*God is* indeed my Lord and your Lord, my God and your God."'

Although Ibn Qayyim uses 'my Lord and your Lord' instead of 'my Father and your Father', it is quite clear that he has Jn 20.17 in mind.[15] As had become typical of that late period, the verse is bereft of context and made into an emphatic statement affirmed by Christ. The author concludes:

> So he testified concerning himself that he is a servant, *ʿabd*, of God, under lordship, *marbūb*, and created, *maṣnūʿ*, just as they are, and that he is like them in his servitude, need and want of God.

Further on in the same work, Ibn Qayyim considers the different reasons why Christians may have claimed divinity for Christ, even though he firmly believes that the latter claimed no more than servanthood, prophethood and apostleship. After refuting these hypothetical reasons one by one, he mentions the hypothetical Christian claim that they may have made Jesus into a god because he called himself 'Son of God', and consequently that a 'son of God' is necessarily himself a god. To this the writer replies again by adducing the testimony of Jn 20.17:

> In this case make yourselves all gods, for in another place he (Jesus) called him (God) 'his Father and their Father', as in what he said: 'I go to my Father and your Father.'[16]

Another early Muslim writer who uses the verse with the same exegetical purpose is ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī in his *Kitāb al-radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*.[17] He is content to take the text of John's Gospel at face value, in the same way that the Caliph al-Mahdī had done. Unlike the Caliph, however, he cites the quotation in full, and both parts of Jesus' saying are used for the same exegetical purpose. His strategy is to challenge Christians to either reject all of Christ's sayings, or to take them all at face value, but not to sift between them, accepting some literally and twisting the meaning of others. The implication is that Jesus affirmed his humanity by confessing God as his Father, and he asserted his servanthood by confessing God as his God. ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī's exegesis is quite simplistic. He

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[15] In a passage of his *Kitāb al-awsaṭ fī al-maqālāt*, al-Nāshi' al-Akbar near the end of the third/ninth century adopts the reading 'to my Father and your Father, to my Lord and your Lord'. There the intention is to reinterpret Christ's 'sonship' into a 'servanthood' to a Lord, while here it is to do away totally with the concepts of 'Fatherhood' and 'Sonship'.

[16] Al-Saqā, *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā*, p. 280.

[17] I.-A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch eds, 'Ar-Radd ʿala-n-Naṣārā de 'Alī aṭ-Ṭabarī', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 36, 1959, pp. 122, 141, and cf. p. 135.

simply accuses Christians of ascribing to Jesus claims that he did not make for himself, and goes on to enumerate the Gospel citations that demonstrate his pure humanity. This is proof-texting in its extreme form, with no attempt to understand the other side's argument or to consider it in a wider exegetical context.

In between these self-indulging extremes, however, there came a relatively more 'creative' period, where Muslim authors tried to re-invest the titles 'Son' and 'Father' with new meaning, so as to avoid the Christian implications of the terms that were totally unacceptable to Islam. Through this new approach, Muslim authors usually strove to replace the 'natural' sense of sonship with a more 'honorific' or 'symbolic' one. The literary beginning of this more properly exegetical process can be found in the *Radd ʿala al-Naṣārā* of Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ. Although this author himself does not fully subscribe to this approach, he does record a Muslim scholar who can be identified as the Muʿtazilī Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām (a slightly older contemporary of his who died sometime between 220/835 and 230/845) approving of it and employing it. Although he is not quoted as using Jn 20.17, his method of interpreting language suggests that this scholar would have referred to such verses as Jn 20.17 in order to show that God was free to attribute to himself any titles that he wanted, and people had to understand them in a way that was appropriate to the particular discourse about God of a community of believers. In the same way, God allowed Muslims to use the 'beautiful names' in addressing him, but forbade the use of any of their synonyms, even though they might carry the same meaning linguistically. Al-Naẓẓām would have accused Christians and Jews of ignoring all rules of language, translation and analogy, because of their adherence to ideology, tradition and anthropomorphism, and thus they misunderstood the use of such terms in the sacred Scriptures.[18]

After al-Jāḥiẓ, this trend was adopted especially in the works of the Muʿtazilī theologians of Baghdād, al-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar (who worked near the end of the third/ninth century) and al-Balkhī (who worked in the early fourth/tenth century). It is therefore to the Muʿtazila of Baghdad that this more creative exegetical trend should be attributed. Although they sometimes disagreed on the extent to which this process of *reinterpretation of Christ's Sonship* was legitimate, they essentially seem to have tried to accept important Christian terminology while stripping it of what they felt was unacceptable content.

In the fifth/eleventh century appeared a third exegetical trend, namely the hard-line *taḥrīf*-stance of Ibn Ḥazm. As a radical Ẓāhirī theologian,

[18] This is what can be inferred from what al-Jāḥiẓ says of him, in J. Finkel ed., *Thalāth rasāʾil li-Abī ʿUthmān . . . al-Ǧāḥiẓ*, Cario, 1962, pp. 25–32.

he launched an offensive not just against Christians and Jews, but also against every sect of Islam that did not adhere to his doctrine of extreme Qur'anic literalism. With regard to Jn 20.17, which he cites several times in his *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī al-milal wa-al-ahwā' wa-al-niḥal*, he declares:

> God is far exalted above being a Father to anyone or having any son, be it Christ or anyone else. Rather he (may he be exalted) is just as much Christ's God as he is the God of everyone else apart from Christ.[19]

This is the first time that any Muslim polemicist has arrived at such a radical conclusion with regard to the Gospel verse, rejecting it entirely as a possible claim of Christ. In fact, in this same section, just before citing Jn 20.17 and other Gospel verses that represent God as Father, Ibn Ḥazm laments over the stupidity of anyone who could adhere to a religion handed down by Matthew the vile, *al-sharṭī*, John who leads people to ignorance, *al-mustakhiff*,[20] Mark the apostate, *al-murtadd*, Luke the atheist, *zindīq*, Peter the accursed, *al-laʿīn*, and Paul the delirious, *al-muwaswas*.[21] These are just a few samples of innumerable abusive statements that Ibn Ḥazm uses against the Gospels, the entire Bible and the early disciples and apostles, as well as the whole Christian tradition from beginning to end.

Ibn Ḥazm cites Jn 20.17 again in the context of his comparison of the different resurrection accounts recorded in the various Gospels. After quoting all four accounts (his quotation from John includes almost the whole of Jn 20.1–28),[22] one of his principle criticisms is the confusion found between the Gospels with regard to the identity of the women who went to the tomb on Easter Sunday morning. Was it the two Marys (as in Matthew), or the two Marys together with other women (as in Mark), or just Mary Magdalene (as in John's account)? These discrepancies, for Ibn Ḥazm, are 'a clear proof that their Gospels are forged books, *kutub muftarāt*, works of apostate liars'.[23]

Fortunately, the extreme position of Ibn Ḥazm was softened by later Muslim theologians. Al-Qarāfī (seventh/thirteenth century)[24] adopts a similar, though milder, attitude, while this accusation of textual *taḥrīf*, *taḥrīf lafẓī*, is largely brushed aside during the interim period by (Pseudo-)

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[19] Unknown ed., *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī al-milal wa-al-ahwā' wa-al-niḥal*, 3 parts, Egypt, 1900, part II, p. 24.

[20] The two adjectives that Ibn Ḥazm uses for Matthew and John are difficult to understand. The way I have translated them here follows the more obscure meanings of the terms as found in E. W. Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon*, though the only ones that make some sense in this context.

[21] *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī al-milal*, part II, p. 24.

[22] Ibid., pp. 52–3.

[23] Ibid., p. 54.

[24] Bakr Zakī 'Awaḍ ed., *Al-ajwiba al-fākhira 'an al-as'ila al-fājira*, 2nd edn, Cairo, 1987.

Ghazālī (fifth/eleventh-sixth/twelfth century)[25] and al-Shahrastānī (sixth/twelfth century).[26] Though Ibn Ḥazm was well aware of the more conciliatory mood of the larger polemical tradition of Islam against Christianity, even making use of it at times, his preferred polemical strategy was to do away with that tradition entirely and to depart from it radically, so much so that he ended up pushing the dialogue between the two religions to an antagonistic point of no return.

(Pseudo-) Ghazālī's *Al-radd al-jamīl li-ilāhiyyat ʿĪsā bi-ṣarīḥ al-Injīl*, and al-Shahrastānī's *Kitāb al-milal wa-al-niḥal* adopt a very different line of argument from the trend introduced by Ibn Ḥazm. They draw upon the older polemical traditions of Islam, which consider Biblical citations as authoritative, and at the same time they approach dialogue with a more positive and conciliatory tone. This does not mean that they do justice to the Christian theological argument in trying to understand it, for they still use the Gospel text for their own purposes. Overall, it is in tone rather than in content that they achieve some progress in the history of Muslim-Christian dialogue. In fact, this conciliatory tone was not really an innovation of the sixth/twelfth century, for we already find it in the work of the historian al-Yaʿqūbī in the third/ninth century, who regards the Bible as an *authoritative document* and draws upon it quite extensively and objectively in the writing of his *Taʾrīkh*.[27]

Nevertheless, Ibn Ḥazm's assault on the Bible was never really forgotten. In the seventh/thirteenth century, the inconsistency of al-Qarāfī's combination of the hard-line *taḥrīf* approach of Ibn Ḥazm together with the 'classical' Muslim 'reinterpretive' approach of the pre-fifth/eleventh-century authors is a case in point. This was the characteristic of a discourse that had definitely become a monologue rather than a dialogue. Al-Qarāfī was no longer challenging Christians and allowing them to reply and defend themselves, but was merely engaging in an intellectual exercise within and for his own Muslim community.

At the end of the period that we are studying, in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā*, which we have already mentioned, Ibn Ḥazm's approach seems only to have left its mark in the hostile and insulting tone adopted by the author against Christians and Jews in

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[25] Robert Chidiac, SJ, ed. and trans., *Al-radd al-jamīl li-ilāhiyyat ʿĪsā bi-ṣarīḥ al-Injīl (Réfutation excellente de la divinité de Jésus-Christ d'après le texte même de l'évangile)*, Paris, 1939. I use the appellation (Pseudo-) Ghazālī with caution as to the authorship of the *Radd*. Lazarus-Yafeh has argued against an authentic Ghazālī authorship (Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī*, Jerusalem, 1975). I am not convinced by her arguments, though my examination of them at length in my doctoral thesis would take too much space here. I have simply put the 'Pseudo' in parentheses to indicate my reservation.

[26] The text of al-Shahrastānī's *Kitāb al-milal* can be found in the margins of the edition of Ibn Ḥazm's treatise.

[27] See, for example, pp. 75–87 of al-Yaʿqūbī's work, in M. T. Houtsma, ed. *Taʾrīkh*, vol. I, Leiden, 1883.

general. The end-result is a blend of aggression and self-indulgent rhetoric, out of touch with any notion of exchange and *rapprochement* so fundamental to any form of dialogue.

As for the immediate Christian apologetic input with regard to the exegesis of Jn 20.17, we have to recognise how inadequate it was in the few works that we can survey. Between Patriarch Timothy I in the second/eighth century, and Būlus al-Rāhib, bishop of Sidon, in the sixth/twelfth century,[28] there is no noticeable progress in the exegesis of the verse. Whereas some Muslim authors use the verse to disprove Christ's divinity, both these Christian authors use it as an indication of the two natures in Christ, one divine and the other human. And whereas some Muslim authors through this verse try to reinterpret the terms 'Father' and 'Son' as 'symbolic' and 'honorific' rather than 'natural', the Christian authors continue to repeat their traditional exegesis of the passage, speaking of the 'natural' sonship of Christ versus the disciples' sonship 'by grace'.

Moreover, even during the intervening philosophical period, represented with regard to Jn 20.17 by Ibn Zurʿa (fourth/tenth-fifth/eleventh centuries), we encounter the repetition of essentially the same classical exegetical argument.[29] There is a slight development in the overall Muslim-Christian discourse on the verse, in the sense that Ibn Zurʿa is practically responding to an earlier issue raised by al-Jāḥiẓ, in which the latter objected to Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām's concession to Christians. As we have seen above, al-Naẓẓām would have allowed Christ to be ascribed the sort of 'honorific' sonship that comes from adoption. But al-Jāḥiẓ rejected this interpretation, only conceding a much more analogical type of sonship, which he failed to define more clearly. Ibn Zurʿa moves the discussion forward by agreeing with al-Jāḥiẓ in his rejection both of the 'physical' and the 'honorific' dimensions of Christ's sonship. And to al-Jāḥiẓ's quest for a suitable analogy, he indirectly provides that of the *ʿilla* and *maʿlūl* 'cause' and 'caused'. As a man of his background and time, he attempts to remove the Christian doctrinal mystery from the materialistic realm in which it had been plunged since Christianity had come into collision with Islam, and tries to place it in a more philosophical, abstract realm, where only 'theoretical' analogies could provide somewhat suitable tools to understand the relationships within the Godhead.

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[28] For Patriarch Timothy's work, see above n. 1. The reference to Jn 20.17 of Būlus al-Rāhib can be found in his treatise entitled '*Risāla fī al-firaq al-mutaʿārifa min al-Naṣārā*', in Louis Cheikho, with L. Malouf and C. Bacha, eds, *Vingt traités théologiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens (IX–XIII siècles)*, Beirut, 1920, p. 33.

[29] Ibn Zurʿa's reference to Jn 20.17 can be found in his refutation of al-Balkhī's '*Kitāb awā'il al-adilla*', in Paul Sbath, ed., *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens du IX*ème *au XIV*ème *siècle*, Cairo, 1929, pp. 64–5.

With the analogy of *ʿilla* and *maʿlūl*, Ibn Zurʿa tries to explain what Christians had meant for centuries when speaking of Christ's 'natural' sonship to the Father. Even though the concept is not new in Christian theology as a whole, it seems to be new in the discourse with Islam. This is a development that needs to be appreciated, at a time when each party was busy repeating its own arguments rather than listening to the other. Unfortunately, it seems that Ibn Zurʿa's philosophical discourse had little lasting impact, since both sides after him continued in the traditional line of argumentation. But even he found himself repeating the classical exegetical argument, and his revision was not radical enough to set the discourse on new lines.

Conclusions

Perhaps the most ironic element in the history of this Muslim-Christian discussion point is that it was those Muslim authors who used the Biblical text most extensively who were the most aggressive against their Christian opponents. The question poses itself: was it this extensive exegesis of the Biblical text that produced an aggressive attitude among Muslim authors against Christianity? I would argue that a careful study of the development of the *taḥrīf* argument, demonstrates that it emerged as a *result* of the unfruitful attempts to prove Christianity wrong through other means, rather than as the foundational *starting point* of Islamic polemics.[30] Only in the fifth/eleventh century, beginning with Ibn Ḥazm, does the accusation of *taḥrīf* become the starting point of the argumentation. Therefore, it is from the perspective of *taḥrīf* that the Bible is approached in such authors as Ibn Ḥazm, al-Qarāfī, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. And it is for the purpose of proving the whole Christian tradition wrong that the opponents' Scriptures are used. As for a more objective, sincere approach to the other's Scriptures as a real attempt to understand their theological thinking on their own grounds, it is absent from both sides of the whole history of the Muslim-Christian discourse, which is why it is hardly possible to call it a 'dialogue'.

While we have seen that some moderate Muʿtazilī theologians tried to compromise on some Christian terms, such as 'Son' for Christ and 'Father' for God, they were at the same time striving to strip them of what they felt were unacceptable 'physical' connotations. Christians agreed on this, but there was no attempt on either side to search for new

[30] I have devoted a long section to the accusation of *taḥrīf* and its development through the history of Muslim polemics in a chapter of my doctoral thesis, which deals with the 'themes' of Muslim polemical discourse.

terminology that preserved the depth of the Christian theological concepts of Sonship and Fatherhood, while sounding acceptable to an Islamic mentality and world-view. What Christians did was mainly to repeat their pre-Islamic interpretation of Jn 20.17 in typically Christian theological language. They were more intent on preserving tradition than on being relevant to their new socio-theological context.

Lessons for the present: Moving on with dialogue

The self-indulgent nature of the Muslim-Christian discourse on Jn 20.17 is perhaps the most striking feature of the above survey. The basic starting-point for dialogue in the present would be for each party to try to understand what the other is saying, not for the sake of proving them wrong, but first to see whether any concessions can be made for the sake of mutual understanding, while at the same time preserving the essence and integrity of what each is trying to say.

Muslims are, of course, invited to examine more deeply Christianity's reasons for its distinctive Christology in the context of the confession of a true monotheism. Christians, similarly, are invited to take into consideration the Muslim concern for the implication of their Christology on God's oneness and uniqueness. They are invited to revise the theological terms that are shocking and perhaps not essential to their discourse, in favour of terminology that would be acceptable to Islam, while at the same time preserving Christian, mainly soteriological, concerns.

A MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC POLEMIC AGAINST CERTAIN PRACTICES AND DOCTRINES OF THE EAST SYRIAN CHURCH: INTRODUCTION, EXCERPTS AND COMMENTARY

Gabriel Said Reynolds

This brief chapter presents an example of how the medieval East Syrian Church was viewed from an outside and hostile perspective.[1] It also provides a rare glimpse of how a medieval Muslim theologian understood and criticized both Christianity *and* the Christians who formed an important part of his own milieu. It is all too easy to locate medieval Islamic polemics that attack Christian dogma, particularly the Trinity and the Incarnation; the Qur'an itself is the first of this widespread genre.[2] Yet to find works which take up an attack on Christian practice and more subtle aspects of Christian doctrine is difficult indeed. In fact, few earlier works with the same spirit can be found, other than *The Refutation of the Christians* (*Fī al-radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*) of ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869).[3] Al-Jāḥiẓ's well-known work, however, is much less rich in detail than ours.

Thus it is hoped that the following analysis will provide a double benefit, by giving us both a look at Eastern Christianity from a different angle and an important example of medieval Islamic polemic against it. The presentation of the following passages is accompanied by a brief and admittedly imperfect commentary, that may well raise more questions than answers. However, by simply presenting these questions this paper might be of use to scholars who are more qualified to provide those answers.

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[1] I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Fr Samir Khalil Samir and Fr Sidney Griffith for their generous assistance with this material.

[2] On the Incarnation see Q 4.171; 5.17, 72; 6.101; 9.30, 31; 19.35; 72.3; on the Trinity see 4.171; 5.73, 116.

[3] Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, '*Fī al-Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*', in J. Finkel ed., *Thalāth rasā'il li-Abī ʿUthmān . . . al-Jāḥiẓ*, Cairo, 1926. Al-Jāḥiẓ's treatise is partially translated by Finkel in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 47, 1927, pp. 311–34, and fully by I. Allouche, 'Un traité de polémique christiano-musulman au IX^{e} siècle,' *Hesperis* 26, 1939, pp. 123–55.

The source

The excerpts below are taken from Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār's Arabic *The Confirmation of the Proofs of Prophecy* (*Tathbīt dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*), written in 385/995. ʿAbd al-Jabbār was the most important scholar of his age in the Muʿtazilī school of Islamic theology (Arabic *kalām*). In fact the Muʿtazila were, in one sense, the founders of Islamic theology. In the early Islamic era 'almost anyone who engaged in theological discourse was regarded as a Muʿtazilite of one sort or another'.[4] Yet the origins of *kalām* (and consequently of Muʿtazilism) are remarkably unclear. It seems likely that the earliest such works related more closely to political concerns than to pure theology.[5] Eventually, however, the Muʿtazila developed into a theological school most famous for their position in favour of the createdness of the Qurʾān (since they held to a rigorous, transcendent monotheism) and against divine predetermination of acts (since they held that God was just, in a way understandable to humanity, and that humans were responsible for their ultimate destiny). Their doctrine became state theology for a brief period under the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Maʾmūn (*r.* 198/813–218/833) yet had been rejected and suppressed by the time of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (*r.* 232/847–247/861). Having lost its political standing, Muʿtazilism began to lose popular support as well (to Ashʿarism and Māturīdism) and within several centuries would disappear altogether as a coherent school. It is in no small part thanks to ʿAbd al-Jabbār (and the team that discovered manuscripts of his works in Yemen in the 1950s) that we have a record of Muʿtazilī thought. Not only was he the most important figure of Muʿtazilism in his day, but his work provides us with extensive summaries and critical appraisals of the thought of earlier generations of the Muʿtazila.

The Muʿtazilī biographer Abū Saʿīd al-Bayhaqī al-Jishumī leaves no doubt as to ʿAbd al-Jabbār's importance, when he introduces the latter's generation by saying: 'The first and foremost of them in virtue is Qāḍī al-Quḍāt Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-

[4] D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam*, Cambridge, 1992, p. 4.

[5] As pointed out by W. M. Watt, the title Murjiʾa refers in early sources not to those who refuse to condemn a Muslim sinner to hellfire, as they were later thought of, but rather to those who make the fourth caliph (or, according to the Shīʿa, first Imām) ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) inferior to the third caliph ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (d. 35/656); W. M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, Edinburgh, 1973, p. 73. Watt notes on p. 123 that the Shīʿī heresiographer Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (d. *ca* 305/917) uses the term Murjiʾa simply to refer to all Sunnīs; see also al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*, Beirut, 1404/1984, p. 6. Al-Nawbakhtī also describes the Muʿtazila not as a theological school, but rather as the group that withdrew, *iʿtazalat*, together with Saʿd Ibn Mālik (or Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ d. *ca* 50/671) from ʿAlī's camp at the battle of Ṣiffīn (37/657); al-Nawbakhtī, *Firaq al-Shīʿa*, p. 5.

Hamadhānī . . . with him was the leadership of the Muʿtazila, so that he became its unopposed *shaykh* and scholar.'[6] Al-Jishumī goes on to report the comments of ʿAbd al-Jabbār's teacher, Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Baṣrī (d. 369/980), 'He stayed with the Shaykh Abū ʿAbd Allāh for a time until he excelled over the others and emerged as unrivalled in his time. The scholar said, "I cannot find an expression that sums up the extent of [ʿAbd al-Jabbār's] standing in knowledge and erudition. For he is the one who has stripped down the science of *kalām*."'[7]

This remarkable scholar came from simple origins, the son of a peasant in a small village of western Iran,[8] Asadābād near Hamadhān. Upon reaching maturity, ʿAbd al-Jabbār performed the *ḥājj* in Mecca, and then went on to carry out his studies under the masters of the Muʿtazila in a number of cities in Iraq and Iran, including Hamadhān, Qazvīn, Rāmhurmuz, Baṣra, Baghdād, Iṣfahān and Rayy. During this time, he completed a large number of compositions, the best known of which is his voluminous *Summa on the Questions of Divine Unity and Justice* (*Al-mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-al-ʿadl*), a work which was described by his political sponsor Ibn ʿAbbād as 'a treasure to the monotheist and a woe to the atheist.'[9] The *Mughnī*, an encyclopedic work composed over a twenty-year period in a number of cities, meticulously dissects an endless list of Islamic theological conundrums, recording the views of numerous scholars on each of them. Yet the work at hand, the *Confirmation*, is quite unlike ʿAbd al-Jabbār's more protracted theological handbooks. Indeed, among all his extant works, only here does ʿAbd al-Jabbār show an active interest in the traditions and practices of the different religious and intellectual schools that surrounded him.[10]

In the *Confirmation* ʿAbd al-Jabbār takes on a wide range of groups who disagree with his Sunnī, Muʿtazilī brand of Islam, from different types of Shīʿīs, to Islamic philosophers, Jews, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, astrologers and most frequently Christians. ʿAbd al-Jabbār's polemic against Christianity here is noteworthy for his unusual use of colourful anecdotes, which seem to reflect first or second hand exposure to the active Christian communities. Indeed, the anti-Christian material in the *Confirmation* could hardly be more different from his more systematic, theological polemic against Christian doctrine in earlier works.[11] Its goal, of

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[6] Al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ʿuyūn al-masāʾil*, Tunis, 1393/1974, p. 365.

[7] Ibid., p. 365. Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazila*, Beirut, 1961, p. 112.

[8] See Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's, *Al-imtāʿ wa-al-muʾānasa*, Cairo, 1939, vol. I, p. 141.

[9] Al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ʿuyūn al-masāʾil*, p. 370.

[10] 'It contrasts with the same author's systematic books on theology: it is no abstract exposition of doctrine, but is full of lively and idiosyncratic polemics against various contemporary trends of thought'; S. Stern, 'Quotations from Apocryphal Gospels in ʿAbd al-Jabbār', *Journal of Theological Studies* new series 18, 1967, p. 34.

[11] See for example ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Al-mughnī*, vol. V, Cairo, [1965], pp. 80–151; *Sharḥ*

course, is the same: to prove that Christianity is a corruption of the Islamic teaching of Jesus.

Muslim doctrine maintains that Jesus was a Muslim prophet like those before him, beginning with Adam, and like Muḥammad after him. While he had certain special charisms (such as his miraculous virgin birth, his miracles including raising the dead, his title as 'word' and 'spirit' of God and his deathless assumption into heaven),[12] Jesus never claimed to be either divine or a saviour, but did announce a prophet to come after him.[13] Yet the Christians willfully corrupted Jesus' Islamic teaching (and the divine revelation that contained it), an act usually referred to in Muslim literature as *taḥrīf* (lit. a twisting of letters).

Thus, as in his earlier works, ʿAbd al-Jabbār sets out in the *Confirmation* to prove that Christianity is a corrupted, *muḥarraf*, form of Islam. However, here he does not content himself with the soporific logical syllogisms and theological questioning (*masā'il wa-ajwiba*) that fill his other works, but spends most of his time telling stories about Jesus and the Church. Thus he gives an extended account of how the Apostle Paul was in fact a trickster, and how the Emperor Constantine did not become a true Christian but rather turned Christianity into a Roman religion.[14] And in a similar effort to discredit Christianity, he relates the stories below about Eastern Christians, specifically those of the East Syrian Church, that interest us here.

Why the East Syrian Church?

By combining what we know of ʿAbd al-Jabbār's life and the evidence that he himself provides in the *Confirmation* we can specify with confidence the Christian community with which he was familiar. To begin with,

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al-uṣūl al-khamsa, Cairo, 1965, pp. 291–8; *Al-majmūʿ fī al-muḥīṭ bi-al-taklīf*, Beirut, 1965–99, vol. I. pp. 222ff. This last work is more properly assigned to Abū Muḥammad Ibn Mattawayh (d. 469/1076), a disciple of ʿAbd al-Jabbār who used much of his teacher's material, but the first of the three volumes in the edition is mistakenly ascribed to the teacher himself.

[12] On the virgin birth see Q 21.91, on raising the dead, 3.143, 5.110, on 'word and spirit' of God, 3.45, 4.171, on the assumption of Jesus, 4.157–8. It should be remembered that the interpretation of these passages, particularly 4.171 and 4.157–8 (and 159), is an issue of great uncertainty in Islamic exegetical literature.

[13] See Q 61.6.

[14] 'If you scrutinize the matter, you will find that the Christians became Greeks, *tarawwamū*, and fell back to the religions of the Greeks. You will not find that the Greeks became Christians, *tanaṣṣarū*'; ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, Beirut, 1966, p. 158. Translations here and elsewhere are mine. Some details of these accounts led the distinguished Israeli scholar Shlomo Pines to conclude that there must be lost Judaeo-Christian polemical material lying behind the *Confirmation*; see S. Pines, *The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source*, Jerusalem, 1966.

ʿAbd al-Jabbār himself offers us evidence regarding the circumstances in which he composed the *Confirmation*, when he tells his readers on page 168, 'today you are approximately in the year 385'.[15] The Islamic year 385 corresponds to the Christian year 995, which can be safely taken as an approximate composition date. Hence, with the help of Islamic biographical literature, we can locate ʿAbd al-Jabbār's whereabouts at the time. Al-Bayhaqī reports that he was summoned to the city of Rayy in 360/970, and that he remained there persevering in teaching until he passed away (may God most high have mercy on him) in the year 415 or 416 (1024–5).'[16] This likelihood increases when we analyze the internal evidence of the work, for at a number of points he gives us clues that reflect a 'Rāzī' mindset: he speaks of Jesus praying towards Jerusalem, to the *west* (p. 149), and of the Egyptians as *westerners* (p. 167); he glosses the Arabic *funduq* with the Persian *khān*, presumably for an Iranian audience (p. 159); and, most clearly, he says that a Turk would be listless from the heat should he come to Rayy, and that an Isfahānī would fare better in Rayy (p. 178).

ʿAbd al-Jabbār's presence in Rayy at the time when he composed the *Confirmation* (385/995) is further confirmed by two letters that have come down to us, indicating that he held an important post in that city. The letters, datable to the year 367/977, are addressed to ʿAbd al-Jabbār by Sāḥib Ibn ʿAbbād (d. 385/995), the vizier of the Būyid dynasty which ruled in Rayy. In the first letter, Ibn ʿAbbād appoints ʿAbd al-Jabbār as the chief judge over the city, and in the second he promotes him, expanding his jurisdiction and praising him: 'Piety is his mount and his path. Truth is his goal and his sign.'[17] ʿAbd al-Jabbār's position as a judge, it might be added, undoubtedly led to extensive contact with Christians. Although Christians had their own courts for most social law, any cases that involved a Christian and a Muslim were judged in Islamic courts, as were most cases of criminal law involving exclusively Christians. Most likely, this was his first close interaction with Christians, as his previous life of study and teaching in the Muslim circles of Baṣra, Baghdād and Rāmhurmuz would have kept him insulated from the Christian communities of these cities.

What, then, was the make-up of Rayy's population at the time, specifically of its Christian community? Today the ancient site of Rayy has been absorbed into the expanding metropolis of Tehran, lying in ruins about 45 kilometres to the south of the city centre.[18] Yet in ʿAbd al-Jabbār's day it was the most important city of north central Iran.

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[15] Cf. the reference in ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, p. 42.
[16] Al-Jishumī, *Sharḥ ʿuyūn al-masāʾil*, p. 366.
[17] Al-Sāḥib Ibn ʿAbbād, *Rasāʾil*, Cairo, 1366/1947, p. 34.
[18] *Synodicon Orientale*, ed. J. M. Chabot (*Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la bibliothèque*

From the reign of al-Mahdī (*r.* 158/775–169/785), Rayy stood as the capital of the ʿAbbāsid province of Jibāl, and it had long been one of the most important centres of political and economic life in the eastern Islamic world. The geographer Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm al-Iṣṭakhrī (d. early fourth/tenth century) remarks that 'in the Jibāl there is nothing greater than Iṣfahān, other than Rayy.'[19] The seventh/thirteenth-century geographer Yāqūt (d. 626/1229) would later quote Iṣṭakhrī as saying: 'After Baghdād no city in the East is more populated, *aʿmar*, than Rayy, even if Naysābūr covers a wider area.'[20] Yet Rayy was an important Christian centre centuries before the arrival of Islam. In 410, the city was designated as the seat of an East Syrian bishopric[21] while in 800 or thereabouts the Patriarch Timothy I elevated Rayy to the seat of a Metropolitan, a position that it would hold until the seventh/thirteenth century.[22] Thus there can be no question that the city in which ʿAbd al-Jabbār wrote his *Confirmation* was an important centre for the East Syrian Church. At the same time, there were no bishops of the West Syrian (Jacobite) Church, or any other church, in Rayy.

We have clear evidence that ʿAbd al-Jabbār was primarily addressing Nestorian Christianity in the text of the *Confirmation* itself. First, there are a number of occasions where ʿAbd al-Jabbār singles out the Nestorians specifically. On p. 96, after briefly describing (in the third person) Jacobite and Melkite doctrine on Christology, he asks: 'So what do you Nestorians say?' On p. 146 he refers to a letter written by the Nestorian ʿAbd Yasūʿ b. Bahrīz,[23] a Nestorian theologian. Also important is ʿAbd al-Jabbār's frequent reference to the title of Metropolitan (*jāthālīq*, from Greek *katholikos*) which,[24] among Syriac speaking churches,[25] existed only in the East

nationale 37), Paris, 1902, p. 228. Fiey locates them at the distance of one parasang; J. M. Fiey, *Oriens Christianus Novus*, Beirut, 1993, p. 124.

[19] Al-Iṣṭakhrī, *Kitāb al-masālik wa-al-mamālik*, Leiden, 1927, p. 199; cf. Yāqūt Ibn ʿAbdallāh, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, Beirut, n.d., vol. III, p. 133.

[20] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. III, p. 133. The phrase is quoted and attributed instead to another tenth century geographer, Abū al-Qāsim Ibn Ḥawqal (d. *ca* 362/973): 'Ut fide Ebn-Hawkel refert Abulfeda, tum et incolis advenisque ita frequentata, ut nulla in Oriente praeter Bagdadum habita fuerit populosior'; M. Le Quien, *Oriens Christianus*, Graz, Austria, 1958, vol. II, cols 1291–2. 'Abulfeda' is Abū al-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl b. ʿAlī ʿImād al-Dīn (d. 732/1331), the Ayyūbid prince and geographer. Fiey also attributes the quote to Ibn Ḥawqal; J. M. Fiey 'Médie chrétienne', *Parole de l'Orient* 1/2, 1970, p. 378.

[21] J. M. Fiey, 'Les communautés syriaques en Iran des premiers siècles à 1552', in *Commémoration Cyrus, Actes du congrès de Shirāz*, Tehran, 1974, p. 281; also J. M. Fiey, 'Médie chrétienne', p. 378, both reprinted in J. M. Fiey, *Communautés syriaques en Iran et Irak des origines à 1552*, London, 1979.

[22] Fiey, 'Médie chrétienne', p. 380.

[23] Read for '*bahrīn*' in the edition. On Ibn Bahrīz see G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, Rome, 1947, vol. II, p. 119.

[24] E.g. ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, pp. 120, 174, 175, 202, 203, etc.

[25] While the Armenians also had a Metropolitan, there are no signs that ʿAbd al-Jabbār was familiar with this church.

Syrian Church. Moreover, it is only in Nestorian Arabic (influenced by Eastern Syriac *gāthālīq*) that this word takes the form *jāthālīq*.[26]

Furthermore, the text is filled with clues that ʿAbd al-Jabbār was dealing with a Syriac- and not an Arabic-speaking Christian community. A few of these clues: On p. 100 of the *Confirmation* he refers to Jesus as *Ɣāshūʿ*,[27] and then explains: '*Ɣāshūʿ* is Syriac for Jesus, *ʿĪsā*'; On p. 146 he supports an argument by referring to the books of the church, *bīʿa*, written in Syriac, present in the districts of Ahwāz and elsewhere in the districts of Iraq'; On p. 207 he quotes a Syriac expression, which we will discuss further below, when describing Christian monks; At least once he refers to Paul as *fawlūs*, which probably corresponds to the Syriac *pawlūs*, in lieu of the Arabic *būlus*,[28] just as he refers to Pontius Pilate as *fīlātus* (cf. Syr. *pīlātus*) instead of the typical Arabic *bīlātus*;[29] On a number of occasions he uses phrases that are peculiar to the eastern Syriac (Chaldean) used by the East Syrian Church, among them the word he gives as *fāthūra*,[30] which comes from the Syriac liturgical term *pethūrā*, used in the East Syrian Church for the eucharistic feast;[31] and on p. 99 he refers to a Christian theologian as *Ɣāwānis*, an Eastern Syriac form of the name John.[32]

Many more examples could be cited, but the issue should by now be clear, and will become increasingly so through our examples below. It should only be added that frequency of references to Syriac by an Arabic speaking, ethnically Persian author is important evidence of the continued primacy of Syriac in the Eastern Church.

Excerpt 1: On the Christian fast

One of ʿAbd al-Jabbār's favourite themes in the *Confirmation* is the question of Christian origins. He repeatedly seeks to show that these are not to be found in the teaching and practice of Jesus, but rather in that of Roman paganism. While speaking about the pagan origin of the Christian fast, he relates the following account:

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[26] In Melkite and Jacobite literature the title is usually referred to as *kāthūlīk*. See G. Graf, *Verzichnis arabischer kirchlicher Termini*, Louvain, 1954, p. 95 and cf. p. 33.

[27] Read for '*yāsūʿ*' of the edition.

[28] Cf. p. 98, where the name unusually appears as Fawlūṣ.

[29] Cf. pp. 94, 99. It is also possible that ʿAbd al-Jabbār, a native Persian speaker, was influenced in both these cases by Persian, a language which also has *pawlūs* and *pīlātus*.

[30] Read for '*fātūra*' of the edition, p. 93.

[31] See Graf, *Verzichnis*, p. 82.

[32] Cognate with the Syriac *yū'annīs or yūhanīs*; see L. Costaz, *Dictionnaire syriaque-français*, Beirut, 1963, p. 409.

> Now the Byzantines, *al-rūm*, are the basis of these three Christian sects. Then the Jacobites, the companions of Jacob, branched off. Then after the Jacobites the Nestorians, the companions of Nestorius [branched off]. They differ regarding the fast. Those who are in Iraq do not fast for half of every day like the Byzantines. They—I mean those who are in Islamic countries—break the fast[33] after the [Muslim] afternoon prayer. (p. 164)

The tripartite division between the Byzantines (usually described as the Melkites), the Jacobites and the Nestorians is typical of Islamic writings on Christianity,[34] and so should cause us no surprise. It is both a relatively accurate portrayal of Christianity in the Near East at the time and a way of emphasizing the Christians' own confusion over Jesus' message. To this effect, some other authors introduce a fourth group, one which preserved the true Islamic message of Jesus.[35]

It is also well known that the fast in the Eastern church was (and is) counted from midnight to midday, so this also is of no surprise. What is curious here is the final comment, that Christians in Muslim countries (presumably the East Syrian Church), broke their fast at the time of the Muslim afternoon prayer. Is this simply ʿAbd al-Jabbār's perception, or did Eastern Christian communities actually time the end of their fast by waiting for the afternoon call to prayer to sound from the mosques?

Excerpt 2: On the prohibition of fowl

Like the first, the second excerpt describes a curious practice of the East Syrian Church. Here ʿAbd al-Jabbār's comment comes in the middle of his response to the Christian argument that all their doctrinal innovations are inspired by miracles. As ʿAbd al-Jabbār portrays them, these Christians put an unusual emphasis on the importance of miracles, even more than on the precedent of Christ or the authority of the Church. This is hardly orthodox Christian teaching, and I imagine that it stems from religious discussion and debate, as opposed to theological texts (which were most likely in Syriac and inaccessible to most Muslims). Whatever the case may be, ʿAbd al-Jabbār seeks to show that Christian doctrine does not have its origin in miracles (he has already shown that its origin is not Jesus) and cites a number of examples as evidence. Then he continues:

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[33] Read *yafturūna* for the *yanzurūna* in the edition.

[34] See G. S. Reynolds, 'The Ends of *al-Radd al-Jamīl* and its Portrayal of Christian Sects', *Islamochristiana* 25, 1999, pp. 45–65.

[35] See, e.g., Ibn ʿAsākir al-Dimashqī, *Sīrat al-sayyid al-Masīḥ*, Beirut, 1996, pp. 215–16.

> This is like what the Bishop of Samarqand did, when he forbade his people [to eat] fowl, *firākh*, for he claimed that the Holy Spirit descends in this dove. So they received this from him and made it religion (p. 175).

We know that Samarqand was in fact the seat of a bishop, from the list of East Syrian Church dioceses made by Elijah of Damascus in the year 900.[36] The identity of the bishop who imposed this decree, and the extent of its popularity, however, remain unknown to me.

Excerpt 3: On the afterlife

In this section, ʿAbd al-Jabbār argues against the Christian claim that their religion must be the correct one since 'Christianity is a difficult and exacting religion. Yet great nations and kings have responded to it, with no compulsion, sword, coercion or constraint.'[37] His first tactic in contradicting this claim is to point to the Manicheans (p. 184) and the Indians (p. 185), who have religions that are still more exacting than Christianity. Thus, by the Christians' logic these religions should be still more correct than their own. Thereafter, he gets to the heart of the matter by questioning whether Christianity is so exacting after all. He states:

> For we do not know of a broader, cheaper or easier religion than the Christian religion. For in it there is no feared obstacle, like the [Islamic] written punishments,[38] nor is there [hell]fire or punishment in the next world. The most severe punishment in the next world is when the stubborn person knows the truth and knows that he left it. A period of distress will follow, then he will be removed and it will be finished.
>
> As for the ones who are not stubborn, even if they have done wrong, and even if their belief was contrary to the Christian religion, they will have no fear or punishment, if their intention was decent and they believed that something was true, even if it was invalid. As for the Christians, they have no fear and they will not be taken [away] for any sin. For they say that the Lord, who is the Father, sent His son to be crucified and killed and to carry our wrongs and forgive our sins (pp. 188–9).

The first remarkable element of this passage is simply ʿAbd al-Jabbār's cognizance of Christian soteriological doctrine. The Christian concept of salvation is so foreign to Islam that it finds no place in the anti-Christian passages of the Qur'an and is almost entirely passed over by other Muslim polemicists.[39] One of the few medieval Muslim polemicists other than

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[36] See Fiey, 'Les communautés syriaques en Iran', pp. 290–1.
[37] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, p. 173.
[38] *Al-ḥudūd al-maktūba*, the punishments set down in Islamic law for various offences.
[39] On this question, see the article of H. Lazarus Yafeh: 'Is There a Concept of

ʿAbd al-Jabbār who explicitly took up this point is an author who wrote in Egypt almost three centuries later, Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Qarāfī (d. 684/1285).[40]

While it is thus a surprise to see such a clear mention of Christian soteriology here, it is even more strange to see ʿAbd al-Jabbār's description of the Christian afterlife. The rejection of hell is, of course, not Christian doctrine and might be understood simply as a tactic in ʿAbd al-Jabbār's argument about the laxity of Christianity. It would be far-fetched and speculative to imagine some form of influence from Origen's well-known 'redemption' theology, whereby even Satan will be ultimately redeemed, since (to my knowledge) Origen's name does not appear anywhere in Islamic tradition.

Even more inexplicable is ʿAbd al-Jabbār's reference to the sinners' punishment in the Christian afterlife as simply the pain that comes from recognizing that they have not followed the truth while on earth. This 'period of distress' is only temporary and will be followed by entrance into heaven. Is it a reference to purgatory?

As traditionally understood, the Eastern Church had no conception of purgatory. The closest concept to it is the doctrine, much like that of Islam, that between the point of death and the general resurrection *all* souls remain in a state of waiting, which, however, will seem to the soul as only an instant. Having been resurrected for the final Judgment, all souls will then be sent on either to eternal bliss or damnation.[41] This state, occasionally referred to in Islamic texts with the Persian word *barzakh* (literally a barrier or hindrance), is more akin to Catholic notions of limbo than purgatory. The same concept, described also as *barzakh*, appears in the writings of some Nestorians, including Bābay the Great (515 AD). One scholar has even suggested that Islam drew this point of doctrine from Nestorian Christianity.[42] The reference in ʿAbd al-Jabbār, however, seems to show that the *barzakh* of the East Syrian Christians whom he encountered was not a realm where souls simply hung around,

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Redemption in Islam?' in R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and C. Jouco Bleeker eds, *Types of Redemption*, Leiden, 1970, pp. 168–80. For a description of the earliest Islamic sources on the subject, see the still authoritative work by E. Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, Breslau, 1930, pp. 128–30.

[40] See his *Al-ajwiba al-fākhira ʿan al-asʾila al-fājira*, Cairo, 1986, pp. 289, 297, 300, 346, 351. See also G. S. Reynolds, 'Saint Thomas' Islamic Challenges: Reflections on the Antiochene Questions', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 12, 2001, pp. 161–89.

[41] See P. Miquel, 'Purgatoire', *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, Paris 1937–94, vol. XII, p. 2655. Note also how Thomas Aquinas took up this point against the Orthodox in a little known treatise addressed to a Dominican cantor in crusader Antioch, '*De Rationibus Fidei ad Cantorem Antiochenum*'; see M. Grabmann, 'Die Schrift: *De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos Graecos et Armenos ad Cantorem Antiochenum* des heiligen Thomas von Aquin', *Scholastik Vierteljahrschrift für Theologie und Philosophie* 17, 1942, pp. 187–216.

[42] See Tor Andrae, *Muhammad, the Man and his Faith*, New York, 1935, p. 89.

unconscious, waiting for the final Judgment. Rather, it is a realm of 'a period of distress' preceding the soul's entrance into heaven. The doctrine that 'Abd al-Jabbār describes is evidently more akin to purgatory than to limbo.

Excerpt 4: On the Sacrament of Reconciliation

'Abd al-Jabbār reports the following excerpt as further evidence in his attempt to show that the Christian religion is not exacting, but in fact the least demanding of religions. Here, however, instead of Christian theology he brings up Christian ritual:

> A remarkable thing in their religion is that the sinner says to the priest and the monk, 'Make for me forgiveness and repentance and bear my sins.' Then [the priest] sets a payment for this one according to the extent of his wealth or poverty. Then the priest opens up his garment, takes the payment and then says to the sinner, 'Come now and mention to me your sins, one by one, until I know them and bear them.'
>
> So, whether this is a man or woman, well-off or a vagabond, he begins to mention what he has done one by one until he says, 'This is all of it.' Then the priest says to him, '[The sins] are great, yet I have borne them and forgiven you.' He might also gather up the garment by its sides, place it on his back, and say, 'What could be heavier than the sins in this garment?'
>
> Among what is handed down about them and well known about them is that a woman confesses her sins to a priest, saying, 'A man penetrated me on such and such a day.' So he inquires how many times and she says how many. Then he says to her, 'Inform me if this man is Christian or Muslim.' She might say, 'Muslim', which he considers greater and will consider the payment [for forgiveness] additional. If she does not add to it he becomes angry and bursts out, saying, 'The Muslims have fornicated with her and she wants me to forgive her! Just give such and such [money].' So she gives it to him, and adds to it to make him content. This is their religion that they consider strict.
>
> They claim that it is the religion of Christ; it cannot be that this is his (God's blessing be upon him) religion.
>
> It was said to one of their priests, 'What kind of repentance is this?' He said, 'There is no way [that we could] not ask them about their sins and nourish them with forgiveness, for if we did not do that and did not take money from them, the churches would be impoverished.'
>
> You will find that few of them fear the torture of the next world, for they believe that Christ killed himself to preserve them from sins and torture. He is sitting at the right of his father. His mother is sitting there, next at the left. When she is informed of sins, she rises and says to her son, 'O son, ask your father, the Lord, to forgive them.' According to them, [Christ] forgives them and asks his father to forgive them (pp. 190–1).

In an argument that would make Luther proud, ʿAbd al-Jabbār here implies that sustained with the sacrament of Reconciliation Christians are free to sin as they wish, so long as they later pay a priest to forgive these sins. What is unique in this case, perhaps, is the emphasis on the priest *bearing* the sins of the penitent in the cloak upon his back, as Jesus bore the sins of the world with the Cross on his back. Does this very Christian idea, and the vivid image of the priest gathering his garment upon his back, indicate that there is some sort of authenticity in this account?

ʿAbd al-Jabbār has also woven in several other polemical threads here, prominent among which is the intimate relationship between Mary and God, as is rather mockingly depicted in her role with regard to intercessary prayer. This relates to an earlier apologetic concern of ʿAbd al-Jabbār in the *Confirmation*, where he takes on a Christian argument against the authenticity of the Qur'an. It comes in the context of Q 5.116, in which God states: 'O Jesus son of Mary, did you say to the people, "Take me and my mother as two gods apart from God"?' Interpreting this logically enough as a polemic against their beliefs, Christians point out to ʿAbd al-Jabbār the Qur'an's apparent confusion here, stating: 'This is a lie. For we have said about [Christ] that he is a god but we have not said about his mother that she is a god.'[43] ʿAbd al-Jabbār makes great efforts to construct a number of retorts to this affront. He points out that the Qur'an nowhere *explicitly* says that Christians believe that Mary is a god, though he cites a Syriac letter in which a Nestorian does accuse a Jacobite of holding this doctrine. And he also describes the Christian 'pantheon', as it were, where '[Mary] is on the throne, sitting to the left of the Lord, the begetter of her son, and her son is on his right.'[44] The scene from the excerpt above, then, serves as a flashback to this earlier portrayal of Christian polytheism and in particular to the divinisation of Mary.

Equally important in this excerpt is ʿAbd al-Jabbār's emphasis on the greed of priests. Throughout the *Confirmation*, ʿAbd al-Jabbār reminds the reader that it is partially due to the Christians' lust for power and money that they changed the Islamic message and practice of Christ. We will see this theme continued in our final excerpt.

Excerpt 5: The greedy, lazy monk and his bishop

> Yet the clever Christians say, 'These signs and miracles are only tricks of the Metropolitan and monks, those who detest work and escape from labour.' They call them, in the Syriac language, '*āziq maʿnāthā*'. Its mean-

[43] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, p. 145.
[44] Ibid., p. 146.

> ing is one who becomes a monk and persists in religion in order to consume another's possessions and to have repose from labour.
>
> Now the monks, whenever they are quarrelling about what they should receive, say to one another, 'The Christians prefer you to us, for they give you more than they give us. What you have is preferable to what we have. All of us have fled from work and are only praying for the Christians.'
>
> . . . A monk may come to the Metropolitan with this type [of discourse] in order to get support from him. The Metropolitan will say to him, 'You are determined to flee from work, you are an *ʿāziq maʿnāthā*'. [The monk] might cry and say to him, 'Father, it is not permitted for you to say this to me.' The Metropolitan will say to him, 'My brother, you should not do this to me, for I know the craft. Let us give our deception to others. We know each other and the craft is one. I am an *ʿāziq maʿnāthā* like you, so do not cry' (207–8).

The curious phrase *ʿāziq maʿnāthā* is unfamiliar to me. Yet I would propose that it is ʿAbd al-Jabbār's (or his predecessor's) poor transliteration of the Syriac *ʿāriq*, a masculine singular active participle meaning 'the one fleeing', and '*maʿnītha*' a noun meaning 'familiar intercourse' or 'chant, antiphon'.[45] The first meaning would convey, more or less, the idea that Christian monks flee from work, and speak of their dark secret only to each other, saying: 'Let us give our deception to others.' If the secondary meaning is preferred, then an equally plausible reading can be made: the phrase then refers to monks who flee from work to chant their antiphons all day. The move from the *ʿāriq* of Syriac to the *ʿāziq* of Arabic might easily have taken place by a confusion between the '*ra*' of Syriac, which has a dot over it, and the '*za*' of Arabic, which also has a dot over it.

Whether or not my suggestion here is correct, the point of ʿAbd al-Jabbār's anecdote is clear, that the Christian clergy have fooled the Christians into following their wayward guidance, since in the end it is a good business. Indeed, this fits in with the Qur'anic indictment of both Jews and Christians who foolishly follow their religious leaders: 'They take their rabbis and monks as lords apart from God and Jesus the son of Mary' (Q 9.31).[46]

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[45] See Graf, *Verzeichnis*, p. 107, and R. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, ed. J. Payne Smith, Winona Lake IN, 1998, p. 289.

[46] This account could not help but remind me of a news programme that appeared near the time of writing on the Arabic/Islamic television station based in Qatar, *Al-Jazeera*, which would later become famous in the wake of 11 September, 2001 for its release of the Bin Laden tapes. Their 'documentary' reported that the Missionaries of Charity (the order founded by Mother Teresa) carried on their supposed charity as a front operation, and in fact, *mirabile dictu*, were receiving dirty money from the Zionists and plotting to undermine Islam. As I was volunteering at the time with the Missionaries of Charity in Beirut, such accusations were a good reminder that no one is safe from wayward imaginations.

Conclusion

I am afraid that I have been able to provide only a superficial interpretation of this material, which seems to be an important new witness, though modest in size, for our understanding of the medieval East Syrian Church. In several places it suggests that there were practices (and in one case, doctrine) which are otherwise unknown to scholarship. Whether these have historical value, or should be cast out as fanciful creations of a polemicist, is a question for a scholar better qualified on the history of the Eastern Church.

I do feel more confident that at least I have been able to show the important place that ʿAbd al-Jabbār holds in Islamic scholarship, and that he did indeed have the East Syrian Church in mind when writing the *Confirmation*. Hopefully, then, the brief excerpts will be interesting and serviceable to those scholars who might interpret them more fully. As an Islamicist, however, I am able at least to comment upon the mindset of ʿAbd al-Jabbār, which might help explain why he chose to report the excerpts above.

The Islamic conception of the divine economy is centred on the ministry of the prophets. Islam did not begin with Muḥammad, but rather with the first prophet, who was Adam the first man. Islam, according to Muslims, is the natural religion of all humans. Thus Muḥammad is remembered as saying, 'Everyone's mother gives birth to them according to the natural religion. Thereafter their parents make them Jews, Christians or Zoroastrians.'[47] The religion of God, the natural religion, has always been the same. It has also been communicated to all peoples, since 'every community has a prophet'.[48] These prophets are entirely

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[47] See, for example, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Beirut, 1421/2000, vol. XVI, p. 172, no. 2659. The Arabic (and Qurʾanic) word used to describe 'natural religion' is *fiṭra*, literally meaning 'a way of being created'. Children are created *ʿalā fiṭrat Allāh*, 'according to the way of God'; see D. B. MacDonald, 'Fiṭra', *EI*[2], vol. II, pp. 931–2.

[48] Q 10.47. Notice the Islamic genre of literature known as *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 'Stories of the Prophets', which is a sort of collective exegesis on this Qurʾanic phrase. See, for example, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, Damascus, 1420/1999. Here is a case where J. Wansbrough's words ring true, that the Islamic historical tradition focuses much more on nostalgia than *wie es eigentlich gewesen war*. Cf. the comments of Wansbrough's disciple A. Rippin, who warns the reader that the historical texts from the earliest Islamic period 'were involved in a creative story-telling in which the raconteur's ability to elaborate, entertain and enhance were highly praised merits', *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London, 2001, p. 43.

This literature, however, still does not eliminate the tension between the theological doctrine that God gave every people a prophet, their opportunity to accept Islam, and the fact that there are no records of Muslim prophets outside Islamic tradition. I posed this problem to a Shaykh with whom I studied the Qurʾan in the Middle East. He responded: 'Maybe there were prophets whom we have not heard about yet. We are still doing research into this question.'

a separate class, above the rest of humanity, the vehicles of divine revelation. Each of them individually brought more or less the same message of simple transcendent monotheism and divine law, although the particulars of these were different according to the exigencies of time and place. Every prophet proclaimed the same profession of faith: 'I give witness that there is no god but God and that (his own name, Adam or Jesus etc.) is the messenger of God.' Yet with Muḥammad, whose life represents to Muslims the axis of human history, everything changed. His profession of faith and his version of the divine law became obligatory for all peoples and for all times. Henceforth the law would not be re-shaped according to the exigencies of time and place, but rather exigencies of the divine law would shape time and place.

Thus we can better understand 'Abd al-Jabbār's fascination with the Christian corruption, *taḥrīf*, of the 'natural religion.'[49] From a Muslim perspective, Christians have gone away both from the simple transcendent monotheism and the divine law that Jesus, like all other prophets, preached. Although Muslim writers are not sure how this happened, they agree that Christians deliberately corrupted the purity of Jesus' message, whether through the influence of Satan, Jews, pagans or their own selfishness.[50] We might conclude, then, that just as many Christians have seen Islam as a Christian heresy, a *taḥrīf* of church teaching, so Muslims see Christianity as a heresy of Jesus' Islamic teaching. As one Lebanese acquaintance explained to me: 'If only you would become a Muslim I could teach you *right worship*.' Or as 'Abd al-Jabbār himself sees it: '[The Christians] took up changes, transformations and innovations in religion . . . They consulted each other as to how they could outsmart the nations so as to respond to them and make them obey. They come to the opinion to enter among the nations, and to make concessions to them, while descending to the level of their whims.'[51]

A number of the themes that we see above follow naturally from this view of religious history. 'Abd al-Jabbār must argue that the 'innovations' in the natural religion do not have their source in the practice or

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[49] The precise term *taḥrīf* does not appear in the Qur'an, but the related verb *yuḥarrifūna*, 'they corrupt', is used specifically in reference to Jews and Christians; see Q 4.46, 5.13, and 2.75. Muslim writers sometimes distinguish between the corruption of Jesus' scripture, the *Injīl*, which is usually referred to as *taḥrīf al-ḥarf*, 'corruption of the letter' (or *taḥrīf al-lafẓ*, *taḥrīf al-naṣṣ*), and the corruption of Jesus' Islamic message, referred to as *taḥrīf al-ma'nā*, 'corruption of the meaning' (or *taḥrīf al-ta'wīl*); see I. di Matteo, 'Il taḥrīf od alterazione della Bibbia secondo i muslmani', *Bessarione* 26, 1922, pp. 64–111, 223–60, and J.-M. Gaudeul and R. Caspar, 'Textes de la Tradition musulmane concernant le *taḥrīf*', *Islamochristiana* 6, 1980, pp. 61–104.

[50] 'Abd al-Jabbār's *Tathbīt* is one of the few texts that actually attempts to reconstruct the process of *taḥrīf*. See pp. 152–8, where pagans, Jews and Christians greedy for power all have a role to play.

[51] 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt*, p. 150.

preaching of Jesus, or in divine revelation or miracles, but rather in human ambitions. The logical target for such an accusation is the Christian clergy, and particularly the monks, an institution that is ultimately rejected by Islam.[52] But could this material be a genuine reflection of the influential position that the clergy held in the East Syrian Church? Unfortunately, there is no question of ʿAbd al-Jabbār taking an objective approach to the Christianity around him. Like the great majority of Muslim authors on other religions at the time, his approach is uniformly hostile. As the Muslim author of a substantial Arabic study of Islamic polemics describes them, 'Every time the same result is achieved: [Christian doctrines] are defective and contradictory, leading to disbelief and heresy.'[53] As always, any conclusions taken from the reports of a polemicist must be handled very carefully indeed.

[52] Two famous Hadith to this effect are recorded by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). The first declares that there is no monasticism in Islam, while the later reports 'The monasticism of this community is religious war, *jihād*.' For an insightful discussion and historical criticism of this Islamic doctrine see L. Massignon, *Essai sur les origines du lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, Paris, 1954, pp. 145ff.

[53] ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Sharfī, *Al-fikr al-islāmī fī al-radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*, Tunis, 1986, pp. 8–9.

EARLY MUSLIM RESPONSES TO CHRISTIANITY

David Thomas

Muslims of the early ʿAbbasid era found little to agree with or approve of in attempts by Christians to explain their doctrines or defend them. The records that survive from the Muslim side of the encounter in the first four centuries of Islam show that far from being persuaded or even daunted by the arguments put forward by their Christian counterparts, Muslims were confident both of having truth and logic on their side, and of being able to prove the superiority of their own beliefs with a finality that put Christians very much on the defensive.

Our information about encounters in the years before the time of the great ʿAbbasid caliphs at the end of the second/eighth century is extremely sparse. And we are not much better informed for the majority of the third/ninth century. But if we take the relatively few texts that have survived from this important period of Christian-Muslim activity and examine them together with the more plentiful and comprehensive works that were written in the fourth/tenth century and afterwards, we are able to form a picture of how Muslims understood and evaluated Christian beliefs. And it is not edifying, because on almost every front we see Muslims mocking Christian doctrines and dismissing them as unconsidered, unfounded and inconsistent. In terms of Muslim theology, Christian doctrines were without value, the inevitable consequence of minds that had gone astray, *al-ḍāllīn*, as the Qurʾan abruptly puts it.

In this chapter we will examine four themes of Muslim responses to Christian doctrines. These are: the method by which Christians establish their doctrine of God; the manner in which the Persons of the Trinity accomplished the Incarnation of the Son; proofs that Jesus was divine; and new questions asked by Muslims of Christians that compelled them to find new answers. There are, of course, a number of other themes as well, among them arguments for the unity of the three Persons of the Godhead, the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ, and the integrity of Christian scriptures. In fact, it would be possible to assemble a comprehensive refutation of all aspects of Christian doctrine from the range of works that survive from the first two or three ʿAbbasid centuries. But this would be a rather artificial exercise, since nothing of this kind survives, and there is no sign that any such comprehensive refutation of all the main aspects of Christian beliefs and doctrines was ever written. That no Muslim thought this necessary or desirable

suggests certain attitudes towards Christianity and its theology, and the paper will conclude with comments on what these may have been.

The Christian Doctrine of God

There is no reason to think that any Muslims in the early centuries, apart from converts, were able to read about Christian beliefs in the languages in which these had habitually been formulated. Until Christians began to write theology in Arabic, probably in the late second/eighth century, Muslims depended for knowledge about what their neighbours believed upon the two sources of the Qur'an and oral reports. The former exerted an immense and continuing influence on their overall attitudes. But the latter, together with such Arabic Christian theological texts that did circulate,[1] provided the information that many Muslim theologians employed to examine and then refute the detailed beliefs that Christians themselves expressed.

Certainly the most important of these beliefs was the Christian doctrine of God, which Muslims found baffling and incoherent. As they read about this in the Qur'an, they could easily appreciate that it involved three divine beings[2] and implicated the transcendent Deity in a relationship with the human Jesus.[3] But many Muslims evidently made direct inquiries about it from Christians themselves, and probably in the course of the third/ninth century came to accept a particular form of explanation. This is conveniently summarised by the Baghdad Muʿtazilī al-Nāshi' al-Akbar (d. 293/906) in a surviving fragment of his *Kitāb al-awsaṭ fī al-maqālāt* as follows:

> Contemporaries among them have argued in this way: The world gives evidence of having a Maker, *ṣāniʿan*, and gives evidence that the One who made it is knowing and living. So we confirm that he has life and knowledge on the analogy that we have never seen a wise agent, *faʿālan ḥakīman*, who is not living and knowing.[4]

Who these third/ninth century Christian contemporaries, *qawm min muḥdathīhim*, were is not disclosed. But they clearly made some impact. For al-Nāshi' himself thought it important to identify them, even in this general way, and to distinguish their doctrinal explanation from the more

[1] The only Arab Christian theologian whose name was widely known by Muslims is Theodore Abū Qurra; see S. Griffith, 'Reflections on the Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah', *Parole de l'Orient* 18, 1993, p. 155, and also n. 48 below.
[2] E.g., Q 4.171, 5.73–7, 5.116.
[3] E.g., Q 4.171, 5.72, 5.116, 19.35, 112.3.
[4] J. van Ess, *Frühe muʿtazilitische Häresiographie*, Beirut, 1971, p. 87.1–3.

traditional formulation of the Trinity that he gives at the beginning of his examination of Christianity in the *Kītāb al-awsaṭ*.[5] And further, their explanation, or one very similar, was also known to al-Nāshi''s contemporary the Baṣra Muʿtazilī Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915), who presents it without attribution at the beginning of his own refutation of Christian beliefs as the main Christian explanation of the doctrine:

> The teaching of all the Christians, except for a small group of them, is that God the exalted is the Creator, *khāliq*, of things, and the Creator is living and speaking. His Life is the Spirit, which they call the Holy Spirit, and his Word is Knowledge. Some of them say that Life is Power.[6]

The logical connections are not included here, though the same necessity of the Creator being a living and speaking or knowing being, and thus being endowed with life and knowledge, is assumed.

These well-known though unidentified Christians had made an important innovation in their effort to present a convincing case for the Trinity. This was to employ the teaching espoused by many contemporary Muslim theologians that the qualities which God demonstrated in his being and actions derived from attributes that were integral to his essence though discrete in their ontological status. As the early third/ninth century *mutakallim* ʿAbdallāh Ibn Kullāb coined it, 'They are neither God nor other than him'.[7] Thus, these Christians known to al-Nāshi' say that God's qualities of knowing and living derive from attributes of knowledge and life that he possesses, and so imply that the Persons of the Godhead are both identical with the being of God and also individual in their expressive functions.

Exactly the same borrowing can be seen in the work of the Nestorian theologian ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī, who was probably active at the beginning of the third/ninth century and participated in exchanges over the nature of the divine attributes with leading Muslim theologians of the time.[8] So it is possible either that these 'contemporary' Christians are following his lead, or indeed that his own arguments have been noticed by Muslims and are summarised here without direct acknowledgement. But al-Nāshi' is far from being convinced by them, and he responds with six brief

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[5] *Ibid.*, p. 76.12–16.

[6] This is preserved in ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Al-mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-al-ʿadl*, vol. V, ed. M. M. al-Khuḍayrī, Cairo, [1965], p. 80.4–7.

[7] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Kītāb maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa-ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul, 1930, p. 169, esp. ll. 12f. On the origins and development of this formula, see J. van Ess, 'Ibn Kullāb und die Miḥna', *Oriens* 18–19, 1967, pp. 92–142.

[8] See S. Griffith, 'The Concept of *al-Uqnūm* in 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's Apology for the Doctrine of the Trinity', in K. Samir ed., *Actes du premier congrès international d'études chrétiennes, Goslar, September 1980* (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 218), Rome, 1982, pp. 169–91; also D. Thomas, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era', in L. Ridgeon ed., *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity*, Richmond, Surrey, 2001, pp. 89–91.

rejoinders that expose the difficulties raised by this borrowing and also the great rational divide that existed between himself and his Christians opponents.

The first four of these responses are closely related, and brief though they are, they show the failure of understanding in the Christian borrowing. The first is that in the observable world agents, in addition to being living and knowing, must also be powerful, so by analogy God must have power as a fourth hypostasis; second, while agents in the observable world may have attributes of life and knowledge, such agents are never one substance and three hypostases; third, in the observable world there is no being with life and knowledge who can be regarded as formally distinct from these attributes by virtue of his own self as opposed to an external cause (*bi-nafsihi wa-lā bi-ghayrih*); and fourth, in the observable world there is no being who possesses knowledge as his son or life as his spirit, nor any being who is the instigator (*ʿilla*) of his attributes rather than being instigated by them.[9]

In different ways, all four arguments expose the central failing in the Christian case of its over-readiness to allow analogies between the Creator in his transcendent otherness and creatures in the mundane world. Al-Nāshi' shows clearly that while drawing comparisons between God and temporal beings who can be directly observed may provide a model for suggesting how God might be Trinitarian, it does not provide a sound basis for proving that he must be a Trinity. Where the Christians have borrowed Islamic ideas in an imaginative picturing of God, the Muslim literalistically compels them to face the logical implications of what they have done.

The same approach characterises al-Nashi''s fifth and sixth arguments. These are: if the Creator is three hypostases and one substance, then according to the philosophical principles that Christians themselves accept, the substance must be a genus or species of which the hypostases are individuals; and if both the Creator and the human are substance, they must be individual specimens of the same species, unless the term 'substance' is being employed differently in each case.[10] These arguments, which also appear in other Muslim polemicists of this period,[11] bring to bear Aristotelian philosophical principles against the Christian doctrines,

[9] Van Ess, *Häresiographie*, p. 87.4–11.

[10] Ibid., p. 87.11–19. I suggest on l. 14 the reading *ʿalā madhāhib falāsifatihim*.

[11] The third/ninth century philosopher Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī reduces the Trinity to individuals within various philosophical categories; see A. Périer, 'Un traité de Yaḥyā ben 'Adī', *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 22, 1920–1, pp. 3–21, which contains the main arguments from al-Kindī's work in extensive quotations; while the fourth/tenth century Ashʿari theologian Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī exposes the confusion in the different applications of the term 'substance' in his *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, ed. R. J. McCarthy, Beirut, 1957, pp. 75–9.

and lead to the embarrassing conclusion that the supreme Godhead must be categorisable like any physical object.

Without going into the precise points at issue in these six arguments, we can make the single observation that not only has this Christian innovation not succeeded in making the Trinity more comprehensible to Muslims, but it has allowed them to define its inconsistencies and shortcomings in precise theological terms. For al-Nāshi' and Abū 'Alī, in his own separate attack,[12] have simply treated the borrowed explanation as a statement of Islamic theology, and subjected it to their customary analysis. In this respect, it is interesting to note that Mu'tazilī theologians commonly condemned Christians and 'Kullābiyya', as they called the supporters of Ibn Kullāb's teaching about the reality of the divine attributes (among whom the celebrated Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935–6) was most prominent at about this time), for the same mistakes of turning the Godhead into a plurality and drawing parallels between the being of God and mundane creatures.[13] And it is also pertinent that all Muslim polemicists, no matter what their own persuasion, whether they were Mu'tazilīs who denied the reality of attributes, or Kullābī/Ash'arīs who listed a set number, usually seven, made use of the argument which al-Nāshi' cites first, that by analogy with effective agents in the observable world God must have more attributes than the few the Christians stipulate. Since the Arabic-speaking Christians had involved themselves in the details of the specifically Islamic *kalām*, they could be refuted according to the logic of this system.

We see, then, in this first example of Muslim responses to Christian teachings a complete failure in communication. Maybe the Christians were not aware of the wider implications of the concepts that bore an immediate and maybe irresistible resemblance to their own Trinitarian ideas, or maybe they somewhat casually ignored these in over-confident carelessness, or maybe they cynically imagined that this strategy of borrowing from the *kalām* would silence their detractors. But the result was ridicule and impatient dismissal of their naïve attempts by Muslim opponents who looked for greater cogency then they found here.

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[12] See on this D. Thomas, 'A Mu'tazilī Response to Christianity: Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī's Attack on the Trinity and Incarnation', forthcoming.

[13] 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. V, e.g. pp. 87.12, 88.3, 5 and 19. In his *Kītāb al-luma'*, which is the best surviving digest of his teachings, al-Ash'arī employs the same logic as these Christians when he argues that God must possess qualities that derive from essential attributes because, for example, 'just as works of wisdom do not proceed from one of us unless he be knowing, so also they do not proceed from one of us unless he have knowledge', ed. and trans. R. J. McCarthy, *The Theology of al-Ash'arī*, Beirut, 1953, para. 18, pp. 12 (Arabic), 15 (English).

The Trinity and the Incarnation

This brief Christian explanation of the Trinity and al-Nāshi' al-Akbar's six brief responses provide just one example among many in the early ʿAbbasid centuries of Christian attempts to defend their conception of God in his essential being and Muslim refutations of the arguments presented.[14] There was the same consistent refusal on the Muslim side to accept any other aspect of the Christian doctrines relating to God's relationship with the created order. And among the many arguments they employed to demonstrate the vacuousness of what the Christians claimed there is one that typifies perfectly the great distance in understanding that divided the two sides.

This argument concerns the involvement of the Persons of the Trinity in the Incarnation of the Son. It is first known at the beginning of the third/ninth century, in the writings of the Jacobite Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'iṭa, the Nestorian ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī[15] and the free-thinking Muslim Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad ibn Hārūn al-Warrāq.[16] And it may well have originated earlier, since there are signs of it in the late second/eighth century debates between the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I and Muslim opponents.[17] Since it is obviously Muslim in origin, we will discuss it as it appears in Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq's *Radd ʿalā al-thalāth firaq min al-Naṣārā*, the most elaborate refutation of Christianity that survives from the early Islamic period.

This mid-third/ninth century refutation is concerned with the two doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, in response to which Abū ʿĪsā analyses in great detail the formulations of the three major denominations of the Nestorians, Melkites and Jacobites.[18] In a transitional passage between the two main parts of the work he turns to the question

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[14] See D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam, Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq's 'Against the Trinity'*, Cambridge, 1992, for an edition of the most thorough Muslim refutation of the Trinity from this time, and also pp. 31–50 for a survey of the known Muslim works on this doctrine.

[15] G. Graf, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb Ibn Ḥidma Abū Rā'iṭa* (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 130 text, 131 translation), Louvain, 1951, text pp. 27–9, paras 2–5; M. Hayek ed., *ʿAmmār al-Baṣri, apologie et controverses*, Beirut, 1977, p. 205.

[16] See D. Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity, Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq's 'Against the Incarnation'*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 96–107.

[17] See H. P. Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu; Lettre de Timothée I (728–823) à Serge*, Rome, 1983, paras 275–9, recounting a debate between the Patriarch and a Muslim philosopher; A. Mingana, 'The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi' (*Woodbrooke Studies* 2), *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 12, 1928, pp. 162f. In the fourth/tenth century it also appears among arguments of Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbā'ī; see ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. V, p. 141.1–4.

[18] See Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic*, for the attack on the Trinity, and *Early Muslim Polemic*, for the attack on the Incarnation.

of exactly how the Persons of the Trinitarian Godhead participated in the act of Incarnation.

He begins with a simple question: Was the act of uniting between the divine and human in Christ an act performed by the Word alone, or by all three hypostases? And he proceeds to draw out the implications: If it was an act of all three hypostases, why did not all three become incarnate, and why should the Word rather than any other hypostasis be the subject? But if it was an act of the Word alone, then each hypostasis must be able to act alone and so be an independent Creator and full divinity, and similarly the Father and Spirit might also have performed acts of uniting for themselves And even if it was an act performed by all the hypostases for the Word, the Word was still singled out in a unique way.[19]

The central point here is that although according to the Christian teachings about the Trinity the three hypostases are identical by virtue of participating in the one substance, the fact that only one of them, the Word, became incarnate suggests that there is some distinction that contradicts these teachings. As Abū ʿĪsā envisages the problem, either all three hypostases must be able to perform acts of uniting with a human subject, or there must be inherent differences between them. Whichever alternative is preferred, the Christian formulation is destroyed.

He continues by arguing against the particular Melkite claim, as he understands it, that it was the divine substance which performed the act of uniting. This means that if the substance alone performed this action then so with all actions, prohibiting the three hypostases from acting, and more seriously from being divine:

> The one who is powerful, knowing, divinity, eternal and living is the substance alone, and whoever worships one of these three or the three together is worshipping one who the divinity is not . . . So if they are like this they are temporal and subordinate, they have no power and do not know, they are not living or speaking. Hence, in claiming that the action is of the substance, which is other than the three hypostases, and not of the hypostases or one of them, [the Melkite] denies action to the Messiah, since for him the Messiah is not the substance, which is other than the hypostases, but for him is one of the three hypostases. And if he denies action to the Messiah, he must deny him power, knowledge and life according to the principle he has set.[20]

Abū ʿĪsā gradually widens out the implications of the central point to the extent that the main doctrines of Christianity are all brought under scrutiny and challenged.

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[19] Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic*, pp. 96–9, paras 151–6.
[20] Ibid., pp. 98–102, para. 157.

In a final step, which reduces the issue to farce, Abū ʿĪsā argues more fully against the Nestorian and Jacobite claim that the three hypostases performed the act of uniting for the Word. If this is possible, the hypostases could also have done this for the Father or the Holy Spirit. Thus there would be three Messiahs, or maybe Messiahs before the historical Christ or after. And the consequences, though logically unavoidable, are ridiculous:

> Then, in this teaching of yours, would not one of the Messiahs have been son of the being you worship, another the father of the being you worship, and the third spirit to him? And would not one of the Messiahs have been son of the other, and one of them father to the Messiah who was his son, so there would have been Messiah son of Messiah and Messiah father of Messiah?[21]

And he goes on to level similar accusations at the Melkites.

Christians who responded to such half serious taunts usually tried to explain that they were misfired because the Persons of the Trinity could not be differentiated in this simplistic way. Abū Rāʾiṭa, for example, says:

> The term 'God' is in our view, both general and specific. So the three [Persons] are God in general and each one is the essence of the other in being, *māhiyya*. It is just like gold . . .; all of it is described as gold, and so is a small quantity. Thus we mean that the One who was incarnate is God, that is to say one of the hypostases, the Son, the living Word of God, who is eternal God, not three hypostases.[22]

He is trying to explain that the term 'hypostasis' is identical with the term 'God', so that even though Christians speak of the Incarnation of the Son they mean that God in his entirety is involved in this action.

This is exactly what Abū ʿĪsā has taken issue with. Evidently, in his mind the named members of the Trinity are all and each distinct in their existence, and so the problem occurs of how they can be said to remain identical when one of them is involved in the action of Incarnation that the others are not. He has a radically different understanding from his Christian opponents, shared with Muslim theologians in this and other periods, that something that can be named is an entity with its own unique characteristics that distinguish it from other things. Thus, in the back of his mind in this discussion lies the assumption that the Christian concept of the Godhead involves four separate beings, the substance and the three hypostases; he has, in fact, raised this issue in the first part of his refutation of the Christian sects.[23] Hence, he can play

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[21] Ibid., pp. 102–5, paras 158f.
[22] Graf, *Schriften*, pp. 27.15–28.3.
[23] Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic*, e.g. pp. 92–5, para. 57, 102–9, para. 65.

with the notion that because the doctrine of the Incarnation states in plain terms that it was the Son who united with the human nature of the Messiah, then this hypostasis must be different in some manner from the others. So, the contradictions within Christian doctrines arising from the concurrent insistence that the hypostases are identical in their common substantiality can be drawn out.

It is not as though Abū ʿĪsā is unaware of what the Christians are trying to say. For in the first part of his refutation, where he provides a very full account of their doctrines, he says quite clearly that the Nestorians and Jacobites hold that the divine substance and hypostases are identical, and the Melkites that the hypostases are the substance but the substance is other than the hypostases.[24] Although he has condensed their theologies into cryptic formulas, he still betrays some awareness of their attempt to preserve the notion that the terms are different usages for the same reality. However, rather than trying to make sense of the Christian formulations in their own terms, if such is possible, Abū ʿĪsā transfers them into the context of his own theology and compels them to retain coherence there. And they simply cannot.

This curious discussion could only have arisen in the circumstances of the two sides employing very similar language to talk about entirely different realities. The Christians use the term God in both the general form of substance, *jawhar*, and the specific form of hypostasis, *uqnūm*, and they then mean the same reality when using these words—as Abū Rāʾiṭa says, the term gold can be used of both the metal in general and of specific objects made of it. But the Muslim Abū ʿĪsā observes the less poetic norm that different terms denote different realities. As a result, he and others with the same cast of mind could surprise Arabic-speaking Christians with a question that they may not have previously encountered.

Here again we see an example of Muslims forcing Christians onto the defensive by demanding that they should discuss their beliefs in language and forms that were germane to Islamic modes of thinking, and showing impatience with them for not doing so.

Proofs that Jesus was Divine

A third example of Muslim impatience with Christian teachings is their refusal to accept the proofs they were given for believing that Jesus was divine. It is, of course, entirely predictable in the light of the numerous

[24] Ibid., pp. 66f., paras 1f.

references in the Qur'an to Jesus' humanity, creaturely status and disjunction from God, that Muslims should reject his divine nature. But the proofs from Christians which the early literature from their side of the debate preserves seem so lame that the Muslim lack of patience is understandable. One of the most common of these was the series of miracles recorded in the Gospels, which Christians apparently adduced as unquestionable evidence, but Muslims dismissed with calm disdain. It appears in differing forms in many Muslim works, from the third/ninth century to at least the seventh/fourteenth,[25] maybe the most popular recurrent motif in the whole corpus of Muslim anti-Christian polemic. Among the earliest examples that will serve to illustrate the Christian proof and Muslim response is that given by Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), the eponymous founder of one of the two main Sunnī schools of *kalām*. It comes in his *Kītāb al-tawḥīd*, dating from the early fourth/tenth century, which is the first surviving compendium of Islamic theology.

In his brief discussion of Christian claims about Jesus, al-Māturīdī turns to the supposed argument that Jesus' divinity was demonstrated in the actions he performed. But the Muslim will have none of this, and retorts by adducing comparisons between miracles of Jesus and of other prophets. Thus, Jesus' miracle of raising the dead is equalled by Ezekiel, and by Moses' miracle of turning a lifeless staff into a serpent; his miracle of feeding many people with little food is equalled by the Prophet Muḥammad producing flour in an empty bowl; his miracle of turning water into wine is equalled by Elisha turning many bowls of water into oil; his miracle of walking on the water is equalled by Joshua, Elijah and Elisha; his miracles of healing are bettered by Elijah and Elisha's miracles of raising the dead; and lastly his allowing himself to be crucified and mocked by the Jews does not stand up to Elijah's bringing down fire on his pursuers and burning them.[26]

Versions in other Muslim polemicists are often fuller and more elaborate, though maybe none repeats the bravura of the final comparison given by al-Māturīdī here.

This tradition of comparisons shows clearly that from a comparatively early stage Muslims knew enough about the Bible to put Christians to shame by showing that Jesus' great feats over nature and human life were not at all unique. And this raises the question of the sources to which they may have had access: were these Jewish polemical writings,

[25] On this subject see D. Thomas, 'The Miracles of Jesus in Early Islamic Polemic', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 39, 1994, pp. 221–43.

[26] See D. Thomas, 'Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī on the Divinity of Jesus Christ', *Islamochristiana* 23, 1997, pp. 52f.

arguments provided by converts from Christianity,[27] or the scriptural texts themselves? But rather than be detained by speculating on this, we should turn to a point that al-Māturīdī and other Muslims make in relation to this comparisons tradition, which is the source of power used for these miraculous acts by Jesus and other prophets.

The rather diffuse discussion about this in al-Māturīdī starts from the attempt by the Christians to claim that the manner in which Jesus performed miracles was unlike that of a prophet such as Moses. For while the latter supplicated God to perform a miracle, in the case of Jesus God made miracles appear from him, *Allāh azhara minhu ʿajā'ib*. The distinction seems to be that God acted directly through Jesus, but not through other prophetic figures. But al-Māturīdī denies this by adducing the irrefutable Gospel evidence that Jesus supplicated God on the night of his arrest, and also made prayers and supplications towards Jerusalem.[28]

A little later al-Māturīdī amplifies this point by denying the Christian claim that God directly empowered Christ for his actions by the presence of the divine nature within him, rather than by performing miracles through him.[29] And again here he rejects the fine distinction drawn by his opponents that Jesus was given power for miracles directly by God, while in the case of other prophets the agent of the miraculous actions was God himself, acting through the prophets. Al-Māturīdī points simply to the miracles themselves, and finding no difference between the actual actions performed by Jesus and by other prophets, rejects the claim that their mode of performing them was at all different. By implication, he in effect argues that miracles of other prophets were more impressive than those of Jesus, and hence indicate that they have a greater claim to divinity.

In nearly all other known Muslim comparisons of Jesus' and others' miracles, there is this accompanying argument about the relationship between the prophet and the divine source of power that made the miracle possible. And Muslim authors consistently refused to accept that there can be any different modes of action when the miraculous results from Jesus and other prophets do not appear different. Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq, in his typically succinct manner, sums up the Christian difficulty by observing that if Jesus' miracles are to be taken as a sign that the divinity actually dwelt within him and controlled creation through him, then the miracles of countless other prophets must be taken as

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[27] The first recorded instance, which seems to be an original compilation, occurs in the *Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā* of the convert ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī; see Thomas, 'Miracles of Jesus', pp. 221–3.

[28] Thomas, 'Al-Māturīdī on the Divinity of Jesus Christ', p. 52, Arabic ll. 22–7.

[29] Ibid., ll. 42–9.

equivalent signs that they were also indwelt by God.[30] In other words, Jesus' miracles themselves give no indication that he was any more than one of the line of prophets among whom he is numbered in the Qur'an.

The earliest instances of miracles comparisons usually go no further than drawing this implication. But later authors often make the point that all the prophets, including Jesus, performed their miracles not by any power of their own but by the help or permission of God. This is first stated in the anonymous letter supposedly written by the Umayyad Caliph ʿUmar II to the Byzantine emperor Leo II, which probably dates from the end of the third/ninth century.[31] In connection with his comparison the author observes that, like Moses, Jesus performed his miracles by the permission, order and decree of God, *bi-idhni Allāhi wa-amrihi wa-qaḍā'ih*.[32] A short time later, probably in the early decades of the fourth/tenth century, the little-known Christian convert al-Ḥasan Ibn Ayyūb explains at slightly greater length that prophets had no part in the production of their miracles, because it was God who produced them by virtue of his own power and brought them about through the prophets.[33]

Both these brief descriptions of the involvement of God in the performance of the miracles suggest a more detailed analysis than earlier of the way in which these exceptional actions were understood. Later in the fourth/tenth century this is taken a step further in the comment of the Ashʿarī theologian Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), that Jesus was not powerful over his miracles, but rather God performed all that he manifested through him, *faʿala jamīʿa mā zahara ʿalā yadihi min dhālika*,[34] which confidently refers to what is evidently received and accepted teaching by this time of the nature of human action, and miracles as a special case of this. And it is taken to its limit towards the end of the fourth/tenth century by the Muʿtazilī theologian ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), who argues that Christians have no grounds for saying the miracles demonstrate that in the person of Jesus God came into contact with the human because, firstly, they only constitute proof that he would have done so at the precise times of the miracles, secondly, God can accomplish miracles without having to be present and, thirdly, such a divine contact would logically occur not between God and the human

[30] Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic*, pp. 170–1, para. 226, also pp. 178–9, para. 229.

[31] D. Sourdel, 'Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d'époque 'abbaside contre les Chrétiens', *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 34, 1966, pp. 1–33; also J.-M. Gaudeul, 'The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar: 'Umar's Letter rediscovered?', *Islamochristiana* 10, 1984, pp. 109–57.

[32] Sourdel, 'Pamphlet musulman', p. 28.10f.

[33] His refutation of Christian beliefs is preserved *in extenso* in Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*, Cairo, 1905, vol. II, pp. 312–63, vol. III, pp. 2f.; see vol. II, p. 335.3–8 for this remark.

[34] Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, pp. 98.13–99.4.

Jesus, but between God and the objects that were affected by the miraculous action.[35] His argument is that miracles are signs of God's action and of his influence upon objects but not of his presence in temporal beings or his contact with them. Like his Ashʿarī contemporary, he can refer to a sophisticated analysis of human actions and an advanced explanation of how miracles as exemptions to predictable events can be accommodated in the orderly progression of the world. Both theologians take it as accepted that human power is given by God, and that in the case of prophets the divine power acts in uniquely unmediated ways in which the prophets are no more than instruments of God's miraculous action without power of their own.

We see, then, some slight change in Muslim treatments of the miracles of Jesus as proofs of divinity, from a straightforward comparison between him and other prophets to a scrutinising of his and other prophets' miracles according to considerations of how human action occurs. In this process, the Christian proof is taken into the structure of Islamic theology, separated from any wider beliefs about Jesus that would give it support and validity, and subjected to a rigorous analysis that destroys it.

This is, of course, what the Qur'an says about Jesus and other prophets. It repeatedly refers to miracles being performed with the permission or help of God, *bi-idhni Allāh*,[36] suggesting that it was not the individual himself who should be credited with the action but God. The polemicists are, therefore, simply following the scriptural lead, but in doing so they unanimously show that what may have been a rather self-conscious Christian attempt to put forward an argument to support their case did not stand up in the context of Muslim theology. Refusing to accept any prior beliefs about the divinity of Christ, they look for the direct evidence itself, and either because Jesus' actions appear no different from those of other prophets or because they prove only that God participated in his miracles as he did in those ascribed to other prophets, they reject Christian manipulation of this evidence. The approach they adopt and the result it produces show at once the confidence and growing sophistication of Muslim theological method, and the difficulty encountered by Christians who faced the challenge of presenting and defending their arguments in a new intellectual context.

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[35] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. V, p. 124.10–12.
[36] E.g., Q 2.251, 3.49, 13.38, 34.12.

New questions demanding new answers

The issue of the involvement of the three Persons of the Trinity in the Incarnation of the Son, which we have said could only be raised by opponents who understood the doctrine to refer to three separate individuals, is a sign that Muslims who knew something about the doctrine had no hesitation in confronting their Christian opponents with awkward questions. But this is just one of a number of issues over which Muslims appeared to throw Christians onto the defensive. If we now turn from Muslim polemical literature to some of the earliest Christian Arab authors, we see more extensively how they became aware of new questions and felt compelled to respond to them.

One of the best known debates between a Christian and a Muslim from the ʿAbbasid era is the encounter between the Caliph al-Mahdī and the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I that took place over two days soon after 164/780 in the imperial palace. Its main outlines have come down in an account given by Timothy himself.[37]

Given this authorship, it is quite understandable why the Christian appears to find elegant answers to nearly all the questions put to him by the Muslim, best known among them being his diplomatic reply to the Caliph's question about the status of Muḥammad, that 'he walked in the path of the prophets', which was so ambiguous that it seemed to satisfy the Caliph and has occasioned scholars in the present day to wonder whether he was according some recognition to the Prophet.[38] But for all his barely-concealed triumphalism, Timothy cannot hide the fact that the agenda is set by al-Mahdī, understandably, and that the Caliph not only has a wide range of penetrating points to raise but also a number of questions that seem to cause Timothy difficulties.

To take one example, the Caliph more or less begins his questioning by asking about Christ, and Timothy clearly finds it difficult to provide satisfactory answers. He sets out his Nestorian belief that Christ was both human and divine, with the divine nature clothing itself in the human. But when al-Mahdī counters that this suggests dualism he can only reply with metaphors, that the relationship was like the human body and soul, or the Caliph as both individual man and imperial ruler. Again al-Mahdī is not convinced and refers to Jesus' words in the Gospel of John, 'I am

[37] Mingana, 'Apology', pp. 137–292.

[38] See e.g. D. Kerr, '"He Walked in the Path of the Prophets": toward Christian Theological Recognition of the Prophethood of Muhammad', in Y. Y. Haddad and W. Z. Haddad, eds, *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, Gainsville etc., 1995, p. 426; S. K. Samir, 'The Prophet Muḥammad as seen by Timothy I and other Arab Christian Authors', in D. Thomas ed., *Syrian Christains under Islam, the First Thousand Years*, Leiden, 2001, pp. 93–6.

going to my God and your God',[39] which suggests that he did not think he was the same as God. Timothy replies that these words indicate the human nature of Christ regarding God as his God, and that his words immediately before, 'I am going to my Father and your Father', indicate his divine nature regarding God as his Father. But al-Mahdī is not convinced, and Timothy resorts to metaphor a second time: when the Caliph writes his own words, of which he can be called father, on papyrus, of which he can be called owner, he combines something generated from himself with something manufactured from elsewhere; in the same way the Son who is generated or begotten by God the Father combines with the human who is created, and so can regard God as both Father and Deity.[40]

We can admire Timothy for his dexterity in coining such apt metaphors under pressure, if this is what he did. But his adroitness does not hide the fact that he has no ready explanation of a more literal, theological kind that might silence or even convince al-Mahdī. This is because the two antagonists are speaking out of different contexts, the Muslim from the belief that the human Christ cannot be Son of the entirely other God or related to him in any way, and the Christian from the belief that the Incarnation is God's redemptive act in which he became human to save the world. Thus, for the Muslim the question is whether God can become one with a human without his transcendent distinctiveness being denied, while for the Christian it is how God can become one with a human and both preserve his divinity and share in the experiences of humanity. The fact that Timothy resorts to metaphors suggests that while he and other Christians had thought about how God could become human, debating the mode of the Incarnation on the agreed assumption that it was an historical fact and datum of belief, they had spent rather less time considering the issue of whether this was legitimate, since the divine could not become implicated in the human and temporal, which was fundamental to Muslims.

Support for this inference is available in the works of the early second/eighth century theologian John of Damascus (d. *ca* 133/750). He lived for much of his life in the Umayyad court, and made the earliest considered evaluation that we have of the Prophet Muḥammad and Islam in the well-known 'Chapter on the Heresy of the Ishmaelites' in his *On Heresies*.[41] But he directed his works at a specifically Christian audience, for whom he wrote in Greek.

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[39] John 20.17. The popularity of this verse in Muslim polemic in all periods is explained both by its contents when separated from its context, and by its similarity to Q 19.36 which may have been thought to give it a warrant for debate.

[40] Mingana, 'Apology', pp. 153–7.

[41] See D. J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"*, Leiden, 1972;

The *On Heresies* is part of what is generally regarded as John's major theological work, *The Fount of Knowledge*.[42] This also includes *The Orthodox Faith*, which is a comprehensive account of Christian thinking in the late antique and early Islamic period. In a hundred chapters, John details the structure of theology, from the doctrine of God in himself, through creation, human freedom, the need for salvation, the Incarnation, and the Christian life. By far the greatest number of chapters, over a third of the whole, is devoted to explanations and defences of the Incarnation and the union of the divine and human in Christ (chs 45–81). Here John shows how the two natures remained separate and unconfused while being truly united in order to accomplish the act of redemption and winning back obedience, and how the Christian formulations of the manner of unity that differ from his own are flawed or plainly wrong. But he does not argue at any length the fact that the Word of God could become incarnate or that the united divine and human being can be called Son of God. For John's Christian audience and John himself there is no need to dwell on the issue of whether the divine had become a participant in human history or whether Christ was God on earth. They all agree on this, but they do not agree on the mode in which the divine and human natures in Christ subsisted.

The main emphasis in these chapters on the Incarnation of John of Damascus' *The Orthodox Faith* betrays no awareness of the kind of questions that the Caliph al-Mahdī asked the Patriarch Timothy. This suggests that John had not been placed in any such awkward situation by a Muslim noble and was not conscious of having to find answers to questions from outside the interdenominational Christian milieu, in which the manner of the Incarnation but not its entire possibility was the main subject of disagreement.

If, however, we move forward from John in the middle of the second/eighth century and Timothy towards the end of that century to Arabic-speaking Christian theologians who lived under Muslim rule in the early third/ninth century, we find for the first time what can be identified as concerted attempts to answer Muslim questions about Christ.

A full examination of such authors as Theodore Abū Qurra, ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī and Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rāʾiṭa would show the extent of their sensitivity towards Islam and to the kind of questions we have noticed in al-Mahdī's debate with Timothy. Here we will discuss two

S. Griffith, in '"Melkites", "Jacobites" and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria', in Thomas ed., *Syrian Christians under Islam*, pp. 19–38, calls for a re-evaluation of John's intentions, against his Muslim and Oriental Christian background.

[42] See J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. XCIV, Paris, 1860, cols 521–1228; trans. F. A. Chase, *Saint John of Damascus, Writings* (*The Fathers of the Church, a New Translation* 37), Washington DC, 1958.

examples out of many others to show how the realities of the new intellectual and social context were requiring them to alter the emphasis of their presentations of Christian doctrine.

The works of Theodore Abū Qurra, who was active in the decades around the beginning of the third/ninth century,[43] focus on a range of topics. Among them is what has been identified as a confession of faith which may have been written at the time Theodore was consecrated bishop, possibly around 180/795.[44] This is concerned solely with the Trinity and Incarnation, though after a short account of the Trinity and a brief statement that the Son came down from heaven and was incarnate 'for our sake and for our salvation', he devotes most of it to an exposition of the correct belief about the union of the divine and human and the errors of major heretics. It is thus a work mainly about the major point of concern between Christians of different denominations, the relationship between the divine and human natures in Christ.

Contrasting with this short statement of belief are other works on the rather different themes of whether God could have a Son or become incarnate. Theodore explores the former in two tracts, in the first of which he argues that God would be inferior to humans if he were unable to beget, and that since for him the will to beget is simultaneous with the act, his begotten Son must be eternal with him;[45] and in the second that God must be master, though not over an inferior creature but over a being equal to and of the same nature as himself, and hence a Son.[46] He explores the other theme of God becoming incarnate more polemically by arguing that if it is accepted that God appeared in a cloud or was seated on a throne (as Islamic scriptures acknowledge), there cannot be any objection to his appearing in human flesh.[47] In each of these tracts, Theodore confidently provides rational or scriptural reasons for what he contends, and forces his opponent to respond in the like manner. The fact that a number of Muslims are known to have taken up his challenges and produced matching replies,[48] shows that his arguments were more attuned to the Muslim audience than Timothy's impressive but unsubstantial metaphors. Here we have some of the first considered

[43] See Griffith, 'Reflections on the Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah', *passim*.

[44] I. Dick, *Théodore Abuqurra, Traité de l'existence du Créateur et de la vraie religion* (*Patrimoine arabe chrétien* 3), Jounieh and Rome, 1982, pp. 64/XVI.

[45] C. Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes de Théodore Aboucara*, Beirut, 1904, pp. 75–82.

[46] Ibid., pp. 91–104.

[47] Ibid., pp. 180–6.

[48] See Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic*, pp. 164–5, para. 133 and n. 67 for the suggestion that Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq was replying to one of these tracts; see also fragments of the argument from the late third/ninth century *mutakallim* al-Qāsim al-Balkhī preserved in P. Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologétiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens*, Cairo, 1929, p. 60.14–16, and 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. V, pp. 144.11–145.2.

Christian reactions to new forms of questions that were being directed from the very different context of Islamic theology.

A second example of this Christian awareness of the need to find answers to new questions occurs in the sustained theological exposition made by Theodore's Nestorian contemporary ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī in his *Kitāb al-burhān*, which is one of the earliest systematic accounts of Christian belief written with a Muslim audience explicitly in mind.

In the part of this work devoted to the Incarnation, ʿAmmār begins by first arguing that in the Godhead fatherhood and sonship are not comparable with human equivalents and do not violate God's unity or transcendence. Furthermore, since only the lowliest of things do not beget, generation must be attributable to God as a sign of superiority.[49] As with Theodore Abū Qurra's works, we see here evident awareness of Muslim sensitivities and a vigorous attempt to answer objections about divine plurality and anthropomorphism.

From here, ʿAmmār proceeds to defend the necessity of the Incarnation itself, which he does in four arguments. He begins from the principle that in his act of creating God shared his attributes of grace and generosity, and then he contends firstly that God's appearance in a human body was his supreme act of communication, following on from earlier partial forms, and the culmination of his generosity to creation; secondly, that his appearance in this form was his response to humankind's desire to see him; thirdly, that in doing this he was showing his justice by allowing his creatures to see the one who would finally judge them; and fourthly, that his appearing in this form enabled humans to have supremacy in all things, including the world to come.[50]

ʿAmmār here makes the Incarnation a natural and almost inevitable result of God's generous act of creation and intention to communicate with his creatures. There is almost nothing in it of any need to rectify an error in the divine plan resulting from the fall, or a desire to win back human souls from Satan. It is as though ʿAmmār wishes to anticipate any criticisms from his opponents by demonstrating that the Incarnation is a sign of God's supreme control over the created order, rather than his reaction to the fatal consequence of human freedom.

The subtlety of ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's presentation of the history of salvation deserves a study devoted entirely to itself. For while it never violates Christian tradition, it presents received teachings with such an emphasis that a Muslim would find there much that was familiar and compelling. For example, the argument that the Incarnation is the culmination of God's generous desire to communicate weaves in stories re-

[49] Hayek, *ʿAmmar*, pp. 56.13–62.14.
[50] Ibid., pp. 62.16–69.15.

cognisable from Christian and Muslim scripture of previous partial theophanies in the cloud and burning bush, and thus invites consent from a scripturalist reader. Then it finally crowns this with the argument that a direct address through a human figure is the highest form that this kind of communication could take, and presents a convincing challenge. It is maybe the most sophisticated attempt by an Arabic-speaking Christian to present Christian beliefs about the humanity and divinity of Christ in a form that Muslims might find appealing and worthy of notice.

In essence, ʿAmmār presents a Christology intended to address the cultural and religious sensitivities of a Muslim audience. And so his main concern is to demonstrate that the Incarnation was not only possible but also necessary, not so much with the traditional Christian preoccupations of the manner in which the divine and human natures subsisted together in Christ as with the Muslim questions we identified earlier, of whether the eternal Divinity could become united in a contingent creaturely life.

We see, then, in the first ʿAbbasid century strong signs that Muslim inquiries forced Christians onto the defensive, and impelled them to search out answers to questions they had maybe thought settled many centuries earlier. That they did not ignore the questions or brush them away as rather naïve is indicative of the political relationship between themselves as clients and their Muslim interlocutors as masters. But it is also indicative of the fact that Muslims had enough confidence in their own beliefs and the doctrinal articulation of them to ask searching questions and to demand intellectually sound answers. They were evidently not overawed by Christian theology, but all too ready to expose its flaws and shortcomings.

The development of early Islamic Theology

A persistent feature of the great majority of the surviving Muslim works on Christianity from the early ʿAbbasid centuries is that they appear not to be concerned with the full range of Christian beliefs as these are evidenced in such systematic accounts of Christianity as John of Damascus' *The Orthodox Faith* or ʿAmmār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-burhān* and *Kitāb al-masā'il wa-al-ajwiba*. The last mentioned may be thought to suggest the contrary, since it features a series of questions asked by a Muslim who seems informed about all the main themes of Christianity. But, in fact, this figure is almost certainly a literary *persona* invented by ʿAmmār to ask a smooth progression of questions that lead into a series of coherently linked answers. He is too cooperative to be real.

In fact, when we examine the surviving Muslim anti-Christian polemical works from the years 200/c. 800–400/c. 1000 we find that nearly

all of them focus on either or both of two Christian doctrines, the Trinity and the Incarnation, or as they customarily express it the Uniting of the divine and human in Christ. And there appears to be a clear progression.

From the early third/ninth century, among the major surviving polemical works are al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm's incisive *Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*, which disproves the Trinity on logical grounds and the divinity of Christ on Biblical grounds;[51] the philosopher Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī's work with the same name, which refutes the Trinity in terms of Aristotelian philosophy;[52] and Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq's elaborate *Radd ʿalā al-thalāth firaq min al-Naṣārā*, which exposes in almost prolix detail the internal contradictions and logical shortcomings of the Trinity and Incarnation.[53] It is probable from the evidence of arguments from this period preserved by ʿAbd al-Jabbār that many other theologians also focused on these two doctrines.[54] And what is striking about these works is that their authors frequently show extensive knowledge of the doctrine of the atonement, the compilation of the Nicene Creed and so on, but show almost no concern to attack them.

There are works on other themes than these, of course, among the best known being ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī's *Kitāb al-dīn wa-al-dawla*, which proves the truth of Islam and the veracity of Muḥammad from Biblical texts, and his *Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*, which exposes inconsistencies in Christianity, largely between the Gospels and the Creed;[55] and also Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ' reply to Christian criticisms.[56] But special circumstances attach to the writing of these works, in that ʿAlī al-Ṭabarī as a former Christian would have particular concerns, and al-Jāḥiẓ was answering particular accusations. So while they show that not all the known works from this time focused on the two main Christian doctrines, they do not detract from the point that the majority of known Muslim theological works do appear to have been concerned with these doctrines and little else.

In the later third/ninth and early fourth/tenth centuries the focus becomes even sharper. From this period the *Kitāb al-awsaṭ fī al-maqālāt* of al-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar and Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī's *Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*, both admittedly fragmentary, refer to only the Trinity and Incarnation, though al-Nāshiʾ knew about the different Christologies of over twenty Christian

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[51] Ed. I. di Matteo, 'Confutazione contro i Cristiani dello zaydita al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm', *Revista degli Studi Orientali* 9, 1921–2, pp. 301–64.

[52] Ed. Périer, 'Un traité de Yaḥya ben 'Adi' (see n. 11).

[53] Ed. Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic* (on the Trinity), *Early Muslim Polemic* (on the Incarnation).

[54] See Thomas, 'A Muʿtazilī Response to Christianity'.

[55] Ed. I.-A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, 'Ar-Radd ʿala-n-Naṣārā de 'Alī aṭ-Ṭabarī', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 36, 1959, pp. 113–48; ed. A. Mingana, Manchester 1923, trans. A. Mingana, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, Manchester, 1920.

[56] Ed. J. Finkel in *Thalāth rasāʾil li-Abī ʿUthmān . . . al-Jāḥiẓ*, Cairo, 1926.

sects. And we also see the beginnings of a new development, in which Christianity is discussed within the context of the larger exposition of Islamic theology.

From this period dates the lost work of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī known as the *Kitāb al-fuṣūl*, a great twelve-volume compendium in which, according to a later description, Christianity was refuted together with other non-Islamic religions and Islamic sects, and the correct Islamic beliefs were set out.[57] The loss of this substantial theological compendium is extremely regrettable, not only because of what it could tell about the development of Islamic theology at this time and its author's own beliefs, but also because it may have been a model for later theological composition.

From about the same period dates al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, which includes a refutation of the specific Christian doctrines connected with the divinity of Christ as part of what can be seen as a coherent, and very systematic exposition of Islamic theology. This is the first surviving work of this kind, and it enables us to see how Christianity was understood by at least some Muslims at this time. The precise location of the refutation of this Christian belief in the progression of the work is immediately following a discussion about the prophetic status of Muḥammad and in a section that seems devoted to the Islamic doctrine of the role of the messenger as channel of God's instructions to his creatures.[58] Here its function seems to be both to demonstrate the error of Christian claims about Jesus' divinity, and to validate the Muslim teaching that he was no more than a prophetic messenger. Thus while it exposes the error of Christianity, it also supports the truth of what Islam teaches about Christ and other prophets. Refutation contributes to the exposition of theology.

Continuing briefly through the fourth/tenth century, al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, which is the earliest surviving Ashʿarī systematic theology, also includes a refutation of Christianity, as well as other non-Islamic sects, together with the presentation and defence of correct doctrines, and focuses in this refutation upon the two doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation.[59] Thus it continues the trend which began in the early third/ninth century of attacking these two doctrines, and shows that a

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[57] McCarthy, *Theology of al-Ashʿarī*, pp. 211f. translating from Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tabyīn kadhib al-muftarī*.

[58] Thomas, 'Al-Māturīdī on the Divinity of Jesus Christ', pp. 48f.

[59] Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, pp. 75–103; see the studies by A. Abel, 'Le chapitre sur le Christianisme dans le "Tamhīd" d'al-Bāqillānī', *Études d'Orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal*, Paris, 1962, vol. 1, pp. 1–11; and W. Z. Haddad, 'A Tenth-Century Speculative Theologian's Refutation of the Basic Doctrines of Christianity: al-Bāqillānī (d. AD 1013)', in Haddad and Haddad, *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, pp. 82–94.

century later this task was regarded as integral to constructing a systemic exposition of correct theology.

It is difficult to see whether the placing of the chapter on Christianity in al-Bāqillānī's work is as strategically significant as in al-Māturīdī. But in al-Bāqillānī's Muʿtazilī contemporary ʿAbd al-Jabbār placing is everything. ʿAbd al-Jabbār's twenty volume *Mughnī* comprises expositions of God in his own self in volumes I–V and God in his just dealings with the world in volumes VI–XX. The refutation of Christianity comes, together with refutations of dualist beliefs, at the end of volume V, as a sort of coda to the exposition of God's unity.

Firstly, it will come as no surprise that this refutation is divided into arguments against the Trinity and Incarnation. ʿAbd al-Jabbār draws together points from earlier polemicists, among them some we have mentioned above, and produces a comprehensive attack on all aspects of the doctrines, though not on any other Christian beliefs. And his arguments demonstrate clearly that the doctrines are internally inconsistent, and from many aspects risk imposing pluralism upon the Godhead and merging his being with that of a creature.

Secondly, and more subtly, the position of the chapter, together with the chapters against dualism, at the end of the exposition and defence of the doctrine of *tawḥīd* makes it function almost as a warning of what happens when belief in God's unity is abandoned. For the result of this unruliness proves to be a chaos of contradictory ideas, which are past redemption and can only be rejected. Thus, the attack on Christianity serves both to make it directly clear what is wrong about belief in anything but the doctrine of divine unity, and to make it implicitly obvious that the doctrine of divine unity is logically sustainable and rationally coherent.

It is evident from the positioning of refutations of other non-Islamic beliefs at key points in the *Mughnī* that ʿAbd al-Jabbār intended these attacks to serve the double purpose of invalidating alternatives to particular Islamic doctrines and of supporting the validity of those doctrines as the only viable possibility. In this way he integrates polemic into the presentation of Islamic theology (not unlike John of Damascus, who prefaces his *The Orthodox Faith* with the exposure of error in 100 or 101 heretical sects in his *On Heresies*), and shows in a structural way what may always have been the intention of attacks on the Trinity and Incarnation.

We have noted that from at least the early third/ninth century Muslim polemicists were interested almost exclusively in the two Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation. As we have already hinted, these doctrines may appear to turn the Godhead into a plurality of divine beings (Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq's quibble that each of the Persons could become incarnate independently of the others, or even create his own

universe, lucidly illustrates how this might be understood) and to implicate the Divinity in the limitations and changes of a human life. So it would seem to follow that Muslims looked on them as threats to or maybe aberrant forms of their own doctrine of the uncompromising unity of God.

If this is so, and there is much evidence to support it not only in the careful positioning of anti-Christian refutations in the first surviving theological treatises but also in the shorter works from earlier times where the unity and distinctiveness of God are held up as the truth or sometimes demonstrated as such, then it would seem that Muslim polemicists were not primarily interested in Christianity as a faith, but only in those doctrines that deviated from their own. This in turn suggests that polemic was a form of apologetic, for its essential intention was to prove the truth and correctness of Islam rather than to investigate the nature and validity of Christianity.

This conclusion is not surprising when we remember that the Qur'an itself portrays Christianity as an earlier form of the final and complete religion, though scarred by erroneous beliefs. But it again shows that Muslims seemed entirely confident of their own beliefs and their ability to sustain them rationally from an early stage, and had no qualms about laying into the edifice of Christian doctrines despite its stature and superficial soundness.

Conclusion

These four examples from Muslim anti-Christian themes show what a huge gulf lay between Muslims and Christians in the early Islamic period. There is no evidence at all that any Muslims reacted positively to Christian attempts to explain their doctrines, or thought them anything but flawed and misguided. From early times they appear to have followed the lead given by the Qur'an in regarding Christianity as aberrant, and with increasing knowledge and understanding of Christian doctrines they were able to mobilise arguments to give vivid expression to this attitude by exposing the logical flaws in their opponents' formulations. Even when Christians attempted to employ methods and concepts from Islamic theology to explain themselves, Muslims were still not convinced as they all the more easily demonstrated the shortcomings in the doctrines under examination.

So it can be seen that Muslims throughout the early 'Abbasid era almost unanimously regarded Christian doctrines as deficient and inferior to their own. The impatience that we have identified in some of their approaches is symptomatic of this attitude, and suggests that relations between theological practitioners were never cooperative and possibly never cordial.

In addition, we have seen evidence to suggest that an important element in Muslim attitudes towards Christian teachings was the use to which they might be put for demonstrating the correctness of Islamic teachings themselves as the only means of making sense of God and his ways. If this was the main interest these teachings held for Muslims, or even a significant one, it again shows how little value was attached to them in themselves, and how second-rate they were generally thought to be.

So it is a gloomy picture, of misunderstanding and failure to understand on the side of Muslims, together with inability and maybe reluctance to explain on the part of Christians. It causes one to wonder exactly how understanding can be improved, and it warns present day practitioners in dialogue that preliminary requirements include patience, readiness to learn and comprehend, and maybe not a little humility.

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