

Kitāb al-majāll

Unknown

DATE OF BIRTH Unknown
PLACE OF BIRTH Unknown
DATE OF DEATH Unknown
PLACE OF DEATH Unknown

BIOGRAPHY

Unknown

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary —

Secondary —

WORKS RELEVANT TO CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Kitāb al-majāll, 'Book of the rolls'; *Jalayān Buṭrus*,
'Apocalypse of Peter'

Alternative attested titles:

Iktishāf Shim'ūn, 'Apocalypse of Simon'; *Kitāb al-asrār*, 'Book of the secrets'; *Kitāb al-sarā'ir al-maktūma*, 'Book of the hidden secrets'; *Kitāb al-fawā'id*, 'Book of benefits'; *Kitāb al-kamāl*, 'Book of perfection'

DATE Unknown; a layered text possibly going back to the late 9th century; one early recension may be dated in the late 10th century

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

The book of the rolls or *Arabic Apocalypse of Peter* is transmitted in numerous Arabic and Karshūnī manuscripts. Its original language is Arabic, and it is probably among the earliest Christian pseudepigrapha

originally composed in that language. It demonstrates a strong interest in the fate of Egypt, and betrays familiarity with Coptic customs and traditions. Thus, Egypt is the most probable place of origin, though the numerous Karshūnī manuscript witnesses attest to the popularity of the text in Syria as well; Roggema argues for the possibility of the text's Syrian origin ('Biblical exegesis', pp. 136-37). Soon after its composition, the work was translated into Ge'ez under the brief title *Qālementos* ('Clement').

The text is extant in three main recension groups. The first and oldest of these does not provide any numbering and mentions that the book is preserved in Rome. The second divides the text into about 90 chapters and states that it was kept in the residence of the bishop of Nicosia in Cyprus. The third presents the text in eight main sections. Mingana notes that the more recent versions do not simply transmit earlier recensions, but develop into 'three totally different works' ('Apocalypse of Peter', p. 94).

The work is very probably a compilation. It claims to be a revelation of Jesus as given to the Apostle Peter, who passed it on to Clement of Rome. It can be divided into three main parts, which must have originated in different periods. The first part, under the title *Kitāb al-majāll* or *the Book of the rolls, one of the Books of Clement*, was originally edited and translated by Margaret Dunlop Gibson from a Sinai manuscript which dates to the 10th century at the latest (Sinai Ar. 508), and belongs to the oldest manuscripts of the first recension. It includes an Arabic version of the Syriac *Cave of treasures*, together with a compendium of major biblical stories, mainly from the Old Testament, that focus on genealogies, ending with the genealogy of Mary and a defense of her virginity. It also includes an Arabic version of the Syriac *Testament of Adam*.

The second and third parts of the work, which were published by Mingana in 1931, focus on heavenly revelations and apocalyptic prophecies. The second part deals with the Godhead and the nature of the angels according to their various ranks, the creation and fall of Adam and Eve, a description of Paradise, and moral exhortations. The third part narrates at length and in cryptic language the history of Islamic rule set within an apocalyptic narrative framework. It includes a list of 70 heresies and a list of Roman emperors down to the beginnings of Islam. This is followed by an account of the Antichrist, and the text concludes with a discussion of early church regulations and practices, and an account of the Apostle Paul in Rome.

The text relies heavily on the Book of Daniel and Revelation and is not directly related to the much earlier Greek/Ethiopic *Apocalypse of Peter*,

though it does share with it an emphasis on eschatology. Bousset notes a possible dependence on the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* (q.v.) and the Arabic *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Ezra* (q.v.), as well as the use of shared motifs, in particular animal symbols for the succession of world empires and 'The lion's whelp' (*jarw al-asad*) as a title for the idealized Christian ruler. Further common motifs, such as the explanation of the apocalyptic number 666 as a reference to Muḥammad, can be found in the Copto-Arabic *Letter of Pseudo-Pisentius* (q.v.). Furthermore, in its concern for the fate of the Church and believers the work has much in common with Copto-Arabic political apocalypses, such as those of *Pseudo-Athanasius* (q.v.) and *Samuel of Qalamūn* (q.v.).

It used to be thought that the work comes from the mid-8th century on account of what were considered to be cryptic references to political events in Byzantine and early Islamic history (see Dillmann, *Bericht*, pp. 201-5), though as Hoyland notes, 'We have no Christian Arabic writing from such an early date' (*Seeing Islam*, p. 293). However, recent studies have suggested the second half of the 11th century, the date of the earliest attestation of a manuscript of the apocalyptic part (in Paris Ar. 76, dated 1336/37, from a *Vorlage* dated to 1288, but ultimately from a *Vorlage* written in the year 1176/77). This would reflect political events relating to the Seljuq-Fatimid wars in Egypt (Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 294). Another suggestion places the text in Egypt in early Fatimid times (mid- or late 10th century), owing to a perceived dependence on the *Letter of Pisentius*, which is commonly dated to the 10th century (Griveau, 'Notes sur la lettre de Pisuntios', p. 443). According to Assemani, some manuscripts contain information about the Muslim conquest of Tripoli (1289) and Acre (1290) (Bratke, 'Handschriftliche Überlieferung', p. 461). Mingana notes additions that can be dated up to the 14th century (Graf, *GCAL* i, p. 287).

A number of manuscripts mention that the text was found in Nicosia. This location could indicate a connection with the crusades. Indeed, Jacques de Vitry (q.v.), bishop of Acre, in a letter to Pope Honorius III dated 1210, refers to an Arabic book that he regards as very ancient, entitled *Revelationes beati Petri apostoli e discipulo eius Clemente in uno volumine redactae*, which predicted the end of the rule of the Saracens. He says that it had been given to him by *Suriani* in Palestine. Furthermore, around the time of the conquest of Damietta in November 1219, Oliver of Paderborn (d. 1227; q.v.) writes about the popularity of an Arabic 'book of Clement' that appears to describe this text very closely, while Shams

al-Ri'āsa Abū l-Barakāt ibn Kabar (d. 1324; q.v.) also refers to a book by Clement, the disciple of Peter, which is known as 'The book of secrets'.

The account of Islamic rule in the third part is particularly extensive and cryptic in character. It presents a long succession of very loosely connected apocalyptic prophecies about the collapse of Islamic rule, with repeated allusions to the various historical periods and mysterious kings and their differing treatment of Christians. At the end of time, the 'lion's whelp' will appear, a victorious Christian king who will besiege the Muslims and restore the Christian faith. The Muslims are not mentioned directly, but by allegorical or biblical names such as 'the sons of Ishmael', 'the sons of Kedar', 'the sons of the tares', or 'the sons of the wolf'.

The text gives only the first letters of the names of the rulers of the 'barbaric nation', followed by details about their rules, lives, and sometimes deaths. There also appears to be a description of the character and physical appearance of Muḥammad, and an allusion to the story that he was taught by a heretical Christian. Not only individuals but sometimes places escape identification, though there is a clear emphasis on the centrality of Jerusalem and the need to recapture it and restore its ruined churches.

There have been many attempts to identify the rulers mentioned. Dillmann (*Bericht*) sees the wars between the King of the East and the King of the West as references to the battles between the Umayyads and Abbasids in the mid-8th century. Certain Abbasid caliphs have also been named (e.g. al-Mutawakkil; see Roggema, 'Biblical exegesis', pp. 145-46), while the victorious 'lion's whelp' has been identified as the Emperor Constantine V (r. 741-75), whose successful campaigns against the Muslims may have rekindled the hopes of a final Byzantine victory among Christians within the Islamic Empire.

Although the Muslims are never named as such, the text betrays some familiarity with Islamic theological arguments, and it possibly reflects elements of the early development of Christian-Muslim debate. Its description of Muslims is typically hostile, including vivid accounts of their desecration and destruction of churches, open contempt for Christians and their faith, periods of harsh persecution and forced conversions, as well as of defections to the new faith. It regards Islamic rule as a chastisement because of the Christians' sins, and it criticizes Christians' use of Arabic, their adoption of Muslim customs, and marriage with Muslims, and condemns Islamic worship, laws and morals.

Until a critical edition of this compelling and monumental work of Eastern Christianity becomes available, the interpretation of its

apocalyptic symbols and ideas, as well as suggestions about dating and provenance, must remain tentative.

SIGNIFICANCE

The book of the rolls/Arabic Apocalypse of Peter is probably the first Christian pseudepigraphon originally composed in Arabic, and is an important witness to the continuation and adaptation of Christian pseudepigraphical literature in the context of new political, historical and cultural conditions. It demonstrates knowledge of Islamic customs and tenets of faith and alludes to elementary Muslim-Christian theological encounters. It refers to the various challenges that Islamic rule posed to the Christian population during various historical periods and in many areas of the East. The text emphasizes that these challenges are to be met by the strictest separation from all things Islamic in the hope of a reversal, when the Christian faith will again have dominance.

The popularity and importance of the text is attested by the numerous recensions and versions that were made, as well as citations in later Arabic and Latin works.

MANUSCRIPTS

For a survey of the known MSS, see E. Bratke, 'Handschriftliche Überlieferung des Petrus Apokalypse', *Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftliche Theologie* 36 (1893) 454-93
Graf, *GCAL* i, pp. 289-92

EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

- A. Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies* 3, Cambridge, 1931: introduction, pp. 93-100, 209-15, 349-56; trans., pp. 100-52, 215-82, 356-407; facsimile, pp. 153-208, 283-348, 408-49 (second and third parts)
M.D. Gibson, *Studia Sinaitica No. VIII. Apocrypha Arabica*, London, 1901 (text and trans., first part)

Ethiopic recension:

- A. Bausi, *Qalementos etiopico. La rivelazione di Pietro a Clemente I libri* 3-7, Rome, 1992
A. Dillmann, 'Bericht über das äthiopische Buch Clementinischer Schriften', *Nachrichten von der K. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* 17-19 (1858) 185-226
S. Grebaut, 'Littérature éthiopienne pseudo-clémentine', *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 16 (1911) 78-84, 167-75, 225-33; 17 (1912) 16-31, 133-44, 244-52, 337-46; 18 (1913) 69-78; 19 (1914) 324-30; 20 (1915-17) 33-37, 424-30; 21 (1918) 246-52; 22 (1919) 22-28, 113-17, 395-400; 26 (1927/28) 22-31

STUDIES

- B. Roggema, *The legend of Sergius Bahira. Eastern Christian apologetics and apocalyptic in response to Islam*, Leiden, 2009, see Index, p. 566, under *Apocalypse of Peter*; focuses primarily on the motif of Muḥammad's heretical teacher)
- E. Grypeou, 'The re-written Bible in Arabic. The paradise story and its exegesis in the Arabic Apocalypse of Peter', in D. Thomas (ed.), *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, Leiden, 2007, 113-29
- B. Roggema, 'Biblical exegesis and interreligious polemics in the Arabic Apocalypse of Peter. The Book of the Rolls', in D. Thomas (ed.), *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, Leiden, 2007, 131-50
- R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it. A survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam*, Princeton NJ, 1997, pp. 291-94
- Graf, *GCAL* i, pp. 283-92 (cites early authors who mention the work, among them Abū l-Barakāt, Jaques de Vitry, Oliver of Paderborn and Assemani)
- C. Conti Rossini, 'Il libro dello Pseudo-Clemente et la crociata di Damietta', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 9 (1921-23) 32-35
- R. Griveau, 'Notes sur la lettre de Pisuntios', *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 19 (1914) 441-43
- F. Nau, 'Clementins (Apocryphes) II. L'Apocalypse de Pierre ou Clément', in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, 15 vols, 1906-8, iii, pp. 216-19
- W. Bousset, *Der Antichrist in der Überlieferung des Judentums, des neuen Testaments und der alten Kirche*, Göttingen, 1895, pp. 45-49
- Bratke, 'Handschriftliche Überlieferung des Petrus Apokalypse'
- P. de Lagarde, *Mittheilungen IV*, Göttingen, 1891, pp. 6-16
- M. Steinschneider, 'Apocalypsen mit polemischer Tendenz', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 28 (1874) 627-59

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