

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF LEO III (717-41) AND 'UMAR II (717-20)

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These two rulers were both known as zealous reformers of their respective faiths, Leo for his iconoclasm and forcible baptism of Jews, 'Umar for his fiscal innovations favouring converts to Islam and rigorous enforcement of Muslim law. And it is on matters of faith that the two are most well known to have corresponded. The Greek chronicler Theophanes (d. 817) tells us:

He ('Umar) composed a theological letter for Leo the emperor, thinking to persuade him to become a Muslim (μαγαρίσαι).¹

A fuller statement is given by the Melkite bishop of Menbij, Agapius (d. c.950):

He ('Umar) wrote for Leo the king a letter summoning him therein to Islam, and moreover disputed with him about his religion. Leo made him a reply in which he tore apart his argument and made clear to him the unsoundness of his statement and elucidated to him the light of Christianity by proofs from the revealed Books and by comparisons from the insights and inclinations of the Qur'ān.²

This notice is preceded in both Theophanes and Agapius by brief entries on "a violent earthquake" and 'Umar's banning of wine, and so it may well be that they draw on a common source and Agapius preserves more fully a report which Theophanes has abbreviated.³

¹ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, Boor, C. de, (ed.), (Leipzig, 1883-5), 399; see Kahane, H. R., "Die Magariten", *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, 76 (1960), 185-204, for this form.

² Agapius, *Kitab al-'unwān*, Vasiliev, A., (ed./trans.), *Patrologia Orientalis*, 8 (1912), 502-503.

³ It is known that Theophanes, Agapius and the Jacobite patriarch Dionysius of Tellmahre (d. 845) - whose history was largely incorporated within the Syriac chronicles of Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) and of an anonymous writer who halted at AD 1234 - share a common source for events occurring in Muslim-ruled lands (see Conrad, L. I., "The Conquest of

The earliest and most detailed extant account is provided by Łevond, a late eighth-century Armenian chronicler, who also gives what he claims are the texts of this epistolary exchange.⁴ In the opinion of Gero, however, these were fashioned and interpolated by an eleventh- or twelfth-century reviser of Łevond. He argues that the narrative framework of the correspondence is taken from the tenth-century history of Thomas Artsruni,⁵ and that Łevond's entries on Yazīd II and Hishām have been lifted from the eleventh-century "Universal History" of Stephen of Taron.

He attempts to prove this first by demonstrating the awkwardness of the supposed adaptation.⁶ The narrative on 'Umar begins: "[Suleiman] was succeeded by 'Umar who reigned for two years and five months and then died", and his reign is then described as though, says Gero, "'Umar reappears from the dead". But, as Gero was surely aware, this is how Łevond habitually introduces each of the caliphs. The account of "'Umar's supposed kindness to the Armenians" and "partiality towards the Armenian nobility" is fabricated, says Gero, but this is a very tendentious reading of the text, which simply has:

We are told that he was the noblest among the men of his race. He had the captives return home, those who had been taken into captivity from Armenia by Muḥammad (b. Marwān) ...And when 'Umar was entrusted with the rule he released all the captives and let them return to their respective places.⁷

Arwād: a Source-critical Study in the Historiography of the Early Medieval Near East" in *id.* and Cameron, Averil, (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I*, (Princeton, 1992), 322-48). However, Michael the Syrian and the Chronicle of 1234 make no mention of 'Umar's letter or of his banning wine.

⁴ Łevond, *Patmut'iwn* (St. Petersburg, 1887), chs. 13-14/tr. Arzoumanian, Z., *History of Lewond the Eminent Vardapet of the Armenians*, (Philadelphia, 1982), 70-105. In this essay I cite the translation of Jeffery, A., "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III", *Harvard Theological Review*, 37 (1944), 277-330.

⁵ Thomson, R. W., "Muhammad and the Origin of Islam in Armenian Literary Tradition" in Kouymjian, D., (ed.), *Armenian Studies/Etudes Armniennes in memoriam Hag Berberian*, (Lisbon, 1986), 839, points out that Thomas does not say he has the letter from Łevond, but - as Thomson notes elsewhere in the same article - Thomas does not name his sources.

⁶ Gero, S., *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources*, (CSCO, 346 subsid. 41; Louvain, 1973), 138-40.

⁷ Łevond, *Patmut'iwn*, ch. 13/tr. Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, 70. Thomas Artsruni, *Patmut'iwn*, Patkanian, K., (ed.), (St. Petersburg 1887), bk. 2, ch. 4/tr. Thomson, R. W.,

Moreover, it is known from elsewhere that ‘Umar was indeed responsible for freeing the Armenian prisoners-of-war held in Damascus.⁸ ‘Umar’s alleged change of heart after reading Leo’s letter is “a clumsy sequence”, says Gero, for the caliph’s benevolence towards the Christians had already been noted. Yes indeed, but Łevond’s aim is clearly to explain this benevolence, namely that Leo’s reply had shamed him into it:

As he (‘Umar) read the letter, he felt very confused. As a result of this letter he now exercised more temperance and indulgence towards the Christian people, presenting himself everywhere as an obliging person and, as we said earlier, he was the one who allowed the captives to return after pardoning them for their faults.⁹

Gero’s claim that the material in Łevond on Yazíd II and Hishām is mostly from Stephen of Taron, supplemented by “fanciful elaborations”, is also unconvincing. Łevond’s history, which spans only 160 years, is generally anecdotal and full of speeches and rhetoric, whereas Stephen, who is writing a “Universal History”, is far more concise.¹⁰ It is therefore at least as likely that Stephen gives an excised version of Łevond, whom he does indeed acknowledge as a source.

The second argument put forward by Gero is that Leo’s letter in Łevond is not a translation or reworking from Greek as has been generally thought, but was written originally in Armenian.¹¹ The points in favour of a Greek ur-text

Thomas Artsruni, History of the House of the Artsrunik’, (Detroit, 1985), 171 says: “He was the most noble of them all”.

⁸ Gatteyrias, M. J. A., “Elégie sur les malheurs de l’Arménie et le martyre de Saint Vahan de Kogthen. Episode de l’occupation arabe en Arménie”, *Journal asiatique*, series vii, 16 (1880), 188.

⁹ Łevond, *Patmut’iwn*, ch. 15/tr. Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, 105-6. Thomas Artsruni, (*Patmut’iwn*, bk. 2 ch. 4/tr. Thomson, *Thomas Artsruni*, 171) is here copying from Łevond, as Thomson (*ibid.*, 37) notes.

¹⁰ Stephen Asolik of Taron, *Patmut’iwn tiezerakan*, (St. Petersburg, 1885), bk. 1, ch. 1/tr. Dulaurier, E., *Histoire universelle par Etienne Acogh’ig de Daron*, (Paris, 1883), 4) says he uses “the history of Łevond the priest who [tells] about the coming of the Arabs and what has happened on account of their violence to the Armenians”; one cannot infer from this, as does Gero (*Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 137), “that Stephen could use Łevond’s work for local events in Armenia only”.

¹¹ Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 164-70. Note that Meïmarē, I. E., *Katalogos tōn veōn arabikōn cheirographōn tēs hieras monēs hagias aikaterinēs tou orous Sina/Katālūg al-*

are slight – Leo refers to “our Greek tongue”, calls the Pentateuch *nomos* and uses the Septuagint names for Chronicles and Canticles¹² – and so Gero has no problem in explaining them away. But his only positive argument is that the Armenian vulgate rather than the Septuagint has been used for scriptural citations, which is a common practice among translators.¹³ And the principal argument for a Greek original, namely in what other language could one hope to pass off a letter of Leo, is passed over by Gero.

There is, therefore, reason to be sceptical about Gero's conclusions regarding the Leo-‘Umar correspondence. The issue can now be resolved to some extent in the light of the studies of Gaudeul, who claims to have unearthed the original letter of ‘Umar to Leo.¹⁴ He recovers this from two documents: the first half from an Aljamiado (Romance written in Arabic characters) text of the early sixteenth century, the second half from an Arabic text of the ninth century.¹⁵ Though both are defective, they overlap for ten paragraphs and can be seen to resemble each other so exactly that they must be versions of the same document. What this document was is given in the title of the Aljamiado text:

makhtūtāt al-‘arabiyya al-muktashafa hadīthan bi-dayr sānt katarīn al-muqaddas bi-tūr Sīnā (Athens, 1985), 41/43, signals an Arabic Sinai Ms. containing a letter of ‘Umar to Leo, which may affect the question of the original language of the dispute (though I can see no obvious resemblances to our text in the two photographs published by Meïmarē).

¹² These and other arguments are given by Beck, H., *Vorsehung und Vorherbestimmung in der theologischen Literatur der Byzantiner*, (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 114; Rome, 1937), 44-5 n. 50, and followed by Khoury, A. T., *Les théologiens byzantins et l’Islam: textes et auteurs*, (Louvain and Paris, 1969), 201-2.

¹³ Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 165 n. 36, observes that Chahnazarian, V., and Jeffery, A., used French and English Bibles when translating Łevond, rather than rendering from the Armenian.

¹⁴ Gaudeul, J. M., “The Correspondence between Leo and ‘Umar. ‘Umar's Letter Rediscovered?”, *Islamochristiana*, 10 (1984), 116-57, gives full discussion. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 162-3, and Thomson, “Muhammad and the Origin of Islam”, 839, point out the very “cursory” nature of ‘Umar's letter in Łevond, but the latter does state explicitly that he is only giving a summary and one should note that there are remarkable similarities between his epitome and the material about to be discussed, which may mean that Łevond was telling the truth.

¹⁵ The Aljamiado text is edited by Cardaillac, D., *La polmique anti-chrétienne du manuscrit aljamiado N 4944 de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Madrid*, 2 vols. (Ph.D thesis; Univ. Paul Valéry, Montpellier, 1972), 2.194-267; I cite the translation of Gaudeul, “The Correspondence between Leo and ‘Umar”, 132-48. The Arabic version is edited and translated in Sourdel, D., “Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d’époque abbaside contre les chrétiens”, *Revue des études islamiques*, 34 (1966), 27-33/13-26.

This is the epistle that ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, king of the believers, wrote to Lyon, king of the Christian infidels.

This letter, as reconstructed from the two texts, voices most of the objections to which Leo's letter in *Levond* is responding, and does so in a very similar order and using similar expressions. Certain themes are distinctive and not found in other Muslim-Christian dispute texts, such as the alleged saying of Jesus that “naked you came into the world, and naked you shall go” and that “God made Satan a Treasurer”, and so their presence in both the Arabic/*Aljamiado* and Armenian documents makes it certain that they are somehow related. The *Aljamiado* text is equipped with a chain of transmitters (*isnād*), which begins “Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Awf al-Ṭa‘ī passed it on to us in the town of Hims”. Gaudeul takes this man, or a contemporary of his, to be the author, because his death date of 885 coincides with the estimated time of composition of the Arabic text. By the late ninth century, however, *isnād* criticism is highly developed and scholarship professional, and so one should not simply dismiss *isnāds* as fictitious without some consideration. Sourdél, the editor of the Arabic text, gives the late ninth/early tenth century as a *terminus ante quem*, and notes that the text compares well with a manuscript of 857.¹⁶ Moreover, the text as we have it could be a copy. The rest of the *isnād* runs: “It has been transmitted to us by ‘Abd al-Quddūs b. al-Ḥajjāj who said it has been transmitted to us by Isma‘īl b. ‘Ayyāsh”. These were both scholars of Hims who died in 827 and 798 respectively, so it is plausible that they transmitted from each other. That there is no attempt to get back to ‘Umar himself is another point in the *isnād*'s favour.

Ostensibly, then, the text of ‘Umar's letter to Leo originates from the end of the eighth century. This is not impossible, and certainly it fits well with the comment in Leo's reply that “it is now 800 years since Jesus Christ appeared”.¹⁷ And it accords with the contemporary situation which witnessed the efflorescence of Muslim-Christian debate. Finally, it coincides with the time of writing of *Levond*, who would then have picked it up very soon after its composition and incorporated it into his history.¹⁸ The only concrete reason advanced by scholars for a later date is the mention of the “Jahdi” in Leo's

¹⁶ Sourdél, “Un pamphlet musulman”, 2-3.

¹⁷ Jeffery, “Ghevond's Text”, 296.

¹⁸ His chronicle halts in the year 788, the last few entries giving evidence of eye-witness material; see Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond*, 25-6, and Jeffery, “Ghevond's Text”, 275-6.

reply, thought to mean the followers of the writer Jāḥiẓ (d. 869).¹⁹ This sect, however, is the invention of these scholars; it is difficult after translation from Arabic to Armenian, very likely via Greek, to determine who are meant, but certainly not devotees of Jāḥiẓ.²⁰

Gaudeul concludes that a Muslim writer of Hims drew up this letter, presenting it as from 'Umar to Leo, and soon afterwards a Christian answered, assuming the identity of Leo. Muslims kept "'Umar's letter", of which one copy reached Spain and was translated into Romance and continued being copied as late as the sixteenth century. Christians kept "Leo's letter" and translated it into Armenian, whence it became integrated into Էւոնդ's *History*.²¹ The story is not, however, so simple, for 'Umar's letter does not only contain objections which Leo then answers, but also includes responses to Leo's replies:

Leo - 'Umar: We do not hope to find there (in paradise) springs of wine, honey or milk. We do not expect to enjoy there commerce with women who remain forever virgin and to have children by them.

'Umar - Leo: You wrote rebuking us for saying that the inhabitants of paradise eat, drink, wear clothes and get married.

Leo - 'Umar: Do you feel no shame to have venerated that house which is called the Ka'ba, the dwelling of Abraham...?

'Umar - Leo: You wrote rebuking us for turning to face the direction of Abraham's place of worship when we pray...

Leo - 'Umar: As a consequence of this licence (given by Muḥammad) a good number of you have contracted the habit of multiplying their commerce with women as if it were a question of tilling the fields.

'Umar - Leo: You rebuke us as well for having many women.

Leo - 'Umar: Nor can I forget the unchasteness of your Prophet and the manner full of artifice whereby he succeeded in seducing the woman Zeda...As for the example of David who took Uriah's wife, as you remind me, it is well known that therein he committed a sin before the Eternal.

¹⁹ Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text", 276; Khoury, *Théologiens byzantins*, 202-3; Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 163 n. 31.

²⁰ See Crone, P., and Cook, M., *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World*, (Cambridge, 1977), 163 n. 26, 165 n. 49; Newman, N. A., *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue. A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries*, (Philadelphia, 1993), 49, suggests that the Yazīdīs are meant.

²¹ Gaudeul, "The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar", 127-8.

‘Umar - Leo: You rebuke us because our Prophet married a woman (Zaynab) whom her husband had repudiated... It is indeed what David did in the case of Uriya and his wife.²²

The last example is particularly noteworthy, for not only is ‘Umar defending himself against Leo's accusation – David did the same, but Leo's accusation includes a reply to that defence – David was wrong. Moreover, though the subjects are the same, ‘Umar's replies, especially the first two, do not exactly fit the criticisms of Leo. It is, therefore, evident that we do not have here a simple exchange of letters.

Both ‘Umar and Leo open their address by mentioning previous correspondence. ‘Umar says:

You have written to me many letters where you have treated questions concerning Jesus and your religion, questions that you treat personally and upon which your messenger enlarged. I do not know what made you write to me again. Is it because you want to verify what it was I wrote to you about?²³

Leo asserts that “it is true that we have several times written to you... but it has always been about mundane affairs, never about affairs divine”. But there is reason to doubt this, for though he avers that “nothing would induce us to discuss with you our doctrines, since our Lord and Master Himself has bidden us refrain from exposing our unique and divine doctrine before heretics”, he nevertheless continues by saying that “Holy Writ bids us reply to those who question us”.²⁴ A possible solution, then, is that a number of Leo-‘Umar/‘Umar-Leo letters were composed in the course of the eighth century, and what has come down to us is a compilation from or rehashing of such works.

One could adduce a number of arguments to demonstrate that at least some of the material in the text as we have it is from the early eighth century. On the Muslim side we have a report that describes the circumstances under

²² Jeffery, “Ghevond's Text”, 322-4, 328; Sourdel, “Un pamphlet musulman”, 31-2/22-4. Newman, *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 47-53, argues for the authenticity of the Leo-‘Umar letters, but he does not notice the composite nature of the documents.

²³ Gaudeul, “The Correspondence between ‘Umar and Leo”, 133.

²⁴ All these quotes are from Jeffery, “Ghevond's Text”, 282.

which an exchange of religious writings took place. Allegedly, 'Umar despatched to Leo 'Abdallāh b. 'Abd al-A'lā and a certain "man from (the tribe of) 'Ans", who narrates the following:

When we came to him (Leo) we found ourselves before a man of Arabic speech and hailing from Mar'ash. 'Abdallāh began to debate, so I said "hold on" and praised God and prayed for His Prophet. Then I said: "I was sent by the same man as him (i.e. by 'Umar). Now, the Commander of the Faithful calls you to Islam. If you accept you will attain the right way, although I think that misery is already decreed for you unless God wishes otherwise. If you accept [well and good], if not write a reply to our letter."²⁵

A short debate ensues between 'Abdallāh and Leo, then the emperor "wrote a reply to our writings, and we returned to 'Umar with it". The account is of course anecdotal and polemical, but its knowledge of Leo's eastern origins is a point in its favour.

More substantial corroboration comes in the form of a Latin version of Leo's letter to 'Umar. This was first published in 1508 by the French physician and humanist Symphorianus Champerius, who included it in his *De triplici disciplina*. In a short note which precedes the text Champerius introduces the work as follows:

The letter of the emperor Leo (*Lenis*) addressed to 'Umar (*Amarum*), king of the Saracens. This letter was translated from Greek into the Chaldaean language. Now indeed, God willing, we shall turn [it] from the Chaldean expression (*eloquio*) into Latin in accordance with the particular nature of [that] speech (*iuxta proprietatem sermonis*).²⁶

²⁵ Muhammad b. Yazīd al-Mubarrad, *Al-kitāb al-kāmil*, Wright, W., (ed.), (Leipzig, 1874-92), 1.295.

²⁶ Symphorianus Champerius, *De triplici disciplina cuius partes sunt philosophia naturalis, medicina, theologia, moralis philosophia, integrantes quadrivium*, (Lyons, 1508) - the *editio princeps* I use (Bodleian) has no pagination. The text was reprinted in *Maxima bibliotheca veterum patrum*, vol. 17 (Lyons, 1677), 44-7, and in *Patrologia Graeca*, Migne, J. P., (ed.), (Paris, 1857-66), vol. 107, 315-24, but both omit this note and wrongly attribute the letter to Leo VI; see Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 154-5, esp. n. 11 thereto.

Unfortunately, it is not known on what grounds Champerius claimed a Greek genealogy for this letter; it may simply have been an assumption based on Leo's authorship. Since it is a reply to a Muslim adversary, Chaldean presumably means Arabic here, a usage found elsewhere in Latin Christian writings.²⁷

Gero, wishing to show that Leo's letter in *Levond* is an original Armenian composition, argues "that the two letters are quite independent documents and cannot even be regarded as two separate replies to the same Muslim attack". Khoury, on the other hand, says "there is no doubt that, in the two cases, it is a matter of the same exchange of correspondence between the emperor and the caliph"; and Jeffery concurs: "the Latin, though much briefer and somewhat differently arranged, is really the same material, meeting the same Muslim objections with essentially the same arguments".²⁸ There are big differences between the two writings. The Latin version is only about one sixth the length of the Armenian and, unlike the Armenian, it does not make constant allusion to a letter already written. Nor does it have the distinctive features, such as the references to Jesus coming naked into the world or to Satan as God's treasurer, and it has very few Biblical quotes in common with the Armenian. It does, however, follow the same general layout: scriptures, divinity of Jesus, defence of Christian practices, attack on Muslim practices; and, like the Armenian, it simply lists Old and New Testament witnesses to Christ's divinity. Though each of the arguments is familiar from Muslim-Christian polemics, enough of them occur in both texts to guarantee that there is some relation between them. But the divergence is too great for the Latin to be an abbreviation of the Armenian or for the latter to be an expansion of the Latin. The most likely explanation is that they are two distinct redactions made from common material, probably Greek in origin and earlier than *Levond*.²⁹ Turning to the contents of Leo's reply, one notes the remark of the emperor to 'Umar that "it is a hundred years more or less since your religion appeared",³⁰ which is correct for the reign of 'Umar (99-101 AH), though this could of course have been added to add *vraisemblance* to the purported setting. More cogent is Meyendorff's argument that "the text clearly

²⁷ Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 156-62, worries too much about a Syriac version; Eulogius, Sancho and other Latin Christians used Chaldean to signify Arabic, see Daniel, N., *The Arabs and Medieval Europe*, (London, 1975), 32, 34, 86.

²⁸ Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 154, cf. 162; Khoury, *Théologiens byzantins*, 201; Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text", 273-4.

²⁹ Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text", 274-5; Khoury, *Théologiens byzantins*, 201-2.

³⁰ Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text", 295.

reflects a state of mind which was predominant at the court of Constantinople in the years which preceded the iconoclastic decree of 726...for neither the Iconoclasts nor the Orthodox were capable, at a later date, of adopting towards the images so detached an attitude".³¹ Certainly the text betrays no sign of images as a burning issue:

As for images we do not give them a like respect (as for the Cross), not having received in Holy Scripture any commandment whatsoever in regard to this. Nevertheless, finding in the Old Testament that divine command which authorized Moses to have executed in the tabernacle the figures of the cherubim, and animated by a sincere attachment for the disciples of the Lord...we have always felt a desire to conserve their images, which have come down to us from their times as their living representation...But as for the wood and the colours we do not give them any reverence.³²

And one might again see this as a vestige of an earlier version. Finally, a number of the opinions expressed about Islamic practices and beliefs are voiced in other apologetic writings of the first half of the eighth century. The attack on the Ka'ba and its stone, the licentious nature of Muslim marriage, divorce and concubinage, and the carnal vision of paradise, are all found in John of Damascus (wr. 730s).³³ Muslim acceptance of the Pentateuch and rejection of the prophets, and adherence to circumcision and sacrifice feature in two Syriac disputations which most likely belong to the first half of the eighth century.³⁴

³¹ Meyendorff, J., "Byzantine Views of Islam", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 18 (1964), 127.

³² Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text", 322.

³³ Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text", 323-6, 328-9; John of Damascus, *De haeresibus* 100/101, *Patrologia Graeca*, 94, 769AD, 772B. Both refer to Muhammad marrying the wife of Zayd (Qur'an xxxiii.37) and to wives as a tilth (ii.223).

³⁴ Scriptural position: Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text", 299-300; Nau, F., "Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens", *Journal asiatique*, ser. xi, 5 (1915), 248/257, 250-1/260 (for the date see Reinink, G., "The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam", *Oriens Christianus*, 77 (1993), 182). Circumcision and sacrifice: Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text", 314-5; Monk of Bet Hale, *Disputation*, Ms. Diyarbakr 95, fol. 2b (the relevant portion is quoted in Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 12-13; for the date see *ibid.*, 163 n. 23).

However, some of the material is certainly of the late eighth/early ninth century. This is intimated by Leo's statement that "it is now 800 years since Christ appeared", and is reinforced by the appearance of arguments known from dispute texts of this period. That Adam, like Jesus, was not born of man and so should, according to the Christians' reasoning, also be regarded as a god, is an argument used to the same end by Jāḥiẓ (d. 869).³⁵ In defence of the Muslim paradise where there is food and drink 'Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. c. 855) also cites Matthew xxvi.29: "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until I drink it again with you in the kingdom of heaven".³⁶ And the subject of the early history of the Qur'ān crops up in other polemical texts of this time. Leo says:

It was 'Umar, Abū Turāb and Salmān the Persian who composed that ("your P'ourkan"), even though the rumour has got around among you that God sent it down from the heavens...

As for your [book] you have already given us examples of such falsifications, and one knows among others of a certain Ḥajjāj, named by you as governor of Persia, who had men gather your ancient books, which he replaced by others composed by himself according to his taste and which he disseminated everywhere in your nation, because it was easier by far to undertake such a task among a people speaking a single language. From this destruction, nevertheless, there escaped a few of the works of Abū Turāb, for Ḥajjāj could not make them disappear completely.³⁷

³⁵ Sourdél, "Un pamphlet musulman", 27/14; Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāḥiẓ, "Al-radd 'alā 'l-naṣārā" in Hārūn, 'A. S., (ed.), *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, vol.3 (Cairo, 1979), 342/tr. Allouche, I. S., "Un traité de polémique christiano-musulmane au IXe siècle", *Hespéris*, 26 (1939), 148. This argument and the following one – that Ezekiel likewise raised the dead and so should be put on a par with Jesus – are also found in the disputation between the patrician Bashīr and a Damascene notable named Wāsil, which is plausibly of the ninth century (see Griffith, S., "Bashīr/Besēr: Boon Companion of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III; the Islamic Recension of his Story in Leiden Oriental Ms. 951", *Le Muséon*, 103 (1990), 293-327).

³⁶ Sourdél, "Un pamphlet musulman", 31/22; Ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb al-dīn wa-'l-daula*, Nuweihed, A., (ed.), (Beirut, 1977), 201/tr. Mingana, A., *The Book of Religion and Empire by 'Ali Tabari*, (Manchester, 1922), 157.

³⁷ Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text", 292, 297-8.

A very similar version of events is narrated by 'Abd al-Masīh al-Kindī and Abraham of Tiberias, both allegedly writing in the reign of Ma'mūn (813-33). They speak of the part played by various Companions of Muḥammad in putting together the Qur'ān and of the first redaction made by 'Uthmān:

Then there was the matter of Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, namely that he gathered together every last copy and caused to be omitted from the text many things..., and a version (*naskh*) was written according to the composition (*ta'līf*) favoured by Ḥajjāj in six copies (*maṣāḥif*), and one was sent to Egypt, another to Syria, another to Madīna, another to Mecca, another to Kufa and another to Basra.³⁸

Kindi avers to his Muslim addressee that "all that I have said is drawn from your own authorities". And this would appear to be so, for we find notices in Arabic sources that "Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf wrote exemplars of the Qur'ān (*maṣāḥif*) and sent them to the chief provinces",³⁹ that he changed the wording or eliminated variant readings,⁴⁰ or introduced diacritical marks into the text.⁴¹ The convergence of reports upon the figure of Ḥajjāj makes it almost certain that he undertook some sort of revision of the Muslim

³⁸ Tien, A., (ed.), *Risālat 'Abdallāh b. Isma'īl al-Hāshimī ilā 'Abd al-Masīh b. Ishāq al-Kindī*, (London, 1885), 137/tr Tartar, G., *Dialogue islamo-chrétien sous le calife al-Ma'mūn (813-834). Les épîtres d'Al-Hashimī et d'Al-Kindī*, (Paris, 1985), 190. Abraham of Tiberias (Marcuzzo, G. B., (ed./tr.), *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Hāshimī à Jérusalem* (Rome, 1986), 331/330) says Ḥajjāj "compiled it and arranged it" (*allafahu wa-rattabahu*). Both also mention the survival of Ali's copy (for his role in writing/editing the Qur'ān see Nöldeke, T. and Schwally, F., *Geschichte des Qurāns*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1919), 8-11).

³⁹ Ibn Duqmāq, *Kitāb al-intiṣār/Description de l'Égypte*, Vollers, K., (ed.), (Bibliothèque Khédiviale; Cairo, 1893), 4.72; cf. Ibn 'Asākīr, *Tahdhīb al-ta'rikh*, Badrān, A.-Q., and 'Ubayd, A., (eds.), (Damascus, 1911-32), 4.82.

⁴⁰ Ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-maṣāḥif*, Jeffery, A., (ed.), under the title: *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān. The Old Codices* (Leiden, 1937), 49-50, 117-8 (*bāb mā ghayyara al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf fī muṣḥaf 'Uthmān*); Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-kāmil fī 'l-ta'rikh*, Tornberg, C. J., (Leiden, 1851-76), 4.463, and Ibn 'Asākīr, *Tahdhīb al-ta'rikh*, 4.69 (opposition to Mas'ūd's reading).

⁴¹ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān w'ambā' abnā' al-zamān*, 'Abbās, I., (ed.), (Beirut, 1968-72), 2.32; Ibn Abī Dāwūd, *Maṣāḥif*, 119.

Scripture, but this may have been no more than the sponsoring of an improved edition.⁴²

To conclude, then, the 'Umar-Leo correspondence is a product of the second century of Islam and as such deserves further study.

⁴² See further Mingana, A., "The Transmission of the Kur'an", *Journal of the Manchester Egyptian and Oriental Society*, 1915/16, 25-47, and Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 17-18.

