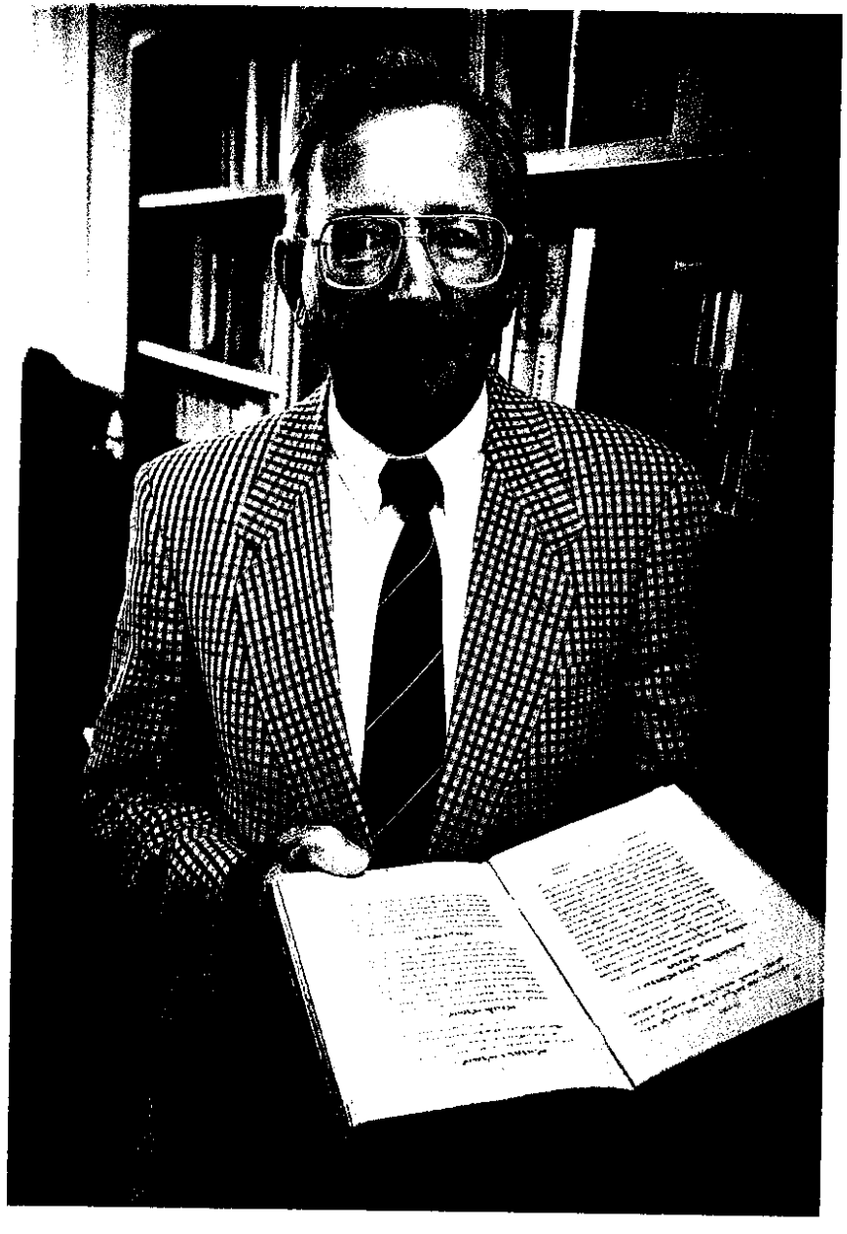
[JACOB OF EDESSA]



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Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers

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JACOB OF EDESSA ON ISLAM[1]

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When, more than a decade ago, Professor Han Drijvers wrote the entry for Jacob of Edessa in the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, he noted that the *opus* of this "most prominent representative of Christian Hellenism in the Syriac-speaking world" has remained only partially edited[2]. Particularly neglected is his correspondence[3]. This is a shame, for Jacob's position as bishop of Edessa and his reputation as an accomplished scholar meant that his opinion was much sought after, and so in his numerous letters to friends and acquaintances we are granted a fascinating glimpse of life in late seventh century Mesopotamia. This article will examine such of this material as sheds light on Christian relations with and knowledge of the religion of Islam in this period.

An anonymous biography of Jacob informs us that he was born and educated in the village of Ayndaba near Antioch, thence proceeding to the monastery of Qenneshre and later to Alexandria in order to further his studies, notably of Greek. He returned to Syria, taking up residence in Edessa for a time before being appointed its bishop in 684. His refusal to relax church rulings and regulations brought him into conflict with the patriarch Julian and fellow bishops, and he resigned his post after four years. He retired to the monastery of Mar Jacob at Kayshum to polemicise against "certain people who transgress the Law of God and trample upon the canons of the church"[4], then accepted a commission to

[1] This article draws on an unpublished paper of the same title given at the First American Syriac Studies Symposium, Rhode Island, June 1991, and on the entry for Jacob in my *Seeing Islam as Others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*, 12), Princeton 1997, 161-168.

[2] H.J.W. Drijvers, "Jakob von Edessa", *TRE* 16 (1987), 468-470, which lists all the secondary literature relevant to Jacob (little has appeared since then). For the chronological parameters of his life see Omert J. Schrier, "Chronological Problems concerning the Lives of Severus bar Mašqā, Athanasius of Balad, Julianus Romāyā, Yoḥannān Sābā, George of the Arabs and Jacob of Edessa", *OrChr* 75 (1991), 72-77.

[3] This is, however, now being rectified by Jan van Ginkel of Groningen University, who is preparing a study and edition of the extant letters of Jacob.

[4] This is the title of a tract by Jacob found in Ms. British Library Add. 12.154, fol. 164b (see William Wright, *A Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London 1870-72, 2.984).

rejuvenate Greek studies at the monastery of Eusebona. Problems with Grecophobe brothers prompted him to leave and he spent the next nine years at Tel'ada convent "revising the Old Testament"[5]. The Edessans entreated him to be their bishop once more, to which he assented, but died after only four months in office in 708[6].

Though born at the time of the Arab conquest of the Near East (630s-640s), Jacob grew up in what was still very much a Christian world. Only in 697 was Byzantine currency replaced with Muslim models[7], only in 700 did Arabic begin to supplant Greek as the administrative language of the empire[8]. It was still largely Christians who staffed the Muslim bureaucracy and who acted as advisors to Muslim rulers. Most prominent in Jacob's day were Athanasius bar Gumaye, a very wealthy nobleman of Edessa, whom the caliph 'Abd al-Malik made guardian of his brother 'Abd al-'Azīz, emir of Egypt, and Sergius son of Manṣūr, secretary to a number of caliphs in the second half of the seventh century[9]. At the local level in particular, existing patterns of government and tax-collection were left mostly intact by the Arabs, entrusted to the same local aristocracies in former Sasanid territory and still the preserve of Greek-educated Christians in ex-Byzantine lands[10]. In the 690s we

[5] This is confirmed by the colophon of two manuscripts containing revisions of the Bible — British Library Add. 14,429 (Wright, *Catalogue*, 1.38) and Paris syr. 27 (H. Zotenberg, *Catalogue des manuscrits syriaques et sabéens (mandaïtes) de la Bibliotheque Nationale*, Paris 1874, 11) — which claim to have been completed by Jacob at "the great convent of Tel'ada" in AG 1016/705.

[6] The biography is preserved by Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* (ed./trans. J.B. Chabot), Paris 1899-1910, 4.445-446/2.471-472.

[7] This is when the first aniconic coins appeared; adaptations of Byzantine and Sasanian models had preceded this. See M. Bates, "History, Geography and Numismatics in the First Century of Islamic Coinage", *Revue Suisse de Numismatique* 65 (1986), 231-261.

[8] The process, which varied according to region, is outlined in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*[2], ed. H.A.R. Gibb *et al.*, London and Leiden 1960-, *s.v.* "Dīwān i".

[9] The anonymous *Chronicon ad AD 1234 pertinens I* edited by J.B. Chabot (*CSCO* 81, Syr 36), Paris 1920, 294, says that 'Abd al-Malik "ordered that Athanasius should be not only his ('Abd al-'Azīz's) scribe, but the manager of his affairs and that authority and administrative direction should be his, while 'Abd al-'Azīz should have only nominal power". On Sergius see especially Theophanes, *Chronographia I* (ed. C. de Boor), Leipzig 1883, 365, and Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *Al-'iqd al-farīd* (ed. M.M. Qumayḥa and A.-M. Tarḥīnī), Beirut 1983, 4.171, 247, 252, 5.124, 147-148. In general see L. Cheikho, *Les vizirs et secrétaires arabes chrétiens en Islam* (*Patrimoine arabe chrétien*, 11), Jounieh 1987.

[10] "The Christians were still the scribes, leaders and governors of the lands of the Arabs", notes the *Chronicon ad AD 1234*, 294, with reference to the period of governorship of Muḥammad ibn Marwān (685-710) in Mesopotamia. Competence in Greek was essential as long as it remained the language of bureaucracy.

find as governor of Edessa one Anastasius bar Andreas[11], at Samosata an Elustriya of Ḥarran with his tax-collector Sergius; and at Dara another Elustriya, whose daughter Patricia was a benefactress of the convent of Qartmin[12]. These were very likely Melkites, and at Anḥel, the principal village of Ṭur 'Abdin, we encounter a Melkite dynasty of local governors, whose members were instrumental in rebuilding the castle of Ṭur 'Abdin in 684 and in the construction of a new church at Nisibis in 706[13].

Intellectual life within the West Syrian community also appeared little affected by Muslim rule. Throughout the seventh century inter-sectarian debate raged with undiminished vitality, and the study of Greek learning that took off in the late fifth century under such figures as Philoxenus of Mabbug and Sergius of Resh'aina continued to flourish. Severus Sebokht (d. 665), bishop of the convent of Qenneshre, wrote much on mathematical and philosophical subjects, and subsequent products of that institution — notably Athanasius of Balad, future patriarch of Antioch (683-687), Jacob of Edessa, and George, bishop of the Arabs (688-724) — were responsible for numerous translations and commentaries of Greek texts[14]. Indeed, from their writings, which make scant reference to the Muslims, one would infer that the Christians carried on as though nothing had happened. Likewise, from Muslim histories about the seventh century, which deal almost exclusively with internal quarrels, names of holders of high office and battles against amorphous external foes, one would infer that the Muslims carried on as though no one else were there. They seem two parallel worlds, the Arabian one of feuds, raids and tribal councils simply floating above that of the Christian Near East with little exchange between them beyond taxes and prisoners of war[15]. This was particularly the case for Mesopotamia where,

[11] *Chronicon ad AD 1234*, 294, which also names Mardanshah bar Zarnosh and his son as governors of Nisibis, and Simeon bar Nun as governor of Ḥaluga.

[12] A. Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier*, Cambridge 1990, 165-167 (citing the *Life* of Theodotus of Amida, d. 698).

[13] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 162 (citing the *Life* of Simeon of the Olives, d. 734).

[14] See S.P. Brock, "From Antagonism to Assimilation: Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning", in: N. Garsoian, T. Matthews, R. Thomson (eds.), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, Washington DC 1982, 17-34; S.P. Brock, "Syriac Culture in the Seventh Century", *Aram* 1 (1989), 268-280.

[15] For what additional exchange one might adduce see H.A.R. Gibb, "Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyads", *DOP* 12 (1958), 219-233; W.E. Kaegi, "The Frontier: Barrier or Bridge", in: *The 17th International Byzantine Congress, Major Papers*, New Rochelle 1986, 279-303; D.J. Sahas, "The Seventh Century in Byzantine-Muslim Relations: Characteristics and Forces", *International Christian Muslim Review* 2 (1991), 3-22.

unlike Iraq, there were no garrison cities, the foci of Muslim settlement in the first few decades of Islam, and opportunities for Muslim-Christian contact were correspondingly fewer.

Towards the end of the seventh century, however, we can begin to detect signs of change. Jacob's stint as bishop of Edessa (684-688) coincided with the second Arab civil war (683-92), one outcome of which was a diminishment of the barriers between Christians and Muslims. In the first place, the former came to be embroiled in the politics of the latter. Whether as clients or slaves, Christians fought in Muslim armies; and those with influence were courted for their favour. Thus the general ʿUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād, seeking a foothold in Nisibis, promised John of Dasen, metropolitan of that city: "If you will accompany me, I will depose him (the patriarch Ḥnanishoʿ) and establish you in the patriarchate in his place."[16] Secondly, the civil war led to an increasing professionalisation of the army, a gradual division of the Muslims into soldiers and civilians, which in turn stimulated Muslim settlement outside the garrison towns[17]. Ever since the first civil war (656-660) military men had begun making their way into Mesopotamia: Banū Arqam, a sub-tribe of Kinda, settled in Edessa in the reign of Muʿāwiya (660-680), and one Ḥātim ibn al-Nuʿmān al-Bāhilī served as governor of Ḥarran, Edessa, Samosata and their environs for the rebel leader Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar (685-690)[18]. But after the second outbreak civilian figures tend to crop up with increasing frequency: Edessa had a Muslim tax-collector in the 690s, and soon thereafter its own Muslim scholar — Zayd ibn Abī Anīsa (d. 127/744), a client of Ghanī of Qays[19]. Further afield, we hear of Muslims as well as Christians responding to the appeal of Theodotus, bishop of Amida (690s), for money to ransom some captives seized from the town; and also of Simeon, bishop of Ḥarran (700-734), building a mosque and school at Nisibis for the Muslims in gratitude for their allowing him to build a church there[20].

[16] Reported by the late seventh-century Mesopotamian monk John bar Penkaye, *Ktābā d-rīsh mellē*, in: A. Mingana (ed./trans.), *Sources Syriaques*, Leipzig 1907, Part 2, 156/184; also translated by S.P. Brock, "North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century. Book XV of John Bar Penkaye's Riš Melle", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987), 65.

[17] P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses. The Evolution of the Islamic Polity*, Cambridge 1980, 37-41.

[18] Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-muḥabbar* (ed. I. Lichtenstädter), Hyderabad 1942, 295 (Banū Arqam); Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf V* (ed. S.D.F. Goitein), Jerusalem 1936, 251 (Ḥātim).

[19] Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, 4.448/2.476 (tax-collector named Muḥammad); Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt* (ed. S. Zakkār), Damascus 1967, 2.822, and Abū Zurʿa, *Taʾrīkh* (ed. Sh. al-Qūjānī), Damascus 1980, 252 (Zayd).

[20] Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 167 (Theodotus), 162 (Simeon).

As Christians and Muslims came into closer contact with one another, the need to regulate relations between them became more pressing, and Jacob is one of the first authorities we know to have responded to this[21]. He produced seven cycles of legal decisions, two existing simply as lists of rulings on various issues, the other five taking the form of judgements of Jacob given in response to questions posed by some correspondent[22]. His stint as a bishop and his authority make it likely that much of the material reflects real problems encountered by and put to Jacob, but the question-answer style which these cycles adopt is also a popular literary device. Moreover, a question and its answer will often vary in length in different manuscripts, for their pithy nature meant they could easily be compressed, amplified and transposed.

The subject matter is diverse, but a large proportion is taken up with the issue of purity, both in liturgical and social practice. In the latter sphere this meant caution in one's dealings with heretics and unbelievers. Thus one should not make altar-coverings, priests' garments or drapes from cloth on which is embroidered the Muslim profession of faith (*tawdītā hāgāraytā*)[23]; an altar used by Arabs (*ṭayyāyē*) for eating off must first be washed and purified before fit for re-use[24]; one should lock the church doors during a service lest "Muslims (*mhaggrāyē*) enter and mingle with the believers, and disturb them and laugh at the holy mysteries"[25]; and one should not go "before the leaders of the world (*rīshānē d-ʿālmā*) or before the pagans" for the settlement of disputes[26]. Jacob does, however, recognise that one must sometimes bow to constraint, and nowhere does he recommend martyrdom. Usually one

[21] Two contemporaries of Jacob, the East Syrian catholicos George I (661-681) and the Melkite monk Anastasius of Sinai (d. *ca.* 700), also show concern for this issue; see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 92-103, 193-195.

[22] Vööbus calls the former "canons" and the latter "resolutions" (*Entscheidungen*). This distinction has some validity, especially for the form of the material, but note that what was once a resolution may appear in later collections as a canon (this is true for almost all the material from Jacob in Bar Hebraeus' *Nomocanon*).

[23] Jacob of Edessa, *Canons (BH)*, 12. Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-maḥāsin wa-l-masāwī* (ed. F. Schwally), Giessen 1902, 498-499, may well then be right that it was ʿAbd al-Malik who first had Muslim slogans printed on cloth as well as on coins and documents.

[24] Jacob, *Letter to Addai*, Q. no. 25.

[25] Jacob of Edessa, *Letter II to John the Stylite*, Q. no. 9.

[26] Jacob, *Canons*, no. 30. This ruling is found in much briefer form in the collection preserved in Ms. Damascus Patr. 8/11, which is edited and translated by A. Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition I* (*CSCO* 367-368, Syr 161-162), Louvain 1975, 272/247. At a synod convened by the catholicos George I in 676 it was similarly urged that "those to be judged should not go outside the church before the pagans and non-believers" (J.B. Chabot (ed.), *Synodicon orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens*, Paris 1902, 219-220).

should not eat with a non-orthodox, but if a Chalcedonian or Muslim governor orders it, then "need allows it"[27]. If in dire need a deacon may serve soldiers on campaign[28], and if compelled by the Arabs, a monk or a priest may participate in battle, though he faces suspension if he kills someone[29]. And Jacob is willing to be lenient in matters that "do no harm". Christians may attend the funeral processions of pagans and Jews, and the latter may reciprocate, if out of philanthropy[30]. Priests may give the blessing of the saints to Muslims or pagans (*mhaggrāyē aw ḥanpē*)[31], and may teach the children of Muslims, Harranians and Jews[32]. They may pardon and give the eucharist to (presumably repentant) apostates[33] in danger of dying, and bury them after their death if no bishop is in the vicinity[34]. And in the thorny area of apostasy Jacob also shows himself accommodating, probably wishing to play down the problem:

> We should not rebaptise a Christian who becomes a Muslim or pagan (*kristiyānā da-mhaggar aw maḥnep*) then returns, but the prayer of penitents is to be said over him by the bishop and a period of penance enjoined upon him[35].
>
> A woman who is married to a Muslim and who says that she will convert to Islam (*thaggar*) unless she is given the host, should be granted it, but with a penalty that is appropriate for her to receive[36].

These two rulings demonstrate how early apostasy to Islam became a serious issue, a fact vividly illustrated by a contemporary apocalypse which laments that "many people who were members of the church will deny the true faith of the Christians, along with the holy cross and the awesome mysteries, without being subjected to any compulsion, lashings or blows"[37]. But though he probably wished to declare to renegades that they would be taken back, Jacob was not advocating a policy of "anything goes". Around the first case he drapes a veiled threat, intimating that such apostasy may deprive one of the grace of baptism; and in the latter instance he insists that "even if there is not fear of her apostatising" some "rebuke" was necessary "so that other women fear lest they too stumble".

The material so far considered conveys information on Christian dealings with Muslims. A couple of Jacob's letters go further and give us some insight into the nature of Islam in the late seventh century, or at least one Christian's understanding thereof[38]. Jacob's most frequent correspondent was John the Stylite from Litarb near Aleppo, and in one of his many exchanges with his friend, while attempting to demonstrate that the Virgin Mary is of the house of David, Jacob presents the Muslim view of Jesus and Mary:

[27] Jacob of Edessa, *Letter to Addai*, Q. nos. 56-57.

[28] Jacob, *Letter to Addai*, Q. no. 79. The questions begins: "A deacon of that time of hunger and want (*zabnā haw d-kapnā wa-d-ḥasīrūtā*)", seeming to intend a specific occasion, perhaps the "unparalleled plague and famine" of AH 67/687 described by the contemporary John bar Penkaye, *Rīsh mellē*, 159-164/186-192 (trans. Brock, "Book XV", 67-71). Jacob's reply is sympathetic: "The fact that as soon as his situation eased he immediately fled from evil and hastened to his former position of indigence, shows that it was out of necessity that he did what he did."

[29] Ibid., Q. no. 80. Again a specific occasion seems meant: "When our bishop of Mardin was attacked by those from the outside (*hānōn d-men l-bar*), the Arabs, who are ruling on the inside (*ṭayyāyē hānōn d-shallīṭīn men l-gawīn men l-gaw*), ordered that everyone go out to the wall to fight and did not exempt anyone from going out, not even the priests. Then a priest or a deacon, when the battle was in full swing (*'shen*), threw a stone from the wall and struck and killed one of the fighters attempting to scale the wall. How is it right to deal with him as regards the canons?..." Jacob's answer is: "The fact that they have been forced to go out against their will shows that they are free [of recrimination] from these things which have been committed", though the priest who killed must at least be suspended for a time "for the sake of penitence". Note that this answer appears abbreviated and without its question in Jacob, *Canons (BH)*, 42.

[30] Jacob, *Letter to Addai*, Q. nos. 62-63.

[31] Jacob, *Letter I to John the Stylite*, Q. no. 6.

[32] Jacob, *Letter to Addai*, Q. nos. 58-59.

[33] The text has *haw d-haggar w-aḥnep*; one could see this as a hendiadys, the whole phrase meaning apostate to Islam, but Vööbus translates it as "a Muslim *or* a pagan", and the same distinction is made elsewhere (see the previous sentence in the text and the ensuing quotation) so that one should probably read *aw* here. Since new converts to paganism, as opposed to die-hard pagans, are unlikely around Edessa at this time, one assumes that indulgence in pagan (i.e. generally reprobate) beliefs/practices is meant (e.g. Jacob, *Letter to Addai*, Q. no. 36, on those who murmur incantations, tie knots, make amulets etc.: though they say they pray, they are not Christians).

[34] Jacob, *Replies to Addai*, Q. no. 116 (in Vööbus, *Synodicon*, 261/238).

[35] Jacob, *Letter I to John the Stylite*, Q. no. 13 = Jacob, *Canons (BH)*, 22. For the sake of space I give Bar Hebraeus' version, but note that as well as being much shorter it appears without John's question.

[36] Jacob, *Letter to Addai*, Q. no. 75 = Jacob, *Canons (BH)*, 41. Again I give Bar Hebraeus' version (except that I correct *mhaggrāyē* to *mhaggrāyā*, as appears in Ms. Harvard syr. 93, fol. 26b, where there is mention of the woman's husband), but again note that Bar Hebraeus' version is considerably shorter and omits the question.

[37] G.J. Reinink (ed./trans.), *Die syrische Apokalypse des pseudo-Methodius* (*CSCO* 540-541, Syr 220-221), Louvain 1993, XII.3.

[38] Outside of his correspondence Jacob's observations on Muslims are limited to three references in his *Chronicle*, edited by E.W. Brooks (*CSCO* 5, Syr 5), Paris 1905, 306 ("Maḥmet went down for trade to the land of Palestine, Arabia and Syrian Phoenicia", "the kingdom of the Arabians, those whom we call Arabs, began when Heraclius, king of the Romans, was in his eleventh year and Khusrau, king of the Persians, was in his thirty-first year", "the Arabs began to carry out raids in the land of Palestine") and one reference in a tract against the Armenians to the effect that the Arabs "make three genuflexions to the south while offering sacrifice and performing circumcision" (C. Kayser, *Die Canones Jacob's von Edessa übersetzt und erläutert*, Leipzig 1886, 35).

> That therefore the Messiah is, in the flesh, of the line of David...is professed and considered fundamental by all of them: Jews, Muslims and Christians...To the Jews...it is fundamental, although they deny the true Messiah who has indeed come...The Muslims too, although they do not know nor wish to say that this true Messiah (Jesus), who came and is acknowledged by the Christians, is God and the son of God, they nevertheless confess firmly that he is the true Messiah who was to come and who was foretold by the prophets; on this they have no dispute with us...They say to all at all times that Jesus son of Mary is in truth the Messiah, and they call him the Word of God as do the Holy Scriptures. They also add, in their ignorance, that he is the Spirit of God, for they are not able to distinguish between word and spirit, just as they do not assent to call the Messiah God or son of God[39].

This passage shows remarkably close fit with the portrayal of Jesus in the Qur'an. There too he is referred to as Jesus son of Mary, as the Messiah[40], and as the Spirit of God and Word of God (iv.171). As in Jacob's letter, the Qur'an stresses that Jesus is not God nor the son of God (v.72, v.75). And in general, Jesus is a very prominent figure in the Qur'an: though a mortal (iii.58), he works miracles (iii.48), both confirms (iii.49) and receives Scripture (lvii.27) and, most importantly, he foretells the coming of Muhammad (lxi.6)[41].

After setting out a proof by logic — the Prophets said the Messiah will be of the lineage of David; the son of Mary is the Messiah; so Mary is descended from David — Jacob continues:

> It is by means of such a compelling and true syllogism that we should show to any Christian or Muslim who inquires, that Mary the holy Virgin and begetter of God is of the race of David, although this is not illustrated by the Scriptures....What I have said is sufficient to demonstrate clearly to a Christian or Muslim who discusses this subject that the holy Virgin Mary..[42].

Muslims then, more so than Jews, are to be engaged in debate. The reason is found in the passage quoted above: whereas the Jews deny that

[39] Jacob, *Letter III to John the Stylite*, 518-519/523-524; see also P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge 1977, 11-12.

[40] In the Qur'an, however, the term is devoid of the redemptive significance that a Christian would understand by it; see G. Graf, "Wie ist das Wort Al-Masīḥ zu übersetzen?", *ZDMG* 104 (1954), 119-123.

[41] A similarly healthy respect for Jesus seems to have been held by Muʿāwiya who, upon his accession to the caliphate, proceeded to pray at Golgotha, Gethsemane and the grave of the Virgin (noted in a Maronite chronicle edited and translated by T. Nöldeke, "Zur Geschichte der Araber im 1.Jahrh. d.H. aus syrischen Quellen", *ZDMG* 29 (1875), 90/95). And in general Jesus is a revered figure in Muslim tradition (see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*[2], *s.v.* "ʿĪsā", esp. xiv).

[42] Jacob, *Letter III to John the Stylite*, 519-520/525-526.

Jesus is the Messiah, the Muslims actually call him such as a matter of course and say much about him that accords with Christian sentiments, yet stopped short of saying he was the son of God. That this frustrated Jacob is clear from his repeated reference to it in the first passage above[43], and some Christians may well, as Jacob implies, have tried to win the Muslims round to their view of Jesus[44].

In another letter John the Stylite asks Jacob why the Jews pray facing south, and receives the following reply:

> Your question is vain...for it is not to the south that the Jews pray, nor either do the Muslims. The Jews who live in Egypt, and also the Muslims there, as I saw with my own eyes and will now set out for you, prayed to the east, and still do, both peoples — the Jews towards Jerusalem and the Muslims towards the Kaʿba. And those Jews who are to the south of Jerusalem pray to the north; and those in the land of Babel, in Ḥira and in Baṣra, pray to the west. And also the Muslims who are there pray to the west, towards the Kaʿba; and those who are to the south of the Kaʿba pray to the north, towards that place. So from all this that has been said it is clear that it is not to the south that the Jews and Muslims here in the regions of Syria, but towards Jerusalem or the Kaʿba, the patriarchal places of their races[45].

Jacob had studied in Alexandria as a youth and so would have been in a position to observe the Muslims there at first hand, and, as pointed out above, there were Muslims resident in Edessa while he was bishop of that town. That Muslims pray towards the Kaʿba is only stated ambiguously by the Qur'an and the other early Christian sources, and Jacob therefore constitutes our first specific reference to the Muslim *qibla*[46].

[43] Similarly, in a commentary on 1 Kings xiv.21f., Jacob says that like the Jews handed over to Pharaoh for the wickedness of Reheboam, "so also the Messiah has surrendered us, because of our many sins and perversities, and subjected us to the harsh yoke of the Arabians who do not acknowledge him to be God and the son of God and the Messiah to be God His son" (G. Phillips, *Scholia on Passages of the Old Testament*, London 1864, 27/42).

[44] That Christians sought to debate with Muslims at an early date is suggested by Anastasius of Sinai, who says: "Before any discussion at all, we must first anathematise all the false beliefs of which our adversaries suspect us. Thus, when we wish to debate with Arabs, we should commence by anathematising whoever asserts two gods or that God has carnally begotten the son, or whoever worships as god some celestial or terrestrial being" (K.H. Uthemann (ed.), *Anastasii Sinaitae Viae Dux* (*CCG* 8), Turnhout 1981, 9).

[45] Jacob, *Letter IV to John the Stylite*, fol. 124a; translated also by Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 173, n. 30, who transliterate the places in Babylonia as *nḥrt* and *bwṣrt* — these are likely Ḥira (read *ḥet-yod* not *nun-ḥet*) and Baṣra (often spelt with a *waw* in Syriac; e.g. Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* 4.449), the *taw* conveying Arabic *ta-marbūṭa*.

[46] The term "Kaʿba" occurs only once in the Qur'an: "God has established the Kaʿba, the Sacred House, as a support for man" (v.97). An anonymous Nestorian chronicle of

His point is that the direction in which the Muslims pray depends upon where they are in relation to the Kaʿba. What and where this is are left vague, and one can deduce little more than that it had some connection with Abraham or some such patriarchal figure and lay in the Sinai-Palestine-Jordan-Ḥijaz area[47]. Interestingly, John the Stylite's question features in two other seventh-century Christian texts, where it occurs along with two topics also of relevance to both Jews and Muslims: circumcision and hostility towards veneration of images[48]. This unprecedented preoccupation with these three issues is perhaps best accounted for by assuming that the inhabitants of the former Byzantine provinces took note of the fact that the newly victorious Arabs were, like the Jews, circumcised, praying towards the south and contemptuous of images, and began to raise questions about the relationship of imperial defeat to Christian practice, and even to ponder whether the Christians might not be the ones in error[49].

The writings of Jacob illustrate well that as early as the 690s the Muslim presence was making itself felt in numerous ways, even outside the principal areas of Muslim settlement, and that Islam was appreciated as a distinctive religion by Christians. The attitude to this presence is difficult to assess. Jacob himself inveighs against the oppressiveness of the Muslim yoke[50], and this is a perennial theme in the many Christian apocalypses composed in the first century of Islam[51]. On the other hand, the Muslims were in this period often generous in their dealings with the

ca. 670 edited by I. Guidi (*CSCO* 1, Syr 1), Paris 1903, 38, mentions that the Arabs worship at the "dome of Abraham"; John bar Penkaye, *Rīsh mellē*, 155/183 (tr. Brock, "Book XV", 64), knows that there is "a certain locality in the south where their sanctuary was", the Muslims' "House of God".

[47] Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 23-24, argue for a northwest Arabian location, but see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 562-575.

[48] G. Bardy, "Les Trophées de Damas: controverse judéo-chrétienne du VII[e] siècle", *PO* 15 (1921), 193-194, 245-250, 252; *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem*, *PG* 28, 617D-624B, Q. nos. 37-41. All three topics also appear in the mid-eighth-century *Disputation* of a monk of Beth Ḥale monastery with an Arab notable (Ms. Diyarbakir syr. 95, fols. 2b, 5a, 7b), and John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa*, Chapters 85, 89, 98. Jacob, *Letter to Addai*, Q. no. 96, also asks "why do we prostrate before images?"

[49] Cf. *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem*, *PG* 28, 624B, Q. no. 42: "How is it evident that the Christians have a faith superior to all the faiths under heaven?"

[50] See note 43 above.

[51] See especially F.J. Martinez, *Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period* (Ph.D. thesis, Catholic University of America), Washington DC 1985; G.J. Reinink, "Ps.-Methodius: a Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam", and H.J.W. Drijvers, "The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles: a Syriac Apocalypse from the Early Islamic Period", both in: A. Cameron and L.I. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East I: Problems in the Literary Source Material* (*Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, 1), Princeton 1991, 149-187, 189-213.

Christians: Muʿāwiya rebuilt the church of Edessa when it was damaged by an earthquake in 679[52], and many Muslim governors showed indulgence towards and even established friendships with various Christian authorities[53]. Jacob also tells us of how some Muslims, pricked by their consciences, had presented to him sacred vessels that they had taken from "the land of the Greeks" and which he subsequently restored to their owners[54].

But for church leaders such as Jacob, it would have been the religious rather than the physical pretensions of the Muslims that provoked greatest alarm. With the completion in 691 of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and the circulation of coins in 697 proclaiming that "God is One, God is the Eternal, He did not beget nor was He begotten" and that "Muḥammad is the messenger of God whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth that he might make it victorious over all religions", Islam presented itself as distinct from and a rival, even successor, to Christianity. The latter was forced onto the defensive, obliged to redefine and re-assess itself. The apocalypses produced at this time, the concern with legislation shown by the Quinisext Council of 691 and by Jacob of Edessa, the iconoclast venture promoted by the emperor Leo III (717-741), and the *De fide orthodoxa* of John of Damascus (d. *ca.* 750) are all responses to the same challenge, that posed by the emergence of a new and vigorous faith in a world of which Christians had considered themselves masters.

[52] Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, 4.436-437/2.457. John bar Penkaye, *Rīsh mellē*, 146-147/175 (tr. Brock, "Book XV", 61), describes at length the peace and prosperity that obtained in Muʿāwiya's reign; the apocalypses put into the mouths of the two early seventh-century Egyptian church leaders Pisuntius of Qeft (A. Perier, "Lettre de Pisuntios, évêque de Qeft, à ses fidèles", *ROC* 19 (1914), 302/446) and Samuel of Qalamun (J. Ziadeh, "L'Apocalypse de Samuel, supérieur de Deir el-Qalamoun", *ROC* 20 (1915-17), 378/394) speak of an initial period of peace between Muslims and Christians.

[53] Gabriel, bishop of Qartmin (633-648), apparently obtained concessions from and enjoyed good relations with the local governor (Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 155-159); so also did Rabban Theodore, ascetic and former teacher at Kashkar, Mar Emmeh, bishop of Niniveh and subsequently cathlicos, and Sabrishoʿ, metropolitan of Beth Garme (A. Scher, "Histoire Nestorienne", *PO* 13 (1919), 598-599, 630, 632-633). And ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ (d. 663) and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān (d. 704) are said to have honoured the patriarchs Benjamin and Isaac respectively (B. Evetts, "History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria", *PO* 1 (1907), 496-497; E. Porcher, "Vie d'Isaac Patriarche d'Alexandrie de 686 à 689", *PO* 11 (1915), 363-385).

[54] Jacob, *Letter II to John the Stylite*, Q. no. 23; note how remote appear Jacob's feelings towards Byzantium.

Abbreviations:

Jacob, *Letter to Addai*, Q. nos. 1-73 = Ms. Harvard syr. 93, fols. 1-18a (lacking nos. 1-12), and Ms. Mardin 310, fols. 178a-191a (lacking nos. 1-5, 37-49)[55]. Nos. 1-71 are found in Ms. Paris syr. 62 of the ninth century; they have been edited by A.P. de Lagarde (*Reliquiae iuris ecclesiastici antiquissimae*, Leipzig 1856, 117-44) and by T.J. Lamy with a Latin translation (*Dissertatio de Syrorum fide*, Leuven 1859, 98-171), and translated into German (Kayser, *Canones*, 11-33) and French (F. Nau, *Canons et résolutions canoniques*, Paris 1906, 38-66).

ibid., Q. nos. 74-98 = Ms. Harvard syr. 93, fols. 25a-33b. Mardin 310, fols. 195b-199a, contains only nos. 74-80. All these questions and some of the answers thereto are translated in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 606-610.

ibid., Q. nos. 99-116 = Vööbus, *Synodicon*, 258-269/235-244, nos. 1-3, 6, 8-21. This collection, found in Ms. Damascus Patr. 8/11 written in 1204, contains 51 questions of Addai with Jacob's replies thereto, but only eighteen are new: nos. 4, 5, 7 and 22-51 correspond to 83, 85, 87, 1, 3, 5-7, 10-28, 31-34, 36 and 80 of the above questions of Addai.

Letter I to John the Stylite, Q. nos. 1-16 = Ms. Harvard syr. 93, fols. 37a-44b. All but the last of these questions are found in Ms. Damascus Patr. 8/11 (with two new questions: nos. 8 and 14) and are edited and translated by Vööbus, *Synodicon*, 245-254/225-233.

Letter II to John the Stylite, Q. nos. 1-27 = Vööbus, *Synodicon*, 233-245/215-225.

Letter III to John the Stylite = Ms. British Library Add. 12,172, fols. 87b-91a; ed./trans. F. Nau, "Lettre de Jacques d'Edesse sur la généalogie de la sainte Vierge", *ROC* 6 (1901), 517-522/522-531.

Letter IV to John the Stylite = Ms. British Library Add. 12,172, fols. 122a-126b.

Canons, nos. 1-31 = Ms. Harvard syr. 93, fols. 18a-25a. Nos. 1, 3-6, 8-20, 22-24, 30 appear in abbreviated form in Ms. Damascus Patr. 8/11 (with 2 new canons: nos. 5 and 23), and have been edited and translated by Vööbus, *Synodicon*, 269-272/245-247.

Canons (BH) = Bar Hebraeus, *Nomocanon* (ed. P. Bedjan), Paris 1898. The material pertaining to Jacob is edited and translated by Kayser, *Canones*, 5-28 (back)/35-46, and translated by Nau, *Canons et résolutions*, 69-75.

[55] Both manuscripts are of the eighth century. The contents of Harvard 93 — formerly no. 85 in Rendel Harris' private collection — are listed in J. Rendel Harris, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, Cambridge 1900, 8-11; for the new reference see M.H. Goshen-Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library*, Missoula 1979, 75-76. On Mardin 310 see A. Vööbus, *Syrische Kanonessammlungen I, 1B* (*CSCO* 317, Subs 38), Louvain 1970, 447-452; this manuscript is accessible via Ms. Mingana syr. 8, which is a late copy made in 1906 (compare ibid., 449-452, with A. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts I*, Cambridge 1933, 25-37).