

# *The Letter of John of Sedreh*

## *A New Perspective on Nascent Islam*

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### **Introduction**

The study of the relationships between Islam and Christianity has grown rapidly in recent years. Many facets of the interaction of the two religious traditions have been reconsidered. For examples, some scholars have concerned themselves with the subject of Muslim-Christian dialogue, while others have explored the possibility of applying literary critical methods, already applied to the study of the Bible, to the study of the Quran. Other scholars have been reexamining the traditional approach to the origin of Islam from historical, sociological and political points of view. Because of the close interaction between the Christians of Mesopotamia and Syria with their new conquerors (Muslims), the Syriac writings have emerged as important historical and theological resources. Therefore, scholars have discussed many Syriac documents during the last two decades. However, work in this area is still in its initial stage, and it can be expected that additional research will bring new understanding results in the field of Muslim-Christian studies.

The Letter of John of Sedreh is the earliest Syriac document to report a religious debate between the Christians and *Mhaggraye*(1). The Letter is probably the earliest document to shed light on nascent "Islam", and on the religious encounter between the Christians and *Mhaggraye*. More specifically this document, though brief, reveals a mid-seventh century understanding of the faith of the *Mhaggraye*, at least, from the Syriac Christian perspective. It also shows the attitude of the various Christian communities towards each other and towards the beliefs of the new conquerors.

It is only recently that scholars turned their attention to the contents of the letter, even though the tradition of the letter have been reported over many generations following the death of John of Sedreh. Contrary to the received history of the birth and develop of the early Islam, the Letter of John reveals new perspective. And because it offers a new perspective on the nascent Islam, it becomes a significant historical and religious source.

Most of the scholars have focused on the Letter's date, its authorship, and the identities of John and the Amir of *Mhaggraye*. The content of the document, on the other hand, though often quoted by many scholars to document early concepts of nascent Islam, has not been studied fully for its own right and from both historical, and religious perceptive.

In this study, I will translate the letter, for the first time, from its Syriac language into English. Then I will critique the various hypotheses about the date, the identities of its characters, and to what extent scholars have used the Letter to better understand the religious character of early Islam. Then, I will analyze the previous points, with particular emphasis on the points that reveal the religious character of the *Mhaggraye* at the time. The sources, which I will examine, will be the Letter itself, content and context, along with the modern views about the early development of Islamic religion.

## Translation of the Text

### The Letter of Mor Yuhannon [John]<sup>(2)</sup> the Patriarch

Concerning the discussion which he had with the Amir<sup>(3)</sup> of the *Mhaggraye*

*Because we know that you are anxious and worried about us, due to the matter for which we have been called to this area(4), with our Father, Master, the Patriarch, the blessed and venerable, we inform you for your love that on the 9th of May of this month, on holy Sunday, we approached the glorious Commander, the Amir.*

I) The blessed Patriarch, the Father of the community, was questioned by him: "Whether the Gospel is one, and whether it is the same, without differences, which all Christians in the world hold to?" The blessed one answered that it is one and the same among the Greeks, the Romans, the Syrians, the Copts, the Cushites, the Indians, the Armenians, the Persians, and the rest of all peoples and tongues.

II) Again he asked, "Since the Gospel is one, why is the faith different?" The Blessed one responded, "Just as the Torah is one and the same and it is accepted by us Christians and by you *Mhaggraye*, and by the Jews and by the Samaritans, and each is distinct in belief; likewise concerning faith in the Gospel, each heretical group understands and interprets it differently, and not like us [the Orthodox].

III) Again he asked, "whom do you say Christ is? Is he God or not?" And our Father answered, "He is God; and the Word, who was born from God the Father, who is eternal and without beginning. At the end of time, for the salvation of mankind, He became flesh and was inhominated from the Holy Spirit and from the holy Virgin Mary, the mother of God, and became man."

IV) And the glorious Amir asked him this: "When Christ was in the womb of Mary, the one you say is God, who was carrying and ruling the Heaven and earth?" Our blessed father argued with him concerning the question: "When God came down to Mount Sinai and spoke with Moses for forty days and forty nights(5), who was carrying and ruling the Heaven and earth; as long as you claim that you accept Moses and his books."(6) The Amir said, "He is God and He rules the Heaven and earth." Immediately, he heard this from our Father: "Likewise Christ [who is] God when he was in the womb of the virgin, he was carrying and ruling the Heaven and earth, and everything which is in them as Almighty God."

V) Again the glorious Amir asked, "What kind of belief and faith did Abraham and Moses hold?" Our blessed Father answered, "It is the belief and faith of Christians that they held: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, the rest of the prophets, all the just and righteous ones."(7)

The Amir said, "Why did they not write clearly and make it known concerning Christ?" Our blessed father replied, "As sharers of the mysteries and intimate ones they knew it, but [because of] the infancy and innocence of the people at the time, who were inclined to worship many gods [polytheism] and cling to them, to such an extent that they regarded wood, stones and many other things as gods, they made idols, they worshipped them and sacrificed to them. [For this reason] the holy ones did not want to give the erroneous ones a pretext that they might depart from the Living God and follow error, but prudently proclaimed the truth: "Hear, Israel, the Lord God is

One Lord"(8) for they truly knew that there is only One God, and one Godhead, that of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus they spoke and wrote symbolically concerning God that He is One in divinity and three hypostases and persons; there neither is nor do we confess three gods or three deities; there are neither gods nor deities; for the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is One, as we have said, and from the Father is the Son and the Holy Spirit. If you want, I am ready and prepared to confirm this from the holy Books."

VI) Again, when the Amir heard all of these, he requested only "if Christ is God, and was born from Mary, and if there is a Son for God, let that be proved literally and from the Torah." The blessed one said that not only Moses, but also all of the holy prophets previously prophesied and wrote this concerning the Christ: One [of the prophets] had written concerning His birth from a virgin(9), another that He would be born in Bethlehem(10), another concerning His baptism; all of them, so to say, [wrote] concerning His saving passion(11), His vivifying death, and His glorious resurrection from the dead after three days(12). He [the blessed one] brought evidences, and began to confirm this from all of the prophets, and from Moses, according to their writings.

VII) The glorious Amir did not accept these [proofs] from the prophets, instead, he demanded proof from Moses that Christ is God(13). The blessed one, therefore, cited Moses in many things (verses), e.g., that "the **Lord** let fire and sulfur come down from the **Lord** on Sodom and on Gomorrah."(14) The glorious Amir demanded that this be shown in the book. Immediately, our father showed it in the complete Greek and Syriac texts(15).

At the same place, there were some *Mhaggraye* with us, and they attentively saw the passages and the glorious Name of the Lords, and the Lord(16). The Amir called a Jew, who was there, and he was considered by them to be knowledgeable in the Scriptures, and asked him if it was literally so in the Torah; and he answered, "I do not know exactly."(17)

VIII) At this point the Amir moved to ask him concerning the laws of the Christians: "what and how are they, and whether they are written in the Gospel or not?" Again [he asked], "if a man die and leave behind boys or girls and a wife and a mother and a sister and a cousin, how would his possessions be divided among them?" Then our holy father said that the Gospel is divine, it instructs heavenly teaching and commands vivifying commandments; it despises all sin and wickedness, and it teaches virtue and righteousness. Many other related issues were brought up.

There were people assembled there, not only the nobles of the *Mhaggraye*, but also the leaders and the rulers of the cities and the believing peoples, the lovers of Christ, the Tanukhaye, the Tu`aye and the `Aqulaye(18).

IX) And the glorious Amir said, "I ask you [Plural] to do one of three things: either show me your laws written in the Gospel and conduct yourselves accordingly, or follow [or submit to] the law of the *Mhaggraye*. Then our Father replied that we Christians have laws, which are just and right, and we follow [submit to] the teaching and the commandments of the Gospel and the rules of the Apostles and the laws of the Church. In this manner the assembly of the first day was dismissed. And we have not yet been interviewed again by him.

[The Amir] had also called on some of the Chalcedonian leaders. All who were present, the Orthodox and the Chalcedonians, prayed for the life and preservation of the blessed Patriarch; they prayed and magnified God who had abundantly given the word of truth in his mouth, and filled him with His power and grace, according to His unbroken true promises as He says: "They will bring you before the kings and the governors on account of Me, but do not become anxious about how or what you will speak, for it will be given you in that hour what you are to speak, for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaks in you."(19)

Now, we have informed you these are brief things out of numerous things which were brought into being at that hour, that we have informed you; so that you pray for us zealously and continuously, without ceasing, and so that you entreat the Lord, that He in His compassion may visit His Church and His people, and that he [the Patriarch] may make an exit from such trial [lit. deed], as it pleases His Will, [and He may] assist His Church and comfort His people.

Also those, the followers of the council of Chalcedon, as we've mentioned above, prayed for the blessed Patriarch. For he had made an apology on behalf of all Christian communities, and he had not caused them any harm. Continuously they used to send for him, and ask his blessedness to speak thus for all [Christian] communities, and he may not bring anything against them. For they knew their weakness and the dimension of the danger, and the expected fear, if the Lord does not visit His Church in accordance with His compassion.

Pray for the glorious Amir, that God may grant him wisdom and enlightenment for that which pleases the Lord, and help [the Church]. And [pray for] the blessed Patriarch, and the bishops with him: Abbas Mar Thomas, Mar Severus, Mar Sargis, Mar Aytilaha and Mar Yuhannan and all of their holy synod, and the leaders and the believers who are assembled with us here, particularly, our beloved and wise principal protected by Christ, Mar Andrew. And we, the humble ones in the Lord, we request your peace and holy prayers at all times.

### **Status Quaestionis**

The history of the colloquy between the Patriarch Yuhannon and the Amir of Mhaggraye was well-known in the 9th, 12th and 13th centuries. Dionysius Telmahre (9th cent), Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) and Bar Hebraeus (d. 1268), and recorded the event, although none of them published the letter.

Michael the Syrian (12th century) wrote about the interview between the Amir and the Patriarch in his Chronicle, in which he speaks about `Amru bar Sa`d , the Amir of *Tayyaye*, calling on "our Patriarch" Yuhannon, confronting him with contentious questions(20). The Patriarch, Michael continues, answered with proof from the Old and New Testament, and from natural phenomenon. As a result of this interview, `Amru demanded the translation of the Bible in Arabic.

Michael pictures `Amru as an oppressor of the Christians who forbids the public display of crosses(21). One century later, Bar Hebraeus recorded the same event independently from Michael(22). Bar Hebraeus, in his Ecclesiastical History, recalls the meeting between Patriarch John of Sedreh and the Amir, whom he named `Amr bar Sa`d . Bar Hebraeus refers to `Amr's request for the translation of the Bible into Arabic on the condition that the Patriarch may not include "Christ the son of God," baptism and the crucifixion. When the patriarch refused, the Amir repealed the condition. The *Anonymous Chronicle up to the year 819 AD* describes the event almost the same way as Michael(23).

After having been forgotten for almost 700 years, W. Wright was the first scholar to introduce the document that contains the history of the meeting between the Patriarch and the Amir. In his Catalogue, Wright presents the document with the title, "A Letter Concerning an interview which John the Patriarch had with an Arab Amir."(24) With the document now known, F. Nau was the first scholar to translate the document into French and publish it with limited comments(25). Nau, relying on the traditional viewpoint recorded by Michael the Syrian (12th century), he identifies the Amir, as `Amru ibn Sa`d. In addition, Nau attempts to calculate the possible date of the meeting, thus he reads: "in the Sunday, the 9th of May," and Nau suggests three dates during the time of patriarch John: 633, 639, 644. Nau, without apparent reason, determines the year 639 CE as a date of the colloquy. Henri Lammens, on the other hand, contests Nau concerning the identification of the Amir and the date of the colloquy(26). Lammens suggests Sa`id ibn `Amir,

the governor of the *Jund* (military district) of Homs, as a candidate for Yuhannon's interrogator, and the year 644 when the colloquy took place.

In the middle of this century, Ephrem I Barsaum, in his book, *History of Syriac Sciences and Literature*, writes about the Patriarch Yuhannon and his dialogue with the Amir(27). Although brief, Barsaum presents a new hypothesis. He credited Bar Hebraeus by naming the Amir as `Umayr ibn Sa`d al-Ansari, despite the fact that Bar Hebraeus named him differently ( "`Amr ibn Sa`d, the Amir of *Tayyaye*." ) Barsaum also gives the Amir the epithet of "*Amir-al-Muslimin*," an anachronistic title, even though neither the Letter, nor any other documents did so. Furthermore, without explanation or citation, Barsaum dates the dialogue to the year 643.

N. Newman edits a commentary on the Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue, in which he tackles the letter of Patriarch Yuhannon(28). Newman assents to Nau's perspectives concerning the date of the letter in 639, but he suggests `Amr al-`As of Egypt to be "the `Amir" in the Letter. Newman argues that the Letter is the earliest document concerning Muslim-Christian dialogue. However, Newman's discussion of the context of the letter was too general, and did not utilize modern scholarship for the historicity of that period. For example, he presupposes the existence of the Quran, and sees the beliefs of the *Mhaggraye* as a distinctly Muslim religion. In addition, and depending on German translation of the Letter, he misunderstands some of its keyword(29). J. Martikainen, in his turn, introduces an historical survey about Yuhannon and the seventh century historical and ecclesiastical context(30). *Orientalische Forschungen*, 34; Wiesbaden: 1991) 1-10. While his book concentrates on Yuhannon's theological writings, Martikainen also speaks about Yuhannon's interest in "Muslim-Christian" relationships. In this context, Martikainen mentions the Letter of Yuhannon which was published by Nau. Martikainen makes no effort to study the letter itself; however, he accepted Nau's analysis with regard to its date, authorship and the identification of its historical figures.

P. Crone and M. Cook, in their book *Hagarism*, examine intensively the historical, political and religious situation in the early and mid-seventh century in Syria(31). They quote the letter several times to prove their conception of the early religious status of the Arab invaders. They identify the Amir with `Umayr ibn Sa`d who was appointed by the second Caliph `Umar as a military governor of the *jund* in Homs (Syria). They date the event of the colloquy to 644 based on the content of the letter that reflects lenient religious attitude of the *Mhaggraye* towards the Christians, as has been attested to during their earlier period. As a result, according to Crone and Cook, the letter demonstrates a thoughtful and tolerant religious discussion. The Letter also, they discuss, implies that the Amir, though he questioned the divinity of Christ, did not implicitly reject Christ as Messiah. Furthermore, the Arab invaders referred to themselves as *Mhaggraye* at this time(32). Cook and Crone cite several Syriac sources that confirm the early *Mhaggraye's* tolerant attitude towards Christians which was reflected in the letter, such as Isho`Yahb III (647-58) and John Bar Penkaye's (7th cent) comments on the new invaders' attitude towards the Church(33).

Furthermore, F. Donner, in his unpublished essay "From Believers to Muslims" discusses the value of the contents of the Letter(34). According to Donner, the Letter fits the circumstances of the late seventh or early eighth century. Reading "the distinctiveness of beliefs" as a reference to a separate faith, Donner sees in the Letter an implicit recognition for the faith of *Mhaggraye* as a distinctive one (Islam)(35). This notion of a separate religious orientation, according to Donner, was not known until the late seventh century.

G. J. Reinink, in his article about "The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature.." asserts the historicity of the meeting between Patriarch Yuhannon and the Amir of *Mhaggraye*, but he casts doubt about the earlier date of the Letter(36). Instead, he suggests the end of the seventh century as a possible date. Reinink's criterion for dating the letter was based on his understanding of the letter relative to its context. Reinink first understands that the letter recognized Islam as a new

religion; second, he refers to the division in Christianity as a problematic issue; finally, Reinink claims that the letter expressed caution and fear from Christian apostasy. However, Reinink anachronistically equates the word *Mhaggraye* with Muslims(37), a term not used in the Letter. In fact, the Letter does reflect the early concept of the faith of *Mhaggraye* and its simplicity in the middle of the seventh century. Reinink's second point was overly hasty, since the Christians always felt that their division was their weakness even before the advent of the *Mhaggraye*. With regard to the third criterion, "the Christian fear of apostasy," the Letter expresses no such fear. The fear and caution that expressed in the Letter relates to the new political balances in the region in which the Chalcedonians were less fortunate because of their ecclesiastical affiliation with the Byzantine, the Arab's enemy. Now because of the fact that there is no such explicit expression of fear about apostasy in the letter, such fear does not meet his criterion for dating the text. S. Griffith, in his article, "Disputes with Muslims.." dates the letter to 644, and acknowledges in a footnote scholars' different opinions on the matter(38). In this article, he also asserted that the document should be considered the first Syriac text with regard to the disputes with the Muslims. He agrees with most recent scholars that the Amir of *Mhaggraye* was `Umayr ibn Sa`d al-Ansari.

### **Analysis of the Letter**

The identity of the Amir as `Umayr ibn Sa`d al-Ansari has been attested to by most modern scholars(39). He was the governor of Homs and Damascus during the reign of the second Caliph `Ummar Ibn al-Khatab (d. 644). Patriarch Yuhannan, on the other hand, was the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch from 631 until 648 A.D.(40) Now, the historicity of both the Patriarch and `Umayr have been confirmed, and the simultaneous dates of their reigns make their meeting possible. Additionally, the letter refers to five bishops who accompanied the Patriarch to this meeting. Three of these bishops (Thomas, Severus, and Sargis) have been historically confirmed through the writings of Michael the Syrian, and the Anonymous, who includes their names among the delegation of the Syrian Patriarch Athanasius al-Jammal (Yuhannan's predecessor) to the meeting with the emperor Heraclius in 630 A.D.(41) Such additional historical figures, proven by different sources, gives further support to the historicity of the event and its approximate date.

Now that the date of the meeting has been determined, the date of writing the letter is called into question. It is obvious that the Letter is not a transcript of the dialogue since it is in the form of a letter, and in the Syriac language. As a result, the date of the writing must be sometime after the conclusion of the meeting. The process of dating, however, could be deduced from the content of the Letter itself. Based on the date of the meeting, which the Letter reports as "Sunday, the 9th of May," and before the death of the Patriarch in 648, the date should not be later than 644 where it is possible in the calendar for the 9th of May to be a Sunday. The significance of the date of the Letter, at any rate, is ultimately the historicity of its content.

The Letter was addressed to an "anxious and worried" congregation about the Amir's summon the Patriarch. The addresser, therefore, would not have waited too long to respond to the congregation. Had the letter been written long after the event, the congregation would no longer have been "anxious and worried".

The Letter also describes the fear of the Chalcedonians, and their prayer with the non-Chalcedonians for the safety and success of the Patriarch. This description confirms the vulnerability of the Chalcedonians in the mid-seventh century because of their ecclesiastical affiliation with the Byzantine.

Further evidence for a specific date can be found in the discussion between the Amir and the Patriarch itself. Both the Patriarch and the Amir refer to the Old Testament, to the prophets, and to logic as a source for their argument, but neither mentions the Quran. The Amir resorts to the "Laws of *Mhaggraye*," and asks his hearers to "submit to the laws of *Mhaggraye*" (*tashlelmun le-nomuso da-Mhaggraye*) but he makes no reference to the book of the Quran. Moreover, the

Patriarch, in his response to the fifth question, contrasts the Quranic understanding of Abraham, but neither the Amir nor any of his *Mhaggraye* companions raised any objection. Furthermore, the Patriarch he quotes Deuteronomy 6:4 "the Lord God is One God," which is similar to the *Shahada*, namely, "there is no god but God" (S. 37:35), but he never refers to the Quran nor to its existence. Additionally, in the meeting place there were the Books of Old and New Testament in Syriac and Greek, but there was no reference to the presence of the Quran. Finally, the absence of any reference to the Quran, and frequent contrasting reference to the Quran without comments from the *Mhaggraye* support understanding of the simplicity of the religious tenets of *Mhaggraye* at the time, and that the Quran had not yet been edited. Now, the absence of any material Quran would date the Letter either prior to the reign of Uthman ibn `Afan (d. 656), in accordance with the traditional date of the collection of the Quran, or the late seventh century according to some modern scholars.

Furthermore, in the discussion, the Amir and his "noble *Mhaggraye*" show more familiarity with Jewish tradition and much less with the Christian. Moreover, the letter indicates that the *Mhaggraye* accepted the Torah (the five books of Moses) as an authoritative book(42). This familiarity with Jewish tradition confirms the Arabs' early religious experience in Arabia, which they carried with them to Syria(43). Such simplicity of religious thoughts, which was reflected in the Letter, along with the absence of the book of the Quran, confirms its early date. Therefore, such religious experience cannot be dated to later than the middle of the seventh century.

The exclusive use of the appellation "*Mhaggraye*," for the conquerors adds additional evidence for the date. For the Arab conquerors claim to be "*Mhaggraye*," i.e., immigrants and not merely conquerors, thereby implying their intention to settle. Although the Syriac writers used this name often even in later periods, the letter does not mention other titles employed in subsequent periods, such as "*Mashelmane* = Moslems), or believers(44). 1933) 195. At any rate, the absence of the title Moslems, and the presence of the early title "*Mhaggraye*" adds further evidence to the early date of the Letter(45). This date, the evidence suggests, should be no later than the middle of the seventh century.

## **Conclusion**

The Letter corresponds to what is known about the historical and religious circumstances of the mid-seventh century. In addition, all argument in support of a late date of the Letter proved to be insufficient. However, there are sound reasons for dating the Letter to the mid-seventh century. For example, the historicity of all the figures mentioned in the Letter has been confirmed: Patriarch Yuhannon of Sedreh was the Patriarch of Antioch for the Syrian Orthodox Church between 631 and 648; the Amir of *Mhaggraye* has been identified as `Umayr ibn Sa`d al-Ansari, who was appointed by the second Caliph `Umarr ibn al-Khattab, as a chief of the *Jund* in Syria, probably in Homs.

The Letter demonstrates the Christian understanding of nascent Islam. According to the Letter, the faith of *Mhaggraye* is monotheistic. In addition, they accept the Torah as a holy book in the same way as do the Christians, Jews and Samaritans. However, the *Mhaggraye* had their own Law, which, as far as the Letter reveals, governs some aspects of social life. Ultimately that the Letter makes no reference to Quran, Muhammad, or Islam, which indicates persuasively the nascent nature of this new religion. The Letter, therefore, characterizes the beliefs of *Mhaggraye*, which would lay the foundation for what later becomes known as Islamic faith.

## Notes

- (1) Mhaggraye was the name by which the Arab conquerors identified themselves. Their reason for that, according to some scholars, is because of their descendants of Hagar, Abraham's wife (Gen. 16: 1-3). However, the most recent article by P. Crone, "The First-Century concept of Hagra," *Arabica: Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3 (1994) 352-87, argues for the meaning of immigrants, the way the Arab conquerors understood their move from Arabia as immigration. Few Syriac writers, including St. Ephrem, called the Arab "the sons of Hagar" (B'nai Hagar: ???????), Des Heiligen Ephraem Des Syrers Sermones III (CSCO, Vol. 320, *Scriptores Syri* Vol. 138; ed. E. Beck; Louvain: Secretariat Du CorpusSCO, 1972) esp. 61; Mhaggraye, (??????), however, had a different connotation.
- (2) He is the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch (d. 648), he was called also "John of Hymns," (Yuhannon d-Sedreh). See Ignatius Ephrem Barsaum, *al-lulu al-Manthur or History of Syrian Sciences and Literature* (7th ed.; Aleppo: 1987) 279 - 80; Jouko Martikainen, Johannes I. Sedra: *Einleitung Syrische Texte, Übersetzung und vollständiges Wortverzeichnis* (Göttinger Orientforschungen, 34; Wiesbaden: 1991) 1-10.
- (3) `Umayr Ibn Saad al-Ansari was the governor of Bilad al-Sham along with Mu`awya. Both governors were appointed by `UMor b.-al-Khattab. `Umayr b. Sa`ad was among the earliest or the earliest governor to show interest in exploring the Christian faith.
- (4) The area is identified as Homs in Syria.
- (5) Exodus 24:18; Cf. Quran Surah 2:48; 7:138.
- (6) There is no reference to the Quran, but rather to the Torah. Michael the Syrian wrote: "Muhammad attached himself to the faith of the Jews, because it pleased him." . See Michael the Syrian, *Chronique de Michel Le Syrien* ed. J.-B. Chabot IV (Paris: Culture et Civilisation, 1963) 405; See also *The Anonymous Chronicle 819 A.D.* ed. Chabot CSCO Syri ser III, 14 (Paris: 1920) 227 - 8; Theodore Bar Koni (d. 792) sees them as "believing as the Jews." Addai Scher, *Theodorus Bar Koni Liber Scholiorum* (CSCO, Vols. 55 and 69; Paris: 1910 and 1912) 235.
- (7) The Patriarch contrasts the Quranic understanding of Abraham, which reads: "Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but Hanif, a Muslim, not one of the polytheists" (S. 3:67; Cf. 1:135/129, 140/134).
- (8) Deut. 6:4.
- (9) Ias. 7:14.
- (10) Mic. 5:2.
- (11) Isa. 53:5.
- (12) Hos. 6:2.
- (13) The Samaritans and other Jewish groups at the time did not consider the books of the prophets as a part of the Scripture, but only the five books of Moses (Samaritans), and others considered the Psalms in addition. In the Quranic tradition, likewise, there was no mention of any book to the prophets except those of Moses.
- (14) Gen 19:24. The Syriac Version reads:
- (15) This is an indication that there was no Arabic Version for the Bible at hand.
- (16) Gen 19:24; otherwise Cf. Gen 19:18.
- (17) The Hebrew Bible and according to the Masoretic text agrees word for word with the Syriac and Greek text. Hebrew Bible reads: : and the Lord rained ... from the Lord from heavens.
- (18) These are the names of the three Christian Arab tribes, the followers of the Syrian Orthodox Church. For their conversion and practice, see F. Nau, "Histoires d'Ahoudemmeh et de Marouta," *Patrologia Orientalis*, III (1909) esp. 24; Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, IV, 429-30; Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* ed. and tr. J. B. Abbeloos, and T. J. Lamy (Paris: 1874) II, 123.
- (19) Mt. 10:18-20; however, the quotation does not match with the Peshitta.
- (20) *Chronique de Michel Le Syrien* ( 4 Vols., ed J.-B. Chabot; Paris: Culture et Civilisation, 1899, 1905, 1963) IV, (text) 421-422; II (tr.) 431-432.
- (21) Michael might confused this `Amru bar Sa`d with the Umayyad Caliph `Ummar Ibn `Abdul-`Aziz (d. 720). Otherwise, it might be an allusion to the "Pact of `Ummar" or "Ummar Conditions," which issued by the tenth Caliph al-Mutawwakel (d. 861) and attributed them `Ummar al-Khatab (d. 644). See J. Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbasies surtout à Bagdad (749-1258)* (CSCO 420, Subs. 59; Löwen: 1980).
- (22) Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* (Vol. 1; J. B. Abbeloos & T. Lamy; Paris: 1877) 275.
- (23) *Chronicon Anonymum ad annum Domini 819* (ed. J. Chabot; CSCO, Syri Ser. III, 14; Paris: 1920).
- (24) W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum* (Vol. 2; London: 1870) 604; the document is under the sign MS Add. 17, 193, within the collection of 125 miscellaneous documents.
- (25) F. Nau, "Un Colloque du Patriarche Jean avec l' Emir des Agareens," *Journal Asiatique* 11th series 5 (1915) 225-79.
- (26) H. Lammens, "A Propos d'un colloque entre le patriarche Jean Ier et `Amr Ibn al-`Asi," *Journal Asiatique* 11.13 (1919) 97-110.
- (27) I. Ephrem I Barsaum, *al-Lulu al-Manthur [in Arabic]* (First edition, 1943; 5th ed., Aleppo: Syriac patrimony, 1987) 279.
- (28) N. A. Newman, *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Pennsylvania: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute,
- (29) One among several of Newman's mistranslations is "the laws of the Muslims" instead of "the laws of the Mhaggraye." See Newman, 27.
- (30) Jouko Martikainen, Johannes I. Sedra: *Einleitung Syrische Texte, Übersetzung und vollständiges Wortverzeichnis* (Göttinger
- (31) P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge/ London/ New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 8, 11, 162.
- (32) P. Crone, "The First-Century Concept of Hagra," *Arabica* 3 (1994) 352-387.



- (33) Iso`Yahb III, *Liber Epistularum* (ed. and tr. R. Duval; CSCO, syri 11) 251 tr. 182; concerning John Bar Penkaye see A. Mingana, *Sources Syriacae* (Vol. 1; Leipzig: 1908) 146 (text), 175 (tr.).
- (34) Fred Donner, "From Believers to Muslim: Confessional Self Identity in the Early Islamic Community," *Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Pattern of Communal Identity* (ed. L. Conrad; Vol. 4; New Jersey: Darwn, 1999), (forthcoming)
- (35) Reference to the text of the Letter, paragraph II.
- (36) G. J. Reinink, "The Beginning of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam," *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993) 165 - 87.
- (37) Reinink, 178, 180.
- (38) S. Griffith, "Disputes with the Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: From Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)," *Religionsgeschichte in Mittelalter* (ed. B. Lewis and F. Niewohner; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992)251-273.
- (39) Cook and Crone, *Hagarism*, 162; A. Palmer, S. Brock, and R. Hoyland, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993) 169. See also *Tarikh al-Tabari*, I, 2646, 2798.
- (40) Martikainen, 1; Barsaum, 279.
- (41) *Chronique de Michel Le Syrien*, IV, 409 (text), II, 412 (tr.); *Chronicon Anonymum*, 238, 14-17 (text), 186, 32-35 (tr.).
- (42) Cf. note 10.
- (43) Yuhannon bar Penekey (7th cent) refers to the religious orientation of the Mhagraye as "...they adhered to the teaching (of Muhammad), the worship of One God in accordance with the ancient (Jewish) Laws." See Mingana, *Sources Syriacae* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1908) 146 (text), 175 (tr.). See also the comments of Michael the Syrian in note 8.
- (44) The earliest appearance of the term *Mashelmane* in Syriac with the meaning of Moslem was in the year 775, in *Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum* (ed. J.-B. Chabot; CSCO, Syri, 34; Louvain: 1933) 195.
- (45) The first appearance of the term of Muslims, although not definitely as a title, was in the late seventh century (961) in the *Dome of the Rock*. Cf. *Hagarism*, 8.