

The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam

Edited by

Emmanouela Grypeou

Mark N. Swanson

David Thomas



BRILL

The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with
Early Islam

The History of Christian-Muslim Relations

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VOLUME 5

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Front cover illustration: Emperor Theophilus (829-842) and the Khalif of Bagdad, al-Mamun, during the cultural exchange mediated by the emperor's envoy, John the Synkellos. Taken from the illustrated manuscript of John Skylitzes' chronicle *Synopsis Historion*.

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Christians and Muslims have been involved in exchanges over matters of faith and morality since the founding of Islam. Attitudes between the faiths today are deeply coloured by the legacy of past encounters, and often preserve centuries-old negative views. The History of Christian-Muslim Relations, Texts and Studies presents the surviving record of past encounters in authoritative, fully introduced text editions and annotated translations, and also monograph and collected studies. It illustrates the development in mutual perceptions as these are contained in surviving Christian and Muslim writings, and makes available the arguments and rhetorical strategies that, for good or for ill, have left their mark on attitudes today. The series casts light on a history marked by intellectual creativity and occasional breakthroughs in communication, although, on the whole beset by misunderstanding and misrepresentation. By making this history better known, the series seeks to contribute to improved recognition between Christians and Muslims in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Emmanouela Grypeou

The papers collected in this volume were presented in the international workshop *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* in Erfurt in June 2003. The Workshop was organized as part of a research project on Islamic Studies at the University of Erfurt with the title *Globalization and Regionalization Processes in Eastern Christianity and their Impact on the Formation, Expansion and Early Development of Islam in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries*.

The Arab conquests of the Byzantine eastern provinces and the consequent establishment of Muslim dominance foreshadowed the end of the long tradition of Hellenism in western Asia. However, the emergence of Islam in the Arabian peninsula and its rapid spread in the eastern provinces of Byzantium were preceded by chronic conflicts between the Byzantines and the local Christian communities. These conflicts were ostensibly of a theological nature. The objective of this research project was to investigate if, how far, and in which ways the possible cultural, religious, and social differences between the Byzantine central power on the one hand, and the peripheries of the empire on the other, could have influenced the emergence and rapid spread of Islam in the eastern provinces. Thus the central theme of the major programme: The struggles between centre and periphery, whereby the margin becomes the or, at least, a centre.

The analysis focuses on theological issues in terms of cultural processes that took place between the Byzantine central power and its periphery. At this time theological issues acquired a specific socio-cultural character. So, the central power's striving for theological and cultural homogeneity can be seen to promote the idea of universal dominion or a global society for the Byzantine Empire, and specific religious controversies can, in turn, be seen as conflicts between globalizing and regionalizing tendencies in an empire that was multicultural in character.

The contextualization of theological matters enables the emergence of Islam to be considered not as an isolated procedure, but rather as a phenomenon that developed by means of complex cultural processes and reciprocal perceptions. This approach provides a better

understanding both of Islam's rapid spread in western Asia and of the great success Islam had in establishing its rule in the region.

The focus of this volume is the versatile encounters and reciprocities between Eastern Christianity and early Islam in the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire and in Persia.

The historical setting covers one of the most important periods of encounter between Christianity and Islam. It deals with the early stage of Islamic history, defined by the development of Islamic faith and by the Arab conquests of Byzantine and Persian territories, and further with the establishment of Islamic rule and the Arabization and Islamization of the conquered regions, as well as with the development of Islam into a unifying universal cultural system during the Abbasid dynasty.

The historical period under consideration is particularly dramatic for the eastern provinces of Byzantium. The impoverishment of the region due to natural catastrophes and the disastrous Persian wars, and the political and military weakness of the Empire contributed to the eventual military success of the Muslim-Arab invasions. Nevertheless, the hope of restoration to the Christian Empire and deliverance from Arab rule was still cherished in the conquered regions centuries after the Islamic conquests, while these provinces were not considered as definitely lost by the Byzantine Empire even as late as the tenth century.

The Christian confrontation with emerging Islam depended on the varying and differentiated reception of Islam by the various Christian communities against the background of their historical and geopolitical contexts in this period. The formation of a collective identity based on religious affiliation is a hermeneutical bone of contention. The question we wish to address here is whether differentiating cultural characteristics, or even the construction of possible local identities, in the multi-cultural urban centres or in the demographically more compact areas, influenced the reception of this dramatic change of masters that took place in the seventh century in these regions. The reactions of the different strata of society in their respective urban and rural settings diverged considerably, and so did the clerical and lay perceptions of the Muslims. The specific religious and historical circumstances of the various Byzantine administrative provinces are also to be taken into account for, as is well known, the Islamic conquests caused crucial demographic and social changes in the region.

The seventh century, the century of Islam's emergence, is a so-called 'dark Age' of Byzantine historiography, characterised by the well-known paucity of primary historical sources. As a result, much reliance is placed on later sources, even though they provide a different paradigm for understanding those events than do the few surviving earlier ones. This difference must be linked to the fact that the latter sources were composed under Islamic rule, and may be more concerned with the evaluation of past events in the large-scale scheme of Islamic world history.

Theological problems and conflicts and their political consequences stand at the centre of this historical period. Its political history is closely interwoven with theological considerations. Under such circumstances there emerged a particular concept of historical explanation which sought to offer a plausible explanation for the rise of Muslim power, placing it in a 'framework' of divine providence, and serving particular theological and political interests. Characteristically, the rapidly changing socio-historical situation of this period gave rise to strong millenarian expectations that were used to explain the Arab conquests as a phenomenon with deep eschatological significance.

Against the background of the specific perspective of a theological explanatory scheme for political and historical events, it seems important to look into the special aspects of a historical interpretation which was shaped to a great extent by ecclesiastical considerations. The importance of the separation of the Churches became evident in later historiography, which still sought to explain historical events as a result of the Chalcedonian ecclesiastical crisis. It can be assumed that among contemporary Christian commentators the understanding of the Islamic invasions depended, at least in part, on interpretations of the Christological crisis, and so the sectarian differences that existed both before and after the Islamic conquests bear a particular importance. How important for Christian writers was, for instance, the unity of the Church or even the survival of the Christian faith in the face of Islamic domination, and especially in the face of the threat of conversion in the late seventh century and onwards? To answer these questions, it is crucial to consider people's willingness to convert to Islam, as well as the reaction of fellow Christians to these conversions.

Furthermore, the Christian presence on the Arabian Peninsula presents another focus of study in connection with the emergence of Islam in this region. The development of local forms of Christianity is

especially relevant in this context. A social group of particular interest in this regard is the Arab-Christian semi-nomadic and nomadic peoples who played a crucial role in the Christological conflict and in the formation of the Jacobite Church. Arab Christianity is especially important in relation to the Byzantine authorities in political and church political contexts, and their role as mediators between the Byzantine Empire and Arab culture, as well as between Christianity and Islam, deserves special attention.

The confrontation of Christianity with the early theological and political development of Islam addresses broader questions of intercultural relations and reciprocities and their impact on the formation of religious systems and identities. Questions to be dealt with include the channels by which Arab and Syriac Christianity contributed to the emergence and rapid spread of Islam, and especially the specific Christian elements in cult and faith that were formative upon Islam and became part of its tradition. Various specific religious habits were developed in this region. Common religious relations and the spread of religious ideas were made possible through financial and commercial bonds between the various religious and social groups of the region, promoted by the activities of religious specialists.

The contributions in this volume range over some of the most important aspects of the multiple encounters of Eastern Christianity with early Islam, from the very beginnings in Mecca to the times of the Abbasids in Baghdad. They also represent geographically the eastern regions from Egypt to Anatolia and as far as Persia. They deal with crucial subjects of political and theological dialogue and controversy that characterized the response of the Christians in the Byzantine Eastern provinces to the challenge of the Islamic conquest, and its subsequent impact on Byzantine society and history.

In the first article *Irfan Shahid* explores the earliest encounters between Islam and *Oriens Christianus* against the background of the study of the historical Muḥammad and the Qur'an, concentrating on the Christian and especially Ethiopic presence in Makka. Shahid stresses the importance of the market of 'Ukāz for the development of the Arabic ideal of literary excellence and of Najrān for the formation of Qur'anic Christology.

Daniel Sahas' article focuses on two prominent figures of the early Muslim-Christian encounters, Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem and 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph and conqueror of Jerusalem. Analyzing details of socio-cultural history which bear on

the personalities of the two protagonists, he demonstrates points of coincidence and divergence in matters of faith and leadership which might have had far-reaching effects on the relations between the two religions and cultures as well as, on the history of Islam and Byzantium.

David Olster shows how the disastrous military defeats by the Arabs caused a fundamental transformation in the Byzantine political discourse of the seventh century as well as an institutional reconstruction of the imperial office to unite political and sacerdotal functions. This enabled the emperor to acquire new authority in matters of defining doctrine, a transformation which later led to the Iconoclastic controversy.

Walter Kaegi analyzes the figure of the emperor Constans II (641-88) against the background of the early Islamic conquests of the East and particularly of Anatolia. In the case of Anatolia he discusses how, despite ineffective defence of the region, the Byzantine army during the reign of Constans managed to prevent permanent loss of the territory. Kaegi examines further in detail the effectiveness as well as the weakness of Constans II compared to his grandfather Heraclius, and comes to the conclusion that, in spite certain similarities, Constans was a 'failed' Heraclius.

Harald Suermann's article deals with the Islamic conquests of Egypt and with the relations between Muslim and Coptic Christians. In a critical reappraisal, he examines the theory that the Copts received the Muslims as liberators, and on the basis of extensive textual evidence he proves that this hypothesis cannot be sustained, but rather that the texts reveal the varied and often difficult relations between Christian subjects and Muslim rulers.

Andrew Palmer in his discussion of the unpublished *Vita* of Theodūtē, bishop of Āmīd in the late seventh century, examines the complex relations of the local Christians with the Muslims in northern Mesopotamia as well as with the Chalcedonians of the region and of the Byzantine centre. He shows how the local Christians began to accommodate themselves to Muslim rule, taking advantage of Muslim protection in what may have been a version of a proto-Millet system.

Martin Tamcke deals with a collection of church hymns attributed to Giwargis Warda from the thirteenth century, which includes material about the Catholikoi of the East through the entire Islamic period up to his time. He shows that although the hymns are more concerned

with internal ecclesiastical affairs than with relations with the Muslim rulers, they reveal the efforts that were made to preserve Christian identity in the context of the changing political situation and the increasing Islamization of their environment.

Gerritt Reinink shows, with the aid of three East Syrian apologetic texts, the Christian response to Islamic allegations that Islam represents the true religion because of its political and military victories. These texts are representative of the Christian reaction to recent politico-religious developments regarding the consolidation of Islamic rule and the theological challenges related to it, and in this way they represent also a theology which develops in close interaction with historical developments.

Jan van Ginkel discusses later Syrian historiography concerning the Muslim conquests. He offers a critical re-examination of the relatively positive image of the Arabs depicted in these, and argues that this historiographical attitude was the result of efforts within the Syrian Orthodox community to define anew their identity under Muslim rule against the Chalcedonians, in this way 're-inventing' and 're-writing' past events and history.

David Cook examines the possibility of an early translation of the Gospel into Arabic on the basis of quotations and paraphrases from the Gospels in Ḥadīth literature. On the evidence of an Arabic document from the eighth century, which contains Jesus' discourses from the Gospel of Matthew and with no apparent Muslim character, he argues for the possibility of an early translation of this Gospel, or part of it, which would have been acceptable to Muslims.

Muriel Debié presents a still unpublished East Syriac text of apocalyptic character from the late seventh or early eighth century. She argues that this text, in spite of being influenced by Pseudo-Methodius, reveals no eschatological expectations and represents a period of transition in anti-Muslim polemic in which already existing anti-Jewish argumentation was used to defend Christianity and to comfort Christians living under Muslim rule, as well as to warn them against conversion. The text is an example of the process of formation and development of early anti-Muslim literature.

Mark Swanson's article deals with three Christian apologetic texts from the second half of the eighth century that counter the denial in the Qur'an of Christ's crucifixion. The article shows how these three texts, which are different in provenance and character, adduce miraculous, prophetic and redemptive evidence to prove the real-

ity and necessity of Christ's death on the cross, an argumentation which was to be influential for later Christian apologetic literature as well.

David Thomas discusses two Muslim texts from the mid ninth century which demonstrate that the main Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation were opposed to the Islamic perception of monotheism as well as to reason itself. He shows that both texts indicate great intimacy with the Christian doctrines and with the Christologies of the three main Christian sects, but also present new theological challenges to Christian apologists. The attitude of these Muslim documents towards Christianity reveals at the same time a close resemblance to the approach to Islam taken by Christian theologians such as John of Damascus.

Sidney Griffith analyzes an unedited and largely unknown short Christian apologetic text in Arabic, originating very probably from the Melkite—possibly Jerusalemite—milieu of the late ninth century, which defends Christian doctrine against the Muslim theological challenge. Griffith stresses the use of Qur'anic quotations and terminology in the text and shows how the author used the Qur'an to defend Chalcedonian Christology. This tract reveals an appreciative attitude towards the revelatory character of the Qur'an and sensitivity towards Islamic faith, and stands out as a very early example of responsible Muslim-Christian dialogue.

These articles open up new research perspectives surrounding the confrontation of Christian theology with a new religion, and the new political and theological issues arising from the first encounters of Eastern Christianity with early Islam. And at the same time they attend to the different social, political and theological aspects of Eastern Christianity under Muslim rule.

The very particular relevance which Christian-Muslim relations have acquired nowadays emphasizes the importance of the study of the beginnings and the foundations of the relations between the two religious and cultural systems, because the historical origins also influence later mutual understanding and reception of the two religions. It provides, furthermore, a better understanding for the current situation of Christian minorities in Islamic countries.

ISLAM AND *ORIENTS CHRISTIANUS*: MAKKA 610-622 AD*

Irfan Shahīd

Qur'anic Christology appears very well developed in the twelve years of the Makkan period, even before the Prophet emigrated to Madina. The Qur'an emphasizes that it is in line with the two previous revelations, Judaism and Christianity, and with their holy books; furthermore, it claims it is the last and most perfect. Yet the divergence from mainstream Christianity, usually called orthodox, is striking and scholars have for a long time tried to account for it. No consensus has been reached, and for the last thirty years or so, through the Revisionists led by the London School, there has been even more radical division in critical opinion, and the wave of revisionism has even spilled over to Biblical and Qur'anic scholars in the Near East.

I belong to a group of scholars whose approach to Qur'anic studies is entirely different. It is a continuation of the conclusions of the distinguished Arabists and Islamicists of the last century, Theodor Nöldeke, Hamilton Gibb, Levi Della Vida, Louis Massignon and Francesco Gabrieli,¹ who accepted the essential validity of the Arabic

* This article is substantially the paper delivered at the Conference; hence its retention of features peculiar to oral delivery and the inclusion of only what is absolutely necessary of annotation.

¹ It is therefore worth quoting two of them in this context. On the Qur'an, nowadays so much under fire, Hamilton Gibb wrote: 'No serious doubt has ever been cast on the authenticity of the collection, the very haphazardness of the compilation, apart from internal evidence, being a proof of its genuineness', *Arabic Literature*, Oxford, 1963, p. 33.

On pre-Islamic poetry, Levi Della Vida wrote: 'The problem has been discussed by many scholars and is a difficult and delicate one. The problem of authenticity has been overemphasized. Even if some of the poems be forgeries, the bulk of poetical tradition is certainly authentic', in *The Arabic Heritage*, ed. N.A. Faris, Princeton, 1944, p. 48.

On the Arabic historical tradition in general, the following is Della Vida's estimation: 'In the present writer's opinion, this skeptical attitude is exaggerated. The historical tradition about the Middle Ages of Arabia is neither better nor worse than any other tradition about a period of history for which direct evidence is no longer available. It is not worse than, say, Livy is for the first five centuries of

tradition and sources after the most rigorous application of German source criticism to it and the pruning away of all legendary accretions which had crept into these sources as a result of later Islamic piety. But since the demise of these distinguished Arabists and Islamicists, much has happened that has shed a very bright light on the two Quests: for the historical Muḥammad, and for the historical Qur'an. These new researches return the two Quests from the Palestine of the third/ninth century² to the Arabia of the first/seventh and to Makka itself, the correct provenance of both, where Islam was born and where the Qur'an was first revealed—in short to its Arab, Arabic and Arabian background.

Makka, the birthplace of the Prophet, was located in the middle of the spice route of western Arabia, which for most of the sixth century and on the eve of the rise of Islam witnessed very strong Byzantine presence and influence. Hence the explosion of Byzantine studies in the second half of the twentieth century has been of great relevance to the two Quests for Muḥammad and for the Qur'an. And these studies are especially relevant when they treat: the reign of the emperor Heraclius,³ the Prophet's contemporary; Arab-Byzantine relations, which involved Makka itself and the caravan route of its traders from Najrān in the south to Buṣrā in the north;⁴ and archaeology, which revealed Christian Arab structures in *Oriens, Bilād al-Shām*.⁵

Roman history, or Saxo Grammaticus for the older age of Denmark. In a way, it is better, though it is not free from gaps and mistakes', *ibid.*, p. 42.

The quotations from these two scholars represent the judgments made after a lifelong companionship with the Arabic Islamic sources.

These distinguished scholars have been followed by equally distinguished ones who have continued their tradition, such as Franz Rosenthal, W. Montgomery Watt, Kenneth Cragg, M.J.M. Kister and such younger contemporaries as Joseph van Ess and Hugh Kennedy.

² See the work of John Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford, 1977, and *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford, 1978.

³ The standard work on the reign is now Walter Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium*, Cambridge, 2003.

⁴ The five volumes of the present writer on the theme 'Byzantium and the Arabs' may be consulted, especially *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C., 1987, pp. 350-92, henceforth referred to as *BAFIC*.

⁵ The well-known works of Fr. Michele Piccirillo may be consulted, especially his latest on the sixth century Ghassānid Arab Church in Trans-Jordan, 'The Church of Saint Sergius at Nitl: a Centre of the Christian Arabs in the Steppe at the Gates of Madaba', *Liber Annuus, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* 51, Jerusalem,

In addition to the Byzantine profile of these researches, there are strictly Arab and Arabic elements represented by: firstly, the rise of Najrān as the Arab and Arabian martyropolis of the sixth century following the celebrated martyrdoms of *ca* 520,⁶ which became the spiritual magnet within whose range were brought the cities of western Arabia, especially al-Ṭāʾif and Makka in the southern portion of the caravan route, and between them the celebrated market fair of ʿUkāz; and secondly, the existence of an Arabic version of the liturgy for the Christian Arabs of this, their golden period, together with a Christian Arabic literature.⁷

This literature is reflected in the *Dīwān* of ʿAdī Ibn Zayd, the avowedly Christian poet of Hīra,⁸ only fragments of which have survived, pitiable remains of a literature which must have been considerable, coming as it did from a people and a peninsula which produced tens of poets in this century. Many of these poets must have composed *marāthī*, elegies, on the martyrs of Najrān, a well-known and highly developed genre in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry.⁹

2001, pp. 267-84, plus thirty plates; I. Shahīd, 'The Sixth Century Church Complex at Nitl, Jordan: the Ghassānid Dimension', *ibid.*, pp. 285-92, and *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C., 2002, vol. II.i., *passim*.

⁶ For Najrān after the martyrdoms, see I. Shahīd, *The Martyrs of Najrān (Subsidia Hagiographica 49)*, Société des Bollandists, Brussels, 1971; and 'Byzantium in South Arabia', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 33, 1979, pp. 23-94.

⁷ For a discussion of this, see the present writer in *BAFIC*, pp. 422-58, with references to the earlier volume on the fourth century. Much has been written on whether or not there was in pre-Islamic times an Arabic version of the Gospel, the liturgy, and the Bible. The question of an Arabic version of the Bible is still *sub iudice*, and I have been researching it systematically for years. But I have no doubt that there was an Arabic liturgy and an Arabic Gospel for which the reader may consult *BAFIC*, pp. 422-30, 449-50, and more recently the glorious Christian Arabic inscription of Dayr Hind in Hīra with its resoundingly Arabic liturgical language; see the present writer in 'The Authenticity of pre-Islamic Poetry: the Linguistic Dimension', *Al-Abhath* 44, 1996, pp. 3-39.

⁸ See *The Dīwān of ʿAdī Ibn-Zayd*, ed. M. al-Muʿayyid, Baghdad, 1965.

⁹ Najrān itself had its school of Arab poets. The *Dīwān* of the Banū al-Ḥārith Ibn Kaʿb, the dominant Arab group in the town, was known to both al-Āmidī and Ibn al-Nadīm; see N. al-Asad, in *Maṣādir al-shiʿr al-jāhili*, Beirut, 1988, pp. 543, 546.

The Syriac writer John Psaltes wrote a hymn on the martyrs of Najrān and it is impossible to believe that the Arab poets of Najrān, who were directly related to these martyrs as their relatives, did not compose on them as well. Their threnodies or elegies must have been among that part of the corpus of pre-Islamic poetry that is no longer extant.

These resources were not available to the Islamicists whose names I have mentioned, but they are now, and in due course they will be laid under contribution in a detailed manner. They will be touched upon in this paper, the title of which relates to the earliest encounter between Islam and *Oriens Christianus*, and it is therefore to Makka that it will return the Quest and on Makka that it will concentrate.

Makka has a privileged position for the two Quests. Attempts to follow Muḥammad in his travels as caravan leader before his call and to detect influences on him during these travels are necessary and called for, but they tend to remain hypothetical and inconclusive. Baḥīrā, for instance, who was dismissed and rejected by Nöldeke as legendary, was pounced on by both Christians and Muslims, the former to vilify Islam, the latter to present him in the context of the *dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* theme.¹⁰ Scholars also made Muḥammad a polyglot and credited him with knowledge of some of the languages of the Near East, such as Hebrew and Syriac-Aramaic.¹¹ This view has no evidence to support it, although I shall argue for his knowledge of one Semitic language other than his native Arabic, a conclusion made possible by this return to his native city. In addition to concentrating on Makka, I shall attend to the axis of Makka-Najrān and pay special attention to it for the rise of Qurʾanic Christology, and the most important of the three Qurʾanic dogmas, namely its own inimitability.

Makka

Christianity in Makka was reflected by both an Arab and an Ethiopian presence. The former was represented by such traces as *maqbarat al-Naṣārā*, ‘the cemetery of the Christians’, the pictures of Jesus and Mary in the Kaʿba, and in such localities in the environs of Makka

¹⁰ On Baḥīrā, see the articles of S. Gero, ‘The Legend of the Monk Baḥīrā: the Cult of the Cross and Iconoclasm’, in P. Canivet and J.P. Rey-Cocquais, eds, *La Syrie de Byzance à l’Islam*, Damascus, 1992, pp. 45-57, and S. Griffith, ‘Muḥammad and the Monk Baḥīrā: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times’, *Oriens Christianus* 79, 1995, pp. 146-74; and on the monastery of Buṣrā see the present writer’s *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, Dumbarton Oaks, 2002, vol. II, i, p. 186.

¹¹ Implied in the introduction to Arthur Jeffery’s *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾan*, Baroda, 1938, pp. 1-41, and more clearly suggested in Christoph Luxenberg, *Die Syro-Aramäische Lesart des Koran*, Berlin, 2000.

as *masājīd Maryam*, ‘the oratories of Mary’, and *mawqif al-Naṣrānī*, ‘the station of the Christian’.¹² The sixth century witnessed an intensive Christianization of western Arabia, which affected Makka. The most important figure in it on the eve of the rise of Islam and during the early years of Muḥammad’s mission was undoubtedly Waraqa Ibn Nawfal,¹³ who is associated with a Gospel, an *Injīl*, and both are the most relevant, even crucial, early contact of Islam with *Oriens Christianus*. The constraints of time and space as well as the prospective detailed treatment of both Waraqa and his *Injīl* in the next volume of my series *Byzantium and the Arabs*, precludes its treatment in this paper. It is therefore to the Ethiopian presence in Makka that I now turn.

Long before the rise of Islam, Ethiopia had established a presence in western Arabia through military expeditions and through trade. According to one view, there was in south Arabia a region inhabited by Ethiopians, even called Ḥabashat.¹⁴ But that presence achieved its strongest form in the sixth century when an Ethiopian Negus, Ella-Aṣḥeḥa (Caleb), invaded south Arabia to avenge the martyrdoms of its Christians, toppled its Ḥimyarite kingdom and occupied the country in about 520 AD.¹⁵ The Ethiopian occupation and supremacy in south Arabia under Abraha and his two sons lasted for half a century.¹⁶ It is natural to suppose that many Ethiopic terms passed into Sabaic and Arabic, mostly military terms and possibly some religious Christian terms as well. The name of Abraha is associated with the Cathedral of Ṣan‘ā’ and with a church in Ma’rib; and surely the religious needs of an Ethiopian army that came to south Arabia as a crusade must have been met by some Ethiopian clergy and an Ethiopic Bible and liturgy.

After the fall of the Ethiopian house of Abraha around 570 AD and the occupation of south Arabia by the Persians, the Ethiopians were scattered as communities in western Arabia, and it was in Makka that a strong Ethiopian colony was to be found in the forty years

¹² For this, see the present writer in *BAFIC*, pp. 390-92.

¹³ For the most recent account of Waraqa, see Chase Robinson, in *EP*², s.v.

¹⁴ On those who have argued for and against Ḥabashat in South Arabia, see A.K. Irvine in *EP*², s.v.

¹⁵ For these events, see the still useful article by S. Smith, ‘Events in Arabia in the Sixth Century’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 16, 1954, pp. 425-68.

¹⁶ For Abraha, see A.F.L. Beeston in *EP*², s.v.

or so that followed the Persian occupation, about which the sources are very informative. These were the *Aḥābīsh* of the Arabic sources. Both H. Lammens and more recently T. Fahd have argued cogently for the ethnic identity of the *Aḥābīsh* as Ethiopians,¹⁷ who performed important functions for the affluent Makkān commercial republic. They fought for the Makkāns and protected them from external threats, guarded their caravans, and performed certain menial duties for them. More relevant for the theme of this chapter is to emphasize their assimilation into Arab and Makkān society. Ibn Ḥabīb has a chapter on Makkāns who married Ethiopian women, and so some Makkāns were sons of Ethiopian parents.¹⁸ Even more striking is the Ethiopian participation in the highest forms of Arabic culture in pre-Islamic times—poetry. The Ethiopian community in Arabia produced some poets, including the celebrated ‘Antar, whose *qaṣīda* was counted among the famous *Mu‘allaqāt*, suspended odes.¹⁹

With important trade relations between Makka and Ethiopia across the Red Sea,²⁰ and a strong Ethiopian colony in Makka itself performing various functions for the Makkāns and contracting marriages with some of them, it is natural to suppose that the Makkāns should have acquired some knowledge of Ethiopic, and that some Ethiopic words entered into the Arabic of the Makkāns. It is also natural to suppose that this colony of Ethiopians must have had an Ethiopic Bible and a place where they could conduct their religious services, if not a church at least an oratory, and they must have had a cleric to celebrate their weddings and officiate at their funerals.

All this is relevant background for the examination of the relationship of the Prophet to Ethiopic and the Ethiopians. And it is in the sources for the life of the Prophet that valuable information on the Ethiopian presence in Makka becomes available, as is clear from the following:

¹⁷ See H. Lammens, ‘Les Ahabis’ in *L’Arabie occidentale avant l’Hégire*, Beirut, 1928, pp. 237-93; T. Fahd, ‘Rapports de la Mekke préislamique avec l’Abyssinie: Le cas des Ahābīs’, *L’Arabie Préislamique et son environnement historique et culturel*, Leiden, 1989, pp. 539-48.

¹⁸ The author devotes three pages to them; Ibn-Ḥabīb, *Al-muḥabbar*, ed. I. Lichtenstadter, Beirut, n.d. (reprint), pp. 306-9.

¹⁹ For Antara, see *EF*, s.v.

²⁰ In international trade, Abyssinia was the destination of one of Quṣayy’s four sons, who according to Ibn-Ḥabīb, *Al-muḥabbar*, p. 163, was ‘Abd Shams. Trade relations between Makka and Ethiopia went back to the late fifth or early sixth century.

1. The Prophet's very own wet nurse Baraka, better known through her tecnonymic, Umm Aymān, was an Ethiopian woman.²¹

2. Before his call as Prophet, Muḥammad had been a caravan leader for fifteen years, and probably some Ethiopians may have acted as guards for his caravans. More important is his possible presence as a trader in Ethiopia, where knowledge of the language was absolutely necessary. A close examination of the Qur'anic passages on the sea and ships reveals a great many striking specificities which can only reflect thorough acquaintance with the sea, and in this case inevitably the Red Sea. This suggests that the Makkans, including Muḥammad, did cross to Ethiopia, which appropriately supplied the loan-word for harbor in the Qur'an, *mursā*, and this immediately suggests the two ports 'Aydhāb and 'Adūlis.²² Knowledge of Ethiopic was important for trading with the country.

3. The Prophet's association with the Ethiopians and Ethiopic is clinched by his dispatch of some of his followers to Ethiopia. The choice of Ethiopia can only suggest that he knew the conditions there were favorable for receiving his followers, knowledge derived from his having personally visited the country in his pre-prophetic period.

4. One of his closest associates was the Ethiopian Bilāl²³ who attended on him in war and peace, and what is more was the first *mu'adhdhin* in Islam.

5. In addition to Bilāl, two Ethiopic names appear in sources, Jabr and Yasar, who are most relevant to the two Quests for Muḥammad and for the Qur'an. According to a tradition cited by al-Bayḍāwī, these two Ethiopians would read the Torah and the Gospel aloud in Makka, and Muḥammad used to stop and listen to them.²⁴ This

²¹ For a detailed account of Umm Aymān, see M. al-Bukhārī, *Al-tirāz al-manqūsh fī akhbār al-Ḥubūsh*, ed. 'A. al-Ghazālī, Kuwait, 1995, pp. 71, 79-81.

²² For the Qur'anic pericopes on the sea, see J. Labaume, *Tafsīl ayāt al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, trans. M. 'Abd al-Baqī, Cairo, 1955, pp. 501-4. For *mursā*, see Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, p. 261.

²³ On him, see W. Arafāt in *EP*, s.v.

²⁴ The precious reference to these two appears in various commentaries; in Ibn-Hishām to Jabr alone. Nöldeke has pointed out that Gabr was an Ethiopian, and so must Yasar have been. For Ibn-Hishām, see *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. A. Guillaume, Oxford (reprint), 1990, p. 180. For Nöldeke on Gabr, *ibid.*, n. 2. For a commentary, see al-Bayḍāwī in the *hāshiya* of al-Shihāb, Beirut, 1974, vol. V. p. 370, in which reference is made to both the Torah and the Gospel read aloud by Gabr and Yasar, an explicit reference to the existence of an Ethiopic Bible in Makka.

tradition seems confirmed by a well-known verse in the Qur'an which denies that the Prophet received his scriptural knowledge from a teacher in Makka, but it does not deny this teacher's existence; indeed, it affirms his existence or association with Muḥammad, denying only his role as a mentor.²⁵ What emerges from the Qur'anic verses and the tradition is that there was in Makka an Ethiopic Bible and Ethiopians who would read it.

It is not extravagant to conclude from these paragraphs that the Prophet knew Ethiopic, or some Ethiopic, and this is reflected in his employment of such Ethiopic words as *sannāy*, 'beautiful', to express his satisfaction.²⁶

These close relations between the Prophet and the Ethiopians in Makka are reflected in verses in the Qur'an which are friendly to the Christians, and their referents are most probably the Ethiopians who converted to Islam.²⁷ This is supported by the fact that in the early message of the Qur'an, the poor and the unprivileged are addressed and kind feelings are expressed towards them.²⁸ As Islam proclaimed an egalitarian principle, it is natural that the Ethiopians who were legally slaves, and so were oppressed, should have responded to a religion that in God's estimation considered them equal to the free men of Quraysh. Furthermore, as the Ethiopians were not pagans but Christians, they were more receptive to the attraction of a scriptural monotheistic religion, which Islam was, than the pagan Arabs of Makka; and they must have seen in Islam just another version of their own Christian faith, well remembered in the Qur'an, and what is more, a faith that suggested the amelioration of their social status, owing to its egalitarian ideal.

That the Qur'an seriously addressed and targeted the Ethiopian

For a detailed recent treatment of this subject, see Claude Guillot, 'Les <Informateurs> Juifs et Chrétiens de Muhammad', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21, 1998, pp. 84-126.

²⁵ See Q 16.103.

²⁶ See M. al-Bukhārī, *Akhbār al-Hubūsh* p. 43. For the term in Ge'ez, see W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez*, Weisbaden, 1991, p. 531 B.

²⁷ See Q 3.199, 5.85-8.

²⁸ See the many verses in the Qur'an which refer to the *yafīm*, the orphan, and the *miskīn*, the poor in need. The weak people, *al-mustad'afūn* and *du'afā' al-nās*, were among the early converts to Islam. See W. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, Oxford, 1953, ch. 4, esp. pp. 87-8. Watt's rejection of Lammens' views on the Aḥābīsh made him oblivious to these as an obvious target of the early Muslim *kerygma*.

community may be reflected in the number of its Ethiopic terms,²⁹ which, when heard by the Ethiopians of Makka, would have sounded familiar to them and attractive to their ears. Noteworthy is not only the number of religious terms, but also their centrality in the Qur'anic version of Christianity and their appeal to the Ethiopians, namely Jesus, the Twelve, and the Gospel, which appear in their Ethiopic forms, as 'Īsā,³⁰ *Hawāriyyūn* and *Injīl*.

The existence of an Ethiopic Bible in Makka is a matter of considerable importance. The Ethiopians in this Axumite period translated both the Old and the New Testament. If this was available in Makka, as has been argued in this paper, it means that much Biblical material was available to the Makkans, including Muḥammad. Hence, they would have understood the Qur'anic reference to Biblical figures and events, even when these sounded elliptical in the Qur'an. It is also noteworthy that the Semitic Ethiopians translated the Old Testament not from Syriac but from the Greek Septuagint. This explains the appearance of some of its prophets in the Qur'an, such as Yūnus, Jonah,³¹ with its terminals reflecting the Greek ζ which attached to their name in the Greek version. And one must not forget that the other name for the Qur'an, *muṣḥaf*, is a pure Ethiopic term.

So much, then, for the Ethiopian Christian presence in Makka, with the language of which some of the Makkans, Muḥammad included, were familiar.

²⁹ For these, see Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, *passim*, collected together in the index, pp. 305-7.

³⁰ For 'Īsā as an Ethiopic form of Jesus, see *infra*, p. 22.

³¹ See Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, pp. 295-6. Of the two Semitic languages in which Jonah ends with an (s), Ethiopic is closer to Makka than Syriac.

I am also inclined to think that Qur'anic Idrīs comes from Ethiopic. Nöldeke identifies him as Andrew, and suggests Syriac mediation. But Ethiopic is closer to Makka than Syriac. And it is not difficult to see how Ethiopic Andrew, Indryas (Matt. 4.18) could become Idrīs when transliterated into Arabic. Better than coalescence with the (d), as has been suggested for the Syriac mediation, the retention of the (n) would have allied the Ethiopic form of Andrew to the Arabic root *darasa* in its seventh derivative form *indarasa*, 'was effaced', unattractive for an important Biblical figure. The transliterated form of Ethiopic Indryas was assimilated to the Arabic morphological pattern *if'īl* in the same way that *Injīl* (Gospel) was. For Nöldeke on Idrīs, see Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary* p. 52.

Casanova and Torrey's derivation of Qur'anic Idrīs from Ezra, Septuagint Esdras, is utterly untenable since Ezra already appears in the Qur'an as 'Uzayr in the diminutive; *ibid*.

Najrān

I turn now to the question of Qur'anic Christology, which calls the founder ʿĪsā and the Christians *Naṣārā*, and presents Christianity as an alloy of the doctrines of various non-orthodox denominations. As it denies the divinity, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of its founder, together with its soteriology, it does not leave much of anything that constitutes mainstream Christianity. The Quest for the historical Muḥammad and the historical Qur'an must therefore account for the provenance of the constituents of this alloy.

A book which appeared in Arabic some years ago entitled *Qass wa-nabī* suggested that all this may be derived from Warāqa as representative of the Ebionite heresy.³² It is an intelligent book, but utterly polemical, written in the wake of the Civil War in Lebanon during which Muslim-Christian relations reached their lowest ebb.³³ There is no evidence that this sect which flourished in Trans-Jordan in the early centuries of the Christian era survived until the seventh and, what is more, in Makka. Qur'anic Christology admits of being sought most securely in other provenances, for which the sources, mainly incontestable Syriac sources, point in the direction of the great Christian Arab center to the south of Makka, Najrān in south Arabia, the city that was the scene of well-known martyrdoms which led to its rise as the great center of pilgrimage in the peninsula. Most relevant for our question is its emergence as the location of so many non-orthodox Christian denominations which gave the peninsula the reputation of being *Arabia haeresium ferax*, 'Arabia the breeding ground of heresies'. (Incidentally, the Ebionites are missing from the extant sources on Najrān.)³⁴

I opened this chapter of Arab Christianity in the early seventies of the last century with the publication of my book *The Martyrs of Najrān*, based on a precious Syriac manuscript which I discovered in the Monastery of St. Mark in Jerusalem, followed by some articles, the most relevant of which was a long one in the *Dumbarton Oaks*

³² See Abū Mūsā al-Harīrī, *Qass wa-nabī: baḥṭh fī nash'at al-Islām*, Diyār 'Aql, Lebanon, 1985.

³³ As mentioned earlier in this article, I shall deal with Warāqa, the main figure in this book, in the next volume of my series.

³⁴ See for instance *Histoire Nestorienne*, ed. A. Scher, *Patrologia Orientalis* 7, pp. 143-4.

Papers on Najrān in the sixth century.³⁵ But it left the relevance of Najrān to the two Quests, for the historical Qur'an and the historical Muḥammad, to a later date and occasion. This chapter provides such an occasion.

The following are the various Christian denominations which flourished in Najrān and south Arabia, a region close to Makka and, what is more, Arabic speaking. They shed a bright light on Qur'anic Christology:

1. In the fourth century, the Emperor Constantius (who was an Arian like his father Constantine towards the end of his life, and like his successors down to Theodosius the Great) sent his emissary Theophilus Indus to convert south Arabia to Christianity. There the latter succeeded in founding three churches.³⁶ The Arians, as is well known, emphasized the humanity of Christ and rejected his divinity. Although condemned by the Council of Nicea, Arianism lingered long mostly in the Roman occident, and it is just possible that it lingered also in the orient, in south Arabia, until the sixth or seventh century, as it did until that time among some of the Germanic tribes of western Europe.

2. More important are the Monophysites who dominated the entire Red Sea area, including south Arabia and Najrān in particular. The moderate form of Monophysitism, that of Severus of Antioch, prevailed, but this could not have been the provenance of the Qur'anic rejection of Christ's divinity, since it accepted the epithet *Theotokos* applied to the Virgin Mary, which also emphasized his divinity. What is relevant in bringing Monophysitism into this discussion is to give attention to the appearance of a group within this larger Severan mainstream Monophysitism, namely the Julianists, followers of Julian of Halicarnassus, called the *Aphthartodocetae*, also related to Docetism, which in one of its forms held that before the crucifixion, Judas Iscariot or Simon of Cyrene was substituted for Jesus who thus miraculously escaped death.³⁷ Docetism is derived

³⁵ For both these bibliographical items, see n. 6 above.

³⁶ On this, see I. Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C., 1984, pp. 86-106.

³⁷ For Julian of Halicarnassus and his followers, see *Histoire Nestorienne*, p. 144; and for Sergius and Moses, the Julianist bishops of Najrān, see Michael Syrus, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)*, ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot, vol. II, Paris, 1901, p. 263.

from the Greek verb *dokein*, 'to seem', and the Qur'anic phrase on the denial of the crucifixion and the substitution of someone else for him, in the phrase *wa-lākin shubbiha lahum*, is practically a calque of the Greek docetic phrase of the substitution; the root of the Arabic *shubbiha* is identical with the Greek *dokein*, and this clearly points to a translation of this docetic view into Arabic in the sixth century, known in Najrān where the Julianists lived. They and other related groups had flocked to Najrān after being ejected from Orthodox Byzantium and it is there that they spread their teachings.³⁸

3. Then there were the Nestorians. The church in Najrān owed its origin to Hīra on the lower Euphrates, when one of their merchants, Ḥayyān by name, accepted Christianity there and brought it to Najrān.³⁹ Hīra was not then Nestorian, but it became later the center of Arab Nestorianism in the Land of the two rivers and it kept close relations with Najrān and south Arabia. When the Nestorians were firmly established in Nisibis and became the great missionaries of Christianity in Asia, Najrān was one of their targets (and so was south Arabia) and their presence in that region is established without doubt.⁴⁰ To them may be ascribed the most striking phrase that described Jesus in the Qur'an, namely 'Īsā Ibn Maryam, 'Jesus son of Mary', a phrase which implies more than it expresses, that 'Īsā was not so much the son of Mary as that he was *not* the son of God. Although it is not yet established even in our times what exactly the Nestorians believed in the sixth and seventh centuries,⁴¹ there is some consensus that unlike the Monophysites they emphasized the humanity of Christ more than his divinity, and what matters for this discussion is what some of them believed or were thought to have believed in those days in Najrān and south Arabia. This is well documented in that precious document published in the twen-

³⁸ In addition to the Julianists, the Gnostics also held similar views on the crucifixion, but their existence in Najrān is not so clear. However, I am thankful to Dr. Emmanouela Grypeou for drawing my attention to the Gnostics in a detailed communication, especially to 'The First Apocalypse of James', (Nag Hammadi Codex V. 3), and 'The Apocalypse of Peter', (Nag Hammadi Codex VII. 3).

³⁹ See *The Book of the Ḥimyarites*, ed. Axel Moberg, Lund, 1924, p. cxxii.

⁴⁰ See Gianfranco Fiaccadori, 'Yemen Nestoriano', in S.F. Bondi, S. Pernigotti, F. Serra and A. Vivian, eds, *Studi in onore di Edda Bresciani*, Pisa, 1985, pp. 195-211.

⁴¹ See Milton Anastos, 'Nestorius was Orthodox', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16, 1962, pp. 117-40.

ties of the last century, *The Book of the Ḥimyarites*, in which Yūsuf the Ḥimyarite king and persecutor of the Christians kept taunting the Monophysites of Najrān for what he called their folly in asserting the divinity of Christ while the Christian world had renounced that folly and started calling Christ 'the son of Mary'.⁴² Although this was not true or accurate of Chalcedonian Byzantium, it was generally true of the Nestorians, to whom apparently Yūsuf the persecutor was not unfriendly and from whom he borrowed the term.

Nestorianism did not disappear from south Arabia with the triumph of Monophysitism after the fall of Yūsuf. It returned with a vengeance after the Persian conquest of south Arabia around 570 AD, as did Judaism, reflected *inter alia* in a precious quatrain of Arabic verses from the poet al-A'shā of those days, and it threatened even Najrān itself.⁴³ 570 AD is the traditional date for the birth of Muḥammad, and so Nestorianism with its phrase 'Jesus son of Mary' was alive and very much so during the Prophet's lifetime. There is even a reference to a Nestorian presence near Makka in that inter-Arab market or fair called *sūq 'Ukāz*,⁴⁴ at which various preachers were active, including the famous Quss Ibn Sā'ida, whom Muḥammad heard before his call and whom he lauded. One can, therefore, assign the phrase 'Īsā Ibn Maryam to this Nestorian ambiance in Najrān and south Arabia.

Najrān was a flourishing urban Arab center—indeed the great center of Arab Christianity in the peninsula, a caravan city on the *Via Odorifera*, and certainly visited by the Makkans and Muḥammad, even documented in the Qur'an in *Sūrat Quraysh* (Q 106) which gives special attention to *riḥlat al-shīta*' to south Arabia and to *riḥlat al-ṣayf* to *Bilād al-Shām*. And Najrānite missionaries are attested in 'Ukāz, the fair near Makka, through the famous bishop of Najrān, Quss, as will presently be discussed. So, in addition to Makka, Najrān should now be considered the second major provenance of Qur'anic Chris-

⁴² See *The Book of the Ḥimyarites*, p. cix.

⁴³ See I. Shahīd, 'The Hījra (Emigration) of the Early Muslims to Abyssinia: the Byzantine Dimension', in *Tō Hellēnikon, Festschrift, Speros Vryonis*, New York, 1995, vol. II, pp. 206-7.

⁴⁴ Documented in a Nestorian chronicle referred to by Louis Cheikho, in his *Le christianisme et la littérature chrétienne en Arabie avant l'Islam*, Beirut, 1923, p. 121. So far, I have had no access to this source.

tology, and it should be remembered that the axis Makka-Najrān may have been echoed in *Sūrat al-burūj* (Q 85).⁴⁵

It remains to account for the two terms 'Īsā, Jesus, and *Naṣārā*, Christians, and which the Qur'an uses instead of *Yasū'* and *Masīhiyyūn*, discussed by Qur'anic scholars:

1. 'Īsā has baffled scholars, and many interpretations have been propounded and rejected, among them Esau. I have no doubt that it has to be sought in the Ethiopian and Ethiopic influence and presence in Makka which I have discussed above, and it is a reflection of the strength of that presence and its impact on the Makkans and Muḥammad. The Ethiopic version of the name 'Jesus' was not a transliteration of the Semitic *Yashū'*, or *Yahushūā'*, but of the Greek *Iēsous*, and so it appears in the Ethiopic New Testament. The Arabic 'Īsā can easily be explained as an acceptance and adaptation of it, minus the final Greek ζ which in Arabic would have sounded odd or even bizarre. This is consonant with the acceptance of Ethiopic versions of Biblical figures in the Qur'an, referred to earlier in this paper, such as *Yūnus*, *Jonah*. So 'Īsā, which sounds as the exact reversal of *Yasū'*, is perfectly intelligible as the Greek version of the name, with the η in Greek becoming the long *yā'* in 'Īsā. Furthermore, the phonology of Arabic and its phonetic genius must be taken into account for explaining the rejection of *Yasū'* in the Qur'an. The morphological pattern of this form is that of the third person masculine singular of the verb, *sā'a*. *Yasū'* thus sounds not like a noun, the name of a person, but like a verb and one not pleasant or elegant semantically:⁴⁶ in one of its significations it means exactly the opposite of Jesus' self-image as the good shepherd. One of the three dogmas of the Qur'an, namely, *lisān 'arabī mubīn*, must always be taken into account when discussing names in the Qur'an.

2. *Naṣārā* has been discussed as if it was a form of the name of certain sects whose name sounds like it, such as the Nazirites, and the Nazarenes, or the Nosraye, a view that cannot be accepted.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁵ Possibly Q 85.10, since the first eleven verses of the *sūra* are about Daniel and the three youths, not about Najrān as is often thought.

⁴⁶ And even a more inelegant signification is noted by James Bellamy, who, however, suggests a different interpretation for 'Īsā; see his 'A Further Note on 'Īsā', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, 2002, pp. 587-8.

⁴⁷ Its most enthusiastic champion has been the author of *Qass wa-nabī*, *supra*, n. 32.

Qur'an insists that it is a revelation that is in direct relationship with the two preceding Semitic Abrahamic religions. It was revealed in a world presided over by the Chalcedonian Byzantine Empire of the Mediterranean, and by Severan Monophysitism in western Arabia and the Red Sea. Consequently, it would not have conceived of the Christians as an obscure *sect* whose name sounded like Qur'anic *Naṣārā*. The *Naṣārā*, the Christians of the Qur'an, were not a sect but those of the Christian *oikoumene* in the seventh century, which included the Ethiopian community in Makka. As for the choice of the term *Naṣārā* rather than *Masīḥiyyūn* for the Christians in the Qur'an, the following reasons may be suggested:

i. Jesus himself was called in the New Testament 'Jesus of Nazareth', his native town in Matthew, John, and Acts.⁴⁸ And so the application of the term *Naṣārā* for his followers, which in Arabic is derived from his hometown Nazareth, is natural. And 'Nazarenes' was the term used in the plural for the Christians in Acts 24:5, in the hostile charge of Tertullus the orator. But it continued to be used of the Christians for centuries, and so presumably the term lingered in the consciousness of the peoples of the Orient, including the Arabs of Makka.

ii. The same reason given against the employment of Yasū' may also be given for *Naṣārā* against *Masīḥiyyūn*, namely, the law of phonetic facility, which is partial to *Naṣārā* as against *Masīḥiyyūn*, especially used in the plural, with the sequence of the *yā'* *mushaddada* and the *wāw*.

iii. More important is the difficulty of deriving denominative verbs from the noun forms. The verb form *tanaṣṣara* is clear for 'to become a Christian' and is also attractive, while *tamassaḥa* is not so clear and can be inelegant in what it can mean in Arabic. So, *Naṣārā* won, and it is used fourteen times in the Qur'an and once in the singular, *Naṣrānī*.

iv. It is also possible that the Qur'an wanted to avoid relating the name of the religion to its founder in view of Qur'anic Christology. *Al-Masīḥiyyūn* would imply belief in al-Masīḥ as God, whereas the Qur'an teaches and insists on rejecting his divinity and so chose the more neutral term *Naṣārā*. It was something like calling Islam Muḥammadanism, an appellation that Muslims rightly reject.

In the course of this paper I have tried to draw attention to the

⁴⁸ Matt. 21.11; John 1.45; Acts 10.38.

importance of the Arab background for the Qur'an and Islam, not the pagan pre-Islamic one but the Christianized Arab one, the world of Arab Christianity in its golden period of the three centuries from Constantine to Heraclius, during which the Christian Arabs contributed saints, martyrs and theologians, and during which at least some portions of the Bible were translated into Arabic.⁴⁹ The Qur'an is both the holy book of Islam and the major literary document of Arabic prose of the seventh century, and to Muslims of all centuries. It insists on its being inimitable, a dogma that makes sense only when it is related to the other, *lisān 'arabī mubīn*. To discuss this holy book, which is a *chef d'oeuvre* of the Arabic language, without attending to its Arab and Arabic background is to leave it unintelligible and in splendid isolation, cut off from its natural moorings which alone can make it fully intelligible. This is not to exclude other non-Arab and Arabic elements. I have indeed paid special attention to them and emphasized that all these non-Arabic elements, such as the Ethiopian and the Ethiopic, must be taken into account in solving many of the cruxes of Qur'anic studies.

'Ukāz

The Arabic sources record that the Prophet Muḥammad visited the *sūq* of Ukāz,⁵⁰ preaching monotheism to the Arabs of that fair, met the Christian Bishop of Najrān, Quss Ibn-Sā'ida al-Iyādī,⁵¹ and heard him deliver a sermon mounted on a camel. Later, after his call, he remembered him appreciatively when he received a delegation from his group, Iyād. As happened in the case of such figures as Warāqa Ibn Nawfal and Bahīrā, much legendary material accumulated around the figure of Quss. This has placed him under a cloud and has obscured the kernel of truth that the account undoubtedly contains when it is shorn of the luxuriant undergrowth that has caused some to doubt even his relationship to Najrān. Those who doubted did so with hardly any awareness of the advances made in

⁴⁹ This is a history that remains to be written in full. I. Shahīd's five volumes, *Byzantium and the Arabs*, have contributed towards writing such a history.

⁵⁰ For the latest on the fair of 'Ukāz, see the entry by the present writer in *EF²*, *s.v.*

⁵¹ On Quss, see *EF²*, *s.v.*, and Sezgin, *GAS*, vol. II, pp. 180-2.

our knowledge of this Arabian martyropolis in the course of the last three decades, since the publication of the volume titled *The Martyrs of Najrān*. Although his episcopate does not have to be related to Najrān, there is no cogent reason for rejecting its Najrānite affiliation, and the following may be adduced in its defense:

1. Najrān was the seat of an episcopate. The incontestable Syriac source, the basis of the book on *The Martyrs of Najrān*, gave us the name of its first bishop Paul,⁵² consecrated by Philoxenos of Maboug, Hieropolis, around 500 AD; this Syriac source was written some twenty years after his consecration. The last bishop of Najrān⁵³ is also attested around 630 AD. He came to the Prophet Muḥammad in Madina with the delegation of Najrān. We also know from the Greek and Arabic sources some of the names of its bishops in the interval. So, the Najrān episcopate was well and alive at the time of the encounter between the Prophet and its bishop in ʿUkāz.

2. Quss's affiliation, according to the genealogists, was to the Iyād, a large Arab group or even confederacy which played an important role in the history of pre-Islamic Arabia, and what is more, of Christianity. In Hīra alone they built and endowed four monasteries.⁵⁴ That one of them, Quss, became the bishop of Najrān should cause no surprise. After the notorious martyrdoms, and even before, the church of Najrān had on its staff clerics from the most varied ethnic groups, as is clear from the Syriac document on the martyrs and from *The Book of the Himyarites*.⁵⁵

3. As for his appearance at the fair of ʿUkāz, this was most natural. That fair was not only a market where the Arabs met to buy and sell. It was also a major venue for the people of the peninsula to listen to the most prized of all artistic performances, the poetic contests that took place with an umpire who would decide on the best poem of the season.⁵⁶ It was also the venue for Christian preachers, where they tried to wean away the Arabs from their paganism. The Prophet Muḥammad frequented it, and the Nestorians too had a

⁵² See *The Martyrs of Najrān*, p. 46.

⁵³ His name was Abū al-Ḥārith; see Ibn Saʿd, *Al-ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, vol. I, Beirut, 1960, p. 357.

⁵⁴ See ʿArif ʿAbd al-Ghanī, *Taʾrīkh al-Hīra*, Damascus, 1993, pp. 49, 58, 59.

⁵⁵ See *The Martyrs of Najrān*, p. 64; *Book of the Himyarites*, pp. cix-cx.

⁵⁶ That the accounts of some of these poetic contests have been embellished should not count against their historicity.

presence there. No wonder then that the great center of Christianity among the Arabs, Najrān, would send its bishop to preach the Word there.⁵⁷ Najrān had within its orbit al-Ṭāʾif, where the Christian poet Umayya Ibn Abī al-Ṣalt flourished,⁵⁸ to whom is ascribed a corpus of poetry redolent of religious ideas, no doubt derived from the close proximity of al-Ṭāʾif to Najrān. The presence, then, of the bishop of Najrān would have been very natural, especially as ʿUkāz was the venue for the Arabs who would come as pilgrims for the pre-Islamic pilgrimage, and there could be no better locale than ʿUkāz for winning them over to Christianity. A Christian bishop at ʿUkāz could easily be related to the Christian presence in Makka, represented by that mysterious Mawqif al-Naṣrānī, ‘the station of the Christian’, one of the stations of the pre-Islamic pilgrimage.⁵⁹ Presumably, Christian missionaries wanted the Christian Arab pilgrims who shared in that syncretistic pilgrimage to halt at a station specifically Christian, and it is not altogether unlikely that this was part of the mission of Najrān and its episcopate, namely, to divert the Arabs from visiting the pagan Kaʿba full of idols in Makka, and lure them away to visit the Christian Kaʿba of Najrān.⁶⁰ So much for the defense of Quss’ episcopate over Najrān; there is no cogent reason for rejecting it.

Qurʾanic scholars have argued about the style of the Qurʾan since the days of Nöldeke,⁶¹ who even went to the length of studying the chronology of the Qurʾanic *sūras* along stylistic lines, one of his substantial contributions to our understanding of Islam’s holy book. And others since then have written on the style of the Arabian *kuhhān*, soothsayers, as a model, especially *à propos* of asseverative passages. There may be an element of truth in this, but all these features—rhyme, assonance, and consonance—had become an integral

⁵⁷ On the Nestorians in ʿUkāz, see *supra*, n. 44.

⁵⁸ On Umayya, see *EP*, *s.v.*

⁵⁹ For this *Mawqif*, see Abū Ubayd ʿAbdallāh al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam mā istāʾjama min asmaʾ al-bilād wa-al-mawāḍiʿ*, ed. M. Saqqa, Cairo, 1945-51, vol. IV, pp. 1190-2, for Wādī Muḥaṣṣir in which the *mawqif* was located.

⁶⁰ This may have been the alternative to the military attempt, referred to in Q 105, which could suggest that the Abyssinians wanted to divert the Arabs from the Makkan pilgrimage to the Christian Kaʿba of Najrān. The sources relate the military expedition to the rivalry between the two Kaʿbas, the one at Makka and the other at Najrān.

⁶¹ See Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Qurʾan: Content and Style*, Aldershot, 2001.

part of Arabic prose composition in pre-Islamic times, when Arabic prose developed alongside poetry, although poetry remained the predominant partner in this association as the highest artistic literary achievement. This is where Quss and his Arabic sermons come in as the most natural source of stylistic influence on the Qur'an. And this conclusion is supported, unlike others in Muḥammadan and Qur'anic studies, not by inferences from uncertain data, but from certain data related to the Prophet's presence in 'Ukāz and his having heard Quss's sermons. So attention must now be paid to this.

As rhymed prose was the quarry from which Arabic verse developed once meter was applied to rhyme, so it was the basis of *artistic* Arabic prose in pre-Islamic times.⁶² It was the stylistic device for any form of elevated speech such as oratory on important occasions, the immediate descendants of which were the speeches and sermons delivered during the lifetime of the Prophet, such as the speeches of the various delegations which came to him in Madina around 8/630.

Life in pre-Islamic Arabia provided many occasions for the development of secular oratory, but the Christian mission to the Arabs stimulated Arabic oratorical literature and imparted to it a new dimension, deriving from the spirituality of the new religion that was preached to them. Part of the Christian liturgy was, of course, the sermon; and just as Christian sermons became an important part of Christian literature in the language of other peoples to whom that faith was preached, so was it for the Arabs, although almost all of it has perished.

It is not difficult to visualize the situation in Najrān. In a long article which appeared in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*⁶³ after the appearance of *The Martyrs of Najrān*, a detailed account was given of the Christian scene in Najrān in the fifty years that followed the triumph of Christianity and its restoration in about 520. Sixth-century Najrān witnessed a flowering of Arabic poetry through some of its own poets, and through other distinguished poets, such as A'shā, one of the poets of the *Mu'allaqāt*, who visited the lords of Najrān to recite his

⁶² See the monumental article by Devin Stewart, 'Saj' in the Qur'an', in Rippin, *Qur'an: Content and Style*, pp. 213-51.

⁶³ See 'Byzantium in South Arabia', *supra*, n. 6.

panegyrics on them.⁶⁴ With this as a background, it is not difficult to conclude how religious oratory must also have striven to keep abreast of poetry and secular oratory in that distinguished Christian urban center, Najrān.

It was within this literary atmosphere that Quss was installed as the bishop of such a center, coming also from a group, the Iyād, which had been especially known both for its eloquence and for its devotion to Christianity.⁶⁵ Najrān was the perfect venue for the development of Christian Arabic oratory. A bishop in Najrān who aspired to reach his audience must have applied all the rhetorical devices employed by the secular poets and orators of the town. He had before him also the well-known speeches and sermons in the Bible in both Testaments, those of Moses and of Christ himself, the Sermon on the Mount. Moreover, of the many peoples of *Oriens Christianus* to whom the Gospel was preached, the Arabs were one of the few whose literature was already flourishing, unlike the Armenians, the Georgians, the Ethiopians and the Slavs. It was only natural, then, that a Christian Arab oratory should have been expressed with consummate literary finish.

Quss' sermons became models of literary excellence, and were judged so by the great connoisseur of Arabic literature, both poetry and prose, Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāhīz,⁶⁶ of whose *Al-bayān wa-al-tabyīn* pre-Islamic oratory formed a part, no doubt due to the fact that he had at his disposal specimens which had survived till his time, including those of Quss and his group the Iyād.

If Najrān was an urban Arab center in which a literary finish was necessary for Christian sermons, 'Ukāz, whither Quss traveled for preaching, was equally such a place, even more so. It is well known that 'Ukāz was the inter-Arab fair, not only for buying and selling, but also for contests where Arab poets presented their compositions, as has already been mentioned. And while Najrān was a regional center for the Christian Arabs, 'Ukāz was the venue for most of the pagan Arabs of the entire peninsula, and was the most famous of

⁶⁴ For the *diwān* of the Banū al-Ḥārith, the Arabs of Najrān, see *supra*, n. 9; and for A'shā's poem, see *Diwān al-A'sha*, ed. M. Ḥusayn, Cairo, 1950, pp. 171-4.

⁶⁵ For Iyād, see al-Jāhīz, *Al-bayān wa-al-tabyīn*, ed. A. Hārūn, Cairo, 1961, vol. I, pp. 42-5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 308-9; and A.Z. Şafwat, *Jamhara khuṭab al-'Arab*, Cairo, 1962, vol. I, pp. 38-9.

all these inter-Arab fairs, *aswāq*. It was here, according to tradition, that al-Aʿshā, one of the foremost poets, won the prize and where the umpire was al-Nābigha, the poet-laureate of the Ghassānids. Quss would, thus, have been preaching the Christian message to Arabs whose ears had been attuned to addresses conceived and expressed in a highly-strung literary Arabic, and he had competitors. The Nestorians, his rivals, had an oratory at ʿUkāz, at which they also tried to preach their own version of Christianity. The Prophet Muḥammad, according to the sources, also presented his new message to his fellow Arabs, trying to win them over. Thus Quss would have been especially careful to deliver sermons that were informed by the highest standards of Arabic rhetorical devices, and the most important stylistic features were the time-honored *sajʿ*, rhyme, together with *muwāzana*, both consonance and assonance. All this is clear in the well-known sermon that has survived, the authenticity of which no one has doubted in medieval or modern times.⁶⁷ Its spell remained vibrant even in the sixth/twelfth century, for after hearing it Saladin recaptured Jerusalem from the Crusaders. His historian ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, entitled his work on that conquest *Al-fath al-Qussī fi al-fath al-Qudsī*, clearly remembering the bishop of Najrān and considering that only his eloquence was worthy of singing the praises of Saladin for the recapture of Jerusalem.⁶⁸ According to the Muslim sources, Muḥammad had heard Quss at ʿUkāz perhaps more than once. An examination of the famous sermon of Quss and the style of the Qurʾan in its employment of rhyme, assonance and consonance, can easily yield the conclusion that the Qurʾanic style in this sense is a continuation of that of the Christian preachers of Najrān, expressed in the Arabic language and addressed to Arabs.

Equally important as an inspiration that came from Christian preaching in ʿUkāz was the rise of that unique dogma, the most striking of the three Qurʾanic dogmas, *ʾijāz al-Qurʾān*, the inimitability or incomparability of the Qurʾan.⁶⁹ The holy books of the two

⁶⁷ Al-Jāhīz, a great connoisseur and critic of Arabic poetry, accepted the sermon and never doubted its attribution to Quss. The non-reference to Jesus in the sermon is not unparalleled: the Christian Emperor Constantius wrote to the two Christian rulers of Ethiopia a letter without any mention of Christ; see the present writer in *BAFIC*, pp. 91-2.

⁶⁸ See his *Al-fath al-Qussī fi al-fath al-Qudsī*, ed. M.M. Ṣubḥ, Cairo, 1965.

⁶⁹ For the latest on *ʾijāz*, inimitability, see *EP*, *s.v.*

other Abrahamic religions never claimed inimitability as one of their attributes, let alone its function as the miracle of their prophets and the basis of their divine origin. But when it is remembered that this was a revelation which took place in Arabia, that it was received by an Arab, and was addressed to Arabs, the mystery starts to unravel. It could happen only in Arabia, among the Semitic people who alone of all Semites had perfected a metrical system consisting of some sixteen different meters and a highly complex rhyme system, and through it developed a poetry which is also unique among all the Semitic literatures. The other dogma, the Arabness of the Qur'an, is also relevant to this discussion, since it was the linguistic medium through which God chose to send down his revelation. And so the literary effect of the message is inextricably bound up with the genius of this particular language. Although poetry was the form of literary discourse which was most highly prized, it did not take prose long to catch up with it and sometimes even to leave it behind in the estimation of pre-Islamic Arab society. Such was the situation around 600 AD, on the eve of Islam; the Arabic language had reached its topographical maturity, to borrow from the language of geology, and Arabic poetry and prose reached the summit of artistic excellence; so much so that the poets started to complain they had exhausted all themes and all possibilities of literary expression.⁷⁰ Additionally, on the Arabic scale of values literary excellence was one of the ideals, and the poet was considered one of the *kamala*, perfect men, in pre-Islamic Arabia. Literary excellence was thus the Arab ideal in the non-military sphere, and this was natural since their pastoralist way of life precluded the potential development of the other arts such as architecture, sculpture, painting, and music.

The further step from literary excellence to literary incomparability was not far. And 'Ukāz provided the venue for the unfolding of this Arab ideal. When a poet such as al-A'shā was declared the best by an umpire, who, according to tradition, was none other than the famous panegyrist of the Ghassānid allies of Byzantium and one of the poets of the *Mu'allaqāt*, the declaration of his victory expressed and implied that his ode had triumphed over those of other contestants, and so in this sense was incomparable. Makkans, including the Prophet Muḥammad, who attended the fair were aware of this ideal

⁷⁰ As in the opening verse of 'Antar's *Mu'allaqā*.

of literary excellence declared at 'Ukāz, and thus the application of the concept to a document such as the Qur'an was very natural. And it was understandable, since most of the literary masterpieces of pre-Islamic Arabia had been poems and odes, not a prose work; and the appearance of the Qur'an, displaying all the qualities of a literary masterpiece, could only have enhanced its uniqueness, since it was a prose work, and a massive one, not a poem or a sermon, neither of which could have been long. The Qur'an, on the other hand, was not a short sermon but a massive prose work which had availed itself of all the resources of 'that deep-toned instrument' (in Gibb's words) Arabic, and especially its sonority, to produce a *chef d'oeuvre* that stood a very good chance of being described as incomparable, certainly in the Arab context, since nothing like it had appeared in Arabic before.

Without denying or eliminating other influences, non-Arab and non-Arabic, it has been maintained in this part of the paper that the crucial encounters and influences for understanding the style of the Qur'an and its dogma of inimitability took place in the Arab ambience of 'Ukāz, but emanated originally from Najrān. Without appreciating this, the Qur'an as an *Arabic* holy book which prides itself on being both Arabic and incomparable, will remain, as has been said earlier, hanging in splendid isolation from the literary tradition to which it clearly belongs. But this background for the Arabic and inimitable Qur'an has not hitherto been taken into consideration, because the history of Arab Christianity in its golden period from Constantine to Heraclius, and especially the significance of Najrān, (and more specifically and relevantly the sixth century, the eve of Islam), had not been written when the *traditional* conclusions on the influences on the Qur'an were drawn and published.

THE FACE TO FACE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN
PATRIARCH SOPHRONIUS OF JERUSALEM AND
THE CALIPH 'UMAR IBN AL-KHAṬṬĀB: FRIENDS
OR FOES?

Daniel J. Sahas

The capitulation of Jerusalem to the Arabs, involving the encounter of Sophronius Patriarch of Jerusalem (634-8) with the second caliph 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (634-44) and the alleged covenant (*ahtnamē*, 'letter of obligation') granted to the Patriarch by 'Umar as a way of securing for the Christians ownership of the holy sites, constitutes an interesting and intriguing footnote, and maybe a valuable chapter, in the earliest period of Christian-Muslim relations.¹ The historical details notwithstanding, this encounter affords an opportunity to concentrate on the two personalities, and to evaluate the relationship that developed between them, speculative though this venture may appear to be.

The dynamics of encounters between people of faith, especially conflicting faiths, are determined by personal predisposition and chemistry. But these are hardly ever recorded, and one has to read between the lines of the written record, allowing the imagination to fill the gaps. Thus the reconstruction of the meeting between these representative men of faith, like the study of the collection of the Qur'an, requires a synthesis of whatever historical fragments can be extracted 'from stones and palm leaves' and 'from the hearts of men', which is to say a kind of 'psychological dissection' of personality traits.

Sophronius' stature, his talent with words, his impressive library (a product of his life at the monastery of St. Theodosius) which was

¹ Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, 'Patriarch Sophronius, 'Umar and the capitulation of Jerusalem', and 'The Covenant of 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb with the Christians of Jerusalem' (Arabic translation), in Hadia Dajani-Shakeel and Burhan Dajani, eds, *Al-sira al-islāmī al-faranjī 'alā Filastīn fī al-qurūn al-wustā*, Beirut, 1994, pp. 53-71, and 72-7; Heribert Busse, 'Omar b. al-Hattāb in Jerusalem', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5, 1984, pp. 73-119, and 'Omar's Image as the Conqueror of Jerusalem', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8, 1986, pp. 149-68.

copied and annotated by generations of writers, and especially his contemporaneity with the earliest Muslim conquests (events only scantily documented by Byzantine and Muslim sources), make him a particularly attractive figure and significant historical source.² His *Conciliar Letter*, or letter of credence which he sent to the synod of bishops in Constantinople on his election to the patriarchal throne of Jerusalem in 634,³ communicates the fear of the Christian population and the impoverishment of religious life they experienced, as well as Sophronius' own shock at the 'revolt ... of all the barbarians, especially the Saracens ... who with raw and cruel disposition, impious and godless audacity were ravaging' the Christian community 'unexpectedly', ἀδοκίτως.⁴ This 'ἀδοκίτως' betrays how much Sophronius and the neighbouring Christians, as well as Constantinople and the emperor Heraclius, had underestimated the social and religious upheaval which was brewing among the Arab tribes inside and outside Arabia. It points also to the military technique of surprise employed by 'Umar in the first wave of conquest.⁵

A few months after the *Conciliar Letter*, in December of the same year 634 (a date confirmed by internal evidence),⁶ Sophronius delivered his *Christmas Sermon* in Jerusalem instead of Bethlehem.⁷ In this he lamented the apprehensiveness felt by Christians at travelling to the birthplace of Christ to celebrate his birth, because the city was

² Cf. R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others saw it. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton, 1997, pp. 67-73, and *passim*. On Sophronius, cf. the authoritative monograph by Christoph von Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem; vie monastique et confession dogmatique*, Paris, 1972.

³ G.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, Florence, vol. XI, pp. 461-510, and *PG*, vol. LXXXVII, cols 3148-3200.

⁴ Cf. *PG*, vol. LXXXVII, col. 3197D.

⁵ On the early Muslim conquests, cf. Fred M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, Princeton, 1981; Walter E. Kaegi Jr., *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, Cambridge, 1992; D.J. Constantelos, 'The Moslem Conquests of the Near East as Revealed in the Greek sources of the Seventh and the Eighth Centuries', *Byzantion* 42, 1972, pp. 326-57; Donald R. Hill, *The Termination of Hostilities in the Early Arab Conquests, AD 634-656*, London, 1971; Hugh Kennedy, 'Change and Continuity in Syria and Palestine at the time of the Moslem Conquests', *ARAM*, 1, 1989, pp. 258-67; Felix-Marie Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine depuis la conquête d'Alexandre jusqu'à l'invasion arabe. Tome II: De la guerre juive à l'invasion arabe*, Paris, 1952; Marius Canard, *L'expansion arabo-islamique et ses répercussions*, London, 1974.

⁶ Cf. Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jerusalem*, p. 103.

⁷ Ed. H. Usener, in *Rheinisches Museum* NF 41, 1886, pp. 500-16; reprinted in *Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* 1, Bonn, 1889, pp. 326-30.

in Arab hands. That was the first year of ʿUmar's caliphate, the first year of his own episcopacy, and the earliest experience of the Arab conquests; hence the relatively mild character of his remarks, and the expression of hope that the Arabs would eventually be defeated once the Christians strengthened their faith in God and amended their conduct. A much more depressing situation had developed three years later when Sophronius was delivering his *Epiphany Sermon*⁸ on January 6, 637, only a few months after the Byzantine defeat at the Battle of Yarmūk in August 636. Damascus fell in that same year,⁹ and Jerusalem capitulated a few months later, in February 638 (not in 635 as asserted by Busse).¹⁰

Abū ʿUbayda Ibn al-Jarrāḥ, the general who conducted the siege, offered either conversion to Islam or capitulation of the city and payment of taxes in exchange for the safe conduct of its inhabitants, or else war and, in the case of defeat, destruction. Violent assault on the city would have meant its devastation and most likely the disappearance of its holy sites.¹¹ The experience of the destruction of the city by the Persians twenty-five years earlier made fighting the Arabs unacceptable to its inhabitants. Conversion to Islam, or any conversion, was also beyond consideration. It is most doubtful whether Sophronius and his contemporaries had any knowledge of Islam, general or in any detail, of the kind that John of Damascus demonstrated decades later.¹² But even in the most general sense, as a 'Christian heresy' Islam could not have been acceptable to a discerning theologian and a staunch Orthodox. Earlier, Sophronius had easily detected monophysitism in disguise in the politically moti-

⁸ Ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Analekta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, vol. V, Brussels, 1963 (1888), pp. 151-68.

⁹ On this event, with reference to Arabic sources, cf. Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, esp. ch. III, pp. 151-3.

¹⁰ ʿOmar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb in Jerusalem', pp. 111-14. Cf. also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 64, n. 31.

¹¹ Walled cities were safe havens for civilians and escaping troops alike. Three such cities, Damascus, Jerusalem and Caesarea Maritima, had proven havens for fleeing Byzantine troops after their defeat at Ajnādayn and the battle of Yarmūk. Such influxes created problems for the local population, which tended to abandon the city in order to avoid disease and food shortages. Sophronius' Christmas and Epiphany sermons reflect the panic of the Christian population of Jerusalem at the Arab invasion and the incursion of fleeing troops; cf. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, pp. 100-1.

¹² Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'*, Leiden, 1972.

vated monothelite compromise, a doctrinal heresy which he opposed vehemently. The Emperor had adopted monothelitism for political reasons as a compromise position between the Chalcedonians and the Monophysite non-Chalcedonians. Pope Honorius I (625-38) had followed his lead, while the Patriarchs Sergius I of Constantinople (610-38) and Cyrus of Alexandria (630-43) were Monothelites by conviction. Finally, the patriarchal throne of Antioch was at the time vacant. Sophronius' stand on this doctrinal issue distinguished him as the only faithful Chalcedonian in the pentarchy of his day. Conversion, therefore, especially to a foreign doctrine, was out of the question. Furthermore, he knew almost nothing of the positive notions and claims with which Islam had embellished Jerusalem, as the city of the sacrifice of Abraham, the site from where Muḥammad had ascended to heaven as the Qur'an intimates (Q 17.1), the setting for the final judgment, and the honoured first *qibla* for all Muslims.

The option of capitulation in exchange for payment of taxes had a precedent, without being considered a treasonous act. Damascus had been surrendered by its bishop, or 'abbot', to Khālīd Ibn al-Walīd,¹³ and in 641 the Patriarch of Alexandria delivered the city to 'Amr Ibn al-ʿĀs. The caliphate of 'Umar was extremely successful from a military point of view, and the Muslims did not allow their foes to have truces except on terms advantageous to themselves.¹⁴ Even so, it seems that it was not fear that led Sophronius to sanction the capitulation of Jerusalem, but a sense of realism. The resounding lack of Byzantine support for the beleaguered city made it a matter of urgency for him to take a decisive initiative.¹⁵ He also chose capitulation without being aware of all the risks that such a choice could entail. The Muslim invasions had brought about a new wave of 'neomartyrs' for the Church and had revived the cult of saints, such as that of the indigenous St. Stephen.¹⁶ After the capitulation

¹³ Cf. al-Baladhūrī, *Futūḥ*, and the *vitae* of John of Damascus in Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*, pp. 17 ff.

¹⁴ Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 239.

¹⁵ On this question, cf. Daniel J. Sahas, 'Why did Heraclius not defend Jerusalem, and fight the Arabs?', *Parole de l' Orient* 24, 1999, pp. 79-97.

¹⁶ As Abel notes, 'Après la reddition de Jérusalem en février 638, dix d'entre eux sont décapités pour l'exemple devant les murs de la Ville sainte, assistés par le patriarche Sophrone qui recueille ensuite leurs dépouilles pour les ensevelir au

of Jerusalem, Sophronius himself became a witness to martyrdom with the death of the sixty martyrs of Gaza.¹⁷

Sophronius' response to Abū ʿUbayda's terms was capitulation, but to ʿUmar in person. What was the meaning of his demand? Was this a symbolic act of defiance towards Abū ʿUbayda, the offender of the Holy City? Had Sophronius some information on ʿUmar's qualities as a person and ruler, which gave him reason to feel confidence in him? Was this posture another expression of Sophronius' independence of mind, and the exercise of an ethnarchic role in the absence of any other political or military authority? Or did he consider that surrendering Jerusalem demanded an official and ceremonial process as only befitted its importance and sacredness?¹⁸ Clear evidence that will provide an answer to these questions is lacking, but a combination of all of the above makes Sophronius' demand natural. ʿUmar received news of Sophronius' request while in Syria and responded immediately, arriving in Jerusalem riding on a camel.¹⁹ No source takes Sophronius away from the city; they all bring ʿUmar to the city. He camped at the Mount of Olives, and that is where he met the Patriarch. It is here that the capitulation of Jerusalem was signed in February 638.²⁰ He then proceeded to enter Jerusalem in what

lieu même sur lequel il fonda l'oratoire du proto-martyr Saint-Étienne'; *Histoire de la Palestine*, p. 404.

¹⁷ Cf. the Latin translation by Hippolyte Delehaye, 'Passio Sanctorum Sexaginta Martyrum', *Analecta Bollandiana* 23, 1904, pp. 289-307. On this source, which has been used to revise the date of Sophronius' death to 639, cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 347-51.

¹⁸ Cf. Schönborn, *Sophrone de Jérusalem*, pp. 95-6.

¹⁹ The question as to how many times ʿUmar came to Jerusalem and for what purpose is a matter of debate. According to Elias bar Shīnāya, bishop of Nisibis, ʿUmar entered Jerusalem in 17 AH. He had come from Medina to al-Jabiya in the Golan in 16 or 17/637-8 for a number of purposes, one of which became to conclude a treaty with the people of Jerusalem; cf. *Opus Chronologium*, ed. Ernest W. Brooks, trans. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, Paris, 1910, pp. 133 (text), 64 (translation); also Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, pp. 151-2, and p. 321 n. 286, for the relevant sources.

²⁰ Were there two phases in the signing of a single treaty, one at al-Jabiya with representatives of the people of Jerusalem (Christians and maybe Jews), and another with Patriarch Sophronius? Details regarding the phases and places of the actual signing of the treaty are confusing and contradictory. Some sources suggest that ʿUmar negotiated a treaty with the people of Jerusalem at al-Jabiya (Gabithā) in the Golan between Damascus and Jerusalem. Some sources even identify it as the site of the battle of Yarmūk. Al-Jabiya had served as a place of retreat and regrouping for the Muslim troops between the first and second sieges of Damascus; cf. Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, pp. 151-2, and 322, n. 287.

one may suggest resembled a pilgrimage, or an official entrance ceremony.²¹

Details of what followed the signing of the capitulation have been related by the learned physician and Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria Eutychius Saʿīd Ibn Baṭrīq (935-40).²² His *Chronography* from Adam to the year 938, written in Arabic,²³ deals primarily with events of the history of the Church of Alexandria, and only in a cursory manner with the period of three-hundred years of Muslim rule. However, it provides interesting and unique information on events which he knew about in such places as Antioch and Jerusalem. Here is how Eutychius endeavours to record their encounter:²⁴

When the gate of the city was opened ‘Umar came in with his entourage and sat at the *atreion* of the Church of the Resurrection. When the time of prayer approached ‘Umar said to Patriarch Sophronius: ‘I want to pray’. And he responded: ‘Commander of the Faithful, pray in the place where you are now’. And ‘Umar [said]: ‘I do not want to pray here.’ The Patriarch then led him to the church of Constantine [the Church of the Resurrection] where he spread a mat made of straw on the floor of the Church. But ‘Umar said: ‘I do not want to pray here either’. He went out to the steps which are at the gate on the eastern side of the Church of St. Constantine and he prayed alone on the steps. Then he sat down and said to Patriarch Sophronius: ‘Patriarch, do you know why I did not pray inside the Church?’ He answered: ‘I do not know, Commander of the Faithful’. And ‘Umar said to him: ‘If I had prayed inside the Church, you would be losing it and it would have gone from your hands because after my death the Muslims would seize it saying: “‘Umar has prayed here”. But give me a piece of *pergamene* to write for you a document.’ And he wrote

²¹ Cf. Shlomo D. Goitein, ‘The Sanctity of Jerusalem and Palestine in Early Islam’, in his *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, Leiden, 1966, pp. 135-48.

²² On Eutychius, cf. Michel Breydy, *Études sur Saʿīd ibn Baṭrīq et ses sources (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 450 = subs. 69)*, Louvain, 1983; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 442-3, giving further bibliography; also Sidney H. Griffith, ‘Eutychius of Alexandria on the Emperor Theophilus and Iconoclasm in Byzantium: a Tenth Century Moment in Christian Apologetics in Arabic’, *Byzantion* 52, 1982, pp. 154-90. On the meaning of the name ‘Baṭrīq’ in the Arab sources, cf. Jean-Claude Cheynet, ‘Notes Arabo-Byzantines’, in *Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν Νίκο Σβορώνο*, vol. I, Rethymno: University of Crete, 1986, pp. 147-52.

²³ *Eutychii patriarchae Alexandrini Annales*, ed. L. Cheiko, 2 vols (CSCO 50, 51), Beirut, 1906-9; Latin translation in *PG* vol. CXI, cols 907-1156.

²⁴ Cf. the Greek text of this narrative in I. Phokylides, ‘Ἡ ὄπισθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Τάφου ἀνακαλυφθεῖσα Ἀραβικὴ ἐπιγραφή’, *Nea Sion* 10, 1910, pp. 262-8, at 263-4; also Eugenius Michaelides, ‘Ἡ συνθήκη τοῦ Ὁμάρ μπέν αλ-Χαττάπ κατὰ τοὺς Ἀραβας ἱστοριογράφους’, *Nea Sion* 21, 1926, pp. 499-504, at 503-4.

that Muslims should not pray on the steps as a congregation, but individually, and that they should not gather here for the purpose of [communal] prayer, nor should be called together by the voice of a caller [*muezzin*]. And he gave it to the Patriarch... Then ʿUmar left to visit Bethlehem. When the hour of prayer approached he prayed inside the Church under the western apse, which was completely decorated with a mosaic. ʿUmar wrote a document for the sake of the Patriarch, that the Muslims should not pray in this place, except individually, the one after the other, nor congregate here for the purpose of praying, nor should they be called by the voice of a caller for prayer, and that no form of this document should be altered.

Sophronius died shortly after the capitulation of Jerusalem, without leaving any note about the circumstances, or about his own feelings. Delivering up the Holy City must have been a painful task and a traumatic experience for him. It may not, therefore, be a coincidence that his death occurred only a few months, if not weeks, later. The date of his death has been placed, not without reason, at 11 March, 638.²⁵ He was a fighter proven in words and actions,²⁶ the only ecclesiastic in Syria and Palestine who did not perish fighting the Muslims, and who by facing ʿUmar extracted from him benefits for the Christians in the Holy Land.²⁷

²⁵ This date is not universally accepted; cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 349-50. On account of the martyrdom of the Sixty Martyrs of Gaza (February, 638) and Sophronius' pastoral care of them, Schönborn has moved the date of Sophronius' death to the next year, 639, *Sophrone de Jérusalem*, p. 97, n. 136, though his argument is not convincing. Less convincing is David Wood's theory that Sophronius died a martyr's death; 'The 60 Martyrs of Gaza and the Martyrdom of Bishop Sophronius of Jerusalem', *ARAM* 15, 2003, pp. 129-50. At no time has the Byzantine Church, which honours Sophronius as a saint, treated him as a martyr, something which would not have escaped its keen attention given the life and stature of the Patriarch and the inclination of the Church to identify as martyrs those who had died violently, especially during the period of the Arab invasions.

²⁶ Cf. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 265.

²⁷ The Greek sources on the conquest of Jerusalem portray an advantageous relationship of the Arabs towards the Christians in making Jerusalem remain a Christian city, as it had been up to that time. The alleged covenant of ʿUmar with Sophronius is a case in point. The equivalent 'Jewish type' of record, which Goitein rejects, makes 'the information that the Caliph [ʿUmar] was accompanied by Jewish sages ... plausible'; Shlomo D. Goitein, 'Jerusalem in the Arab Period (638-1099)', *Jerusalem Cathedra* 2, 1982, p. 171. In fact, such 'accompaniment' proved to be effective as, in the words of Goitein, 'With the Arab conquest, a permanent Jewish population returned to Jerusalem after an absence of five hundred years', p. 169. The record shows a caliph intentionally impartial towards both communities, something which is confirmed by Sebeos and various Jewish texts. Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 124ff. and 448ff.

Eutychius' brief account of Sophronius' encounter with 'Umar dates, of course, from three hundred years after the event. One may suspect that such an account may be part of a lengthy Christian literature promulgated to safeguard the rights of the Christian community over the Holy Land and its sites.²⁸ However, it does also portray the sense of a unique rapport between two persons in one of the earliest Christian-Muslim encounters. The focal point of convergence between them is the event of prayer—a central component both of the life of an ascetic Patriarch and saint of the Church, and of an early caliph, *amīr al-mu'minīn*, a hero and saint of his faith, the 'St. Paul of Islam'.²⁹ Islamic and Christian traditions both connect the name of 'Umar with holiness, piety and kindness. A similar tradition is attached to the name of Sophronius. In the context of this essay this is a significant and determining parallel!

'Umar was well aware of the centrality of prayer in the life of priests and monks. The Qur'an makes a particularly complimentary mention of priests and monks who 'are not proud', that is 'muslims' in the generic sense of the word, and thus 'nearest in affection' to followers of Islam.³⁰ Sophronius was both, a priest (in fact, archpriest) and a monk. One may wonder what impression 'Umar's request to perform his prayers made on the Patriarch who must certainly have been unaware of the importance and centrality of prayer at fixed times in the daily life of a Muslim.³¹ At this early juncture the basic tenets and practices of Christianity were better known to Muslims than the tenets of Islam were to Christians. It makes for an interest-

²⁸ A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus in his *Analecta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias*, vol. IV, Brussels, 1963 (1897) pp. 401- 516, has edited from *Cod. Patriarch. 428* a series of such documents attributed to various Muslim authorities, beginning with Muḥammad (no. 1) and Mu'āwiya (no. 2): XX 'Παλαιαί Μεταφράσεις ἐνίων ἀραβικῶν τε καὶ τουρκικῶν ἐγγράφων περὶ τῶν Ἁγίων Τόπων'.

²⁹ For a brief and comprehensive portrait of 'Umar, see the entry "'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb' in the *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Ithaca, NY, 1965, pp. 600-1. There might exist some confusion between 'Umar I and 'Umar II in the popular Christian, and Muslim, tradition. Syriac chronicles (819, p.15 and 846, p.234) praise 'Umar as 'a kind man and a more compassionate king than all the kings before him', although *Chronicle 1234*, I, p. 307 mentions that 'he persecuted the Christians more than the kings before him'; cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 625, n. 84, and his translation of the *Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741* on pp. 611-30, at p. 625, §40.

³⁰ Sūra 5 (*al-Mā'ida*), 82.

³¹ *Ṣubḥ* at dawn but before actual sunrise; *zuhr*, immediately after midday, 'asr between three and five o'clock in the afternoon; *maghrib* after sunset but before darkness; 'ishā', any hour of darkness.

ing insight, however, to learn from Eutychius' note that Sophronius spread a prayer mat for ʿUmar. As a spiritual man, Sophronius seemed to have had no difficulty whatsoever in understanding immediately ʿUmar's need to pray, without inquiring or questioning him about the doctrinal details of his tradition. As himself an ascetic and spiritual person,³² he would have considered it natural that any place could be a place of prayer. As the head of a Patriarchate, he offered ʿUmar a place for prayer in his own cathedral, the church of the Resurrection, and the church of Bethlehem!

Eutychius' account reveals a detail of the actual event here. Excluding the dawn prayer (*ṣubḥ*) and the late evening prayer (*ʿishāʾ*), and taking into consideration that according to the narrative ʿUmar went to Bethlehem *on the same day* when another time of prayer occurred, one may surmise that the meeting in Jerusalem took place some time before the prayer of *zuhr*, *ʿaṣr* or, at the latest, *maghrib*. In any case, the essential point in the narrative is that the encounter took place in the context of prayer, with mutual appreciation of the prayer needs and requirements of each community. It is in this context also that Eutychius places the handing of an *akhtnamē*, or covenant of rights, to Sophronius by ʿUmar that sealed the agreement between the two leaders. ʿUmar returned to Jerusalem in 644 to begin a program of public buildings, particularly mosques,³³ dedicated in his honour with the name "ʿUmarian" (*al-masājid al-ʿUmarīyya*). Many of them may actually have been former Byzantine churches converted into mosques with the name of ʿUmar attached as a tribute to him.³⁴

Eutychius' account of the encounter between Sophronius and

³² He joined the monastery of St. Theodosius in 619, after he had travelled extensively with his teacher and fellow itinerant John Moschos to numerous monastic centers in Palestine, Egypt and Rome, and had collected spiritual experiences and teachings which formed the *Pratum Spirituale*, the famous corpus of spiritual stories, sayings and anecdotes. Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, 'Saracens and Arabs in the *Leimon* of John Moschos', *Byzantiaka* 17, 1997, pp. 123-38, for the relevant bibliography. Election to the patriarchal throne of Jerusalem at the advanced age of seventy-four was an event 'forced physically' upon him, as he confesses himself while lamenting the loss of his former peaceful monastic endeavours, *PG*, vol. LXXXVII, cols 3148A-3149B.

³³ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig, 1883-5, vol. I, p. 342. Other evidence may suggest that ʿUmar returned to Jerusalem soon after his encounter with Sophronius, even before the death of the Patriarch; cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 64-5, for relevant bibliography.

³⁴ Cf. Phokylides, 'Η ὀπισθεν τῆς ἐκκλησίας', p. 268.

‘Umar allows also for a second observation: the mutual acknowledgement and use of each other’s official title which describes the most essential manifestation of authority and quality of leadership (*zuhūr*)³⁵ in each community. ‘Umar knew that he was dealing with a Patriarch, and Sophronius with a ‘Commander of the Faithful’ (*amīr al-mu’minīn*), a title which had been assumed first by ‘Umar. If the alleged dialogue between the two is indeed historical, this is a most interesting item of evidence for its use! Eutychius’ account reflects an explicit mutual acceptance of the theocratic nature of authority which each figure represented,³⁶ but also an implicit exclusion of each other. In view of his reference to the Arabs as ‘barbarians’, to their war machine as the ‘Saracen sword’, and to their disposition as ‘cruel and beastly ... irreverent and ungodly daring spirit’,³⁷ one may ponder as to what were Sophronius’ actual feelings towards ‘Umar as a person and, therefore, whether the appellation *amīr al-mu’minīn* carried meaning on his part, or was simply a mere formality mixed with a deep seated conviction that ‘Umar represented the eye of the ‘axis of evil’! Eutychius seems to be on the side of sincerity and authenticity, and of the distinction made between the acts of the Arabs which were abhorrent to Sophronius, and the qualities of ‘Umar which were equally demonstrable and attractive.³⁸

Before Eutychius, Theophanes’ (ca 752-818) record of Sophronius’ encounter with ‘Umar presents a contrast, but also a supplement, to

³⁵ Cf. Elizabeth Savage, *A Gateway to Hell, a Gateway to Heaven*, Princeton, 1997, p. 26, n. 51.

³⁶ ‘Umar’s authority was based on the knowledge originating in the heart of the community—an undeniable and undisputed general consensus. It is interesting that ‘Umar was the implicit prototype in the Ibādī sources of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Rustam, the first Rustamid, as the ideal Imam; cf. Savage, *A Gateway to Hell*, p. 59, and n. 89. The same kind of authority was afforded to and enjoyed by Sophronius.

³⁷ *Synodical Letter*, PG, vol. LXXXVII, col. 3197D, and *Christmas Sermon*, ed. Usener, pp. 506-7.

³⁸ In the history of the Eastern Christian encounter with Islam there are many examples of allowing explicit distinction and respect for Islam as *theoseveia* (true reverence for God) and a Muslim person on the one hand, and condemning and rejecting communal behaviour on the other. A characteristic case is that of Gregory Palamas (1296-1360), the well-known spiritual leader, Hesychast and Archbishop of Thessalonica, who called upon his flock to inculcate the Islamic reverence for God while rejecting as ‘barbarian’ the conduct of the Muslim Turks who had held him in captivity; cf. Daniel J. Sahas, ‘Captivity and Dialogue: Gregory Palamas (1296-1360) and the Muslims’, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 25, 1980, pp. 409-36; and idem, ‘Gregory Palamas on Islam’, *The Muslim World* 73, 1983, pp. 1-21.

his story. Relying mostly on Syriac sources, he records that at the first sight of ʿUmar Sophronius exclaimed with disgust: ‘In truth, this is the abomination of desolation established in the holy place, which Daniel the prophet spoke of.’³⁹ He was shocked at ʿUmar’s shabby appearance covered with ‘a filthy camel-hair garment’, and offered him a gown of his own ‘until his cloak had been washed’. ʿUmar at first refused the offer, but in the end he accepted. The seventy-eight year-old Patriarch must have been impressed by the humility of the forty-six year-old⁴⁰ warrior and caliph. The Muslims have retained a variation of this detail: a fourteenth century account has it that ʿUmar was changed out of his dirty riding clothes by his officials and led into the city, whereupon the populace refused to accept him as the true caliph until he changed back.⁴¹ The name of Sophronius or any other Christian authority is understandably omitted in order to safeguard ʿUmar’s prominence.

Theophanes’ record underlines the stark contrast between the two camps which Byzantine historiography, or imagination, wanted to preserve. At the same time it adds another tender and human touch in the encounter between Sophronius and ʿUmar. The story has its origin in Theophilus of Edessa’s (d. 785) *Syriac Common Source*, which subsequently became the source used by Theophanes, Dionysius of Tell Maḥrē, and Agapius of Manbij for events dating between the years 590 and 750.⁴² However, the only early Greek chronicle on the subject which is independent of Theophanes, the *Historia Syntomos (Breviarium)* of Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople (806-15), written probably between the years 775 and 787,⁴³ is completely silent on the whole episode, though the author’s silence may reflect the Constantinopolitan attitude towards the ‘smallest’ and by then fallen Patriarchate. In any event, Christian and Islamic tradition seem on

³⁹ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, vol. I, p. 339 (referring to Daniel 9.27; cf. I Maccabees 1.54 and 6.7).

⁴⁰ ʿUmar converted to Islam at the age of twenty six four years before the *hijra* in 618.

⁴¹ Cf. R. Ebied and D. Thomas, ed. and trans., *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades, the Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī’s Response*, Leiden, 2005, pp. 176-9.

⁴² Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 400-9, 639 and n. 45.

⁴³ Cf. Cyril Mango, *Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople: Short History, Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Washington DC, 1990, § 20-27. No literature on Islam in the seventh century comes from Constantinople.

the whole not to want to contradict the gist and spirit of Eutychius' version, which has prevailed among the Christian Oriental historians and chronographers; Nectarios of Crete, Patriarch of Jerusalem from 1660 to 1669, repeats Eutychius' version,⁴⁴ making 'Umar enter the city as pilgrim rather than as conqueror.

This encounter may belong more to comparative culture than history. However, for lack of hard historical evidence on that earliest period of contact between Christianity and Islam, we are obliged (perhaps even privileged) to view any such crumbs of history at least as phenomena which may 'preserve' or by their own force even obliterate historical evidence. In either circumstance, their value for the history of Muslim–Christian relations is undeniable.

⁴⁴ Nektarios of Crete (1602-76), Patriarch of Jerusalem, *Ἐπιτομή τῆς Ἱεροκοσμικῆς Ἱστορίας*, Athens (1677), 1980, pp. 282-3.

IDEOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION AND
THE EVOLUTION OF IMPERIAL PRESENTATION
IN THE WAKE OF ISLAM'S VICTORY

David Olster

In the reign of Justinian, the Roman Empire extended from one end of the Mediterranean to the other. By the time of namesake, little over one hundred years later, it was a major military campaign for the emperor to cross from Constantinople to Thessalonica.¹ But, although the Lombards, Slavs and Persians must be given some credit for the imperial collapse of the seventh century, it was the Arabs that inflicted by far the greatest damage to the Empire, and who remained, in Roman eyes, the most prominent danger to its existence. The trauma of so many disasters, including the loss of Jerusalem and the two sieges of Constantinople by the Arabs, and the seemingly miraculous ability of the Empire to survive them, was no where better expressed than in the evolution of Roman, or perhaps one might say, Byzantine, political discourse. I have spoken and written elsewhere of the ideological impact of the Arab invasions on Roman self-definition and political discourse, and I will not now rehearse those arguments. What I would like to discuss is the impact that the Arab invasions had on the ideological and institutional roles of the imperial office in the seventh century, and the implications of these developments for the great political and religious conflict of iconoclasm.

Before proceeding further, I would like to clarify certain methodological issues inherent in this investigation. Ideology is a term that is not altogether appropriate for a discussion of late Roman political discourse, since it carries the implication of modern philo-

¹ See the description in Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, Leipzig, 1883, v. 1, p. 364. Significantly, this rather minimal accomplishment is presented as a major military triumph. It suggests that the initial source for this information was some sort of official declaration like much of the material describing the campaigns of Heraclius, and points to the poverty of material with which imperial propagandists had to work.

sophical systematics. Hans-Georg Beck preferred the expression ‘political theology’ to ideology since he felt that Byzantine political rhetoric continuously reinterpreted the mimetic heritage of Hellenic rhetorical constructions in a manner similar to the way in Christian theologians reinterpreted Biblical texts.² This rhetorical thesaurus of classical clichés or *topoi* was exceptionally broad, and possessed mutually contradictory elements that permitted a wide range of political exploitation. Hence, what we identify as ideology was little more, from one vantage point, than the momentary exploitation of a set of rhetorical clichés to meet immediate political needs; in this sense, there was no Roman political ideology, and hence, the remarkable Roman capacity for invective and panegyric. On the other hand, these competing rhetorics remained fairly consistent in their assumptions about the nature of the Empire: that it was universal, that it was chosen by God to rule the world, and that virtuous emperors were the conduits by which God’s favor to the Empire was delivered, while evil emperors brought God’s wrath and punishment.³ In this limited sense, then, one can speak of a Roman imperial ideology that underwent continuous rhetorical reconstruction to meet contemporary political needs, but which retained certain core foundations that found variable and competing discursive expression.

A second methodological point concerns the role of Christianity in Roman political discourse. For some scholars, Christianity possesses a monolithic spiritual autonomy that transcends historical, and especially political, context. I do not agree with this assessment; rather I would say that there were Christianities produced and defined by historical contexts. Obviously, Latins, Monophysites, Nestorians and Byzantines were quite distinct, but there was significant evolution within each of these traditions as well. Byzantine Christianity in the eighth century—the century of iconoclasm—was certainly very different both theologically and ritually than what it had been in the sixth. The reasons for this, I hope to show, had something to do with the redefinition of Christian authority that found a cause in the Arab invasions. In short, what I hope to demonstrate is that the impact of the Arab invasions on the Christian Roman discourse of

² See H.-G. Beck, *Res publica romana. Vom Staatsdenken der Byzantiner*, Munich, 1970, pp. 5-11.

³ See D. Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew*, Philadelphia, 1995, pp. 33ff.

imperial authority accompanied an institutional transformation of the imperial office that enhanced its sacerdotal claims—both ritual and doctrinal—eventually creating political conditions in which emperors could claim sufficient ecclesiastical authority to impose restrictions on Christian ritual.

Christians easily and swiftly adopted the rhetoric of Roman triumphalism, the notion that imperial victory rested upon the favor of the gods guaranteed by the virtue of the emperor to whom victory was personally given. In the wake of the Milvian Bridge, the fourth-century bishop and courtier Eusebius adopted the topoi of Roman victory to establish Christ as the greatest god of victory. For the next three centuries, despite the increasing precariousness of imperial claims to universal victory, Roman Christians remained fairly consistent in their appropriation of the discourse of military prowess and divine favor. Justinian's pronouncement that 'The maintenance of the integrity of the government depends on two things: law and the force of arms... Each of these has ever required the aid of the other, for as military affairs are rendered secure by the law, so also are the laws preserved by force of arms,' differs little in spirit from Virgil's characterization of Roman rule:

The maintenance of the integrity of the government depends upon two things: namely, law and the force of arms... Each of these has required the aid of the other, for as military affairs are rendered secure by the law, so also are the laws preserved by force of arms.⁴

Of course, as Justinian also recognized, the success of Roman arms depended on God's favor:

Our mind cannot conceive, nor our tongue express what thanks and what praises we must show to our Lord god, Jesus Christ...

Indeed, this exceeds all the miraculous works that are contained in the earth, that now omnipotent God has deigned to show through us for the sake of His praise and name so that Africa, after a short time, has received liberation [from the Vandals] who were enemies of both bodies and souls.⁵

⁴ *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Codex*, ed. P. Krueger, repr. Berlin, 1963, proem.

⁵ *Corpus Iuris Civilis*: I.27.1. The commentary on this passage in H. Hunger, *Prooimion: Elemente der byzantinischen Kaiseridee in den Arengen der Urkunden*, Vienna, 1964, p. 70, points to its thematic 'consciousness' that the emperor is the personal recipient of divine favor on the one hand, and the vicar of God on earth on the other hand.

One can easily compare this sort of victory rhetoric to Jupiter's support of the pious Trajan in Pliny's panegyric,⁶ or the miraculous defeat of the Palmyrenes by Aurelian in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*.⁷ In short, there was no opposition or dialectical tension between Christianity and Romanity. As Polybius had noted several centuries earlier, Romans had always been exceptionally dutiful about recognizing divine powers that aided their realm—they had even employed religious rituals to call their opponents' deities to their side in war. If Christ was now Rome's only God, it was because He had proven Himself mightiest in battle.

The dominant military and juridical character of the late antique emperor limited his charisma to the secular sphere. And even those emperors who intruded furthest into the ecclesiastical sphere remained bound, whatever their political actions, to a rhetoric that clearly delineated the boundaries of ecclesiastical and imperial authority. Justinian, whose interference in ecclesiastical affairs ranged from condemning heresies to creating a few of his own, nonetheless distinguished sharply between ecclesiastical and imperial authority. In his oft-cited sixth Novel, Justinian explained, 'There are two great gifts that God's mercy has granted from heaven: the priesthood and the Empire. The first serves divine things; the second presides over and administrates human affairs.'⁸ The sharp separation of church and state espoused by one of Byzantium's most ardent meddlers in ecclesiastical affairs obviously does not reflect the limits of imperial power, but the accepted conventions within which such meddling took place. Ecclesiastical politics was thus complicated by the emperor's anomalous position. The peculiar title claimed by Constantine, 'Bishop to those outside the church,' was not continued after his death, and direct imperial interference in ecclesiastical, especially doctrinal, affairs was rarely successful, and more often than not, counter-productive. Especially after Chalcedon, as the fissure between Monophysites and Dyophysites widened, imperial intervention in doctrinal disputes was invariably a failure, and frequently worsened

⁶ Pliny, *Panegyricus*, trans., B. Radice, London/Cambridge, 1975, 8.1.

⁷ *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, London, Cambridge, 1968: for the consulting of the Sibylline books, and the necessity for performing the sacred liturgies to the gods, see 20.5-21.4; for the appearance of a miraculous form in the midst of battle that Aurelian (according to the text at least) attributed to the Sun, see 25.3-6.

⁸ *Novellae*, ed. R. Scholl/G. Kroll, repr. Berlin, 1963, pp. 44-5.

the political situation. Zeno's Henoticon decree, Anastasius's liturgical innovation of the Trisagion, and Justinian's broad spectrum of orthodox formulae, from Theopaschism to Arthropodocetism not only failed to secure any agreement between the disputing parties, but received criticism from both sides of the dispute who resented imperial interference in dogmatic affairs. Politics might dictate that emperors transgress this theoretical boundary to their authority, but they ran against not only the practical problems of enforcement and consensus, but also a dominant political discourse that did not legitimate their actions, and which permitted challenges to their authority, if not their material capacity to enforce their will on the church. The emperor might possess the imperial power to browbeat the church into submission, but he sorely lacked the sacerdotal authority to lead the church except as its 'guardian' or other secular role.

This division of temporal and spiritual authority found expression in the rhetorical parallelism of heavenly and earthly powers. The parallelism that established the emperor as the divinely ordained bringer of order to the mundane plane is extremely common. An acclamation from Anastasius's coronation proclaimed, 'Emperor in heaven, give us an emperor on earth.'⁹ And even so Christian emperor as Theodosius could be praised, 'Spain has given us a god that we see.'¹⁰ Iconographically this parallelism can be seen in the sixth-century Barbarini diptych that sets the imperial image in a direct line with the divine, and sets the imperial image between the heavenly register and the earthly. While Christ presides in the upper register, the emperor, arrayed as military victor, crushes Christ's enemies in the lower register, while the enemies of the God-guarded emperor lie prostrate or kneeling in submission in the lowest register. The arrangement of Christ directly centered above the imperial image impresses on the viewer that heavenly ruler supervises and guides the military victory of the earthly ruler below, while the iconographic

⁹ *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae*, ed. J. Reiske, Bonn, 1837, v. 2, pp. 424-5. Such parallelisms between heaven and earth are extremely common, and date back to Hellenistic times, H. Hunger, *Prooimion*, pp. 49ff.; H. Hunger, *Reich der neuen Mitte. Der christliche Geist der byzantinischen Kultur*, Graz, 1965, p. 64; and W. Enßlin, 'Gottkaiser und Kaiser von Gottesgnaden,' *Sitzungsberichte der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, phil.-hist. Abt., Munich, 1943, pp. 66ff.

¹⁰ Latinus Pacatus Drepanius, *Panegyric of the Emperor Theodosius*, ed. R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford, 1964, 4.5.

parallel rule of the emperor remained bound to earthly things: above all, military victory.

Such imperial deomimesis was nothing new; this rhetoric had been employed since the Hellenistic kings. But ecclesiastical writers tended to circumscribe more carefully the limits of this imitation that court panegyrists. In particular, while freely employing all the Hellenistic trappings of *deomimesis*, they tended to avoid employing *Christomimetic* language. The reason for this was simple; they tended to limit specific Christomimetic rhetoric to the bishop, developing a competing discourse of authority. Gregory Nazianzenus explained, 'The emperor has the image of god just as also the bishop has the image of Christ,'¹¹ a distinction that ecclesiastics exploited in order to challenge, in an indirect way, claims of imperial authority over the church. The bishops at Chalcedon characteristically acclaimed Marcian, 'You serve the faith; Christ whom you honor guards you; you strengthen the orthodox faith; light of the world, lord, you stand guard.'¹² The emperor was to protect and honor the servants of Christ, but was not to interfere in their sphere of authority: the formulation of doctrine. Sozomen, for example, ascribed to Valentinian the recognition that he had no part in doctrinal considerations, 'As I am only a layman, I cannot look into these matters too closely; but let the priests, who have charge of these things, meet together wherever they wish.'¹³ Nonetheless, more aggressive emperors like Justinian employed the rhetoric of guardianship to force his way into dogmatic disputes by the simple claim that the only way to guard doctrinal orthodoxy was to promulgate it himself.¹⁴ But regardless of how emperors exploited this rhetoric, they employed it, and con-

¹¹ See J. Straub, 'Constantine as *Episkopos Koinos*: The Representation of the First Christian Emperor's Majesty,' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 21, 1967, pp. 44-5.

¹² E. Schwartz, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, Berlin, 1935, t. 2, v. 4, p. 434.

¹³ Cited in F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Backgrounds*, Washington, DC, 1966, v. 2, p. 788.

¹⁴ See D. Olster, 'Justinian, Rhetoric and the Church,' *Byzantinoslavica* 50, 1989, pp. 65-76. The most determined effort at imperial Christomimesis was made not surprisingly by Eusebius in the first flush of Christianity's victory. Moreover, Constantine too claimed greater ecclesiastical status than any emperor after him, and it is tempting to note the confluence of these rhetorical and institutional trends. Certainly, later emperors moved increasingly away from the Constantinian model of ecclesiastical authority regardless of how blatantly they imposed their will on the church.

sequently, imperial self-definition and intervention in ecclesiastical affairs remained bound to it, although not necessarily by it. Thus, although the late antique emperor was more than God's mundane representative—he was in fact God's mirror image on earth—and ecclesiastical authors accepted almost without exception this formulation—nonetheless, they withheld ecclesiastical authority from the imperial office. Emperors' *potestas* guarded the church, and thus honored Christ through his service to the bishops, but they lacked ecclesiastical *auctoritas* that would permit them to dictate doctrine to the church. The bishops at Chalcedon explained how '[The emperor] first brought together the pious army against the devil, whereupon God provided an impenetrable defense against all error.' Led by the Pope, they had achieved the victory of the faith.¹⁵ It was the duty of the emperor to ensure peace and stability so that the bishops might deliberate, but the formulation of doctrine was rightfully the sphere of the church, and in the wake of Chalcedon, the Pope. Consequently, when emperors 'endorsed' synodal or councilor decrees, he was employed the power of the state to enforce the doctrine of the church. Justinian explained that his laws merely were the instruments of enforcement, 'We, who have established said rules, in conformity with the sacred, apostolic canons of the church, may inflict the proper punishment upon those who are guilty.'¹⁶ It was only in this context that emperors—with the notable exception of Constantine—were said to be 'priestly.' Pope Leo I, calling on Marcian to uproot heresy had addressed him, 'For the priestly and apostolic soul of Your Piety should be aroused to the justice of retribution [against heretics].'¹⁷ It was the defense of doctrine, not its formulation that rested with the imperial office, although in practice, emperors could in fact formulate doctrine by claiming to guard it.

The condominium that developed between the church and state, however, was neither as clear nor as carefully observed as a few exemplary citations would imply, for the practical control of the emperor over the church (within his political and military reach) was in fact quite broad, and emperors interfered constantly in church affairs, especially as the Monophysite controversy divided the church. The

¹⁵ *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, p. 553.

¹⁶ *Novellae*, v. 1, pp. 57-8.

¹⁷ *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, p. 96.

institutional need of the provincial Dyophysite church to depend increasingly on imperial support tended to draw the state deeper into the morass of doctrinal affairs: generally with dismal results. But a second institutional development began to transform aspects of the imperial image that also affected the potential position of the emperor within the church. The institutional evolution of the imperial office dictated that the deomimetic rhetoric of law and order be balanced by an increasing emphasis on the emperor's personal, rather than civic, piety. For nearly two hundred years only one emperor actively went on campaign, and that to regain his throne after he had lost control of Constantinople; and the rhetoric of victory had to be adjusted to account for the emperor's reluctance to leave the safety of the walls of Constantinople. But triumphalist discourse remained, and if emperors would not campaign, it was still necessary to attribute victory to them. Consequently, victory was attributed to prayer and personal piety. Theodosius II could win battles through prayer, and the panegyric of his monastic regimen heightened not only his image of a pious Christian emperor, but as a victor as well.¹⁸ By the seventh century, the emperor Heraclius could claim, 'Neither a purple robe, scepter or power are able to harness as much strength as the practice of piety since it is naturally praiseworthy.'¹⁹ This reconstruction of the imperial image is especially clear in the evolution of imperial titulature between the fifth and seventh centuries. The titles of the fifth century were largely military. Typically, Marcian and Valentinian III were addressed 'Most pious, faithful, Christian Emperors, Victors and holders of Triumphs, eternal Augusti.'²⁰ Emperors received both religious and military epithets, but on coins, emperors tended to emphasize their military titles. The most common obverse legend was 'Our Lord, Perpetual Augustus,' and the most common reverse legend, 'Victory of [perhaps 'to'] the Augustus.'²¹ The obverse legend dated to the

¹⁸ See the discussion of the evidence and the institutional and rhetorical effects of this development in D. Olster, *Roman Defeat*, pp. 30ff.

¹⁹ *Ius Graeco-Romanum*, ed. K. Zachariae von Lingenthal, reprinted Darmstadt, 1962, p. 36. Significantly, it was in this novel that the imperial title *basileus* first appeared.

²⁰ *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, pp. 13-14.

²¹ See A.R. Bellinger, ed., *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, Washington DC, 1966, v. 1, pp. 380-1.

third-century, long before Constantine. The reverse legend had obvious military implications, although victory was clearly understood as founded on divine good-will. Thus, while the emperor was always considered pious, piety was generally understood in the traditional Roman context of the proper performance of those civic duties that maintained proper state relations with transmundane powers, and the reward of victory followed from the proper respect paid to divine powers. During the course of the sixth century, however, the title 'pious' began to receive greater prominence and assume connotations of personal piety. Whereas the piety of the emperor had traditionally been understood as maintaining the duties of the citizens toward the gods (or Christ), the personal piety of the emperor as the exemplar, rather than the enforcer of Christian piety began to take hold.²² The climax of this evolution in titulature was the adoption of the title 'faithful in Christ' by Heraclius. While this title had appeared at times in the sixth century, it came to dominate imperial titulature after its initial adoption. Indeed, in the laws, it supplanted the plethora of victory titles—Germanicus, Persicus, Sarmaticus, and the like—that had dominated the legal documents of earlier emperors.²³

Perhaps the reason that Heraclius chose to adopt such a title was his immediate situation. The war against Persia had been transformed into a test of Christian—not simply Roman—mettle, and in 629, it is possible that he felt that God had answered the call issued on the reverse of his silver coinage, 'Deus adiuta Romanis.' Certainly, the victory over the Persians appears in the literature of the 620's—not only court sources like George of Pisidia or the *Paschal Chronicle*, but authors who would soon sour on the imperial ideal like Maximus the Confessor or Sophronius—as God's special favor to the Romans as a reward for their repentance and faithfulness.²⁴ The extraordinary

²² This rhetorical phenomenon of the evolution of civic into personal piety was noted long ago by O. Treitinger, *Die ostroemische Kaiser- und Reichsidee*, reprinted Darmstadt, 1956, p. 145, and has not perhaps been sufficiently emphasized by later scholars. Rather, however, than attribute it to Christianization as did Treitinger, one might seek more mundane institutional causes.

²³ See *Ius Graeco-Romanum*, pp. 33, 36, 40, 45, 49, etc. Clearly, the legal documents do not by any means limit the use of victory titles in other literary and rhetorical contexts: far from it. For the increasing de-emphasis on imperial military titles and honorifics, see G. Roesch, *Onoma Basileias. Studien zum offiziellen Gebrauch der Kaisertitel in späetantiker und frühbyzantinischer Zeit*, Vienna, 1978, pp. 101-23.

²⁴ See the comments of W.E. Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium*, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 192ff., who describes the victory over the Persians as 'religious' as well

crisis of the last Persian War, and the utterly bewildering defeat by the Arabs that followed so swiftly swept away the triumphalist rhetoric of the late antique period, with its emphasis on imperial victory and military power. Even the Romans' remarkable ability to ignore political realities when deploying rhetorical figures could not overlook the disasters that followed the victories of Islam. Moreover, these disasters directly affected the legitimacy of the Heraclian dynasty. The dominant discourse of defeat in late antiquity had employed the emperor's vice as the cause of defeat; but the hundred-year survival of the Heraclian dynasty made that explanation impossible for court sources, although sources from the periphery exploited this explanation for defeat extensively. Initial Arab victories were ascribed to the incestuous marriage of Martina and Heraclius; and continuing Arab successes to the Monotheletism of Constans II. At his trial for treason, Maximus the Confessor was accused of spreading the view that so long as the Heraclian dynasty held the throne, the Arabs could never be defeated. Under these circumstances, it was essential that the court develop a political discourse that could challenge this traditional attribution of defeat, and establish new grounds for imperial and dynastic legitimacy.²⁵

Thus, as imperial fortunes swiftly declined, triumphalist discourse gave way to a discourse of imperial renewal. Defeat was now integrated into God's greater plan for the renewal of the Empire after punishing, through the Arabs, the Romans for their collective sin. And for renewal, imperial rhetoricians looked not to the canon of Hellenistic kingship, but to Biblical rhetorical models, particularly Christological models. Additionally, however, during the seventh century, the Byzantines began to exploit apocalyptic imagery to explain events in a manner not previously adopted. It was this historical overview that defined the emerging apocalypticism of the seventh century: the end of history was coincidental with the ultimate victory and restoration of the Empire. Seventh century court literature did not develop a full-blown expression of a Greek apocalyptic construction, but rather drew on those elements that related to the specific

as military. For the legend of the hexagram, see (for example), P. Grierson, ed., *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, Washington DC, 1966, v. 2.2, p. 437.

²⁵ For the differing views of contemporaries on the rise of the Arabs, see Olster, *Roman Defeat*, pp. 36ff.

concerns of imperial restoration, which was the chief concern of contemporaries. Consequently, the use of apocalyptic imagery in the literature of this period varied widely from author to author and found no systematic exposition until the beginning of the eighth century when Pseudo-Methodius was translated from Syriac into Greek. Nonetheless, the Arab invasions certainly provided the impetus to seek texts like Pseudo-Methodius, which dominated medieval, Greek apocalypticism, and set contemporary events into the narrative and rhetorical structure of the Daniel and Ezekiel apocalypses in order to produce victory against the Arabs, if not in the near future, at least at the end of time.²⁶ The greater the sufferings of the Empire, the more assuredly did those disasters stem from God, and the more inconceivable was it that the tribulations of the Empire did not somehow fit into God's grand plan for eventual Roman victory. Indeed, the Greek Pseudo-Methodius included God directly intervening to avert the Arab menace. Thus, what one finds in the court documents that we will review shortly is not a systematic apocalyptic exposition, but imagery that associated imperial restoration with Christ's millennial rule of the Empire, and the association of the Roman emperors with that rule. Thus, this millennial imagery marched hand-in-hand with the intensification of imperial, Christological rhetoric by directly linking the emperor and Christ in a millenarian context.

Arab victory then was not only the cause for revolutionary institutional developments of Byzantium in the seventh century, but for equally revolutionary developments in the rhetorical thesaurus from which the Byzantines drew to express the historical and institutional challenges of the seventh century. Further, these images were the rhetorical models for the state and emperor that first began, in the later seventh century, to permit the emperors to reformulate their rhetoric of legitimacy in new ways, and ultimately to put forward for themselves new institutional claims.

Clearly, this rhetoric reflects shifting rhetorical strategies of imperial presentation. But it is far more difficult to measure to what extent this appropriation of liturgical rhetoric represents some institutional shift in the sacerdotal powers of the emperor. The sources for this are

²⁶ See G. Podskalsky, *Byzantinische Reicheschatologie*, Munich, 1972; W. Brandes, 'Endzeitvorstellungen und Lebentrost in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit (7.-9. Jahrhundert),' *Varia III*, (*Poikila Byzantina* 11), Bonn, 1991, pp. 9-62.

exceedingly scarce, and however much emperors may have begun to draw on the rhetoric of sacerdotal activity, it is a far cry from assuming that they acted as ecclesiastics. Nonetheless, sources for, and sometimes from, the seventh century certainly hint at growing imperial sacerdotal claims. Sometimes our sources are clearly worthless. The ninth- to tenth-century Nestorian *Chronicle of Seert*, for example, described the ‘customary’ coronation of the emperor Phocas performed by three bishops who anointed him, and it is implied, celebrated the mass with him.²⁷ Obviously, in this case the author, knowing nothing about Roman coronations, simply substituted an episcopal investiture for an imperial coronation. But another Nestorian source, the contemporary Guidi Chronicle, might however have more value. It reported that the Persian king Chosroes, when asked whether he feared Heraclius’s might, responded that he, a god, had no fear of Heraclius, a mere priest, ‘because he had heard that Heraclius had received ordination.’²⁸ Again, it is not the literal truth of this assertion, but the confusion of sacerdotal and imperial in these eastern, specifically Nestorian, sources, that is arresting. This confusion did not arise in western Syrian or Greek sources, but the western Syrian sources reported a rather different sort of connection between the sacerdotal and imperial in the wake of the Persian War. According to Michael the Syrian, Heraclius attempted to participate in the communion at a Monophysite church in Edessa, but when he approached the altar, he was refused communion by the local prelate because he would not anathematize Chalcedon. Heraclius, enraged, drove the bishop out and initiated a persecution of the Monophysites.²⁹ Again, the historicity of the story is less important than its implications about Heraclius’s perception in the east.

Such perceptions may possibly have stemmed from Heraclius’s own ecclesiastical policy in the east, where he entertained the exceedingly ambitious project of uniting the diverse Christian communities of the east: Melkite, Monophysite, and Armenian. In particular, he took the

²⁷ *Histoire Nestorienne, Chronique de Seert*, tr. A. Scher, (*Patrologia Orientalis* 4), Paris, 1907, pp. 518-19.

²⁸ *Die von Guidi herausgegebene Syrische Chronik*, tr. T. Noeldeke, (*Abhandlungen der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*), Vienna, 1993, p. 28.

²⁹ Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, tr. J.-B. Chabot, Paris, 1910, v. 4, pp. 411-12.

unusual step of personally negotiating the doctrinal and institutional steps toward this goal. Since Constantine had proclaimed the '*homo-ousian*' formula at Nicea, no emperor had so directly participated in doctrinal negotiations with ecclesiastical dissidents. Previous emperors had generally used go-betweens or ecclesiastical institutions in such delicate matters however much they desired to impose doctrinal unity on the church. Even Justinian had been compelled to call an ecumenical council in order to legitimate his condemnation of Origen and the Three Chapters. The unique circumstances of Heraclius's victory over the Persians, and his pilgrimage through the east with the True Cross provided him with the political capital to undertake such a task personally. He clearly exploited the Christian symbolism of the Cross to enhance his authority in the ecclesiastical sphere; how much and in what way is far less clear. When he entered Jerusalem with the Cross he removed his imperial insignia, although it is far less clear exactly what sort of insignia he did assume.³⁰ Without stretching this point too far, it seems that Heraclius was trying to reshape the imperial image around his return of the Cross. Is it possible that Heraclius exploited the Cross and his victory over Persia to enhance his credentials as a direct negotiator of doctrinal questions? And was this the source of the rumors in east about Heraclius's supposed sacerdotal status? These questions cannot be answered with any certainty, but without doubt, some sort of sacerdotal charisma was understood by the court since by the time of Heraclius's successor, some type of claim that the emperor was a priest was established.

The value and significance of these sources is certainly open to dispute, and I have no desire to push them very far. But there is indisputable evidence that Constans II, Heraclius's eventual successor, made the claim that the emperor was also a priest. At the treason trial of Maximus the Confessor, the prosecutor charged that when Gregory, the son of Photinus, the emperor's representative in Italy, went to Maximus's cell in Rome to persuade him to accept the *Typos*, Constans II's decree regarding Monotheletism, he asserted that the emperor had the authority to issue the *Typos* because he was a priest. Maximus strongly denied this, asserting first that emperors had conceded to the priesthood the right to dictate doctrine, that the emperor could never be a priest. Only those who perform the

³⁰ See Kaegi, *Heraclius*, p. 206.

mysteries were priests, and the emperor was divided both spatially and spiritually from the clergy:

Emperors have put forward edicts and orders, one after the other, for their preferred doctrine, clearly saying that to seek and define the orthodox doctrines of the universal church belongs to the priests. And you said, 'What then, is not every emperor a Christian and a priest?' And I said, 'He is not! He does not stand at the altar, and he does not raise the host saying "Holy things to the holy."' ³¹

Maximus went on to detail all the liturgical and sacramental powers that the emperor lacked: baptism, ordination, and unction. By sixth-century standards, Maximus was certainly correct, but evidently by the mid-seventh century, the court had put forward this claim of sacerdotal authority for the emperor. Whether this was done on Constans's own initiative, or whether he was drawing on the precedent of his grandfather Heraclius is unclear. But what is clear is that Maximus could be charged with treason for denying Constans's sacerdotal status. In fact, what this dialogue illustrates is the differing definitions of the priesthood that the court and Maximus entertained. For Maximus, the priest not only defined doctrine, but performed the liturgy, and it was this latter function that legitimated the former. The court, however, simply defined the priesthood solely in terms of defining doctrine. Obviously, Constans made no claim to perform the liturgy, but to defend the *Typos*, Constans, or his spokesmen, evidently felt the need to claim sacerdotal status. The resolution of the Monophysite controversy was a problem that had weighed on the imperial office for centuries, and in the light of the Arab crisis, Constans certainly felt that he had to employ extraordinary claims of authority in order to impose his will.

Again, the basis and extent of Constans II's sacerdotal status is unclear because the sources offer little more evidence than this brief notice from Maximus's trial. Unfortunately, it is difficult to track these changes in political discourse after the 630's because the Greek sources are so poor. In fact, our most extensive seventh-century Greek source for the later seventh century is the notes of the Sixth Ecumenical Council. They are particularly useful because they contain extensive court material attributed to Constantine IV. Whether

³¹ *Patrologia Graeca* xc, col. 117. See the comments of J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: the Transformation of a Culture*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 285.

he wrote them himself or not, they are our best source to gauge the court's rhetorical self-construction in the 670's and 680's. And the Sixth Ecumenical Council had no doubt that that the emperor possessed—or at least claimed—some sort of sacerdotal status. The letters of Constantine IV exploit the apocalyptic expectation that pervades seventh-century Greek literature, 'We wish as men, but God commands all things to their final end. For he knows what is better, and He brings our trials to a successful conclusion.'³² Just as Christ had suffered unto victory, so too would the Empire. Even more importantly, in spite of its sufferings the Empire had never ceased to be loved and aided by God. Both the Empire and Christ suffered, but the process of salvation had not stopped:

Let not the pagans and heretics scoff at us. Let them not receive our lands until they hold it all against us. For, while He suffered from a most manly service to mankind, and was insulted as the epiphany of our God, in this matter He did not cease doing things for the consolation of His own.³³

One can see how closely Constantine associated the calamities of his own time with the humiliation of Christ, and with the expectation of eventual imperial victory and renewal based on that Christological model. This political discourse was not employed before the Arab invasions; one will look in vain for court admissions that enemies of Rome could stand and scoff at the Empire's discomfiture. During the seventh century, such admissions were common, and developed into a rhetorical form of address that requested God's forgiveness and aid. The hope of seventh-century Rome was in the future, the point at which Christ would return to redeem His people, the Romans. The Empire was a physical manifestation of the Empire to be, and when Christ returned, the earthly Empire would be united with its heavenly prototype.

This change in tone complemented a further change in the parallelism between the heavenly and earthly rulers. The separation of heaven and earth into distinct spheres of rule by God and his

³² *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. J. Mansi, Venice, 1768, col. 196.

³³ Mansi, col. 197. Treitinger, *Reichsidee*, pp. 76-7, draws attention to the (later) imperial hymn, 'Raise yourself, as the resurrection of Christ,' to show the association of Christ's victory in the resurrection as a model of imperial victory.

earthly representative became increasingly blended into a union of heaven and earth:

[The Empire is that] in which Christ established His Church as if it were His own house, and as Emperor over all [pambasileus], He directs the throne of our Empire and the scepter that He put in our hands, as if it were some high and mighty rock: something the Savior, with the father and the Holy Spirit discloses as a mystic covenant [*mystiken homologian*] between Him and ourselves, something composed of both heaven and earth, in order that through it, as if it were the middle of a ladder, we might rise to the heavenly condition of statehood and unite with the more heavenly Empire.³⁴

The Empire was more than a parallel of heaven, but was joined to its earthly counterpart through a mystic covenant between the emperor and Christ. More importantly, the Empire was no longer sent merely to provide order to a chaotic world, but was given a direct role in the process of salvation: just as heaven was joined to earth, so imperial was joined to ecclesiastical. It was through the Empire that men rose to the heavenly state and were reunited with Christ, an unusual and very different construction of the relationship of church and state than one hundred years earlier. Christ ruled both, the latter as high priest, and the former as emperor, and consequently Christ's direct participation in mundane imperial rule led increasingly to His representation as co-ruler with the emperor. Such a fusion of earthly and heavenly rulers found ritual expression several centuries later in the Book of Ceremonies, which describes occasions on which two thrones would be displayed: one for the emperor, one for Christ, the sharer of the mundane emperor's earthly rule and his effective co-ruler.³⁵ In the writings of Constantine IV, this fusion of earthly and heavenly was only first being rhetorically adopted. The earlier rhetoric of parallel rule was subtly transformed into a millenarian rhetoric of Christ's descent to rule the Empire.

The expression of Christ's union with the emperor, moreover, drew on rhetorical sources far removed from those of Hellenistic kingship on which Justinian and other late antique emperors had

³⁴ Mansi, col. 697.

³⁵ Treitinger, *Reichsidee*, pp. 32-3. There is no evidence that such a double throne was used in the seventh century, although the common adoption of multiple emperors—a rarity in the fifth and sixth centuries—certainly may have made it easier to conceive of Christ as a *megas basileus*, and to adopt the vocabulary and iconography of joint emperorship.

relied. The rhetorical construction of this union of emperor and Christ was drawn from the most logical source for such unions, the liturgy. The relationship between the emperor and Christ was a 'mystic covenant' that Christ and the emperor shared. The expression *mystiken homologian* most commonly described the relationship between believer and Christ expressed in the mystery of the Eucharist, the model for the union of Christ and Christian. It was, so far as I know, exceedingly rare for this type of language to be applied to the relationship of the emperor and Christ for whom there already existed an entire Hellenistic rhetorical tradition of deomimesis. The use of such language, however, blurred the boundaries of mundane and transcendent, just as it did in its liturgical context, and complemented the rhetoric of Christ's joint rule.

This liturgical expression of the union of emperor and Christ was further employed to enhance the rhetoric of Christomimesis upon which Constantine IV drew to legitimate his authority:

Because we desire that the nobility of the grace bestowed by adoption [*huiiothesian*] be within us, and because we desire to imitate Christ, the One who crowns us and assimilates all things into Himself, God, we desire to bring our Christ-loving state of governance into agreement and peace.³⁶

Constantine attached imperial Christomimesis to his participation in Christ's assimilatory power through his 'adoption.' Constantine's use of *huiiothesia*, adoption by Christ, is not altogether unusual in imperial rhetoric, but I would suggest that its use here is not drawn from the Hellenistic rhetorical thesaurus, in which it refers to the adoption of the king as a god among the panoply of gods, but rather is drawn from the liturgical terminology for baptism. Moreover, like 'mystic covenant,' this term also was part of the common rhetoric used to express the union of Christ and Christian in the mystery of the Eucharist. Constantine brought these two rhetorical streams, the liturgical and the apocalyptic, together when he proclaimed:

In this faith we live and reign, and we hope someday to share the rule with our co-emperor God [*to sumbasileunto sumbasileuein*], and we pray that we will stand at the bema and accompany Him.³⁷

³⁶ Mansi, col. 713.

³⁷ Mansi, col. 712.

The image that Constantine draws is on the one hand liturgical, the priest present with Christ during the Eucharist, and I would tentatively suggest that the powerful impetus given to liturgical mysticism by Sophronius and Maximus during the seventh century might well have played a role in the employment of this rhetoric by the court. More importantly, here was the answer to Maximus's objection to imperial sacerdotalism. If the emperors did not stand at the altar during the mundane liturgies, they would ultimately stand at the altar with Christ not only as their co-emperor, but as priest. On the other hand, this image of the emperor and Christ joined together in the liturgical mysteries is apocalyptic in so far as it raises the expectations of a future imperial restoration in which Christ directly participates as emperor in the renewed Empire.

Unlike the previous four ecumenical councils in which the emperor had not directly participated except to open or close the council, Constantine IV was present for most of the sessions as a participant, returning to the precedent of his namesake Constantine I. Moreover, the bishops called upon Constantine IV to preside over the council because 'It is not tolerable that you should bring together worldly things into harmony, but divide and tear away the most important [spiritual] things from them.'³⁸ Constantine's authority extended beyond the earthly because he was more than earthly himself. By sharing the rule with Christ, Constantine was given a share in divine things, doctrine, just as Christ was given a greater share in the rule of earthly things. He fought with Christ against their common enemies, both the material and spiritual spheres:

Constantine, you bring the world to order through the purple. You are crowned in the faith. You are completely crowned in both ways. The doors of Hell will not prevail against your orthodox rule. Your God saves you, girding you with His might. One the one hand, He puts down your enemies; on the other hand, he dispenses grace to your subjects.³⁹

Constantine's double crowning, in both the material and spiritual realms, was part and parcel of his Christomimesis. The Council employed the imagery of the breaking of the doors of hell, the common image of the resurrection, to express Constantine's role

³⁸ Mansi, col. 660.

³⁹ Mansi, col. 668.

as emperor. Furthermore, the role of the emperor as the definer of doctrine was a corollary of this Christomimetic role. The personal piety of Constantine, whose growing importance as an imperial virtue we have noted, was now employed to legitimate Constantine's claim that he made doctrine along with the bishops. 'What then is more suitable than that you arrange your subjects according to your piety?' proclaimed the council.⁴⁰

Constantine's piety, moreover, was further tied to his claims to the presidency of the council, and ultimately, his right to act as the arbitrator of doctrine:

Piety, through which we [the Council] serve the living and true God with one body and one heart, is the source of the peace of God. And these things are not from men or through men, but rather faithful lord, you receive them from divine grace, holding all else secondary as is fitting for your divine and priestly summit.⁴¹

The council's acknowledgement that Constantine ruled from a 'priestly' summit was a sharp departure from late antique practice. As we have noted, emperors could be said to be priestly in so far as they defended doctrine, but as Maximus had pointed out, emperors did not have the express right to define doctrine. The assertion that the power to define doctrine had been placed in the emperor's hand by divine authority entirely transcended the careful condominium of church and state that had developed since the fourth century. Constantine made his claims explicit when he wrote, 'If one desires to become first among all, let him become a priest,'⁴² and at the end of the council, he presented its decisions to the Patriarchs as if they were his own. The council, furthermore, accepted Constantine's formulation of his role when they wrote to the Pope, 'Because we were led by Constantine, the one reigning divinely, in conjunction with him we have thrown forth the error of the heretics.'⁴³ Constantine not merely numbered himself among the members of the council, but claimed that the council had accepted his doctrinal formulation under his presidency:

We acted in order that we might take part in that which is most proper to us, and we extended the sight of our understanding, with wisdom

⁴⁰ Mansi, col. 660.

⁴¹ Mansi, col. 349.

⁴² Mansi, col. 358.

⁴³ Mansi, col. 684.

and acquaintance with such things alone, to God, and there we received release from confusion through our long-standing prayers because we were given clear sight by His spirit. We then know that we should call together the eyes of the Church, we say the priests, to the observation of the truth... For we did not neglect these things, but rather, we carefully judged them and on this account, all proclaimed with one understanding and with one tongue that which, on the one hand, we believed in, and on the other hand, that which we pronounced.⁴⁴

In effect, Constantine claimed to have received the direct revelation of true doctrine from God, and to have called the council to ratify his doctrinal pronouncement. Rather than coming to God through the church, as his predecessors had done, Constantine strongly implied that the Church had come to God through him. The right of the emperor to claim a sufficient degree of sacerdotal status to make the claim to define doctrine was established. And the council provided the final demonstration of the new imperial status by including Justinian as one of the doctrinal authorities in its collection of doctrinal authorities.⁴⁵ Constantine had succeeded in opening up the definition of the priesthood so that the right to make doctrine without liturgical function could supply the emperor with sacerdotal status.

Although there were some noteworthy—and in the light of the emperor's defeat by the Bulgars during the council, particularly embarrassing—dissidents, on the whole the council members in Constantinople did not challenge Constantine's reformulation of the sacerdotal character of the emperor. Nonetheless, there was at least one churchman who was quite cognizant that Constantine had reconstructed the imperial image and role, and was not pleased about it: the Pope. Imperial sacerdotalism threatened the Papacy's claims to doctrinal authority, and Agatho's letter to the council made clear that the emperor's role was to follow the Papacy's lead in doctrinal matters. Agatho had sent Constantine his own formulation of orthodoxy:

In order that Your Christimitating [Christomimetos] Serenity might find these worthy according to the holy promise of your imperial letter, and that you might deem it worthy that your understanding give favor to

⁴⁴ Mansi, col. 722.

⁴⁵ Mansi, col. 430.

the correct suggestions in these [letters]. Thus, will your Piety discover the ears of the All-Ruling God through our prayers.⁴⁶

Agatho was not so much requesting imperial agreement as demanding it as a matter of course. If the emperor did not accept these doctrines, he would lose the Pope's intercession with God. In this way, Agatho challenged not only Constantine's claim to doctrinal authority, but also the claims to revelatory charisma that he had used to bolster his authority. In fact, Agatho was quite aware that he had not only challenged Constantine's authority, but the claim on which that authority rested, and he was careful to add, 'For the manner of these things [that we have written] was not given as an insult, so that we might dare to ordain these things for Your Pious Presence; but rather, your caring, Christ-loving command brought these forth, and we fulfilled your command obediently.'⁴⁷ The Pope tried to turn his challenge of Constantine's spiritual authority into an assertion of secular submission by employing the traditional rhetoric of ecclesiastical clarification of imperial queries regarding the faith. In this sense, he appealed to Constantine's Christ-loving action in consulting the Papacy, once again identifying loving Christ with loving Christ's representatives, the bishops, or at least, the Pope. It was only by respecting sacerdotal authority that the emperor might prosper, and Agatho chided Constantine that were he to follow his doctrinal prescriptions, Agatho would pray, 'May the highest majesty establish through the most manly and unblemished toils of your care, under the aegis of your well-intentioned and absolute diadem, that the peoples ill-disposed toward you be brought to order. For from this every soul and all peoples might be secure.'⁴⁸ The Pope answered Constantine's claims to sacerdotal authority with the claim to hold Constantine's victory in the power of his prayer.

Thus, the Pope employed the Christomimetic vocabulary that Constantine was employing, even referring directly to the emperor as Christomimetic, but attempted to retain the more traditional sense of honoring Christ's servants that we have seen before. The Pope (or his secretaries) was cleverly able to combine the emerging discourse of the court within the context of the earlier vocabulary

⁴⁶ Mansi, col. 237.

⁴⁷ Mansi, col. 237.

⁴⁸ Mansi, col. 237.

of guardianship in order to maintain the doctrinal monopoly of the clergy, and particularly, of himself:

On account of this [guarding the church], a final reward will be laid up in heaven for Your Most Calm Piety for your pious labors on behalf of the universal and orthodox faith from the one co-reigning with Your Most Christian Power, whose truth you guard unshakably.⁴⁹

New terminology was mixed with older in the Pope's correspondence, but its intent was to maintain the clerical—and specifically Papal—monopoly on doctrine. The emperor guarded the faith and was expected to show love and honor to the representatives of that faith, especially the Pope. And although the emperor was described as co-reigning with Christ, the Pope maintained the separation of powers between those who were the servants of Christ, as he called himself,⁵⁰ and the emperor who shared his earthly rule with Christ. The emperor's activities were confined to ordering the world with the aid of God, and it was only in this sense that the Pope considered the 'co-imperium' of emperor and Christ:

May the highest majesty establish through the most manly and unblemished toils of your philanthropy, under the aegis of your well-intentioned and absolute diadem, that the peoples ill-disposed toward you be brought to order. For from this every soul and all the peoples might be secure.⁵¹

It was the emperor who maintained earthly peace and harmony, but it was the Pope who had received the apostolic doctrines that were 'the foundations of the orthodox church of Jesus Christ.'⁵² The Papal claims of authority were accepted without reservation by the emperor when he described the deference that past emperors had shown to the Papacy in combating heresy at the councils.⁵³ But nonetheless, Constantine still reserved to himself the right to define doctrine through his spiritual association with the Papacy.⁵⁴

With the close of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, another gap appears in the sources, but the reign of Justinian II, the last of the

⁴⁹ Mansi, col. 284

⁵⁰ Mansi, col. 287. See also the remarks of W. Enßlin, 'Gottkaiser', pp. 114-16.

⁵¹ Mansi, col. 237.

⁵² Mansi, col. 237.

⁵³ Mansi, col. 662.

⁵⁴ Mansi, col. 664

Heraclians, evidences the climax of the seventh-century process of the sacerdotalization of the imperial office. The years 692 saw two landmark events: the publication of the canons of the Quinisext Council, and the issuance of a new Byzantine coin type. The Quinisext Council is mostly known for its regulation of Christian rituals and institutions, and for placing into the corpus of canon law practices common in the eastern church. Additionally, however, the council issued a canon that bestowed the status of deacon on the emperor, and specifically permitted him to stand at the bema as a deacon. Whether emperors actually exercised these rights or not is less important (for the purpose of this essay) than why Justinian would have wished such a canon to be included, for it is not likely that such a canon would have emerged from the council without some imperial hint.⁵⁵ In a very real sense, whether Justinian exercised his liturgical privilege or not, he institutionalized his father's imagery of the liturgical link between the emperor and Christ. Whatever emperors did in the ninth or tenth centuries—the periods for which we have the best evidence for imperial ceremonial—I would maintain that in the context of the seventh century, the appropriation of some institutional recognition of the emperor's sacerdotal status was a logical consequence of the developing discourse of imperial rule and of the imperial office in particular. Moreover, I think it reasonable to assume that if Justinian oversaw the inclusion of this canon—and given that the council was held in the Trullan chamber at the imperial palace, it is quite possible that Justinian assumed the same presidential position as his father had at the Sixth Ecumenical Council—he intended to put it to use. Even if its addition was only symbolic, at the least, it further buttressed the sacerdotal claims that had been used to enhance imperial authority in the latter half of the seventh century, if not in the reign of Heraclius himself.

⁵⁵ Scholars have debated (at times rather hotly) the degree to which emperors exploited this opening into acquiring an institutional claim for sacerdotal authority, and on the whole have doubted that emperors pushed this opportunity very far. But such debate has generally addressed Byzantine practices long after the Quinisext council for the simple reason that there is no evidence about the extent to which Justinian might have exploited his new ecclesiastical status. For the basic arguments and interpretation of this and other liturgical privileges of the emperor, see Treitinger, *Reichsidee*, pp. 128ff., who believed that the emperors did indeed make use of these privileges, and L. Brehier, 'Hiereus kai Basileus,' *Das byzantinische Herrscherbild*, ed. H. Hunger, Darmstadt, 1975, pp. 86-94, who doubts that they did.

The institutionalization of the emperor's sacerdotal charisma found, I would assert, its most powerful expression in the remarkable solidus Justinian issued immediately following the council. The coin has an image of Christ in a pallium on the obverse, with the legend *Iesus Christus Dominus Rex Regnantium*, while the reverse shows Justinian, holding a cross, dressed in a *loros* with the legend, *Dominus Iustinianus Servus Christi*. While Christ had appeared once or twice on previous ceremonial Byzantine coinage, this was the first regular class of coinage to bear Christ's image, and was a radical break not only with the iconographic standards of previous seventh-century rulers, but with the earlier coinage of Justinian's own reign.⁵⁶ The title of Christ is relatively common in its Greek form, *Basileus basileon*, but its significance is the identification of Christ as an emperor. As we have seen, the joint rule of Christ and emperor had been an important development in the Christomimetic discourse of kingship during the seventh century, and in the image and legend of Christ on the obverse, the place reserved for the imperial portrait on all Byzantine coins, Christ was iconographically identified as the Roman emperor. The reverse portrait of Justinian is somewhat more complicated. Seventh-century reverses were reserved for co-emperors—generally imperial sons when they were available—who jointly held a cross, as Justinian had during the reign of his father. Hence, his portrait on the reverse clearly marks him as Christ's *sumbasileus*. The legend, however, is unprecedented, and the costume is somewhat unusual. Many explanations for the legend have been proposed, and doubtless, the legend carried several meanings at once. *Dominus* was the ubiquitous imperial title for imperial portraits, but the title *Servus Christi* is an episcopal title: as we have seen, the Pope used it in his correspondence with Constantine IV. Significantly, this title became exceedingly popular on contemporary seals. They come from a variety of officials, mostly secular, and it would seem possible that the use of the title 'servant of Christ' on the coinage may have influenced contemporaries. They come from a variety of officials, mostly secular, and it would seem possible that the use of the title 'Servant of Christ [*doulos Christou*]' on the coinage may have influenced contemporaries.⁵⁷ The use of *doulos theotokou* on Byzantine

⁵⁶ See Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins*, v. 2, pp. 568-70.

⁵⁷ G. Zacos and A. Vegliery, eds, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, Basel, 1972, v. 1, pp. 620

seals was quite traditional, and there are myriad examples of these from the sixth century forward. But *doulos Christou* is very rare, and only one example (so far as I know) pre-dates the seventh century. The sixth-century seal is of a bishop Nicholas with the simple legend, 'Nicholas bishop, servant of Christ.'⁵⁸ While it would be supposing too much to imagine that episcopal seal legends influenced Justinian's coin design, it does not seem too great a leap of logic to imagine that the title 'Servant of Christ' had episcopal roots, and was, for that reason, adopted as the reverse legend on the coin that bore Christ on the obverse. As we have seen, other options, like *sumbasileus*, were available, and Justinian's coinage chose not to adopt a title that emphasized the co-rule of Christ and emperor, but rather set their association in a very untraditional context.

The emperor, therefore, was presented not only as Christ's co-emperor, but also employed a legend that had episcopal connotations. The loros further enhanced this image, for although it was the consular costume of by-gone centuries, and had generally graced coinage celebrating imperial consulates, it had not appeared on Constantinopolitan gold or silver for nearly a century, and the imperial consulate itself had not been celebrated for nearly half a century. At the same time, the military iconography of the imperial bust with cuirass and paludamentum, which Constantine IV had adopted to celebrate his victory over the Arabs, and which had dominated late antique numismatic iconography, saw its last appearance on Byzantine coinage in the reign of Tiberius III, Justinian's successor.⁵⁹ By the end of the seventh century, it seems to have developed into the costume most commonly worn by the emperor in religious processions and in church.⁶⁰ Although the evidence for the loros as the garb worn by the emperor in church is later than the seventh-century, it is also clear that it had lost its consular associations, and its

(#900), 621 (#905), 646 (#954); v. 2, pp. 893 (#1505), 934 (#1606c), 1162 (#2092), 1301 (#2385), 1356 (#2501); v. 3, p. 1607 (#2795). All of these seals are dated to the late seventh or eighth centuries. It is of course possible that those dating the seals were influenced by Justinian's legend as well.

⁵⁸ Zacos and Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, v. 3, p. 1615 (#2816).

⁵⁹ For the development of seventh-century coin iconography see Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins*, v. 2, pp. 65-8.

⁶⁰ See J. Breckenridge, 'The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II', *Numismatic Notes and Monographs* 144, 1959, pp. 28-45.

striking use on Justinian's coinage implies that it had at least begun to develop its ecclesiastical associations. Thus, just as the obverse presented Christ, the high priest, as emperor, the reverse presented the emperor in his ecclesiastical garb. This unusual coin symbolized the trends in imperial discourse that joined Christomimesis and imperial sacerdotalism. It announced a new definition of the emperor that incorporated the new rhetoric of rulership that addressed the challenges to imperial legitimacy created by the victory of Islam. No less significant for the following century, such symbolism was closely tied to institutional changes in the imperial office that were more than images or rhetoric.

The generation after Justinian was dominated by political instability and military defeat, climaxing with the second Arab siege of Constantinople in 717-18. The emperor who finally reestablished Roman political and military stability, Leo III, was the product of a century of reformulating imperial powers. Whether he employed the title, 'Priest and Emperor' as his enemies claimed, is not altogether clear.⁶¹ What is clear is that Leo felt that he had the authority to make decisions about Christian ritual practices, and on that basis, limit the veneration of icons, thus initiating a century and half of struggle between the emperor and those elements of the church that he could not directly control. There were many causes for the iconoclast controversy, but I think that it is necessary to add to the list the transformation of imperial discourse and the evolving institutional claims to sacerdotal authority that developed over the course of the seventh century. The trauma of the Arab invasions not only required the institutional transformation of the late Roman Empire into what we might call the Byzantine Empire, but also a transforma-

⁶¹ S. Gero has noted that the language of the *Ekloga* is very different in tone and attitude toward the emperor's spiritual authority from the Theodosian Code. Strikingly, the prologue to the *Ekloga* refers to the emperor having direction over the 'flock' of his subjects, a very different vocabulary indeed than that employed by previous emperors, and one laden with sacerdotal implications. See S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources*, (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 346, *Subsidia* 41), Louvain, 1973, pp. 53ff. More recently, G. Dagron has seconded this view, and in particular has drawn attention to the utility, if not the historicity, of the letters of Pseudo-Gregory II in understanding the centrality of imperial claims to sacerdotal authority in the political history of iconoclasm. See G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, tr. J. Birrell, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 158-66.

tion in the rhetorical construction of the Empire and the emperor. The emerging imperial discourse of the seventh century was a direct response to the political challenge of defeat, and generated in its turn a growing imperial sense of sacerdotal authority over not only the church but also the piety and purity of its subjects. From this complex of political discourse and institutional evolution emerged, I would like to suggest, yet another cause for iconoclasm.

THE EARLY MUSLIM RAIDS INTO ANATOLIA AND
BYZANTINE REACTIONS UNDER EMPEROR
CONSTANS II¹

Walter E. Kaegi

The most crucial imperial reign for Byzantine-Muslim encounters in the seventh century, other than that of Heraclius himself, is that of his grandson, the enigmatic Constans II (641-668). Yet his military and diplomatic activities in Anatolia between 641 and 663 and in the central and western Mediterranean between 663 and his assassination in 668 in Syracuse, Sicily have presented something of a riddle and have puzzled many historians. I may not be able to solve all aspects of the riddle but I shall try to reexamine problems that relate to his efforts to check or reverse the Early Islamic Conquests in the east, with special attention to Anatolia. First I shall try to look at the larger historical context for these momentous Muslim-Christian encounters.

Historians face a lot of challenges. Many today object to paying attention to leaders at the top, that is, they criticize the notion or value of studying 'great men,' or even lesser leaders such as Constans II, whom no one regards as a great man. So for some even investigating such an emperor is faulty and unworthy of labor. There is another problem. The paucity of primary sources in Latin, Greek, and Arabic presents a major challenge to all historians and has discouraged research on the seventh century in Italy and elsewhere. To understand Constans II we must understand the empire's challenges

¹ I wish to thank Dr. Grypeou and Professor Malik for honoring me with an invitation to participate in this valuable conference, which has become the occasion for me to think about a range of problems. I received invaluable comments from others who participated in the conference. This essay has also profited from comments that I received on related papers: 'The Riddle of Constans II in Italy', University of Bologna, Sede Ravenna, 12 March 2003, and University of Bologna, Bologna campus 27 March 2003; 'Reinterpreting Constans II (641-668)', at the 29th Annual Byzantine Studies Conference (Bates College, Lewiston, Maine), 17 October 2003.

in Anatolia, Africa and even further away, in Italy. This is a reading of the evidence in a wider context.

We must start by looking at Constans II,² who inherited power in late 641 at the age of eleven, after the premature death of his father Heraclius Constantine or Constantine III, who had reigned only a few months after the decease of dynasty's founder, Heraclius. Constans needs reevaluation in the light of the most recent research on his grandfather Heraclius. Recently completed research on Heraclius underscores some characteristics of Heraclius with which to compare Constans II.³ While avoiding any exaggeration in comparisons let us start now to look at the two. Constans was aware of strife at the death of Heraclius and his own vulnerability in the face of factions within the capital of Constantinople and in the provinces of the empire, and more particularly within the army. It is inappropriate here to review some of the conclusions about internal strife reached more than two decades ago, back in 1981.⁴ We need to examine Anatolia in the context of Constans II's reign. Indeed even the cause for Constans II's stay in Italy emerges from a longer historical context that preceded his arrival in spring 663 in southern Italy.

Constans II was very insecure at the beginning of his reign. All eyes were on him. The legitimacy of the Heraclian dynasty was none too secure anyway. Being young and vulnerable he had to prove himself. Yet the heritage of Heraclius was an ambiguous one: magnificent victories but also many terrible military disasters, conspiracies, and scandals. Constans II and his advisors faced the problem of finding a justification for his rule and a standard or benchmark and justification for his policies and rule. But there was another problem. It seems that the members of the Heraclian dynasty, including that of Constans II (to judge from trial of Pope Martin I and Maximos the Confessor), sought to deflect blame for defeats at the hands of Saracens or Muslims to others than themselves, namely, to others' disobedience of imperial orders or to deliberate sabotage of imperial initiatives.⁵ Therefore they could continue to try to emulate

² 'Konstans II.', # 3691 *Prosographie der Mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, Abt. 1, Bd. 2, Berlin, 2000, pp. 480-4.

³ W.E. Kaegi, *Heraclius, Emperor of Byzantium*, Cambridge, 2003, and W.E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests*, rev. ed., Cambridge, 1995.

⁴ W.E. Kaegi, *Byzantine Military Unrest 471-843: An Interpretation*, Amsterdam and Las Palmas, 1981, pp. 154-80.

⁵ Accusation against Pope Martin I for alleged correspondence and financial

the successful campaigns and strivings of Heraclius, the founder of the dynasty, despite the serious military reverses, especially those at the hands of the Muslims, late in his reign, which they refused to attribute to himself. Having inherited power very young Constans II endeavored to justify his policies as a continuation in spirit and in fact of those of his grandfather Heraclius. Hence Constans II could still attempt to strive to campaign in person and to direct defenses behind the military front but not too far from it.

This thesis depends in part on an estimate without explicit textual documentation. So I believe that there was a tendency to stress the will and testament of Heraclius, including his crown, and Heraclius' order almost certainly very late in his reign to undertake a new census of the whole empire. Heraclius appointed Philagrios to the rank of *sakellarios*, and he ordered him, perhaps as late as 640 or the initial days of 641, to make a new census (ἀπογραφὴν) for the entire empire, which was to be surveyed (κησευθῆναι).⁶ This was a bold step, for no such general census had been taken for a long time. This indicates again that Heraclius remained in active control of the government until shortly after his demise. How far Philagrios managed to accomplish this imperial instruction is uncertain. After the death of Heraclius it may have been expedient to remind subjects that it was Heraclius himself who had ordered the reassessment.⁷ A Georgian tradition of Sumbat Davit'is-dze offers possible corroborative information by reporting a census in K'art'li between 642 and 650 that was taken to Byzantium.⁸ It is even conceivable that the

contacts with 'Saracens': Martin I, letter: *PL CXXIX*, col. 587. See also P. Allen and Br. Neil, ed. and trans., *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions. Documents from Exile*, Oxford, 2002, pp. 49-51; Wolfram Brandes, "Juristische" Krisenbewältigung im 7. Jahrhundert? Die Prozesse gegen Papst Martin I. Und Maximos Homologetes', (*Fontes Minores* 10), ed. L. Burgmann, *Forschungen zur Byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte* 22, Frankfurt a.M., 1998, pp. 141-212.

⁶ *Σύνοψις Χρονική*, ed. Constantine Sathas, (*Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη* 7), 1894, p. 110. On Philagrios see *PLRE* vol. 3, p. 1018, *s.v.* Philagrios 3 (identical probably with *PLRE* 3: 1019, *s.v.* Philagrios 6). W. Brandes, *Finanzverwaltung in Krisenzeiten: Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen Administration im 6.-9. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt a.M., 2002, pp. 459-60, argues for the historicity of the census.

⁷ Theophanes, A.M. 6131, in Cyril Mango, trans., *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, Oxford, 1997, pp. 473f. On Theophilus of Edessa and Syriac transmitters: C. Mango, *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, pp. lxxxii-lxxxiv.

⁸ Stephen H. Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography*, Leuven, 2003, p. 354.

account of Heraclius' order for a new census was floated or elaborated in the reign of Constans II to justify subjecting the empire's tax payers to the miseries and ordeal of a new order of taxes and controls. The census may genuinely have been started and finished under Heraclius or its actual implementation may have occurred after Heraclius' decease but with full responsibility ascribed to him by his successors, especially his grandson Constans II. We simply do not know more. Whatever the real facts, there was an effort (on his part or on that of his advisors) to associate Constans II undeviatingly with the precedents and policies and tangible that is physical items of his impressive grandfather. Presumably Constans II's government implemented that census in Anatolia as well as in other better-attested regions of the empire.

Constans II's persistent personal campaigning fits into the above pattern of copying the precedents of Heraclius, who broke with precedent to campaign almost perpetually in person on many battlefronts and campaigns. Constans II probably sought to involve himself personally because the last military memories of victories against external foes, especially those coming from the east, were those of Heraclius who personally engaged and risked his life and reputation in campaigning. Those memories surely affected the actions of his grandson, Constans II. They were the only successful precedents in the effective historical memory of the mid-seventh century, even though Heraclius' efforts against the Muslims failed catastrophically. But Constans II went out on campaign in Armenia and Anatolia. The Byzantine armies apparently wanted that. Certainly the military inactivity of sovereigns who did not campaign did not leave a great record of military success either. His own father Heraclius Constantine (Constantine III) avoided campaigning in person. Constans II instead sought to follow the successful military precedents and examples of his grandfather.

Constans went to Armenia in 652/3 in an unsuccessful effort to restore his claim to authority there, despite the extension of new Muslim authority (although virtually no conversions to Islam took place) there.

But Constans, unlike his grandfather, was compelled to engage in some diplomatic relations—embassies—with the Muslims, which the recent researches of Alexander Beihammer and Andreas Kaplony⁹ have helped to illuminate.

⁹ A.D. Beihammer, *Nachrichten zum byzantinischen Urkundenwesen in arabischen Quellen*

Like his grandfather Heraclius, Constans II was suspicious of treachery and espionage. Again, like his grandfather Heraclius, Constans II aggressively blamed military failures in the time of his grandfather on betrayal. Like his grandfather, Constans II fought to suppress dangerous generals. We see echoes of earlier Heraclian accusations of betrayal in Constans II's courtiers' accusations against Maximos the Confessor and Pope Martin I. Constans, like Heraclius, had a difficult problem to explain: the Byzantine military disasters at the hands of the Muslims. Heraclius and Constans II both resorted to public accusations and ridicule and denunciation of accused perpetrators of harm to the empire and the dynasty. Like his grandfather Heraclius, Constans strove to construct and maintain close ties and communications with his subjects. But we have no specific reference to his resort to military or other bulletins or public letters to keep his subjects in Constantinople and elsewhere in the east informed about his activities (including his military achievements), his policies, and his solicitude for the welfare of his subjects. We do not know how Constans II kept contact with his subjects elsewhere (in Anatolia, Thrace, and even Constantinople) while he was in Italy and Sicily. We do not even know how he communicated with them in Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia.

Like his grandfather Heraclius' response to an arrogant letter from the Sasanian King Khusro II, according to the narrative of the Armenian historian Sebeos, Emperor Constans II reacted to the receipt of a letter from Caliph 'Uthmān that summoned him to Islam and proposed that he become a subject. He had that letter deposited on the altar of St. Sophia Church and invoked a passage from Isaiah.¹⁰ Here Constans II the emperor was acting indeed as head of state and mediator to the deity, as his grandfather had done.

The ultimately triumphant Chalcedonian literary tradition tried to claim that Heraclius had correctly changed his mind late in life and had rejected Monotheletism. However this was simply an effort

(565-811). (*Ποικίλα Βυζαντινά* 17), Bonn, 2000, pp. 259-323. A. Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus. Gesandtschaften und Verträge zwischen Kaisern und Kalifen 639-750* (*Islamkundliche Untersuchungen* 208), Berlin, 1996, pp. 48-9.

¹⁰ *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, R.W. Thomson, ed. and trans., J. Howard-Johnston commentary, Liverpool and Philadelphia, 1999, c. 50, pp. 144-5; cf. c. 38, pp. 79-81, connected with the Persian siege of Constantinople, thus comparable to the Arab one.

of Maximos the Confessor and his followers to create a different Heraclius for memory to suit their apologetical purposes.

We must be careful, but there probably was a real case of conscious imitation on the part of the grandson Constans II. But there were limits to the possibility of genuine imitation, given that circumstances and other aspects were different.

We have epigraphically attested reports of devastating Muslim raids on Cyprus in 649 and 650 CE at Soloi during the reign of Constans II.¹¹ These underscore the intensifying Muslim military activities and the sufferings, including the wholesale captivity and deportation of many Cypriots, reportedly 120,000.

Even some Muslim historical traditions in Arabic conflate and confuse Constans II with his grandfather Heraclius, calling them both Heraclius without distinguishing them. The late Suleiman Bashear also noted this phenomenon.¹²

Both Heraclius and Constans II reportedly (and the sources are diverse even in diverse languages) sought to encourage their local subjects to take up arms to defend themselves against aliens, whether Muslims in Asia or Egypt or Lombards in Italy. Yet both suffered mixed outcomes to their endeavors to encourage self-defense.

We do not understand Heraclius' perception of incipient Islam.¹³ Likewise we do not know Constans II's view or understanding of Islam, even though by his reign Islam had had more time to take form.

There is another similarity between Heraclius and Constans II. In politics one normally acts and thinks in the light of one's most recent experiences. For Constantinople that meant in the light of its experiences during the Muslim invasions in Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Upper Mesopotamia, where the government opposed and rejected

¹¹ D. Feissel, 'Inscriptions chrétiennes et Byzantines', *Revue des Etudes Grecques* 100, 1987, Soloi on pp. 380-1, par. 532.

¹² S. Bashear, 'The Mission of Dihya al-Kalbī and the Situation in Syria', in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 14, 1991, pp. 84-114=repr., *Der Islam* 74, 1997, pp. 64-91, esp. pp. 81-4; L.I. Conrad, 'Heraclius in Early Islamic Kerygma', in G. Reinink and B. Stolte, eds, *The Reign of Heraclius*, Leuven, 2002, pp. 113-56. Other problems and differing perspectives about early Islamic historiography: Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, Princeton, 1998; C.F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, Cambridge, 2003; A. Noth, with the collaboration of L.I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: a Source-Critical Study*, Princeton, 1994.

¹³ Legendary Muslim material cannot solve this problem; it can only illuminate later alien traditions: L.I. Conrad, 'Heraclius in Early Islamic Kerygma,' *supra*.

local bartering with the Muslims. Emperor Heraclius, the grandfather of Constans II, sought to dismiss any bureaucrats or ecclesiastics who engaged in such activities, and to replace them with more reliable ones. The same process took place in North Africa during the reign of Constans II.¹⁴ Constans attempted to enforce such policies outside of North Africa as well. This is not a new policy. It is a continuation, like so many of his others, of the policies of his grandfather Heraclius even though he may not mention Heraclius by name. Constantinople was very suspicious of anyone who made or might make unauthorized contacts with Muslims. The outcome was suspicion of treason against any governor or ecclesiastic who showed hesitation about any aspect whatever of imperial policy, whether civil or religious. Constans II's efforts to censure Pope Martin I for unauthorized contacts with Muslims are consistent with those of his grandfather Heraclius to prevent unapproved negotiations between local leaders and Muslim commanders.

Muslim historical traditions diverge concerning the identity of the leader of the earliest Muslim raids beyond the initial mountain passes into what became known as the land of the Romans, whether Maysara b. Masrūq or 'Abd Allāh b. Qays Abū Baḥriyya or 'Iyāḍ b. Ghanim or Abū 'Ubayda al-Jarrāḥ. We shall not here embark on any detailed study of 'firsts,' but Arabic literature is replete with the genre. Elsewhere I have discussed some evidence from Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam's *Futūḥ Miṣr* for the earliest Muslim expedition against Amorium in 644 (AH 23), when Constans II was too young to be responsible for trying to develop defenses.¹⁵ Mu'āwiya probably commanded another expedition against Amorium two years later, in 646. The pressure against Byzantine defenses in Anatolia intensified.

Latin and Arabic sources agree on the discontent of western Mediterranean landowners because of the extortion of heavy taxes by Byzantine officials. Where were these payments going—for the defense of Africa or for the defense of Anatolia, or for some other far-away expenditures, such as general expenses of the government? There were big controversies and disagreements. The first great

¹⁴ W.E. Kaegi, 'Society and Institutions in Byzantine Africa,' in *Ai confini dell'impero. Storia, arte e archeologia della Sardegna bizantina*, Cagliari, 2002, pp. 15-28.

¹⁵ W.E. Kaegi, 'The First Arab Expedition Against Amorium,' (*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 3), 1977, pp. 19-22, repr. as essay XIV in W.E. Kaegi, *Army, Society and Religion in Byzantium*, London, 1982.

Muslim victory over the Byzantines in Africa in 647 resulted in a vast diminution of available funds for the Byzantine government, because the Muslim-imposed-tribute was very high. That harmed not only Byzantine defenses in Africa and Italy but also Byzantine defenses in Anatolia. There was a close connection between military operations and diplomacy in the east and the west. Each kilo of gold that the Muslims extorted from the Africans diminished potential resources for Byzantium in its struggle against the Muslims, while increasing those of the Muslims. According to the Muslim geographer Ibn 'Idhārī, Byzantine African taxpayers refused to pay more taxes to Byzantium because, in their words, 'All of the wealth that we had we ransomed up to the Arabs. As for the Emperor, he is our lord, he would punish us again!'¹⁶

Both Heraclius and Constans II lived in a mental environment of eschatological, indeed apocalyptic (although not explicitly millennial) expectations. Scholars are only beginning to understand just how strong those fears and hopes were throughout the seventh century and in many regions east and west and how they affected and may have nurtured certain religious manifestations and movements.

Constans II unlike Heraclius in fighting the Persians but like Heraclius in confronting Muslims or Arabs was unable to find some way to split his foes or decapitate or neutralize their leadership. It is unclear whether Constans II and his advisers even understood the extent to which his grandfather Heraclius owed his military victories to skillful exploitation of the internal divisions within the ranks of his opponents, whether Phokas or Khusrau II.

The combination of Heraclius' personal leadership and presence on campaigns and initiatives together with the imperial propaganda blaming defeats on betrayal, disobedience, stubbornness, misunderstanding all contributed to Constans II's personal appearances on land and naval campaigns, but they raised risks of death. I do not wish to dwell on Constans II's experiences before his coming to Italy, but he previously assumed personal command of imperial troops in Armenia, which resulted in an unsatisfactory outcome. He likewise personally

¹⁶ Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān al-maghrib*, ed. E. Levi-Provençal, Tunis, 1992, vol. I, p. 17. But could this incident possibly be an echo of the flight in 826 CE of Elpidios, the governor of Byzantine Sicily, who became a rebel, and fled for help to Africa, where he received Muslim assistance, which in fact constituted the beginning of the Muslim conquest of Sicily?

participated in the disastrous naval battle at Phoenix (called The Battle of the Masts by Muslim historians) in 655 and barely escaped with his life. Constans II consistently tried to use his personal presence and hands-on involvement to solve vulnerable external border situations. Heraclius' propagandists had also celebrated Heraclius' prowess onboard ship, both sailing from Africa to assume imperial power in Constantinople and with respect to his sailing across the straits from Constantinople to campaign in Asia.

A couple of observations are necessary about relevant coinage of Constans II. Firstly, the frontal portraiture of Constans II after about 651 or more appropriately after 654 strongly resembles that of his grandfather Heraclius after approximately 629 or 630 CE.¹⁷ This may well be another aspect of the deliberate emphasis on the resemblance of the two sovereigns. Secondly, it is conceivable that an inscription *PAX* on a Carthaginian silver coin issue of Emperor Constans II may reflect a temporary peace with the Muslims, but there are problems with such an ascription.¹⁸ If it reflects peace with Muslims, it reflects it in Africa alone, and not Anatolia or Syria, which would involve the treaty after the death of the African exarch Gregory in 647. Possibly that was the issue to which Muslim commentators refer, rather than to Gregory the exarch himself, but that identification is very insecure as well. It is most likely the *PAX* inscription celebrates the restoration of peace between Byzantine Africa and the central Byzantine government in Constantinople after the death of Gregory at the hands of the Muslims in 647.¹⁹ Agapius

¹⁷ P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection* [henceforth, *DOCat*], Washington DC, 1968, vol. 2, Pt. 2, nos. 25a-37, on Plates XXIV-XXV, especially solidi of Constans II struck after 654. Compare with solidi of Heraclius, Grierson, *DOCat* vol. 2.1, nos. 26a-32a, pp. 223-5. More coins of Constans II that imitate those of Heraclius: W. Hahn, *Moneta Imperii Byzantini*, III (*Denkschriften, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Phil.-Hist. Kl. 148), 1981, p. 124.

¹⁸ W. Hahn, *Moneta Imperii Byzantini*, vol. III, p. 134, no. 157a and 157b, silver; Grierson, *DOCat* vol. 2.2, pp. 475, 476, nos. 132.1, 132.2, 132.3, 133. Grierson comments on p. 475n., 'The obvious occasion was the defeat of the rebel Gregorius in 647 and the conclusion of peace with the Arab government in Egypt.' Hahn wonders whether it was issued for the 651 peace with Muawiya, but none was struck in the east for the peace, so that makes little sense. It might possibly celebrate the selection of a new exarch after the elimination of Gregory, but one seldom celebrates or acknowledges internal strife in any fashion.

¹⁹ Such *PAX* issues were struck in the late fifth century, to celebrate the restoration of relations between emperors in the west and in Constantinople, respective

refers to a peace made with ‘the king,’ that is, with Constans II, after the defeat of Gregory at Sufetula (Sbeitla) in 647, and it is probable that the PAX issue is referring to that peace, not to any peace with the Muslims in Syria, Anatolia, or Africa.²⁰ There is no record of Byzantine coinage celebrating peace with barbarians in any other case, to my knowledge.

Personal presence of the emperor elevated risk but insured that no intermediary would sabotage, disobey, misinterpret or by incompetence ruin imperial commands with respect to diplomatic or military policy. Personal presence of the emperor was required to make the system work, as in the case of Komnenian warfare²¹ a half of a millennium later.

Constans II moved west to Italy and Sicily from Constantinople and Anatolia because a glance at a map shows the bar-belled shaped remaining parts of his imperiled empire that required emergency attention and reinforcement. As the Muslim threat grew in North Africa and the Lombard threat likewise grew in Italy Constans II probably believed that he had to do something to try to save Africa and Italy. P. Corsi is probably correct. Italy and Sicily could serve as a strategic pivot. Any such decision and strategy involved major commitments to the buildup and exercise and maintenance of naval power and naval supremacy. We cannot ascertain the numbers of his military force with any certainty.

reigns of Leo I and Anthemius. See W.E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome*, Princeton, 1968, pp. 37-43. I thank Frank M. Clover of the University of Wisconsin/Madison for his comments on this matter. Significantly that fifth-century PAX coinage also was issued in the west, and not at Constantinople, to demonstrate peaceful solidarity with the government at Constantinople. Ph. Grierson opines to me in a letter dated 8 March 1997, ‘...the PAX refers to a local “peace”. Since no eastern mint celebrated that of 651 with Mu‘āwiyā, it seems inconceivable that Carthage would have thought of doing so.’

²⁰ Agapius, *Kitāb al-‘Unwān*, ed. A.A. Vasiliev, in *Patrologia Orientalis*, vol. VIII, p. 479. The only problem is this defective text also reports that after the defeat of Gregory he fled to ‘Rum’, which Vasiliev translates as ‘Greece’, and then ‘made peace with the king’. All other texts state that Gregory was slain at Sufetula and it is likely that was the case. The text appears to be defective here. Of course Agapius was located far from Africa anyway, in northern Syria, and probably draws on a manuscript tradition that derives from Theophilus of Edessa. On this Theophilus, see L.I. Conrad, ‘Theophanes and the Arabic Historical Transmission’, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 15, 1990, pp. 1-44.

²¹ John Birkenmeier, *Development of the Komnenian Army*, Leiden 2002, p. 235.

We can speculate, but that involves the perils of counterfactual history, whether Constans II might have better appointed his son Constantine IV in his stead to serve as troubleshooter in the west; certainly he needed someone who could unmistakably assure of the highest imperial involvement in efforts to hold together the situation in the west. Supposedly his own murder of his brother so poisoned the atmosphere in Constantinople that he believed that he could no longer function effectively there. If that is true that the option of appointing his son would not have really existed. And there was no trustworthy general to whom he could have delegated such formidable powers.

There is no doubt that Constans II inherited his grandfather Heraclius' policies—in contrast to those passive ones of the even more vulnerable Martina and her sons Heraklonas and David—of marshalling armed resistance to the Muslims in Anatolia and in Egypt and presumably any points further west. But this effort had mixed results.

We know from the *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* of Ibn Sa'd, that the first establishment of a Muslim winter quarters in Anatolia, *'ard al-rūm*, occurred in AH 42 (between 26 April 662-14 April 663 CE): 'And the Muslims wintered in the land of the Byzantines in the year 42 and this was the first winter quarters/winter camp (*huwa awalu mashtān*) they wintered in it.'²² He does not identify its leader or leaders or where they wintered or other details such as the number of raiders or their provenience.

The issue and initial date of Muslims' establishing winter quarters in Byzantine territory are important. That act will make life and agriculture in Anatolia more perilous for the Byzantine inhabitants than were the summer raids. But it also was risky for the Muslims to attempt it.²³ The identification of the date for the first Muslim

²² Mu'ammad Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. E. Sachau, Leiden, 1905, vol. V, p. 166= newer Arabic printing under title *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kubra*, Beirut, vol. V, p. 224. Ibn 'Asākir, 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan, *Ta'rikh Madīnat Dimashq*, ed. 'Umar Gharāma 'Amrawī, Beirut, 1995-8, vol. XXXVII, p. 114. Muḥammad ibn 'Alī 'Aẓīmī, *Ta'rikh Ḥalab*, ed. Ibrāhīm Za'rūr, Damascus, 1984, p. 177.

²³ For a survey of raids, but use with caution: Ralph-Joahannes Lillie, *Die byzantinische Reaktion auf die Ausbreitung der Araber (Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia 22)*, Munich, 1976, esp. pp. 63-155, 346-51; cf. review by W.E. Kaegi, *Speculum* 53, 1978, pp. 399-404. See W.E. Kaegi, 'The Earliest Muslim Penetrations into Anatolia',

wintering has implications for Byzantine institutional history and for the history of Constans II in Italy as well. The first winterings added an inducement for the Byzantines to tighten up their defenses of Anatolia. It may help to explain or date the background for the emergence of the Byzantine military ‘themes’ (military corps and their districts).²⁴ In any case the fact of initial recordings of mentions of some kind of thematic units in Anatolia (irrespective of any possible social or economic ties) a few years after the initial Muslim winterings in Anatolia deserves notice and reflection. Yet the Byzantines could not prevent such winterings. On the other hand, the successes of the Muslims were limited. Their winterings resulted in no permanent Muslim occupation of territory on the plateau in the Early Islamic period.

The Muslim traditionist Abū Zur‘a (d. 893) reports that Mu‘āwiya engaged in sixteen winter and summer campaigns against the Byzantines.²⁵ Yet if we consider the actual list of campaigns in al-Ya‘qūbī’s *Ta’rikh* we find only fifteen on page 285 of the M. Th. Houtsma edition. The sixteenth campaign of Caliph Mu‘āwiya against Byzantium could well refer to the lost year 42 which apparently fell out of the text edited by M.Th. Houtsma in his edition of al-Ya‘qūbī’s *Ta’rikh*. This above passage from the *Kitāb al-tabaqāt al-kabūr* of Ibn Sa’d helps to clarify a section of al-Ya‘qūbī’s *Ta’rikh* that has apparently been dropped. References in other sources may be relevant: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*: ‘During this year the Muslims raided the Alans. They also raided the Byzantines and inflicted a shocking defeat

in A. Avramea, A. Laiou, E. Chrysos, eds, *Byzantine State and Society in Memory of Nikos Oikonomides*, Athens, 2003, pp. 269-82.

²⁴ W. Brandes, *Finanzverwaltung in Krisenzeiten*; J. Haldon, ‘Military Service, Military Lands and the Status of Soldiers: Current Problems and Interpretations’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 47, 1993, pp. 1-67. Also, J. Nesbitt and N. Oikonomides, eds, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art*, 4 vols., Washington, 1991-2001. See also, St. Lampakes, ed., *He Vyzantine Mikra Asia 6.-12. ai.*, 6th International Symposium, Ethniko Hidryma Ereunon, Institutouton ton Vyzantinon Ereunon, Athens, 1998. V. N. Vlysidou, et al., eds. *He Mikra Asia ton thematon: ereumes pano sten geographike physiognomia kai prosopographia ton vyzantinon thematon tes Mikras Asias 7os.-11os. ai.*, Athens, 1998; K.G. Tsiknakes, ed., *To empolemo Vyzantio, 9.-12. ai.*, 4th International Symposium, Ethniko Hidryma Ereunon, Institutouton ton Vyzantinon Ereunon, Athens, 1997.

²⁵ Abū Zur‘a, *Ta’rikh*, Beirut, 1996, 101, p. 42.

on them, reportedly killing several generals [*batarīqa*].’ [Year AH 42].²⁶

The sequence of modern Orientalist publications allowed this reference in Ibn Sa‘d’s *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* to escape notice by modern scholars. No critical edition of the relevant section of Ibn Sa‘d’s *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* was published until 1905, that is, after the appearance of Julius Wellhausen’s 1901 treatise on Umayyad-Byzantine warfare.²⁷ In his treatise Wellhausen did not include any reference to the first Arab wintering in Anatolia in AH 42, nor did earlier the 1898 essay by the Orientalist E.W. Brooks in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*²⁸ nor Leone Caetani in any of his writings.²⁹ Naturally later surveys by Byzantinists, who wholly depended on translations or surveys by Arabists, included no mention of a first wintering in AH 42.

The cessation of the Byzantine-Umayyad truce after the one of 657-8 had terminated with Byzantine Emperor Constans II in May-June 662, after the end of the Muslim civil war, probably was the catalyst for Mu‘āwiya’s undertaking a more active approach to Byzantine Anatolia.³⁰ The likely occasion was Constans II’s departure for the west probably immediately following June 662.³¹ The absence of Constans II from Constantinople with his best troops offered an opportune moment to the Muslims. The date for the first ‘wintering’ was not an accidental or random one. Henceforth Muslim winterings in Anatolia became common. No Byzantine source specifies which

²⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *History*, trans. M. Morony, Albany NY, 1987, vol. XVIII, p. 20.

²⁷ J. Wellhausen, ‘Die Kämpfe der Araber mit den Romäern in der Zeit der Umajjiden’ (*Nachrichten, Königl. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, philologisch-historische Klasse*), 1901, pp. 414-47.

²⁸ E.W. Brooks, ‘The Arabs in Asia Minor (641-750) from Arabic Sources’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 18, 1898, pp. 182-208.

²⁹ Such as L. Caetani, *Annali dell Islam*, 10 vols. in 12, Milan, 1905-26.

³⁰ New studies on Mu‘āwiya: Khaled Mohammed Galal Mohammed Ali Keshk, ‘The Depiction of Mu‘āwiya in the Early Islamic Sources’, Ph.D. diss., Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago, 2002; David B. Cook, ‘The Beginnings of Islam in Syria During the Umayyad Period’, Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2002; Mirzap Polat, *Der Umwandlungsprozess vom Kalīfat zur Dynastie. Regierungspolitik und Religion beim ersten Umayyadenherrscher Mu‘āwiya ibn Abi Sufyan*, Frankfurt, Bern, 1999.

³¹ A.D. Beihammer, *Nachrichten zum byzantinischen Urkundenwesen*, pp. 313-4; also A. Kaplony, *Konstantinopel und Damaskus*, pp. 48-9. Beihammer’s analysis of this dispute seems the more plausible.

Muslim raid was the first in which there were winterings.³² The date cited by Ibn Sa'd fits the context of the early 660s.

No seventh-century Christian historian writing in Latin or Greek probably wanted to try to write a coherent history or explanation of what happened, any more than anyone did for what had happened in Syria. It was a major challenge to try to explain how and why events had unfolded the way they did. Even contemporaries were probably confused about what was happening and whether there were any sound solutions. Such labors would likely only cause problems for the author with one authority or another. The modern historian must try to peer through the discordant perspectives and memories to gain some glimpses or insights into those final, confused moments of Byzantine North Africa and their relationship or separation from the fortunes of Sardinia and other islands that lay within the sphere of Byzantine control or influence.

The pace of the Muslim struggle against Byzantium intensified in Africa and Anatolia and on the sea after the end of the first Muslim or Arab civil war in 661. The departure from Constantinople in 662 of Emperor Constans II for Italy and Sicily exposed Anatolia and Constantinople to increasing Muslim military pressures. But Constans II's visit to Italy and Sicily did not pacify Muslims in the central Mediterranean sector either.

Another group of challenges for the historian come from the large number of contemporary historians who have no interest in, and reject any importance of, military history. Does one dismiss the reports as 'just raids' and turn to more interesting topics?

Given that Northern Syria was not settled by many Muslims until late, it is not surprising that there are few traditions from Syria about the earliest raids into Anatolia. In fact most Muslim traditions survive from Iraq, where, for reasons of considerable logistical hurdles, including distance, heat, and supplies, relatively few raids into Anatolia originated.

Elsewhere I have explained why Byzantinists need to understand why the information given by Muslim historians about raids into Anatolia survives in the form that it does and what one can extract

³² M.A. Cheïra, *La lutte entre arabes et byzantins*, Alexandria, 1947, p. 113, believed that the first one occurred in 663.

and not extract from it.³³ I argue that Muslim historiography probably contains some traditions that seek to glorify the names of individuals from specific groups and regions for their activities on such raids into Anatolia. In itself that does not eliminate their credibility, but of course it can result in the omission of other perhaps more significant participants in those expeditions who happened not to have such esteemed affiliations.

Although there was a tradition of recording *maghāzī* (raids by the Prophet) from earliest Islamic times Anatolia was not a subject of priority for those earlier Muslim historians. Extant Early Muslim historiography primarily comes from Iraq, where scholars had very different priorities from those who lived in Syria. Many Syrian traditions from the earliest period are lost.

To summarize: Either a) material equivalent to the extensive narratives of other regions has not survived; and/or b) the conquests of Anatolia were not worthy of historical interest. Hence the space allotted to the conquest of Spain in al-Ṭabarī: a couple of lines, but his point, that the *Dār al-Islām* was expanding apace even in the far West, was made. It seems that the details either were not available or did not really matter to him.³⁴ The brevity of preserved allusions in Muslim histories to such seventh-century raids into Anatolia may well derive at least partially from the following causes: (1) many raids started from Ḥimṣ or points further north, where there were few Muslim scholars in the mid- and late-seventh century. The surviving raiders were probably often not in much proximity to historians or their tradents who could record (one way or another) and pass on such information. (2) Unlike Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Africa, where later there were juridical and tax and property rights issues that might contaminate, but at least offer incentives to report, some details about relations with inhabitants, there was no incentive to do so about Anatolia, which was not conquered by Muslims at that time. (3) A possible motive for recording such expeditions was the pious commemoration of the memory and names of participants, including those who perished, partly to add fame and distinction to the families, groups, and clans or 'tribes' back in Syria, Iraq, and even in Egypt, but all that was necessary was to list the names and dates

³³ W.E Kaegi, 'The Earliest Muslim Penetrations of Anatolia', pp. 269-82.

³⁴ P.M. Cobb helped clarify this for me.

(accurate or not) for those events. (4) A final possible motive was the Muslim dedication and celebration of the House of Mu'āwīya, the Umayyad Caliph. (5) Al-Awzā'ī and the Syrian doctrine of *jihād* need more investigation, but at first glance do not clarify the situation in Byzantine Anatolia at that time.³⁵

A number of conclusions emerge. Most notably, there is a need to reconsider the activities of Emperor Constans II.³⁶ 662/3 marked a turning-point in the intensification of Muslim military pressures on many fronts against the Byzantines, now that the Muslim civil war had terminated, thereby releasing human and material resources for employment against Byzantium. The fates of Asia Minor, Africa, Sicily and Sardinia now became interdependent and correlated.³⁷ The broader patterns of developments require reinterpretation.³⁸

Whatever his administrative undertakings, Constans II did not suddenly create some extremely effective defensive theme system in Anatolia between 659-662, because otherwise why and how would the Muslims only then have been able to initiate winter campaigns in 662/63 and be able to continue them thereafter? The Byzantine Empire managed to survive in Anatolia, but at a very high human and material cost. Again in Anatolia there is no evidence that Constans II had developed any great institutional system of military defense, although it is true that the Muslims did not succeed in seizing a permanent base north of the Taurus Mountains. Now it could have been worse. Some may argue that the existence of Muslim raiding starting in 662/663 could even be regarded as a kind of circum-

³⁵ M. Bonner, *Aristocratic Violence and Holy War. Studies in the Jihad and the Arab-Byzantine Frontier* (American Oriental Society 81), New Haven, 1996.

³⁶ On the probable rationale for Constans II's departure for Italy and Sicily as an effort to strengthen military defenses in the west: P. Corsi, *La spedizione italiana di Costante II*, Bologna, 1983, pp. 85-96, 117-8. W.E. Kaegi, 'Byzantine Sardinia Threatened: Its Changing Situation in the Seventh Century', *Convegno sui Bizantini in Sardegna: 'Forme e caratteri della presenza bizantina nel Mediterraneo occidentale: la Sardegna (secoli VI-XI)'*, 22 March 2003, to be published in the proceedings of that congress. See also W.E. Kaegi, 'The Riddle of Constans II', in preparation.

³⁷ W.E. Kaegi, 'Byzantine Sardinia Threatened: Its Changing Situation in the Seventh Century'.

³⁸ N. Oikonomides significantly elucidated late seventh-century conditions in the western Mediterranean: N. Oikonomides, 'Une liste arabe des stratèges byzantins du VII siècle et les origines du Thème de Sicile', *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici*, n.s. 1, 1964, pp. 121-30.

stantial proof for the effectiveness of the theme system. But winter campaigns did not merely start in 662/663, they continued for the next decades. They were an escalation of Muslim military activity. To be sure, however worse the Muslim winter campaigns made the situation for the Byzantines in Anatolia, that was preferable (from the Byzantines' perspective) to any irreparable Muslim conquest. So if any nascent theme 'system' in Anatolia was effective in stiffening Byzantine defense, it was only a relative success. In any case, the military situation worsened in Anatolia for the Byzantines after 663 in the intermediate term, it did not improve.

Hard realities impinged. Constans II did not copy Heraclius' victories and skills in exploiting his enemies' internal strife. Instead in the long run internal strife would overwhelm him and result in his murder. Likewise Constans II did not possess Heraclius' skills in somehow identifying and applying sufficient leverage against his external foes at key pressure points. He did not have his grandfather's rare sense of timing and ability to exploit it. There is, however, no apocalyptic Muslim or Christian gloating about the death of Constans II, nor did Muslims take credit for his death. Constans II ranged geographically almost as widely as Heraclius did. Yet things were falling apart or on verge of doing so within Africa and other parts of the Byzantine Empire at the death of Constans II.

Recently there has been an attempt to credit Constans II with more prescience and effort than most previous historians did. Most specifically, Warren Treadgold in his book *Byzantium and Its Army* and in his survey *History of the Byzantine State and Society* seeks to attribute the creation of the notoriously controversial Byzantine military themes (military corps and their respective districts), together with major fiscal reform of military financing, to an initiative of Constans II between 659 and 662.³⁹

We however may observe that the documentation does not appear to exist in any language to support this hypothesis. With respect to

³⁹ W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, Stanford, 1995, pp. 25, 156, 180, 207; W. Treadgold, *History of the Byzantine State and Society*, pp. 314-8; also W. Treadgold, 'The Struggle for Survival (641-780)', in C. Mango, ed., *The Oxford History of Byzantium*, Oxford, 2002, pp. 132-3. On this now see the W. Brandes review of W. Treadgold, *History*, in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 95, 2002, pp. 716-25, esp. pp. 722-3, and my review of W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army* in *Speculum* 74, 1999, pp. 521-4.

Anatolia, the earliest sigillographic documentation for the existence of themes, whatever their nature and scope, dates to the late 660s.⁴⁰ Advocates of Constans II as the originator of the themes assume the necessity of a top-down great man to institute military reforms, even though the armies and their soldiers and commanders, in the years since the final moments of Heraclius, may well have asserted their own initiatives to support themselves and to increase their influence over policymaking. One need not assume that all power was centralized in the imperial palace in the years that immediately followed 641. There is no evidence that any new system of land grants for Byzantine soldiers was suddenly created by central imperial initiative in the final half-century or so of Byzantine rule in Africa, or in seventh-century Italy and Sardinia, contrary to W. Treadgold. In any case the imperial government evidently found no fool-proof institutional means by which to check or reverse the Muslims or Lombards. There was no dramatic improvement in the empire's military fortunes in Anatolia, Italy, or Africa at that time. No Arabic text offers details on the financial structure or any other means of support for Byzantine soldiers in Africa, Italy, Sicily, or Sardinia.

It is wrong to search for some single great reformer to create the themes simultaneously with a comprehensive social and economic reform that included lands and military finance. The latest comprehensive study of the Byzantine financial structure by Wolfram Brandes argues for a gradual evolution of the theme system, including the *kommerkiarioi* and related financial administrative structures.⁴¹ This opinion contrasts with the recent reiteration by Michael Hendy, who argues that the emergence of the *genikos kommerkiarios* with an *apotheke* or warehouse was related to thematic reform and the financial overhaul, that took form from the year 656/657.⁴² For Hendy 'There is no alternative.'⁴³ Brandes does not put the case in such stark terms, has a somewhat different interpretation of the function

⁴⁰ J. Nesbitt and N. Oikonomides, *DO Seals*, vol. III, p. 144, vol. IV, p. 54, among other citations. Also on dating: V.N. Vlysidou, *He Mikra Asia ton thematon*, pp. 37-50, and my review in *Speculum* 76, 2001, pp. 486-7.

⁴¹ Wolfram Brandes, *Finanzverwaltung in Krisenzeiten*, especially pp. 235-8, 307-8, 323-30, 420-6, 475-9, 507-9.

⁴² M. Hendy, 'East and West: the Transformation of Late Roman Financial Structures', in *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto medioevo* 49, Pt. 2, Spoleto, 2002, pp. 1307-70, esp. pp. 1358-61.

⁴³ M. Hendy, 'East and West', p. 1370.

of the warehouses and although radically different in chronology, sees the process of change as a longer and more complex one. I have not seen Brandes' reaction, if any, to Hendy's new paper, but I estimate that he will adhere to his previous position, because Hendy adduces no new evidence. The numismatist and economic historian D.M. Metcalf strongly criticizes Hendy's thesis.⁴⁴ Let us be clear. We agree, as I do, that the reign of Constans II is an important one for the development of Byzantine adaptations to new difficult military and fiscal realities, most notably a rising Muslim threat. We agree that the reign of Constans II deserves more research. I shall attempt to contribute to elucidation of his reign in future publications. But we disagree about the specifics of the chronology and acts of Constans II, most notably with respect to any institutional changes. Everyone concedes that Constans II was a courageous emperor but was he anything more than that? No doubt he tried to do his best. Presumably he did not leave the east for Italy without having made what he thought were adequate preparations for the security of western Anatolia. Of course he had to weigh the risks of inaction in Italy and Africa as well. He decided, it appears, that the greatest risk was inaction in the central and western Mediterranean, that somehow the Byzantines could manage to maintain their hold on Anatolia, which they did, in spite of his absence. It is not fruitful to engage in counterfactual speculation whether the military situation could have turned even worse if Constans II had not set out for the west after making whatever arrangements in Anatolia as he saw fit.

The issue of efficacy comes to the forefront nonetheless. The ease with which Mu'āwiya's forces penetrated Anatolia in the middle of the 650s indicates that whatever had been previously done, the imperial government in Constantinople failed in the first fifteen years after the early Islamic conquests to devise some effective land resistance against the Muslims on the Anatolian plateau. Sebeos says, with respect to the year 653/4 CE: 'When he [Mu'āwiya] penetrated the whole land, all the inhabitants submitted to him, those on the coast and in the mountains and in the plains.'⁴⁵ No smoothly functioning

⁴⁴ D.M. Metcalf, 'Monetary Recession in the Middle Byzantine Period: the Numismatic Evidence', *Numismatic Chronicle* 161, 2001, pp. 111-55, esp. pp. 151-2.

⁴⁵ *Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, ed., R.W. Thomson, vol. I, c. 50, sect. 170, p. 144.

defensive system effectively protected Anatolia from raiding at that time. Mu'āwīya's armies were able to range widely and devastate Anatolia. Things might have even been worse, of course. If some smoothly functioning Byzantine thematic system were fully in place it is difficult to understand how the Muslims could have successfully escalated to a higher level of military activity in Anatolia. It is nonetheless true that the Muslims failed to secure permanent territorial acquisitions there, so the Byzantines were not supine or totally ineffective in their resistance, far from it. But evidently no great institutional defense system was protecting Anatolia efficiently in the 650s or 660's. To the contrary, Muslim raids were intensifying in severity. Sebeos may be exaggerating damage for literary effect, however.

All of this is consistent with understanding the increasingly perilous situation for Byzantine Empire in the central Mediterranean and explicitly along Sardinian and Italian coasts even earlier than hitherto supposed.⁴⁶ Evidently no safe havens remained any more within the central and western Mediterranean regions under Byzantine authority.

Constans II in Anatolia, Italy and Sicily failed as an emulator of his grandfather Heraclius. He was a failed Heraclius. His imitation of Heraclius contributed to the formation of his identity but also to his failure. He was not a great man but his personal intervention occurred at a critical time and cannot be ignored. His is an interesting case of the extent to which an individual can be decisive in history. In his case, he could not reverse longer and broader trends.

Among the many tasks that remain for Byzantinists and Islamicists is more study of the interaction between Damascus and Constantinople, and the interrelationship between Anatolia, North Africa, and even Italy and Sardinia. Warfare near and on the island Jerba (Jirba) and its opposing port Gigthis on the African mainland between 665 and 668 will be fateful for Constans II. The Muslims will gain more ability and more opportunity to penetrate Anatolia as well as North Africa. We need to investigate more fully the years 662 to 668 and even to 670 in order to uncover the dynamics of events, and in particular the interchange of officials and military commanders

⁴⁶ For comparative material: W.E. Kaegi, 'Byzantine Sardinia Threatened: its Changing Situation in the Seventh Century'.

between Anatolia and North Africa. One thinks of the transfer of Fadhalā b. 'Ubayd to join Ruwayfī b. Thabit al-Ansarī in the major Muslim raid on the island of Jerba (Jirba), which probably occurred in AH 47 (677/8 CE).⁴⁷ It is imperative to think in terms of the entire Mediterranean.

⁴⁷ Mālikī, *Riyād al-Nufūs*, ed. H. Munis, Cairo, vol. I, p. 53; al-Dabbāgh, 'Abdulrahmān, Ibn Nājī, *Ma'ālim al-īmān fī ma'rīfat ahl al-Qayrawān*, Cairo, 1968, vol. I, pp. 122-3. From Tripoli: Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ al-'Uṣfurī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. Akram Ḍiyy' al-'Umarī, Baghdad, 1967, AH 47 (AD 667/8), vol. I, p. 193. He is an early transmitter (d. late eighth century). Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. 'Umar Gharāma 'Amrawī, Beirut, 1995-, vol. XLVIII, p. 296. Al-Bakrī, Abū 'Ubayd 'Abd Allāh al-'Azz, *al-Mughrib fī dhikr bilād Ifrīqiya wa-al-Maghrib*, ed. de Slane, Algiers, 1857, repr. Baghdad, n.d., p. 19; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *al-Istī'āb fī ma'rīfat al-aṣḥāb*, ed., 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī, Cairo 1960, vol. II, p. 405, Mu'āwiya sent Ruwayfī to Tripoli in AH 46. Ruwayfī raided Ifrīqiya from Tripoli in AH 47 and returned. Abdulwahid Dhanun Taha, *The Muslim Conquest and Settlement of North Africa and Spain*, London, 1989, pp. 59-60.

COPTS AND THE ISLAM OF THE SEVENTH CENTURY

Harald Suermann

The Islamic conquest of Egypt in AD 640-642 had far-reaching consequences for the country. The impact of such an event ought to be reflected in the contemporary sources, assuming that authentic contemporary sources have indeed come down to us. In order to know more about the assessment of this event by contemporary Egyptian Christians, it is necessary first to analyse the sources that we have at our disposal.

Below I shall deal only with texts that reflect the relationship between Coptic Christians on one side and Muslims and their beliefs on the other. At first glance, we do not seem to be well informed about this relationship. (a) Tito Orlandi mentions only one Coptic text, which is probably from the eighth century, in his contribution to a 'Bibliography of the Islamic-Christian Dialogue'.¹ (b) Otto F. A. Meinardus² as well as C. Detlef G. Müller³ base their research on the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, attributed to Severus of Ashmunayn but in fact a compilation and translation of materials from various periods.⁴ Here we must ask whether later ideas about the conquest have been attributed to its contemporaries. The section on the conquest was originally composed by the archdeacon George

¹ T. Orlandi, 'Auteurs de langue copte du VII^e au X^e siècle', *Islamochristiana* 6, 1980, pp. 295-6. The text he mentions is the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Athanasius*; see below, note 40.

² O.F.A. Meinardus, 'The Attitudes of the Orthodox Copts towards the Islamic State from the 7th to the 12th Century', *Ostkirchliche Studien* 13, 1964, pp. 153-70.

³ C.D.G. Müller, 'Stellung und Haltung der koptischen Patriarchen des 7. Jahrhunderts gegenüber islamischer Obrigkeit und Islam', in T. Orlandi and F. Wisse, eds, *Acts of the Second International Congress of Coptic Studies: Roma, 22-26 September 1980*, Rome, 1985, pp. 203-13.

⁴ For the composition of the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* see J. den Heijer, *Maḥūb ibn Maṣṣūr ibn Muḥarrīg et l'historiographie copto-arabe: Étude sur la composition de l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 513 = subs. 83)*, Louvain, 1989.

around AD 715, and he may have interpreted the conquest from the perspective of his time, when relations between the Copts and the Muslim rulers had already undergone a significant development.⁵ (c) Patricia Crone and Michael Cook mention the *Chronicle of John of Nikiu* and the *Panegyric of the Three Children of Babylon* in their book *Hagarism*.⁶ The *Chronicle* is only preserved in an Ethiopic translation and is incomplete for the early Islamic period.⁷ (The *Panegyric* will be treated below.) (d) Alain Ducellier does not go beyond the sources already mentioned in his opus *Chrétiens d'Orient et Islam au Moyen Age. VII^e-XV^e siècle*.⁸ Thus it seems that there are only very few sources on the Coptic reaction to the Islamic conquest.

If we compare the number of Coptic sources concerning the Islamic conquest to that of the Syriac sources, it is clear that we have many more of the latter. Intensive research into these Syriac sources since the 1980s has given rise to a completely new and more profound understanding of Syriac-speaking Christians' reactions to the conquest.⁹ For a long time, the statement handed down by Michael the Syrian was accepted: that the Syrian miaphysites, who had been persecuted by the imperial Byzantine church, regarded the Islamic conquest as a liberation from the Byzantine yoke.¹⁰ Today we know that the miaphysites did *not* receive the Arabs as liberators at the beginning of Islamic rule, but that they clung to the traditional vision that the Roman Empire was the realisation of the Christian Empire and would last until the end of the world. The Islamic conquest was the harbinger of that End.

The situation is quite similar for the conquest of Egypt. The conviction that the Egyptian miaphysites received the Muslims as liberators

⁵ Ibid., pp. 117-25.

⁶ P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge, 1977, p. 155, note 28.

⁷ *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu*, trans. R.H. Charles, London, 1916; *Chronique de Jean, Evêque de Nikiou: Texte éthiopien*, trans. M. H. Zotenberg (*Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale et autres bibliothèques ... 24*), Paris, 1883.

⁸ A. Ducellier, *Chrétiens d'Orient et Islam au Moyen Age: VII^e-XV^e siècle*, Paris, 1996; *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)*, ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot, 4 vols, Paris, 1899-1924, vol. II, pp. 412-13 (text); vol. IV, p. 410 (translation).

⁹ See, for example, the contribution by J.J. van Ginkel in the present collection.

¹⁰ *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. II, pp. 412-13 (text); vol. IV, p. 410 (translation).

from the Byzantine yoke was still widespread in the 1980s; C. Detlef G. Müller holds that opinion in his work published in 1981.¹¹ But there were already others who rejected that position, e.g. F. Winkelmann already in 1979.¹²

In 1985, Müller published his article on the position and attitude of the Coptic patriarchs vis-à-vis the Islamic authorities and Islam, which he had already presented at the Second International Congress of Coptic Studies in Rome in 1980. The basis of this analysis was the *History of the Patriarchs*. In his analysis he could not provide evidence that the Copts received the Muslims as liberators. He showed that the relationship between the patriarchs and the Islamic authorities was sometimes friendly, but sometimes problematic. Thus a new understanding of the Islamic conquest has begun to develop also for the region of Egypt; but it is only a beginning, and much research still needs to be conducted.

In the present essay I shall first compile characteristic statements from Müller's research on the *History of the Patriarchs*. Then I shall consider five other Coptic texts. The first one is the *Romance of Cambyses*, which has been held by some to be contemporary with the Islamic conquest.¹³ The second text is the *Legend of Eudoxia and the Holy Sepulchre*, which may reflect the first Coptic reaction to it.¹⁴ The third is a discussion of the patriarch John with the Egyptian governor 'Abd al-'Azīz, which may be the oldest known text to describe the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the Islamic period in Egypt.¹⁵ The fourth text is a *Vita* of Patriarch Isaac (686-689),¹⁶ while the fifth is the anonymous *Panegyric of the Three Children of Baby-*

¹¹ C.D.G. Müller, *Geschichte der orientalischen Nationalkirchen (Die Kirche in ihrer Geschichte 1.D2)*, Göttingen, 1981, p. D330.

¹² F. Winkelmann, 'Ägypten und Byzanz vor der arabischen Eroberung', *Byzantinoslavica* 40, 1979, pp. 161-82.

¹³ H.L. Jansen, *The Coptic Story of Cambyses' Invasion of Egypt (Avhandlingar utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo II, Hist.-Filos. Klasse. 1950. No. 2)*, Oslo, 1950.

¹⁴ *Eudoxia and the Holy Sepulchre: A Constantinian Legend in Coptic*, ed. T. Orlandi, trans. B.A. Pearson, with a study by H.A. Drake (*Testi e documenti per lo studio dell'antichità* 67), Milan, 1980.

¹⁵ H.G. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of Wadi 'n Natrūn, Part I, New Coptic Texts from the Monastery of Saint Macarius*, New York, 1926, pp. 171-5.

¹⁶ *Histoire du Patriarche Copte Isaac*, ed. and trans. E. Amélineau (*Publications de l'École des Lettres d'Alger: Bulletin de Correspondance Africaine* 2), Paris, 1890. English translation and study in Mena of Nikou, *The Life of Isaac of Alexandria and The Martyrdom of Saint Macrobios*, trans. David N. Bell (*Cistercian Studies* 107), Kalamazoo MI, 1988.

lon which may have been written shortly after the Arab invasion of Egypt.¹⁷

The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria

In his study of Coptic-Muslim relations in the seventh century (on the basis of the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*), C. Detlef G. Müller analyses the meeting of the Coptic miaphysite patriarch Benjamin with the conqueror 'Amr.¹⁸ Having returned from exile, 'the Egyptian [patriarch] appeared in perfect sedateness and dignity and spoke excellently. ... 'Amr confirmed the patriarch in all his rights and bade him reassume the tasks of administration.'¹⁹ Furthermore the conqueror called on the patriarch to pray for his conquest of the West. Benjamin did so, and added an edifying discourse that was greatly admired. He also gave 'Amr some hints concerning the situation in the country. Müller assesses the episode as follows:

The Coptic patriarch does not behave himself in paraenesis and prayer differently than he would before any Christian authority. As he would there, he exhorts and prays. Theological differences with Islam appear to play no role as yet. On the other hand, any political aspirations are missing. The patriarch remains entirely in the path of the great Egyptian theologians and monks. He is a religious leader.²⁰

Analysing this meeting, Müller does not find on the side of the patriarch the opinion that the Arab conquest was a liberation from the Byzantine yoke. Rather, this meeting represents a return to 'normality'. He writes:

Therewith [Benjamin] and also the rest of the Coptic ruling class think in the habitual ways to which they were accustomed in the Roman Empire. There as well, each of the great patriarchs claimed a considerable internal autonomy. One managed one's affairs by oneself. The emperor was responsible for the whole of the Empire, and made an appearance predominantly (and nearly solely) in the field of taxation. ... One rose in opposition only if the emperor transgressed

¹⁷ H. de Vis, *Homélie coptes de la Vaticane*, II (*Cahiers de la Bibliothèque Copte* 6), Kopenhagen, 1929 (reprint Louvain and Paris, 1990), pp. 64-120.

¹⁸ *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, II, *Peter I to Benjamin I (661)*, ed. and trans. B. Evetts (*Patrologia Orientalis* 1), Paris, 1907, pp. 496-7 = [232-3].

¹⁹ Müller, *Stellung*, p. 204. (English translations by Harald Suermann.)

²⁰ *Ibid.*

the bearable amount [of tax]. Therefore the arousing impulse for the struggle against Byzantium was the intervention in matters of faith, the imposition of a foreign Christological doctrine. Now [with the Arab conquest], this danger of an attack on one's own spiritual property and kind was turned away. One returned to one's own affairs and managed everything independently. The type of the new authority troubled no one as long as it did not penetrate into one's own life.²¹

Concerning Agathon (661-677), the second Coptic patriarch under Muslim rule, Müller refers to the notice that he bought Christian prisoners, captured in the West, from the Muslims.²² He did not want them to be left in the hands of unbelievers. This points to the fact that 'the Arab religion was experienced throughout as something fundamentally strange'.²³

It is under the next patriarch, John III (677-686), that Müller diagnoses the first frictions with the Islamic authority. He refers to the narrative according to which the governor 'Abd al-'Azīz came privately to Alexandria and was not properly received by the patriarch. The patriarch was denounced for the disrespect and condemned to imprisonment and torture until he pay a heavy fine. Eventually, however, a reconciliation was effected.²⁴ Müller guesses that there were Chalcedonian interests behind these events, but the power of the Chalcedonians was now being finally broken. A number of Chalcedonian congregations were afterwards integrated into the Coptic Orthodox communion.²⁵ Müller interprets the events as follows.

This [integration of the Chalcedonian congregations and the victory over the Chalcedonians] may have been in the forefront of Egyptian thinking. They thanked God for the possibility of operating freely, and for the edifying activity of the patriarch. In this event one does not recognize a necessity for a fundamental confrontation with Islam, especially since the Muslim governor now treats the patriarch with courtesy. ... Later on the governor is, so to speak, the saviour of the church, since he helped Isaac, envisaged by John III himself as his successor, to accede to the throne in the face of an intrigue.²⁶

²¹ Ibid., pp. 204-5.

²² *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, III, *Agathon to Michael I (766)*, ed. and trans. B. Evetts (*Patrologia Orientalis* 5), Paris, 1910, pp. 4-5 = [258-9].

²³ Müller, *Stellung* 205-6.

²⁴ *History of the Patriarchs*, III, ed. Evetts, pp. 13-17 = [267-71].

²⁵ Müller, *Stellung*, pp. 206-7.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 207.

According to *The History of the Patriarchs*, John's successor Isaac (686-689) had restricted room for manoeuvre. We learn about the difficulties he had in cultivating relations with the Nubian kings. The governor also ordered the destruction of crosses in Egypt, and had the following words placed on the doors of churches: 'Muhammad is the great Apostle of God and Jesus is also an Apostle of God. Truly God has not been begotten nor does He beget.'²⁷

The *History of the Patriarchs* tells of dogmatic quarrels between Christians and Muslims in the time of Patriarch Simon I (692-700).²⁸ Müller comments on this as follows:

However, with the gradual consolidation of Islam there also came direct attacks on Christian religious expression, in that Christians were, in the usual fashion, reproached with having attributed to God a wife and a son, thereby spreading false doctrine. Nevertheless, the governor apparently declined to censor the statements of the Christian liturgies in accordance with Islamic ideas. But the reproaches still moved him to rage, and a diplomatic patriarch like Simon I had to summon up all his adroitness in order to ward off judgements or statements uttered in rage, which were then taken by the Muslims as commands.²⁹

Our assessment is as follows: *The History of the Patriarchs* does not make any categorical statements concerning the attitudes of Coptic Christians toward the Islam of the seventh century. Individual episodes, however, throw a light on the relationship between Christians and the Islamic authority. It is not clear whether these episodes exemplify the basic relationship or whether they are accounts of specific, isolated events. The events taken together give the impression of a relationship full of suspense. There is virtually no event related from which the Christians really benefit. Müller still interprets specific episodes within the framework of the old idea that the Coptic Christians celebrated the Muslims as liberators from the Byzantine yoke. While this is not explicitly stated in his article, the idea that the Coptic Church had returned to 'normality' is probably to be understood in that sense. But Müller's interpretive framework is no longer tenable. The texts do not present the Muslims as liberators.

²⁷ *History of the Patriarchs*, III, ed. Evetts, p. 25 = [279].

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-6 = [289-90].

²⁹ Müller, *Stellung*, p. 209.

The Romance of Cambyses

Are there other texts of the seventh century with which this material from *The History of the Patriarchs* may be compared?

The *Romance of Cambyses*³⁰ is sometimes cited as the earliest text referring to Coptic-Muslim relationships. Only one fragment exists. The story is about the Persian king Cambyses II (529-522 BC), who had tried to instigate a revolt in Egypt, but without success. In a letter to Cambyses, the Egyptians expressed their antipathy towards him and their loyalty to their land and their pharaoh. Cambyses (hereafter identified in the text with Nebuchadnezzar II (604-562 BC)) then made a cunning plan; sending false ambassadors, he invited the Egyptians to a feast in the name of the pharaoh and the god Apis. The Egyptians discovered the plot; while they pretended to gather for the feast, in reality they gathered an army. The fragment breaks off at this point in the story, but it is almost certain that it ended with the victory of the Egyptians.

Leslie MacCoull has been the most outspoken representative of the theory that this story derives from the time of Patriarch Benjamin I (622-661), probably the decade 630-640.³¹ She suggests that a Syrian monk from Scetis wrote the text using 'reminiscences of Herodotus..., "popular epic", and the Bible' as well as out of his own vivid memories of the Persian occupation between 617 and 627.³² In the story Cambyses is the villain; but he in fact represents the real and present danger that is the caliph 'Umar (634-644). Thus the romance should be understood as a warning to the miaphysite population of Egypt in the period before the conquest. If this interpretation—with which Winkelmann agrees³³—is correct, then it is the oldest text from Egypt in which we find a warning about the Islamic conquest.

This interpretation has not gone uncontested, however. Thissen

³⁰ Jansen, *The Coptic Story of Cambyses' Invasion of Egypt*.

³¹ L.S.B. MacCoull, 'The Coptic Cambyses Narrative Reconsidered', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 23, 1982, pp. 185-8; compare F. Winkelmann, 'Die Stellung Ägyptens im Oströmisch-byzantinischen Reich', in P. Nagel, ed., *Graeco-Coptica: Griechen und Kopten im byzantinischen Ägypten* (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg: *Wissenschaftliche Beiträge* 1984/48 (= I 29)), Halle (Saale), 1984, p. 15.

³² MacCoull, 'The Coptic Cambyses Narrative Reconsidered', p. 187.

³³ Winkelmann, 'Die Stellung Ägyptens', p. 15.

and Richter have seriously questioned MacCoull's thesis.³⁴ Their main argument is that paleographic analysis of the single manuscript dates the text earlier than the seventh century: the oldest part must have been written in the sixth. But if this is correct, then the text cannot derive from the time of the imminent Islamic conquest. There remains the possibility that this text was read at the time of the imminent Islamic conquest and interpreted in the sense of MacCoull's thesis, but evidence for this is lacking.

The Legend of Eudoxia and the Holy Sepulchre

There is another Coptic romance that has been assumed to reflect the time of the Islamic conquest of Egypt: the *Legend of Eudoxia and the Holy Sepulchre*.³⁵ The events recounted in this legend in fact belong to the fourth century. The Muslims or Arabs are not mentioned explicitly, and thus it is again difficult to show that the text derives from the time of the Islamic conquest. The content of the romance is as follows: Constantine is chosen for the throne of the Roman Empire, receives Baptism, and gains acceptance through miracles. A second part of the narrative relates how he helped to find the sepulchre of Christ. Although the events come from the fourth century, the legend has features that surely point to a later period. H.A. Drake has scrutinised the romance and has concluded that the legend was composed in the seventh century, shortly after the Islamic occupation of Egypt.³⁶ I only mention here Drake's main arguments:

1. Bishop Theophilus prays Psalm 78 (79) on the discovery of the sepulchre, expressing bitter feelings more than joy. Such a prayer may fit best into the time of the Persian occupation and destruction of Jerusalem.
2. There is a close connection between the sepulchre and Zion. This appears in the fact that Constantine has first to build a church for Zion before he can enter the sepulchre. This also points to

³⁴ H.-J. Thissen, 'Bemerkungen zum koptischen Kambyses-Roman', *Enchoria* 23, 1996, pp. 145-9; T.S. Richter, 'Weitere Beobachtungen am koptischen Kambyses-Roman', *Enchoria* 24, 1997-1998, pp. 54-66.

³⁵ *Eudoxia and the Holy Sepulchre* (see note 14 above), pp. 29-82.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-179.

- the Persian period, when Zion was in high esteem but in ruins; Patriarch Modestus was to reconstruct it.
3. The episode in which Constantine tries in vain to get the inscription of the cross out of town may be an allusion to Jerusalem's claim on the relic of the cross at the time it was taken to Constantinople.
 4. Various details of the story can be better understood if they are taken to refer to the time of Heraclius, whose popular image was assimilated to that of the emperor Constantine. Heraclius' son Constantine III and grandson Constantine II also cultivated their connections to the first Christian emperor. The name 'Eudoxia' could hint at the daughter of Heraclius by his first wife, Flavia-Eudocia.
 5. The role of the Jews in the legend is negative in such a way that it reflects the time of the reconquest of Jerusalem by Heraclius.
 6. The representation of the Persians is not historically correct, but mythical. It gives the impression of a tale of the past. The Persians could no longer be the real enemies at the time of the composition of the legend. It may be that in the story 'Persians' refers in fact to the Arabs.

For Drake, then, the legend was written at the time of the early Islamic conquest as a plea to the royal couple to reconquer and reconstruct Jerusalem and to protect its relics. Jerusalem was conquered by the Muslims in 638, and in 640 the conquest of Egypt began. The romance should be dated to 641.³⁷

The pleas of the Egyptians expressed in the legend are addressed to the house of the emperor. There is a request for help, as had in fact been offered by Heraclius during the successful campaign against the Persians. But Drake believes that the Egyptians had an ambivalent position towards the Muslims and the Byzantines: if the emperor did not succeed in liberating Jerusalem, the Copts would then be disposed to cooperate with the new Islamic authority.³⁸

I cannot here explain all of the allusions to historic events of the seventh century found in the legend, but I want to observe (leaving the proof for another occasion) that many of the motifs found here are also found in the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiu. In the *Chronicle* there

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-77, esp. p. 168.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 175-7.

are combinations of individual historical events and motifs that support the dating of the *Legend* to a time around the year 640.

We must keep in mind that the *Legend* does not explicitly mention the Arabs or Muslims, and that there is no single unambiguous allusion to events of the seventh century.

The dating is based only on indications. Winkelmann contests the thesis that the story has anything to do with the Islamic conquest, stating that it belongs to the time of the Persian invasion.³⁹

In this context I can point to the fact that in the seventh and eighth centuries the ‘recycling’ of subject matter from the fourth century was quite common. The best known Coptic example that refers to Islam is the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Athanasius*.⁴⁰ This eighth-century apocalypse explicitly mentions Islam but also treats subject matter from the time of the Arian disputes. The *Legend of Eudoxia and the Holy Sepulchre* could be just such a text.

The Dialogue of the Patriarch John

Another Coptic text of the seventh century may be the discussion of the patriarch John before the governor ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.⁴¹ There is, besides the Arabic recension of the text, a Bohairic fragment of the dialogue. In the text the patriarch John has a discussion with a Jew and a Chalcedonian in the presence of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz who was governor in Egypt at the time. I agree with Georg Graf that Patriarch John is the miaphysite patriarch of Alexandria with the title ‘the Merciful’ who held office from 677 until 686.⁴² ‘Abd al-‘Azīz

³⁹ Winkelmann, ‘Die Stellung Ägyptens’, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁰ B. Witte, *Die Sünden der Priester und Mönche: Koptische Eschatologie des 8. Jahrhunderts nach Kodex M 602 pp. 104-154 (ps. Athanasius) der Pierpont Morgan Library*, Teil 1, *Textausgabe (Arbeiten zum spätantiken und koptischen Ägypten 12)*, Altenberge, 2002; F.J. Martinez, ‘Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius’, Ph.D. dissertation., The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, 1985; H. Suermann, ‘Koptische Texte zur arabischen Eroberung Ägyptens und der Umayyadenherrschaft’, *Journal of Coptic Studies* 4, 2002, pp. 167-86, here pp. 177-9.

⁴¹ Bohairic text and English translation in Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of Wadi ‘n Natrân*, I, *New Coptic Texts*, pp. 171-5. Evelyn White also mentions the copies of the Arabic recension found in Paris, B.N. ar. 215 and 4881.

⁴² Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, I, *Die Übersetzungen (Studi e Testi 118)*, Vatican City, 1944, pp. 478-80.

was governor of Egypt from 685 until 705, so that, if historical, the dialogue took place in 685 or 686.

The text sets the stage for the dialogue with the governor as follows: a Jew died without an heir, leaving behind him a silver box containing a piece of wood. The silver box was shown to the patriarch during a visit to the governor. The patriarch identified the piece of wood as a relic of the holy cross. The authenticity of the relic is proved by a miracle: it does not burn when thrown into a fire; rather, the fire is extinguished. Then the patriarch is allowed to purchase the relic for three thousand dinars.

Later, the patriarch has a dispute about the true religion with a Jew and a Melkite. The Jew boasts of his physical descent from Abraham, the patriarch of his spiritual descent; biblical passages mentioned by the Jew are interpreted by John as applying to Christ and his Church. John's application of Biblical citations to the Eucharist causes the Jew to convert to Christianity. The interpretation of Biblical passages as referring to Christ and the Eucharist is also at the centre of the dispute between the Melkite and the patriarch. Two personal visions support the interpretation of the patriarch, and finally the Melkite converts to the miaphysite creed. There follows a brief discussion between the patriarch and the governor in which an explanation of the *qurbān*, Eucharist, is at the centre. In response to the claim that a robber was crucified in place of Christ, the patriarch answers that the governor had defrauded him of three thousand dinars if this were the case! Thereupon the governor gave up.

We note the importance of the cross and the dispute about the crucifixion in this dialogue. The Islamic conviction that it was not Christ but somebody else who was crucified is—if the dialogue of Patriarch John is historical—the oldest doctrinal challenge to Coptic Christians that we find in their recorded dialogues with Muslims. The *History of the Patriarchs* does not report any doctrinal dispute between Christians and Muslims until the time of Patriarch Simon I, the successor of John III.⁴³ This dispute has to do with Trinitarian theology. Of course, polemic against Christian Trinitarian theology is as old as the Christological polemic and is already to be found in the Qur'an. The similarity of the *Dialogue* of the Patriarch John to

⁴³ See above, p. 99.

the controversy reported under his successor makes it possible that it can be dated to sometime shortly after John's death in 686.⁴⁴

The Life of Patriarch Isaac

The *vita* of Patriarch Isaac (686-689), written by Mena of Nikiu around the year 700,⁴⁵ mentions the Muslims for the first time as Isaac's predecessor was dying. It is stated that this took place when 'Abd al-'Azīz was emir. When the emir came to Egypt he tried to do harm to the Christians: he destroyed crosses and persecuted the patriarch. But God punished the emir as he had punished Pharaoh, and revealed to him in a dream that he should not touch the patriarch. The emir took heed to the divine warning.⁴⁶

When the patriarch died, two candidates for a successor were presented, and 'Abd al-'Azīz asked the people who they wanted. They cried out for Isaac, but the other candidate tried to bribe the emir. However, instead of being selected by 'Abd al-'Azīz he was rejected and deprived of his priesthood, and Isaac became the new patriarch.⁴⁷

One day 'Abd al-'Azīz had a vision in which he saw the patriarch at the altar, surrounded with virtue. Asked for an explanation, the patriarch said that he was very close to God every time he was at the altar. The emir came to realize that the patriarch was a holy man, and henceforth regularly asked for his counsel.⁴⁸ Later, the emir's wife had a similar vision, and the patriarch was asked to pray in the residence of the emir.⁴⁹ Out of respect for the patriarch, the emir built churches and monasteries around Helwan.⁵⁰

One day some of the Arabs accused the archbishop of not being the friend of the emir, and asked the emir to put him to the test. So the archbishop was asked to eat with the emir—but without making

⁴⁴ I discuss the date of the dialogue in more detail in a forthcoming article, 'Diskussion des koptischen Patriarchen Johannes III. vor 'Abd al-'Azīz'.

⁴⁵ See note 16 above. My references will be to Amélineau's edition and translation.

⁴⁶ *Histoire du Patriarche Copte Isaac*, pp. 42-4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-61.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

the sign of the cross over his food, as was his custom. If he would do this, then he would be considered a friend of the Muslim emir. When Isaac came into the palace, he was invited to eat dates together with the emir. He took the basket and asked the emir whether he should eat from this side or that, from here or there. The emir answered that he should eat from wherever he wanted! After the meal, the emir was convinced that Isaac had indeed eaten from the dates without first having made the sign of the cross—but learned from his advisers that he had made the sign with his clever question. The emir expressed his admiration at Isaac's sagacity and honoured him.⁵¹

The text shows the Muslim ruler attempting to intervene in the selection of the patriarch, although 'Abd al-'Azīz followed the will of the people. According to the text, the relationship between emir and patriarch was very friendly, although some Muslims attempted to it.

The Panegyric of the Three Holy Children of Babylon

The *Panegyric of the Three Holy Children of Babylon*⁵² is handed down anonymously, as the first two pages of the Vatican manuscript copy from which we know the text are missing.⁵³ According to palaeographic analysis, the manuscript probably dates to the twelfth century. In addition, we have several text fragments belonging to two traditions, both written in Bohairic and coming from the monastery of St. Macarius. The original was most probably written in Sahidic, as the texts do not give the impression of being translations from Greek.⁵⁴ The homily was probably composed shortly after the Arab invasion of Egypt.⁵⁵

The homily treats a variety of subjects. Because humanity fell into sin and did not want to listen to the prophets, the Son of God became man. He was the first martyr, and many others followed. There follows the story of the three child saints and Daniel. Then the author moves on to a defence of the miaphysite Christology.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 67-71.

⁵² de Vis, *Homélies* (see above, note 17), pp. 60-4.

⁵³ Vatican copt. 69, ff. 103r-29v, which is used by de Vis for his edition.

⁵⁴ de Vis, *Homélies*, pp. 60-4.

⁵⁵ Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 155.

In the second part of his homily, the author mentions the Muslims:

Concerning us, O my dear beloved, let us fast, pray without respite and observe the commands of the Lord, so that the benediction of all our fathers who have pleased him comes down on us. Let us not fast like the deicidal Jews; neither let us fast like the Saracens, oppressors who follow after prostitution and massacre, and who lead the sons of men into captivity, saying: 'We fast and pray at the same time.' Let us not fast like those who deny the healing suffering of the Son of God, who died for us in order to liberate us from death and perdition. But let us fast like our fathers the apostles...⁵⁶

If this homily really was written shortly after the Arab conquest, it is the earliest record of the Coptic sentiment that the Muslims were not liberators but oppressors. They are at the same time discerned to be a competing religious group: they fast in a manner similar to the Christians, even though Christians should not fast like them because their morality is different. Their fasting, like the fasting of the Jews, is not correct. If what follows also refers to the Muslims, then we have here a very early record of the Muslim denial of the saving death of Christ. We note, however, that it is not stated here that the Muslims deny that Christ was crucified at all (as was the case in the dialogue of Patriarch John); the text can be understood as simply a denial of the salvific value of Christ's death.

Conclusion

There are more Coptic texts from the end of the Umayyad period that have been handed down to us,⁵⁷ but by then the relationship of the Copts with the Islamic authorities had deteriorated and the first Coptic revolts had taken place. Thus the statements of that time cannot be relied upon for discerning the earliest Coptic reactions to the Arab conquest.

The texts that can help us are limited in number. The most important source is the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, and other

⁵⁶ de Vis, *Homélie*s, pp. 99-100.

⁵⁷ For example, the *Fourteenth Vision of Daniel*. Other texts may originate from this period, even though they are only preserved in Arabic translation. See H. Suermann, 'Koptische Texte zur arabischen Eroberung Ägyptens', pp. 167-86, here pp. 181-3.

chronicles may be used in support of the statements of the *History*. The *Romance of Cambyses* cannot be used in this context, as the text is probably written before the rise of Islam. While I tend to accept a dating for the *Legend of Eudoxia* to the early Islamic period, it cannot without doubt be dated to the time of the conquest. One text that may indeed come from the seventh century is the dialogue of the patriarch John before the governor 'Abd al-'Azīz, but this text does not give any information on the relationship between Christians and Muslims, but rather on the topics of religious polemic at that time. The *Panegyric of the Three Holy Children of Babylon* does date from the early period of Islamic rule in Egypt, and provides an important witness to Egyptian Christian attitudes towards this rule.

Are some tentative conclusions about these attitudes possible? *The History of the Patriarchs* as well as the other texts show that relations between the Copts and their Muslim rulers were mainly good, and that the patriarchs were respected as holy men. On the other hand, the *History of the Patriarchs* also reports that the Copts were attacked under Patriarch Isaac (686-689): crosses were destroyed, and polemical statements against the doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity were written on the doors of churches. Furthermore, the *Panegyric* calls the Muslims 'oppressors'. This evidence suggests that the idea that the Copts received the Muslims as liberators is no longer tenable.

ĀMĪD IN THE SEVENTH-CENTURY SYRIAC LIFE OF THEODŪṬĒ

Andrew Palmer

Introduction: The Life of Theodūtē and the contents of this paper

Theodūtē (a Syriac form of the Greek name Theodotos, no doubt adopted at the hellenized Syrian Orthodox Monastery of the Eagles' Nest, *qēn neshrē*, on the Euphrates, where Theodūtē became a monk) died in the province of Dārā in 698, leaving his disciple Joseph, a monk of the monastery of Zūqnīn on the Tigris, north of Āmīd, in charge of the monastery which he had founded above the village of Qelleth. Remains of this tiny monastery can still be seen. The local Christians, who speak Arabic, call it *dayr waja' ra's*, 'the head-ache monastery'. Sufferers from migraine spend the night in the burial chamber in the hope of a cure. Theodūtē healed people with headaches in his lifetime, according to the memoir dictated by his disciple soon after his death. Joseph, not himself a writer, dictated this memoir to the priest and precentor Shem'un (= Symeon, Simon) of Samosata.¹

¹ A.N. Palmer, 'Saints' Lives with a difference: Elijah on John of Tella (d. 528) and Joseph on Theodotos of Amida (d. 698)', in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. H.J.W. Drijvers, R. Lavenant, C. Molenberg and G.J. Reinink (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 229), Rome, 1987, pp. 203-16; idem, 'Semper vagus: the anatomy of a mobile monk', in *Studia Patristica*, 18:2, ed. E. Livingstone, 1989, pp. 255-60; idem, 'The Garšūni version of the *Life* of Theodotus of Amida', *Parole de l'Orient* 16, 1990-1, pp. 253-60; idem, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Tur 'Abdīn* (*University of Cambridge Oriental Publications* 39), Cambridge, 1990, pp. 25, 76, 88-91, 163, 165-8, 183; Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (*Studies in Late Antiquity and Islam* 13), Princeton, 1997, pp. 156-60. I am editing the *Life of Theodūtē*. The edition will be based on one Syriac MS, no. 12/17 (12th century) of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate at Damascus, which I have seen and photographed by courtesy of His Holiness Mōr Ignatios Zakka I 'Iwās, having begun to work on it with photographs taken by Dr Sebastian Brock. The lacunae can be filled from the Arabic translation made from this same MS by the monk Bishāra in 1733, before it was damaged; this, too, I saw and photographed in 1986 by courtesy of His Grace Mōr Dionysios Bahnām Jejjāwī, then Metropolitan Bishop in residence at St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Monastery in the Old City of

The first part of my discussion here centres on a chapter from this source, which shows that the people of Claudia, a region on the west bank of the Tigris north of Samosata, had little if any direct contact with their Arab rulers. For them, the conquest meant exposure to the new danger of raids from nearby Melitene or Anzitene, which were still in Roman hands. It also subjected them to the exactions of tax-collectors who did not spare the many poor people who lived in the region, some of whom emigrated for this reason to the Roman Empire. It is typical that one of the few things they borrowed from the Arabs in the early years was a new word for tax: *jizya*, which became *gʿzīthō* in Syriac.

The second part is mainly about Theodūṭē's time in Āmīd. So far as we know, it was only when Theodūṭē became bishop of Āmīd that he had direct dealings with the Arab authorities. At first it was a horrible experience: Theodūṭē, it seems, was physically abused in the mosque, where presumably the seat of judgment was, but his Arab judge seems to have been satisfied that he was not an enemy spy, in spite of the evidence that he had corresponded—presumably in Greek—with the commanders of the Roman garrisons in the castles of Anzitene. Later, if we can believe the vicariously boastful Joseph, Theodūṭē was recognized by the Arab authorities as the best man to act as judge in cases which concerned only Christian members of the population. The order that Theodūṭē should be regarded as leader of all the Christians of Āmīd is said to have been issued by the Arab plenipotentiary in the East, which ought to mean al-Ḥajjāj.²

The final part is about the fact that Joseph says nothing about the Chalcedonians of Theodūṭē's diocese of Āmīd, whereas he says quite a bit about Theodūṭē's encounter with the Chalcedonians of Ūrhōy (Edessa), even though that encounter was a brief one. Does this mean that the Arabs did not tolerate Chalcedonians in this border-province? After all, Theodūṭē, though no Chalcedonian, was suspected for a letter he wrote to someone in the Roman Empire. Or does it mean

Jerusalem. Rabban Shem'ūn Jan of that monastery and the late Professor Michel van Esbroeck helped me to read the Arabic.

² Robert Hoyland feels, no doubt for a good reason, that it would have been a lower official. Typical of the *Life* is the absence of a name. The only Arab mentioned by name in the life is Jaydar, a much-feared leader of raids over the frontier with Anzitene, who is otherwise unknown. Even the commander of the garrison in Āmīd, who acquitted Theodūṭē of the charge of treason, is not named.

that the Chalcedonian community had been somehow dissolved? A related question is: for whom did Heraclius built a cathedral church in 628, after his victory over Persia, the Chalcedonians (as one might assume), or the Syrian Orthodox (an interesting possibility), who were the owners of that church in 770? If it was built for the Syrian Orthodox, there may have been Chalcedonians in Āmīd after all and we must look for another reason for Joseph's silence.

Part One: The visit of the tax-collector

For five years Theodūṭē, who after the death of the Patriarch Theodore had left the Monastery of the Eagles' Nest to embrace a life on the road, lived with his disciple Joseph in Claudia, making a thorough nuisance of himself to the superior of a monastery called after Saint Sergius, which may be that above the village of Vank.³ It is worth quoting a whole chapter of the *Life of Theodūṭē* in which a tax-collector (being a slave, he is referred to as a 'boy') comes to this tiny monastery, which, paradoxically, is called *Dayrō d'Pathyō*, 'the Monastery-which-is-spacious'.

27. In the land of Samosata a governor had been appointed whose name was Ēlūstrīyā.⁴ This man was from Ḥarrān. He sent to Claudia one of his boys, by name Sargīs, to exact tribute (*maddāthō*) even from the poor people of that region; for there are many displaced persons (*akṣ'nōyē*) in that region. When that slave reached that region, he began to cause distress to the orphans and to the poor people of that region; and he sent [the following letter] to the Monastery-of-Mōr-Sergios-which-is-spacious, in which the blessed Theodūṭē was dwelling: 'Get ready for me the tribute of the ten men whom I have [written in my register as dwelling] in your monastery! Have a care, lest I stir up the people of Claudia against you! And do not rely upon Theodūṭē, because I am going to levy the poll-tax (*g'zīthō* = Arabic, *jizya*)⁵ from him as well!'

³ I am indebted to Linda Wheatley-Irving, who works on Syrian Orthodox monasteries on the Middle Euphrates at the University of Chicago, for this identification. The monastery above Vank (Armenian for 'monastery') might have been described as being 'seven miles away from Ṭammīn' (Chapters 27 and 28), if Ṭammīn is to be identified, as seems probable, with Pūtūrge.

⁴ So vocalised in the MS.

⁵ This word is used again in Chapter 46, where the older word for tax is also used, no doubt less exactly: 'He [Theodūṭē] asked of him [Ēlūstrīyā, governor of Dārā] that that monastery [the Monastery of Mōr Abay at Qelleth] should not

When the head of the monastery had read the letter out to the blessed ones, they were afraid of that man and they told the blessed Theodūtē and he wrote him a letter, which he sent by the hand of his disciple, Mōr Joseph, to a village called Alwand. When Joseph gave him the holy man's letter, he read it out and everyone told him, 'It will not go well with you if you ignore that man's command.' But as for Sargis, he was not persuaded, and he did not grant Theodūtē's disciple an audience. The blessed Mōr Joseph then told his holy master everything that the boy had done to him and to all the poor people and the widows. When the holy Theodūtē heard this, he left the Monastery-which-is-spacious and went to a sanctuary of Her-who-gave-birth-to-God (*d^eyōldath allōhō = tēs Theotokou*) which was in a village called Ṭamnīn, about seven miles away from the monastery; meanwhile, the tax-collector arrived and fell upon the head of the monastery with blows and harsh insults.

Now there were two people there who had devils. The blessed Theodūtē used to keep them under severe restraint. Every day they would howl at the sight of him and particularly of the saints (i.e. relics) which he possessed; but he called them liars. He asked God to prevent them from revealing the truth about him and their mouths were sealed. When he was nowhere near them, they would talk; but as soon as he approached they were unable to speak and could only point the finger at him. And while that boy was seated, uttering threats against the monks and against the blessed man, on a sudden these tormented (lit. tested) men arrived and found him sitting there, demanding tribute from the poor people in that religious community; and all of a sudden, the demons seized him by his hair and made him go into the presence of the saints venerated by the blessed Theodūtē. They tore his clothing to shreds and he was left standing there naked; and no one had the power to save him from them.

'Up to now,' they told him, 'we have been helping you. It was we who advised you to threaten this old man, Theodūtē. But now he is seated in the sanctuary of Mary-who-gave-birth-to-God and he has sent word and brought Her-who-gave-birth-to-God and all the saints of the earth; and this night the saints arrived from Constantinople out of respect for him. They are torturing (lit. judging) us because of you,' they went on. 'It is now thirty days that we have been tortured (lit. judged) because of you, to make us drive you out of this place. So go to him and do whatever he tells you! But if you do not, we shall this minute come out of the bodies in which we now dwell and we shall enter you; and there will not be a single stone in these mountains

have to pay the *maddāthō*; and Ēlūstrīyā (to be distinguished from his contemporary namesake, the governor of Ḥarrān) made him the following promise: "As long as you live, it shall not pay the *g^ezīthō* to the king (*malkō*): I shall pay it out of my own house."

which does not get its fill of you from us.’ [After this] they began to revile him and to beat him across the shoulders.

Then, holding onto one another, they began to leap from one lamp to another in the sight of all the people, perching on the walls and on the roof-beams (*sh’mayy shūrē*) like birds; then hanging head-downwards, without any purchase from above and without touching the ground—just hanging there like lamps. The report of this spread through the region and men and women came to see—a great swarm of people was there. For those demons continued to torment that man with blows for four days and four nights, undergoing torture (lit. being judged) themselves at the hands of ‘the chosen Theodūtē’, ‘the holy one of God’ (Mark 1.24), as they named him in their howls. Men approached in order to seize the ones with devils in them, but these came out and attacked them and tore their clothes to shreds, so that those people ran away from them and the whole people cried, ‘Lord, have mercy!’ (*qūryelleysōn = Kyrie eleēson*).

Again, the demons said to him, ‘What are you thinking of? You shall not get away from us until you promise that you will do everything that Theodūtē orders you to do.’ And they inflicted a cruel beating on him. Then that boy, trembling, ran up to Mōr Joseph, the disciple of the holy Theodūtē, and fell down at his feet saying, ‘Have mercy on me, my lord! I do not want to die. Urge that holy man to let me see him! Only let me leave this place alive and get away safely from those demons, and I swear not to collect any taxes from this region!’ So his disciple went and found him prostrate in prayer in the garden behind the church. As soon as he saw him, he said, ‘Why have you come, my son? Do not try to rescue from the demons the enemy of God!’ But his disciple knelt down in front of him and entreated him, and he consented.

This is the message which he sent him: ‘If you give back all that you have taken from all the poor and the orphans and the widows, I shall come to you. But if you do not do this, you and you alone will be responsible for the consequences (lit. you know [best] and your soul [knows best]).’ His disciple took the letter and left; and when he reached the monastery, the tormented men came out and snatched the note from him and placed it on the sack containing those holy men who belonged to the blessed Theodūtē. A rain of heavy blows began to fall upon them [not only from those holy men, but] from the holy man himself as well. That note fell to the ground and they began to puff at it, as though it were a fire.

The tax-collector tried to take that note and read it, but they snatched it from him and began to strike him on the face, saying, ‘The note is for us: when Theodūtē was writing it, we were standing beside him.’ And they began to read out all the contents. Then they dragged him in front of the altar of the monastery and said, ‘If you promise that you will do everything that the holy man is telling you—but if not, we swear by Adonai the glorious that we shall dwell in you.’ That boy was terrified and became like one dead. He made the following

promise: 'I shall do everything he tells me.' He urged his disciple to make him come and pray over him; and he was just leaving when Theodūtē walked in—for nothing that those demons had done to that man was hidden from him.

Then all the people that were there came out to meet him and knelt down, weeping, in front of him; and the blessed man also knelt down in front of them, saying, 'My brethren, these things are not due to me, for I am a sinner. It was the holy ones of God in the sack who did these things.' Then that boy fell down at his feet and, weeping, said, 'My lord, have mercy upon me and rescue me from those demons, which are trying to attack me!' For those possessed men were standing beside him with their faces covered and their mouths closed, pointing the finger at the holy man, for they wanted him to give them permission to get their claws into that predator and they were grinding their teeth at him.

Theodūtē looked at him and said, 'You fool! You plunderer! You murderer! Give me all that you have wrongfully extorted from the poor and the destitute!' Then the boy stood up and did what he had told him to do. He gave him a great deal of money (*ḏīnōrē* = *denariū*)—the whole amount extorted by him from the poor and the orphans and the widows—together with the tax-assessment (lit. the book) which he had written about the monastery. At this the holy man shouted at those demons and they disappeared [with a noise] like a thunder-storm (cf. Mark 1.26). He gave the boy many instructions, then gave him some holy dust (*ḥēnōnō*, lit. pity) and prayed over him. As for those people who had had the evil spirits, he rubbed them with a blessing (*būrḱē thō*, probably oil which had been in contact with holy relics) and they fell on the ground and became like dead men from the ninth hour until the crowing of the cock. The evil demons had left them—they would never see them again; and they became proven⁶ monks.

Joseph, we see, is the one man who can persuade this vengeful 'Old Testament prophet' of a saint to turn from cursing to blessing. This self-appointed role remained valid, Joseph hoped, at the time of writing, which was after the holy man's death.

An earlier seventh-century source, the *Life of Sēwīrē* (*Severius*) *bar Mashqē*, *Bishop of Samosata*, which is partially preserved in Patriarch Michael's quotation from the chronicle of the Patriarch Dionysius of Tell-Maḥrē, also speaks of demoniacs suspended in the air like lamps.⁷ This is a literary topos, then; but life may have imitated

⁶ This adjective—*b'ḥivō*—is the one which gives the 'name' of the monk Bahīrā, originally anonymous, from whom Muḥammad is said to have learned certain things.

⁷ See J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche Syrien Orthodox d'Antioche*

literature, just as Theodūṭē's attempt to silence the demons who wanted to identify him as 'the holy one of God' may have been a coquettish imitation of Matthew 16.20 rather than an invention of the biographer. The two acrobats we have just read about may have been actors playing a part at the behest of Theodūṭē, who constantly needed 'supernatural' justification of his merely charismatic authority. Theodūṭē exposed other holy frauds;⁸ was he one himself? If he really intimidated the tax-collector, that will have offset the unpopularity he earned by opposing the head of the monastery from time to time. However, though life may be stranger than fiction, the humiliation of the taxman sounds like wish-fulfilment.

What is particularly interesting is that Theodūṭē's opposition to the tax-collector from Arab-held Samosata needed to be backed up by the *Theotokos* ('Mother of God' is a misleading name for her, as Nestorius rightly remarked, and Syriac does not call her that, only *yōldath allōhō*, Her-who-gave-birth-to-God; there is a subtle difference) and by all the saints from, of all places, *Constantinople*. In spite of its Chalcedonian 'heresy', Constantinople was evidently still the capital

1166-1199, Paris, 1899-1910, XI 7, pp. 419f.: '[The possessed men] went and stood in front of a casket in which there was a relic of the Apostle Paul. Their hands were locked together behind them and they began to complain out loud of the tortures which they invisibly underwent. After this they were raised up from the ground and stood in the air in the House of the Martyrs like hanging lamps.' This Sēwīrē, a monk of the Monastery of the Eagles' Nest, went in 640/41 to the Monastery of Mōr Ya'qūb at Qayshūm to die; he is therefore to be identified with Theodūṭē's first spiritual father, 'the bishop who gave him the habit' (*Life of Theodūṭē*, Chapter 106): in Chapter 86 of the *Life*, the monks of the Eagles' Nest say to Theodūṭē, 'Do not do to us what your master, Mōr Sēwīrē, did, when he left us for the Monastery of Mōr Ya'qūb in Bēth Kushmōyē! [...] Stay with us, Father, that we may have your body at least as a wall of defence!'

⁸ Chapter 32 of the *Life of Theodūṭē* tells of a man at the Monastery of Mōr Barṣawmō, on a ridge north of the summit of what is now Nemrut Dağ, who 'could recite the Old and the New [Testaments] and long poems and liturgies and [the writings of] the teachers', and, like Theodūṭē, could 'reveal people's sins and secrets', so that everyone thought that the Holy Spirit was in him; 'But as for the favoured Theodūṭē, when he saw the deception of the evil demons, he sent word to everyone, saying, "My sons, do not be led astray by devils! Before long the Lord will expose him in the presence of the victorious Mōr Barṣawmō." Now some people said, "This favoured one is motivated by envy.'" The founder of this monastery, who died in 458, was a model for the 'Old Testament prophet'-style holy man which Theodūṭē apparently tried to be; see F. Nau in *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 18, 1913, pp. 272-6, 379-89; 19, 1914, pp. 113-34, 278-89, where he is wrongly identified with Barṣauma of Nisibis. I am editing the *Life* of Barṣawmō of Claudia as well.

of a Christian empire and the locus of a divine power believed even by Syrian Orthodox to be superior to that which held sway in the empire of the Arabs. This power resided in the ancient relics which were stockpiled there, not in the Chalcedonian custodians of those relics.

Theodūṭē was sensitive to the presence of heresy. There was a Nestorian from Bēth Garmay in the same monastery of Saint Sergius, a simple man who knew the psalms by heart and received communion from the Syrian Orthodox clergy. Theodūṭē, with the help of a useful little demon, put an end to this, which the community regretted, because the Nestorian had been a good carpenter. If Theodūṭē had met Chalcedonians in Claudia, we might have expected Joseph to mention the fact. Yuḥannōn, the *epitropos* of Claudia, was evidently a Syrian Orthodox: he consulted Theodūṭē over a murder which occurred at Singīs, and the holy man kept vigil with him and his fellow-villagers in the church of Her-that-gave-birth-to-God in Yuḥannōn's village. (The culprit was Yuḥannōn's own son-in-law; he was put to death by the *arkhōn* of Samosata.)⁹

From these chapters we learn that Samosata was governed for the Arabs by a Ḥarrānite with a Greco-Roman name or title (*Ēlūstrīyā* > *il loustrios* > *illustris*), who was more probably a pagan than a Christian,¹⁰ and that the government of the region of Claudia was delegated to a local Syrian Orthodox called Yuḥannōn, though Yuḥannōn was not responsible for tax-collection in his region: that job was attempted—without great success, if we can believe our source—by Sargīs, a slave of the *arkhōn* of Samosata, whose name (from that of

⁹ *Life of Theodūṭē*, Chapter 33.

¹⁰ *Ēlūstrīyā* is to be identified with *Ēlūstrīyā* the son of 'Araq, from Ḥarrān, a prisoner of war released with 6,000 Arab captives by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian II in 705: see I.-B. Chabot, *Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, vol. I (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 109 = *Scriptores Syri* 56), Louvain, 1920, p. 298. Ḥarrān was largely pagan, with a hellenized élite. The name 'Araq is certainly not a Christian name; the only question is whether, at that date, a Christian might have borne a religiously neutral name. *Ēlūstrīyā* itself is a doubtful case, since it is originally a title not a name. Many of those who rose in the Arab administration at this time were Chalcedonians with a good command of Greek, still the language of the civil service; but in a frontier province the early Arab administration *may* have preferred a pagan to a Chalcedonian of suspect political loyalty. If this *Ēlūstrīyā* was a pagan, then it is not true that *all* the governors of the cities and regions [in the former Roman Empire under Arab rule] at this time were still Christians, as Dionysius of Tell-Maḥrē seems to have implied (see n. 26 for a literal rendering of his Syriac words).

Saint Sergius of Ruṣāfā) indicates his Christian religion, but not his denomination. If the silence of our heresy-sensitive source is a reliable guide, Chalcedonians were scarce in this frontier region.

Claudia was remote. The east side of Nemrut Dağı still is. Before the visit of Sargīs, the people of that region had probably never had to pay taxes to the new empire. The word used for the tax is normally *maddāthō*, an Akkadian word for tribute which survived in the language of the Assyrians' Aramaean subjects.¹¹ On one occasion, however, in referring to a tax which he proposed to levy on Theodūṭē personally (perhaps having heard that his charismatic ministry had made him a secretly wealthy man), Sargīs is reported as having used the word *gʿzīthō*, a Syriacised version of the Arabic word *jizya*. This word may have been the closest that the inhabitants of Claudia, many of them refugees from debt or justice, or families bereaved of a father, ever came into contact with their Arab rulers. More often, perhaps, by their raids from Melitene, the Romans reminded them of their power.

Part Two: Theodūṭē at Āmīd

The visit of the tax-collector to the little monastery near Ṭamnīn, then, may have been the first in that region since the Arab conquest. Perhaps, after all, it is not implausible that the tax-collector failed to raise some of the taxes he had down in his assessment. That assessment may have been based on an outdated Roman census and so have borne little relation to late seventh-century reality. The tax-collector might even have collaborated with Theodūṭē to stage-manage a performance which actually helped to save his face with the people and gave him an excuse for returning empty-handed to Samosata. As Chase Robinson has noted, partly on the basis of what has already been published about the *Life of Theodūṭē*, northern Mesopotamia in the seventh century was rather loosely governed by the Arabs. Only at Āmīd, so far as we know, was there an Arab military presence.¹²

¹¹ Akkadian *maddattu*, Aramaic *mindā* and *middā*; see A. Harrak, *Chronicle of Zūqnān, Parts III and IV A.D. 488-775 (Mediaeval Sources in Translation 36)*, Toronto, 1999, p. 147, n. 7.

¹² See n. 1, and Chase F. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest:*

Āmīd was therefore one of the first places in northern Mesopotamia where an extended encounter between eastern Christianity and early Islam occurred. Every city in northern Mesopotamia must have encountered Arab fighters at the time of the conquest. But that encounter was in most cases a brief one. The treaty or pact which was then negotiated gave the Christians their first taste of the ethic of Muḥammad. According to al-Balādhurī, the conditions under which Āmīd was taken in 639 were like those accorded to Kallinikos, which was taken earlier the same year. These included the following clause: ‘Their churches shall not be destroyed nor be used as dwellings, if they pay the tax which has been imposed on them, commit no murder and build no new church or sanctuary, use no gong in public and make no processions.’¹³ But the province of Āmīd, the Diyār Bakr, bordered in the north on unconquered Christian territory. The Arabs placed a garrison there and the soldiers practised their religion, observed by the local population. This population comprised pagans as well as Christians.¹⁴ It is time to follow Theodūṭē and Joseph to this city.

Some time after the memorable visit of the tax-collector, the itinerant holy man and his disciple left Claudia, having received advance warning of a Byzantine raid, which was presumably to be launched from Melitene.¹⁵ It will not, in sober fact, have been directly from the Holy Spirit that Theodūṭē received this warning. Already before the death of Bishop Tūmā of Āmīd, Theodūṭē used to send his disciple to the castles of the Romans on the frontiers (Bēth Ḥesnē) with instructions which even the military commanders dared not disobey. Joseph explains this as follows: ‘For the favoured one had

the transformation of northern Mesopotamia (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization), Cambridge, 2000, pp. 43, 57f.

¹³ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1866, p. 173.

¹⁴ On the pagans of the upper Tigris region, who were numerous as lately as the nineteenth century, see D. Chwolson, *Die Sabier und der Sabismus*, St. Petersburg, 1856, pp. 292-5; H. Southgate, *Narrative of a Tour through Armenia etc.*, 2 vols, London & New York, 1840, pp. 284-5; N. Göyünc, *XVI. Yüzyılda Mardin sancağı*, Istanbul, 1969, pp. 77-9.

¹⁵ Tiberius Apsimar ‘sent an army of Romans against the Arabs, which, having invaded the region of Samosata, killed five thousand Arabs and took captives and booty from that whole region’: see J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche Syrien Orthodox d’Antioche 1166-1199*, Paris, 1899-1910, XI 16a, p. 448. Theodūṭē died in 698, the year in which Tiberius came to the throne, so an unrecorded earlier raid must be referred to in the *Life* of Theodūṭē.

redeemed many souls, both from the Arabs and from the Romans. This, indeed, is why the favoured one liked to be in the frontier region.’ Perhaps then it was a letter from a Roman well-wisher in Anzitone which contained the early warning.¹⁶

At any event, it is to Anzitone that the dynamic duo go. Theodūṭē motivates this destination as follows: ‘My son Joseph, let us go and visit those Syrian Orthodox¹⁷ people who flee *the dearth and the hardships brought about by the Arabs*, and let us pray for them and encourage them with the hope of the Faith. For I know the Romans try to coerce them into changing their Faith.’ Joseph explains: ‘This was due to his habit of writing letters which he sent to Bēth Ḥesnē with his disciple to the poor people who lived there, that they might hold fast to the Orthodox Faith, and that the leaders of the heretics might not turn them aside by means of enticements or threats. Likewise, he would send word to the governors of Bēth Ḥesnē with hard words to frighten them, so that they might not be aggressive towards those poor people who lived among them.’ When the two monks reach Lake Hūrē (Hazar Gölü),¹⁸ they find the Syrian Orthodox trying to get into the castles or onto the islands in the lake, because they have got wind of an Arab counter-raid led by a certain Jaydar (*g-y-d-r*). The holy man made the governors promise that they would not imprison the Syrian Orthodox or force them to convert, and only then did he hold a vigil of prayer with them to ward off the raid. In return for this the Chalcedonian governors brought him ten [wagon-] loads of fishes.¹⁹

Without waiting to see if the vigil had been effective, Theodūṭē and Joseph cross the Arsenias (Murat Nehri) at Bīlū w^ePīlīn²⁰ and enter a region, still probably of the Roman Empire, where there are not only Chalcedonians and Syrian Orthodox, but also a Nestorian pretending to be Theodūṭē. Joseph may well have invented this man

¹⁶ *Life of Theodūṭē*, Chapter 34.

¹⁷ Perhaps the earliest reference to this name, which may owe its origin to the terminology of the new Arab rulers, who, confronted with several groups calling themselves ‘Orthodox’, sensibly distinguished between them by their ethnicity without impugning the Christian doctrine of one or approving that of another.

¹⁸ Between Colchis and Korra/Corvilu (cf. the name Hure) on the map printed in the *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*, Princeton, 2000, p. 899.

¹⁹ *Life of Theodūṭē*, Chapter 35.

²⁰ See Balisbiga/Baioulous and Palios or their regions Balabite and Paline, in the *Barrington Atlas*, p. 899.

in order to explain how some evil rumours about Theodūṭē got into circulation, such as that he was greedy for gold and occasionally stayed the night with a widow. The real Theodūṭē performs prayers for the heretics and ‘absolves’ many of their number, but the impostor ‘goes into the houses of heretics and associates with them just as freely as with the Orthodox’.²¹

A distinguished man from Interior Anzitene, that is, from Armenia, is healed of ‘a very painful disease which had taken hold of his brain. The excessive pain had robbed him of his sight and a putrid matter was coming out of his nostrils. So they took him and threw him on the ground in front of the favoured one while he was walking on a path, then ran away to one side.’ Before healing him (all that is required is three signs of the cross made over his head and face), Theodūṭē exacts from him the assurance that he will become a true Christian.²² The Armenians were Orthodox in the eyes of the Syrian Orthodox, except for those who adopted the doctrine of Julian of Halicarnassus. ‘Aphthartodocetism’, as this doctrine was called, ‘taught that from the moment of the incarnation the earthly body of Christ was in its nature incorruptible, impassible, and immortal, though this fact did not preclude Him from accepting suffering and death as an act of free will’.²³

The two vagrant monks now re-cross the river Arsenias and travel for three days through an uncultivated, waterless region. On the fourth day they are taken captive by robbers who suppose they are spies from Bēth Ḥesnē. They talk their way out of captivity, then travel on to Mayperqaṭ where Theodūṭē manages to avoid meeting the governor, Eṣartī.²⁴ From there they go to the monastery of Qartmīn, where Theodūṭē is recognized by the governor of Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, a man who ‘had received an arrow-wound in the battle which the

²¹ *Life of Theodūṭē*, Chapter 37. Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 158, applies this to the real Theodūṭē, omitting to note that the previous sentence reads: ‘Then the inhabitants of that region told him about a man who called himself Theodūṭē, but he was a deceiver wearing hair-cloth and carrying an iron cross, who led men astray.’ If Theodūṭē did associate with Chalcedonians, then this is something else which Joseph was at pains to explain away.

²² *Life of Theodūṭē*, Chapter 38.

²³ The definition is from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. E.A. Livingstone, Oxford, 1977, p. 27 (the 2004 edition, also by E.A. Livingstone, is available through Oxford Resources Online).

²⁴ This looks like a distortion of a Greek name or title beginning with *Strati-*

Arabs fought over Nišībīn.’ This is the only mention of the Arab conquest, sixty years or so earlier, in the *Life*. From Qartmīn the two men go towards Dārā and are intercepted by Ēlūšṭrīyā, the governor of that city, apparently an old acquaintance, who becomes their patron.²⁵ Until about 700 ‘the cities and regions’ about which the Syrian chroniclers wrote were still governed by Christians.²⁶ From his patronage of the Syrian Orthodox Theodūṭē, and the gift of a stoa to the Syrian Orthodox monastery of Qartmīn by ‘Patricia, the daughter of Ēlūšṭrīyā’, one might conclude that Ēlūšṭrīyā was a Syrian Orthodox.²⁷ I have argued elsewhere (on the basis of his Hellenism) that he was a Chalcedonian;²⁸ but now I think this unlikely. If a man who was usually careful to avoid being compromised by too close a relationship with Chalcedonians conveniently forgot his aversion to heretics when it was financially convenient to do so, this fact would have been covered up, or justified, by his pious biographer.

It is shortly after this that Theodūṭē becomes bishop of Āmīd. First the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Julian arrives in the city. We are told that ‘the Christians and the Arabs and all who were present in Āmīd’ came out to meet the patriarch. This is the third mention of the Arabs (Ṭayyōyē) in this text. The first one was like it, in that

²⁵ *Life of Theodūṭē*, Chapters 39-46.

²⁶ See Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, XI 16a, p. 449, lines 8 to 10 of col. 2, continuing in lines 10 and 11 of col. 3 and followed there by the date A.G. 1014 = A.D. 702/3: ‘All the same, Christian governors still managed all the affairs and the effects of the State (taking *dpwbytyš* as the Syriac genitive preposition *d-*, followed by the Greek singular noun *politeia* with a genitive ending in *-s*, reflecting the Greek construction with the definite article: *tēs politeias*) in the cities and in the regions.’ The claim (see above) that Ēlūšṭrīyā, the son of ‘Araq of Ḥarrān, may have been a pagan not a Christian, has to contend with this generalisation by Michael’s source, Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē, an intelligent chronicler of the early ninth century who used contemporary or near-contemporary sources; see A. Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (*Translated Texts for Historians* 15), Liverpool, 1993, pp. 85-104. It may be noted, however, that the chronicle does not actually say that all the cities and regions were governed by Christians and that this Christian boast is in any case likely to be an exaggeration. The truth may be that Christian governors still managed all the affairs of State in *those* cities and regions *for which they were responsible!*

²⁷ There is an undated but evidently ancient inscription at Qartmīn Abbey (the letter-forms are consistent with a date around 700) commemorating in Syriac the building of a stoa by ‘Patricia, the daughter of Ēlūšṭrīyā’; see A. Palmer, ‘A Corpus of Inscriptions from Ṭūr ‘Abdīn and Environs’, *Oriens Christianus* 71, 1987, pp. 53-139, at p. 120f.

²⁸ Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier*, pp. 165-8.

we were told of the affection in which the Arabs had held another Syrian Orthodox patriarch. However, on this occasion, the Arabs may just have been curious because of the ‘great pomp’ with which the patriarch made his entrance.²⁹ After this Theodūtē is fetched from Qelleth and accepts the appointment in principle, after going through more than the usual theatre.³⁰

The next chapter is worth quoting in full because of its importance for the subject of the encounter between Eastern Christianity and early Islam:

58. There was a man among the Arabs in Āmīd who was in authority over the city and its region. Before Theodūtē became bishop, Satan stirred this man up against the favoured one. He sent men to bring him by force, in order that he might judge³¹ him on account of a letter that he had written to the Roman Empire. He accused him of being a friend of the Romans. When he arrested him, the whole city was in shock; and all the Arab cavalry were shaken by what had happened. They dragged him into their mosque (*bēth mazgē dō*)³² and there that wicked man arose [from the seat of judgment?] and kicked him; and he fell to the ground, at which all the Arabs cried out with a loud voice. The church of our Lord was greatly grieved. It had nearly reached the point of people getting killed, when they carried the holy man out of their mosque.

In the middle of the following night the Lord struck that wicked man and took his light from him; with his eyes wide open he could see nothing at all. He fell upon his bed, at his wits’ end. Then he sent a group of prominent men—some citizens of Āmīd, others Arabs—who summoned him to accompany them without delay; and he fell down and venerated him and said, ‘Righteous man of God, have mercy on me! Forgive me for the sin I have committed against you and give me back the light of my eyes which you have taken away!’ The favoured Theodūtē replied, ‘You unbeliever! You enemy of God! Did you not realise that your deeds would be requited? Once God’s arrow has been loosed, it cannot be deflected from its target. You cannot now avoid being struck by the wrath of the God [who is] my Lord. Nonetheless, in order that his name may be glorified, our Lord gives you back your light. But you may be sure you will be hit again, and harder!’

²⁹ The treaty recorded by al-Balādhurī prohibits public processions, but perhaps an exception was made for the Head of the Church.

³⁰ *Life of Theodūtē*, Chapters 53-7.

³¹ ‘To judge’ is synonymous with ‘to torture’ in the chapter quoted in Part One.

³² An imperfectly Syriacised form of the Arabic *masjid*. It is as though the relationship between the Arabic root *s-j-d* and the Aramaic root *s-g-d* had not been recognized.

He made the sign of the cross on his eyes in the name of our Lord and that man saw the light. All who witnessed it were amazed and the report of it flashed across the city, so that when Theodūṭē left that man's house the people thronged about him, seeking his blessing, Christians, Arabs and pagans.³³ The very next day that man received a summons from his commanding officer and left Āmīd, sped on his way by hisses of hatred. On that journey he was thrown from his horse, which trampled on his arms with its hooves; he died of the injuries, as a result of which the people feared the Lord and his servant.

Once again, wishful thinking has surely transformed events; yet it is probably true that some Arabs, even followers of Muḥammad, were superstitious enough to seek healing at the hands of a Christian holy man. In Chapter 93 we read of a Ṭayyōyō who was unable to walk until the aged Theodūṭē, at his disciple's request, prayed for him and smeared him with oil from the relics of the saints. Today in Ṭūr 'Abdīn, Kurdish Muslims (called Ṭayyē in Ṭūrōyō, the dialect of the Syrian Christians of that region, regardless of their ethnicity) frequently seek healing or fertility from the relics of the holy men of old in the fourth-century Monastery of Mōr Gabrīyēl near Qartmīn (Yayvantepe).³⁴

Theodūṭē was made bishop on the Sunday of Pentecost and became 'the occupant of the apostolic see of Āmīd, which adopted Christianity through Addai, the apostle, and Aggai, his disciple.' 'The Arabs and all [their] cavalrymen called the city blessed.' The following Sunday the church was filled, 'both inside and outside'. 'Both Christians and Arabs were gathered there to see him.' Once again, the presence of the Arabs can be put down to curiosity.³⁵

In the section of the *Lifē* devoted to Theodūṭē's short tenure as bishop of Āmīd, followers of Muḥammad, elsewhere in the text called Ṭayyōyē, are several times referred to as *m^hagg^rrōyē* or (more probably) *mahg^rrōyē*. The meaning of this term is problematic.³⁶ It

³³ Not the Jews, we notice, of whom Joseph says nothing at all.

³⁴ This observation is my own, made on several occasions between 1977 and 1997 and supported by many oral testimonies, including the voluntary admissions of Muslims and Yezīdīs. One of the relics in question is the skull of Yuḥannōn Ṭayyōyō, allegedly a convert from Islam.

³⁵ *Lifē of Theodūṭē*, Chapters 59 and 61. Ṭayyōyē is translated as 'Arabs', the whole nation being known to Joseph (and to his scribe) after one tribe of Arabs, the Ṭayy; the word 'Arabōyē does not occur.

³⁶ Patricia Crone and Michael Cook introduced a further complication when they suggested by the very title of their book *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic*

may be related to the Arabic *muhājirūn*, those who took part in the Hijra from Mecca to Medina. But Syrian Christians also used the terms *b^lnay hōgōr*, ‘Sons of Hagar’, and *hōgōrōyē*, meaning thereby to suggest that they were illegitimate descendants of Abraham (Genesis 16 and 21). This suggests another interpretation of *mahg^rrōyē*, namely as a form of *mah^ggrē*: ‘those who have been made [sons of] Hagar’, which is confirmed by the existence of the corresponding verb, *ahgar*, meaning ‘he became a Muslim’. It is possible, then, that the word is used in our text for the Aramaeans (former Christians, Jews or pagans) who have been converted to Islam. I shall preserve the uncertainty in translation by writing ‘Muslims/converts to Islam’.³⁷

Part Three: The Chalcedonians of Āmīd and the church built by Heraclius

In the whole of this long section there is only one reference to Christian ‘heretics’ in Āmīd: ‘The fear of the holy man took hold of the Muslims/converts to Islam and the heretics and the Orthodox and they accepted with joy everything that he commanded.’³⁸ It is hard to say how much truth there may be in this. Certainly one can believe Joseph when he claims that both Christians and Muslims/converts to Islam gave Theodūtē money with which to redeem captives from the Romans.³⁹ Presumably there were both Christian and Arab captives; and Theodūtē was evidently a good negotiator, when it came to dealings with Roman military commanders. It seems likely that he knew Greek. His family was known in his home-village of ‘Nōth as *Bēth Qeryōnō*, ‘the house of reading’,⁴⁰ and he spent more than twenty-six years as a monk at the monastery of the Eagles’ Nest,⁴¹ where several impressive Greek scholars resided in the seventh century.⁴² Joseph may have his own reasons for play-

World, Cambridge, 1977, that the name is an objective term for the early followers of Muḥammad. Their coinage, ‘Hagarism’, is based on the Greek *magarismos*.

³⁷ The form *mahg^rrō* is attested as well as *mahgrōyō*; Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, p. 8 with note 51; R. Payne-Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, Oxford, 1879-1901, p. 972; Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum*, p. 171; J.E. Manna, *Chaldean-Arabic Dictionary* (reprinted Beirut, 1975), p. 128. T. Awdo, *Sīmṭō dLēshōnō Sūryōyō*, Urmia, 1896, pp. 223-4, who also attests *hōgōrōyō* and *mahg^rrō*, omits *mahg^rrōyō* altogether.

³⁸ *Life of Theodūtē*, Chapter 67.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 66.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Chapters 2-11.

⁴² Severus Sebokht (died 666/7), for example, would have been teaching Greek

ing this down; perhaps he did not wish his own lack of education to be accentuated by the contrast with his educated master.⁴³ Yet Theodūṭē's will (Chapter 98 of the *Life*) only mentions five books, which he acquired at the end of his life, presumably for liturgical purposes.

Theodūṭē forbade any of his clergy to accept any office of secular authority. One deacon disobeyed and became a *sālārō* (*sacellarius*?). The other office which is mentioned as a temptation for clergy is that of *epitropos*.⁴⁴ Latin and Greek titles, we see, were still prevalent in the 690s. But Theodūṭē himself was invested with some kind of authority by the Arab rulers: 'Again, the plenipotentiary of all the East (*ahūd shultōnō d'kūlōh madn'ḥō*) wrote to Āmīd concerning Theodūṭē the bishop as follows: "I command that the laws of the city of Āmīd and of all the region be given into the hand of that righteous man who holds the office of bishop in it. For I have heard that he has no respect of persons. For this reason have I given the laws of the Christians into his hands."⁴⁵

This report is of great interest. It seems to anticipate the *millet*-system. Theodūṭē was effectively appointed in a personal capacity, rather than by virtue of his function, as *millet başı* = 'ethnarch', that is head and judge of the Christian *ethnos*, including (presumably) those whom he himself regarded as heretics. Evidently, any crime involving an Arab would have been tried in a Muslim court. But there is no word of a rival Chalcedonian bishop of Āmīd who might have disputed Theodūṭē's right to judge the Christians of the city. The argument from silence is always an uncertain one, but Joseph

philosophy and astronomy all the time that Theodūṭē was at the Eagles' Nest, of which he was the bishop. For a basic summary, see S. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, Kottayam, 1997, p. 53; for greater detail it is still useful to refer to A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur mit Ausschluss der syrisch-palästinensischen Texte*, Bonn, 1922, p. 246f.

⁴³ He says nothing of the Greek language or Greek scholarship; indeed, his biography of Theodūṭē omits his education altogether and makes his time at the Eagles' Nest appear short. In fact, his first master, Sēwīrē (see n. 7; the name is a Syriac form of Severus, but he is to be distinguished from Severus Sebokht), who introduced him to that community, died in 640/1; and he did not leave it until after the death of the Patriarch Theodore, his second spiritual father, in 666/7; so he was there for at least a quarter of a century!

⁴⁴ *Life of Theodūṭē*, Chapter 72.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Chapter 74.

might have been expected to make capital out of the fact that a rival bishop had been passed over by the Arab authorities. Joseph lived in Āmīd for some time before becoming Theodūṭē's disciple and he lived there again while Theodūṭē was bishop; yet only once does he mention 'heretics' in the city, without specifying which variety of heretic he means.

That reserve contrasts with the readiness he shows in advertising Theodūṭē's discreet dealings with the Chalcedonians of Ūrhōy (modern Urfa or Şanlıurfa, the Greek name being Edessa), although his stay there was very brief: 'From Baṭnon da-S^erugh they travelled to Ūrhōy, where they camped in one of the gardens of the Garden Area.⁴⁶ The chief men and the governors of Ūrhōy were glad, because they had heard about the holy Theodūṭē, and for this reason they sought by every means to see him. They went out to him and greeted him and he prayed for them. The *Synodikoi* also asked him saying, "My lord, go in with us to our monastery and pray for us and we shall be of your Faith for ever!" But he said to them, "Go in and bring me your children and I shall pray for them." For he knew their deceit; and for this reason he refused to go in. When both Orthodox and heretics had done this, he blessed them and prayed for them.'⁴⁷

How is the discrepancy between these two cities to be explained? It may be that Edessa negotiated a treaty with the Arabs which was more advantageous to the Chalcedonians than that negotiated at Āmīd. It may also be that their community at Āmīd had never been very deeply rooted in the city. My investigation of the Edessene Chronicle of 506 suggested that the chronicler intended his readers to notice the coincidence of doctrinal polarisation with many disasters, both natural and military, and to conclude from this that what angers God most is arrogance in matters of religion.⁴⁸ He addressed it to

⁴⁶ Probably the present Halepli Bahçeler, or 'Alepine Gardens', on the west side of the Old City, in the alluvial plain of the upper course of the Dayşōn.

⁴⁷ *Life of Theodūṭē*, Chapter 87.

⁴⁸ A.N. Palmer, 'Who wrote the "Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite"?', in R. Schulz and M. Görg, eds, *Lingua Restituta Orientalis: Festgabe für Julius Assfalg (Ägypten und Altes Testament 20)*, Wiesbaden, 1990, pp. 272-84. F.R. Trombley and J.W. Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite (Translated Texts for Historians 32)*, Liverpool, 2000, p. xix, remark: 'Palmer has correctly observed that "here the Bible is being used as a means of coded communication", but we are not convinced by his decoding it in terms of Christological sectarianism, for there is no hint anywhere else in the text that our author was at all troubled by such matters.' In n. 33 they add that they

Sergius, the abbot of a monastery near Āmīd, who was evidently one of those who abstained from sectarianism. But the clear implication of the preface is that the majority of the Āmīdene monasteries were fanatically anti-Chalcedonian. From John of Ephesus we get the same impression. We learn, it is true, of repressive measures carried out in Āmīd by the Chalcedonian authorities—for example the imprisonment and subsequent banishment of Euphemia—but it seems that the sympathy of the population is with the resistance to these authorities.⁴⁹ Once the authorities disappeared as a result of the conquest, little would have been left of the Chalcedonian community.

The prevailing mood must surely have been a conviction that only someone with God on his side could be so completely successful in subjecting a foreign power, that of the Sasanian Persians, which had just conquered Syria and Egypt and laid siege to his capital city. In the light of this wonder many must have doubted the rightness of their continued opposition to the religious policy of Constantinople.

also find my translation of *m'dabb'rōnē* as 'abbots' unconvincing for the same reason. That this word can bear this meaning is attested by Payne-Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, col. 817, and Manna, *Chaldean-Arabic Dictionary*, p. 135: '*abbas, superior coenobii*', '*raʿṣ dayr*'. It would be interesting to know what alternative interpretation these authors would offer. They 'can see no adequate grounds for believing [the author of the chronicle] to be either [a monk or a clergyman]', p. xxvi. Even a secular author at that time would have had to adopt one of the three or four positions described by Evagrius Scholasticus: 'And so, during this period [the earlier part of the reign of Anastasius] ... some [prelates] adhered [to the Council of Chalcedon]. Others ... refused to accept the Synod at Chalcedon... Others relied on the Henoticon of Zeno, ... while others inclined rather to greater peace,' M. Whitby, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, (*Translated Texts for Historians* 33), Liverpool, 2000, pp. 166f. [my italics]. Trombley and Watt missed my point. Their observation that he does not discuss Christology is correct, and this fact shows that he did not belong to either the pro-Chalcedonian or the anti-Chalcedonian party; this is precisely what I had maintained, that he belonged to the peace-loving party. In those days, almost everyone thought that wars and disasters were a punishment from God. The parties diametrically opposed in their Christology blamed each other; the peace-loving party would surely have blamed both the other parties for the arrogance with which they presumed to analyse the mystery of Christ's nature. For one brought up in the doctrine of Saint Ephraim (as an Edessene would have been) it was clear that this intellectual intrusiveness was a great sin and that it was responsible for internal division and so weakened the defences of the Empire.

⁴⁹ '[Euphemia] was confined for thirty days in the dungeon, while the whole city [of Āmīd] entreated that she might be released', John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, ed. and tr. E.W. Brooks (*Patrologia Orientalis* 17), Paris, 1923, p. 183, in ch. XII, entitled, 'The two holy sisters, who were called Daughters of the Gazelle'.

Later they would deny it, but, at the time, the leaders of the Syrian Orthodox, of the Armenians and of the Nestorians were impressed and came to separate agreements with the emperor.⁵⁰ Heraclius tried to receive communion at the Syrian Orthodox altar of Edessa, but was prevented by the fanaticism of the bishop of the city, who would not give him communion unless he renounced Chalcedon and the *Tome* of Leo. Heraclius avenged himself by transferring ownership of the main church to the Chalcedonians of the city. In the rest of the cities of Syria he did the same. But in the cities he had liberated before Edessa, he had not done so; nor did he revise that decision after what happened at Edessa.⁵¹

Āmīd was the first of these cities. In Āmīd, I suggest, the short-term effect of Heraclius's victory was such that popular support overwhelmed and stifled the hardened resistance of the monks. This support will have grown even stronger when Heraclius decided to build a church in the city.⁵² The rapture with which he was received must have filled Heraclius's head with dreams of what could be achieved, if only all the schismatics, the pagans and the Jews followed the lead of the dissident population of Āmīd.

Max van Berchem identifies this church with that of St. Thomas.⁵³

⁵⁰ See C. Mango and R. Scott, tr., *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near-Eastern History AD 284-813*, Oxford, 1997, pp. 460-1 with n. 1, mentioning the Syriac Chronicle of Se'ert (p. 224) and the Greek Anastasius of Sinai (*Sermo* III, i 20-5), as well as the two Syriac chronicles which transmit the account of Dionysius of Tell Mahrē. The latter are translated by A.N. Palmer in Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, n. 332 on pp. 142-3. On these events and their later distortion by opponents of union, see J. Howard-Johnston, in R.W. Thomson et al., *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos (Translated Texts for Historians 31)*, Liverpool, 1999, Part 2, pp. 227-8, and J.W. Watt, 'The portrayal of Heraclius in Syriac historical sources', in G.J. Reinink and B.H. Stolte, eds, *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation*, Leuven & Paris, 2002, pp. 63-79.

⁵¹ The sources are collated by A.N. Palmer in Palmer et al., *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, p. 140 with n. 323.

⁵² *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, p. 458 n. 3, quoting Agapios, pp. 452 ff., says that Heraclius spent the winter at Āmīda. This was probably that of 628-9, since the Zūqnīn Chronicle (Vatican Syriac MS 162, ed. J.-B. Chabot, *Incerti auctoris chronicon anonymum pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, vol. II [*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 104 = SS 53], Louvain, 1933, p. 150; trans. Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, p. 57) records that 'Heraclius, king of the Romans, began to build the great church of Āmīda' in the year 940 of the Seleucid era, which began on 1 October, 628; Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zūqnūn*, p. 142. M.M. Mango, art. 'Amida', in A. Kazhdan, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Oxford, 1991, p. 77, identifies this church with that of St. Thomas.

⁵³ M. van Berchem, 'Matériaux pour l'épigraphie et l'histoire musulmanes du

This identification has shaky foundations.⁵⁴ First of all, there is only one source which may have identified the patron-saint of the main church at Āmīd as Thomas and that is al-Wāqīdī (748-822—if it is really he!), who, as a non-Christian, *may* have been informed wrongly about such a matter.⁵⁵ Baumstark, who surveys the Syriac sources without finding any record of a church of St. Thomas at Āmīd, warns that the phrase ‘the main church’ can be applied at different times

Diyar-Bekr’, in M. van Berchem and J. Strzygowski, eds, *Amida*, Heidelberg, 1910, p. 51. I am grateful to Marlia Mango for this reference and for the confirmation that this is the only source for her own identification of Heraclius’ church as the church of St. Thomas: M.M. Mango, art. ‘Amida’, in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, p. 77, and G. Bell, *The Churches and Monasteries of the Tur ‘Abdin, with an introduction and notes* by M.M. Mango, London, 1982, pp. 105-9.

⁵⁴ M. van Berchem, *ibid.*: ‘Il est vrai que l’église d’Héraclius fut entièrement restaurée en 770, sous l’épiscopat de Mar Aba. Or, cette indication ne paraît pas s’accorder avec le partage de l’église entre musulmans et chrétiens. [...] la grande Mosquée d’Amid, dont l’origine préislamique ne fait aucun doute, a dû être convertie entièrement en mosquée durant les premiers siècles de l’Islam, comme on va le voir. Bien qu’aucun texte précis ne l’affirme, il est permis d’attribuer cette opération au calife Walīd [cf. Michael the Syrian, tr. Chabot, vol. II, p. 481]. Mais alors, il devient difficile d’identifier la grande Mosquée avec l’église d’Héraclius, qui fut restaurée, comme sanctuaire chrétien, en 770, c’est-à-dire 55 ans après la mort de Walīd.’ Remarkably, van Berchem goes on immediately to say (p. 52, with original emphasis): ‘En résumé, nous admettons provisoirement que l’église d’Héraclius est *peut-être* l’église Saint-Thomas de Wāqīdī; que celle-ci, partagée entre musulmans et chrétiens, est *probablement* la grande Mosquée actuelle, entièrement convertie en mosquée à une époque ultérieure, soit sous le calife Walīd, soit seulement sous les Abbasides, si l’on veut tenir compte de la restauration de l’église d’Héraclius en 770.’

⁵⁵ On top of everything else, this Arabic source is itself more than a little problematical. Van Berchem assesses the value of the text he calls Wāqīdī in *Amida*, p. 13, n. 2. His quotation on p. 51 is a French translation from the German of B.G. Niebuhr and A.D. Mordtmann, eds, *Geschichte der Eroberung von Mesopotamien und Armenien von Mohammed ben Omar el Wakedī*, Hamburg, 1847, p. 108: Von der Hauptkirche der Stadt, die dem heiligen Thomas gewidmet war, nahm er zwei Drittheile zur Dshamea, und blieb zwölf Tage in der Stadt. Geert Jan van Gelder appends the following note: Al-Wāqīdī, *Futūḥ al-Shām* (The Conquest of Syria), 2 vols, Cairo, 1954, has a long passage (vol. II, pp. 103-10) on the conquest of Āmīd. The book is not by al-Wāqīdī but by Pseudo-Wāqīdī, who probably wrote in the time of the Crusades, and who is not exactly a reliable source for the period of the conquests. I could not find anything about ‘Iyād’s taking “two thirds of the main church of the city”. There is a passage in which ‘Iyād says, “We forgive you,” upon which the inhabitants say, “If you forgive us, we shall convert to your religion”. The text continues: “Then most of them became Muslims. The *jizya* was imposed the following year on those who did not turn Muslim, four *mithqals* for every adult. He took their weapons and they brought him half of their possessions (*shaṭr amwālīhim*); he took them away (?*hamalaha*); and he built the well-known church into a mosque (*wa-banā al-bay‘ata al-ma’rūfata jāmi‘an*)’.

(and, we may add, from different denominational perspectives) to different buildings.⁵⁶ Whose church the Arab conquerors will have regarded as the main church of the city is uncertain. Yāqūt says that 'Iyād b. Ghanm 'reached the city [of Āmīd] and its people fought against him. But then they reached a settlement with him about it on condition that they should have their *haykal* (probably 'altar') and its surroundings, and that they should not found any church.'⁵⁷ This must refer to a building other than that initiated by Heraclius, seeing that the latter remained in the hands of the impoverished Christians of the city, as we learn from the *Chronicle of Zūqnīn*, which dates from 769-70:⁵⁸

During this time, the people of Amida executed a major and splendid renovation of their great church which had been built by the God-fearing emperor and believer Heraclius. Because this church had not been renovated since its first construction, they took care about its reconstruction. Since it was dilapidated to the extent that it was almost falling, the abbas Mār Ābay, bishop of the city, the venerable Mār George, the Visitor, and Thomas the Archdeacon, took great diligence over it and spent much money on it. They applied new material in

⁵⁶ A. Baumstark, 'Die altchristlichen Kirchen von Amida', *apud* J. Strzygowski, 'Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte des Mittelalters von Nordmesopotamien, Hellas und dem Abendlande', in van Berchem and Strzygowski, *Amida*, pp. 163-7, p. 165: 'Man muss sich indessen hüten, vorschnell immer an diese Kirche ["the great church" mentioned in British Library Add. MS 1425 of A.D. 463/64, on which see Wright, *Catalogue*, p. 5], sei es auch nur in irgendeinem späteren Neubau, zu denken, wo anderwärts die für sie gebrauchte Bezeichnung wiederkehrt, da die fragliche Bezeichnung eben der jeweils als Kathedrale des Metropoliten benützten Kirche zukam, hier aber ein mannigfacher Wechsel im Laufe langer und sehr stürmischer Jahrhunderte nicht ausgeschlossen ist.' The cathedral churches of the Chalcedonians and of the Syrian Orthodox would presumably both have been referred to by their owners as 'the main church' of the city.

⁵⁷ Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, ed. Farīd 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Jundī, Beirut, 1990, vol. I, p. 76 (though since Yāqūt numbers each entry this reference is less important than no. 40 Āmīd). I owe this reference to Geert Jan van Gelder, who adds the following note: 'Like most Arab authors, Yāqūt contents himself with pronouns instead of substantives, and his sense is not altogether clear. He probably means that according to the terms of this capitulation agreement, the Amidenes retained possession of their *haykal* (which can mean 'a large building' or significantly 'an altar'). Their concession not to found any new churches would be a typical term of such an agreement. It might thus be possible to interpret this reference to mean that the Christians retained the sanctuary of their main church and the Muslims took the rest.'

⁵⁸ See the following note. This is the source to which van Berchem refers (*Amida*, p. 51, n. 6) as 'Denys, trad. Chabot, p. 6', giving the date of this report as 770.

replacement of all the decay that was in it, and made it as glorious as it had been originally.⁵⁹

There is nothing in this record, included in a chronicle finished in the Syrian Orthodox monastery of Zūqnān five years after the restoration, to suggest the chronicler is talking about the sanctuary of a larger building, the rest of which was maintained by the Muslims as their mosque. The praise for Heraclius is remarkable in this Syrian Orthodox Chronicle, but then it is remarkable that the Syrian Orthodox possessed a church built by Heraclius. Could that church have been built for the Syrian Orthodox in the first place? It is, after all, a Syrian Orthodox chronicle which preserves the record of its construction. Perhaps there was a local tradition, stemming from the diplomacy of Heraclius himself, that this emperor's Faith was compatible with that of the Syrian Orthodox. Such a tradition would have been reinforced by the decision of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-1) to repudiate the monothelete doctrine which had been espoused by Heraclius.⁶⁰

It seems possible, then, that Theodūṭē preached from the *bema* of the church built by Heraclius.⁶¹ His biographer calls Āmīd an apostolic see and says that it 'adopted Christianity through the agency

⁵⁹ J.-B. Chabot, ed., *Incerti auctoris chronicon pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, vol I (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 104), Louvain, 1933, p. 258-9, tr. Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān*, p. 228; compare the French tr. by R. Hespel, (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 507), Louvain, 1989, p. 203 (A.G. 1081 = A.D. 769/70): 'En ce temps-là, les Amidéens entreprirent une restauration considérable et admirable de leur grande église, qui avait été bâtie par l'empereur craignant Dieu, le fidèle Héraclius, parce que depuis la première fondation, cette église n'avait pas été restaurée. Et il fit diligence pour sa restauration, parce qu'elle était endommagée et près de tomber.' (I owe the transcription of this reference to David Thomas.) Amir Harrak (personal communication, 13 March 2005) adds the following note: 'The date of the restoration of the church in Sel. 1081 (769-70) was suggested by Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, ii 114; see Chabot, *Chronique*, p. 96, note 1.'

⁶⁰ The Syrian Orthodox patriarch Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē, writing his chronicle shortly before the middle of the ninth century, decided (probably in order to make political capital—a deposit on which the Syrian Orthodox patriarch still draws today!) to portray Heraclius as a tyrant from whom the Syrian Orthodox were glad to be freed by the Arab Conquest. It would be consistent for him to have omitted, invidiously, to mention Heraclius' benefaction to the Syrian Orthodox of Āmīd; and he probably did so, for the two later chronicles in which the bulk of his lost work has been preserved are silent on this point; see Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, Part 2.

⁶¹ *Life of Theodute*, Chapter 60.

of the Apostle Addai and his disciple, Aggai'.⁶² The Greek *Acts of Thaddaeus*, for which I have proposed a date in the reign of Heraclius, relates that the Apostle Thaddaeus led a mission to Āmīd and built a church there.⁶³ Addai (though in reality a second-century missionary) was soon promoted, with his contemporary King Abgar the son of Ma'nu, to the generation of the first Apostles and is identified already by Eusebius with Thaddaeus. This should mean that there existed, in the early sixth century, a church founded by Addai at Āmīd—the church which Heraclius selected, Syrian Orthodox though it was, for a benefaction so generous that it resulted in an entirely new church being built on the foundations of the old.⁶⁴ In crude terms, this could be seen as a bribe to the Syrian Orthodox community, making it harder for them not to enter a union with all the other Christian denominations of the time (and even with the Jews) against paganism. If the *Acts of Thaddaeus* is Heraclian not only in date but also in inspiration, as seems likely, its message in 630 will have been exactly that.⁶⁵

The church of St. Thomas at Āmīd (if that was really the dedication) is likely to have been the possession of the Chalcedonians, who, as the only official representatives of the Eastern Roman Empire, whatever progress Heraclius had made towards a union with the Oriental Churches, will have negotiated the terms of surrender to the Arab conquerors. There is every probability that there were

⁶² *Life of Theodote*, Chapter 59.

⁶³ Greek: *ektisen ekklēsiān*. These two words, besides alluding to the church which Heraclius built at Āmīd, may at the same time be understood as a nod towards the Armenian tradition (otherwise ignored in the Greek text) that Thaddaeus was the founder of their Church. A. Palmer, 'Les Actes de Thaddée', *Apocrypha* 13, 2002, pp. 63-84; id., 'Les Actes de Thaddée', and V. Calzolari, 'Le martyre de Thaddée arménien', in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens* 2, ed. P. Geoltrain and J.-D. Kaestli, Paris, 2005, pp. 643-66, 667-701.

⁶⁴ Had Heraclius built a new church for the Chalcedonian community, he would have missed an opportunity for showing that he did not share the exclusive attitude of that community towards the Oriental dissidents.

⁶⁵ The *Acts of Thaddaeus* contains a number of words which, when translated back into Syriac, give a better sense. For example, the message of Jesus to King Abgar begins with the words: *eirēnē soi* (Peace to you), which, in Syriac, would be *shlom lokh* (a normal way of beginning a letter) and so would bear the complementary meaning 'Perfect health to you', something which is found in all other versions of Jesus' message, but not in the Greek version. If the original *Acts of Thaddaeus* was drafted in Syriac, the most likely author is the Patriarch Sergius, who was of one mind with Heraclius.

many defections from the Chalcedonian congregation of Āmīd to Islam; those who attached themselves to that congregation when (in their eyes) God gave the victory to the Chalcedonian empire will have detached themselves from it as easily when God transferred his favour to the Arabs,⁶⁶ and others will have retreated into Byzantine territory. The few remaining members of the community will have found the sanctuary of the church quite sufficient for their needs. They probably died out in the course of the next fifty years. By the time Theodūṭē became bishop of Āmīd there may have been no Chalcedonian clergy there at all. Certainly Joseph gives no hint, when he speaks of the mosque (*mazgdō* = *masjīd*) of the Arabs, that this adjoined the Chalcedonian church.

However low the fortunes of the Chalcedonian community of Āmīd sank, there is no report of the confiscation of the remaining portion of their church by the Muslims and they may well have held on to it with the tenacity so characteristic of Christians under Islam. Naser-e Khusraw, who visited Āmīd in December 1046, speaks of a church 'near to' the mosque of Āmīd. According to Thackston's translation, the mosque and the church were built of the same stone.⁶⁷ Schefer/van Berchem's translation of the phrase in question draws no comparison between the stone of the church and that of the mosque.⁶⁸ Yet, if Thackston is accurate, Naser-e Khusraw probably meant to say more than that the church was built of black basalt, since that would make it like the whole city, not like the mosque in particular.⁶⁹ On the whole it seems likely that he was talking about a mosque housed in what had formerly been the nave of the church,

⁶⁶ Compare *Sūra* 30, 'The Greeks'. It is claimed that this part of the Qur'ān was revealed before the Hijra (622). It begins as follows (in the 1955 translation of A. J. Arberry, Oxford, 1964, p. 411): 'The Greeks [literally: the Romans] have been vanquished in the nearer part of the land; and after their vanquishing, they shall be the victors in a few years. To God belongs the Command before and after, and on that day the believers shall rejoice in God's help; God helps whomsoever He will; and He is the All-mighty, the All-compassionate.'

⁶⁷ W. M. Thackston, Jr., tr., *Naser-e Khusraw's Book of Travels*, Bibliotheca Persia, 1986, p. 9. I owe this reference to Geert Jan van Gelder.

⁶⁸ C. Schefer, *Sefer Nameh, Relation du voyage de Nassiri Khosrau*, Paris, 1881, pp. 8 and 29: 'Elle [l'église près de la mosquée] est construite aussi en pierres'. Van Berchem, *Amida*, p. 52, was first to notice the possible relevance of this text; he modifies Schefer's translation to render the Persian original more accurately.

⁶⁹ The basalt of Mount Ayshūmō, the extinct volcano between Āmīd and Edessa (see *Life of Theodūṭē*, chapter 88), is the main building material of the city which was formerly known in Turkish as 'Kara [Black] Amid'.

as van Berchem thinks. It is possible that close study of this text in the original will show that the church in question was Chalcedonian, because Naser-e Khusraw appears to speak of a splendid cast-iron gate in front of the sanctuary: the Syrian Orthodox have never closed the royal entrance with a solid gate.⁷⁰ In 1032 the East Roman Empire expanded to include neighbouring Osrhoene; probably the Chalcedonian community of Āmīd, if it still existed, was then subsidised from Edessa and received a new lease of life—and perhaps a new royal gate with which to impress the Muslims.

Conclusion

In the first part of our discussion we read an account of what was perhaps the first brush the inhabitants of Claudia had with a tax-collector after the Arab conquest. No doubt the absence of taxation was what attracted so many displaced persons to live in that remote mountainous area. While the hagiographical account is naturally a distortion of reality, it may be the case that the first attempt to raise taxes for the Arabs from the motley population of this steep mountainside between the monument of the megalomaniac Antiochus Epiphanes on the summit of Nemrut Dağı on one side and the gorge of the Euphrates, where it breaks through the Taurus range, on the other foundered on the rocks of their abject poverty. The region, though mountainous, will have been more prosperous in the last years of Byzantine rule, not least from the traffic on the river, which will have been cut off by the Arab conquest. Arab authority was mediated here by a Christian slave working for a governor from the largely pagan city of Ḥarrān, a man whose own name is actually a Greek honorific, whereas that of his father seems religiously ambivalent. The only Arab thing about the whole event was the new word used for tax, *jizya*, and even that was Syriacised.

⁷⁰ Schefer/van Berchem: ‘Dans cette église, à l’entrée de la rotonde (*tarim*) qui est le lieu d’adoration des chrétiens, j’ai vu une porte de fer grillée, telle que je n’ai vu nulle part la pareille.’ Schefer’s translation of *tarim* is ‘sanctuaire surmonté d’une coupole’. Van Berchem adds (note 3): ‘Le contexte semble indiquer qu’il s’agit du chœur; c’est donc, soit l’espace central et circulaire voûté en coupole [which is incompatible with a church made out of the apse of a former basilica], soit l’abside voûtée en berceau ou en cul-de-four.’

A significant detail: in this account, the word ‘to judge’ is used to mean ‘to torment’.

In the second part we followed Theodūṭē to Āmīd and witnessed his trial in the Arab mosque of that city. Having found that judgment and torture were treated as one and the same thing in the story of the tax-collector, we are only surprised by the limit imposed on the physical violence. If the maltreatment had gone beyond kicking Theodūṭē on the ground, Joseph would surely have let us know: it would have helped to justify the bad end to which this judge came, even though he acquitted Theodūṭē of treasonable friendship with the Romans. If the rigidly Syrian Orthodox Theodūṭē had been suspect to the Arabs, the suspicion of relations with the Romans would surely have lain even more heavily on Chalcedonians in this frontier province. Theodūṭē’s status as client of the governor of Dārā would be out of character, if that governor were a Chalcedonian, as I used to think; in this article I argue that he was a hellenized Syrian Orthodox nobleman.

In the third and final part I argued that ‘Iyād, the Arab commander who received the surrender of Āmīd, dealt with the Chalcedonians of the city, who shared the confession of the Romans, against whom the Arabs fought. Many of the local Chalcedonians immediately went over to Islam. As Muslims, they were able to pray in the converted nave of the church they had prayed in as Christians. The east end was walled off and the few local Chalcedonians who remained faithful to Christianity continued to worship there for centuries. Joseph refers to them just once, as ‘heretics’, in his biography of Theodūṭē, probably because they were so few, and says they accepted the Syrian Orthodox bishop’s authority. It seems they had no bishop of their own. The rest of the church, which had been dedicated to St. Thomas (according to an Arabic source I have only be able to read in a quotation from a nineteenth-century German translation which attributes it to al-Wāqidī), was rededicated to Islamic worship immediately after the conquest. This must be the mosque to which Joseph refers, where Theodūṭē was tried for espionage and found not guilty. Joseph says nothing about there being a church under the same roof.

He does, however, speak about the Syrian Orthodox cathedral church of Āmīd. He also makes Theodūṭē call Addai and Aggai the apostles of Āmīd. It seems likely, therefore, that the Syrian Orthodox cathedral was dedicated to these Apostles. Max von Berchem, fol-

lowed by Marlia Mango, identifies the (Chalcedonian) church of St. Thomas as the cathedral built by the Emperor Heraclius at Āmīd. This must be wrong, because Heraclius's church—not just the east end of that church, but the whole building—was restored by the Syrian Orthodox about 770. St. Addai (identified with Thaddaeus) and St. Thomas were rival claimants to the title of apostle of northern Mesopotamia. The Greek *Acts of Thaddaeus* removes St. Thomas from the history of the mission altogether and seems thereby to side with the Syrian Orthodox against the Chalcedonians. Nevertheless it seems that this book was inspired by the Emperor Heraclius. This may be explained, in the context of the years immediately after 628 as good diplomacy, as may the paradoxical fact (if it be accepted as such) that Heraclius built a cathedral church at Āmīd, not for his own confession but for the opponents of Chalcedon.

DIE ISLAMISCHE ZEIT IN GIWARGIS WARDAS 'ONITA ÜBER DIE KATHOLIKOI DES OSTENS

Martin Tamcke

Von einem Hymnus, der alljährlich zu bestimmten Anlässen im Kirchenjahr gesungen wird, kann man nicht erwarten, eine differenzierte Schau historischer Vorgänge mitgeteilt zu bekommen. Man kann aber erwarten, das Essentielle dessen in Erfahrung zu bringen, was mit diesem Hymnus über die Jahrhunderte als zur Selbstverständigung notwendig erachtet wurde. Eben dies hat sich dann über den gesungenen Text durch die stetige Wiederholung tief in das kollektive Unbewusste der Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen eingegraben. Insofern gibt ein solcher Text eben doch Auskunft über ein historisch konkretes Moment.

Wenden wir uns dem konkreten Hymnus zu, so stellen sich schnell Fragen zu seiner äußeren Zuordnung ein. Er wird dem Giwargis Warda zugeschrieben. Bereits Noeldecke hatte in einer Untersuchung aus dem Jahr 1873 auf ein Problem hinsichtlich dieses Autors aufmerksam gemacht. 'Ueber die Zeit des Sammler's Warda, der manche der Lieder selbst verfaßt hat, kann ich nichts Genaueres angeben.'¹ Die nachfolgenden Untersuchungen und Einleitungen zu Teileditionen zu Giwargis Warda und die einschlägigen Ausführungen in den Geschichten der syrischen Literatur sind ihm in dieser Hinsicht nicht gefolgt. Ohne hier die Argumente der einzelnen Autoren zu diskutieren, seien nur deren Datierungshinweise aufgeführt.

William Wright wies auf den Bericht über die Katastrophe der Jahre 1224-1227 hin und nahm dies als Indiz dafür, dass Giwargis Warda diesem Zeitraum angehört haben müsse.² Aladar Deutsch fügte den Hinweis auf das Datum des Aufbruchs der Mongolen aus

¹ Theodor Noeldecke, 'Zwei syrische Lieder auf die Einnahme Jerusalems durch Saladin', *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 27, 1873, S. 489-510, insb. S. 489.

² William Wright, *A Short History of Syriac Literature*, London 1894 (Nachdruck Amsterdam 1966), S. 283.

Karakorum hinzu, 1235/1236.³ Isak Folkmann folgte ihm hierin.⁴ Hilgenfeld arbeitete als konkrete Daten die Mongoleneinfälle von 1224-1228 und 1239 heraus.⁵ Hilgenfeld folgte Duval in seiner Literaturgeschichte, ähnlich Anton Baumstark (1223/1224 und 1235/1236).⁶ 1300 als Todesjahr erschien Baumstark als eine zu späte Ansetzung des Lebensendes des Dichters. Genau aber dieses Jahr bot als Todesdatum des Giwargis der maronitische Gelehrte Cardahi.⁷ Und im *Kethabona departute* von 1898 heißt es ähnlich: 'Dieser fromme Lehrer Giwargis stammte aus Arbela und lebte im 13. Jahrhundert zur Zeit des Kamis bar Qardahe'.⁸ Kamis bar Qardahe aber weist als jüngerer Zeitgenosse des Abdicho zumindest auf das Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts, wenn nicht gar erst auf den Beginn des 14. Jahrhunderts.⁹

Zusammenfassend bleibt festzustellen: zumeist wird in der Forschungsliteratur die Zeit der mongolischen Invasion in Mesopotamien als die Lebenszeit des Giwargis Warda angesehen, während die orientalischen Autoren ihn einige Jahrzehnte später datieren.

Dass der Sammler des Buches von Kirchenliedern mit dem Namen 'Rose' identisch sein könnte mit dem Autoren einer Vielzahl der darin gesammelten Lieder gilt bislang als wahrscheinlich, auch wenn die historisch jüngeren Hymnen von dieser Zuweisung natürlich auszunehmen sind. Das ästhetische Urteil, das hier in der Dichtkunst des Giwargis Manifestationen des Schönen sah, ließ individuellen

³ Aladar Deutsch, *Édition de trois syriacques de poésies d'après une manuscrit de la Bibliothèque royale de Berlin, Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doctorwürde, eingereicht der hohen philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Bern*, Berlin 1895, S. 6.

⁴ Isak Folkmann, *Ausgewählte nestorianische Gedichte von Giwargis Warda, mit Einleitung, Anmerkungen und deutscher Übersetzung*, Kirchhain 1896.

⁵ Heinrich Hilgenfeld, *Ausgewählte Gesänge des Giwargis Warda von Arbela*, Leipzig 1904; Heinrich Hilgenfeld, 'Giwargis Warda', *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 47, Leipzig 1904, S. 269-72.

⁶ Rubens Duval, *La littérature syriaque*, 3. Aufl., Paris 1907 (Nachdruck Amsterdam 1970), S. 403; Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur mit Ausschluß der christlich-palästinensischen Texte*, Bonn 1922, § 49c, S. 304-6.

⁷ Cardahi, *Liber thesauri de arte poetica Syrorum necnon de eorum poetarum votis et carminibus*, Rom 1875, S. 51, s. auch: Hilgenfeld, *Ausgewählte Gesänge*, S. 1-2.

⁸ *Kethabona departute*, Urmia 1898, s. den syrischen Text mit dt. Übersetzung von Hilgenfeld, *Ausgewählte Gesänge*, S. 2-3.

⁹ Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, § 52a, S. 321-22; Sebastian Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature*, Kottayam 1997, S. 80-81 (23 sind ediert); David Bundy, 'Interpreter of the Acts of God and Humans: George Warda, Historian and Theologian of the 13th Century', *The Harp* X,3, 1997, S. 19-32.

Namen und den Namen des Buches ohnehin nahe aneinander rücken. 'Wegen der Schönheit seiner Gesänge wurde dieser Giwargis die Rose genannt; denn wie die Rose zum Schmucke der Gärten und Parke gereicht, so schmückte auch er die Kirche mit den Liedern, welche er dichtete'.¹⁰ Diese Gesänge werden im Gottesdienst gebraucht. Einige werden sofort nach der Verlesung des Evangeliums gesungen, andere bei der Kommunion.¹¹ Nur 23 seiner 150 Lieder sind zur Zeit ediert.¹²

Die 'Onita über die Katholikai des Ostens ist natürlich 'am Gedenktag der Väter, der östlichen Katholikai, der orthodoxen Patriarchen, der geisterfüllten Theologen, die wohlbekannt sind, und siegreich waren, und die Krone erhalten haben im Kampf der Arbeit der Tugend' zu singen, wie der Hymnus gleich zu Beginn betont.¹³

Und dass wir hier einbezogen werden in eine künstlerisch gestaltete Schau von Geschichte, wird bereits in der ersten generellen Aussage zu den Katholikai deutlich: 'Für die Wahrheit kämpften sie. Sie schlugen alle Häresien, die vom Geist des Irrtums erfüllt waren, und trügerische Dogmen schmähten sie, die der Böse in der heiligen Kirche ausgesät hatte'. Natürlich 'pflanzten' diese 'Jesus Liebenden' dabei 'die Wahrheit auf'. Und poetisch werden die Singenden emporgehoben in den Strom des Göttlichen über den historisch realen Menschen, wenn Giwargis von den Katholikai meint aussagen

¹⁰ *Kithabona departute*, Urmia 1899, s. den Text bei Hilgenfeld, *Ausgewählte Gesänge*, S. 2f (syrischer Text) und S. 3 (dt. Übersetzung).

¹¹ George Percy Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, II, London 1852 (Nachdruck London 1987), S. 25.

¹² 23 ist die Nummerierung nach Brock, *A Brief Outline*, S. 74. Einen neueren Datierungsvorschlag macht Anton Pritula: 1. Hälfte des 13. Jahrhunderts. Er glaubt, dass die Hymnen dann im 13. oder in der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts in Gebrauch gekommen seien. Vgl. Anton Pritula, 'An autobiographic hymn by Givargis Warda', in Martin Tamcke, *Syriaca II, Beiträge zum 3. deutschen Syrologen-Symposium in Vierzehnheiligen 2002*, (Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 33), Münster 2004, S. 229-41. Zum Gesamttext mit ausführlicherer Diskussion des Forschungsstandes—ausgenommen den Untersuchungen zur Anthropologie—vgl. Martin Tamcke, 'Bemerkungen zu Giwargis Wardas 'Onita über die Katholikai des Ostens', in: Tamcke, *Syriaca II*, S. 203-27.

¹³ Ms. or. quart. 1168 (in Assfalgs Zeit UB Tübingen, ehem. PrSB, jetzt in Berlin), Julius Assfalg, *Syrische Handschriften, Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland V*, Wiesbaden 1963, 36 (Nr. 196). Zu Informationen über die Menschen, die die Handschrift geschrieben und verkauft haben, s. Rudolf Macuch, *Geschichte der spät- und neu-syrischen Literatur*, Berlin/New York 1976, S. 260-62, 279, über die Person, die das Namensregister schrieb s. *Geschichte*, S. 50, 76, 140, 173, 261, 166, 181. Alle Zitate in: Ms. or. quart. 1168.

zu können, dass sie ‘mit dem Wasser des Lebens trunken gemacht’ und den ‘Geist in ihren Verstand’ hätten ‘fließen lassen’. Da ist der Hörer des Gesanges mit den Singenden in der Schau der himmlischen Kirche oder—wie Giwargis sagt—der ‘oberen Kirche’, obwohl er doch mit der ‘unteren’, also der irdischen, nur diesen Lobpreis singen kann in einer Sicht, aus dem der Lobpreis der Kirchen ‘aus dem Munde der Jungen und der Kinder’ erwächst.

Tatsächlich umfasst der Hymnus für die islamische Zeit die gesamte Breite der Katholikoi von ‘Ischo’jahb II. von Gdala (628-646) bis zu Timotheos II. (1318-1332).

Mit dem zuletzt besungenen Katholikos nun liegt der Hymnus schon deutlich nach den Datierungsversuchen der bisherigen Forschungsliteratur. Er liegt damit zugleich nahe bei den Datierungen seitens der orientalischen Quellen. Dies könnte ein Hinweis für die Datierungsfrage sein, es kann aber auch schlicht bedeuten, dass der Hymnus dem Giwargis abzusprechen wäre und eine spätere Zufügung unter seinem Namen darstellt. Um nicht vorschnelle Rückschlüsse zur Verfasserfrage zu ziehen, möchte ich vorerst die traditionelle Zuschreibung des Liedes an Giwargis Warda belassen und nur schon für die noch ausstehende Edition seiner Lieder das Problem erneut aufgeworfen haben.

Die Betrachtung allein der islamischen Zeit im Hymnus ist natürlich künstlich und wird der Gesamtkomposition nicht wirklich gerecht. Sie ist nur pragmatisch gerechtfertigt im Sinne der Bescheidung des Untersuchungsgegenstandes. Diese Bescheidung aber wird immer wieder zu überschreiten sein auf das Gesamte hin, denn was immer auch zur Datierung des Giwargis gesagt werden mag, dieser Hymnus weist uns mit seiner Entstehung zu Beginn des 14. Jahrhunderts selbstverständlich hinein in eine bereits islamisch dominierte Umwelt, in einen zu jener Zeit erstarkten Prozess der Islamisierung.

Schauen wir zunächst auf die Liste der Patriarchen der islamischen Zeit und was Giwargis zu den jeweiligen Patriarchen erwähnenswert erschien.

Zunächst sind die kurzen Erläuterungen zu den meisten Katholikoi ernüchternd wenig aussagefähig für unsere Fragestellung. Wenn etwa der Katholikos Pethion (731-740) nur die Erläuterung ‘ein berühmter Mann’ erhält oder der Katholikos Henanicho II. (775-780) nur die Auszeichnung ‘der Würdige’ und Giwargis II. (828-831) nur als der ‘Fleißige’ oder ‘Eifrige’ bezeichnet wird. Näherhin können zwar solche Aussagen auf dem Hintergrund der jeweils konkreten histori-

schen Umstände als eine etwa zurechtrückende positive Würdigung erscheinen, zumeist aber wird der betreffende Katholikos so nur in die 'obere' Kirche eingeholt und bleibt der konkreten Aussage zu der Person ledig.

Aber natürlich ist es nicht nebensächlich, wenn der Katholikos 'Ischo'jahb II. (628-646) als einzige Erläuterung zu seiner Person seine ethnische Zugehörigkeit hinzugefügt bekommt.

Wären schon nicht die Umstände und Aktionen seines Lebens als theologischer Lehrer erwähnenswert gewesen, so doch vielleicht in irgendeiner symbolischen Weise etwa die als kirchlicher Hierarch.¹⁴ Er hatte sich bereits früh in kontroverstheologischen Fragen positioniert, wenn er mit dreihundert anderen Studierenden die Hochschule von Nisibis aus Protest gegen die neochalcedonischen Lehren eines Henana verließ, war theologischer Lehrer in Balad gewesen und— beachtenswert genug!—trotz seiner Verheiratung Bischof geworden. Er war es auch, der zu Kaiser Herakleios nach Aleppo zog und dort ein vielen seiner Theologen und Kirchenmänner zu weitgehend sich dem Chalcedonense näherndes Bekenntnis ablegte, um zur kultischen Gemeinschaft mit den Griechen zugelassen zu werden. Und er war der erste, der nach langer Vakanz nach dem Tod des persischen Großkönigs Chosrau II. wieder als Katholikos hatte inthronisiert werden können. Aber weder diese Stationen vor der arabischen Eroberung noch die ihm nach der Eroberung zugeschriebenen Akte findet Giwargis bemerkenswert. Kein Hinweis darauf, dass er sich an Mohammed gewandt habe, um einen Schutzbrief von ihm für die Gläubigen seiner Kirche zu erlangen oder dass er einen Schutzbrief durch Omar ausgestellt bekommen habe. So bleibt die Dimension des Beginns des Schutzvertrages (Dhimma) hier ganz aus dem Blick, obwohl diesem Patriarchen späterhin die Erlangung des ersten Schutzbriefes für die ostsyrische Kirche zugeschrieben wird.¹⁵ Was aber bleibt im Hymnus stehen? Was kommemorierten

¹⁴ Über 'Ischo'jahb II.: Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, § 30a, S. 195-96. Louis R. Sako, *Lettre christologique du Patriarche Syro-Orientale Iso'yahb II. Gdala (628-646)*, Rom 1983, S. 63-81; Dietmar W. Winkler, *Ostsyrisches Christentum, Untersuchungen zur Christologie, Ekklesiologie und zu den ökumenischen Beziehungen der Assyrischen Kirche des Ostens*, (Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 26), Münster 2003, S. 100-103.

¹⁵ S. Harald Suermann, *Christen und Moslems, Christliche Texte bezüglich des Islams im syro-mesopotamischen Raum zur Zeit der ersten Kalifen und der Omayyaden-Dynastie*, Diplomarbeit Bonn 1981, S. 24-26 (die spätere Veröffentlichung eines Teiles als Aufsatz beseitigt einige der gravierendsten Fehler und den gesamten zweiten Teil der Arbeit:

die Gläubigen im Gedenken an jenen Mann, der die Kirche in den Zeiten der arabischen Eroberung leitete? Giwargis lässt sie nichts anderes über die Jahrhunderte hinweg zu ihm sich einprägen als den kleinen Umstand seiner Abstammung. Der Katholikos war gebürtig aus 'Bet 'Arbaje'. Und eben dies qualifizierte ihn nun in der Liste der Katholikoi: 'Mar 'Ischo'jahb, der Araber'. Darin hielten die Gläubigen fest an ihrer Verwurzelung in der arabischen Welt. Darin stellten sie sich aber auch zu denen, die über sie herrschten und den Siegeszug des Islams über die Welt des Vorderen Orients begründeten. 'Wir sind auch zugehörig zur Welt der Araber', könnte das für spätere Rezipienten bedeutet haben, die dabei nichts weiter taten als die überlieferte ethnische Zugehörigkeit des gefeierten Katholikos zu benennen. Zweifellos ein gelungener Griff des Dichters. Prägnanz der Kürze mit nachhaltiger Wirkung über die Jahrhunderte hin. Die geographische Bezeichnung der Region ist alt und traditionell. Zu einer Wahrnehmung der zeitgenössischen Araber liefert sie gerade nichts, was spezifisch ausgewertet werden könnte.

Nicht immer bedeutet Kürze Prägnanz, schon gar nicht im historischen Sinn. Manches ist im Aussagegehalt zu unspezifisch und kann bei der möglichen Identifizierung am historisch Bekannten nur vage zugeordnet werden.

Die Zeit des Katholikos Giwargis I. (661-680) beispielsweise kennzeichnete einerseits dessen Bemühungen um Ausgleich mit seinen schismatischen Gegnern, andererseits sein Bemühen um Erhalt der vom Abfall zum Islam bedrohten christlichen Bevölkerung besonders auf der arabischen Halbinsel.¹⁶ Warum der Dichter hier nur von Giwargis bemerkenswert findet, dass er sich darauf vorbereitet habe, dass 'er seinen Herrn sähe und getröstet wurde' ist nicht eindeutig festzustellen. Aber ein Zusammenhang zu dem Selbstverständnis des die Erosion seiner Herde bekämpfenden Katholikos wäre eine vorsichtig zu erwägende Möglichkeit. Empfund der sich doch als in der 'schweren Zeit des Weltendes' vom Los der Kirchenleitung betroffen.

Harald Suermann, 'Orientalische Christen und der Islam, Christliche Texte aus der Zeit von 632-750', *Zeitschrift für Missions- und Religionswissenschaft* 67, Münster 1983, S. 120-135).

¹⁶ Über Giwargis: Anton Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, § 32e, S. 208-209; Oscar Braun, *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, Wien 1900 (Nachdruck Amsterdam 1975), S. 331-71.

Auch die bloßen Mitteilungen zur Erwählung der Katholikoi Maremmeh (646-650) und 'Ischo'jahb III. (650-658) erlauben keine weiteren Rückschlüsse zur Sicht ihrer Zeit. Gleiches gilt von der in der Kürze seiner Regierungszeit zum Licht auf dem Leuchter emporgesetzten Katholikos Johannan I. Bar Marta (680-683). Das betrübliche Faktum der Kürze allein scheint dem Dichter dessen Leuchtkraft auszumachen.

Zuweilen aber wird Giwargis mittelsamer. Das Schisma zur Zeit des Katholikos Henanisch I. (685-700) findet ausdrücklich Erwähnung.¹⁷ Für das Interesse des Giwargis, die Katholikoi sozusagen als Glieder der oberen Kirche zu erweisen, ein nicht einfach der Memorierung anzubefehlender Umstand. Giwargis löst das Problem zunächst dadurch, dass er klar Stellung bezieht und damit deutlich macht, dass nur Henanisch I. und nicht sein Widersacher Johannan der Aussätzige (692-693) als Katholikos zu werten sei. Das Schisma gehört in die Zeit, in der die Oberhäupter der Kirche des Ostens fast unausweichlich aufgrund ihrer politisch bedeutsamen Stellung in die Auseinandersetzungen innerhalb des Kaliphats der Omajaden gerieten. In den verworrenen Machtkämpfen zwischen den omajadischen Kaliphen, den Führern der Schia und des zeitweilig über Mekka herrschenden 'Abdallah und seines Bruders Mus'ab musste das Patriarchat politisch lavieren und konnte sich nicht mehr einfach—wie noch in der frühesten Zeit—politisch neutral verhalten. Nach dem Tod Hussains, des Sohns von Ali, hatten bekanntlich Teile Mesopotamiens 'Abdallahs Herrschaft anerkannt. Doch musste er vor der militärischen Rückeroberung durch Yazid I. nach Arabien ausweichen. Der Führer der Schia nun, Mukhtar, ermordete 686 den omajadischen Gouverneur 'Obaidullah und erlangte die Herrschaft in Mesopotamien im Abwehrkampf gegen den Omajaden-Kaliphen 'Abd-al-Malik und den Herrscher über Arabien, 'Abdallah. Doch vermochte nun 'Abdallahs Bruder Mus'ab Mukhtar zu besiegen und

¹⁷ Über Henanisch I.: Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur*, § 32f, S. 209. Zum historischen Hintergrund: Claude Cahen, *Der Islam. I: Vom Ursprung bis zu den Anfängen des Osmanenreiches*, bearbeitet von Gerhard Endreß, Frankfurt 2003; Rudolf Sellheim, *Der zweite Bürgerkrieg im Islam (680-692): das Ende der mekkanisch-medinensischen Vorherrschaft*, Wiesbaden 1970; Gernot Rotter, *Die Umayyaden und der zweite Bürgerkrieg (680 bis 692)*, (Abhandlungen zur Kunde des Morgenlandes 45,3), Wiesbaden 1983.

Mesopotamien seinem Herrschaftsbereich einzuverleiben. Erst 692 erschien der Kaliph ‘Abd-al-Malik selbst. Seine Invasion in Mesopotamien gelang vollständig, ein von ihm ausgesandtes Heer eroberte Mekka, wo ‘Abd-al-Maliks Kontrahent sodann ermordet wurde. In dieses politische Weltgeschehen hinein gehörten nun die Vorgänge beim Schisma zwischen Henanicho und Johannan.

Der omajjadische General ‘Abd-ul Rahman, Bruder des ermordeten omahadischen Gouverneurs in Mesopotamien, bot dem Aspiranten auf den Patriarchenthron der Kirche des Ostens, Johannan dem Aussätzigen, dem Metropolit von Nisibis, als Gegenleistung für militärische Hilfe den Patriarchenstuhl an.¹⁸ Der war aber mit dem als Exegeten und Theologen berühmten Henanicho I. besetzt, der seinerseits sich mit den realen Machthabern in Mesopotamien,

¹⁸ Johannes bar Penkaye (spätes 7. Jh.) gibt mehr Details in seiner Weltgeschichte, in der über die Geschichte der Kirche während der arabischen Eroberungen und die letzten Jahrzehnte des 7. Jahrhunderts spricht, vgl. Alphonse Mingana, *Sources Syriacques I*, Leipzig 1907, S. 1-197. Dieses Kapitel von Johannes bar Penkayes Geschichte ist für diese Periode ‘a rare contemporary local source’ (Brock, *A Brief Outline*, S. 56). ‘Abd-ul Rahman ‘took with him John, who was at that time Bishop of Nisibis. For long George, Patriarch of the Church of Christ, had passed into glory, and the Patriarchal See had been occupied by Mar Henanisho‘ the Expositor. Therefore this son of Ziyad (‘Abd-ul Rahman) had promised John: “If you come with me, I shall depose Mar Henanisho‘ and establish you in his place in the patriarchate”. So John believed for long that the victory would be his’, Mingana, *Sources Syriacques*, S. 184, William G. Young, *Patriarch, Shah and Caliph*, Rawalpindi 1974, S. 103.

Vgl. zum Autoren auch: Sebastian Brock, ‘North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century, Book XV of John Bar Penkaye’s *Ris Melle*’, (Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 9), Festschrift M. Kister, 1987, S. 51-75; Gerrit J. Reinink, ‘*Paidiaia: God’s Design in World History According to the East Syrian Monk John Bar Penkaye*’, in: Eric Kooper, Hrsg., *The Medieval Chronicle II: proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle*, Driebergen/Utrecht, 16-21 July 1999, Amsterdam 2002, S. 191-98; Harald Suermann, ‘Das arabische Reich in der Weltgeschichte des Johannan bar Penkaje’, in: *Nubia et Oriens Christianus*, Festschrift C. Detlef G. Müller, Köln 1988, S. 59-71; Peter Bruns, ‘Von Adam und Eva bis Mohammed—Beobachtungen zur syrischen Chronik des Joannes bar Penkaye’, *Oriens Christianus* 87, 2003, S. 47-64; Hubert Kaufhold, ‘Anmerkungen zur Textüberlieferung der Chronik des Johannes bar Penkaye’, *Oriens Christianus* 87, 2003, S. 65-79; A. Scher, ‘Notice sur la vie et les oeuvres de Yohannan bar Penkaye’, *Journal Asiatique* 10/10, 1907, S. 162-163, 165; M. Albert, ‘Une Centurie de Mar Jean bar Penkaye’, *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont, Contributions à l’étude des christianismes orientaux*, Cahiers d’Orientalisme XX, 1988, S. 143-51; Anton Baumstark, ‘Eine syrische Weltgeschichte des siebten Jahrhunderts’, *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 15, 1901, S. 273-80.

Mukhtar und dem Bruder 'Abdallahs, Mus'ab, arrangierte. Henanischo verdankte seine Einsetzung 685/86 wahrscheinlich dem Führer der Schia, Mukhtar.¹⁹ Da zunächst die Omajaden besiegt wurden, hatte Johannan Mühe, sein Leben zu retten.²⁰ Doch das Blatt wendete sich. Wenn die Quellen denn zutreffend sind, so wurde Henanischo bereits ein Jahr vor dem vollständigen Sieg des Kaliphen 'Abd-al-Malik 692 im Jahr 691 beim Sohn des Kaliphen, Bishr, von Johannan verklagt. Inhalt der Anklage des Widersachers um das Patriarchenamt war die Allianz, die Henanischo mit Mukhtar bzw. Mus'ab eingegangen war. Glaubt man der Chronik des Mari ibn Sulaiman, so gab Johannan dem Kaliphensohn Bishr ausreichend Bestechungsgeld, um seiner Anschuldigung Nachdruck zu verleihen, dass Henanischo von den Opponenten des Kaliphen in sein Amt eingesetzt worden sei.²¹ Gewaltsam nahm daraufhin der Sohn des Kaliphen Mitra, Pallium und Gewand des Patriarchen an sich und vertrieb Henanischo aus den für seine Kirche wichtigen Städten. Johannan wurde nun an seiner Stelle installiert. Doch er starb ohne Nachfolger 22 Monate später. Henanischo blieb nichtsdestotrotz in seinem Exil im Jonas-Kloster bei Ninive/Mosul. Seine Autorität war ohnehin in der Adiabene, in Nisibis und Bet Garmai, also den zentralen Gebieten der Kirche, unangefochten geblieben. Er starb in diesem Kloster im Jahr 700 an der Pest und der omajadische Gouverneur erlaubte aufgrund der politischen Verunsicherung hinsichtlich der Stellung des Patriarchen und seiner Kirche im Kräftespiel des Kaliphats für 14 Jahre keine Neuwahl eines Patriarchen.

Giwargis nun lobt zunächst das Wissen des gebildeten Henanischo und nennt ihn einen 'mit allem Wissen Erfüllten', was immerhin Anhalt findet an der umfangreichen literarischen Hinterlassenschaft des Patriarchen, die von einem großen Korpus seiner Rechtsentscheidungen bis zu einem Kommentar auf die Evangelien des Kirchenjahres, von Homilien, Leichenreden, Briefen, Lehrgedichten, einem Kommentar zu Aristoteles' Analytika bis zu einem Gedicht auf seinen verehrten Lehrer, den Katholikos-Patriarchen 'Isho'jahb III. reicht. Johannan kommt zwar ausdrücklich, aber nur als Usurpator in den Blick. Er habe Henanischo vertrieben. Sogleich lenkt Giwargis

¹⁹ So Young, *Patriarch, Shah and Caliph*, S. 103, 160 ('possibly by Mukhtar').

²⁰ Nach Johannes bar Penkaye, Mingana, *Sources Syriacques*, S. 185 ('He who had intrigued for the Patriarchate had difficulty in saving his own cloak!').

²¹ Young, *Patriarch, Shah and Caliph*, S. 103, 160.

den Blick zurück auf die geistige Potenz des vertriebenen Patriarchen, der auf allen Gebieten anerkannt worden sei. Mit keinem Wort werden in diesem Fall die muslimischen Machthaber und Kaliphen genannt. Für den gesamten kirchenpolitischen Vorgang bleibt nur der kurze und konzentrierte Hinweis auf die Vertreibung des Henanischos durch Johannan. Demgegenüber wird diese Wunde im Blick auf die Autorität des Kirchenoberhauptes durch die dreifache Versicherung seiner geistigen Bedeutsamkeit, seines Rufes und seiner Akzeptanz ausgeglichen. Deren bedurfte es aber wohl, um dem Makel des Schismas die Schärfe zu nehmen.

Der Konflikt zwischen Henanischos und Johannan kann als geradezu repräsentativ gelten. Rivalitäten schufen in den Gemeinden chronisch wiederkehrende Abspaltungstendenzen. Dass hier die Bestechungsgelder eine ebenso entscheidende Rolle spielen wie falsche Anschuldigungen und die Anpassung an die politische Herrschaft, nicht nur in Zeiten politischer Instabilität eine ambivalente Angelegenheit, ist offensichtlich. Die Phänomene sind nicht nur bei den Angehörigen der Kirche des Ostens in dieser Zeit zu beobachten. Die in der Interessengemeinschaft mit den muslimischen Herrschern Privilegierten gründeten ihre Ämteransprüche oft auf der Bestechlichkeit der Herrschenden.

Im Gegensatz dazu wuchs ein erstaunlicher Zusammenhalt der Gläubigen. Und der gründete in deren ekklesialem Selbstverständnis, in dem die Individuen durch das Gefühl kollektiver Verantwortung verbunden waren. Und eben hieraus speist sich die Behandlung des Schismas im Hymnus des Giwargis. Wie er die theologische Grundausrichtung seiner Kirche gleich zu Beginn repräsentativ im Namen des heiligen Nestorius einfiel, so repräsentierte hier für ihn Henanischos die Legitimität und die Dauer des Amtes, während Johannan nur als Quelle eines gewaltsamen und widerrechtlichen Aktes in den Blick kommt. Und während Johannan auf einen konkreten historischen Vorgang begrenzt wird, wird Henanischos in seiner Bedeutung geradezu entgrenzt: sein Ruhm habe sich in den vier Himmelsrichtungen verbreitet, kurzum: überallhin. Er war auf allen Gebieten anerkannt und—diese Qualität erhob ihn zu denen, die stolz ob ihres Besitzes zu Lehrmeistern der Muslime wurden—er war eben 'ein mit allem Wissen Erfüllter'. Der so in die obere Kirche Eingereihte war nicht mehr anzufechten von jenem, der unten seine politischen Ränke schmiedete. Das ist sicher keine hinlängliche Beschreibung der historischen Fakten zu diesem Schisma, aber es ist

eine Grundaussage kirchengeschichtlichen Selbstverständnisses, das um die eigene Verwundbarkeit von innen weiß und gerade deshalb sich dem zu widersetzen verstand, was ansonsten wohl tatsächlich mittels ihrer usurpierten Geschichte zum Auslöschen in die Nicht-Existenz geführt haben würde. Dieser Widerstand aber war nicht anders hervorgerufen als durch die Enthobenheit der Rechtgläubigen über die Scham ob der erniedrigenden Realitäten der Geschichte.

Zur Darstellung der weiteren Geschichte der Katholikai nach 700 seien hier nur noch einzelne Aspekte hervorgehoben.

Angesichts des zu dem Schisma zwischen Henanisko I. und Johannan des Aussätzigen Gesagten, kann verwundern, dass die Notiz zum Katholikos Sargis I. (860-872), der zuvor Bischof von Nisibis war, keinen Zweifel daran lässt, dass dieser Hierarch seine Amtseinsetzung dem Kaliphen zu verdanken hatte. So lässt Giwargis die Gläubigen von Sargis singen, dass ihn 'der arabische König ehrte und als Oberhaupt der Kirche einsetzte'.

Dass Bagdad zur Zeit des Katholikos Makika II. (1257-1265) 'geplündert' wurde, ist natürlich ein Umstand, den Giwargis gesondert die Gläubigen singend commemorieren lässt.

Gemeint ist damit die Eroberung Bagdads 1258 durch Hülägü, die zugleich den Herrschaftswechsel von den Arabern zu den Mongolen bedeutete. Seit der Zeit des Katholikos Timotheos I. (780-823, die lange Regierungszeit dieses Katholikos kommentierte Giwargis mit den Worten, dass er lange Zeit gelebt habe, während er ihm als Eigenschaft die Bezeichnung 'der Demütige' zuschrieb) residierten die Katholikai der Kirche des Ostens in Bagdad als dem neuen Zentrum der Macht. Makika II., der den Palast des Kaliphen in Bagdad nun als seine Residenz seitens der Mongolen zugewiesen bekam, wäre historisch mit dem neuen Glanz für seine Kirche unter der mongolischen Herrschaft anzuführen gewesen. Dass es aber bei dem Hinweis auf die Plünderung bleibt und daneben Makika nur seiner persönlichen Tugenden wegen geehrt wird als 'fleißig' und 'demütig', zeugt schon davon, dass der vorgebliche Giwargis dies Ereignis aus einer Perspektive besingt, in der die Mongolen auf ihrem Vormarsch am 3. September 1260 bereits von den ägyptischen Mamluken besiegt worden waren. Zu der Zeit ständigen Wechsels zwischen Ausplünderung und Privilegierung seitens der Mongolen können die entsprechenden Lieder unter dem Namen des Giwargis Warda reichlich Auskunft geben. Schon zum Mongolensturm der

Jahre 1223/4 bis 1227/8—noch unter arabischer Herrschaft—war
 trostlos, was der Dichter in seinen Liedern zu berichten hatte:

Die Behörden sagten zu uns: gebt uns!
 Die Könige sagten: gebt uns noch mehr!
 Und als sie alles erhielten, was wir hatten,
 Verlangten sie von uns auch, was wir nicht hatten.
 Das Schwert in allen Landschaften,
 der Säbel in allen Städten
 Und Kummer in allen Herzen,
 Und die Sünde nimmt zu und nicht ab.²²

Obwohl der politische Wechsel sich zur Zeit Makikas II. vollzogen
 hatte, würdigt Giwargis erst Yahballaha III. (1281-1317) als den
 Bringer der Wendung zum Frieden. Von Yahballaha ruft er den
 Singenden in Erinnerung, dass der ein Türke war. Er habe nach
 dem Gefallen des lebendigen Geistes 'dem christlichen Volk Ruhe'
 gegeben.

Der letzte namentlich erwähnte Katholikos ist Timotheos II.
 (1318-1332). Er ist als noch in jüngster Zeit verstorben erkennbar.
 Wieso er als mit den Wundmalen Christi ausgezeichnet beschrieben
 wird, bleibt ebenso undeutlich wie seine allgemeine Einreihung in
 die 'obere Kirche', in der der Geist ihn mit den Gerechten ruhen
 lassen möge. Übrigens überschreitet Giwargis hier die Grenze zu
 den Lebenden, insofern er für die Gläubigen sich und sie mit dem
 Katholikos der Ruhe anbefiehlt. Obwohl das alles sehr vage Aus-
 sagen sind, ist die noch lebendige Erinnerung an den verstorbenen
 Katholikos erkennbar.

Der Hymnus wurde also nach 1332 geschrieben, frühestens zur
 Zeit des Katholikos Denha II. (1332-1364). Daher ist stets mit ins
 Kalkül zu ziehen, dass auch Aussagen zur vorislamischen Zeit mit
 Konnotationen der späteren Zeit versehen sein können. Das betrifft
 etwa die Herausstellung der Heilkunst, die zur Zeit der muslimischen
 Herrschaft nicht weniger bedeutungsvoll war als zu der der sassani-
 dischen. Das gilt natürlich besonders von der steten Betonung der
 Wissenschaftspflege seitens der Katholikoi, die doch in eben dem 14.
 Jahrhundert, in dem der Hymnus entstand, längst im Niedergang
 begriffen war.

²² Hilgenfeld, *Ausgewählte Gesänge*, S. 43 (55 und 56 von 'Ein anderes Lied über
 die Züchtigungen, welche entstanden in den Jahren 1535-39, von demselben Lehrer
 Giwargis Warda').

Der Hymnus kündigt von der steten Verarbeitung der Geschichte im Angesicht der je gegenwärtigen Bedingungen. Auf das Fortschreiten der Islamisierung wurde nicht einfach mit Resignation reagiert, sondern mit einer Fülle sich an der Geschichte festmachenden Verstehenshilfen, die eine Fortexistenz in der überlieferten Identität gestatteten und davor bewahrten, zu einer geschichtslosen Existenz herabzusinken. Bedenkt man, dass der Hymnus selbst die Erfahrung des Scheiterns der abendländischen Kreuzzugsbemühungen schon hinter sich hatte, also höchstens noch von einer zur Utopie geratenen potentiellen Veränderung der Herrschaftsverhältnisse ausgehen konnte, so führt kein Weg umhin, in der in den abschließenden Bitten enthaltenen Erwähnung der 'Könige' eben auch die muslimische Herrschaft mitgemeint zu wissen. 'Dein Kreuz möge die Bischöfe an jedem Ort stützen und stärken und durch das Herz der Könige deinem Volk, das dich anschaut, Schonung geben'. Das Handeln der kirchlichen Hierarchen als Kreuzesnachfolge einerseits, die Hoffnung auf Schonung des Christenvolkes durch die Herzen der Herrscher andererseits, künden zwar von der Bedingungen einer ausgelieferten Existenz, aber diese Existenz ist zugleich nur in Korrespondenz zum Glaubensgrund zu verstehen und erfährt ihre Existenzerhellung im Gebet, nicht in der Analyse der politisch womöglich niederschmetternden äußeren Lebensbedingungen.

Was Giwargis Warda hingegen hier den Sängern seines Liedes einprägt, ist komplexer: Da solidarisieren sich die Christen etwa über die Zugehörigkeit eines Teiles von ihnen zu den Arabern, später auch zu den Türken. Da wird die Rechtmäßigkeit aus den 'christlichen' Qualitäten eines Katholikos hergeleitet und die Unrechtmäßigkeit seines Kontrahenten auf deren Hintergrund schlicht festgestellt. Erhabene Enthobenheit dispensiert den Gedanken an das Zusammenspiel mit den muslimischen Machthabern. Dieses Zusammenspiel konnte nur dort Erwähnung finden, wo nicht die beschämende Geschichte der eigenen Intrigen zu besingen war, sondern das schlichte Faktum des herrscherlichen Eingreifens in das Gefüge der Kirche des Ostens. Dahin gehörte auch die Hoffnung auf ein für ihre christlichen Untertanen schlagendes Herz der muslimischen Herrscher, deren Herrschaft somit im Hymnus festgestellt wird im tieferen Kontext des Gebets, über das an der Haltung der Herrscher sozusagen mitgewirkt wird.

Konstitutiv für die Sicht der islamischen Zeit ist die Kommemoration mit Gebet und verherrlichendem Lobpreis. Sie verbindet die

Gläubigen der ‘unteren Kirche’ mit dem anhaltenden Gebet der verstorbenen und in die ‘obere Kirche’ entrückten Hierarchen. Wo die ersten Jahrzehnte der islamischen Zeit erkennbarer in den Blick kommen, da immer aus dieser Perspektive, der Perspektive, die sozusagen die irdischen Vorgänge vom Himmel aus ortet und erfasst.

POLITICAL POWER AND RIGHT RELIGION IN THE
EAST SYRIAN DISPUTATION BETWEEN A MONK
OF BĒT ḤĀLĒ AND AN ARAB NOTABLE

Gerrit J. Reinink

The epigraphic coins that were the result of the coinage reform of the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (685-705 AD) proclaimed a strong politico-religious message. One of the oldest known post-reform dirhams from South Iraq was struck in Kashkar in the year 79 AH (698/9 AD), another in the same year in Kufa.¹ Their obverse field has: ‘There is no god but God alone. He has no partner.’ The reverse field has the text of Qur’an 112, *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*: ‘God is One, God is the Everlasting. He does not beget nor is He begotten, and there is none equal to Him.’ The reverse margin offers an approximation to Qur’an 9.33 (cf. 61.9): ‘Muḥammad is the messenger of God whom he sent with guidance and the religion of truth in order to make it victorious over all religions, even though the polytheists detest [it].’²

For the first time since the Arab-Islamic conquests, the Arab rulers, namely, the Umayyad authorities and pro-Umayyad circles, now began officially and by various means to propagate and promote the claim of Islam to be the true religion, succeeding Christianity and superior to it. As has recently been emphasized by Larry Conrad, the proclamation of Islam through inscriptions in and on buildings³ and

¹ M.G. Klat, *Catalogue of the Post-Reform Dirhams*, London, 2002, pp. 201-2 (nos 537 and 540). Cf. M.G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, Princeton, 1984, pp. 47-51.

² Klat, *Catalogue*, p. 11. For the analogous texts on the post-reform dinars, which were struck from 77 AH (696/7 AD), see J. Walker, *A Catalogue of the Arab-Byzantine and Post-Reform Umayyad Coins*, London, 1956, p. 84.

³ For the inscriptions inside the Dome of the Rock built by ‘Abd al-Malik in 691/2, see C. Kessler, ‘Abd al-Malik’s Inscription in the Dome of the Rock: a Reconsideration’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, new series, 1970, pp. 2-14; S.S. Blair, ‘What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?’, in J. Raby and J. Johns, eds, *Bayt al-Maqdis: ‘Abd al-Malik’s Jerusalem*, I, Oxford, 1992, pp. 59-87, here pp. 86-7; O. Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*, Princeton, 1996, pp. 56-71. For the posters fixed on the doors of churches in Egypt on the orders of

coins,⁴ as well as through literary texts, implicitly made an appeal to the non-Muslim populations of the Middle East to join in the new faith.⁵ These proclamations had a distinct anti-Christian polemical tenor, stating on the basis of Qur'anic texts that the Christian view of Christ as God or Son of God is false and the Islamic view of Jesus the son of Mary true,⁶ and that Islam's absolute monotheism and not Christian Trinitarian doctrine represents the true religion.⁷

It is quite understandable that these new and unexpected developments had a strong impact on the Christian clergy in particular. We will not enter into the question of the political and social factors which incited the Marwanids to this radical policy change, beginning in the 690s,⁸ but will rather discuss here the different patterns of

'Abd al-'Azīz, governor of Egypt (685-704/5) and brother of 'Abd al-Malik, see G.R.D. King, 'Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48, 1985, pp. 267-77, here p. 270; P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge and New York, 1986, p. 26.

⁴ See also O. Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, New Haven and London, 1973, pp. 94-5; Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, p. 25, n. 8; Blair, 'What is the Date?', p. 67.

⁵ L.I. Conrad, 'Heraclius in Early Islamic Kerygma', in G.J. Reinink and B.H. Stolte, eds, *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation*, Leuven and Dudley, MA, 2002, pp. 113-56, esp. pp. 122-4. Conrad suggests a relation between the genesis of the Arab Islamic 'Messenger Stories', in which the role of Islam as a religion superseding the other religions, in particular Christianity, is asserted, and the building of the Dome of the Rock by 'Abd al-Malik with its Qur'anic inscriptions declaring Christianity to be the superseded religion. Al-Zuhrī (d. 761), who seems to have been responsible for the creation of these stories, is reported to have had important connections with the Umayyad caliphate in Damascus.

⁶ Reference to Q 4.171-2; 19.34-7 (God has no son) in the inscription on the inner face of the octagonal arcade in the Dome of the Rock. References to Jesus and/or Muḥammad being God's messengers are found in the inscriptions on the outer and inner face of the octagonal arcade of the Dome of the Rock, on 'Abd al-'Azīz's posters and on 'Abd al-Malik's post-reform coins.

⁷ Reference to Q 112 (God does not beget nor is He begotten) in 'Abd al-'Azīz's posters, in the inscription on the outer face of the octagonal arcade in the Dome of the Rock and on 'Abd al-Malik's post-reform coins. For the proclamation of Islam on the milestones from the reign of 'Abd al-Malik and the Arabic-Greek/Greek-Arabic protocols from the time of Walīd I (705-715) and Yazīd II (720-724), see R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: a Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 13)*, Princeton, 1997, pp. 700-1.

⁸ For a discussion of the appearance of proclamations of Islam through different public media by the time of 'Abd al-Malik's successful conclusion of the Second Arab Civil War (691/2), see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 550-9; G.J. Reinink, 'Fol-

early Christian reactions to these developments in society.

After a first wave of vehement reactions in highly polemical apocalyptic and other texts, in which early Islam is portrayed as a demonic and godless doctrine⁹ and the Muslims as people who hate the name of the Lord,¹⁰ a more serious response to Islamic criticisms of Christian tenets, rituals and practices was required. Here we shall discuss two examples which represent early East Syrian theological responses to the claims of Islam propagated by the Arab government in and after the 690s.

The first witness is provided by the exegetical homilies written by Mar Aba II (641-751), bishop of Kashkar in South Iraq, and during the last ten years of his life Catholicos of the East Syrian Church.¹¹ In all probability, Mar Aba wrote these homilies, or at least some of

lowing the Doctrine of the Demons: Early Christian Fear of Conversion to Islam', in J.N. Bremmer et al., *Cultures of Conversion*, Louvain, 2005, pp. 127-38.

⁹ For the testimonies of Anastasius of Sinai in the early 690s, see B. Flusin, 'Démons et Sarrasins: L'auteur et le propos des *Diègèmata stèriktika* d'Anastase le Sinaïte', *Travaux et Mémoires* 11, 1991, pp. 381-409. For the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* (written in 691/2), see Reinink, 'Following the Doctrine of the Demons'. For the story of the interrogation of the chief of the demons by the Muslim emir 'Abd Allāh ibn Darrāj (perhaps written before the end of the seventh century), see G.J. Reinink, 'Die Muslime in einer Sammlung von Dämonengeschichten des Klosters von Qennešrīn', in R. Lavenant, ed., *VI Symposium Syriacum 1992 (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 247)*, Rome, 1994, pp. 335-46, esp. 342-6. The *Edessene Apocalypse* (written shortly after the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*) predicts the destruction of the Islamic power by the Byzantine emperor because of the infidelity and denial of the 'sons of Ishmael', a statement which alludes to their rejection of Christian beliefs; cf. G.J. Reinink, 'Der Edessenische "Pseudo-Methodius"', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 83, 1990, pp. 31-45, here 40-1.

¹⁰ The *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* prophesies the Second Arab Civil War and the ensuing destruction of the Arab empire by the Byzantine emperor, when the Muslims finally 'will afflict all of those who confess our Lord Christ, since they hate the name of the Lord'; J. Rendel Harris, ed., *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, Cambridge, 1900, pp. 20 (Syriac), 38 (English trans.); cf. H.J.W. Drijvers, 'The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles: A Syriac Apocalypse from the Early Islamic Period', 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, pp. 189-213, here 206-8. The three Syriac apocalyptic texts (*Pseudo-Methodius*, the *Edessene Apocalypse* and the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*) are likely responses to 'Abd al-Malik's building of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem; see G.J. Reinink, 'Early Christian Reactions to the Building of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem', *Xristianskij Vostok* 2 (VIII), 2000, pp. 227-41.

¹¹ For Mar Aba's life and works, see G.J. Reinink, *Studien zur Quellen- und Traditionsgeschichte des Evangelienkommentars der Gannat Bussame (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 414 = subs. 57)*, Louvain, 1979, pp. 70-6.

them, by the beginning of the eighth century, when he was bishop of Kashkar.¹² In two fragments, which are preserved in the *Gannat Bussame*, Mar Aba refutes the Islamic denial of Trinitarian doctrine and of Christ's being the Son of God.¹³ It is likely that Mar Aba is here responding to current, publicly expressed Muslim criticisms of these Christian tenets. His tone is polemical and defensive, and he seems to be reacting to quite recent events.

At the end of his homily on Matthew 1.18-25, Mar Aba suddenly attacks people whom he calls the *sārōbē*, the 'gainsayers' or 'deniers', who have recently introduced a 'creed' in which they do not accept the word 'birth' (*yaldā*).¹⁴ In my view, it is very likely that Mar Aba is here alluding to the text of Qur'an 112, which since the end of the 690s had appeared on 'Abd al-Malik's coins, especially the phrase that God *lam yalid wa-lam yūlad*, 'does not beget nor is He begotten'. The Syriac word *syāmā*, 'creed', which Mar Aba uses here, strongly suggests that he knew this Qur'anic text through its official proclamation, as it appeared on 'Abd al-Malik's epigraphic coins and on the posters which 'Abd al-Malik's brother and governor of Egypt 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān ordered to be fixed on the doors of churches in Egypt.¹⁵ The same text also appears in the inscription on the outer face of the octagonal arcade in the Dome of the Rock built by 'Abd al-Malik in 691/2.¹⁶

The second Mar Aba fragment concerns a text which also belongs

¹² Mar Aba is reported to have been bishop of Kashkar in 728 AD; cf. J.M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, III (*Recherches ILOB, Série III: Orient Chrétien* 42), Beirut, 1968, p. 170.

¹³ Mar Aba wrote exegetical homilies on several Old and New Testament lessons from the ecclesiastical year, which in all likelihood were read in his episcopal church in Kashkar; cf. Reinink, *Studien*, pp. 76-9. Their original texts are lost, but Mar Aba's homilies represent one of the main sources of the *Gannat Bussame*, the East Syrian exegetical compilation on the readings of the ecclesiastical year (composed in the tenth century); cf. Reinink, *Studien*, pp. 281-2.

¹⁴ For a full discussion of this fragment, see G.J. Reinink, 'An Early Syriac Reference to Qur'an 112?', in H.L.J. Vanstiphout et al., eds, *All those Nations...: Cultural Encounters within and with the Near East (Comers/ICOG Communications 2)*, Groningen, 1999, pp. 123-30.

¹⁵ See above, n. 7; Reinink, 'An Early Syriac Reference?', pp. 126-7; King, 'Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine', p. 270; Blair, 'What is the Date?', p. 67.

¹⁶ Blair, 'What is the Date?', p. 86. Cf. also J. van Ess, 'Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock: An Analysis of Some Texts', in Raby and Johns, *Bayt al-Maqdis*, I, pp. 89-103, here 97-8.

to the caliph's public proclamations in the Dome of the Rock. In the inscription on the inner face of the octagonal arcade, among other anti-Christian Qur'anic texts, Q 19.36 is quoted, where Jesus says: 'God is my Lord and your Lord. So serve Him. This is the straight path.'¹⁷ According to Mar Aba the *'arbāyē da-b-zabnan*, 'the Arabs of our time', use the words of Jesus in John 20.17: '[I ascend] to my God, and your God', to censure the Christians for having a confession which is opposed to Christ's own words, since these words prove that Jesus considered himself to be only a man and not God or the Son of God. The present Arabs, Mar Aba objects, polemically abuse John 20.17, since the full text speaks of Christ's ascending to 'my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God'. One may conclude from the last words ('my God') that Christ is man, but the first words ('my Father') testify that he is also the Son of God.¹⁸ Again, Mar Aba's words seem not to be a purely theoretical discussion of those Qur'anic texts that make Jesus speak of God as 'my Lord and your Lord';¹⁹ instead he seems to be responding to Islamic objections against Christianity that were current in his society.

Our second witness—the main topic of this paper—is probably the oldest known East Syrian apologetic work against Islam: *The Disputation between a Monk of Bēt Ḥālē and a Muslim Notable*. Three manuscripts

¹⁷ Reinink, 'An Early Syriac Reference?', p. 126; Blair, 'What is the Date?', p. 87.

¹⁸ For the translation and discussion of this fragment, see Reinink, *Studien*, pp. 64-8.

¹⁹ Q 3.51; 5.72, 117; 19.36; 43.64. Cf. H. Busse, *Islam, Judaism, and Christianity: Theological and Historical Affiliations*, Princeton, 1998, pp. 128-31. The Caliph al-Mahdī (775-785), in his discussion with the Catholicos Timothy I, also advances John 20.17, and Timothy's refutation follows Mar Aba's line of argumentation; A. Mingana, ed. and trans., 'Timothy's Apology for Christianity', in *Woodbrooke Studies*, vol. 2, pp. 95 (Syriac), 20 (English trans.) [henceforth given in the form pp. 95/20]. However, Mar Aba's aggressive polemical tone is, of course, absent from the learned and polite discussion between the Catholicos and the Caliph. For Timothy's apology, also see n. 60 below. For the use of John 20.17 in Muslim-Christian dialogue, see now also M. Accad, 'The Ultimate Proof-Text: The Interpretation of John 20.17 in Muslim-Christian Dialogue (Second/Eighth-Eighth/Fourteen Centuries)', in D. Thomas, ed., *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq*, Leiden and Boston, 2003, pp. 199-214. However, Accad does not mention Mar Aba, the oldest Syriac witness of the use of John 20.17 in Christian-Islamic polemics, and he also fails to note the Qur'anic polemical background and its early use by the Umayyad authorities.

of this work are known to exist or to have existed: Siirt 112 (without date, but according to Addai Scher written in the 15th century);²⁰ Diyarbakir 95 (early 18th century);²¹ and Mardin 82 (1890).²² The most detailed study of this work is the one recently made by Sidney Griffith.²³ Griffith convincingly argues that the monastery of Bēt Hālē, in which, according to the work, the encounter takes place, is the site near Kūfa and Hīra in South Iraq founded by Kūdāhwi by the middle of the seventh century.²⁴ The monk's Arab interlocutor is introduced as a notable (*īdī ā*) in the entourage of the emir Maslama, and is said to have officiated for a long time as manager (*rab baytā*) of the emirate.²⁵ It is generally assumed that the emir Maslama may be identified as the caliph 'Abd al-Malik's son, who in 720-1 was governor of both Iraqs.²⁶ If these identifications are right, a very plausible historical picture emerges. The Arab notable retires from Maslama's court in Kufa to the nearby monastery of Bēt Hālē, his purpose being to recover from an illness. This monastery is the scene

²⁰ A. Scher, *Catalogue des manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés dans la bibliothèque épiscopale de Séert*, Mosul, 1905, pp. 81-2. This manuscript appears to be lost, cf. A. Desreumaux, *Répertoire des bibliothèques et des catalogues de manuscrits syriaques*, Paris, 1991, pp. 230-1. I thank Miss Barbara Roggema for drawing my attention to this manuscript.

²¹ A. Scher, 'Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés à l'archevêché chaldéen de Diarbékir', *Journal Asiatique*, ser. 10, 10, 1907, pp. 395-8. In 1969 this manuscript was in the Chaldean episcopal library in Mardin; cf. Desreumaux, *Répertoire*, p. 130. In the following I quote this work as *Disputation* according to the folios of this manuscript (Diyarbakir 95, item 35, ff. 1r-8v). My forthcoming edition with English translation of the *Disputation* is based on this manuscript.

²² A. Scher, 'Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés dans la bibliothèque de l'évêché chaldéen de Mardin', *Revue des Bibliothèques* 18, 1908, p. 87; cf. Desreumaux, *Répertoire*, p. 182. This manuscript is not accessible to me.

²³ S.H. Griffith, 'Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: From Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)', in B. Lewis and F. Niewöhner, eds, *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter (Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien 4)*, Wiesbaden, 1992, pp. 251-73, here 259-61; idem, 'Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bēt Hālē and a Muslim Emir', *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3,1, 2000, pp. 1-19.

²⁴ Griffith, 'Disputes with Muslims', p. 259; idem, 'Disputing with Islam', p. 6. For this monastery, see Isho'denah, *Le livre de la chasteté*, ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot, Rome, 1896, pp. 45 (Syriac), 38 (French trans.); Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne*, III, p. 222.

²⁵ *Disputation*, f. 1r.

²⁶ Cf. G. Rotter, 'Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. VI, p. 740.

where, on the initiative of the Arab, a discussion ‘on our Scriptures and their Qur’an’ arises and develops.²⁷

Griffith rightly concludes that ‘the text is Christian apologetics pure and simple’.²⁸ The *Disputation* is deliberately couched in the Question-and-Answer format, representing the literary genre of the *drāšā*, the controversial treatise, which in the East Syrian school tradition served to instruct the students in how to respond to religious, theological or philosophical objections of some opposing party. Its intention, however, is no less to determine the differences between the points of view of the two opposing parties and thus to define sharply the author’s own position in the matters under discussion.²⁹ Accordingly, the author of the *Disputation* designates his work as ‘a report of our investigation into the Apostolic Faith *through* a son of Ishmael’.³⁰ In other words, it is important to realise that, whereas the topics under discussion in the *Disputation* may reflect contemporary Muslim-Christian religious discourse, the literary presentation and elaboration of them were intended primarily to serve scholarly and edifying purposes for the benefit of the community producing the *Disputation* rather than to reflect verbatim the contents of the discussion. A closer examination of the literary and theological traditions behind the monk’s long *exposés* to the Arab’s questions reveals the highly sophisticated character of some parts of the work. When, for example, the author discusses the meaning of Isaac’s sacrifice, the Arab is supposed to accept *a priori* the Biblical story of Genesis 22, which differs from the Qur’anic story of the sacrifice of Abraham’s son,³¹ and it is also implied that he can understand, and be immediately convinced by, what is a piece of clear-cut Christian exegesis. In fact, the monk is not quoting directly from the Biblical text,

²⁷ *Disputation*, f. 1r.

²⁸ Griffith, ‘Disputes with Muslims’, p. 260; idem, ‘Disputing with Islam’, p. 7.

²⁹ For the *drāšā* in the East Syrian School tradition, see S.H. Griffith, ‘Chapter Ten of the *Scholion*: Theodore Bar Kōnī’s Apology for Christianity’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47, 1981, pp. 158-88, here 170; G.J. Reinink, ‘The Lamb on the Tree: Syriac Exegesis and Anti-Islamic Apologetics’, in E. Noort and E. Tigchelaar, eds, *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations*, Leiden and Boston, 2002, pp. 109-24, here 111-12.

³⁰ *Disputation*, f. 1r.

³¹ Cf. Busse, *Islam, Judaism, and Christianity*, pp. 82-4; F. Leemhuis, ‘Ibrāhīm’s Sacrifice of his Son in the Early Post-Koranic Tradition’, in Noort and Tigchelaar, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, pp. 125-37.

providing it with its proper explanation; but, as also appears from the style, he is simply epitomising some commentary on Genesis 22, including traditions that are firmly rooted in the East Syrian school tradition.³²

Nevertheless, we can endorse Griffith's cautious conclusion that the *Disputation* seems to anticipate the apologetic methods found in the more popular Arabic Christian apologetic texts that were composed in the 'Abbasid period, and that it is not at all to be excluded that the author's indication that it was composed in the 720s complies with the facts.³³ My own opinion is that the literary framework of the discussion, which begins and ends with the same problem raised by the Arab official, to a large extent defines the socio-historical circumstances which induced its composition. These circumstances presuppose a social environment in which the Arab authorities had begun to propagate Islam by means of public monuments, statements and assertive policies. In particular, the texts on 'Abd al-Malik's post-reform coins represent a connection between the superior political position of the Arabs and the rightness of the Islamic faith—including the latter's superiority over all other religions, Christianity in particular.

The ultimate goal of the discussion is to answer the question as to which religion is the religion of truth: Islam or Christianity. The high official, who represents the point of view of the Arab authority, introduces the discussion on the religious topics as follows:

I know that one's belief is dear to everyone, but say now the truth to me: Is our confession not better than all the confessions that there are on earth?³⁴

When the monk asks how this may be, the Arab continues:

If you want [to know], we carefully keep the commandments of Muḥammad and the sacrifices of Abraham. And if you want [to know], we do not ascribe to God a son who is visible and passible like us. Further, there are other things: we do not worship the cross, nor the bones of the martyrs, nor images as you [do]. You lead pagan people astray and say to them: everyone who is baptized and confesses the Son, his sins will be forgiven him. This is the sign that God loves us and agrees

³² Reinink, 'The Lamb on the Tree', pp. 113-23.

³³ Griffith, 'Disputing with Islam', p. 12.

³⁴ *Disputation*, f. 1v.

with our confession: that He gave to us authority over all religions and over all nations. See—they are slaves subject to us.³⁵

With these words the Arab sets the agenda for the whole following discussion, which concerns circumcision and sacrifice as commandments belonging to the Abrahamic faith; the rejection of the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ; the position and authority of Muḥammad; the rejection of the Christian practices of venerating icons, crosses and the relics of the martyrs; and the Christian direction of prayer toward the East. The author of the *Disputation* thus defines the essential differences between the two religions, in order to demonstrate in the following discussion of these topics which of the two confessions represents the religion of truth. It is, of course, the Arab who time after time has to admit expressly or tacitly the soundness of the monk's arguments, and he finally comes to the conclusion that Christianity represents the religion of truth:

You certainly possess the truth and not a false worship, as some people thought. Muḥammad, our prophet, also said about the inhabitants of the monasteries and the mountain dwellers that they will enjoy the kingdom.³⁶ Truly, God will not reject any person who, according to this point of view, as you told me, possesses your belief and is purified from wickedness and sin.³⁷

In addition, the Arab returns to the initial question of the discussion, namely, the question of the relation between political power and right religion:

But, although I accept the truth of everything you have said, and even if I have troubled you much, I still want to learn from you the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Cf. Q 5.82, where the Christian priests and monks are praised. The same opinion is found in John bar Penkāyē's world history written at the end of the 680s (see below, n. 62): '...thus they [the sons of Hagar] also had a special commandment from God concerning our monastic order, that they should hold it in honour.' Later on John traces this commandment back to Muḥammad; A. Mingana, ed., *Sources syriaques*, I, *Msiha-Zkha (texte et traduction) Bar-Penkayé (texte)*, Mosul, 1908, pp. 141*, lines 17-19, and 146*, lines 14-17; English translation by S.P. Brock, 'North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book XV of John Bar Penkāyē's *Riṣ Melle*', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9, 1987, pp. 51-75, here 57, 61 (reprinted in S.P. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity (Collected Studies Series CS537)*, Aldershot, 1992, II).

³⁷ *Disputation*, f. 8r.

entire truth, since I want, in addition to all specific questions, to raise further one small question.³⁸

This question is:

Though I know that your religion is right, and your way of thinking is even more excellent than ours, what is the reason why God has handed you over into our hands, and you are driven by us like sheep to slaughter, and your bishops and priests are killed, and the rest are subjugated and enslaved, night and day, to the king's burdens, more bitter than death?³⁹

As we shall see, this question was not a new one, but in the *Disputation* it is related to the Arab's initial statement that the truth and superiority of Islam appear from its being the religion of the rulers and victors, since God expresses His approval of the right confession by placing its supporters in the position of political superiority. If it should be not Islam but Christianity which is the religion of the truth, the question remains: how can this fact be reconciled with the subordinate position of the Christians? In order to see how Christian clergy in the late Umayyad period responded to this claim of the Arab authority, we shall discuss the monk's answers to these questions at some length.

In reply to the Arab's question concerning the superiority of his confession (*tawdītā*), which he considers to be confirmed by the world dominion of his co-religionists, the monk makes the following statement:

You rightly say that you are kings and that the whole world is subject to you. But before, from the beginning of our creation till the flood, for two thousand years and two hundred and forty years, there was no king on earth. After the flood, Nimrod reigned, the first king on earth. After him, pagan kings, who venerated created things. Afterwards [kings] from the people of the Jews reigned, and pagan [kings] together with them. And when the people of Israel provoked God to anger, God chastised them through these kings of the nations. And after the kings of the Hebrews, the kings of the Medes and the Persians reigned, and with them also [the kings] of the Romans in this region of the East where we are settled. But in these [other] three regions many kings reigned, those who were not acquainted with [the fact] that we are in the world. In the North, twenty-two kings reigned. In the West, in the land of the Cushites and of the Indians, there were

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

many kings; and four kings reigned in the territories of the Romans. In the South there were many kings: in Marw, in Šīn, in Sīrandīb, in Rayy, in Hamadān, in Gurgān, in Gīlān, [and] over the islands many kings reigned. But you, sons of Ishmael, you hold a small part of the earth, and the whole creation is not subject to your authority.⁴⁰

The force of this concise chronological and geographical summary of the kingdoms in the world turns on two points. First, if one considers the four quarters of the world, it is clear that the Arabs only have control over some eastern regions, namely, the former Roman (Byzantine) provinces in the Middle East and the Persian empire. They do not rule over the northern kingdoms. The ‘twenty-two kings’ of the North undoubtedly correspond to the twenty-two peoples, the descendants of Japheth, who—according to *the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*—were confined by Alexander the Great behind the gates of the North, and who would flood and destroy the world at the end of times.⁴¹ In the West the lands of the Cushites and the Indians are not under Arab control, neither are the regions belonging to the (former) western Roman empire and Byzantium.⁴² The list of the kings in the South is more puzzling. With Šīn and Sīrandīb it is probable that China and Ceylon are meant.⁴³ Marw (if the city of the ‘great’ or ‘royal’ Marw in Khurāsān is meant) and the city of Hamadān (ancient Ekbatana in central Iran) had actually been

⁴⁰ Ibid., f. 2r-v.

⁴¹ *Pseudo-Methodius VIII*, 3-10, in G.J. Reinink, ed. and trans., *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 2 vols (CSCO 540-541 = syr. 220-221), Louvain, 1983, pp. 14-16 (Syriac text in CSCO 540 = syr. 220), 21-6 (German trans. in CSCO 541 = syr. 221). [Henceforth these references will be given in the form pp. 14-16/21-6.] For a discussion of the background of Pseudo-Methodius’s list of 22 peoples and its relation with the list of 15 kings of the Huns in the Syriac *Alexander Legend* and the list of the 30 peoples in Pseudo-Ephrem’s poem ‘On the End’, see G.J. Reinink, ‘Pseudo-Ephraems ‘Rede über das Ende’ und die syrische eschatologische Literatur des siebenten Jahrhunderts’, *Aram* 5, 1993, pp. 437-63, here 447-51. For a general overview and discussion of the seventh-century Syriac works on Alexander the Great, see G.J. Reinink, ‘Alexander the Great in Seventh-Century Syriac ‘Apocalyptic’ Texts’, *Byzantinorossica* 2, 2003, pp. 150-78.

⁴² For the author, the Cushites (Ethiopians) and the Indians (Nubians?) are located in the Western part of the world. Do the ‘four kings’ in the territories of the Romans refer to Diocletian’s tetrarchy (two *augusti* and two *caesares*)?

⁴³ Cf. R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, Oxford, 1879-1901 (reprint Hildesheim and New York, 1981), cols 3395, 2743; M. Hartmann and C.E. Bosworth, ‘al-Šīn’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. IX, pp. 616-22; C.E. Bosworth, ‘Sarandīb’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. IX, p. 39.

under Arab control since 651 and 645 respectively.⁴⁴ Both cities were home to a substantial number of East Syrian Christians.⁴⁵ Rayy, ancient Raga, located to the south of the Caspian Sea and long a seat of East Syrian bishops,⁴⁶ came under Arab power in the 640s.⁴⁷ But the author of the *Disputation* may not yet have been informed about the Arab conquest in 716/7 of the region of Gurgān at the southeast corner of the Caspian Sea.⁴⁸ Gīlān, the region along the southern shore of the Caspian Sea, was indeed independent and remained so for a long time.⁴⁹ Since the middle of the sixth century there had been an East Syrian bishop there, but it was not before the missionary activities of the Catholicos Timothy I (780-823) that Christianity was more firmly implanted in this region.⁵⁰

In the second place, the summary implicitly demonstrates that—contrary to the claims of the Arab government—one cannot discover in the history of the world anything like a divine ‘sign’ showing that religious truth and political power are intertwined. In the period from the creation till the flood, for two thousand two hundred and forty years (the author here is following the Eusebian chronology⁵¹),

⁴⁴ Payne Smith, *Thesaurus*, cols 2220, 1019; J.P. Margoliouth, *Supplement to the Thesaurus Syriacus*, Oxford, 1927, p. 101; A. Yu. Yakubovskii and C.É. Bosworth, ‘Marw al-Shāhidjān’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. VI, pp. 618-21; R.N. Frye, ‘Hamadhān’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. III, pp. 105-6.

⁴⁵ Cf. J.M. Fiey, *Pour un Oriens Christianus novus: Répertoire des diocèses syriaques orientaux et occidentaux (Beiruter Texte und Studien 49)*, Beirut, 1993, pp. 110-11, 87; idem, ‘Chrétientés syriaques du Horāsān et du Ségestān’, *Le Muséon* 86, 1973, pp. 75-87 (reprinted in J.M. Fiey, *Communautés syriaques en Iran et Irak des origines à 1552*, London, 1979, VI); idem, ‘Médie chrétienne’, *Parole de l’Orient* 1, 1970, pp. 368-72 (reprinted in Fiey, *Communautés syriaques*, IV).

⁴⁶ Fiey, *Répertoire*, p. 124; idem, ‘Médie chrétienne’, pp. 378-82.

⁴⁷ However, local kings are mentioned alongside the Arab governor; cf. V. Minorsky and C.E. Bosworth, ‘al-Rayy’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. VIII, pp. 471-3.

⁴⁸ Payne Smith, *Thesaurus*, col. 690; Margoliouth, *Supplement*, p. 71; cf. R. Hartmann and J.A. Boyle, ‘Gurgān’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. II, p. 1141; R.N. Frye, *The Golden Age of Persia: the Arabs in the East*, London, 2000, pp. 716-7. For Christianity in Gurgān, see Fiey, *Répertoire*, pp. 85-6; idem, ‘Médie chrétienne’, pp. 382-4.

⁴⁹ Payne Smith, *Thesaurus*, col. 634; B. Spuler, ‘Gīlān’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, vol. II, cols. 1111-2; Frye, *The Golden Age*, pp. 117-8.

⁵⁰ Fiey, *Répertoire*, pp. 82-3; idem, ‘Les provinces sud-caspiennes des églises syriennes’, *Parole de l’Orient* 2, 1971, pp. 334-8 (reprinted in Fiey, *Communautés*, V). See Thomas of Margā, *The Book of Governors*, ed. and trans. E.A. Wallis Budge, London, 1893, pp. 259-61 (Syriac), 478-82 (English trans.).

⁵¹ Eusebius, *Die Chronik*, ed. J. Karst (*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der*

there were no kings in the world at all. And after Nimrod the first king (Gen. 10.10), pagan kings reigned, who, in venerating created things, were far removed from having the right religion. Even the Jews, who possessed the right conception of God, did not acquire world dominion, but rather, when they had provoked God to anger, were chastised by pagan kings. Kingship and political power can be used by God as instruments wherewith He punishes humankind. Therefore, should the Arab authorities think that God loves them and agrees with their confession because He gave them authority over all religions and all nations, this belief would rest upon false presuppositions. Not only do they not reign over all nations, but they also cannot claim God's love by virtue of their having subjected the Christians to their authority.

The reason why they cannot do so is explained in the monk's answer at the end of the *Disputation*, in response to the Arab who still requires an explanation for the subordinate position of the Christians:

Moses said to the sons of Israel: 'God does not bring you into the promised land to inherit it because of your righteousness, but because of the wickedness of its inhabitants.'⁵² You also reigned for a period of sixty years, and you were driven away by Gideon the Hebrew; he killed four kings from among you: Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna. The sons of Israel, although they were a heroic people, were also enslaved by the Egyptians for four hundred years. When they were carried into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, they were slaves in Babylon for seventy years, and [then] they were handed over to the Assyrians. As for you too, sons of Ishmael, God did not give you authority over us because of your righteousness, but because of our sins, and because the Lord loves us and does not want to deprive us from His kingdom, because it has been said: 'The Lord chastises whomsoever He loves. And if you are without chastisement, you are strangers and not sons.'⁵³ Our God, good and merciful, wants to chastise us in this transitory world

ersten drei Jahrhunderte 20, *Eusebius Werke* 5), Leipzig, 1911, p. 38; cf. W. Adler, *Time Immemorial: Archaic History and its Sources in Christian Chronography from Julius Africanus to George Syncellus* (*Dumbarton Oaks Studies* 26), Washington, DC, 1989, pp. 26-50. For the influence of Eusebius's *Chronicle* in Syriac historiography, see W. Witakowski, 'Sources of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre for the Christian Epoch of the First Part of his *Chronicle*', in G.J. Reinink and A.C. Klugkist, eds, *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers* (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 89), Louvain, 1999, pp. 329-66, here pp. 332-3.

⁵² Cf. Deut. 9.4-6.

⁵³ Heb. 12.8.

of short and brief life, lest He make us inherit eternal life there.⁵⁴

It is important to note first that the author of the *Disputation* uses the argumentation of the *Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse*; the correspondences between the two works are so conspicuous that the *Disputation* here in all likelihood is directly dependent on the *Apocalypse*. In the reference to Deuteronomy 9.4-6, the *Disputation* follows Pseudo-Methodius's rendering and summary of the biblical text.⁵⁵ The identification of the Midianites with the 'sons of Ishmael' is derived from Pseudo-Methodius, as is the reference to Gideon's slaying the four Midianite kings (Judges 7.25; 8.21). Even the remarkable figure of 'sixty years' of Midianite supremacy is taken from Pseudo-Methodius's typology.⁵⁶ Again the explanation that the Arabs, like the Midianites in the time of Gideon, are used by God as a temporary scourge wherewith to punish His children for their sins follows Pseudo-Methodius's arguments. Like Pseudo-Methodius, the author of the *Disputation* quotes Hebrews 12.8 in order to demonstrate that God chastises His children because He loves them.⁵⁷

The monk's message is clear. The assumption that the Arab authority over the Christians has something to do with the truth and rightness of their religion is a fallacy. The Arabs only function as an instrument in the hands of God, through which He wants to make the Christians inherit the eternal heavenly kingdom.

The ultimate apologetic goal of the *Disputation* is expressed in the Arab's last words:

I testify that were it not for the fear of the government and of shame before men, many would become Christians.⁵⁸

It is the fear of Christian conversion to Islam on a much larger scale than before that troubled the Christian clergy in and after the 690s,⁵⁹ and the apologetic message which lies hidden in the Arab's

⁵⁴ *Disputation*, f. 8r-v.

⁵⁵ *Pseudo-Methodius* XI,5; Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse*, pp. 25/43.

⁵⁶ *Pseudo-Methodius* V,2-7; Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse*, pp. 8-9/11-14. For the sixty years of Midianite supremacy, see Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse*, p. 13 (translation volume), n. 2.

⁵⁷ *Pseudo-Methodius* XIII,5; Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse*, pp. 37/59.

⁵⁸ *Disputation*, f. 8v.

⁵⁹ See Reinink, 'Following the Doctrine of the Demons'. The fear of conversion is one of the main issues in Pseudo-Methodius: *Pseudo-Methodius* XII,1-8, XIII,15;

words can be expressed as follows: If even a representative of the Arab authority is in principle prepared to convert to Christianity, but is prevented from doing so only because of his social status and birth, why should Christians then of their own free will convert to the religion of the authorities?

Conclusion

In his report of the discussions which he had with the caliph al-Mahdī (775-785) in Baghdad, the East Syrian Catholicos Timothy I (780-823), at the end of the conversation he had with the caliph on the first day, touched on the question of the political supremacy of the Arabs. In contrast with the author of the *Disputation*, Timothy does not shrink from connecting the topic of the religious rightness of the Arabs with their socio-political position. The Ishmaelites, he says, are held in great honour and high esteem by God and men, because they rejected idolatry and the demons, and worshipped and honoured only one God. However, Timothy does not compare this circumstance with the subjugated position of the Christians, but with that of the Jews. The Jews had lost their former privileged position with God and humanity because they had rejected Christ, the incarnate God.⁶⁰ When, at the beginning of the conversation of the second day, the position of Muḥammad is discussed, the Catholicos returns to the question of the relation between right religion and political power. Muḥammad rejected idolatry and polytheism and fought for the doctrine of the one unique God. He promised his followers kingship, praise and honour from God, both in this world and in Paradise. In reward for his struggle against paganism, God made Muḥammad victorious over the Persian empire, which

Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse*, pp. 32-5/53-6, 40/65 (and see in particular the notes to the translation).

⁶⁰ Mingana, 'Timothy's Apology', pp. 131-2/58-9. Other recensions of the Apology include: a full-length Arabic version, H. Putman, ed. and trans., *L'Église et l'Islam sous Timothée I (780-823)* (*Recherches ILOB, Nouvelle Série, B. Orient Chrétien* 3), Beirut, 1986; an abbreviated form of the Syriac text, A. van Roey, 'Une apologie syriaque attribuée à Élie de Nisibe', *Le Muséon* 59, 1946, pp. 381-97; and other Arabic recensions, R. Caspar, 'Les versions arabes du dialogue entre le Catholicos Timothée et le calife al-Mahdī (IIe/VIIIe siècle)', *Islamochristiana* 3, 1977, pp. 107-75.

worshipped creatures instead of the Creator.⁶¹ For his explanation of the victories of the Arabs over the Byzantine empire, Timothy falls back upon the theological explanation which almost a century earlier had been propounded by the East Syrian monk John bar Penkāyē: it was God's punishment for the theopaschite ideas professed by the Byzantines.⁶² At the end of the conversation, the Catholicos expresses his wish that God may preserve the kingdom for the caliph for many years, that He may subjugate all the barbarous nations before al-Mahdī's sons and their descendants, and that all the kings and the governors of the world may serve the caliph and his sons 'till the day in which the Kingdom of Heaven is revealed from heaven to earth'.⁶³

Though there are many correspondences between the topics discussed in Timothy's apology and the *Disputation*,⁶⁴ one of the striking differences between them is the way in which they deal with and try to solve the problem of political power and right religion. Whereas in the *Disputation* this theme is the framework within which the whole discussion takes place, in Timothy's apology it is only a minor theme, which is not raised by the caliph but by the Catholicos himself. Moreover, the theme in Timothy's apology is not discussed in the light of the question of the religious truth of Islam as compared with Christianity. Of course, the whole argumentation of Timothy is directed towards the persuasion that the Christians hold 'the pearl of the true faith', whereas the caliph finally expresses his hope in God that the Muslims 'are the possessors of this pearl'.⁶⁵ But neither the question of Arab political superiority nor some theological explication of Christian social subordination has a role to play in

⁶¹ Mingana, 'Timothy's Apology', pp. 133-4/61-2.

⁶² Mingana, *Sources syriaques*, pp. 144*, line 20—145*, lines 1, 17-18; English trans. Brock, 'North Mesopotamia', pp. 59-60. John's *Kiābā d-rēs mellē*, 'Book of the Main Points' [of world history], was composed in about 687 AD in North Mesopotamia. For its concept of history and its apocalyptic tendencies, see now G.J.Reinink, 'Paideia: God's Design in World History according to the East Syrian Monk John bar Penkaye', in E. Kooper, ed., *The Medieval Chronicle*, II, Amsterdam and New York, 2002, pp. 190-8, in J.J. van Ginkel et al., *Redefining Christianity. Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, Louvain, 2005, pp. 77-89; idem, 'East Syrian Historiography in Response to the Rise of Islam: The Case of John bar Penkaye's *Kiābā d-rēs mellē*' (forthcoming).

⁶³ Mingana, 'Timothy's Apology', pp. 162/90.

⁶⁴ See, for example, note 19 above, and my forthcoming edition and translation of the *Disputation*.

⁶⁵ Mingana, 'Timothy's Apology', pp. 161-2/89.

the argumentation regarding the question of just who is the one who holds 'the pearl of the true faith' in his hands.

The relation between political power and right religion is the main problem in the *Disputation*, and the reason for that is that it is responding to recent politico-religious developments in the late Umayyad caliphate. In its solution to this problem the *Disputation* still follows certain lines of reasoning employed in the *Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse*. There is no connection between Islamic religious rightness and political power. The political power of the 'sons of Ishmael' is geographically—this point is not taken from Pseudo-Methodius⁶⁶—and chronologically limited; moreover, it only serves to chastise the Christians for their sins, this chastisement being a sign of God's love for his children. However, contrary to the apocalypses written in the 690s, the author of the *Disputation* does not indulge in speculation about when and how the Arab political power and the time of chastisement of the Christians will come to an end.⁶⁷ He wants rather to focus the attention of his co-religionists on the eternal heavenly kingdom, which is only accessible to those who have received Christian baptism.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ For Pseudo-Methodius's description of the Arab-Islamic conquests, see *Pseudo-Methodius* XI,9-16, XIII, 6, 14-15; Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse*, pp. 27-30/46-50, 37-8/59-60, 39-40/64-5. The failure of the Arabs to conquer the *whole* world is not a topic of polemic in Pseudo-Methodius.

⁶⁷ In the three Syriac apocalypses the imminent destruction of the Arab-Islamic empire through the emperor of Byzantium, who is God's representative on earth and the protector of the whole Christian world, is at the centre. The ensuing final world-dominion belongs only to the Christian empire.

⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that the monk, at the Arab's question whether the 'sons of Hagar' are going to enter the heavenly Kingdom or not, responds that only those who 'are born of water and Spirit' (i.e., have received Christian baptism; John 3.5 is quoted) will enter the kingdom. However, the torments of hell will be withheld from any man who has good deeds, though God should think of him as a 'hired man' and not as a 'son'. The expressions 'hired man' and 'son' refer to the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15.19). The Christians are the children of God, whereas the unbaptized (here, the Muslims) will at best be regarded as 'hirelings', i.e. as second-class members of the household (*Disputation*, f. 8r-v).

THE PERCEPTION AND PRESENTATION OF THE
ARAB CONQUEST IN SYRIAC HISTORIOGRAPHY:
HOW DID THE CHANGING SOCIAL POSITION OF
THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX COMMUNITY INFLUENCE
THE ACCOUNT OF THEIR HISTORIOGRAPHERS?¹

Jan J. van Ginkel

An often quoted phrase about the Arab conquest from the *Chronography* of Michael the Great (d. 1199), also known as Michael the Syrian, runs as follows:

Heraclius did not allow the orthodox to present themselves before him, and he refused to hear their complaints about acts of vandalism committed on their churches. This is why the God of vengeance, who alone has power over all, changing the rule of men as He wants, giving it to whom He wants and raising up to it the lowliest of men, seeing the cruelty of the Romans, who, wherever they ruled, cruelly plundered our churches and our monasteries and condemned us mercilessly, [for that reason God] brought from the land of the South the children of Ishmael that by their hands we would acquire salvation from the hands of the Romans. And if, in truth, we did suffer some damage, in that the cathedral churches that had been seized and given to the Chalcedonians remained with them—because when a city submitted to the Arabs, they would give to each one of the confessions those temples that they found in their hands. At that time the great church of Edessa and that of Harran were taken from us. But it was no light benefit for us to be freed from the cruelty of the Romans, their wickedness, their anger and their bitter zeal towards us, and to find ourselves in peace.²

¹ I would like to thank the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NOW) for sponsoring my research and Mark Swanson for some very helpful remarks.

² J.-B. Chabot, ed. and trans., *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)*, 4 vols, Paris, 1899-1924, Book XI, Chapter 3 ; vol. IV, p. 410 (Syriac text), vol. II, pp. 412-13 (French translation). [Hereafter cited as follows : MS XI, 3 (IV, 410 / II, 412-13).] For quotations in secondary literature see, for example, S. Brock, 'Syriac Views of Emergent Islam', in G.H.A. Juynboll, ed., *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society (Papers on Islamic History 5)*, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1982, pp. 9-21, 199-203; here p. 11. My English translation takes Brock's as a starting point (although note that Brock in fact translates a hybrid text,

This image of the Arabs as rescuing the anti-Chalcedonians from the oppression of the Byzantines has been repeated by many, both by Syrian Orthodox authors and by modern scholars writing on the seventh century. It presents the Byzantine empire as an empire at odds with itself, and more particularly with large parts of its population. This in turn is seen as the reason why the Byzantine empire collapsed under the onslaught of the Arabs in the seventh century.

In 1981, however, J. Moorhead wrote an important article called 'The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasion', challenging the perception that during the Arab invasions of Syria, Palestine and Egypt the indigenous peoples supported, or at least failed to oppose, the attackers.³ Moorhead asserts, in the first place, that there were large numbers of (so-called) Monophysites fighting against the invaders; secondly, that the eastern provinces of the Byzantine empire were by no means completely Monophysite; and finally, that *at that time* the most vocal dissidents in the empire were not the Monophysites, but rather the strict Chalcedonians: it was people like Sophronius and Maximus Confessor who led the most direct opposition to the emperor.⁴

Scholars such as Friedhelm Winkelmann and Walter Kaegi have pointed out the complexity of the fighting that took place in this period, adding detailed evidence to the more general criticism of Moorhead.⁵ In addition, the perception of 'Monophysite disloyalty' does not take into account the fact that the Byzantine empire of the early seventh century was not a national state, but rather an empire

incorporating elements of Michael's account and a fragment from the anonymous *Chronicle of 1234*; see below, n. 24).

³ J. Moorhead, 'The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasion', *Byzantion* 51, 1981, pp. 579-91; here p. 579.

⁴ W. Brandes, "Juristische" Krisenbewältigung im 7. Jahrhundert? Die Prozesse gegen Martin I. und Maximos Homologetes', *Fontes Minores* 10, 1998, pp. 141-212; F. Winkelmann, 'Die Quellen zur Erforschung des monenergetisch-monotheletischen Streites', *Klio* 69, 1987, pp. 515-59. On the history of the seventh century see J.F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture*, Cambridge, 1990.

⁵ W.E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquest*, Cambridge, 1992; idem, *Heraclius*, Cambridge, 2003; F. Winkelmann, 'Ägypten und Byzanz vor der arabischen Eroberung', *Byzantinoslavica* 40, 1979, pp. 161-82. From an Arab perspective, see F.M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, Princeton, 1981.

of power networks.⁶ In such an empire, geographical territory is not as clearly defined as in a national state and, as a result, loyalty is less directed to a concept of a 'state' than to members of the network and their ideology, which has given them the power to rule. The borders of the state may change without causing the collapse of the state. A comparison of the seventh-century transitions with the 'ease' with which Chalcedonian citizens in the Balkans adapted to life under Avar rule in the sixth century is instructive.⁷

The Syriac sources that describe the Arab conquest have been discussed by Sebastian Brock in his article on 'Syriac Views of Emergent Islam',⁸ which appears to have been, at least in part, an inspiration for works by Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (1993), and Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (1997).⁹ Although much has been written about Syriac authors' views of early Islam, the focus in this contribution will be on how these authors may have used their presentation of the events of the seventh century to assert, shape and explicate their own community's identity at the time of writing.

This essay, then, is concerned with matters of perception and presentation—how the conquest is being seen with regard to the position of the (proto-) Syrian-Orthodox community in society, both at the time of the conquest and at the time of the authors—rather than with trying to reconstruct 'the historical events'. How do Syrian Orthodox writers see this turning point in history in the context of history as a whole? Does their presentation tell us anything about the self-image of the community that they represent?

Few of these early Syrian Orthodox histories have come down to us in one piece. Some independent works are preserved in the manuscripts, but only in a mutilated state; others are not preserved independently at all, but only as fragments incorporated within later works, most notably in the *Chronography* of Michael the Great and the

⁶ M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. I, *A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*, Cambridge, 1986, pp. 250 ff.

⁷ See *MS X*, 21 (IV, 379 / II, 361), based on Chapters 45-49 of Book VI of the Third Part of the *Church History* of John of Ephesus (d. c. 588).

⁸ Brock, 'Syriac Views', pp. 9-21; idem, 'Syriac Sources for Seventh Century History', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2, 1976, pp. 17-36.

⁹ A. Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (*Translated Texts for Historians* 15), Liverpool 1993; R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (*Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* 13), Princeton, 1997.

anonymous *Chronicle of AD 1234*.¹⁰ Although these fragments give us a tantalizing peek at works now lost, they must be used with caution; we do not know to what extent the later authors and compilers have influenced the corpus by preserving only those parts of earlier works that suited *their* point of view, rather than the point of view of the original authors. It is often assumed that Michael incorporated his sources into his work almost indiscriminately or ‘completely’, but, for example, when referring to Jacob of Edessa’s *Chronicle* Michael states explicitly that he ‘incorporated the entire chronicle *insofar as it was relevant to the subject*’.¹¹ In a paper presented at the Syriac Symposium in Uppsala in 1996, I have shown how an author like Michael the Great could *manipulate* his sources, using only excerpts and fragments in order to fit his perception of the events of a particular century. By comparing Part III of the *Church History* of John of Ephesus with Michael’s account based on excerpts from this text, I was able to document a significant shift from John to Michael in the representation of the conflict between Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians.¹²

Given this result, in the present study only those fragments will be used which show a clear difference in approach to the works in which they have been preserved, or those which are preserved independently in other works.

Survey of the historical accounts

No major Syrian Orthodox historiographical works contemporary to the Islamic conquest have been preserved, but there are some fragmented chronicles.¹³ They describe the conquest as a war with many casualties, without the invaders making any distinction between

¹⁰ See the introduction of J.-B. Chabot, ed. and trans., *Anonymi auctoris : Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, I (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 81 = syr. 36 [Text], 109 = syr. 56 [Translation]), Louvain, 1920, 1937. [Henceforth cited as *1234*, page in text volume / page in translation volume. Other references to separate text and translation volumes will be handled the same way.] Note that when *MS* and *1234* have parallel accounts, *1234* usually has the more elaborate version.

¹¹ *MS* XI, 17 (IV, 450 / II, 482-3). Emphasis added.

¹² J.J. van Ginkel, ‘Making History: Michael the Syrian and his Sixth-Century Sources’, in R. Lavenant, ed., *VII Symposium Syriacum 1996 (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 256)*, Rome, 1998, pp. 351-8.

¹³ For a survey of the relevant texts see Palmer, *Seventh Century*, pp. 1-42.

Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians.¹⁴ No specific explanations are given for the success of the invaders.

More extensive texts exist from the eighth century. First of all, there is a short notice of natural disasters, dated to the years 712 and 716, in which the fact that the Arabs are the rulers of the country is clearly stated. The author describes a long list of disasters as a rebuke to those who had acted wickedly and as a goad to make them repent of their sins. The rule of the Arabs itself is not clearly identified among the disasters, but rather as the context within which the disasters occur.¹⁵ The Arab rule is seen as another 'empire', a *malkūtā*, not the rule of a new religion. The invaders and new emperors (*malkē*) are Arabs, not Muslims.

This ties in with the lists of caliphs that have come down to us. One of these lists, part of the 'account of the generations, races, and years, from Adam down to the present day', written in AD 775, continues its listing of emperors after Phocas and Heraclius with Muḥammad and the caliphs. It simply states that during the reign of Heraclius, the Arabs entered Syria and took control.¹⁶ For the author, the caliphs were the successors of the emperors; Palmer speaks of a '*translatio imperii*'.¹⁷ The invaders are no longer plunderers, i.e. a temporary nuisance, but are replacing the 'imperial top layer'. One empire replaces another.¹⁸

The perception of the conquest as 'castigation' and an appeal by

¹⁴ E.g., in the *Chronicle of AD 640* we read: 'Some 4,000 poor village people of Palestine were killed there, Christians, Jews and Samaritans. The Arabs ravaged the whole region.' E.W. Brooks, ed., and J.-B. Chabot, trans., *Chronica Minora II* (CSCO 3 = syr. 3 [Text] and 4 = syr. 4 [Translation]), Paris, 1904, pp. 77-156 / 61-119; esp. pp. 147-8 / 114; Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 19. The English translation given here is Palmer's.

¹⁵ Edited with a French translation in F. Nau, 'Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens et faits divers des années 712 à 716 d'après le ms. du British Museum Add. 17193', *Journal Asiatique* ser. 11, 5, 1915, pp. 225-79; Palmer, *Seventh Century*, pp. 45-7, esp. p. 47. It should be noted that in the manuscript this account of disasters is preceded by an account of a dispute between Patriarch John I with an unnamed emir, but the two texts are linked only in the manuscript, which dates from AD 874.

¹⁶ E.W. Brooks, ed. and trans., *Chronica Minora III* (CSCO 5 = syr. 5 [Text] and 6 = syr. 6 [Translation]), Paris, 1905, pp. 347-8 / 274; also *Chronica Minora II*, p. 155 / 119; Palmer *Seventh Century*, pp. 51-2 (and also see p. 43). Palmer's translation of the title.

¹⁷ Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 52.

¹⁸ On *malkā* and *malkūtā*, see Brock, 'Syriac Views', pp. 13-14, 20.

God to repent and to turn away from wickedness can also be detected in the *Zuqnān Chronicle* (AD 775), the first major Syrian Orthodox historiographical work written after the conquest that has been preserved.¹⁹ Again, the conquest is seen as a more or less permanent state—no direct hope of a return of the Roman Empire is expressed—but the rule of the Arabs is not seen as bringing anything positive for the Syrian Orthodox community. The Arab conquest is a war on the Christian empire, which the empire lost. The war is presented in a rather detached manner, as a war between two armies rather than as a war against the people of the region.²⁰

The *Zuqnān Chronicle* is aware of Islam and uses Arabic terms like *rasūl* and ‘prophet’ to refer to Muḥammad. However, in a general introduction the Arabs are described as ‘lascivious and sensual’.

Every law instituted for them, be it by Muḥammad or by any other God-fearing person, is despised and dismissed if it is not instituted according to their sensual pleasure. But a law which fulfils their wishes and desires, even if it is instituted by a nobody among them, they accept, saying: ‘This has been instituted by the Prophet and Messenger of God. Moreover, it was commanded to him in this manner by God.’²¹

It is this perception of the Arabs which becomes dominant in the later part of this *Chronicle*, but it does not dominate the account of the conquest. This may be the result of the fact that the *Zuqnān Chronicle*’s source material for the seventh century was limited to a chronicle with few narrative elements.

The main historiographical source of the ninth century is the *Church History* of Patriarch Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē (d. 845). Although this work as such has not survived the vicissitudes of history, many parts have been preserved in both the *Chronography* of Patriarch Michael

¹⁹ J.-B. Chabot, E.W. Brooks and R. Hespel, *Incerti auctoris: Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, I-II (CSCO 91, 104, 121, 507 = syr. 43, 53, 66, 213), Paris, 1927, (first three vols.) and Louvain, 1989. [Henceforth *PD*, Part, page in text volume / page in translation volume.]

²⁰ *PD* I, pp. 149-51 / 111-13. See also A. Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān, Parts III and IV: A.D. 488-775 (Medieval Sources in Translation 36)*, Toronto, 1999, pp. 141-4. A lack of interest in civilian casualties can also be detected in a *Chronicle of AD 819*: J.-B. Chabot, ‘Chronicon anonymum ad annum Domini 819’, in *1234*, pp. 3-22 / 1-15, here p. 11 / 7.

²¹ *PD* I, p. 150 / 112; Harrak, *Chronicle of Zuqnān*, p. 142. Harrak’s translation.

the Great and an anonymous work known as the *Chronicle of AD 1234*.²²

Dionysius seems to be the first Syrian Orthodox historian known to us who makes a clear and explicit distinction between his community and that of the Chalcedonians, and stresses the dichotomy to the point of making it an element that leads to the 'aramisation' of the anti-Chalcedonians in Syria:

When the holy fathers who have been the writers in our Church saw that they (the Chalcedonians) had been corrupted not only by the doctrine of two natures, but also by that of two wills and *energiae* and forms and properties, and that instead of one Christ they confessed Him as two, they turned right away from them for this reason and did not even use their language and their literature as in former times, nor did any Orthodox scholars remain in their regions.²³

It is this distinction that Dionysius uses to depict history as it unfolds.

The conquest is introduced as follows:

However, the God of vengeance, who holds sovereignty over the kingdom of men on earth, will give it to whom He chooses and raise up to it the lowliest of men. When He saw that the measure of the Romans' sins was overflowing and that they were committing every sort of cruelty against our people and our churches, bringing our Confession to the verge of extinction, He stirred up the Sons of Ishmael and enticed them hither from the land of the south. This had been the most despised and disregarded of the peoples of the earth, if indeed they were known at all. By their hands we acquired salvation. In this manner it was no light benefit for us to be delivered from the tyrannical rule of the Romans. Yet we suffered a loss as well. The cathedral churches which had been unjustly confiscated from our people by Heraclius and given to his co-religionaries, the Chalcedonians, have continued to languish in their possession until the present day. Because when cities made an agreement at the time that they opened themselves up and submitted to the Arabs, they [the Arabs] would give to each one of the confessions those temples that they found in their hands. In this way the Orthodox were robbed of the Great Church of Edessa and that of Harran; and this process continued throughout the west, as far as Jerusalem. ...²⁴

²² On the difficulties of using excerpts and fragments taken from later works of compilation, see p. 174.

²³ *MS XI*, 17 (IV, 452 / II, 482-3); Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 94. Palmer's translation, with very slight adaptations.

²⁴ *1234*, pp. 236-7 / 185; Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 141. Cf. *MS XI*, 3 (IV,

When Isaiah, the Syrian Orthodox bishop of Edessa, denies Heraclius communion unless he rejects Chalcedon, the narrator (Dionysius) calls him 'zealous to a fault or rather, to tell the truth, an uneducated idiot'.²⁵ As a result, the Church is handed over to the Chalcedonians and the Syrian Orthodox bishop is expelled.

Dionysius presents a reasonably accurate although polemical description of some of Muḥammad's teachings. The military account, however, has few references to the religion, although the Arabs are presented as extremely well-behaved. Arab troops are instructed to

kill neither the aged, nor the little child, nor the woman. Do not force the stylite from his high perch and do not harass the solitary. ... Do not cut down any (fruit-) tree, neither damage any crop, neither maim any domestic animal, large or small. Wherever you are welcomed by a city or a people, make a solemn pact with them and give them reliable guarantees that they will be ruled according to their laws and according to the practices which obtained among them before our time. They will contract with you to pay in tribute whatever sum shall be settled between you, then they will be left alone in their confession and in their country. But as for those who do not welcome you, make war on them. Be careful to abide by all the just laws and commandments which have been given to you by God through our prophet, lest you excite the wrath of God.²⁶

The war is presented as one between 'noble' Arabs²⁷ and arrogant Romans. This is highlighted by an anecdote about Theodoric,

410 / II, 412-13), translated at the beginning of this article. The translation of *1234* given here is Palmer's with adaptations, some on the basis of Brock's translation in 'Syriac Views', p. 11 (see note 2 above). Note the small differences between this text from *1234* and the passage quoted earlier from Michael the Syrian.

²⁵ *1234*, pp. 235 / 184; Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 140. Palmer's translation. Compare *MS XI*, 3 (IV, 409 / II, 411-2): same account but without the criticism of Isaiah.

²⁶ *1234*, pp. 240 / 188; Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 145. Palmer's translation. See R. Hoyland, 'Arabic, Syriac and Greek Historiography in the First Abbasid Century: An Inquiry into Inter-cultural Traffic', *Aram* 3, 1991, pp. 217-33, esp. pp. 220-2. Note that Michael has not preserved this text! This instruction can also be found in Arabic accounts of the conquest. Whether or not Dionysius had access to Arabic material is still under discussion.

²⁷ For example, no Arab horseman drowns while crossing the river Tigris in the battle against the Persians; *1234*, pp. 247 / 193; *MS XI*, 7 (IV, 417-8 / II, 423-4); Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 153. Tribute to the Emesenes was returned as the Arabs had been promised the city under the condition that they defeat the Romans first; *1234*, pp. 250 / 195; Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 156.

brother of Heraclius and general of the Roman army. He visits a Chalcedonian stylite near Emesa, who asks him to persecute the followers of Severus after his victory over the Arabs. After his defeat, a Syrian Orthodox soldier reminds him of his promise—pointing up Theodoric's hubris and implicitly making a distinction between the soldier's religious community and the arrogant Chalcedonians.²⁸ Time and again the Arabs are presented as being on their best behaviour. Whenever they are tempted to plunder, a commander reigns them in. The inhabitants of the land should pay a tribute and then be left alone.²⁹ The Romans on the other hand, as they 'marched towards the Arab camp every city and village on their way which had surrendered to the Arabs shouted threats at them. As for the crimes the Romans committed on their passage, they are unspeakable, and their unseemliness ought not even to be brought to mind.'³⁰ After the defeat, Heraclius says 'Farewell, Syria', and has his army pillage the territory 'as if Syria was already enemy territory'.³¹

Dionysius also refers to the conquest of Egypt and the active role that patriarch Benjamin played in 'handing it over' to the Arab general 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, referring to the 'tales and stories of the Egyptians' as the source of his account.³² These 'tales and stories of the Egyptians' may possibly refer to the Life of Benjamin as preserved in the *History of the Patriarchs*. Interestingly enough, Dionysius' version of the story gives Benjamin a more active role than the account that has been preserved by the tradition of the Coptic Church.³³

²⁸ 1234, pp. 242-4 / 190-1; *MS XI*, 5 (IV, 414-5 / II, 418); Palmer, *Seventh Century*, pp. 148-9.

²⁹ E.g. 1234, pp. 248-9 / 194-5; Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 154-5: on the capture of Damascus, the Arabs behaving themselves, the population becoming tributaries, and 'Umar preventing the taking of captives and looting. 1234, pp. 250 / 196; Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 157: on the anti-Roman behaviour of the local population.

³⁰ 1234, pp. 250 / 196; Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 157. Palmer's translation. This passage is not preserved by Michael.

³¹ 1234, pp. 251 / 196; *MS XI*, 7 (IV, 418 / II, 424); Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 158. Palmer's translation.

³² 1234, pp. 252 / 197; *MS XI*, 9 (IV, 422-3 / II, 432-3); Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 158.

³³ 'Life of Benjamin I', in *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, ed. and trans. B. Evetts, *Patrologia Orientalis* 1, 1907, pp 487-518 [223-54]. Note that the (Arabic) 'Life of Benjamin' in the *History of the Patriarchs* was based on a previous (Coptic) Life, probably written in the early eighth century, or possibly the late seventh century. See also J.J. van Ginkel, 'Heraclius and the Saints', in G.J. Reinink and B.H. Stolte, eds, *The Reign of Heraclius (610-641): Crisis and Confrontation*

Dionysius is very keen on naming the various cities that received a 'contract' from the Arabs by capitulating. The accounts, which portray the Arabs in a positive way, fit very well with Christian attempts of the eighth/ninth centuries to 'reinvent' the history of the seventh century so as to assert the antiquity of the special status of the various Christian communities. It is in this period that the so-called 'Covenant of 'Umar', with its rules and regulations for non-Muslims in society, seems to have become more prominent in Christian-Arab relations.³⁴ Apparently, Christians met challenges to their special position in society with references to the contracts of old. However, at least some of the details were settled only round about the time of Dionysius, and were then given authority by attributing them to the acknowledged contracts from the seventh century. Dionysius' account may well be seen in this light.

Although the image of the conquest in Dionysius' presentation appears to be clear, some problems remain. As stated earlier, Dionysius was one of the main sources of Michael and the Anonymous Chronicler of 1234, but there were others: Michael explicitly refers to Jacob of Edessa, John of Litarba and Ignatius of Melitene.³⁵ These sources were almost certainly available to the Anonymous Chronicler as well, so that not every account common to Michael and the Anonymous Chronicler necessarily comes from Dionysius. For example, an account of the slaughter of anti-Chalcedonian ascetics and monks on the mountain near Mardin³⁶ does not fit in well with the overall picture of Dionysius, in which the noble and honourable Arabs do their utmost not to harm the local population. In fact, this particular account is known from another chronicle-like source from the seventh century.³⁷

(*Groningen Studies in Cultural Change* 2), Leuven, 2002, pp. 227-40. Note that after Benjamin's death in 'The Life of Agathon' and 'The Life of John III' in *The History of the Patriarchs*, ed. and trans. B. Evetts, *Patrologia Orientalis* 5, 1910, pp. 1-12, the author states that the Chalcedonians were the most influential Christian force in Islamic Egypt and that the Coptic hierarchy only achieved a similar influence under governor 'Abd al-'Azīz (after 685), rather than, as Dionysius would have it, under the leadership of Benjamin (d. 661).

³⁴ On the pact see, e.g., M. Cohen, 'What was the Pact of Umar? A Literary-Historical Study', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 23, 1999, pp. 100-57.

³⁵ *MS X*, 20 (IV, 377 / II, 357)

³⁶ 1234, pp. 245 / 192; *MS XI*, 5 (IV, 414 / II, 419); Palmer, *Seventh Century*, p. 150.

³⁷ Brooks, *Chronica* II, pp. 148 / 114; Palmer *Seventh Century*, 19.

Even more problematic is a second account of the conquest. According to both the *Chronicle of AD 1234* and Michael the Great, presumably on the basis of Dionysius, the success of Muhammad in converting his fellow tribesmen to Islam is based on his repeated success as a raider into Palestine. The conquest is described as an intensification of the raids culminating in the Arabs' taking possession of the land. 'And God, whose purpose was to chastise us for our sins, nodded in assent while this [Arab] empire waxed in power.'³⁸ Now this does not fit Dionysius' overall picture at all. But neither does the account look like a lemma from a chronicle. This example, and the previous one, illustrate the need for some caution in ascribing all texts available in both the *Chronicle of AD 1234* and Michael the Great to Dionysius.

Before the *Chronography* of Michael the Great, no complete written account of the events of the seventh century by a Syrian Orthodox author has survived (with the exception of the *Zuqnān Chronicle*).³⁹ Since Michael had to rely on his sources to present his view of the conquest, his own perspective must be detected by the small changes and adaptations he made in the text of his sources. This can be done, assuming that variants between Michael's *Chronography* and the *Chronicle of AD 1234* normally reflect conscious decisions by Michael, because the *Chronicle of AD 1234* does not appear to have altered its source material—at least, most of the time. Because Michael used the work of Dionysius extensively, his perspective appears to be comparable to that of Dionysius;⁴⁰ yet often he abbreviated Dionysius' account, removing some of the nuances present in it. In Dionysius' account of Heraclius' encounter with Isaiah of Edessa (as preserved, we assume, in the *Chronicle of AD 1234*), the author rebukes the bishop and calls him an 'idiot' for opposing Heraclius so directly over Chalcedon. Michael, however, merely reports the event, without the critical comment. By doing so he implicitly seems to take the side of Isaiah. Rather than adopting a pragmatic stance

³⁸ *1234*, pp. 228 / 179; *MS XI*, 2 (IV, 405-6 / II, 404); Palmer, *Seventh Century*, pp. 130-1. Palmer's translation.

³⁹ However, the *Zuqnān Chronicle* does not seem to have had any impact on the Syriac tradition of historiography. According to A. Harrak (*Chronicle of Zuqnān*, pp. 12-17), the surviving manuscript is the autograph. In later Syriac historiography, no fragments or even influence of this chronicle can be detected.

⁴⁰ If our assertions about Dionysius are correct!

(like Dionysius), Michael stands on principle. Michael, even more than Dionysius, sees the history of his community as a battle against Chalcedon. Whoever opposes Chalcedon will not receive rebuke from Michael.⁴¹

Interestingly enough, however, Michael is generally more pragmatic or realistic than Dionysius as far as the Arabs are concerned. Where they are almost too good to be true in the fragments of Dionysius (as preserved in the *Chronicle of AD 1234*), some of his most positive passages about the Arabs are not included in Michael's account. For example the instructions for the invading Arabs⁴² are missing, and on the final march of the Romans to the Yarmuk there are no jeering villagers.⁴³ Michael also includes accounts of plunder and destruction, even when anti-Chalcedonians were being targeted or killed.⁴⁴ He also does not refrain from using terminology which has a negative connotation, such as *bnay Hagar*.⁴⁵

Epilogue: Developing group identity

A few trends seem to be emerging from this quick survey of views of the conquest in Syrian Orthodox historiography. First of all, after the initial perception of a period of plunder and anarchy, the Arab conquest was seen early on as the arrival of a new 'government' replacing an old government because of the failure of all Christians. The war became more and more a war between two armies in which the community was not involved, marking a mental separation from the 'Christian Empire'. Rather than identifying with that empire—which, up until then, had been the norm even though a particular emperor may not have been orthodox in the eyes of the Syrian Orthodox—the community is presented as a 'bystander' (often suffering, no matter what). There does not seem to be a specifically Syrian Orthodox identity in the account of the conquest, but rather a Christian identity, which has suffered through

⁴¹ Also see van Ginkel, 'Making History'.

⁴² See above, p. 178 and n. 26.

⁴³ See above, p. 178-9 and n. 29.

⁴⁴ e.g. *MS XI*, 6 (IV, 416-17 / II, 421-2): plundering the region between Aleppo and Antioch and assaulting the people gathering at the monastery of Symeon the Stylite.

⁴⁵ *MS XI*, 2 (IV, 405 / II, 403).

war and plunder. Although the original 'identity' of being a member of the 'Christian empire' gradually disappears, it is not until the late seventh or early eighth century that a clearly separate identity is present in the accounts.

Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē is the first Syrian Orthodox writer (at least the first whose text is at least partly available to us) who presents the conquest as a positive event. He presents the Arabs in a very positive light. The event is now seen as part of the struggle with the Chalcedonians; it is *their* behaviour, their sins, that bring about the conquest. There is no desire any more for a 'Christian Empire'; a repentant emperor is no longer on the agenda. The community has come to terms with existence in a society ruled by an elite of another religion. The past, however, seems to have been used to protect the societal position held by the community at a particular time. Group identity is now established over against the new dominant force in society, the Islamic Arabs.

Later authors like Michael the Great seem to have reduced the pro-Arab elements in the narrative to more normal proportions. Nevertheless, Michael often sees the Chalcedonians as the main opponents threatening the existence and identity of his community. The more balanced description of the Arabs found in works from the time of the Crusades may reflect the diminished power of the Arabs in the Near East at that time.

The accounts of the Arab conquest illustrate the gradual move from a 'greater Christian' identity towards a specifically Syriac Christian identity. Although not clearly visible in the accounts of the conquest, this shift is not, in the first place, towards a *dogmatically* defined identity. While the Chalcedonians are the defining 'not-us', interestingly enough the anti-'Nestorian' element in group identity receives less stress. As shown above, already Dionysius of Tel Maḥrē instead stresses language as a defining element of the community. This trend finds its culmination in Michael the Syrian. The identity of the Syrian Orthodox community could in part only be formed by the fact that the Arabs had conquered their lands and had separated them from the 'Greek-speaking' Christians. Until the arrival of the Arabs, this linguistic distinction had not been a boundary between religious communities, and both Greek and Syriac had been used by Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians alike. Due to the Arab conquest the cultural setting of Syria changed; Greek faded away, as well as Chalcedonian Christianity in parts of Syria. What remained

was the Syriac-speaking miaphysite community, which then claimed to be the only 'Syrian' Christianity. After establishing this perception of identity, some of their historiographers used it to 're-narrate' the arrival of the Arabs. They projected the clear separation of Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians in their own days back upon the early seventh century, thus reinventing history.

NEW TESTAMENT CITATIONS IN THE ḤADĪTH LITERATURE AND THE QUESTION OF EARLY GOSPEL TRANSLATIONS INTO ARABIC*

David Cook

The problem and the historical context

The problem of the nature of early Islam and its relation to Christianity continues to be a vexing one for the historian of religions. After the Muslim conquest of much of the classical world during the century following the year 634 AD, the conquerors remained a tiny minority, eventually swamped by a large number of converts to the new faith. Many of the key attitudes and doctrines of Islam were developed in this context. Of these, one cannot doubt that the Muslim attitude towards Jesus was of the utmost sensitivity. This was because of the overwhelming number of Christians in the empire, a striking number of whom served the Muslims in sensitive leadership positions, apparently without compromising their Christianity. During the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries we find the beginnings of the vast corpus of the *ḥadīth* literature—traditions anachronistically attached to the Prophet Muḥammad—forming not only the basis of Muslim law but also of the civilization which came to be called Islamic. For this reason it is profitable to examine once again the question of Gospel materials in the *ḥadīth* literature, especially those concerning Jesus, because of the central role they play in the developing polemic between Islam and Christianity and consequently the development of Islam itself.

At the dawn of the Muslim occupation of Syria it seems clear that for the Arabic speaking Christian there was no complete text of the Bible in his language, although there may well have been selections of verses or even of certain books. Prof. Sidney Griffith in his important research on the question of early translations of

* My thanks to the participants in the *Encounter of Oriental Christianity with Early Islam* workshop for their criticisms of this paper, especially Sidney Griffith and Andrew Palmer; and my thanks to Elizabeth Urban for critiquing the final draft.

the Gospels into Arabic came to the conclusion that the texts were not translated until the early 'Abbasid period, and that citations dating from texts earlier than this period are based upon individual, perhaps oral translations, often paraphrases, and not upon a larger translated text.¹ To come to this conclusion, among other pieces of evidence, he examined the most famous of the early Muslim Gospel selections, the 'translation' of John 15.23-16.1 in which Jesus foretold the coming of the Paraclete to his disciples. This account appears in the earliest known biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, that of Ibn Ishāq (d. 145/762) in the version of Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833).² In this selection the Paraclete is identified with Muḥammad himself, and in the larger sense with his mission and the revelation of the Qur'an. Rightly, Griffith pointed out the fact that this type of translation does not, and cannot, reflect accurate *verbatim* Gospel accounts because of the simple fact that the Muslim conception of the Gospels is so radically different from that of the Christian original texts. Using Muslim texts such as Q 57.27, which say specifically that the Gospels were 'given' to Jesus, in obvious opposition to Matt. 1.1, Luke 1.3 and John 21.25, all of which use words such as 'account' or 'record' to describe their function, he emphasized the futility of expecting Muslim writers to look to the Gospels as authoritative records concerning the actions of Jesus.³

This conclusion is confirmed by a perusal of the early Muslim Arabic texts themselves. It is comparatively rare for the entries on Jesus in the *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, stories of the prophets, literature or the 'historical' accounts of his actions to contain material which is either translated from the New Testament or is even paraphrased from it (with the exception of the historian al-Ya'qūbī).⁴ In fact, these

¹ Sidney Griffith, 'The Gospel in Arabic: an Inquiry into its Appearance in the First 'Abbasid Century', *Oriens Christianus* 69, 1985, pp. 126-67.

² Ibn Hishām, *Al-sīra al-nabawīyya*, Beirut, n.d., vol. I, p. 251.

³ Eventually giving rise to the doctrine of *tahrīf/tabdīl*; see R. Caspar and J.-M. Gaudéul, 'Texts de la tradition musulmane concernant le *tahrīf* des écritures', *Islamochristiana* 6, 1980, pp. 61-104; I. Goldziher, 'Über muhammadanische Polemik gegen *ahl al-kitāb*', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 32, 1878, pp. 341-87, esp. pp. 344-53; N. Roth, 'Forgery and Abrogation of the Torah: a Theme in Muslim and Christian Polemic in Spain', *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 54, 1987, pp. 203-36; and 'Alā al-Dīn al-Muttaqī b. Husām al-Hindī, *Kanz al-'ummāl*, Beirut, 1987, vol. II, p. 358 (no. 4234).

⁴ E.g., Abū Rifā'a Ibn Wathīma, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. R.G. Khoury, *Les légendes prophétiques dans l'Islam depuis 1er jusqu'au IIIe siècle de l'Hégire d'après le manuscrit d'Abū*

accounts are usually either based upon apocryphal Gospels or upon the Qur'anic stories of Jesus, often with the details fleshed out more than the account given in the original text of the Qur'an. Quotations ascribed to Jesus are extremely common in Muslim literature, especially in the *ḥadīth* literature ascribed to the Prophet Muḥammad, and also in the ascetic and the anecdotal material. However, it is clear that for the most part these citations are also not based upon the Gospel accounts, either literally or in paraphrase.⁵

Many of these citations must be based upon apocryphal Gospels, a subject which remains to be examined. Several examples of the following are translated below.

Blessed are those who humble themselves not out of necessity, abasing themselves without being wretched, and give wealth collected without disobedience, having mercy upon the abased and wretched, and frequenting the people of learning and wisdom. Blessed are those whose earning is (by) good (means), and whose heart is righteous, whose outer appearance is noble, and who have departed from the evil of the people. Blessed are those who work according to their knowledge, giving the bounty, *faḍl*, of their possessions, and keeping back the extra, *faḍl*, from their talk.⁶

The style of this selection is that of the Sermon on the Mount, which as we will see was the most commonly cited Gospel account, and there are no obviously Muslim insertions, but the citation is clearly extra-canonical.

Rifā'a 'Umāra b. Wathīma al-Fasawī: Kitāb bad' al-xalq wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā', Wiesbaden, 1978, pp. 298-340; Abū Ishāq Aḥmad al-Tha'labī, *Arā'is al-majālis*, Cairo, n.d., pp. 213-27; Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh al-Kisā'ī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, Leiden, 1923, pp. 174f., trans. Wheeler Thackston, *Tales of the Prophets*, Boston, 1978, pp. 326-36; Quṭb al-Dīn Sa'īd b. Hibbatallah al-Rāwandī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, Beirut, 1989, pp. 264-80; Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Maṣṣūr al-Nishāpūrī, *Qīṣaṣ-i anbiyā'*, Tehran, 1902, pp. 364-75; Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, Cairo, n.d., pp. 518-82; and 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-'Ulaymī Mujīr al-Dīn, *Al-uns al-jalīl*, Amman, 1973, vol. I, pp. 158-69.

⁵ E.g., Abū Aḥmad Wakī' Ibn Jarrāḥ, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, Medina, 1984, vol. III, p. 809 (no. 498); Abū Mas'ūd al-Ma'āfā al-Mawṣilī, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, Damascus, 1986, pp. 273-4 (no. 161); Abū Bakr 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad Ibn Abī Shayba, *Kitāb al-muṣannaḥ*, n.p., n.d., vols VIII, pp. 339 (no. 5409), 400 (no. 5642), XIII, pp. 203 (no. 16108), 205 (no. 16113), 512-13 (no. 17095); Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān b. Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *Musnad*, Beirut, 1996, vol. II, p. 134 (no. 1055); Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-bayān wa-al-tabyīn*, Beirut, n.d., pp. 455-6, 469-70, 474; Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī b. al-Hasan Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḥ madīnat Dimashq*, Beirut, 1995-2001, vols XXVIII, p. 46, XXIX, p. 217, XXXIII, p. 382, LXVIII, p. 39.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarānī, *Musnad*, vol. II, p. 57 (no. 912).

Other citations that are probably Biblical represent the common monotheistic ‘wisdom’ and ‘ascetic’ fund of sayings to be found throughout the Near East. For example, both ‘The one who returns (to take) his charity is like the dog who vomits and returns to his vomit and eats it’⁷ and ‘I saw a man dig a hole, *ḥufra*, and then fall into it himself’⁸ appear in Proverbs (Prov. 26.11 and 26.27), but it is impossible to say whether these two citations are directly from the Biblical source or whether they are from other collections of sayings and proverbs.

Yet other selections suggest an actual translation or at least a verified reading:

‘Abd al-Wāḥid b. Ḥabīb al-Dimashqī said: I read in the Psalms of David, Blessed is the servant for whom God makes known satisfaction to his heart which will necessitate a great reward; blessed is the one who does not worry like (other) people do—when anger in which there is rebellion appears he controls his rage with self-control.⁹

However, despite having a form that resembles that of Wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible, and an ascription to an early source, this translation is either from an apocryphal source or is an invention.

The problem of the position of Jesus in early Islam

Before discussing further the question of the New Testament translations, let us examine Jesus’ position in early Islam. This was clearly important. many verses in the Qur’an emphasize his standing as a prophet, as the most immediate predecessor of Muḥammad, as an authentic messenger from God, and as a unique creation in the divine plan, born of a virgin. While it is true that Christian doctrines such as the divine nature of Jesus (Q 5.73, 116) and his bodily crucifixion (Q 4.157) are attacked in the Qur’an, these polemics are clearly designed to protect the absolute unity of God, and in the

⁷ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, vols XXXV, p. 149, XLIX, p. 325; compare Abū Ḥayyān ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Tawḥīdī, *Kitāb al-baṣā’ir wa-al-dhakhā’ir*, Beirut, 1988, vol. VII, p. 236 (no. 693); al-Ṭabarānī, *Musnad*, vol. III, p. 116 (no. 1899); Abū Ya’lā Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Mawṣilī, *Musnad*, Damascus, 1986, vol. V, pp. 105-6 (no. 2717).

⁸ Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. V, p. 350; ‘Abdallāh Ibn Lahay’a, *Papyrus*, ed. R.G. Khoury, *‘Abdallāh b. al-Lahī’a (97-174/715-790). Juge et grand maître de l’école égyptienne*, Wiesbaden, 1986, p. 285.

⁹ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. XXXVII, p. 211.

case of the crucifixion to remove an event perceived as shameful from Jesus' life, not to denigrate him in any way.

The titles accorded Jesus in the Qur'an are all respectful. He is usually referred to as Jesus son of Mary, 'Īsā Ibn Maryam, and as al-Masīḥ. This last title was examined by Georg Graf, the scholar of Christian Arabic, in an article entitled 'How is the word al-Masīḥ to be translated?'¹⁰ This is highly problematic, as the word, which is clearly derived from the Hebrew *mashiah*, appears to be divorced from its messianic content and is made a part of Jesus' personal name (only three times, however, is it used alone to refer to Jesus). It has obviously been influenced strongly by the Christian use of 'Christ'= Messiah as part of Jesus' personal name. No other figure in Islam is ever given the name al-Masīḥ, with the exception of the Prophet Muḥammad himself in several rather isolated traditions.¹¹ Furthermore, in Q 4.171 we read 'The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, is only Allah's apostle and His word which He imparted to Mary, and is a spirit from Him!' (see also 3.45). In the following verses Christians are urged not to believe in the deity of Jesus; however, the above description does place him in a category by himself, using as it does the Arabic *kalima*, word, which appears to be equivalent to the *logos* of John 1.1ff. Even though the verse says that Jesus is 'only' Allah's apostle, the descriptions following this limiting phrase are unique within the Qur'an and very similar to those accorded to Jesus in Christianity.

It is significant that an overwhelming number of the Arabic inscriptions found in the deserts of Syria-Palestine, which have been dated to the first two centuries of Islam, mention Jesus.¹² Frequently these are invocations begging forgiveness for sins, and appear to ascribe power to Jesus. These inscriptions and also apocalyptic traditions from this time indicate that the early Muslim community in Syria lived with an overwhelming consciousness of the imminence of the Day

¹⁰ G. Graf, 'Wie ist den Wort *al-Masīḥ* zu übersetzen?' *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 104, 1954, pp. 119-23.

¹¹ Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *Al-riyāḍ al-anīqa*, Beirut, 1985, pp. 244-5 (*li-annahu wulida ka-annahu mamsūḥ bi-dihān*).

¹² Robert Hoyland, 'The Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21, 1997, pp. 77-102; Yehuda Nevo, 'Towards a pre-History of Islam', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17, 1994, pp. 108-41; and Yehuda Nevo, Zamira Cohen and Dalia Helfman, *Ancient Rock Inscriptions from the Negev*, Beersheva, 1993, pp. 20, 32, 36, 43-5, 47.

of Judgment. It is not surprising to find that in the earliest books of Muslim apocalyptic prophecies, which come from Syria, Jesus' role at the end of the world is described in great detail. It is probable that he was the prototype of the messianic figure in Islam, a role which is preserved in some stray traditions,¹³ although by the time they were written down this figure had been identified with the Mahdi and is not significant for this research. Of much greater importance is the fact that the Qur'anic citations preserved in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem—the earliest Muslim monument to survive, and dated to 72/691—are either concerned with Jesus' status or are polemics against the Trinity.¹⁴

All of this literary tradition shows that the definition of Jesus' position in early Islam was of significance, both from the popular believer's point of view, as exemplified by the desert inscriptions, and from the Umayyad government's point of view, as shown in official monuments such as the Dome.

Jesus in early Muslim literature

As I noted above, there are many citations either directly ascribed to Jesus or stories describing his actions scattered throughout the Muslim literature. A great deal of this material has been collected together by Tarif Khalidi in his well researched book, *The Muslim Jesus*. He gathers 303 *logia*¹⁵ and attempts to date them, presenting material from the second/eighth to the twelfth/eighteenth centuries. In this Muslim lore one can identify four basic Jesus types (these are considerably different from the classifications given by Khalidi).

1. One based upon the teachings of the New Testament (which will be the subject of the rest of this paper).

2. An anti-Jewish Jesus. This Jesus specializes in exposing petty thieves and criminals, especially liars, who are always identified as Jews.

¹³ See my *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Princeton, 2002, chapter 3.

¹⁴ Translations in R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others saw It. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton NJ, 1997, pp. 696-9.

¹⁵ Others are to be found as well; see my 'The Beginnings of Islam in Syria during the Umayyad Period', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2002, chapter 3.

3. An ascetic Jesus, who is clearly based upon the monastic tradition. The sayings of this Jesus form one of the core elements of the early Muslim ascetic literature, and are important in later Ṣūfī materials as well.

4. A Muslim Jesus, whose sole function is to polemicize against Christians and to predict the coming of Muḥammad (for example, Q 61.6). This Jesus, as he is presented in the Qur'an and developed in later anti-Christian polemics, had a message given to him by God which was later perverted by either the Jews (usually Paul is singled out)¹⁶ or the Romans.¹⁷ This perversion from the original teachings of Jesus constituted the beginnings of Christianity as it is known to history. The pristine message as Jesus first delivered it would have pointed out the coming of Muḥammad.

Given the difference between the Muslim and the Christian perceptions of Jesus' function and the nature of his literary remains, what are the chances of finding a Muslim translation, whether partial or complete, of the Gospels? I think that they are quite good. There is actually one extensive area of commonality: Muslims see the Gospel as a God-revealed Book sent down to Jesus, while Christians see the Gospels as the record of Christ's actions on earth. The area of overlap would include, therefore, the discourses and parables delivered by Jesus. Of course their function would be seen to be different by Christians and Muslims. But both groups would see these discourses as having at least some amount of spiritual authority and to be worthy of preservation. And it is legitimate to expect that these discourses would be the focus of Muslim interest and possible translation. In fact, as previously noted, there is a huge number of citations ascribed to Jesus, some of which are based upon the New Testament or direct translations of it. Many of these have been noted already by Khalidi and others who have worked with the *ḥadīth* literature, or those who have read the early ascetic literature.¹⁸ However, Khalidi did not

¹⁶ P.S. van Koningsveld, 'The Islamic Image of Paul and the Gospel of Barnabas', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20, 1996, pp. 200-29.

¹⁷ S.M. Stern, 'Abd al-Jabbar's Account of how Christ's Religion was falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs', *Journal of Theological Studies* new series 19, 1968, pp. 128-85.

¹⁸ I. Goldziher, 'Matt. VII.5 in der Muhammadischen Litteratur', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 31, 1877, pp. 765-7; idem, 'Influences chrétiens dans la littérature religieuse de l'Islam', *Revue de l'Historie des Religions* 18, 1888, pp. 180-99; idem, *Muslim Studies*, trans. C. Barber and S.M. Stern, London, 1971, vol.

use the most important Syrian source, Ibn 'Asākir's eighty volume *History of the City of Damascus*, nor did he differentiate between those sayings that were actually translations or near-translations of verses from the New Testament and those sayings that originated from other sources. There is a large number of *verbatim* or nearly *verbatim* citations from the Gospels, often from the Gospel of Matthew. This raises the question that Khalidi avoids in *The Muslim Jesus*: could there have been an early Muslim translation of one or part of the Gospels?

Since he did not concentrate on the identifiably Biblical material, this will be my focus. I have assembled fifty-nine selections that are from the New Testament or are recognizable paraphrases of verses or groups of verses (these are listed in Appendix I below). Of the latter group, forty-three citations are probably from Matthew (or also cited in other Gospels), while fifteen are from other Gospels or other books in the New Testament. Some of these are double citations, such as: 'God said, I have prepared for my righteous servants what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what has never entered into the heart of man.'¹⁹ This verse appears in I Cor. 2.9, which is itself a citation of Isaiah 64.4, 65.17, and it is impossible to say from where precisely the citation originates in the Muslim context. More interesting are those cited prayers that are based upon Biblical material. One of the most common is to use a combination of phrases well known to both Jews and Christians.

I say: O God, make the distance between me and my sins the same distance as between the east and the west; O God, clean me from my sins as a white cloak from impurity; O God clean me from my sins like snow and clean water.²⁰

II, pp. 346-62; idem, 'Neutestamentliche Elementen in der Traditions Litteratur des Islams', *Oriens Christianus* 2, 1902, pp. 390-7; M.J. de Goeje, 'Quotations from the Bible in the Qur'an and the Tradition', in *Semitic Studies in Memory of Rev. Dr. Alexander-Kohut*, ed. G.A. Kohut, Berlin, 1897, pp. 179-85; Tor Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, trans. Birgitta Sharpe, Albany, 1987, p. 26, and n. 59; also K. Athamina, 'Biblical Quotations in Muslim Religious Literature: a Perspective of Dogma and Politics,' *Shofar* 16, 1998, pp. 84-103.

¹⁹ Hammām b. Munabbih, *Ṣaḥīfa*, Amman, 1987, p. 36 (no. 30); al-Ṭabarānī, *Musnad*, vol. I, p. 93 (no. 135); Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vols XLI, p. 35, LII, p. 151.

²⁰ Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad Ibn Bishrān, *Amālī*, Riyadh, 1997, p. 249 (no. 573).

This selection combines Psalms 51.7 and 103.12, but it is not ascribed to David. Frequently this citation appears in the prayers of soldiers going off to the Byzantine front, and it was clearly seen as something of a 'last rite'. Another common citation is that of Isaiah 11.1-6, one of the most popular images of the messianic age, which appears frequently in the apocalyptic literature:

The anger of each beast will be taken (from it), until the little boy can put his hand into the snake-hole, *hanash*, and it will not harm him; the little boy will meet the lion and it will not harm him, and it (the lion) will be among the camels as if it is their dog, and the wolf among the sheep as if it is their dog.²¹

This selection has so many variants that it would not be possible to review them all here. Some are more literal than others; this one exchanges some of the names of the beasts so incongruously joined together to celebrate universal peace for those more familiar to the audience.

Let us now turn to the citations from the Gospels, concentrating primarily upon those from Matthew. A number of the citations are also stories about Jesus. This would seem to be in opposition to the conclusions reached above that the only possibility for authentic translation would lie in the actual sayings of Jesus himself. However, upon examination one finds that none of the citations are entirely biographical in nature; they are all focused on the teachings that give meaning to the citation.

Many of the citations are quite literal, usually from the Sermon on the Mount:

It is written in the Gospels: Blessed are those who are mutually compassionate because of me—they will receive mercy on the Day of Resurrection. Blessed are the humble because of me—they will be lifted up to the pulpits of power on the Day of Resurrection. Blessed are the pure...²² (Matt. 5.7, 3, 8)

²¹ Abū 'Abdallāh Nu'aym b. Ḥammād al-Marwazī, *Fitan*, Beirut, 1993, pp. 346, 359; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. XV, p. 159 (no. 19372); Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vol. XXXIV, p. 173.

²² Abū Dā'ūd Sulaymān b. al-Asha'th al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, Hulwan, 1993, p. 32 (no. 2); the editor notes that the text is unreadable for a line after this; and compare Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Ṣiyar al-'ālam al-nubalā'*, Beirut, 1985, vol. IV, p. 552; Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā al-kabīr*, Beirut, 1987, vol. II, p. 648.

Although the citation stops rather abruptly because of a lacuna in the text at this point, and the order of the blessings is different from that in Matthew, it is clearly the same material, probably having gone through several translations.

Most of the Sermon on the Mount can be reconstructed as well. Likewise:

Jesus son of Mary said to the disciples: Do not take a fee from those you teach other than that which you have given me. O salt of the earth! Do not be corrupted, since everything if it is corrupted can be treated with salt, but if the salt is corrupted there is no treatment.²³ (Matt. 5.13)

The initial sentence is not from the Sermon on the Mount, but the sequence of ‘salt of the earth’ is clearly from the Gospels. Yet other citations are ascribed to the Prophet Muḥammad, even when they are clearly direct translations of Jesus’ teachings.

The Messenger of God said: Whoever has a misdeed towards his brother—either with regard to possessions or honor—let him go and clear it up with him, before it is taken from him (the offender), and there will be neither *dīnār* nor *dirham*, and if he has good things they will be taken from him and given to his fellow, or the evil things of his fellow will be cast upon him.²⁴ (Matt. 5.23-6)

There is nothing in this citation that is against the teachings of Islam, but it has clearly been cleaned up slightly before its ascription to the Prophet. In the more literal translation that we will examine below, the element of the sacrifice to God as being the context in which a clean conscience is required is not suppressed.

Teachings which are associated with an ascetic lifestyle are taken *verbatim* from the Sermon on the Mount: ‘The Messenger of God said: Whoever has two garments, *qamīṣayn*, let him wear just one of them, and give the other (away)’²⁵ (Matt. 5.40), and ‘Jesus son of Mary said: Doing well, *iḥsān*, is not doing well to those who do well to you—that would be *quid pro quo*—but doing well is doing well to

²³ ‘Abdallāh Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, Beirut, 1971, p. 96 (no. 283); Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. XLVII, p. 460; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaḥ*, vol. XIII, p. 197 (no. 16088).

²⁴ Al-Ṭabarānī, *Musnad*, vol. II, p. 273 (no. 1326).

²⁵ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Zuhd*, p. 259 (no 750); from Ibn Abī Uṣaybī’a, ‘*Uyūn al-ambā’*’, Beirut, 1966, p. 197 it is clear that Muslims were familiar with the saying ‘turn the other cheek’ (Matt. 5.39).

those who do evil to you'²⁶ (Matt. 5.43-6). Neither of these sayings is original to the Gospels, however, and may very well be part of the larger ascetic fund of sayings. In connection with fasting and prayer, we find:

Jesus son of Mary said: When it is the day of fasting for one of you, let him anoint his head and beard with oil and wipe his lips, lest the people see that he is fasting; and when he gives his right hand, let his left hand not know; and when he prays, let him let down the curtain of his door, for God most high will distribute praise like he distributes daily sustenance.²⁷ (Matt. 6.1-8, 16-18)

It is not clear whether these sayings, despite their common citation in Muslim ascetic volumes, are in accord with Muslim spirituality. Both fasting and prayer are public activities in Islam, and it is difficult to see why this pair of sayings could have entered into Islam if there were not some authoritative translation available.

In this category of sayings there is no lack of apocryphal Sermon on the Mount-like sayings which do not appear in the present-day text. 'Jesus said to his followers. In truth I tell you, whoever looks to find Paradise, barley bread is his (portion) and sleeping in garbage with the dogs'.²⁸ Many additional sayings are adduced by Khalidi. But the majority of the material is well-known from Christian sources, and may simply have been picked up verbally by the early Muslims, who frequently ascribed it to their early holy men:

'Abdallāh b. Mas'ūd said: Whoever can place his treasure in heaven, let him do so, where moth-worms cannot eat it and where thieves cannot reach it, for the heart of every man is with his treasure.²⁹ (Matt. 6.19-21)

²⁶ Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vol. XLVII, pp. 436, 450; and compare Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, Beirut, 1998, vol. IV, p. 84: 'The Messiah said: Your sexual organs will never commit illicit actions as long as you lower your gaze'; and Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, Beirut, 1987, p. 138 (no. 263).

²⁷ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Zuhd*, pp. 48-9 (no. 150); compare Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣan-naf*, vol. XIV, p. 14 (no. 17398).

²⁸ Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vol. XLVII, p. 443.

²⁹ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Zuhd*, p. 223 (no. 633); compare p. 101 (no. 301); Abū Bakr 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, Beirut, 1999, p. 34 (no. 31), which is from Jesus, but a less direct quote; and Ibn al-Mubārak, *Zuhd*, pp. 200-1 (no. 572), which is from Muḥammad and concerns the *ṣahāba*; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vol. XLVII, p. 456; Zakī al-Dīn 'Abd al-'Azīm b. 'Abd al-Qawwī al-Mundhirī, *Al-tarḡīb wa-al-tarḥīb*, Beirut, n.d., vol. II, p. 254 (no. 5).

In the third/ninth century Iraqi *littérateur* al-Tanūkhī's collection of edifying tales we find a prayer similar to the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6.9-13). It is cited from the now lost *Kitāb al-adab al-ḥamīda wa-al-akhlāq al-naḥīya* by the well-known Muslim historian Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, who says that a certain Ḥumayd b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥimyarī used to say when he was suffering from distress:

Our Lord, whose throne is in the heavens, our Lord who is in the heavens, may his name be holy. Your will is fulfilled in the heavens and on the earth; just as Your mercy is in the heavens, make it on the earth. Forgive us our sins and our misdeeds, *dhunūbana wa-khaṭāyāna*, for You are the Forgiving, the Merciful One, *al-Ghaḥūr, al-Raḥīm*. O God, cause mercy to descend from Your mercy, and healing from Your healing upon the pain suffered by so-and-so.³⁰

Only the reference to God as *ghaḥūr* and *raḥīm*—so strongly reminiscent of the Qur'anic phrasing—reveal this to be a Muslim translation.

The Gospel materials in *ḥadīth* literature are eclectic. Of the parables, the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats appear; while among the biographical material the story of Jesus' temptation by Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4.5-7), Jesus' walking on the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 14.22-33), the story of the rich young man who was asked to give up everything for the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19.16-30), several lengthy polemical discourses against the Pharisees, the instructions given to the disciples in Matt. 10, Jesus' attack upon the money-changers in the Temple (Matt. 21.12-16), and selections from the Last Supper discourses (most completely reported in John 13-17) and the passion in the Garden of Gethsemane. Even the line 'Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times' (e.g. Luke 22.34) is included among these final discourses. However, there are also clearly gaps. Many of these verses and chapters of Matthew are paraphrased or summarized in a way that does not suggest direct translation or sustained interest in minute details on the part of the translator. The healing ministry of Jesus, for example, is entirely absent from any of the citations, as is the extensive focus upon the crucifixion and resurrection scenes, which is entirely understandable given the Muslim rejection of these sequences.

³⁰ Abū 'Alī al-Muḥassin b. 'Alī al-Tanūkhī, *Al-faraj ba'd al-shidda*, Beirut, 1978, vol. I, p. 130.

One must also ask how it is possible to know precisely from which Gospel these selections are taken, since the content of the four Gospels overlaps to a large degree. This is not an easy question to answer, but clearly certain verses only occur in certain Gospels and therefore some conclusions can be reached. For example, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector cited in the Muslim sources, where the former exhibits spiritual pride while the latter is submissive to God and conscious of his many failings, is only reported in Luke 18.10-14. The Golden Rule as well appears only in Luke:

A man came to Jesus and said. Teacher of good, teach me something for which God will give me benefit and not harm. He said. Pray to God to lighten upon you of matter(s) what is unnecessary with God, other than God, and to have mercy upon your fellows, and whatever you do not want to receive from others do not give to others, and you have given your due.³¹ (Luke 6.31)

Likewise, the story about the woman taken in adultery who is brought to Jesus for judgment, whereupon he gives the verdict of 'He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone', appears only in John 8.4-9. This sequence would seem to be in opposition to the proscribed Muslim punishment of stoning for adultery (note, however, that the word appearing in the Muslim version is *zānin*, which perhaps indicates a male adulterer; see Appendix 1, no. 52). In the story of the Last Supper, although the text apparently follows the account in Matthew, the element of foot-washing appears, which is only recorded in John. There are other examples of stray translations from Mark, Luke and John, but the balance of the material appears to originate in Matthew. Part of the reason for this preponderance is no doubt that the Sermon on the Mount discourses in Matt. 5-7, and a number of the parables which appear in their most complete form in Matthew, were the principal focus of the translations.

Certain verses are paraphrased or are mixed with other material:

Jesus son of Mary said: Do not speak overmuch in matters other than the mention of God most high, for your hearts will harden, and the hard heart is far from God. But do not (try) to learn, do not look at the sins of the people like you are lords, *arbāb*, but look at them like you are servants, for people are two (types) of men. the tested and

³¹ Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vol. XLVII, pp. 435, 446.

the forgiven, and so have mercy on the tested and praise God about the forgiven.³² (Matt. 7.1-5)

It is clear that this selection has a topical similarity to the sections of the Sermon on the Mount, where followers of Jesus are commanded not to judge each other. While the translation is far from literal, one cannot point to Muslim additions. Most probably it is a citation from Christian ascetic teaching that passed *verbatim* into early Muslim literature.

Certain citations from Matthew were important to how the first Muslims saw themselves in relation to the end of the world. For example, there is a rephrasing of the Parable of the Workers appearing in Matt. 20.1-16:

The Messenger of God said: Your end will only be like those communities who passed before you, like between the afternoon and the sunset. A parable of you (the Muslims), the Jews and the Christians is that of a man who hired workers and said: Who will work for me until the middle of the day for a *qīrāt*? So the Jews worked until the middle of the day for a *qīrāt*. Then he said: Who will work from the middle of the day till the late afternoon for two *qīrāts*? And the Christians worked. Then he said: Who will work from the late afternoon prayers until the sunset for four *qīrāts*? But you who work from the late afternoon prayers until the sunset for four *qīrāts* are receiving the wage double. So the Jews and the Christians were angered, and said: We have worked more and received less! He said: Have I refused any of your rightful due? They said: No. He said: This is my generosity given to whom I wish.³³

Although this rendition is clearly based upon the New Testament version, there are key differences. Jesus' original telling of the parable is eschatological in nature, but not so closely identified with the end of the world. In the version given in Matthew five groups are listed, unlike the three above, and none of them is identified.

³² Ibn al-Mubāarak, *Zuhd*, p. 44 (no. 135); Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh*, vol. XLVII, pp. 441-2; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. XIII, p. 193 (no. 16077); compare Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh b. Wahb al-Qurashī, *Kitāb al-jamī'*, Riyadh, 1996, vol. II, p. 552 (no. 447); Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣīfat al-ṣāfiya*, Beirut, 2001, vol. II, pp. 175-6; and see Goldziher, 'Matt. VII.5', and the parody of the 'speck in your brother's eye' in al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, Beirut, 1987, vol. XX, p. 348.

³³ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Medina, 1991, vol. IV, pp. 174-5 (no. 3459); Abū Ya'lā, *Musnad*, vols IX, p. 343, X, pp. 208-9; Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Sa'dī, *Hadīth 'Alī b. Hujr al-Sa'dī*, Riyadh, 1998, p. 146.

Here each group works for a specific period of time, while in the Matthew version all of them receive work-shifts that begin at various times throughout the day ending with payment in the evening. As opposed to this Muslim version, the first group starts in the morning, later ones are hired throughout the day, but each works until the end, although like in the above translation the last group works minimally, much to the irritation of the others. This Islamic version of the parable of the workers is significant in that it closely defines the way the first Muslim communities saw themselves in relation to the end of the world and to the previous faiths of Judaism and Christianity. According to the parable, the Muslims receive more and work less for their wage, yet the earlier faiths also receive a wage, although less than that of the Muslims. It is interesting to note, however, that there are no other obvious examples of citations of New Testament apocalyptic materials available, despite Jesus' role in the end of the world as described in the Qur'an and the Muslim apocalyptic literature.

Other verses have possibly left traces of the language from which they were translated: 'Jesus passed by a woman, who said: Blessed is the womb which bore you, and the breasts which suckled you. He said: Nay, blessed are those who read the *qur'ān*³⁴ and act upon it'³⁵ (Luke 11.27-8). In this verse we note the intrusion of the word *qur'ān*, where the original has 'the Word of God'. Most probably this does not reflect the Arabic meaning of Qur'an, but the Syriac *qeryānā* from which it was probably borrowed. Thus, the verse is apparently modified for the use of Muslims, but may very well have originally been a simple translation.

However, there are outright uses of the Qur'an and its relationship to the teaching of the Gospels:

Jesus son of Mary would say: It is not possible for a creature, '*abd*, to have two masters: he will please one and despise the other, and if he despises one, he will please the other. Thus it is not possible for a creature to be a servant to the world and perform the actions of the next. In truth I say, do not be interested in what you will eat or what

³⁴ Of course, the word *qur'ān* here cannot mean the Muslim Qur'an. In the verse this is 'the word of God', in Syriac *melito d-oloho*. See further A. Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, Baroda, 1938, pp. 233-4.

³⁵ Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. XIII, pp. 193-4 (no. 16078); Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. XLVII, p. 434, but note that in the version in Abū 'Ubayd b. Sallam, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, Beirut, 1991, p. 24, there is only *kitāb Allāh*.

you will drink, for God never created a soul greater than its provision, nor a body greater than its clothing, so think (on this).³⁶ (Matt. 6.24)

This selection is very similar in content to that of Q 39.29, which also speaks about a person who is divided in his spiritual loyalties and is unable to make up his mind in the choice between two masters, one being this world and one the next. Another selection contains a spiritual message originally stated in the Gospels, but re-ascribed to the Prophet Muḥammad:

A man said to the Messenger of God: Blessed are those who have seen you and believed in you. He said: Blessed are those who have seen me and believed in me, blessed, blessed, blessed are those who believe in me without seeing me.³⁷ (John 20.29)

After noting the texts from Matthew, one must logically ask whether these apparent fragments ever constituted a larger document. Did they come into the *ḥadīth* literature as pieces, perhaps as the result of conversations or polemical discussions with Christians, or with the influx of converts? Or are they the remains of a lost Gospel translation? Although it is possible that many of these Gospel citations were absorbed into the *ḥadīth* literature verbally, and did not pass through a literary phase, we have some preliminary evidence that there was at one time a larger document.

A possible Gospel fragment in Ibn 'Asākir

Several scholars have noted the importance of Ibn 'Asākir's (d. 571/1175-6) recently published *Tārīkh madīnat Dimāshq* for understanding Biblical history accounts in the Muslim tradition.³⁸ There is a great deal more work to be done on this point, since the material in Ibn 'Asākir is often radically different from that in the 'stories of

³⁶ Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh*, vol. XLVII, p. 445, compare p. 431; the version in al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, *Siyāsāt al-naḥs* (in his *Majmū' kutub wa-rasā'il al-Imām al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm*, Sana'a, 2001, vol. II, pp. 341-2) and Q 39.29.

³⁷ Abū Ya'ālā, *Musnad*, vol. II, p. 520 (no. 1374), and compare vol. I, p. 147 (no. 160); Mu'āfā b. Zakariyya, *Al-jalīs al-ṣāliḥ*, Beirut, 1987, vol. III, p. 180; and Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mukhallas, *Juz' fīhi sab'a majālis min 'amalī Abī Ṭāhir*, Riyadh, 1998, p. 69.

³⁸ For example, Suleiman Mourad, 'A Twelfth Century Biography of Jesus', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7, 1996, pp. 39-45.

the prophets' literature and is usually much closer to the Biblical accounts. Therefore, it is legitimate to look at the Jesus material in this text and see whether it is dependent upon a translation. There are two entries in Ibn 'Asākir in which most of the Gospel citations are to be found, the entry on Jesus, in which a great many of the above citations are recorded, and the entry on the Disciples. The entry on the Disciples contains parts of a document that could very well be an early translation.

In the rest of this section I will try to analyze this document and to date it. Several things stand out upon an initial reading of the text (I am not speaking about the miserable editorial job presented to us in the printed version; it speaks for itself. Even in its printed form, it must be read as a manuscript, and it is abundantly clear that the editor had not the slightest conception of the type of document with which he was working). In a text that is for the most part dedicated to Muslim traditions, it stands out by virtue of its relative length. The total document is ten pages in the printed edition, while for the most part it is rare to see a tradition even longer than a page throughout the eighty volumes of Ibn 'Asākir. This lends some preliminary support to the idea that it was originally a single document. According to the chain of transmitters, it is taken from a pair of Syrian scholars who both lived in the second/eighth century. It is ascribed to an anonymous figure who 'read the holy books and converted to Islam', and is entirely in the form of a discourse spoken by Jesus and addressed to the disciples. This fact, as previously noted, would help facilitate its entrance into the fund of Muslim documents. The lack of a name for the first link in the chain of traditionalists does not enable us to date the document closely (even if we were to accept the chain of transmitters at face value, which is problematic for early Muslim literature), yet at first glance it would seem to date from the early to middle of the second/eighth century.

The contents of the discourses are varied. For the most part they are translations, sometimes paraphrases, and sometimes very free paraphrases of parts of the book of Matthew. However, interspersed with these translations there is additional material that is extra-Biblical. Many of the citations resemble those cited above in the first part of this paper. This leads us to the question of which came first: the selections or the document? Ordinarily, one would suspect the document to have the primacy. Although no name is supplied for the translator, at least the material is presented in a reasonably coher-

ent form in the document and given some context. Unfortunately, however, in the case of early Muslim literature most scholars have come to believe that the more complete ‘documents’ are in fact the later ones, and are essentially stitched together from smaller pieces—a conclusion which has a good deal of support from the examination of hard historical traditions. Comparing the document with the scatter selections cited above does not help us, because while most of them do date from the second/eighth to third/ninth centuries—roughly the time during which the Bible was translated by Christians into Arabic—they do not point to one source. Even the material in Ibn ‘Asākir’s biography of Jesus does not enable us to trace the source. Therefore, we must look at the contents and not the transmitters.

Since all the material cited in this paper is from Muslim religious sources, including the long document in Ibn ‘Asākir, we must ask about the interrelation of this material, as well as its relation to the Christian translations, from a linguistic point of view. After reading through the document, there are few signs one way or another as to the source of the translation. The Arabic for the most part is smooth, and there are few apparent foreign words. But, more importantly, there is no apparent Muslim influence or import to the document whatsoever. Jesus speaks without reference to the Muslims: there are no predictions of the Prophet Muḥammad nor are there allusions to later Muslim practice, or even use of typical Muslim vocabulary.

In general, however, the vocabulary is not specific enough to be able to isolate phrases from another language. Part of this is due to fact that the printed version of the text simply leaves out any word that the editor did not comprehend, and he misreads many others. The material that I have been able to trace thus far is of a Syriac origin, as one might suspect. The Arabic used also indicates the early date of the document; for example, the Temple in Jerusalem is referred to as a *masjid*, the use of which is Qur’anic, but of course in later Arabic the word came to mean specifically ‘a mosque’. This use of *masjid* is also common to the stray translation fragments dealt with in the first part of this paper. For example,

The disciples said to the Messiah: O Messiah of God, look at the Temple of God, *masjid Allāh*, how beautiful it is! He said, Amen, amen, in truth I say to you, God will not leave one stone standing on another, but that it will be destroyed because of the sins of its people. God will make—not with gold or silver or with these stones that impress you—something dearer to God than it: righteous hearts. With them

God will settle the earth, and with them God will destroy the earth when they believe in something other than Him.³⁹ (Matt. 24.1-2)

Clearly this translation was made early. When for example, the Pharisees are denounced, they are referred to as *'ulamā'*, the learned ones, or *qurrā'*, readers of the Qur'an—two words with a great deal of baggage in Islam; it is difficult to tell whether this is a comparison or whether the translator is simply using two of the only words available to him. Going back to the document in Ibn 'Asākir, several plants are mentioned in the text that could possibly help with the identification: the orange, the *diflā* (usually translated as 'sunflower' or 'oleander'), and the fig tree. All these plants are commonly associated with Syria-Palestine, but this is hardly surprising.

The contents of this document are interesting. It starts by giving us a picture of the ascetic Jesus travelling throughout the world, homeless and friendless, preaching to whoever would listen. In this section God gives Jesus explicit directions about how to teach (many of which are reminiscent of the instructions given to the twelve disciples in Matt. 10). However, the text then makes a very abrupt transition to Jesus' direct speech to the disciples. Most of this material is taken from the Sermon on the Mount. We find the disciples told not to worry about food or drink but to be like the birds of the heavens, then a non-Biblical selection on the four stages of creation, which then returns to the discourse about not worrying about the cares of tomorrow. A polemic against outward manifestations of religiosity, largely taken from the Sermon on the Mount, and other diatribes against the Pharisees, then follows with various parables. After this we return to exhortations, such as 'removing the speck in your brother's eye', then instructions to not swear using the name of God, to turn the other cheek, to pray for those who curse you, and to ask forgiveness of others before offering up a sacrifice (using the word *qurbān*). Even more radical instructions, such as those to cut off bodily parts that might cause one to sin are included, and arms, legs and eyes are specified. A number of other parables are cited, usually those with a sowing and harvesting theme, which obviously suggest the Day of Judgment. Until this point, for the most part Jesus addresses the disciples, then the discourse becomes directed at 'slaves of this world', and loses its connection with the Gospel text.

³⁹ Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vol. XLVII, p. 454.

Several of the topics mentioned in this document are not in accord with Muslim doctrine as it later developed. For example, it is difficult to understand how the issue of oaths using God's name—which is one of the most common features of the Arabic language; even well-known atheists speaking in Arabic are required to speak in this manner—could be inserted by a Muslim. What, therefore, is the date and significance of this translation? I am inclined to date this document early, probably the middle of the second/eighth century, and to see it as part of a possible Arabic translation of the Gospel of Matthew. It is doubtful whether the text could date from an earlier period because the standard of Arabic is too high; later than this period it would come under the influence of Muslim theological concepts and prejudices that would preclude translating certain passages in the Gospel of Matthew accurately.

Conclusions

A great deal of work remains to be done on the issue of early Christian influence upon Islam. It is clear from a reading of the *ḥadīth* literature that there are large numbers of translated verses from the Bible and ascetic sayings, probably taken verbally from monks in the area of Syria-Palestine. However, in light of the above evidence I would like to propose that there was a Muslim translation of the Gospel of Matthew into Arabic, or at least of those parts which were not objectionable to the early Muslims. I think that the large number of citations indicating this Gospel, the redaction work done to make many of them acceptable, or even attaching them to the figure of the Prophet Muḥammad, and their eventual entrance into the much larger field of *ḥadīth* literature, point to this conclusion.

In the above we have partially examined some of the reasons why the Gospel of Matthew was chosen. I think that the most convincing reason is the fact that this Gospel is designed to show most clearly the appearance of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. The healing emphasis of Mark, the 'historical' trend of Luke, and above all the heavily Trinitarian interpretations of John did not appeal to the early Muslims.⁴⁰ Because of their belief in the imminent end of the

⁴⁰ However, they were used extensively by the historian al-Ya'qūbī (d. 904-5), *Ta'riḫh al-Ya'qūbī*, Beirut, 1999, pp. 61-72, who cites extensively from each Gospel.

world, and later, when this failed to materialize, the establishment of a godly state in this world, the Gospel of Matthew would be attractive. It contains the highest percentage of Jesus material in the first person of all the Synoptic Gospels, which accords more closely with the Qur'anic perception of the nature of the original Gospels given to Jesus. Many of the discourses are of an ascetic or eschatological bent; it not coincidental that these have survived in great numbers in the *ḥadīth* literature. It is not surprising to find that large amounts of material concerning Jesus' polemic against outward manifestations of religiosity survived as well; these statements fit in well with the purpose of Jesus' ministry according to the Qur'an. He came to purify a corrupted faith, just in the same way as the revelation given to Muḥammad came to purify previous corrupted revelations.

For what purpose could a Muslim translation of the Gospel have been undertaken? And why would only fragments have survived? The answers to these questions must remain conjectural at this point in the research, but one must take into consideration the elevated position accorded to Jesus during the first centuries of Islam (and thereafter), and the apologetic need to find the true Gospel given to Jesus as described in the Qur'an. The fragments in Ibn 'Asākir described above were obviously never important to the Muslim community outside Syria, and were clearly unknown as the New Testament was being translated by Christians into Arabic during the third/ninth century.⁴¹ Most probably these fragments were chosen by Ibn 'Asākir solely because they were directed towards the disciples. Whether they were part of a larger fragment or translation with other subjects, we may never know.

However, when we compare the fragments in Ibn 'Asākir and the *ḥadīth* literature, it is easy to see that there is no real consistency. Differing versions of the same verses abound, and in most cases there does not seem to be the unity that one would expect from a single translation. Unfortunately, this is also true of the one fragment cited by the polemicist al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 246/861). His beautiful translation of most of the Sermon on the Mount does not seem to have any relationship to the other Gospel or Sermon on the Mount fragments, nor does he use it himself in his own writings. In his

⁴¹ Nor does there appear to be any relationship to the *Diatesseron* of Tatian; see Erwin von Preuschen, *Tatian's Diatesseron*, Heidelberg, 1926; and William Petersen, *The Diatesseron and Ephrem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist*, Louvain, 1985.

Sīyāsāt al-nafs there is a pair of New Testament citations. Since one of these is Matt. 6.24 we can compare it with his translation of the same verse. Even though the same person (presumably) was doing the translation of a verse that had additional versions in the *ḥadīth* literature, there are significant variations in word order, choice of words and emphasis. While it is most probable that al-Qāsīm was himself translating from a previous Arabic translation of the Sermon on the Mount—it strains credibility to believe that a Qurashī nobleman would have learned a Christian language merely to refute Christianity—this translation effort seems to have been abortive and did not lead to a standard text appearing at the hands of a Muslim.

Is it possible to expect that we will actually find a complete Muslim translation of the Gospels? I believe that it is reasonable to hope to find additional texts and possibly attempt a reconstruction. The fragments above show the plethora of material yet to be extracted, and the unexpected appearance of a document in Ibn ‘Asākir shows that partial documents (at least) do survive. Most importantly, one should be on the look-out for Gospel citations in Muslim religious literature. Even if we never find a complete document, these citations can to a large extent help reconstruct what once was.

APPENDIX I

New Testament citations in the Ḥadīth literature

1. Jesus son of Mary met the devil, who said: Do you not know that nothing can hurt you which has not been foreordained for you? He said: Of course. So the devil said: So climb to the peak of this hill and throw (yourself)⁴² from it and see whether you live or not. ... He said: Do you not know that God said, My servant shall not test me, for I do as I will.⁴³ (Matt. 4.5-7)
2. Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.⁴⁴ (Matt. 4.19, Mark 10.21, Luke 5.28, John 1.43)

⁴² The editor notes that this is corrupt. read *raddika minhu* in place of *turaddi minhu*.

⁴³ Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, Beirut, 1999, vol. II, p. 239; Iṣḥāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Marwazī, *Musnad Ibn Rāḥwayh*, Beirut, 2002, p. 352 (nos. 825-6); and Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh*, vol. XLVII, pp. 385-8, with variants.

⁴⁴ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, ed. C. Pellat, Beirut, 1973, vol. I, p. 71 (noted by Pellat).

3. Blessed is every ignoble servant who knows the people but they do not know him—God will cause him to know satisfaction...God will open for them the gates of His mercy.⁴⁵ (Matt. 5.3)
4. Jesus son of Mary said. Blessed is he who controls his tongue, and opens his home, and weeps over his sins.⁴⁶ (Matt. 5.4, paraphrase)
5. It is written in the Gospels: Blessed are those who are mutually compassionate because of me—they will receive mercy on the Day of Resurrection. Blessed are the humble because of me—they will be lifted up to the pulpits of power on the Day of Resurrection. Blessed are the pure...⁴⁷ (Matt. 5.7, 3, 8)
6. Wahb [b. Munabbih] said: I have read in a book of one of the disciples, When you are treated in the manner of tribulation, be happy, *qurra ‘aynan*, and comfort your soul, for this is the way the prophets and the righteous were treated.⁴⁸ (Matt. 5.11-12)
7. Jesus son of Mary said to the disciples: Do not take a fee from those you teach other than that which you have given me. O salt of the earth! Do not be corrupted, since everything if it is corrupted can be treated with salt, but if the salt is corrupted there is no treatment.⁴⁹ (Matt. 5.13; Mark 9.50, Luke 14.34-5)
8. The Messiah Jesus son of Mary said: Whoever learns, teaches and acts, that person shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven, *malkūt al-samā’*.⁵⁰ (Matt. 5.19)
9. The Messenger of God said: Whoever has a misdeed towards his brother—either with regard to possessions or honor—let him go and clear it up with him, before it is taken from him (the offender), and then there will be neither *dīnār* nor *dirham*, and if he has good things they will be taken from him and given to his fellow, or the evil things of his fellow will be cast upon him.⁵¹ (Matt. 5.23-6)
10. Jesus son of Mary said...it was said to him: Adultery, what begins it and what returns it (back)? He said: The gazing, and in the heart will befall the advance towards pleasure and enjoyment,

⁴⁵ Al-Mawṣilī, *Ṣuḥd*, p. 216 (no. 53).

⁴⁶ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Ṣuḥd*, p. 41 (no. 124).

⁴⁷ See n. 22.

⁴⁸ Abū Dā’ūd, *Ṣuḥd*, p. 39 (no. 14).

⁴⁹ See n. 23.

⁵⁰ Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. XLVII, p. 456.

⁵¹ See n. 24.

and then distraction and sin. So do not extend a glance to what is not yours.⁵² (Matt. 5.27-8)

11. Jesus son of Mary said: Moses forbade you from adultery, and I forbid you from it, and I forbid you from involving yourselves in disobedience—because similar to that is like the one who perforates a tree-trunk; if he does not break it, he will cause it to be worm-eaten and weakened. Or like smoke in the house; if it does not burn it, it will still cause it to change color and become putrid.⁵³ (Matt. 5.27-8, paraphrase)

12. The Messenger of God said: Whoever has two garments, *qamīṣayn*, let him wear just one of them, and give the other away.⁵⁴ (Matt. 5.40)

13. Jesus son of Mary said: Doing well, *iḥsān*, is not doing well to those who do well to you—that is *quid pro quo*—but doing well is doing well to those who do evil to you.⁵⁵ (Matt. 5.43-6, Mark 12.31, Luke 10.27)

14. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said: If a man has memorized the Qurʾan and his neighbor does not know it, if a man has learned great religious knowledge and people do not know of it, if a man has prayed a long prayer in his house when he has visitors and they do not know it, then we have attained people of actions the like of which has never been on the face of the earth, able to perform actions in secrecy so that they will be public for evermore. Muslims would exert themselves in prayer and not a sound would be heard from them; it would be nothing but mumbling between them and their Lord. This is because God most high said: Call upon your Lord humbly and secretly. He certainly does not like the aggressors (Q 7.55).⁵⁶ (Matt. 6.5-6)

15. When one of them prays, let him draw the curtain, and God will allot praise as He allots daily rations.⁵⁷ (Matt. 6.6)

16. Jesus son of Mary said: When it is the day of fasting for one

⁵² Ibn al-Mubāarak/Nuʾaym, p. 12 (no. 44); and compare Ibn Qutayba, vol. IV, p. 84; al-Qurashī, *Jamīʿ*, vol. II, pp. 577-8 (no. 475) is a much expanded version.

⁵³ Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. XIII, pp. 196-7 (no. 16087).

⁵⁴ See n. 25.

⁵⁵ See n. 26.

⁵⁶ Ibn al-Mubāarak, *Zuhd*, pp. 45-6 (no. 140); compare Ibn Jarrāh, *Zuhd*, pp. 511 (no. 245), 513 (nos. 247-8) about secret actions being rewarded in public (Matt. 6.3-4).

⁵⁷ Ibn Jarrāh, *Zuhd*, p. 620 (no. 344).

of you, let him anoint his head and beard with oil and wipe his lips, lest the people see that he is fasting; and when he gives with his right hand, let his left hand not know; and when he prays, let him let down the curtain of his door, for God most high will distribute praise like he distributes daily sustenance.⁵⁸ (Matt. 6.1-8, 16-18)

17. ‘Abdallāh b. Mas‘ūd: Whoever can place his treasure in heaven, let him do so, where moth-worms cannot eat it and where thieves cannot reach it, for the heart of every man is with his treasure.⁵⁹ (Matt. 6.19-21, Luke 12.21)

18. Jesus son of Mary would say: It is not possible for a creature, ‘*abd*, to have two masters: he will please one and despise the other, and if he despises one, he will please the other. Thus it is not possible for a creature to be a servant to the world and perform the actions of the next. In truth I say, do not be interested in what you will eat or what you will drink, for God never created a soul greater than its provision, nor a body greater than its clothing, so think (on this).⁶⁰ (Matt. 6.24, Luke 16.33)

19. Jesus son of Mary said: Labor for God, and do not work for your bellies. Look at this bird eating and going forth without harvesting or sowing, while God provides for it. If you would say that we have larger bellies than that bird, then look at the cattle of the wild and the donkeys, how they eat and go forth, without sowing or harvesting, while God provides for them. Beware of the excess of the world, because the excess of the world in God’s eyes is filth, *rijs*.⁶¹ (Matt. 6.25-31)

20. Jesus son of Mary would say to his followers: Take the places of worship, *masājīd*, as dwelling places, and houses as stop-offs, *manāzil*, and eat of the produce of the wild; thus save yourselves from the world in peace...⁶² (Matt. 6.25-31)

21. In the Books: As you judge so shall you be judged; the cup

⁵⁸ See n. 27.

⁵⁹ See n. 29.

⁶⁰ See n. 36.

⁶¹ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Ẓuḥd*, p. 291 (no. 848); Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaḥ*, vols XIII, p. 194 (no. 16079), XIV, p. 24 (no. 17432); Abū Bakr ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-Qanā‘a*, in *Majmū‘a*, Beirut, 1993, vol. I, p. 71; and compare Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. XLVII, p. 444.

⁶² Ibn al-Mubārak, *Ẓuḥd*, p. 198 (no. 563); Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaḥ*, vol. XIII, p. 197 (no. 16089).

you pour shall be poured for you and more, for the one who begins receives more by necessity.⁶³ (Matt. 7.1-2, Luke 6.37)

22. Jesus son of Mary said: Do not speak overmuch in matters other than the mention of God most high, for your hearts will harden, and the hard heart is far from God. But do not (try) to learn, do not look at the sins of the people like you are lords, *arbāb*, but look at them like you are servants, for people are two (types) of men, the tested and the forgiven, and so have mercy on the tested and praise God about the forgiven.⁶⁴ (Matt. 7.1-5)

23. The Messiah said: Do not throw the pearl to the pig, for it will not do anything with it, and do not give wisdom to the one who does not want it, for wisdom is better than a pearl and one who does not want it worse than a pig.⁶⁵ (Matt. 7.6)

24. Wahb b. Munabbih said: I find in the revealed Book of God that there are people who are religious for non-pious reasons, gaining this world at the expense of the next, wearing the skins of sheep with hearts of wolves, their tongues sweeter than honey, their souls more bitter than aloes. They are being deceived by Me and being audacious against Me, and I swear than I will raise them as a tribulation—the one with self-restraint will be confused in it.⁶⁶ (Matt. 7.15)

25. Woe to you, slaves of this world! What does all the light of the sun profit a blind man, since he does not see it. Similarly, what profit does a knowledgeable person have of his knowledge if he does not act upon it? How many fruits of trees there are, but not all of them are beneficial, and are not eaten, and how many learned there are, but not all of them take advantage of their knowledge. Beware of the lying learned, who are wearing wool garments, their heads bent to the ground, watering their eyebrows like (...);⁶⁷ their words contrary to their deeds. Who harvests grapes from thorns, figs from the colocynth, *hanzal*? Likewise, the word of the learned liar does not bear anything but falsehood. The camel, if its master does not fasten it in the desert, will return to its home and origin;

⁶³ Abū Dā'ūd, *Ṣuḥd*, p. 40 (no. 16).

⁶⁴ See n. 32.

⁶⁵ Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫh*, vol. XLVII, p. 459; compare Abū al-Qāsim 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad al-Baghawī, *Musnad Ibn Ja'd*, Beirut, 1990, p. 123 (no. 765).

⁶⁶ Ibn Bishrān, *Amālī*, p. 304 (no. 696); and compare Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫh*, vol. LIII, p. 121.

⁶⁷ The editor notes that the next words are incomprehensible.

(so too) knowledge, if its possessor does not use it, leaves his breast and abandons him and forsakes him. Vegetation will not prosper but with water and soil; so, too, faith will not prosper but with knowledge and action. Woe to you, slaves of this world! There is a sign by which everything is known, witnessing either for or against him, and of religion there are three signs: faith, knowledge and actions.⁶⁸ (Matt. 7.15-20)

26. Jesus son of Mary said: Whoever's house is made out of clay, does not build a home on the edge of the sea.⁶⁹ (Matt. 7.24-7)

27. A parable of the guidance and knowledge that God has sent is like rain that falls upon the ground, and a seed that fell into the water. Much herbage and grass sprouted from this, and there was hard soil that held the water, so that God caused people to benefit from it—they drank, watered and planted. Others of it (the rain) fell on soft soil which did not hold the water, and so no herbage sprouted.⁷⁰ (Matt. 8.5-8, 11-15)

28. He (Jesus) left the home of a prostitute and they said to him: O Messiah of God, what are you doing with the likes of her? He said: The doctor comes to the sick.⁷¹ (Matt. 9.12)

29. Jesus son of Mary said: If you would be my followers and brothers, then accustom yourselves to enmity and hatred from people; and if you do not do this, then you are not my brothers. For I teach you that you should know and not be astonished that you will not attain that which you hope for except by endurance of that which you dislike, and you will not reach that which you wish except by leaving that which you desire. Beware of the (lustful) glance, for it sows in the heart lust, and its possessor will have distraction—temptation. Blessed is he whose vision is in his heart, and his heart is not in the vision of his eye. How far is that which has passed, and how close is that which is coming! Woe to the possessor of this world, how will it be when he dies and leaves it. He relies upon it, and it deceives him; he believes in it and it manipulates him. Woe to the deceived, for what they dislike is already approaching! And what they were promised has arrived, and what they love is separated

⁶⁸ Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vol. XLVII, p. 461.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

⁷⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. I, pp. 32-3 (no. 79).

⁷¹ Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Ibn Ḥamdūn, *Tadhkīra*, Beirut, 1996, vol. I, pp. 57-8 (no. 67).

from them through the length of the night and the day. Woe to those whose interest is the world, and sins are their works; how will it end tomorrow with their Lord?... (continuing with a previously cited passage).⁷² (Matt. 10)

30. Wahb b. Munabbih said: Jesus son of Mary went that day with a number of his followers. When it was the middle of the day, they passed through a field that was ripe, and they said: O prophet of God, we are hungry. And God revealed to him permission for them to eat, and so he gave it to them. They dispersed among the field and picked it, eating...⁷³ (Matt. 12.1-2)

31. The disciples lost their prophet Jesus, and it was said to them: He went to the sea. So they went to search for him, and when they arrived at the sea, behold! he was coming, walking on the water, the wave lifting him and pulling him down again, and a garment was half on him, half attached, until he came to them. One of them said to him: Can I come to you, O prophet of God? He said: Yes, and so he began to lift one leg and place the other and walk, while he was in the water, and he said: Save me, I am drowning, O prophet of God! Jesus said to him: Take my hand, you of little faith, *qaṣīr al-yaqīn, imān*; if you gave a grain of faith to the Son of Man, you would have walked on water.⁷⁴ (Matt. 14.25-33)

32. Jesus son of Mary said: If there is a complaint, *ma'taba*, between you and your brother, then meet him, greet him and ask his forgiveness for the both of you. If he accepts it then he is your brother, if not then take two or three or four witnesses to bear witness against him—on that the testimony of everything stands or that of the council of his group, *majlis qawm*... If he refuses then let him be as a tax collector, *ṣāhib maks*, or as one who has denied God.⁷⁵ (Matt. 18.15-17)

⁷² Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vol. XLVII, pp. 462-3; al-Bayhaqī, *ẓuḥd*, p. 167 (no. 384); Ibn al-'Arabī, *Kitāb fihī ma'nā al-zuḥd*, Cairo, 1993, p. 102.

⁷³ Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Walīd al-Ṭurtūshī, *Sirāj al-mulūk*, Beirut, 1995, vol. I, pp. 47-8. The continuation of this story is considerably different from the one in Matthew and involves the master of the field protesting the theft of his property, with Jesus praying to God to reveal all of the previous owners of the field giving permission to them to eat.

⁷⁴ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-yaqīn*, in *Majmū'a*, vol. I, pp. 36-7; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vol. XLVII, pp. 408-9, 417.

⁷⁵ Al-Qurashī, *Jamī'*, vol. I, p. 383 (no. 270); al-Mundhirī, vol. III, p. 375, slightly different in Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vol. VII, p. 138.

33. The Prophet said: None of you believes until he loves his brother as much as he loves himself.⁷⁶ (Matt. 19.19)
34. Jesus son of Mary said to one of his followers who was rich: Give your possessions to charity, and he disliked this. Jesus said. Rich people will not enter paradise.⁷⁷ (Matt. 19.21-3)
35. The Messenger of God said: Your end will only be like those communities who passed before you, like between the afternoon and the sunset. A parable of you and the Jews and the Christians is that of a man who hired workers and said: Who will work for me until the middle of the day for a *qīrāṭ*? So the Jews worked until the middle of the day for a *qīrāṭ*. Then he said: Who will work from the middle of the day till the late afternoon for two *qīrāṭs*? And the Christians worked. Then he said: Who will work from the late afternoon prayers until the sunset for four *qīrāṭs*? But you who work from the late afternoon prayers until the sunset for four *qīrāṭs*, are but receiving the wage double. So the Jews and the Christians were angered, and said: We have worked more and received less! He said: Have I refused any of your rightful due? They said: No. He said: This is my generosity given to whom I wish.⁷⁸ (Matt. 20.1-16)
36. The master of a group must be their servant.⁷⁹ (Matt. 20.26)
37. Jesus son of Mary entered into the Temple, *masjid bayt al-maqdis*, with Banū Isrā'īl following him, and made his garment into a whip, and began to beat them with it and disperse them, saying: You sons of snakes and vipers! Are you making God's places of prayer into market-places?⁸⁰ (Matt. 21.12-14)
38. God most high said, condemning the rabbis of Israel: You learn the law, *tafaqqahūna* for purposes other than the faith, and teach for purposes other than action, and sell the world for the action of the next, dressing for people in skins of sheep, hiding souls of wolves,

⁷⁶ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Zuhd*, p. 236 (no. 677); al-Ṭabarānī, *Musnad*, vol. IV, pp. 14 (no. 2093), 38 (no. 2670); al-Qurashī, *Jamī'*, vol. I, p. 347 (no. 241), Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vols VIII, p. 313, XXXVIII, p. 300; Abu Ya'lā, *Musnad*, vol. V, p. 407 (no. 3081); and see A.J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane*, Leiden, 1936-88, s.v. *ḥubb*.

⁷⁷ Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. XIII, p. 196 (no. 16084).

⁷⁸ See n. 33.

⁷⁹ Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vol. XXXIII, p. 313.

⁸⁰ Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Wāsiṭī, *Faḍā'il al-Bayt al-Muqaddas*, Jerusalem, 1979, p. 67 (no. 107).

rejecting the mote (dust) from your drink and swallowing mountains of forbidden (actions). You make the faith heavy like mountains for people, and do not designate for them the lifting of the little finger. You lengthen the prayers, whiten the clothes, catch the property of the orphan and the widow, and by My glory I have sworn that I will strike you with a tribulation in which the mind of every intelligent person will go astray.⁸¹ (Matt. 23)

39. The Messiah said: Woe to you, teachers of evil! Do not be like the sieve that takes from the good flour and passes and keeps the bran. Just like that you dispense wisdom from your mouths and keep the secret hatred in your breasts. Woe to you! for whoever wades through the river must get water on his cloak, even if he tries not to; so, too, whoever loves the world will not be saved from sins.⁸² (Matt. 23)

40. The disciples said to the Messiah: O Messiah of God, look at the Temple of God, *masjid Allāh*, how beautiful it is! He said. Amen, amen, in truth I say to you, God will not leave one stone standing on another, but that it will be destroyed because of the sins of its people. God will make—not with gold or silver or with these stones that impress you—something dearer to God than it: righteous hearts. With them God will settle the earth, and with them God will destroy the earth when they believe in something other than Him.⁸³ (Matt. 24.1-2)

41. The Messenger of God said: Every believer, *mu'min*, who gives food to a hungry *mu'min* will be fed by God from the produce of paradise; every *mu'min* who gives a thirsty *mu'min* to drink will be 'given to drink from a sealed wine' (Q 83.25); every *mu'min* who clothes a naked *mu'min* will be clothed by God with the green (clothing) of paradise.⁸⁴ (Matt. 26.34-6)

42. God will say: O son of man, I asked you for food and you did not feed me; and he will say: O Lord, how did you ask me for food, and I not feed you? You are the Lord of Worlds! He will say:

⁸¹ Ibn al-Mubārak, *Zuhd*, p. 161 (no. 470); Abū Dā'ūd, p. 35 (no. 7) and compare pp. 31-2 (no. 1); and Ibn Ḥamdūn, vol. I, p. 58 (no. 68). In Abū Dā'ūd, p. 36 (no. 8) we apparently find the Pharisees called *qurrā'*, with Wahb saying to the Muslims that those like them will appear in their midst (i.e. the Khawārij); also al-Zamakhsharī, *Rabī' al-abrār*, Qumm, 1989, vol. I, p. 490.

⁸² Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh*, vol. XLVII, p. 460.

⁸³ See n. 38.

⁸⁴ Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. XIII, p. 234 (no. 16202).

Did not My servant so-and-so ask you for food and you did not feed him? Do you not know that if you had fed him, you would have Me? O son of man, I asked you for drink and you did not give me to drink. He will say: O Lord, how could I give you to drink when you are the Lord of Worlds? He will say: Did you not know that my servant so-and-so asked you for drink and you did not give him to drink? Do you not know that if you had given him to drink, you would have Me? O son of man, I was sick and you did not visit me. He will say: O Lord, how could I visit you when you are the Lord of the Worlds? He will say: Did you not know that my servant so-and-so was sick and if you visited him, you would have done so to Me?⁸⁵ (Matt. 26.34-45)

43. Jesus son of Mary, when God told him that he was leaving the world, suffered death and it was painful to him. He called the disciples and made a meal for them, and said: Be with me this night, for I have need of you. When they gathered to him in the night, he ate supper with them and rose to serve them. When they had finished with the meal, he began to wash their hands with his hand, to cleanse them, and wipe their hands with his garments, and they were amazed by this and disliked it. He said: Whoever refuses something of me tonight, he is not of me and I am not of him, and so they accepted it from him until he finished with that. He said: What I have done with you tonight, the service of the meal to you, the washing of your hands with my hands, let this be my model to you, for you know that I am the best of you, therefore do not be proud one to another, but sacrifice each person himself for the other, just like I sacrificed myself for you. As to the need that I ask of you, pray to God, and exert yourself in prayer that my end be postponed. When they placed their hands for prayer and desired to exert (in prayer), sleep took them, until they could not pray. Then he woke them and said: Praise be to God, can you not persevere one night for me helping me in it? They said: By God, we do not know what came over us... He said: The shepherd is taken and the sheep are scattered, and began to speak in this fashion, and he said: Truly I say to you, one of you will betray me before the

⁸⁵ Iṣḥāq b. Ibrāhīm, *Musnad*, Medina, 1991, vol. I, p. 115 (no. 28).

cock crows, and one of you will sell me for small change, and eat my price.⁸⁶ (Matt. 26.17-34)

44. The food of John the Baptist was locust and the insides of trees.⁸⁷ (Mark 1.6)

45. Jesus said: If a man does good works, but does not love God, what does it profit him?⁸⁸ (Mark 8.36)

46. Blessed are they who weep remembering their sins, and guard their tongues and throw their homes open.⁸⁹ (?Luke 6.21)

47. A man came to Jesus and said: Teacher of good, teach me something for which God will give me benefit and not harm. He said: Pray to God to lighten upon you of matter(s) what is unnecessary with God, other than God, and to have mercy upon your fellows, and whatever you do not want to receive from others do not give to others, and you have given your due.⁹⁰ (Luke 6.31)

48. Jesus passed by a woman, who said: Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that suckled you. He said: Nay, blessed are those who read the *qur'ān* and act upon it.⁹¹ (Luke 11.27-8)

49. God said to one of the prophets of the Israelites: O Banū Isrā'īl! How long will you be audacious before me and how long will you kill my prophets and my messengers, and how long will you rebel against my rule; how long will you kill my prophets and my messengers—beware that I do not take you for the blood of John the Baptist, for the blood of a man who killed his brother, beware that I do not turn my face from you, and will not receive (repentance) from you. How long will I place you under my wing, *kanaf*, as a chicken places her chick under her wing, *janāḥ*—but you are audacious.⁹² (Luke 13.34)

50. The Messenger of God said: Blessed is everyone who humbles himself without decreasing, who humiliates with destitution, who gives wealth collected without rebellion, who has mercy upon the people of humiliation and destitution, who mixes with the people of learning and wisdom. Blessed is the one who humiliates himself,

⁸⁶ Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. XLVII, pp. 470-1.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. LXIV, p. 198.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. XLVII, p. 445.

⁸⁹ Ibn Jarrāḥ, *Zuhd*, vol. I, p. 259 (no. 31).

⁹⁰ See n. 31.

⁹¹ See n. 35.

⁹² Ibn Bishrān, *Amalī*, p. 38 (no. 36); and compare Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. LXIV, p. 212.

and makes his acquisition good, who makes his bed righteous, who is noble on the outside and withdraws from evil people. Blessed is the one who works according to his knowledge, who gives the bounty of his wealth and holds off on the bounty of his speech.⁹³ (Luke 14.11-15)

51. While the Banū Isrāʾīl were praying, two men came and one of them entered while the other did not, but stayed at the gates of the place of prayer, *masjid*, saying: I am to enter the House of God? Such as me does not enter the House of God when I have done such-and-such and done such-and-such, and he began to weep and did not enter. Kaʿb said: The following day it was written that he was a *ṣiddīq*.⁹⁴ (Luke 18.9-13)

52. Someone came to Jesus son of Mary with an adulterer, *zānin*, and said: Stone him. When they took the up the stones, he said: No one who has done what he did should throw at him. And all of them threw down what was in their hands other than John the Baptist.⁹⁵ (John 8.4-9)

53. A man said to the Messenger of God: Blessed are those who have seen you and believed in you. He said: Blessed are those who have seen me and believed in me, blessed, blessed, blessed are those who believe in me without seeing me.⁹⁶ (John 20.29)

54. God said: I have prepared for my righteous servants what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what has never entered into the heart of man.⁹⁷ (I Cor. 2.9, citing Is. 64.4, 65.17)

55. The believing servant who is attacked by exhaustion, *waʿk*, or heat is like iron which is put in the fire—its impurities are burned away and the good remains.⁹⁸ (I Cor. 3.13)

56. Ibn ʿUmar said: The servant will never reach the truth of faith until he is counted a fool in his religion by the people.⁹⁹ (I Cor. 4.10, cf. 1.18, 27) Remember God so much that they will say about you that you are crazy.¹⁰⁰ (I Cor. 4.10)

⁹³ Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh*, vols LXIII, p. 35, LVIII, p. 349.

⁹⁴ Abū Dāʾūd, p. 37 (no. 10).

⁹⁵ Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. LXIV, pp. 196-8.

⁹⁶ See n. 37.

⁹⁷ See n. 19.

⁹⁸ Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. XXXIV, p. 185.

⁹⁹ Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaḡ*, vol. XIII, p. 324 (no. 16478).

¹⁰⁰ Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. XVII, p. 220.

57. Let each man work as he is able; no one knows the length of his life.¹⁰¹ (II Thess. 3.10)

58. The beginning of every sin is the love of the world.¹⁰² (James 4.4, I John 2.15)

59. For God most high has a table, and in another version, there will be a feast at Qirqasiyya, and one on high from the heavens will ascend and call out: O birds of the heavens, O beasts of the earth, come and be satiated with the flesh of tyrants.¹⁰³ (Rev. 21. 23-4)

APPENDIX II

*The Gospel document in Ibn 'Asākir*¹⁰⁴

From Ismā'īl b. 'Īsā b. 'Atiya al-Sa'dī and 'Abdallāh b. Ziyād b. Sim'ān;¹⁰⁵ they both said: From one of the *ahl al-kitāb* who converted to Islam...

O disciples, do not bear to me today the worries of tomorrow. Each day has enough of its own worries; let no one worry about the sustenance of tomorrow. You were not created for food, but food was created for you,¹⁰⁶ and the Creator of tomorrow will bring sustenance to you in it. None of you should say when facing the winter: 'How will I eat?' or 'How will I dress?'; or when facing the summer: 'How will I eat?' or 'How will I drink?' If you have length (of life) during the winter, you will have sustenance; if you have length (of life) during the summer, you will have sustenance. Do not bring the worry of your (upcoming) winters and summers upon your (present) days. Each day has worry enough. (Matt. 6.25-34, Luke 12.22-5, 29).

O disciples, humans, *ibn adām*, are created in four stages in the world—for three of them he is certain with regard to God, and his opinion of God is good, but during the fourth his opinion of God

¹⁰¹ Ibn Jarrāḥ, *Ḍuḥd*, vol. II, p. 498 (no. 237).

¹⁰² Al-Bayhaqī, *Ḍuḥd*, p. 134 (no. 247); Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Ḍuḥd*, p. 43 (no. 51); al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, *Siyāsat al-nafs*, in *Majmū'a*, vol. II, p. 342; while in Ibn Ḥamdūn, *Tadhkirā*, vol. I, p. 58 (no. 69), this statement is associated with Jesus, probably on the basis of Matt. 6.24.

¹⁰³ Yūsuf b. Yaḥyā al-Sulamī, *Iqd al-durar*, Zarqa', 1987, p. 156 (no. 155); and Muḥammad al-Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, Beirut, 1983, vol. LII, p. 337.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫh*, vol. LXXIII, pp. 60-4.

¹⁰⁵ 'Abdallāh b. Ziyād b. Sim'ān b. Sulaymān b. Biṭrīq al-Qurashī al-Madinī, d. second/eighth century (Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫh*, vol. XXVIII, pp. 265-83).

¹⁰⁶ Reading *ghidhā'* for *ghadd*.

becomes bad when he fears God deserting him. The first stage is when he is created in his mother's belly after he is created from the three darknesses. the darkness of the belly, the darkness of the womb (61)¹⁰⁷ and the darkness of the placenta—God pours upon it His sustenance from the innards of the belly's darkness. When he leaves the belly, he finds (his mother's) milk—he does not make haste towards it with his foot, or take it by his hand, nor does he stand up with (his own) strength to obtain it, but he is coerced towards it, until he is raised beyond milk and weaned¹⁰⁸ and finds himself in the third stage between his parents, who clothe him. When they die, they leave him an orphan and people have compassion upon him, this one feeding him and that one clothing him, having mercy because of God. In the same way God most high does not feed His creatures anything from His hand to theirs, but He causes them to be sustained and showers them from those of His storehouses by means of His creatures in accordance with His will. When he reaches the fourth stage, and his character is formed and gathered, he is a man who fears that God will not sustain him, so he dares the forbidden, and attacks people, killing them for the (vanities) of the world. Praise be to God—how far these two modes (of thought) are from each other—when he is young, he thinks well of God, but when he grows old he thinks badly (of Him), and entangles himself in the search for that which has been promised him (by God).

O disciples, take heed of the bird that flies in the atmosphere of the heavens. Have you seen a bird store up sustenance one night for the next day ever? Don't you see it taking refuge in its nest without anything to store up? Then it wakes up early in the morning rejoicing, and its sustenance is provided for it, and then it returns in this manner to its nest (Matt 6.26, Luke 12.24). In this manner, also, the cattle, the beasts, the fish and the wild animals, while the human, *ibn adām*, stores up sustenance always for the day if he is predestined for it. If he parted from this world and saw the next, he would regret it in a way that would never be any use to him.

O disciples, the most hated of the learned and the readers, *qurrā'*, in the sight of God are those who love to rule in the sittings, *majālis*, be noticed at meals, and are pointed out by fingers—those who have

¹⁰⁷ Page numbers are those of the printed edition of Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh* (see n. 104 above).

¹⁰⁸ Reading *yufṣim* for *yanzim*.

finished (drinking) from jugs, *jarā'ib*, of widows—may God double the punishment of them! (Matt. 6.5, 23) O disciples, truly I tell you, do not love this world and (at the same time) hope for the next. If you indeed love this world, then you will perform actions that will gain benefit in this world; if you hope for the next, then you will perform actions that will gain benefit in the next (Matt. 6.24). Truly I tell you, you have come into a time when their (?) words are those of the prophets, while their merit is that of fools. Your words are a remedy that will heal the sick, since your (their?) hearts are sick unable to receive the remedy. You have killed yourselves with love of this world. Your hearts take heed of your actions, but your actions do not take heed of your sins. Know that this land supports the mountains, and the mountains grasp the land. So, too, your bodies support your hearts, but your hearts do not grasp your bodies—they are distracted and cause you to incline towards love of this world. This world has bewitched (62) your eyes; in your eyes this world has achieved the level of a bride being presented—everyone who sees her loves her, while (really) it is at the level of a snake, supple to the touch, killing with its poison.

O disciples, let your worry in this world be yourselves that you might be successful in it (the world), and do not let your worry be your bellies or your genitals. If you are emaciated from (lack) of food, then you will hasten/tend towards wisdom. O disciples, if you relied upon God fully, then He would supply you with sustenance just as He brings birds their sustenance in the air of the heavens—they wake up empty and go to sleep full. O disciples, can you work for two—that is, this world and the next? Whoever seeks this world leaves the next, whoever seeks the next world leaves this one. He is like the (...) ¹⁰⁹barley and coarse-ground salt, leaving this world complete *salīmīn*.

O disciples, I have already stricken this world for you, and placed you above it. There are none with the light of knowledge in it other than two. kings and women. As for the kings, if you do not compete with them about their world, they will not compete with you about your religion, *dīn*; as for women, use fasting against them, and know that a glance at a woman is one of the poisoned arrows of the devil,

¹⁰⁹ In the text *ka-lawha* (perhaps), although this does not make any sense. Most probably this word is some adjective or modifier to the 'barley' which follows it.

and it sows lust within the heart, and makes the one who does it sin. Kings only kill good (people) because they call them (the good people) to their world, but the latter do not respond, and so the populace becomes aware of their defects. So they say: We will kill them and have done with them.

O disciples, do not compete with the people of this world about their world, or they will compete with you about your religion—and you will not have gained their world nor stayed with your religion. O disciples, speak with the wisdom God has given you in your hearts. Do not soil your bodies with the vanities of this world (...) this world do not be glad. Know that this wisdom enlightens the heart when it is touched by (good) actions; do not be corrupted lest the people be corrupted. A parable of the wise man who acts in accordance with his wisdom is that of the sun which shines upon the created beings and does not burn itself, and a parable of the wise man who does not act (63) in accordance with his wisdom is that of the lamp which lights that which is around itself but is burned up. A parable of the wise man who acts in accordance with his wisdom is that of the orange, *utranja*: its scent is good and its taste is good. A parable of the wise man who does not act in accordance with his wisdom is that of the *diflā* (oleander, sunflower). Its leaves are beautiful but its taste is bitter. To sit with the wise believer is like sitting with musk; even if you do not take any of it, the scent rubs off on you; sitting with an evil man is the same as sitting in a grave; even if the loneliness does not get to you, the stench will. Woe is the one sitting with rebellious people!

O disciples, do not purify your drink of the mosquito and leave the she-camel, *qayla*; you are pulling the mote from people's eyes and leaving the obstacles, *'awārid*, in your eyes. You look at the sins of other people as if you were gods/lords, so do not look at other people's sins (Matt. 7.1-5). Gods do not look at your sins as slaves (?). There are two types of people: the tormented one and the one in good health, *mu'āfan*, so have mercy on the one tormented, and praise God for health.

O disciples, God said to Moses: Do not swear falsely on My name; and Moses ordered the Israelites: Do not swear on God(s name) unless you are telling the truth. But I tell you: Do not swear on God either telling the truth or lying, but say: Yes. A lie does not suffice (to cover) a sin, or a false oath (Matt. 5.33-5). O Israelites, be wise, knowledgeable, but do not place wisdom other than with

its people, nor conceal it from (its) people. If you speak of wisdom with anyone other than its people, you become ignorant, and if you deny it to its people you act wrongfully. Be like the knowledgeable doctor who gives his remedy when he knows that it will avail. Speak wisdom and act in accordance, and receive it from those who speak it. If you hate the speaker of it, leave the evil words aside, and if you love the speaker of it, love those who hate you and have mercy upon those who hurt you. Give of your precious things, and pray for those who curse you. If you only love those who love you and give to those who give to you—this is *quid pro quo* and you have no merit over anyone. But give to those who refuse you, and honor your fathers and mothers, that God may avert hardship from you and give you ease of living. Be forgiving to people and God will be forgiving to you. Do you not see that the sun rises also on God's enemies, and He gives sustenance to them (as well)? (Matt. 5.43-8) Do not forbid them their sustenance because of their disobedience towards Him, but invite them to repentance so that they might enter paradise, *al-janna*. Know that for every good or evil word there is an answer that will be given on the day of resurrection. When one of you offers a sacrifice, *qurbān*, to be sacrificed, and you remember that your brother (64) (... has something) against him, let him leave his sacrifice and go to his brother and satisfy him (Matt. 5.23-4).

O Israelites, requite in goodness—return an evil action with a good (one), since God has the account of every man. When the shirt of one of you is taken, let the inner garment be offered as well. Whoever slaps your cheek, turn the other cheek so that it can be slapped. If a man accompanies¹¹⁰ you for a mile, go with him two (Matt. 5.40-1). If a man commits a sin with his eye, and it is for the sake of satisfying God that he remove it, then let him remove it. If he commits a sin with both of his eyes and it is for the sake of God that he remove both of them, let him remove both of them. It is better that he be blind, *ʿmā*, in this world, while seeing in the next will be better¹¹¹ for him. If he commits a sin with his arms and his legs and it is for the sake of satisfying God that he cut them off, then let him cut them all off. That he should be in this world without arms and legs is better than he be in hell with arms and legs (Matt. 5.29-30).

¹¹⁰ Reading *ṣaḥabaka* for *sakḥkharaka*.

¹¹¹ Reading *khayr*.

O Israelites, do not sit with kings at their tables, and do not eat what they eat, wear what they wear, or ride what they ride, for this is forbidden to you by God, and diminishes (one's) spiritual ranks. O Israelites, it is useless for the outside of a darkened house to have a lamp when its interior is darkened, so begin with your houses before what is inside them is robbed and they fall into ruin, and do not give people your lamp. Begin with your own selves: correct it and exhort it, and act with wisdom, then teach it to the people.

How useless it is for the outside of the body to be healthy while the inside is corrupt. Your bodies are useless for you to save your skins while your hearts are corrupt. What is the use of cleaning¹¹² your skin when your hearts are impure—bestowing wisdom upon people and keeping the hatred in your breast? Do not be like the sieve, *munkhal*, that expels the good flour and keeps the bran. That is the wisdom that comes out of your mouths while you keep hatred in your breasts. Leave the evil and seek for the good that will benefit you, for if you have good and evil together, how will the good benefit you? The one who fords a river must inevitably see his clothes wetted, no matter how hard he tries (to avoid it), and thus it is with those who love this world—they will not be saved from sins.

¹¹² Reading *tanaqū* for *tabqū*.

MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN CONTROVERSY IN
AN UNEDITED SYRIAC TEXT
Revelations and Testimonies about Our Lord's Dispensation

Muriel Debié

Revelations and Testimonies about Our Lord's Dispensation is one of a number of Syriac texts with apocalyptic content produced at the end of the seventh century AD and afterwards. Up to now, the text is unpublished and has never been studied. As I am planning an edition of the text with Alain Desreumaux, I have made a first attempt at analysing it; it is the result of this preliminary inquiry that I present here. *Testimonies*, as I am going to call the text, is anonymous, without date or indication of the place of composition. We are thus compelled to seek internal arguments that will allow us to situate the text in place and time.

Testimonies is preserved in two late manuscripts of the eighteenth century: Vatican syr. 164 (dated 1702 AD)¹ and London, BL add. 25,875 (1709 AD).²

Content of the manuscripts

The content of the two manuscripts may be seen from the following table.

Vatican syr. 164 (1702 AD)	London, BL add. 25,875 (1709 AD)
(ff. 1-63) <i>The Cave of Treasures</i>	(ff. 1-50) <i>The Cave of Treasures</i>
(ff. 65 ^v -71 ^v) Question of Simeon Cephas about the origin of the divine Sacraments and Baptism	(ff. 50 ^v -54 ^v) Question of Mar Simeon Cephas about Eucharist and Baptism

¹ See S.E. Assemanus, *Bibliothecae apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus*, Rome, 1759, pp. 329-31.

² W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838*, London, 1872, vol. III, pp. 1064-9, no. DCCCCXXII.

Vatican syr. 164 (1702 AD)

(ff. 71^v-73) Question of Ezra the Scribe regarding the End of Times and the Kingdom of the Ishmaelites

(ff. 75^v-79) *The Testament of Adam*

(ff. 79-109) *Testimonies of the Prophets regarding the Dispensation of the Messiah*

f. 110, colophon: ms. copied by the deacon Hormizd bar Cyriacus bar Ascar from Mosul, AnGraec 2013 (= 1702 AD)

London, BL add. 25,875 (1709 AD)

(ff. 54^v-57^v) Question of Ezra the Scribe regarding the Kingdom of the Ishmaelites

(ff. 57^v-58^v) *The Testament of Adam*

(ff. 58^v-77^v) *Revelations and visions of the Just Ones of old and of the true Prophets regarding the Dispensation of the Messiah*

(f. 77^v) Names of the nations that arose after the Confusion of Tongues

(ff. 77^v-81) Extracts regarding Nebuchadnezzar from a discourse of John Chrysostom

f. 81, colophon: ms. copied by the priest Homo bar Daniel from Alqosh, AnGraec 2020 (1709 AD)

(ff. 81^v-157^v) *The Book of the Bee* of Solomon of Basra

f. 157^v, second colophon by the same scribe

(ff. 159-232) *Chronicon* by Simeon Shanklawi

f. 232, third colophon by the same scribe

(ff. 232^v-253) *The History of Shalitā*

(ff. 253-258^v) *The Martyrdom of Mamas*

(ff. 258^v-361) *The History of Alexander the Great*

f. 361, fourth colophon by the same scribe

The two manuscripts contain the same texts in the same order, except that the Vatican manuscript contains two additional elements before a first colophon. Its scribe later resumed his work of copying in three stages, probably using a different manuscript as model each time, at the request of and on behalf of different people (one of whom is mentioned in the second colophon). The manuscripts were copied just a few years apart, in Iraq, in the same East-Syrian script. This could mean that they copied the same exemplar, but the variant readings in the titles of the different pieces as well as the slight differences regarding *Testimonies* point to two different ancestors. This

indicates, in turn, that these texts were thought interesting enough to deserve several copies.

The material that precedes *Testimonies* was not copied at random but seems to have been gathered on purpose. The content of the manuscripts shows, on the one hand, a clear interest in a theology of history and a preoccupation with the chronology of world history and the End of Time, as in the *Cave of Treasures*³ and the *Apocalypse of Ezra*⁴ (with, in this particular case, a further interest in the coming of the Arabs). On the other hand, the *Questions of Simeon Cephas* show a concern for matters concerning the Christian sacraments. We find all these themes in *Testimonies* as well.

Testimonies

Introduction

Under the guise of a random collection of prophecies, the text is a kind of *vademecum* of what is to be known about the Dispensation of Christ and about the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. It is addressed to an anonymous reader whom the author invites to consider ‘the mysteries and allegories which took place in every generation until the coming of our Lord, who accomplished them in the body of his Humanity and the strength of his Divinity and beloved Humanity’ (Test. 1).

Testimonies from the Old Testament represent types of New Testament realities. J. Rendel Harris postulated the existence of entire collections of such testimonies—whether oral or written—as sources for anti-Jewish Christian literature in Greek and Syriac.⁵ What we have in *Testimonies* is not in fact a raw collection, but rather an elaborate compilation of traditional material. It has a

³ See Su-Min Ri, ed. and trans., *La Caverne des trésors: les deux recensions syriaques* (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 486-487 = syr. 207-208), Louvain, 1987; with commentary in idem, *Commentaire de la Caverne des trésors: étude sur l’histoire du texte et de ses sources* (CSCO 581 = subs. 103), Louvain, 2000.

⁴ See J.-B. Chabot, ‘L’Apocalypse d’Esdras touchant le royaume des Arabes’, *Revue Sémitique* 2, 1894, pp. 242-346.

⁵ J. Rendel Harris and V. Burch, *Testimonies*, 2 vols, Cambridge, 1916-20. See a collection of biblical testimonies and their interpretation in an eighth-century treatise in A.P. Hayman, ed., *Disputation of Sergius the Stylite against a Jew* (CSCO 338-339 = syr. 152-153), Louvain, 1973.

strong anti-Jewish flavour. The very first prophecy (taken from the *Cave of Treasures*) shows Adam foreseeing the crucifixion of Christ at the hands of the Jews (Test. 1). Later on, the text speaks of the 'stubborn Jews who sacrificed Christ' (Test. 6). Elsewhere, the Jews are said to be impure (Test. 8), ungrateful (Test. 22) and wicked (Test. 23). The text aims at showing that the Christians are the new elected people, the Jews having been divested of the Promise since they did not listen to the prophets and did not receive Christ: David himself announced the baptism given to the holy nation elected from among all other nations, the nation of the Christians believing in Christ (Test. 7).

Testimonies relies heavily upon the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*,⁶ which it cites as one of its sources: Pseudo-Methodius is mentioned twice under the name of Te'edos (Test. 33 and 35). From the *Apocalypse*, *Testimonies* borrowed the idea that divine election passed to the nation of the Syrian Christians who possess the true Hope, which is the Cross. Using Pseudo-Methodius, *Testimonies* provides its Syrian readers with material to prove that they are the true children and heirs of Abraham. This argument is in fact directed as much to the Arabs as it is to the Jews.⁷ Drawing from Pseudo-Methodius, the text says:

If the wicked Jews or the Arabs say to you, 'Abraham is the father of the Jews, and the heathens' father is Ishmael, son of Abraham. And you, Syrian Christians, who is your father?' Answer [them]: 'We, Christians, are the elected people, the sacerdotal tribe for the heavenly Kingdom according to what the Prophets announced.' (Test. 27)

The figure of Melchizedek

To support the view that Christians are the elect people, stated clearly in Test. 27, other elements had appeared previously in the text. First, there is an emphasis on Melchizedek, for whom twelve kings had built a city he called Jerusalem (Test. 11). The number

⁶ G.J. Reinink, ed. and trans., *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius* (CSCO 540-541 = syr. 220-221), Louvain, 1983.

⁷ On the habit of Christian apologetic texts of the ninth century to characterize Islamic beliefs and practices as Jewish, see S.H. Griffith, 'Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century', *Jewish History* 3, 1988, pp. 65-94.

twelve, of course, refers to Christianity and the twelve apostles. At the same time, Melchizedek's offerings are a type of the Christian mysteries. Abraham himself is supposed to have partaken of these mysteries, thus becoming the first Christian (Test. 14). Melchizedek prophesies also regarding Rebecca's twins that the elder brother would become the servant of the younger, that is, that the Jews would be the servants of the Christians (Test. 12). Contrary to the traditional Christian interpretation of the priesthood of Melchizedek as a type of the eternal priesthood of Christ, here it is explained as a type of the union without separation of humanity and divinity in Christ (Test. 11).

The role of Jerusalem

The text uses Melchizedek on different levels: to announce the Christian mystery of the Eucharist, as a profession of faith about Christ's natures, and as a means to make a symbolic linkage between the Christians and the founding of Jerusalem. The *Cave of Treasures* is the main source here. In that text, as in the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, Jerusalem plays a central role. It is said to be at the centre of the Earth where Adam was buried with offerings of gold, incense and myrrh (Test. 16). In *Testimonies*, however, God places the heavenly Jerusalem above the earthly one (Test. 18) because He created everything by pairs, such as the moon and the sun, night and day.... Human beings also are dual, with two hands, two ears, and so on. The text adds that even the divine mysteries ought to be celebrated, according to the apostles' instruction, by two members of the clergy: a deacon and a priest.

Jerusalem appears on another occasion, in the Testimony of Jeremiah (Test. 30): the Lord asks Jeremiah to sit on a rock for a year and a half without speaking or eating. After that time, He allows him to explain that this rock is Jerusalem, church of the nations; it is also Christ who will come at the end of time and place his church on the rock of Truth; and it is also the head of the twelve rivers that water the Creation, that is, the twelve disciples of the Lord, who are 'called *kiphā* ["stone"] by our Lord' (Test. 30). Jeremiah then announces the defeat of the Jews whose Jerusalem will be destroyed. Ostriches, monkeys and jackals will inhabit it, and the Jewish people will be dispersed.

This peculiar passage evidently aims at showing that Jerusalem is no longer the city of the Jews, but is now a Christian city. The

emphasis put on Jeremiah's rock may be a way of countering any claim that the Dome of the Rock—whose building deeply moved contemporary Christians and had an echo in Syriac apocalyptic tradition, notably in Pseudo-Methodius⁸—could be the heir of the Jewish Temple. Jerusalem will remain ruined after its destruction: 'the house of the Jews is empty, because the Holy Ghost left it at that time' (Test. 40). The destruction of Jerusalem is actually announced twice: the first prophecy, by Jeremiah, announces that Jerusalem will be laid waste and deserted by its inhabitants and refers to its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar (Test. 30); the second time, Daniel announces the coming of Christ and his Crucifixion 'after 500 years'. Jerusalem will then be destroyed and remain deserted (Test. 31). That destruction, if actual, is also symbolic; it means that the Temple will be torn down at that time and will remain so.

The End of Time

Testimonies offers no hope of a political change that would give the city of Jerusalem back to the Christians, as in other Syriac apocalypses. Instead, the text resorts to a *symbolic* appropriation of the city. The 'End of Time' is no longer at hand, as it was in the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*. While the text reflects the traditional chronology of the six millennia, Christ's birth taking place in the sixth millennium, 5,500 years after the Creation (Test. 1, 31), no eschatological expectations are announced. *Testimonies* summarizes Pseudo-Methodius' account of Alexander the Great building the North Gates and the prophecy of the coming of the impure tribes of Gog and Magog 'at the End of Time' against the Land of Israel, as well as the prophecy that the Romans will hand over the Kingdom to God the Father 'at the End of Time' (Test. 33). There is, however, no *Endkaiser* in *Testimonies* and the kingdom is not a political one. *Testimonies* gives an interesting interpretation of kingship through the story of Nimrod (Test. 33). One day in his palace, he saw an image of a crown. He called his jeweller, Sisun, and asked him to make an actual crown similar to the image. Sisun did so and, as soon as he finished, the

⁸ See G.J. Reinink, 'Early Christian Reactions to the Building of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem', *Xristianskij Vostok* 2, 2000, pp. 227-41; B. Flusin, 'L'esplanade du Temple à l'arrivée des Arabes d'après deux récits byzantins', in J. Raby and J. Johns, eds, *Bayt al-Maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, I, Oxford, 1992, pp. 22-6.

image embodied itself in the artefact. That is why (the text goes on) people say that the crown came from heaven. Since then it was upon the heads of the Persians until Alexander, and then upon the heads of the Romans, who will wear it forever because they believed in Christ (Test. 34). Based once more on Pseudo-Methodius, this account makes a key point: Roman kingship is divinely ordained—but this kingship is primarily spiritual and heavenly rather than political.

We are here in a situation different from that in Pseudo-Methodius or the Edessene apocalypse.⁹ The ‘End of Time’, which according to these apocalypses was supposed to witness the victory of the Last Emperor, is interpreted in *Testimonies* in a symbolic way: it in fact refers to the time of Christ’s birth from the race of David, from the Virgin Mary. The Messiah reveals himself at the ‘End of Time’ whereas the Son of Perdition will manifest himself ‘at the end of this world’. Eschatology is radically ‘realized’ in *Testimonies* by splitting off the ‘End of Time’—which already took place when Christ was born (Test. 4, 27, 42)—from the ‘End of this World’ when the Antichrist will appear (Test. 4, 8).¹⁰ Neither a political change nor particular eschatological events are expected. The defence of Christianity will not come from a Last Emperor, but from Christians living within the Islamic empire equipped with arguments such as those provided in *Testimonies*.

The prophecies are intended to rebuke the Muslims as much as the Jews. Christians had trained for anti-Jewish controversies for centuries, but in the early Islamic period had not yet built arguments to respond to attacks from Muslims. With *Testimonies* we probably find ourselves in a period of transition, when Christian apologists found the weapons of anti-Jewish controversy at hand and used them to create, little by little, a new defence directed to the Muslims.

Indeed, in *Testimonies* we can see the construction of a range of anti-Muslim arguments in process. Thus, when the author needs to explain why Christ was riding a donkey when he entered Jerusalem, he says that it is not because he did not have a horse to ride but

⁹ See G.J. Reinink, ‘Der edessenische ‘Pseudo-Methodius’’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 83, 1990, pp. 31-45; idem, ‘Pseudo-Ephraems ‘Rede über das Ende’ und die syrische eschatologische Literatur des siebenten Jahrhunderts’, *Aram* 5, 1993, pp. 437-63.

¹⁰ It is only when it relies upon Pseudo-Methodius that the text identifies the ‘End of Time’ and the ‘End of this World’ (Test. 33 and 34).

because ‘he wanted to show that he is the Lord of all creatures, quiet and humble’ (Test. 37). This sounds as if it could be a response to mockery from the Arabs who were fond of horses, especially in the battlefield.

Testimonies also asserts that the religion of the Syrian Christians is more excellent than any other since they pray facing the East, which is, according to the text, the way human beings originally prayed, from Adam until the confusion of tongues. Moses and Aaron also turned to the East, where the sun rises, where Paradise lies and where the door of Heaven is placed—as well as God’s throne and Jacob’s ladder (Test. 17). We may have here the very beginnings of controversy with Islam about the direction for prayer, something that would become an important topic in ninth-century texts.¹¹ Toward the end of *Testimonies*, a warning to Christians not to ‘abandon the path of Justice’ lest God abandon them (Test. 38) may be directed against conversion to Islam.

In order to comfort Christians and convince them that they do possess the true religion, the text uses the argument of miracles (Test. 27, 40), but in a less elaborated way than in ninth-century literature.¹² The argument comes once again from anti-Jewish literature, but is now obviously aimed at Muslims: the miracles accomplished by Moses and those coming after Christ’s resurrection are proof of the Jews’ blindness and of Christianity’s superiority. Most of all, the emphasis on Christ being the only and true Messiah sounds like a refutation of the prophetic status of Muḥammad: ‘There is no other Messiah in truth than Christ who can give strength and power to human beings’ (Test. 40). In the same way, the heavy insistence upon the Jews having crucified Jesus Christ could be an answer to the Muslims’ denial of the crucifixion as much as an anti-Jewish argument.

¹¹ See already the eighth-century *Dispute of the Monk of Bêt Hâlê* and the ninth-century *Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis* (d. c. 870); S.H. Griffith, ‘Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bêt Hâlê and a Muslim Emir’, *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3, 1, January 2000, pp. 1-19.

¹² See S.H. Griffith, ‘Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians’, *Proceedings of the PMR Conference*, 1979, pp. 63-87.

Date and place of composition

The above examples lead me to consider *Testimonies* as a witness to the very beginnings of Christian discussion with Islam, a laboratory in which new arguments are being developed out of the existing anti-Jewish polemical literature. The only firm ground for determining a *terminus a quo* for the composition of the text is its use of the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, which implies a date after 691-692 AD.¹³ As indicated above, with *Testimonies* we are no longer in a period of political hardships for Christians such as those brought about by 'Abd al-Malik's tax reforms and the Second Civil War, nor in a time of expectation of a military victory by a Christian empire or of the coming of the End of Time as in the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*.¹⁴ The expected victory is a super-worldly one, at a time when the worldly power of the Arabs seemed unrivalled. The elements of anti-Muslim controversy, as well as the warning against conversion point to a period when the new religion was becoming known to Christians and was well installed. The early decades of the eighth century fit this picture, perhaps the decade between 720 and 730, before the development of controversies with Islam in the form of dialogues, Questions and Answers, and letters.¹⁵ The text does not actually name the Muslims as such but refers to them as 'heathens' or 'Arabs' and does not, at any time, claim openly to be a disputation with them.

As we saw earlier, *Testimonies* is intended for Syrian Christians, in all probability East-Syrian ones. The last paragraph of the text is an appeal to remember the fast of the Ninivites¹⁶ observed particularly in the Church of the East: 'We... Christians, fast on these days... to represent the Prophet Jonah, type of our Lord and Saviour Jesus

¹³ See G.J. Reinink, 'Pseudo -Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam', in A. Cameron L.I. Conrad and G.R.D. King, eds, *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, I: Problems in the Literary Source Material (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 1)*, Princeton, 1992, pp. 149-87; Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius (CSCO 541 = syr. 221)*, pp. XII-XIII.

¹⁴ See G.J. Reinink, 'Pseudo-Methodius: A Concept of History'.

¹⁵ See S.H. Griffith, 'Disputing with Islam in Syriac'.

¹⁶ Sabrishō, the metropolitan of Karkā, is supposed to have introduced this fast to the liturgical calendar of the Church of the East in the sixth century. See J.-M. Fiey, *Assyrie Chrétienne, III (Recherches ILOB, Série III: Orient Chrétien 42)*, Beirut, 1968, pp. 20-2.

Christ's burial. Let us keep the memory of them [the Ninivites] as a testimony of the Dispensation of our Lord' (Test. 44). This statement is at one and the same time an explanation of a Christian practice and a call to hold to it, perhaps against the background of conversions to Islam.

Other clues point to an East-Syrian origin as well. The author identifies the biblical town of Baflel, near the place where the great fish spat out the prophet Jonah, with the city of Balad (Eski Mosul)—a piece of information a West-Syrian would probably not know or at least not bother to mention. Persia occupies a central place in the text: the offerings of gold, incense and myrrh are brought back to the East by Nebuchadnezzar after the fall of Jerusalem and were then kept 'in the Treasury of Persia' (Test. 31). Twelve Persian kings brought them to Christ in Bethlehem,¹⁷ converted, returned home with the blessings of the Virgin Mary and started to spread the Good News (Test. 31-32). This story became very popular in the East-Syrian Church and became an accepted tradition, as the correspondence of Patriarch Timothy shows.¹⁸

Last but not least, *Testimonies* lays stress on the inhabitation of the second Person (*par̄sôpâ*) of the Trinity (Test. 4). The vocabulary used in the text does not reflect the evolution and elaboration worked out after the ecumenical councils of the fifth and sixth centuries, which is not surprising considering the isolation of the Church of the East.¹⁹ Moreover, anti-Theopaschite elements²⁰ point to the same East-Syrian stock.

¹⁷ This passage comes from the *Cave of Treasures*, although there the number of kings is three.

¹⁸ See O. Braun, 'Der Katholicos Timotheos I und seine Briefe', *Oriens Christianus* 1, 1901, pp. 142-50 (Latin translation: pp. 96-102); F. Briquel-Chatonnet et al., 'Lettre du patriarche Timothée à Maranzekha évêque de Ninive', *Journal Asiatique* 288, 2000, p. 10.

¹⁹ For general introduction to the Christology of the Church of the East, see S. Brock, 'L'Église de l'Orient dans l'empire sassanide jusqu'au VI^e siècle et son absence aux conciles de l'empire romain', *Istina* 40, 1995, pp. 25-43; idem, 'The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods of the Fifth to the Early Seventh Centuries: Preliminary Considerations and Materials', in G. Dragas, ed., *Aksum-Thyateira: A Festschrift for Archbishop Methodios*, London, 1985, pp. 125-42 (reprinted in S. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature and Theology (Variorum Collected Studies Series CS357)*, Aldershot, Hampshire and Burlington VT, 1992, XII).

²⁰ 'The human death of our Lord' (Test. 3); 'By offering his humanity that the Jews have crucified on the Cross' (Test. 6); 'He stayed in his divinity that does not suffer' (Test. 40).

Conclusion

The gathered prophecies of *Testimonies* look like a compendium of arguments designed for East-Syrian Christians as a defence of their religious and liturgical practices and beliefs in the guise of an anti-Jewish controversy, but actually directed against Muslims. The text gives answers to specific challenges, but is far from advancing any idea of political relief or eschatological liberation in some immanent future. It seems an attempt to cope with the historical situation at the beginning of the eighth century and represents a transitional phase in the literature, coming later than the vivid eschatological expectations reflected in the older Syriac apocalypses, but earlier than the more technical treatises of controversy from the late eighth and early ninth centuries. The atypical literary form of the text probably reflects this situation. It is not an apocalypse, despite what the word 'Revelations' in the title would seem to imply and despite its heavy borrowings from the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*. But if not an apocalypse, neither is it an actual text of controversy with Islam.²¹

²¹ I am particularly grateful to Dr. Arietta Papaconstantinou for her help in weeding out errors in my English text. Of course, all the blame for remaining defects should be mine.

FOLLY TO THE *HUNAFĀ'*: THE CRUCIFIXION IN EARLY CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM CONTROVERSY¹

Mark N. Swanson

Introduction

One of the oldest known Arabic versions of the letters of St. Paul is found in a manuscript of the ninth century AD preserved in the library of St. Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai and catalogued as Arabic MS 155.² In it, we find a rendering of I Corinthians 1.22-5 that we might translate as follows:

[T]he Jews demand signs,
and the *ḥunafā'* seek wisdom.
As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ,
for the Jews a thing of doubt, and for the nations folly,
but for those who are chosen from among the Jews
and from the *ḥunafā'*,
Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God;
because the folly of God is wiser than the people,
and the weakness of God is stronger than the people.³

The word left untranslated, *ḥunafā'* (singular *ḥanīf*), comes from the Syriac *ḥanpē*, meaning 'pagans' or 'Gentiles' or 'Greeks'. According to St. Paul in his early Arabic dress, the generality of the *ḥunafā'* found the 'word of the cross' (1 Cor. 1.18) to be 'folly' (*ḥumq*), the precise opposite of the wisdom (*ḥikma*) that they were seeking.

As is well known, the loan word *ḥanīf* / *ḥunafā'* is not only to be found in the Arabic writings of Christians of Syriac background, but occurs several times in the Arabic sacred scripture of the Muslims,

¹ This article draws heavily on my unpublished dissertation: M.N. Swanson, 'Folly to the *Ḥunafā'*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian-Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D.', doctoral dissertation, Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, Rome, 1992.

² The manuscript was published by M.D. Gibson, ed. and trans., *An Arabic Version of the Epistles of St. Paul to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, with Part of the Epistle to the Ephesians, from a Ninth Century MS in the Convent of St. Katharine on Mount Sinai (Studia Sinaitica 2)*, London, 1894.

³ My translation of the text in *ibid.*, p. 39 (Arabic).

the Qur'an. There it has a distinctive meaning, referring not to Greek pagans but rather to persons with a monotheistic faith such as that of Abraham, who was 'not a Jew, neither a Christian; but he was a *hanīf* and a *muslim*'.⁴ In Islamic usage, *hanīf* very quickly came to be a synonym of 'Muslim' and *al-hanīfiyya* a synonym of 'Islam'.⁵

Christians who found themselves under Islamic rule as a result of the conquests of the seventh century AD quickly discovered that the New Testament 'word of the cross' had not only been folly to the Greek *hunaḡā'* of whom St. Paul had spoken, but was also a puzzle, at the very least, to the Muslim *hunaḡā'*. In particular, they learned that the Muslims' sacred scripture appeared to deny the simple *fact* of the crucifixion of Christ—to say nothing of its meaning and redemptive significance. The critical verse *al-Nisā'* (4) 157 is part of a polemic against the Jews, who are rebuked for a variety of offenses—including *their claim to have crucified Christ*. To this claim the Qur'an responds:

... *mā qatalūhu wa-mā ṣalabūhu, wa-lākin shubbiha lahum* ...

... they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but it was made to appear so to them ...

Christian interpreters throughout fourteen centuries have sought ways of construing this verse to allow for the reality of Christ's death on the cross, so central to Christian faith. In the Christian version of the legend of Baḡīrā the monk, which may date to the ninth century AD, the claim is made that the original Christian meaning (!) of the verse is that 'Christ did not die in the substance of his divine nature'.⁶ Much more recently, Louis Massignon⁷ and scholars from his extended circle (including Giulio Basetti-Sani⁸ and

⁴ *Āl 'Imrān* (3) 67. The English rendering here and throughout this chapter leans on that of A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, London, 1955.

⁵ See W.M. Watt, 'Hanīf', *EP*, vol. III, pp. 165-6; S.H. Griffith, 'The Prophet Muḡammad, his Scripture and his Message, according to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century', in Toufic Fahd, ed., *La vie du prophète Mahomet (Colloque de Strasbourg, 1980)*, Paris, 1983, pp. 118-21.

⁶ See B. Roggema, 'A Christian Reading of the Qur'an: The Legend of Sergius-Baḡīrā and its Use of Qur'an and Sīra', in D. Thomas, ed., *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, Leiden, 2001, pp. 57-73, here p. 61.

⁷ L. Massignon, 'Le Christ dans les Évangiles, selon Ghazali', *Revue des Études Islamiques* 6, 1932, pp. 533-6.

⁸ G. Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, Chicago, 1977, pp. 163-74.

François Jourdan⁹) have suggested that the verse need not deny the fact that Jesus was crucified, and have offered ingenious interpretations in support.

Yet, in spite of a rather intense Christian desire to find readings of *al-Nisā'* (4) 157 that would allow for the fact of Christ's crucifixion, the main trajectory of Islamic commentary on the verse¹⁰ affirms that Jesus was *saved* from crucifixion and raised alive into heaven, leaving as the principal issue for scholarly speculation the question: what or who was crucified in Jesus' place? (When identifications are hazarded—and agnosticism on the question is a respectable option—they range from a volunteer among the disciples, to one of those coming to arrest Jesus, to Judas Iscariot).¹¹ Furthermore, Christian texts from early in the Islamic period show that Christians were aware that (most) Muslims did not believe that Christ was crucified. For example, the Arabic *Life of Shenoute* preserves a little historical apocalypse that may well date back to the 690s AD¹² and that refers to the 'children of Ishmael' as 'those who deny my sufferings, which I accepted upon the cross'.¹³ More familiar is the statement of St. John of Damascus in his chapter on Islam in *On Heresies*. Writing in the second quarter of the eighth century (if the attribution

⁹ F. Jourdan, 'La mort du Messie en Croix dans les églises araméennes et sa relation à l'Islam jusqu'à l'arrivée des Mongols en 1258', doctoral dissertation, Université de Paris—Sorbonne and Institut Catholique de Paris, 1988, pp. 273, 299-300, 315-6, 380.

¹⁰ There did exist dissent from this main trajectory in the early Islamic centuries, notably from Ibn al-Rāwandī, Rhazes, and certain Ismā'īlīs. See Swanson, 'Folly', ch. 3, II.D.

¹¹ N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, Albany, NY, 1991, pp. 127-41; Swanson, 'Folly', ch. 3, I.B.

¹² For the text, see E. Amélineau, *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne aux IV^e et V^e siècles*, Paris, 1888, pp. 338-46 (with French translation and comment at pp. lii-lviii). See also R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: a Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 13)*, Princeton, 1997, pp. 279-82. Hoyland dates the text earlier in the seventh century than I do; the issue is the Muslim building project which the apocalypse describes as 'rebuilding the Temple that is in Jerusalem'. I take this to be a reference to the Dome of the Rock (completion usually dated to AD 692); see the report of Anastasius of Sinai published by B. Flusin, 'L'Esplanade du Temple à l'arrivée des Arabes, d'après deux récits byzantins', in J. Raby and J. Johns, eds, *Bayt al-Maqdis*, Part 1: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem (Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9), Oxford, 1992, pp. 17-31.

¹³ Amélineau, *Monuments*, p. 341.

to John is correct),¹⁴ the Damascene reports the Qur'an as saying that the Jews, having themselves transgressed the Law, wanted to crucify him, and having arrested him they crucified his shadow; but Christ himself was not crucified (they say), nor did he die, for God took him unto Himself in heaven, because He loved him.¹⁵

In this chapter I will present three Christian texts from the second half of the eighth century that give something of the flavor of the Christian responses to the Qur'anic denial of the crucifixion. The three texts are different in literary genre, original language and community of origin. Taken together, however, they give us a range of Christian responses that will set the apologetic tone and agenda for centuries to follow.

The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria

The historical, apocalyptic and apologetic literature of the Christian communities in the early Islamic period is full of allusions to the power of the cross and to the miracles done by it. For examples one may well turn to *The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*. Life number 46 in this famous Arabic compilation, that of Patriarch Michael I (744-68), was originally written in Coptic by a contemporary, one Yūḥannā or John, spiritual son of Mūsā, bishop of Awsīm in Giza.¹⁶ John's chronicle, written around 770, is punctuated by stories about and allusions to the cross. Miracles are performed with the sign of the cross, as, for example, when Bishop Mūsā heals a paralytic boy.¹⁷

¹⁴ For a recent discussion of matters of authenticity and date, see A. Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (*Oxford Early Christian Studies*), Oxford, 2002, pp. 33-4 (on the date of the *Pēgē Gnōsēos*), 76-83 (on the chapter on Islam).

¹⁵ *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos herausgegeben vom Byzantinischen Institut der Abtei Scheyern*, IV. *Liber de haeresibus. Opera polemica*, ed. B. Kotter (*Patristische Texte und Studien* 29), Berlin, 1981, p. 61, lines 18, 22-5; see also D.J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The 'Heresy of the Ishmaelites'*, Leiden, 1972, pp. 132-3.

¹⁶ *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, III. *Agathon to Michael I* (766), ed. and trans. B. Evetts, in *Patrologia Orientalis* 5, 1910, pp. 88-215. On the sources and redaction of the *History of the Patriarchs*, see J. den Heijer, *Mawḥūb ibn Mansūr ibn Mufarrīḡ et l'historiographie copto-arabe: Étude sur la composition de l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie* (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 513 = subs. 83), Louvain, 1989.

¹⁷ *History of the Patriarchs*, p. 134. Later in the narrative, Bishop Stephen of Shuṭṭb

In other stories, Muslim individuals deride the cross—with startling consequences. For example, John tells the following story:

On a certain day the governor in Alexandria wanted to launch the ships of the fleet into the sea. There was a crowd of the Orthodox in the Church of St. Mary, about ten thousand people. A young man of the Muslims saw an image pictured on the wall [of the church], of the Lord Christ on the cross and the one with the spear who was piercing him.

He said to the Christians, to test them, ‘What is he, this one who is on the cross?’ They said to him, ‘It is the sign of our God Christ on the cross for the salvation of the world’. At this he took a rod, ascended to the upper gallery, and stabbed the picture [of Christ] in his other side, the left one, while mocking in his speech and blaspheming. Suddenly the form of the young man was extended as if he were crucified, like the image that he had stabbed, and he felt great pain, as if he had been stabbed in his side like the image. His hand stuck to the rod that he had used to stab, and no one was able to remove it from his hand. And he was suspended in the midst of the people, between heaven and earth. He remained that way the entire day, crying out and saying, ‘O people, I have been stabbed in my side’.

Then the Muslims cried out to the Christians in a loud voice, glorifying God, the doer of wonders, and asked them to pray to God for his deliverance. So the Christians prayed, saying ‘*Kyrie eleison*’ many times. But he did not descend from his place until one of the Muslims said to him, ‘Unless you confess the creed of the Christians and say that this image is the image of Christ the son of God, and say what the Christians say and believe like them, he will never let you down’.

The Muslim accepted that word [of advice], confessed that it was an image of Christ, and said, ‘I am a Christian, and I will die in the religion of Christ’. Then he descended into the midst of the crowd. And he went to the monasteries and was baptized there.¹⁸

This story is immediately followed by the Coptic historian’s account of the Abbasid revolt—which resulted in much devastation in Egypt and great hardship for Pope Michael. Remarkably, John makes the claim that it was *through the sign of the cross* that the Abbasid rebels achieved victory. As John tells the story, God called a certain ‘Abd Allāh and his father Abū Muslim to fight against the Umayyad caliph Marwān II by means of dreams in which God promised them vic-

made the sign of the cross to return a newborn baby to normal after calling it to bear witness that he was the legitimate son of his deceased father; *ibid.*, pp. 204-5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-50. Here and later, my translation of Evetts’ Arabic text. For another story of this sort, see *ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

tory. In their first military encounter, the rebels' ill-equipped army of twenty thousand triumphed over the caliph's hundred thousand fighting men, including forty thousand horsemen, 'with God's help' (as John puts it).¹⁹ We read:

Abū Muslim saw the angel of the Lord, in his hand a golden staff surmounted by a cross. So he defeated his enemies; [Abū Muslim] observed that wherever the cross drew near, [his enemies] fell down dead before it. And the followers of 'Abd Allāh and Abū Muslim took their horses and weapons.²⁰

Soon afterwards, we read,

The *shaykh* Abū Muslim ordered his soldiers to make crosses of every kind and to make them go before them, saying to them: 'This is that by which God has given us the victory, and which has taken the empire for us'.²¹

Earlier in his history, John had mentioned the Nubian King Mercurius of Dongola, who was called 'the New Constantine'.²² Ironically, however, it is Abū Muslim, the leader of the Abbasid revolt, who most fully inhabits the role of a 'new Constantine', receiving a vision from God and conquering in the sign of the cross! In this startling way the power of the cross is vindicated—even though John is constrained to report that, not long after their triumph, the Abbasids 'forgot ... that it was God who had given them the kingship; and they abandoned the holy cross that had given them the victory'.²³

Such stories about the power of the cross can be found in all the literatures of Christians who found themselves under Muslim rule or in conflict with the Muslims. They do not lack an apologetic edge. As Johannes den Heijer has pointed out, with reference to *The History of the Patriarchs*,

[t]hese texts are actually a complicated mixture of history and legend, of fact and fiction. To be sure, their intrinsic value lies, not in their reference to actual historical events, but in their reflections of attitudes and mentalities. In quite a few cases, their real message is interconfessional polemics, or, at least, an assessment of the relations between

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 152.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 153.

²² Ibid., p. 140.

²³ Ibid., p. 189.

their own religious community and the others, translated, so to speak, into the language of narrative.²⁴

John makes the apologetic aspect of his narrative explicit in a story about a contest between rival religious communities to see whose prayers will be answered during a time of inadequate Nile flooding. According to John, 'this withholding of the water took place according to God's will, in order to show forth His wonders ... *and the truth of the Christian religion*'.²⁵ As he relates the story, it is only the Christians, praying with great display of crosses on the Feast of the Glorious Cross (17 Tūt = September 14), to whom God responds by causing the level of the Nile water to rise.²⁶

Such stories may be understood, in part, as an *indirect* defense of Christian claims about the crucifixion of Christ in the face of Islamic denial: were the Christian claims not true, the cross would have no power. The fact that the cross *does* have power—whether the healing sign of the cross made by a Christian bishop, or the crosses that accompany prayer for a provision-miracle, or a wall-painting that resists mockery, or a military standard that scatters the enemy—vindicates the rudely paradoxical Christian claim that the one crucified is none other than (in the words of the Christians in John's story about the wall-painting) 'our God Christ', who is 'on the cross for the salvation of the world'.²⁷

On the Triune Nature of God

Another way of defending Christian claims about the crucifixion of Christ without directly taking on Sūrat *al-Nisā'* (4) 157 and its body of interpretation is the argument from prophecy. In a missionary and apologetic enterprise that can be traced back to the New Testament itself, Christians had sought to convince Jews that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah of Israel's scriptures and that his career

²⁴ J. den Heijer, 'Apologetic Elements in Coptic-Arabic Historiography: the Life of Afrahām ibn Zur'ah, 62nd Patriarch of Alexandria', in S.K. Samir and J. Nielsen, eds, *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, Leiden, 1994, pp. 193-4.

²⁵ *History of the Patriarchs*, p. 194. Emphasis added.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 193-7.

²⁷ See above, p. 241.

was foretold in those scriptures in considerable detail. Collections of scriptural *testimonia* to the Incarnation, ministry, passion, resurrection and ascension of Christ were made, probably appearing in book form as early as the second Christian century.²⁸

As Christian apologists became aware of the Islamic challenges to Christian belief, it was natural that they should ‘redeploy’ available apologetic resources—a move that seemed all the more natural because of the similarities that these apologists discerned between beliefs of the Jews and those of the Muslims, sometimes called the ‘new Jews’.²⁹ John of Damascus stated the logic of this case well when, in response to Muslims’ claim that Muḥammad is a prophet, he said:

We say: ‘... Which of the prophets foretold that such a prophet would arise?’ And they being at a loss, [we say] ... that all the prophets in succession, beginning from Moses, prophesied Christ’s advent, that Christ is God, that the Son of God would come in the flesh, be crucified, die and be raised, and will be the Judge of the living and the dead.³⁰

A few lines further on, John makes a comment with respect to the divinity of Christ that could equally well apply to the reality of his crucifixion: ‘This is what the prophets and the scripture have handed down; and you, as you strongly insist, accept the prophets!’³¹

We find Old Testament prophecies of the crucifixion in the oldest dated Arabic Christian apologetic text in our possession, that found in Sinai Arabic MS 154 and called by its first editor *Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid* or *On the Triune Nature of God*.³² The date given in the text is 746 years since God had ‘raised up and fashioned’ the Christian

²⁸ See J. Daniélou, *Études d’exégèse judéo-chrétienne (Les Testimonia) (Théologie Historique 5)*, Paris, 1966, esp. pp. 5-11. While Melito of Sardis probably composed a book of *testimonia*, the oldest such works in our possession are those of Cyprian (written AD 246-8) and one attributed to Gregory of Nyssa (from c. AD 400). On these, see A.L. Williams, *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird’s-Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance*, Cambridge, 1935, pp. 56-64 and 124-31.

²⁹ So the catholicos Timothy in his (Syriac) Letter 40 to Sergius; *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu de Timothée I (728-823) à Serge*, ed. and trans. H. Cheikho, Rome, 1983, p. 275, no. 7 (French translation, p. 186). See S.H. Griffith, ‘Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century’, *Jewish History* 3, 1988, pp. 65-94.

³⁰ John of Damascus, *Liber de haeresibus*, ed. Kotter, pp. 61-2, lines 33-41.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63, lines 63-4.

³² M.D. Gibson, *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles ... with a Treatise on the Triune Nature of God (Studia Sinaitica 7)*, Cambridge, 1899.

religion,³³ which converts to AD 755 if we measure these years from the Incarnation³⁴ or AD 788 if we measure from the crucifixion and resurrection.³⁵ In any event, we are dealing with an original Arabic apology for the Christian faith dating back to the second half of the eighth century.

The unnamed Melkite author opens his work with a beautiful prayer full of Qur'anic echoes,³⁶ and then proceeds to treat issues at the heart of Christian-Muslim controversy: Chapter One is a defense of the doctrine of the Trinity, while Chapter Two explains the necessity for the Incarnation of the Word of God. This apology for the Incarnation is a remarkable attempt to take a traditional Christian redemption narrative, that of the incarnate Word's cunning defeat of the Devil in order to save humankind, and to reshape it so that its presentation of salvation history has clear parallels with Qur'anic sequences of stories about the messengers of God such as those found in Sūrat *al-A'rāf* (7) or Sūrat *Hūd* (11).³⁷ In an unforced and natural way, the author weaves Qur'anic expressions and narrative details into his narrative. Just so, Chapter Two of *On the Triune Nature of God* is an important milestone in the history of Arabic Christian soteriological discourse.

This chapter is less significant, however, for the history of Christian apologetic specifically with respect to the *crucifixion*. The author, of course, does affirm that Christ's crucifixion is central to the story of human redemption. At the climax of the chapter we read: 'He crucified sin by his crucifixion, killed death (which Adam inherited through trespass) by his death, and showed forth the resurrection'.³⁸

³³ Sinai Arabic MS 154, f. 110v. This date was first pointed out in a scholarly publication by K. Samir, 'Une apologie arabe du christianisme d'époque umayyade?', *Parole de l'Orient* 16, 1990-1, pp. 89-90.

³⁴ Sidney H. Griffith has maintained this position, e.g. in his 'The View of Islam from the Monasteries of Palestine in the Early 'Abbāsid Period: Theodore Abū Qurrah and the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7, 1996, p. 11 and p. 25 n. 20.

³⁵ I have argued for this position in M.N. Swanson, 'Some Considerations for the Dating of *Fi Taṭlīṭ Allāh al-Wāḥid* (Sinai Ar. 154) and *al-Ġāmī' Wuḡūh al-Imān* (London, British Library or. 4950)', *Parole de l'Orient* 18, 1993, pp. 115-41. See also Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 503.

³⁶ See M.N. Swanson, 'Beyond Prooftexting: Approaches to the Qur'an in some Early Arabic Christian Apologies', *The Muslim World* 88, 1998, pp. 305-8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 308-11.

³⁸ Sinai Arabic MS 154, ff. 107v-108r.

However, the author does not explain *how* he can make such claims, or *how* it is that Christ's ignominious death by crucifixion defeats sin, death and the devil. While Chapter Two of *On the Triune Nature of God* exploits Qur'anic sequences of messenger-stories in order to offer an explanation for the necessity of the Incarnation of the Word, with regard to the *crucifixion* of the incarnate one it simply reasserts traditional liturgical language, without *apologia*.

We do find something approaching an apology for Christian claims about the cross, however, in the final chapter of the treatise (at least, in the shape in which we now have it).³⁹ That chapter begins as follows:

And this is what the prophets of God prophesied concerning the crucifixion of Christ, through which he redeemed us from the misguidance of the Devil and his works:

Moses prophesied, to whom God spoke and caused his face to blaze [so that] none of the Children of Israel were then able to look at his face. He prophesied concerning the crucifixion of Christ and said to the children of Israel in the *Tawrāt*, which God sent down to him: 'You shall see your life hanging before your eyes, and you shall not believe' [Deut. 28.66, LXX]. What life was hanging before the eyes of the children of Israel, in which they did not believe, other than the Light of God?

So understand what the prophets have prophesied by the Holy Spirit concerning Christ, who was crucified, and who by his crucifixion crucified sin and destroyed the Devil.⁴⁰

The author then goes on to discuss another passage from the Pentateuch which Christians have traditionally understood as a prophecy of Christ's crucifixion, the story of the bronze serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21.6-9).⁴¹

There is nothing surprising about the quotations found here. The Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 28.66, while unfamiliar to most contemporary Western Christians, is first attested as a prophecy of

³⁹ Ibid., ff. 137v-139v, where the text breaks off. One has the impression that one is close to the end of the chapter, and perhaps to the end of the treatise as a whole. Note that this chapter on the cross was not edited by Gibson.

⁴⁰ Ibid., f. 137r-v. The Arabic text is published in M.N. Swanson, 'The Cross of Christ in the Earliest Arabic Melkite Apologies', in Samir and Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, p. 129.

⁴¹ Sinai Arabic MS 154, ff. 137v-139r.

the crucifixion in Melito of Sardis and is used frequently thereafter.⁴² What might be surprising, however, is the way the author limits himself to passages from the Pentateuch—when the Gospels themselves offer prophecies from so many other parts of scripture.⁴³ We may be reminded here of the Syriac account of an early religious discussion between a Christian patriarch and Muslim official, the *Letter of Mar Yohannan the Patriarch*, which purports to date to a time shortly after the Islamic conquest of Syria, but which may well be a composition of the early eighth century.⁴⁴ Responding to the Patriarch's claims that the divinity of Christ is announced not only in Moses but in all the prophets, the Muslim official insists that the Christian confine himself to quotations from Moses.⁴⁵ The author of *On the Triune Nature of God* does just that in his chapter on the cross. He stresses that the prophecies are those of the prophet to whom God spoke directly⁴⁶ and to whom God sent down (*anzala*) the *Tawrāt*.⁴⁷ According to him, the Muslim reader should be prepared to accept Moses' prophecies, and hence the reality of Christ's crucifixion: 'So understand what the prophets have prophesied by the Holy Spirit concerning Christ, who was crucified.'⁴⁸ For this eighth-century Christian apologist, Moses' prophecies of the crucifixion should settle the matter of its historicity once and for all.

⁴² See J. Daniélou, 'Das Leben, das am Holze hängt: Dt 28,66 in der altchristlichen Katechese', in J. Betz and H. Fries, eds, *Kirche und Überlieferung: Festschrift für Joseph Rupert Geiselmann*, Freiburg/Br, 1960, pp. 22-34.

⁴³ See, for example, the Old Testament passages quoted by the Catholicos Timothy, notes 55-59 below.

⁴⁴ The text was published by M.F. Nau, 'Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens', *Journal Asiatique* ser. 11, 5, 1915, pp. 225-79 (Syriac text and French translation). For a thorough discussion of the text and its date, see G.J. Reinink, 'The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam', *Oriens Christianus* 77, 1993, pp. 165-87.

⁴⁵ Nau, 'Un colloque du patriarche Jean', pp. 250-1 (Syriac text), 260 (French translation).

⁴⁶ In Chapter Two, the author echoes *al-Nisā'* (4)164, *wa-kallama -llāhu Mūsā taklīman* ('and God spoke to Moses directly') as he tells the story of Moses.

⁴⁷ Note how precisely the apologist uses the Islamic vocabulary of revelation.

⁴⁸ See the text above, p. 246.

The Discussion between the Caliph al-Mahdī and the Catholicos Timothy

The religious discussion between the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdī (775-85) and Timothy the Great, Catholicos of the ('Nestorian') Church of the East (780-823), has been justly described as 'the most famous of the early exchanges between the two great religions'.⁴⁹ The discussion itself is usually dated to 781; the Syriac report of the encounter which Timothy sent to his friend, the priest Sargīs, dates to sometime between 786 and 795.⁵⁰ Various recensions of the report were made in both Syriac and Arabic, manuscript evidence for the latter extending back to the tenth century.⁵¹

The text is of great significance for the history of Christian-Muslim encounter, not least because we find, perhaps for the first time, a direct and sophisticated Christian response to *al-Nisā'* (4) 157. The Caliph had asked about the Christian practice of venerating the cross, and Timothy, in his response, quite naturally spoke of the redemptive significance of the death of the Son of God in the flesh.⁵² The Caliph first asks whether this meant that God could die, then, after hearing out Timothy's careful distinctions between Christ's divinity and humanity, he quotes *al-Nisā'* (4) 157: 'they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but he made a likeness for them'.⁵³

The first argument that Timothy offers in response may be summarized as follows: the Qur'an itself bears witness to the *fact* of Jesus' death, while the *manner* of this death was foretold by the prophets. To

⁴⁹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 472-3.

⁵⁰ The Syriac text is reproduced and translated in A. Mingana, 'The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi', in *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūni*, vol. 2, Cambridge, 1928, pp. 91-162 (reproduction of Syriac text), 15-90 (English translation). For the dates, see H. Putman, *L'Église et l'Islam sous Timothée I (780-823) (Recherches ILOB, Nouvelle Série, B. Orient Chrétien 3)*, Beirut, 1975, pp. 184-5; R. Caspar, 'Les versions arabes du dialogue entre le catholicos Timothée I et le calife al-Mahdī (II^e/VIII^e siècle): "Mohammed a suivi la voie des prophètes"', *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977), pp. 116-7.

⁵¹ For the recensions, see the works listed in the previous note and the literature cited there. There are quotations from Timothy's report in the recension of the Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī debate translated by Vollers from a tenth-century manuscript: K. Vollers, 'Das Religionsgespräch von Jerusalem (um 800 D) aus dem Arabischen übersetzt', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 29, 1908, pp. 29-71, 197-221.

⁵² The passage under consideration here is found in Mingana, 'The Apology of Timothy', p. 114, col. 1 (Syriac text), pp. 40-1 (English translation).

⁵³ The Syriac text renders the Qur'anic passive *shubbiha* with an active form.

show that the Qur'an itself bears witness to the fact of Jesus' death, he quotes two verses: *Maryam* (19) 33, where Jesus says, 'Peace be upon me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised up alive!' and *Āl 'Imrān* (3) 55, 'When God said, "Jesus, I will cause thee to die and will raise thee to me"'. The Caliph is ready with a response: Jesus had not *yet* died, but would die in the future. To this, Timothy responds something as follows:

And likewise he has not yet ascended into heaven, and has not yet been raised up alive, but will ascend and be raised later! But you have it that he ascended into heaven alive. He did not ascend until he died and was raised, as we saw earlier. So if he ascended, then he had previously died ...⁵⁴

To understand the argument, we must keep in mind the order of the verbs in the quoted verses: *amūtu* ('I die') is followed by *ub'athu ḥayyan* ('I am raised up alive') in the verse from *Sūrat Maryam*, while *mutawaffika* ('I will cause thee to die'—if this is the correct interpretation) is followed by *rāfi'uka ilayyā* ('I will raise thee to myself') in the verse from *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*. Timothy assumes that the sequence of the verbs reflects the order of their occurrence, so that the two verses taken together establish the logical and temporal sequence: death, resurrection, ascension. It is therefore on Qur'anic grounds, Timothy argues, that one cannot affirm that the ascension of Jesus into heaven has already occurred without also affirming that his death has already occurred. Then, having to his satisfaction demonstrated that the Qur'an affirms the past *fact* of Jesus' death, Timothy turns to the Old Testament for confirmation of the *manner* of that death, offering prophecies of the crucifixion from David,⁵⁵ Isaiah,⁵⁶ Jeremiah,⁵⁷ Daniel⁵⁸ and Zechariah.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Caspar, 'Les versions arabes', p. 141 (no. 30). While I normally follow the Syriac text, the redactor of the Arabic recension edited by Caspar has skillfully cleared up some confusion in the Syriac, notably the misunderstanding of *ub'athu* as 'I was sent'.

⁵⁵ Psalm 22.16b-18: 'They pierced my hands and feet, all my bones cried out, they gazed at me and watched me. They divided my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots'.

⁵⁶ Isaiah 53.5: 'He was pierced for our sins and abased for our iniquity'.

⁵⁷ Jeremiah 11.19: 'Wood shall ravage his flesh and shall cast him out from the land of the living', to which Timothy adds Isaiah 50.6: 'I gave my body to blows and cheeks to slaps. I did not turn my face away from shame and spitting'. The Jeremiah passage, while unfamiliar today, is attested as a prophecy of the crucifixion as early as Justin Martyr; see G.T. Armstrong, 'The Cross in the Old Testament

Timothy's argument is not unimportant, as Christian arguments of this sort may have played a role in the developing Islamic exegetical tradition of *Āl 'Imrān* (3) 55 and other verses referring to Jesus. Two features in the exegesis of *Āl 'Imrān* (3) 55 might be mentioned. First, there is a tendency to interpret *mutawaffika*, most naturally translated as 'will cause thee to die', in some way that does not refer to death.⁶⁰ Al-Ṭabarī reports the interpretation 'I will cause thee to *sleep*',⁶¹ as well as the interpretation that became standard for much of the tradition, *mutawaffika* = *qābiḍuka*, 'I will *take* thee'.⁶² A second strategy for dealing with the verse, also reported by al-Ṭabarī,⁶³ is to take it as a case of *al-taqdīm wa-al-ta'khīr*, a phenomenon in Arabic syntax in which words appear in the reverse of their logical or temporal order. For example, *Sūrat al-Qamar* (54) 18 reads: 'How then were My chastisement and My warnings', even though the warnings (*nuzur*) logically precede the chastisement (*adhāb*).⁶⁴ As applied to *Āl 'Imrān* (3) 55, this means that in the phrase 'I will cause thee to die and raise thee to me', 'the "and" does not impose the temporal order', as al-Ṭabarī puts it.⁶⁵ If this is the case, then the verse can well mean: 'I will raise thee to me, and *afterwards* will cause thee to die'.

This was not the last word in the discussion, and a slowly developing Christian-Muslim conversation on these matters may be traced.⁶⁶ The main lines of the conversation are already set, however, in the report of the Catholicos Timothy.

according to Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem and the Cappadocian Fathers', in C. Andresen and G. Klein, eds, *Theologia Crucis—Signum Crucis: Festschrift für Erich Dinkler zum 70. Geburtstag*, Tübingen, 1979, pp. 17-38, here pp. 23, 33, 38.

⁵⁸ Daniel 9.26a: 'The anointed one shall be killed, and shall have nothing'.

⁵⁹ Zechariah 13.7: 'Smite the shepherd of Israel upon his cheeks' and 'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd'.

⁶⁰ See N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, Albany, NY, 1991, ch. 12.

⁶¹ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākīr and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr, Cairo, 1955-69 (incomplete), vol. VI, p. 455 (no. 7133); cf. *al-An'ām* (6)60 and *al-Zumar* (39)42.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 455-7 (nos 7134-40).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

⁶⁴ This example is given by al-Ṭabarī as coming from al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 723); Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl al-Ṭabarī, *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Beirut, n.d., vol. II, p. 95. Another example of Qur'anic *taqdīm wa-ta'khīr* that receives early mention is *Āl 'Imrān* (3) 43, 'prostrate yourself and bow', even though in actual prayer the bowing precedes the prostration.

⁶⁵ al-Ṭabarī, *Majma' al-bayān*, vol. II, p. 95.

⁶⁶ A few more details may be found in Swanson, 'Folly', ch. 3, II.A.

The *second* argument developed by Timothy has to do with the mysterious words *shubbiha lahum*. According to the Syriac debate-report, the Caliph al-Mahdī responds to Timothy’s recital of Old Testament predictions of the crucifixion by saying, ‘He made a likeness for them in this way’.⁶⁷ It appears that, according to the report, the Caliph understands the Qur’anic *shubbiha lahum* as implying that *any* evidence which Christians might advance to support their claim that Christ was crucified is but an instance of *tashbīh*, and therefore an appearance with no basis in reality.

Timothy responds to this with a dilemma-question. If the prophetic and apostolic claims about Christ’s crucifixion are but *tashbīh*, who then is the author of this *tashbīh*: God or Satan? For Timothy, it is obvious that the answer cannot be God: ‘It is entirely unfitting for God that He deceitfully show one thing in the place of another’. Can the *tashbīh*, then, be ascribed to Satan? Timothy thinks not, for one would then have to be prepared to admit not only that Satan played a role in the divine economy, but was also able to deceive the disciples—who, according to the New Testament, had the power to cast out demons.

Timothy’s argument was developed further by later apologists. An Arabic tract entitled *The Refutation of the One Who Denies the Crucifixion* expands Timothy’s (two-fold) dilemma into a four-fold exclusive disjunction: those who claim *tashbīh* must admit that its author be either God, Christ, Satan or the Jewish leaders—but none of these possibilities is admissible.⁶⁸ There is little that is new here, however. The main lines of the conversation are set with Timothy.

There is much more that can be said about Timothy’s discourse on the crucifixion. Among the Caliph’s interventions is a dilemma-question that has appeared over and over again in Islamic controversial texts. According to the Syriac report, al-Mahdī asks:

Which of the two do you say: was Christ willing to be crucified, or not?

If he was willing to be crucified, why then are the Jews who fulfilled his will cursed and despised?

⁶⁷ For this entire discussion see Mingana, ‘The Apology of Timothy’, p. 114, col. 2 (Syriac text), pp. 41-2 (English translation).

⁶⁸ See Swanson, ‘Folly’, Appendix II (edition of the text) and ch. 3, II.C.2 (discussion). The text may be found in Vatican Arabic MS 107, ff. 106r-107v.

But if he was not willing to be crucified, and he was crucified [all the same], he was weak whereas the Jews were strong. How can he be called 'God' who was unable to deliver himself from the hands of his crucifiers, whose will appeared much stronger than his?⁶⁹

Timothy responds with a number of examples that illustrate the mystery of creaturely disobedience and divine sovereignty,⁷⁰ or that distinguish between intention and result, since good results can result from that which is intended for ill. For example, the Muslim who dies while fighting *fī sabīl Allāh* is prepared to die and expects to be rewarded with Paradise; but this does not mean that his killer is blameless.⁷¹ This response and others like it were repeated by other Christian apologists.⁷² Indeed, on this issue there is very little evi-

⁶⁹ Mingana, 'The Apology of Timothy', p. 116, col. 2 (Syriac text), p. 43 (English translation). The translation given here is my own. The same dilemma-question is posed by:

a. 'Alī al-Ṭabarī in his *Refutation of the Christians*, in the fragments preserved in the refutation by al-Ṣafī Ibn al-'Assāl; Marqus Jirjis, ed., *Kūṭāb al-ṣaḥā'ih fī jawāb al-naṣā'ih, taṣnīf al-Ṣafī ... Ibn al-'Assāl*, Cairo, 1927-8, pp. 119-20.

b. Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq in his *Against the Incarnation*, ed. and trans. D. Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity: Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq's 'Against the Incarnation'*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 160-3.

c. The hero of *The Story of Wāṣil*, edition and translation in S.H. Griffith, 'Bashīr/Bēsér: Boon Companion of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III: The Islamic Recension of his Story in *Leiden Oriental MS 951 (2)*', *Le Muséon* 103, 1990, pp. 318-19.

⁷⁰ Timothy mentions the fall of Satan and of Adam: their sin does not imply divine weakness; Mingana, 'The Apology of Timothy', pp. 116, col. 2—117, col. 2 (Syriac text), pp. 43-4 (English translation).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 117, col. 2—118, col. 1 (Syriac text), pp. 44-5 (English translation). Timothy also gives the examples of Joseph and his brothers (*ibid.*, p. 119, col. 2 / p. 46), and of the enemy who razed and burned a palace that happened to be slated for demolition (*ibid.*, pp. 119, col. 2—120, col. 1 / pp. 46-7).

⁷² Early arabophone Christian apologists who responded to the dilemma-question include:

a. Theodore Abū Qurra; see S.H. Griffith, 'Some Unpublished Arabic Sayings attributed to Theodore Abū Qurrah', *Le Muséon* 92, 1979, pp. 29-35; or Samir Khalil, '*Kūṭāb "Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān" wa-mujādalat Abī Qurra 'an ṣalb al-Masīh'*', *Al-Masarra* 70, 1984, pp. 417-19.

b. Ḥabīb Abū Rā'īṭa, in *On the Incarnation*, ed. G. Graf, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Habīb ibn Ḥidma Abū Rā'īṭa (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 130 = ar. 14)*, Louvain, 1951, pp. 60-3;

c. 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, in *Kūṭāb al-masā'il wa-al-aḡwiba*, ed. M. Hayek, '*Ammār al-Baṣrī: Apologie et controverses (Recherches ILOB, Nouvelle Série B. Orient Chrétien 5)*', Beirut, 1977, pp. 242-3 (*maqāla* 4, *mas'āla* 40).

d. Eustathius the Monk, in *Kūṭāb Uṣṭāth*, Mingana chr. ar. MS 52, ff. 49v-51r.

e. An unknown Melkite in *al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān*, ch. 18, Question 5; British

dence of any development of ideas: Muslim controversialists thought that the dilemma-question was powerful and regularly repeated it; Christian apologists had what they considered a convincing set of answers, which they regularly repeated.⁷³ Once positions were drawn up, conversation stopped.

There is, however, one part of Timothy's response to the Caliph's dilemma-question that *was* open to further development. Timothy is constrained to stress the *freedom* with which Christ went to his crucifixion. Christ was, of course, capable of escaping from his captors. But:

If he had delivered himself from the Jews, then he would not have been crucified. If he had not been crucified, neither would he have died. If he had not died, neither would he have risen to everlasting life. And if he had not risen to everlasting life, then people would have remained without a sign of or arguments for [the reality of] everlasting life.

Today, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the eyes of all people are looking towards everlasting life. So that this expectation of everlasting life and of the world to come be firmly impressed upon the people, therefore, it was fitting that Jesus Christ rise from the dead; and so that he rise from the dead, it was fitting and right that he first die; and so that he die it was right first that his death—as also his resurrection—be witnessed by all. [Therefore] it was fitting that he die the death of the cross.⁷⁴

Here Timothy has moved from an argument about the *fact* of the crucifixion to one about its *fittingness*: Christ's public crucifixion followed by his glorious resurrection is the appropriate way in which God grants the witnesses 'expectation of everlasting life and of the world to come'.

Timothy here is working with a 'narrative redescription' of the story of Jesus⁷⁵ that is markedly different from that which we have

Library or. MS 4950, f. 119r-v, published in Samir Khalil, 'Šalb' (see a. above), pp. 414-17.

⁷³ All this material is summarized in Swanson, 'Folly', ch. 4, III. 'Excursus'. This excursus is reproduced in an *estratto* from the dissertation: M.N. Swanson, *Folly to the Hunafā': The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian-Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D., excerpta ex dissertatione ad doctoratum apud Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Arabicorum et Islamologiae*, Cairo, 1995, pp. 61-73.

⁷⁴ Mingana, 'The Apology of Timothy', pp. 118, col. 2—119, col. 1 (Syriac text), pp. 45-6 (English translation). The translation given here is my own.

⁷⁵ The phrase is that of M. Root, 'The Narrative Structure of Soteriology', in

found in *On the Triune Nature of God*: rather than a narrative about Christ's turning the tables on Satan, Timothy assumes a narrative that describes Christ's life, death and resurrection in large part as *a divine demonstration of the reality of the general resurrection*, a demonstration that affords hope and confidence to his faithful people. This soteriological narrative has deep roots in the Antiochene Christological tradition, as may be seen, for example, from the *Catechetical Homilies* of Theodore of Mopsuestia preserved in Syriac by the Church of the East.⁷⁶ While it is no great surprise to find this narrative in Timothy, it seems that he senses its potential for making sense of the crucifixion of Jesus in an Islamic environment: Christians *and* Muslims claim to believe in the resurrection of the dead, though it is only the believers in Christ who have a sure 'sign of or arguments for' its reality.

Many of the great arabophone Christian apologists of the generation after Timothy would contribute to the development of this redemption-narrative in Arabic. One of the most sensitive analyses of the character of Christ's death and resurrection as divine demonstration is found in the work of another 'Nestorian' apologist, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī'.⁷⁷ This train of apologetic thought was not restricted to East Syrian circles, however, for we find contributions to it in the work of the 'Jacobite' Ḥabīb Abū Rā'īṭa⁷⁸ and of the 'Melkites' Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī⁷⁹ and the anonymous author of the

S. Hauerwas and L.G. Jones, eds., *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI, 1989, pp. 263-78, here p. 267.

⁷⁶ See A. Mingana, ed. and trans., 'Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Nicene Creed', in *Woodbrooke Studies*, vol. 5, Cambridge, 1932 (esp. chs 6-7, pp. 62-82) and idem, 'Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist', in *Woodbrooke Studies*, vol. 6, Cambridge, 1933. Note the commentary in R.A. Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Exegete and Theologian*, Westminster, 1961, ch. 4, esp. pp. 74-5. I thank Prof. Gerrit Reinink for directing my attention to Theodore.

⁷⁷ See his *Kūtāb al-masā'il wa-al-ajwiba*, in Hayek, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī', pp. 228-42 (*maqāla* 4, *mas'āla* 32-9).

⁷⁸ See, for example, passages from his *On the Incarnation* in K. Samir, 'Création et incarnation chez Abū Rā'īṭa: Étude de vocabulaire', in *Mélanges en hommage au professeur et au penseur libanais Farid Jabre (Publications de l'Université Libanaise, Section des études philosophiques et sociales 20)*, Beirut, 1989, pp. 187-236, here pp. 206-9 (nos 199-215).

⁷⁹ Ibrāhīm explicitly makes the claim that it is the Christians alone who have sure knowledge of the reality of the resurrection: G. Marcuzzo, ed. and trans., *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī à Jérusalem vers 820 (Textes et études sur l'orient chrétien 3)*, Rome, 1986, pp. 512-15 (nos 535-45).

eighteenth chapter of the compendium *al-Jāmi' wujūh al-īmān*.⁸⁰ To the best of our present knowledge, Timothy stands at the head of this series. He emerges, therefore, as a significant Christian apologist for the reality of Christ's death on the cross. While his apology includes several elements of a *direct* response to the Qur'anic denial of Christ's crucifixion in *al-Nisā'* (4) 157, it may be that his greatest contribution to a Christian 'theology-with-a-mind-for-Islam'⁸¹ was an *indirect* response, a way of narrating the salvation worked by Christ that placed Christ's crucifixion at the very center of the story and made a plausible case that—in his words—'it was fitting that he die the death of the cross'.

Conclusion

By some time early in the eighth century AD, Christians in the *Dār al-Islām* had come to know that the dominant Islamic interpretation of important Qur'anic verses—*al-Nisā'* (4) 157 in particular—was that Jesus the Messiah did *not* die on the cross, but rather was saved by God from those who willed his crucifixion. Some Christian teachers tackled the texts and their interpretation head on, as when the catholicos Timothy questioned the dominant interpretation of *al-Nisā'* (4) 157 both from the point of view of its coherence with the plain sense of other Qur'anic verses (Q 3.55 and 19.33) and from the point of view of internal coherence (i.e., the meaning of *shubbiha lahum*). But in addition to this new skill of arguing for Christian truth on the basis of Qur'anic texts, Christian apologists, like the scribe 'trained for the kingdom of heaven' in St. Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 13.52), brought the old as well as the new out of their apologetic storehouses.

The old, of course, did not remain unchanged. Christian teachers reached deep into the tradition and 'redeployed' traditional apologetic and catechetical motifs and strategies, often in very striking ways, so as to be effective within the Islamic environment. The examples that have been presented in this paper may communicate some-

⁸⁰ See Chapter 17, Question 25, 'On the death of Christ our Lord by means of public crucifixion', in British Library or. MS 4950, ff. 109v-110r.

⁸¹ The expression is that of K. Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East*, Louisville, 1991, p. 291.

thing of the range and boldness of this redeployment. In a startling instance of the continuing liveliness of Byzantine imperial ideology in Egypt more than a century after the Islamic conquest, the Coptic scribe John recalled the story of the emperor Constantine's military victories in the sign of the cross—and used it to explain the success of the Abbasid rebels against the Umayyads. An unknown Melkite, perhaps a monk of Mt. Sinai, remembered Old Testament prophecies of the crucifixion that had been collected in ancient controversy with Jews—and redirected them to the attention of Muslims who honored Moses, the prophet to whom God spoke directly. Timothy the Great, Catholicos of the Church of the East, drew on a venerable soteriological tradition in which Jesus Christ, through his death and resurrection, becomes an 'earnest' of the believers' 'participation in the event'⁸²—and brought it into direct contact with the central Qur'anic proclamation of the reality of the general resurrection.

The churches that found themselves in the *Dār al-Islām* possessed a centuries-old repertoire of means to speak the 'word of the cross'; their eighth-century teachers used and supplemented these means in new and sometimes surprising ways as they attempted to offer an *apologia* for their Christian hope (1 Peter 3.15) in a religious environment dominated by the Muslim *ḥunafā'*. In doing so, they developed lines of argument that many of their successors would follow.

⁸² Mingana, 'Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Lord's Prayer and on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist', pp. 19-20, with comment in Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia*, p. 74.

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIANS AND NEW QUESTIONS

David Thomas

Introduction

The Christians who came under Muslim rule in the seventh and eighth centuries AD encountered monotheists of a kind entirely different from themselves. Their own internal debates about the Trinitarian nature of God and his relationship with the created order through the incarnate Son clashed in every respect against the Muslim emphasis upon God's unity. And so when Christians met Muslims to explore their differences, they found opponents who confronted them with new and unexpected challenges. The two sides were set on such different courses in developing their fundamental beliefs that they were almost bound to lay the beginnings of what became a tradition of misunderstanding that inevitably led to indifference and condemnation.

In order to demonstrate the huge gap between Muslims and Christians in their mutual understanding in the early Islamic period, and also the Muslim attitude towards and treatment of Christian beliefs, we will examine in this chapter two of the earliest surviving treatises written by Muslim thinkers against Christian doctrines. These are the relatively brief *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā* of the Zaydī Imām al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (d. 246/860) and the extremely long *Radd 'alā al-thalāth fīraq min al-Naṣārā* of the independent Shī'ī theologian Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Warrāq (fl. c. 250/864). Both date from the third/ninth century, though it is quite probable from some underlying similarities in their structure and approach to Christian beliefs that they reflect attitudes established rather earlier but now irrecoverable by direct means.

These two Muslim responses to Christianity can be set in an inter-religious intellectual context by a brief consideration of the major work of John of Damascus, *The Fount of Knowledge*, the most comprehensive treatise of Christian theology from the late Patristic period. As is well known, John was probably brought up in the Umayyad court and functioned as a senior official under the caliph before withdrawing

from public life, taking the monk's habit at the monastery of Mar Sabas outside Jerusalem, and devoting himself to writing.¹ This was probably in about 100/718, a century or so before the two Muslim authors we shall examine were active.

John composed *The Fount of Knowledge* on the basis of considerable experience at the centre of Islamic rule, and in a religious milieu in which Islam was increasingly influential. Despite this, it is difficult to see any but the merest traces of Islamic influence upon the composition of the work. If, for example, we take the part which is concerned with the exposition of Christian doctrine, *The Orthodox Faith*, we find in its hundred chapters expected accounts of the nature of God in himself and of the Incarnation of the Son.² But we do not find any studied explanation of precisely how it might be possible for the three divine Persons to be one single and undivided God, nor any demonstration of exactly how the infinite, unbounded God could become united with the finite, constricted human Jesus. Rather, the majority of the presentation is taken up by defences of John's own Christology against those of other Christians. In this way, the work substantially reflects past traditions of Christian doctrinal teaching and inter-denominational rivalries, and there is no obvious gesture towards Muslim questions about the possibility of God being a Trinity or of his uniting with a human.³

This apparent indifference to the new inter-religious context is maybe explained by the one part of *The Fount of Knowledge* that is explicitly concerned with Islam, Chapter 100/101 of the second part of the work *On Heresies*,⁴ where John briefly portrays the faith as a mishmash of beliefs concocted from Christianity and entirely human in origin, and only seems interested in its teachings insofar as these support Christian doctrines about the person of Jesus Christ

¹ For biographical details cf. S. Griffith, 'Melkites', 'Jacobites' and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria', in D. Thomas, ed., *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, Leiden, 2001, pp. 19-22.

² This is part of John's major theological work, *The Fount of Knowledge*, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 94, Paris, 1860, cols 521-1228; trans. F.A. Chase, *Saint John of Damascus, Writings (The Fathers of the Church, a New Translation 37)*, Washington, DC, 1958.

³ Cf. Griffith, 'Melkites', 'Jacobites' and the Christological Controversies in Arabic', pp. 23-5.

⁴ Ed. and trans. D.J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"*, Leiden, 1972, pp. 132-41.

(on which he incidentally shows surprisingly detailed knowledge of the Qur'an), and as they provide evidence of ridiculous and incoherent beliefs. Islam is not a faith to take seriously, and certainly not a force that might dictate new directions for Christian doctrinal explanations and defences.

In this disdainful disregard for Islam John refers to a single fragment of evidence that shows that Christians and Muslims were clear about the differences between them: the Muslims, he says, called Christians 'Associators', Ἐταιριστὰς, because they placed other beings alongside God in divinity, and he in turn accuses the Muslims of being 'Mutilators', Κόπτας, because they sheared off all God's attributes, leaving an impoverished divinity devoid of character.⁵ But despite this scrap that shows the two sides defining their positions with regard to each other, John shows little concern for investigating what these were in detail and no apparent concern for resolving them. This tranquil indifference corresponds curiously to the attitude shown by the two Muslim polemicists from the next century, to whom we now turn.

Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm's Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā

The slightly earlier of these, al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī, was the great-great-grandson of al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and was looked back on as a leading theologian as well as Imām of the Zaydī Shī'a.⁶ He was active in the first half of the third/ninth century and, judging by its style, his *Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā* was probably one of his first substantial works.⁷ Wilferd Madelung points out that the relative lack of smoothness here of the rhyming prose that characterises this and al-Qāsim's other works marks out the *Radd* as a composition of his early years. Madelung plausibly suggests that al-Qāsim wrote the *Radd* when he was in Egypt, which if correct dates it to about 210/825, making it the earliest known sustained Muslim refutation

⁵ Ibid., pp. 136-7.

⁶ For biographical details cf. W. Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen*, Berlin, 1965, pp. 86-96; idem, 'Al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm and Christian Theology', *ARAM* 3, 1991, p. 36.

⁷ 'Al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā', ed. I. di Matteo, 'Confutazione contro i Cristiani dello zaydita al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 9, 1921-1922, pp. 301-64.

of Christianity.⁸ However, for all that it has claim to be one of the best informed and most sophisticated Muslim works on Christian themes, it lacks the quality of true engagement.

As it stands, the *Radd* can be divided into two main sections, the first an exposition of the Muslim doctrine of God and demonstration of the impossibility and illogicality of his having a son to share his divinity (pp. 304.1-314.8); and the second a direct refutation of Christian doctrines, which includes an accurate account of Christian beliefs and a series of long quotations from the early chapters of Matthew's Gospel (pp. 314.8-331).⁹ This order of setting out the argument is significant in itself, for it rests the main case against the details of Christian doctrine on a prior demonstration of what logic dictates must be accepted about God, with which Islam happens to agree, and so leads into its main refutation after already having proved that anything different from Islam must be mistaken. In terms of its structure it thus portrays Christianity as a counter-case to Islam that can be shown to be wrong on *a priori* grounds. This feature of the *Radd* is of great significance in the development of Islamic theology and its attitude towards other religions, as we will briefly discuss in the conclusion to this chapter.

Al-Qāsim's attitude towards Christianity and its relationship with Islam can be seen in more detail from a closer analysis of these two parts of the *Radd*. The first, in which, as we have said, his major concern is to set out the proof of the oneness and distinctiveness of God, can be further divided into four sub-sections, in each of which he combines exposition with refutation.

The first of these sub-sections contains the fundamental argument on which the whole of the rest of the work is based (pp. 304.1-305.25). This is that God is too exalted to be the origin, *aṣl*, of any other thing, or a constituent, *unṣur*, of things mixed together, in such a way that he should be like one of them or they should be derivations from him. This would mean that he was like them, and thus his divinity and lordship would be shared with them.

It is not difficult to see that behind this proof, presented as logically compelling in its own terms, lies the Qur'anic presupposition

⁸ Madelung, *Der Imām al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm*, pp. 89-90; 'Al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm and Christian Theology', p. 36.

⁹ Although this is translated into al-Qāsim's rhyming prose style of brief coordinate clauses piled one on another, it nevertheless impressively preserves the meaning of the original.

that for God to be God he must be one and distinct from all other existence. But al-Qāsim does not express it in explicitly religious or Qur'anic language, for reasons that immediately become clear as he goes on to draw the necessary implication from his initial proposition:

A being who has a son, *walad*, is never one, and a being who is progenitor, *wālid*, or father, *ab*, is not eternal, because the father is not Lord to his son. (p. 305.16-17)¹⁰

Here he comes closer to stating his objection against Christianity, and so he is particularly concerned to demonstrate that a fundamental belief of this opposing faith is not so much contrary to the scripture of Islam as contrary to reason itself. This is his initial proposition, stated clearly at the very outset: that God is logically distinct, and hence Christianity, though he has not yet referred to it as such, is fundamentally flawed. He completes this argument by pointing out that a son must be like both parents, and so prepares the way for the second sub-section of the first part of the *Radd*, where he shows that since Jesus had a human mother he cannot have been divine.

In this sub-section al-Qāsim introduces the person of Jesus and shows that he was entirely human (pp. 305.26-308.9). First of all, he makes a jibe at the Christians by exposing the contradiction in their openly worshipping him as divine but not worshipping his mother or her ancestors in the same way:

If they had not existed he would not have existed, and if they had not prepared the way for his birth he would never have been born. (p. 306.2)

Then he goes on to show that Jesus possessed all the traits of humanity such as eating and drinking, and thirdly he returns to the theme of Jesus' identity with his mother, who, Christians and all others agree, gave birth to him in human terms.

Here al-Qāsim begins to increase the pressure on his opponents by exposing the internal contradictions in their beliefs, as well as the disagreements between these beliefs and the initial premise of the *Radd*. And he also introduces another important element of his argumentation, the witness of the Qur'an. He quotes some verses

¹⁰ Read *li-anna al-ab laysa li-ibnihi bi-rabb* instead of *li-anna al-ibn laysa li-abih bi-rabb*.

to support his assertion that Jesus is human, and in so doing quietly touches on the theme that the Islamic revelation agrees with rational truth. It is important to note that he does not use the Qur'an as an independent source of argument, because that would open the way for the Christians to reject his points as derived from a source that they did not accept. Rather, he brings in verses as supports and illustrations to his main contention, so that the point is implicitly made that whereas Christianity struggles against reason, Islam and its revealed basis agree with and indeed embody it.

Having made the point that the Christians portray Christ as son of God, in the third sub-section al-Qāsim argues that there cannot be two Divinities (pp. 308.9-310.13). He begins by likening the Christians to star worshippers, because both postulate deities besides God and apportion to them intermediate tasks such as being the agents or instruments of creation. The simple mention of this similarity seems enough to al-Qāsim, without any need to drive it home, for he goes on to state the argument of mutual hindrance, that if there were more than one Divinity they would have to be capable of frustrating one another's activities and so could not be all-powerful. He completes his point by extolling the purity of Islamic teaching about the oneness and utter transcendence of God, again quoting apposite verses from the Qur'an.

Once again we see al-Qāsim weaving together his themes of denigrating the Christians, this time by portraying them as pagan polytheists, and justifying Islam by intimating for a second time how its teachings accord with the inferences of pure reason. A point worth noting is that by this stage he portrays Christianity as belief in two distinct divinities who might disagree and seek to contend with each other. This is surprising in view of the thorough knowledge of Christian doctrines, including the Trinity, that he reveals later in the *Radd*.

The main argument of the fourth sub-section of this first part is that if God had a son then this son must be begotten (pp. 310.13-314.8). This means that the son would have to be contingent, but, as al-Qāsim has already shown, the begetter must be like the begotten, and so the Christians bring the Creator into relationship with the creature and make both of them like humans. To compound these contradictions they continue to insist upon the lordship and unity of God, although they cannot maintain this in logic unless they abandon their claims about the son.

Here al-Qāsim rounds off his exposition of the oneness of God and the mistakenness of the Christians by showing the illogical consequences of their claims and the contradictions in their doctrines, even in their own terms. He implies that by departing from the rational belief in the oneness and distinctiveness of God that stands by its own consistency they have descended into meaninglessness, and more seriously still, into insulting error about God. By comparison, Islam can be seen to be entirely consistent with reason, to the extent that the Qur'an, which al-Qāsim quotes copiously here, can be used to refute these opponents.

Again we see the themes of refuting the opponents' views and presenting the correct Islamic view being developed side by side. Building on the preceding arguments, al-Qāsim can show that his own faith is rationality itself, while Christianity is irredeemably impaired. His proof of the one is also a proof of the other, and refutation leads almost imperceptibly into apologetic.

Building on this *a priori* rational proof that God is not organically related to any other being, and therefore the Christian claims must be wrong and Islamic doctrine correct, al-Qāsim then turns in the second section to a direct refutation of Christian doctrines in terms that he clearly assumes his opponents will acknowledge, and therefore have to concede. In this part he demonstrates a greater intimacy with Christian doctrine than almost any other Muslim from the early Islamic period, but also an unflinching loyalty to the Qur'an that betrays his real concern as being not so much to comprehend and argue away Christian doctrines themselves as to vindicate the teachings of Islam.

This section can be conveniently divided into five sub-sections. In the first of these (pp. 314.8-318.13) al-Qāsim gives an impartial account of Christian doctrine, including a description of the Trinity that incorporates the Patristic analogies of the sun's disc, beams and heat, and a human's soul, reason and life, and refers to such typically Arabic Christian coinages as *uqnūm* for 'hypostasis'. He also presents an account of the reason why the Son descended to earth; the Christologies of the three main sects of Melkites (called *al-Rūm*), Jacobites and Nestorians; and an explanation of the atonement.

This is one of the features of the *Radd* that distinguishes it from many other Muslim works of this kind. It shows that al-Qāsim took pains to discover the main beliefs of Christians as they themselves portrayed them, and went as far as anyone in allowing them to

speak for themselves. But he abandons this attempt to understand as he begins his refutation with an attack on the Trinity (pp. 318.13-319.28). His argument here centres on the two concepts of fatherhood and sonship, and consists of a demonstration that these cannot denote the essence of an entity because they arise from an action and relationship which are by definition contingent and temporal. This means they cannot refer to God in his eternal being. Moreover, the books in which Christians say they find the basis for this doctrine are unreliable.

What is striking here is that after his painstakingly detailed description of the Trinity of three Persons as one God in the previous sub-section, al-Qāsim ignores this and instead follows the Qur'an in arguing that Christians claim God took a son. The change of approach is evidenced by the absence of any reference to the Holy Spirit, although the Spirit is included equally with the other Persons in the earlier account. At this point, maybe more than anywhere else in the *Radd*, the divergence of al-Qāsim's own preoccupations from those of his opponents is made starkly clear. The Christians in their doctrine attempt to explain the mysterious nature of God, as they experience it and read about it in their scripture. But al-Qāsim is unconcerned to investigate the problem of three beings with a single nature, triple and single simultaneously, and returns instead to his earlier theme of the implausibility of God taking a son, with the new variation that the relationship has nothing to do with the being of God in itself. While his argument is effective in showing that the names given to God by the Christians have no connection with God's essential being, the terms in which it is couched pay no heed to the doctrine as it is expressed, but rather remain within the Qur'anic purview and again, as earlier, serve to vindicate its condemnation of Christian teaching while refuting the teaching itself in general terms. Al-Qāsim does not counter the Christians in their own doctrinal terms, but prefers to defend the Qur'anic accusation against them.

He continues this approach in the third sub-section, where he comes to the main point of his attack in the second section of the *Radd* (pp. 319.28-322.26). He proposes that if the two sides are to proceed fairly they must find common ground on the question of the nature of Jesus, and he suggests that they should both interpret the same Christian scripture in an equitable manner, free from the ambiguous exegesis, *ta'wīlan multabisan*, employed by the Christians.

As they do this, the two sides will acknowledge five witnesses, all of whom attest in the Gospels to the humanity of Jesus, and no more: these are God, his angels, Jesus himself, Mary and the disciples. Statements preserved in the Gospels from all of these state clearly that Jesus was a man.

The solution al-Qāsim offers here to the difficulty of finding agreement over the person of Jesus is original and impossible to reject in its own terms. It recalls the precept of his contemporary, the convert 'Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. c. 250/864), that Christians should follow the meaning contained in the 20,000 verses of the New Testament that support the humanity of Christ, rather than the dozen or so that ambiguously mention his divinity.¹¹ But the solution is nevertheless disturbing in that it presumes to know more about the Christian scriptural teachings than the Christians do themselves. And in order to present a clear solution it ignores teachings that are not immediately amenable. In this respect it anticipates the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* of Paul of Antioch (probably written in the late sixth/twelfth century),¹² where the Christian selects isolated verses from the Qur'an that can be read in ways that support Christian beliefs and practices. It exposes an assumption underlying al-Qāsim's approach throughout the *Radd*, that since Christian claims do not conform to reason they do not merit treatment in their own right.

Al-Qāsim goes on in the fourth sub-section to argue that the terms 'father' and 'son' have been used figuratively as well as literally from the time of Jesus to his own (pp. 322.26-324.11). Thus, when the Christians claim that there was a unique relationship between Jesus and God, indicated by the usage of 'Father' and 'Son' in the Gospels, they are being disingenuous.

Then finally he presents a long series of quotations from the Gospel of Matthew (pp. 324.12-331.22) in order to demonstrate that even in Christian scripture itself there is ample evidence to support the judgement that Jesus was only a human prophet who did not regard himself as anything more. It is probably no accident that these quotations are taken from the early parts of the Gospel of Matthew, mainly

¹¹ 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, ed. I.-A. Khalifé and W. Kutsch, *Ar-Radd 'alā-n-Naṣārā de 'Alī aṭ-Ṭabarī*, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph* 36, 1959, pp. 138.17-139.5.

¹² Ed. P. Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche, évêque melkite de Sidon (XII^e s.)*, Beirut, 1964, pp. 59-83 (text), 169-87 (French translation).

the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7, where, more vividly than almost anywhere else in the Gospels, Jesus is portrayed as a human teacher in the tradition of Moses and other prophets.

The Radd is concluded with these quotations, which provide convincing support to al-Qāsim's earlier arguments that Jesus was not Son of God in any meaningful sense, and help to bring home the point that if Christians heeded their own scriptures they would recognise this.¹³

Summing up this second section of the work, we see that al-Qāsim's single contention in this direct attack on Christianity is that the doctrine of Jesus as Son of God is unsustainable, either in terms of the nature of God himself, or in terms derived from Christian scripture. As we have said, this is not, therefore, so much a refutation of Christian doctrines in themselves, and far less a response to Christian beliefs, as a defence of the Qur'anic accusation that Christians claim that Jesus was son of God.

This direction in attack makes all the more curious the presence of the comprehensive and accurate account of Christian doctrines we have noted at the beginning of this second section. Like the long quotations from the Gospels with which the section concludes, this account was surely the fruit of thorough study of Christianity and deep, even sympathetic, understanding. As Wilferd Madelung has shown, al-Qāsim's study of Christianity probably included works by Theodore Abū Qurra, one of the earliest Christian theologians known to have written in Arabic.¹⁴ In fact, as Madelung says, 'Al-Qāsim was not only thoroughly familiar with the Christian theology of his time, he was also formatively influenced by it'.¹⁵ But neither this wider knowledge nor the more precise knowledge demonstrated in the *Radd* is put to much use. In contending that Jesus was not the Son of God, al-Qāsim shows that his greater concern was to vindicate Islam rather than to analyse and test the merits of the doctrines held by Christians.

Considering the *Radd* as a whole, its two major sections work

¹³ The *Radd* concludes abruptly after the quotation of Matthew 8.22, leaving it unclear as to how al-Qāsim intended to proceed, whether to translate further Gospel passages, introduce more arguments, or sum up his attack. The condition of the series of translated passages left uncommented upon indicates that the work was left incomplete.

¹⁴ Madelung, 'Al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm and Christian Theology', pp. 37-44.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

together towards this single point of showing clearly that in the light of reason and also by its own scriptural light Christianity is deficient and contradictory. But al-Qāsim has a further concern than this, which is to show that Islam is true, because it harmonises with and embodies reason, and also because the Qur'an points out the errors in Christianity. Thus, like John of Damascus before him, he shows both complete confidence in the soundness and coherence of his own faith, and a certain indifference towards Christianity. The fact that he knows its major beliefs yet ignores them indicates that his main concern was not to give it the fair treatment he himself advocates, but to show that by comparison with the true monotheism of Islam it is deficient. Thus the questions and challenges with which he confronts Christian doctrines are directed neither at the whole array, nor at any one of them as it is expressed. Rather, they are intended to disprove the fundamental possibility of God being related to another being, and therefore of his having a Son. So they attempt to engage with Christianity at a more basic level than the Christological models of the denominations or the atoning death of the incarnate Son. The attack in the *Radd* is aimed not at the modalities of Christian doctrines, but at their sheer logical improbability.

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's Radd 'alā al-thalāth firaq min al-Naṣārā

The other Muslim author we shall discuss adopted an approach that is similar in many respects to al-Qāsim, though there is no evidence that he knew his *Radd*. This is Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Warrāq, one of the more enigmatic—though maybe widely influential—figures of early Islam. He was regarded by some as a fine scholar, and many later authors referred with respect to his *Kitāb maqālāt al-nās*, often quoting passages on dualist religions from it. But to others he was an irreligious threat to Islam, or even a Manichaean, and closely connected with the arch-heretic Ibn al-Rāwandī. Picking through the contradictory accounts, it seems most probable that he was a Mu'tazilī who became a Shī'ī of some kind, though always preserving a mild scepticism about the beliefs of any one religious tradition in favour of a clear unadorned monotheism. He probably died sometime after the mid third/ninth century.¹⁶

¹⁶ For biographical details, cf. D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam*,

Abū 'Īsā's *Radd 'alā al-thalāth fīraq min al-Naṣārā* is the longest refutation of Christian doctrines that survives from the early period of Islam. It has come down more or less in its entirety thanks to the response to it made by Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī, in which it is quoted at length. Like al-Qāsim's *Radd*, it shows both extensive knowledge of Christian doctrines, as these are articulated by the Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites, and also a similar concern to set them against monotheistic belief rather than to examine them in their own right.

Abu 'Īsā's *Radd* comprises three main sections, an exposition of Christian beliefs, and then refutations of the Trinity and Incarnation respectively. In the first of these Abū 'Īsā shows as much detailed knowledge of Christianity as al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, though he differs in ordering his account according to the teachings of the three chosen sects and in presenting the doctrines more abstractly.

Abū 'Īsā begins this exposition (*Trinity*, pp. 66-77) by explaining the doctrine of the Trinity as he understands the three sects to hold it, giving details about the relationship between the three hypostases and the substance, the relationships between each of the three, and the meaning of the term 'hypostasis'. He goes on to explain the respective understandings of the manner in which the divine Word united with the human body of Christ, and gives the metaphors that are popularly employed by Christians to describe this action. Then, thirdly, he briefly explains the historical origin of the three sects from differences over the Nicene Creed, describes their accounts of the relationship between Christ's human and divine natures, and finally summarises their understandings of how the crucifixion affected Christ.

This very full account makes it immediately clear that Abū 'Īsā was thoroughly versed in the main Christian teachings of his time, even down to the details of terminology. His study of Christianity was at least as close and comprehensive as the study of dualism for which he was mainly remembered by later Muslims. But for all this, he cannot conceal a certain bias in his choice of topics to be included in this exposition and his approach to presenting them. For example, he shows no curiosity about the reason for the uniting of

Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's 'Against the Trinity', Cambridge, 1992 (hereafter *Trinity*), pp. 9-30; *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity, Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's 'Against the Incarnation'*, Cambridge, 2002 (hereafter *Incarnation*), pp. 21-36.

Christ's natures when he describes the Christological models, nor about the atonement or resurrection of Christ when he discusses the crucifixion. In the same way he reduces the Trinity to a simple formulaic model:

The Jacobites and Nestorians claim that the Eternal One is one substance and three hypostases, and that the three hypostases are the one substance and the one substance is the three hypostases. The Melkites...claim that the Eternal One is one substance which possesses three hypostases, and that the hypostases are the substance but the substance is other than the hypostases, though they do not acknowledge that it is numerically a fourth to them. (*Trinity*, pp. 66-7)

This is elegantly simple, though it makes the doctrine into a sort of theorem. Again, in his account of Christ's death there is nothing about the cosmic drama it enacts:

The Nestorians claim that the Messiah was crucified with respect to his human nature but not his divine nature;...

Many of the Melkites claim that the crucifixion and killing affected the Messiah in his entirety in the body, 'the Messiah in his entirety' being the divine nature and the human nature;...

The majority of the Jacobites claim that the crucifixion and killing affected the Messiah who was one substance from two. (*Trinity*, pp. 74-5; *Incarnation*, pp. 92-5)

Abū 'Īsā's main interest at this point is obviously the implication that the Divinity was involved in Christ's death. He evidently knows more about Christian beliefs connected with this, since he quotes them a little later saying, 'The Divinity was crucified for us, to save us.'¹⁷ So he must be excluding these aspects of Christian belief from his exposition deliberately, presumably because they do not serve his purpose of examining and refuting those elements that introduce plurality into the absolutely one God and bring him into close relationship with created humanity.

This elaborate though subtly biased presentation of Christian beliefs and doctrines is followed in the second section of the *Radd* by an even more elaborate refutation of the doctrine of the Trinity (*Trinity*, pp. 76-181). Abū 'Īsā first examines the three sects' understandings of the relationship between the hypostases and the substance, and shows that each one is illogical and implicitly contradictory (*Trinity*,

¹⁷ *Trinity*, pp. 76-7; *Incarnation*, pp. 94-5. The quotation is without attribution.

pp. 76-113). The tenor of his arguments can be gauged from a brief quotation from the section on the Nestorians and Jacobites:

Tell us about the hypostases. Are they differentiated because they are substance or because of another cause? If they say: Because they are substance, they impose differentiation upon the substance. But if they say: Because of another cause, they affirm a cause other than the substance and hypostasis, which is opposed to their views. (*Trinity*, pp. 78-9)

He applies some straightforward logic to the proposition that the hypostases are each distinguished from the others. There must obviously be a cause of this, but then difficulties arise because if this cause is the substance then, by virtue of the fact that according to the Jacobites and Nestorians it is identical with the hypostases, it too must be internally differentiated; but if it is not the substance then the cause must lie outside God. Either way, there are serious problems confronting the coherence of the doctrine.

Abū ʿĪsā moves on to inquire about the hypostases in themselves, how they can be both differentiated from one another and also uniform with one another (*Trinity*, pp. 112-55). This takes him into the question of how, as substance, they are identical with and distinct from the unifying substance of the Godhead; and also into attacks against explanations of the Trinity that are known from Theodore Abū Qurra's works (*Trinity*, pp. 130-55). Like al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, he may have known the thought of this theologian.

In this second part of his attack Abū ʿĪsā pursues the same method as in the first, which is to construe the statements about the doctrine he has made in the initial exposition of the *Radd* as propositions rather than descriptions and analyse their elements accordingly. One characteristic consequence among many is that he succeeds in identifying two substances in each hypostasis, one that must be specific in itself and the other that is the general substance of the Trinitarian Godhead, which is, of course, embarrassing—though one has to ask to whom, since it is so remote from Christian discourse about the Trinity that, justifiably or not, it might provoke humour rather than self-conscious attempts to respond.

Abū ʿĪsā continues in the third part of the attack to examine the hypostases as differentiated entities with their own characteristics (*Trinity*, pp. 154-81). He develops the point that they cannot be identical or uniform in the Godhead and at the same time distinguished

from one another by their unique attributes. Again, there is clear contradiction in the doctrine.

These brief summaries represent a series of long and intricately detailed arguments that show a masterly knowledge of the three Christian sects' teachings about the Trinity, and formidable dexterity in drawing out their implications and exposing their contradictions and inconsistencies. In this respect Abū 'Īsā confronts Christians with an array of new questions about the descriptive formulas they present and compels them to rethink the claim that the Godhead is one while the three Persons are real and distinguishable. Above all, he confronts them with their doctrines as statements about separate and countable divine entities that should be susceptible to logical inquiry, but clearly are not.

Abū 'Īsā follows this attack with an equally elaborate attack on the doctrine of the divine and human natures of Christ in the third major section of the *Radd (Incarnation)*, pp. 96-277). This can be divided into two main parts, as before directed at the main sects of the Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites. The first part is an examination of the sects' accounts of the human experiences of Christ (*Incarnation*, pp. 96-165), which begins with what was evidently a very telling argument that is found in other works from this time about the involvement of the Trinity in the action of the uniting of the divine and human (*Incarnation*, pp. 96-107).¹⁸ With characteristic forensic perceptiveness Abū 'Īsā shows that if the Son alone was involved then he must be distinguishable from the Father and Holy Spirit and also an independent Divinity, raising the spectre of a plurality of creators bringing a plurality of worlds into being. But if it was not the Son alone, then all three hypostases must have been involved, which raises the question why the Father and the Holy Spirit did not each unite with a human, to which there is no easy answer.

Here Abū 'Īsā argues according to the same premise as before, that the named individuals in the Trinitarian Godhead can be distinguished ontologically and treated as separate beings. Thus the defence he mentions, that the Godhead as a whole effected the Incarnation for the Son, is meaningless in his terms:

¹⁸ Cf. D. Thomas, 'Early Muslim Responses to Christianity', in D. Thomas, ed., *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq*, Leiden, 2003, pp. 236-9.

But if they...say: But the uniting was an action which the three hypostases performed as a uniting for the Son alone, we say: In this action of uniting the Son had what the Father did not have. And if they say: No, we say: Then how was it the uniting of the Son and not the Father, and what is the meaning of your statement, 'The three hypostases performed it as a uniting for the Son and not the Father', if the Son had nothing in it that the Father did not have? (*Incarnation*, pp. 98-9)

His language may be the same as that of Christian opponents, but his conceptuality is totally different.

He goes on in this part to examine the accounts given by the three sects of the conception of Christ, his birth, crucifixion and death (*Incarnation*, pp. 106-65). In each case he shows how the explanation offered by each sect is simply inadequate since it violates consensus views about the nature of God, implicating him in human experiences that deny the very reality of what divinity is. The alternative defence, that only the human nature of Christ experienced development in Mary's womb, birth, maturing, suffering, crucifixion and death, leads to the ludicrous conclusion that since Christ comprised both divine and human natures, a being other than him underwent these experiences.

Within Abū 'Īsā's own terms these arguments are devastating, since they unravel the whole Christian perception of the life of Christ as an immediate disclosure of God present on earth. As can be seen, they are established on the strict Islamic, probably Mu'tazilī, dictum that God is completely and utterly separate from created beings. Abū 'Īsā applies this to the doctrines and strains them to destruction in the impressively systematic way he has. This is clearly an approach to the doctrines and the explanations that are offered by the Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites from an entirely new direction and subject to fresh norms and preconceptions. It is almost chillingly effective.

In the second part of this third main section of the *Radd* Abū 'Īsā turns to the sects' explanations of how the two natures united in Christ (*Incarnation*, pp. 164-277). He begins by destroying a series of metaphorical explanations, drawing out unforeseen difficulties that make them more hindrances than helps to understanding, and then he deals with each sect's explanation in turn. He brings out the specific difficulties in the model that each of them proposes and, in the same way as he dealt with the models of the Trinity in the second section, demonstrates that they are incoherent and logically flawed for the major fundamental reason that the divine and the

human are so different in characteristics that any attempt to argue that they can unite must fail.

Again, here in this final main part of the *Radd* Abū 'Īsā painstakingly, and sometimes risking prolixity, goes through the details of doctrines to show how they simply do not work in terms that he understands, in which the primary principle is that God is utterly distinct from creatures and cannot be involved with them without a loss of his divinity or a violation of all that is reasonable.

So here in Abū 'Īsā's refutation of the three Christian sects, written at most a few decades after al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm's *Radd*, we have a major analysis and refutation of Christian doctrines that was used in one form or another by a succession of later Muslim authors.¹⁹ From its strictly monotheistic stance, and on the basis of a thorough exposition of Christian teachings, it shows that the two major doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation are unsustainable in the terms in which they are expressed, and also in terms of impartial logic. Unlike al-Qāsim, Abū 'Īsā does engage with the doctrines that he sees Christians themselves presenting, though like his elder contemporary he subjects them to an analysis from an external standpoint that shows they do not possess objective cogency, but rather collapse in shameful disarray.

Abū 'Īsā does go some way in meeting his opponents on their own ground, and he was presumably confident that he was overcoming them in terms of argument that they could not reject. (Significantly, he makes no use of the Qur'an in his arguments, but bases them all on logic he might expect would be generally acceptable.) Indeed, we can assume from the fact that Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī considered it necessary to answer these criticisms about a century after they were composed that many thought them too powerful and difficult to answer. But there is a strong indication in the structure of this work that, like al-Qāsim's short refutation, its author was at least as concerned to vindicate his own form of Islamic monotheism as he was to show Christians the errors of their ways.

As we can see from our summary, Abū 'Īsā's attack on Christianity centres exclusively on the two doctrines that threaten most closely the Islamic doctrine of *tawḥīd*, the Trinity and Incarnation or Uniting of divine and human in Christ. This is despite the fact

¹⁹ Cf. *Trinity*, pp. 41-50; *Incarnation*, pp. 75-82.

that he shows in his introductory exposition of Christian beliefs and in brief remarks at various points in the attack a wide and deep knowledge and understanding of what Christians believe. This disparity can only be explained by the fact that he was not primarily concerned to examine and refute Christianity as such, but to attack those aspects that appeared to threaten his own principle of absolute monotheism. Thus, for all its detail and ingenious analysing of Christian doctrines, Abū ʿĪsā's *Radd* is as much a work of defence of basic Islam as it is a demonstration of the flaws in Christianity. In this central intention both this and al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm's *Radd* share a common purpose.

Christian doctrines in Islamic theology

The two works at first appear to be very different in aim. Al-Qāsim's brief attack begins with a statement and defence of monotheism in which the claim that God might have a son is shown to be impossible; it continues with an exposition of Christian beliefs, and then a series of arguments to prove that God could not have had Jesus as his Son either on rational or Christian scriptural grounds. Abū ʿĪsā's work is simpler in structure, an exposition of Christian beliefs followed by refutations of the Trinity and Incarnation as these have been articulated in historical Christianity. This seems to be a much fuller engagement with opposing doctrines as they are actually held than is al-Qāsim's.

However, as we have already pointed out, both al-Qāsim and Abū ʿĪsā select particular points against which to press their arguments. They both take trouble to summarise Christian beliefs with impressive insight, but then they set aside most of this in favour of an attack on one or two aspects. In this curious shared characteristic they are both evidently conforming to an understanding that refutation of the opposing faith is intimately related to defence of one's own. Thus, al-Qāsim centres on the Christian belief that brings the transcendently supreme Divinity into an organic relationship with a human, and Abū ʿĪsā on the belief that compromises the divine unity and implicates the Creator in the experiences of creatures. In slightly different ways they both attempt to show that any alternative form of belief about God to the strict monotheism of Islam is unacceptable.

If this was the common intention of the two attacks, then it seems clear that at some level they must both have been written to promote and vindicate Qur'anic teachings. It follows that their approach to Christianity was focused on issues that radically undercut issues of Trinity and Incarnation by challenging their very validity in terms of reason and logic, and, in the case of Abū 'Īsā, internal coherence.

In this respect al-Qāsim and Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq resemble their Christian predecessor John of Damascus. For like him they exhibited unshakable confidence in the teachings of their own faith and a measure of indifference towards the faith of the other. They clearly did not look on it as a threat of any profundity, and so, despite knowing a great deal about it and even showing some sympathetic understanding of its teachings, they did not consider it useful or necessary to get involved in discussions of these teachings, but rather confronted them with problems that challenged their fundamental validity.

The approach we see here may well have been representative of the third/ninth century and earlier, though sadly the paucity of Muslim works on Christianity surviving from this period prevents us from knowing in detail. But we can see a line of continuity with the more plentiful works from a century or so later, where this rather indifferent approach is expressed in unambiguous terms. If we take the Mu'tazilī 'Abd al-Jabbār's great digest of theology, the *Mughnī*, as a single example, we see there that following the exposition of monotheistic belief in the first four volumes of the twenty-volume work, there appear in Part V refutations of dualist faiths and Christianity.²⁰ This positioning in itself indicates that to this theologian Christianity, just like other faiths that held pluralist theologies, was a distortion of correct teaching. In his actual refutation, 'Abd al-Jabbār demonstrates this clearly by arguing only against the Trinity (pp. 86-113) and Incarnation (pp. 114-51), like Abū 'Īsā whose *Radd* he employs, so that Christianity becomes an instance of how teaching about God can go wrong if it departs from strict adherence to monotheism. It functions here as a counter-example that helps strengthen the case in favour of Islam, and it has little more value than that. In reducing Christianity to this, 'Abd al-Jabbār takes the intimations apparent in al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm and Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq to their logical limit.

²⁰ 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī, *Al-mughnī fī abwāb al-tawhīd wa-al-'adl*, vol. V, ed. M.M. al-Khuḍayrī, Cairo, 1965.

We see, then, in these examples from the earliest period from which Muslim refutations of Christianity survive, that polemicists were posing challenges to doctrines in terms that questioned their basic validity, rather than the forms in which they were expressed that had become the main Christian inter-denominational concerns. In such circumstances, we can understand why Christians might perceive that their doctrines and faith were not treated with full seriousness, and why Muslims in turn might think their arguments were not received seriously by Christians. The two sides effectively were not talking to one another. Sadly, it is difficult to think of any time since when this lack of communication has substantially changed.

Answers for the Shaykh:
A 'MELKITE' ARABIC TEXT FROM SINAI
AND THE DOCTRINES OF THE TRINITY AND THE
INCARNATION IN 'ARAB ORTHODOX'
APOLOGETICS

Sidney H. Griffith

I. *'Do not exaggerate in your religion!'**

Muslims have been in dialogue with Christians from the very beginnings of Islam. Indeed, the Qur'an itself presumes in its audience a familiarity not only with the biblical narratives of Abraham, Moses and Jesus, along with the other prophets and messengers of God, but also with Christian doctrines and practices. In the Qur'an the dialogue with Christians most prominently takes the form of a critique of these very doctrines and practices; in particular it criticizes and admonishes the Christians in connection with their doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. The most succinct and direct passage in this regard reads as follows:

O 'People of the Book', do not exaggerate in your religion. Do not say about God anything but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only God's messenger, and His Word, which He cast into Mary, and a spirit from Him. Believe in God and His messengers. Do not say, 'Three'. Stop it! It will be better for you. God is but a single God; He is too exalted to have offspring. (*al-Nisā'* (4) 171)

Not surprisingly, this verse figures prominently in the apologetic and polemical texts that Christians wrote in Syriac and Arabic in the early Islamic period. It is in fact the most frequently quoted verse from the Qur'an in these texts precisely because it ascribes Word and Spirit to God at the same time that it challenges Christian teaching about the Word and the Spirit of God. To meet this challenge, Christian thinkers drew not only on the resources of their

* From the Qur'an: *al-Nisā'* (4) 171 and *al-Mā'ida* (5) 77.

traditional theologies, but by the nature of the case they were called upon also to defend their faith in the very idiom in which it was challenged and critiqued.

The purpose of the present essay is to examine in some detail one small Christian tract, written in Arabic by a now unknown author, as one example of how Christian thinkers in the Islamic milieu chose to commend the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation to inquiring Muslims, and at the same time to develop for themselves a satisfactory expression of their theology in the unaccustomed idiom of the Arabic language. The author of the tract was a 'Melkite'. As it happened, the Melkites were the first of the Christians in the Oriental Patriarchates to begin writing theology in Arabic. Accordingly, the essay will unfold under the following headings: the beginnings of Melkite theology in Arabic in Jerusalem in the late eighth century; the presentation of the Arabic tract in its single manuscript source, with special attention to the structure of the text and the unfolding of the author's arguments; and finally a discussion of the role of the quotations from the Qur'an in the tract, and the author's use of Qur'anic references and modes of expression, in the service of his basically apologetic enterprise of contextualizing Christian theology within the parameters of the discourse of the non-Christian, Islamic scripture.

II. *Jerusalem, 'Mother of the Melkites'*

After the year 750 AD, when the promoters of the Abbasid revolution in the Islamic world had consolidated their hold on power in the Caliphate, and especially after the installment of the seat of the caliph in the new capital city of Baghdad in the reign of Caliph al-Manşūr (754-775), the Muslim polity seems to have turned its back on the city of Jerusalem. She had been an important cultural and religious center for almost a century under the Umayyads. But in the second half of the eighth century, under the early Abbasids, Jerusalem became a venerated but neglected provincial backwater, ruled from afar by a succession of appointed emirs and governors, and visited only occasionally by caliphs and trusted generals sent to put down the ever restless bedouin of the neighboring deserts.¹

¹ See M. Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099*, Cambridge, 1992, esp. pp. 283-312.

Otherwise, Jerusalem was left to her fate, to become in government eyes just a pilgrimage center for pious Jews, Christians and Muslims. By the ninth century's end, from 877/878 until 904/905, Jerusalem and Palestine were not even ruled from Baghdad but from Egypt under the Ṭulūnids.² It was during these very years of political and social neglect, when the cultural and intellectual attention of the Islamic world was focused on Baghdad, that, for many of the Arabic-speaking Christians in the caliphate, Jerusalem became an important center of ecclesiastical development and even of denomination-building.

From the middle of the eighth century until late in the tenth century, the bishopric of Jerusalem and the surrounding monastic communities, cut off as they were during this period from effective contact with Constantinople and the Byzantine world generally,³ became the first Christian enclave in the Islamic world actively to promote the translation of the Christian heritage into Arabic and to adopt the language of the Islamic community as their own.⁴ In the process a new Christian denomination came into view. The 'Melkites', Arabic-speaking by necessity, Byzantine Orthodox in their faith, and religiously challenged by the ever more insistent 'call to Islam',⁵ found in Jerusalem, the 'Mother of the Churches' as her

² See A.A. Duri, 'Jerusalem in the Early Islamic Period, 7th-11th Centuries A.D.', in K.J. Asali, ed., *Jerusalem in History*, Brooklyn, 1990, pp. 105-29; A. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem & Islamic Worship, Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage*, Leiden, 1995.

³ See S.H. Griffith, 'Byzantium and the Christians in the World of Islam: Constantinople and the Church in the Holy Land in the Ninth Century', *Medieval Encounters* 3, 1997, pp. 231-65; idem, 'What has Constantinople to do with Jerusalem? Palestine in the Ninth Century: Byzantine Orthodoxy in the World of Islam', in L. Brubaker, ed., *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?*, Aldershot, 1998, pp. 181-94.

⁴ See S.H. Griffith, 'The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic', *The Muslim World* 78, 1988, pp. 1-28; idem, 'From Aramaic to Arabic: The Languages of the Monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51, 1997, pp. 11-31; idem, 'Arab Christian Culture in the Early Abbasid Period', *Bulletin for the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 1, 1999, pp. 25-44.

⁵ See S.H. Griffith, 'Melkites', 'Jacobites' and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria', in D. Thomas, ed., *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, Leiden, 2001, pp. 9-55. See also idem, 'The Church of Jerusalem and the 'Melkites': The Making of an "Arab Orthodox" Christian Identity in the World of Islam; 750-1050 CE', to appear in the forthcoming volume, O. Limor and G. Stroumsa, eds, *Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land: a History to the Time of the Crusades*, Jerusalem.

Christian devotees had long loved to call her,⁶ the focal point of their cultural and ecclesiastical life. While the 'Melkites' (as even the Muslim writers regularly referred to them) took their place alongside the 'Jacobites' and the 'Nestorians' as one of the three standard denominations of Christians in the Islamic world, they in fact became a sociologically distinguishable group of 'Arab Orthodox' Christians within the canonical boundaries of the larger community that would eventually come to be called the 'Greek Orthodox' church in the patriarchate of Jerusalem.⁷

It was in the Greek and Arabic works of writers with a close ecclesiastical association with Jerusalem from the eighth through the tenth centuries AD that Melkite theology came to its distinctive expression. The Greek works of St. John of Damascus (d. c. 749) in particular, and especially his *Fount of Knowledge*, set down the basic theological parameters of the Melkite creed.⁸ Subsequently, this theological discourse was shaped and developed in the Arabic works of later writers to meet the challenges of the Christian theological adversaries of the Melkites, to address in Arabic the Islamic critique of Christian doctrines, and to find a vocabulary in Arabic sufficient to express the developing theological profile of Melkite creedal identity.⁹ The most significant contributions to this theological enterprise now known to us include the anonymous, late eighth-century Arabic text called by its modern editor *On the Triune Nature of God*,¹⁰ the Arabic

⁶ Cyril of Schythopolis (c. 525- c. 558) used this phrase a number of times in his *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*. Presumably he borrowed it from the Jerusalem liturgy of St. James. See R.L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought*, New Haven, 1992, p. 171.

⁷ See more on this topic in Griffith, 'The Church of Jerusalem and the 'Melkites''.

⁸ See Griffith, 'Melkites', 'Jacobites' and the Christological Controversies in Arabic', but especially A. Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*, Oxford, 2002. See also L. Perrone, 'Four Gospels, Four Councils'—One Lord Jesus Christ: The Patristic Development of Christology within the Church of Palestine', *Liber Annuus* 49, 1999, pp. 357-96.

⁹ See the discussion of the most important works in M.N. Swanson, 'Folly to the *Hunajā*: The Cross of Christ in Arabic Christian-Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries AD', doctoral dissertation, PISAI, Rome, 1992; S. Khalil, 'La littérature melkite sous les premiers abbasides', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 56, 1990, pp. 469-86; S.H. Griffith, 'The View of Islam from the Monasteries of Palestine in the Early Abbasid Period', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7, 1996, pp. 9-28.

¹⁰ See S.K. Samir, 'The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity (c. 750)', in

works of Theodore Abū Qurra (c. 755-c. 830),¹¹ the anonymous Arabic summary of Melkite theology entitled *Summary of the Ways of Faith*,¹² the work of Peter of Bayt Ra's called *The Book of the Proof*,¹³ along with a number of other compositions, including several Melkite creeds specially designed to state the articles of Byzantine Orthodoxy as it was confessed in the Oriental Patriarchates in a succinct and definitive manner.¹⁴

Given this intense theological activity among the Melkites in Jerusalem and her environs, it comes as no surprise to notice that Jerusalem and her monasteries figure prominently in the broad range of Melkite Arabic literature produced from the eighth to the eleventh centuries. For example, in hagiographic texts Jerusalem is often the *mise en scène* for encounters between Christian 'neo-martyrs' and their Muslim nemeses, as in the case of the *Passion of St. Michael*, the monk and martyr of Mar Sabas monastery.¹⁵ Similarly, the *Life of St. Theodore of Edessa* has as one of its principal purposes the commendation of Jerusalem and the monastery of Mar Sabas as founts of orthodoxy in

S.K. Samir and J.S. Nielsen, eds, *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, Leiden, 1994, pp. 57-114 for further bibliography.

¹¹ For the most recent bibliographical orientation see S.H. Griffith, 'Theodore Abū Qurrah: The Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian Writer of the First Abbasid Century' (*Annual Lecture of the Dr. Irene Halmos Chair of Arabic Literature*), Tel Aviv, 1992; idem, 'Reflections on the Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah', *Parole de l'Orient* 18, 1993, pp. 143-70; J.C. Lamoreaux, 'The Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah Revisited', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56, 2002, pp. 25-40.

¹² See S.H. Griffith, 'The First Christian *Summa Theologiae* in Arabic: Christian *Kalām* in Ninth-Century Palestine', in M. Gervers and R.J. Bakhazi, eds, *Conversion and Continuity in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, Toronto, 1990, pp. 15-31; idem, 'Islam and the *Summa Theologiae Arabica; Rabī'* I, 264 AH', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13, 1990, pp. 225-64.

¹³ See the text published and translated into English, but wrongly attributed to Eutychius of Alexandria, in P. Cachia, ed. and W.M. Watt, trans., *Eutychius of Alexandria: The Book of the Demonstration (Kūtāb al-burhān)*, 4 vols (*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 192-3, 210-11 = ar. 20-23), Louvain, 1960-1961.

¹⁴ See S.H. Griffith, 'Muslims and Church Councils: The Apology of Theodore Abū Qurrah', *Studia Patristica* 25, 1993, pp. 270-99; idem, 'Theology and the Arab Christian: The Case of the 'Melkite' Creed', in D. Thomas, ed., *A Faithful Presence: Essays for Kenneth Cragg*, London, 2003, pp. 184-200.

¹⁵ See S.H. Griffith, 'Michael, the Martyr and Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery, at the Court of the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik: Christian Apologetics and Martyrology in the Early Islamic Period', *ARAM* 6, 1994, pp. 115-48. See also idem, 'Christians, Muslims, and Neo-Martyrs: Saints' Lives and Holy Land History', in A. Kofsky and G.G. Stroumsa, eds, *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land, First-Fifteenth Centuries CE*, Jerusalem, 1998, pp. 163-207.

the Melkite community.¹⁶ Jerusalem and pilgrimage to the church of the *Anastasis* is the setting for Theodore Abū Qurra's (c. 755-c. 830) *Letter to the Jacobite David*, an apologetic text in which the author defends Melkite theology and ecclesiastical allegiance against its Jacobite rival.¹⁷ A Melkite pilgrimage document, probably composed in the ninth century,¹⁸ promotes the importance of Jerusalem and the *loca sancta* as sites 'that God glorified by the appearance in [them] of his Messiah and the presence of the Holy Spirit',¹⁹ and declares that they must always remain in Christian hands. Finally, among the Melkites, Jerusalem is frequently the chosen venue for literary evocations of debates between Jews, Christians and Muslims, often as exercises in the literary genre that features a 'monk in the emir's *majlis*',²⁰ as in the case of the anonymous work that goes under the title of *The Dialogue of Abraham of Tiberias with 'Abd ar-Rahmān al-Hāshimī in Jerusalem around 820*.²¹ It is in this context that one should discuss the remarkable Melkite Arabic tract that offers answers to three pointed questions said in the text to have been posed to a monk by a prominent Muslim *shaykh* in Jerusalem, perhaps in the early ninth century. For convenience, we may hereinafter refer to the work simply as *Answers for the Shaykh*.

¹⁶ See S.H. Griffith, 'The *Life of Theodore of Edessa*: History, Hagiography, and Religious Apologetics in Mar Saba Monastery in Early Abbasid Times', in J. Patrich, ed., *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, Leuven, 2001, pp. 147-69.

¹⁷ The Arabic text is published in C. Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes de Theodore Abou-cara, Évêque d'Haran*, Beirut, 1904, pp. 104-39. See the German translation in G. Graf, *Die arabischen Schriften des Theodor Abū Qurra, Bischofs von Harrān*, Paderborn, 1910, pp. 239-77.

¹⁸ The text of the document is included in a work by Peter of Bayt Ra's entitled *Kitāb al-burhān*, mistakenly attributed in its publication to Eutychius of Alexandria (877-940). (See n. 13 above.) For the text of the pilgrimage document, see Cachia, *Eutychius of Alexandria*, I (CSCO 192 = ar. 20), pp. 165-207; for an English translation, Watt, *Eutychius of Alexandria*, I (CSCO 193 = ar. 21), pp. 134-62.

¹⁹ Watt, *Eutychius of Alexandria*, I (CSCO 193 = ar. 21), p. 134.

²⁰ In this connection see S.H. Griffith, 'The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*: Reflections on a Popular Genre of Christian Literary Apologetics in Arabic in the Early Islamic Period', in H. Lazarus-Yafeh et al., eds, *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, Wiesbaden, 1999, pp. 13-65.

²¹ See G.B. Marcuzzo, *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Hāshimī à Jérusalem vers 820*, Rome, 1986.

III. *The Monk and the Muslim Shaykh in Jerusalem*

Sinai Arabic MS 434 contains the text of a hitherto unstudied account of the responses of an unnamed hieromonk to three questions set for him by an anonymous Muslim shaykh whom the writer identifies only as someone ‘outstanding in his Islam, in the city of Jerusalem (*bi-madīna bayt al-muqaddas*)’.²² The short, anonymous *Answers for the Shaykh*, of some twenty-two manuscript pages, offers no obvious, external indication of the date when it was first composed, but a brief colophon appended to the only known manuscript copy of it says that the copyist’s task was finished in the year 533 AH, or 1138/1139 AD.²³ One recent scholar, on the basis of internal criteria which we shall discuss below, proposes a date as early as c. 780 AD for the text’s original composition, but sometime in the ninth or even the tenth century seems more likely.²⁴

A. *The text of Answers for the Shaykh*

Answers for the Shaykh is written in a somewhat careless *naskhī* script that is not infrequently difficult to decipher. What is more, the writer is so negligent of the classical grammar and usages of the Arabic language, and so inconsistent in diction, that one cannot easily claim his text as an exemplar of that ‘Christian Arabic’ or ‘Melkite Arabic’ that Joshua Blau identified as a phase in the development of the ‘Middle Arabic’ dialects.²⁵ Rather, the idiom seems to be that of one who speaks and writes Arabic colloquially; the text betrays no evident underlying Syriac or Aramaic usages. In fact, the writer is obviously

²² Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171r.

²³ See Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 181v.

²⁴ See R. Haddad, *La Trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes (750-1050)*, Paris, 1985, p. 38. The suggested dating is accepted in R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton, 1997, pp. 504-5. The ninth century dating is suggested in M.N. Swanson, ‘Beyond Proof-texting: Approaches to the Qur’ān in Some Early Arabic Christian Apologies’, *The Muslim World* 88, 1998, p. 301, n. 25. Hoyland reported that Swanson was preparing an edition of the text; Swanson, ‘Beyond Proof-texting’, p. 301, n. 24, reports that the Rev. ‘Īd Ṣalāḥ Sa’d (Eid Salah) is preparing an edition for publication.

²⁵ See J. Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic*, 3 vols (CSCO 267, 276, 279 = subs. 27-29), Louvain, 1966-7; idem, ‘A Melkite Arabic *Lingua Franca* from the Second Half of the First Millennium’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57, 1994, pp. 14-16.

very familiar with the Qur'an and often uses standard Arabic phrases and proper nouns, but betrays a total befuddlement over the transcription of such foreign elements as Greek proper names, which are otherwise common features in Melkite compositions.

1. *The copyist's prologue*

Answers for the Shaykh begins with a prologue that seems not to derive from the original writer;²⁶ perhaps it is the work of the twelfth-century copyist. It states that the work is an exercise in 'questions and answers, logical and divine, from God's scriptures'.²⁷ It explicitly mentions the 'Melkite Orthodoxy' that in fact the tract's Christology will reflect. And then, the writer immediately evokes the Islamic milieu of his time by speaking of God's 'logical attributes': 'living' (*ḥayy*), 'wise' (*ḥakīm*) and 'rational' (*nāṭiq*), by means of which He is to be distinguished from the golden calf of the Israelites (Exodus 32), which was neither living, wise, nor rational. 'My God and helper', he says, 'is the one whose being (*jawhar*) "has no associate" (*lā sharīka lahu*) [*al-An'ām* (6) 163] . . . the God whose descriptive attribute is "the Compassionate the Merciful" (*al-rahmān al-rahīm*) [*al-Fātiḥa* (1) 1]'.²⁸ And then he announces, 'Here is an answer to some most enlightened questions to a priest monk (*al-qass al-rāhib*) from a shaykh, eminent in Islam, in the city of Jerusalem (*bi-madīna bayt al-muqaddas*).'²⁹

2. *The author's preface*

The author of the work that the copyist presents as *Answers for the Shaykh* begins speaking in his own voice, in the first person, in the brief preface he provides for his treatise.³⁰ He mentions a note (*ruq'a*) that had reached him from an eminent shaykh, whom he praises lavishly. He says that the note contained three questions. The shaykh is reported to have read the three questions in *The Book of the Refutation of the Christians* (*Kitāb al-radd 'alā al-naṣārā*). The shaykh said that the questions were put in this book 'by their composer in an adversarial way, to confound and to frighten the simple-minded among us, who are not conversant with the Christian sciences of

²⁶ See Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171r, lines 1-13.

²⁷ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171r.

²⁸ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171r.

²⁹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171r.

³⁰ See Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171r, line 14-171v, line 8.

divinity'.³¹ Nevertheless, the author of the little treatise under review here says that he is happy with the shaykh's inquiries because he knows that they are not motivated by a spirit of hostility. In fact the author says, 'I say he is neither an interrogator nor one to pose menacing questions . . . and his parents' stock is too noble for [him] to engage in harassment.'³² For all this, the author never mentions the shaykh's name, nor does he further identify him in any proximate way; in the text he simply calls him 'my master' (*sayyidī*).³³

As for the *Kitāb al-radd 'alā al-naṣārā* cited by the shaykh in his note to the author of *Answers for the Shaykh*, there is no further identification of it in the text, and the wording of the questions cited from it by the author holds no clue to help the modern researcher to identify the Muslim scholar who wrote it. The title was a common one for texts composed by Muslim religious controversialists from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. To judge by the reports in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm, the earliest of them seem to have been written by Mu'tazilite *mutakallimūn* such as Ḍirār ibn 'Amr (d. c. 806), Abū Mūsa 'Īsā ibn Ṣubayḥ al-Murdār (d. c. 840) and Abū l-Hudhayl al-'Allāf (d. c. 840), but none of the texts attributed to these writers are known to have survived.³⁴ Perhaps the earliest surviving works under this title were the essays written by the Zaydī scholar al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (d. 860)³⁵ and the Mu'tazilī *littérateur* al-Jāhīz (d. 869/870).³⁶ There is also a work of this title attributed to the 'Nestorian' convert to Islam, 'Alī Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (d. c. 850).³⁷ While the issues highlighted by

³¹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171v.

³² Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171v.

³³ See, e.g., Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 172v, line 7.

³⁴ For more information on the early Muslim anti-Christian literature see E. Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter: Beiträge zur Geschichte der muslimischen Polemik gegen das Christentum in arabischer Sprache*, Breslau, 1930; A. Bouamama, *La littérature polémique musulmane contre le christianisme depuis ses origines jusqu'au XIIIe siècle*, Algiers, 1988; D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's 'Against the Trinity'*, Cambridge, 1992; idem, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity: Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq's 'Against the Incarnation'*, Cambridge, 2002.

³⁵ See I. Di Matteo, 'Confutazione contro i cristiani dello Zaydita al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 9, 1921-1922, pp. 301-64.

³⁶ See 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ḥassān, ed., *Rasā'il al-Jāhīz*, vol. 2, Cairo, 1979, pp. 301-51.

³⁷ See A.K.W. Kutsch, 'Ar-radd 'alā n-Naṣārā de 'Alī at-Ṭabarī', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 36, 1959, pp. 115-48. There is a French translation in J.-M. Gaudoul, *Riposte aux chrétiens par 'Alī al-Ṭabarī*, Rome, 1995. This work should not be confused with the same author's *Kitāb al-dīn wa-al-dawla*. For the latter see A. Mingana, *The*

the questions posed in *Answers for the Shaykh* were certainly raised by all three of these authors, the wording is not sufficiently close to enable one to say that any one of the three books was the one the shaykh in Jerusalem is said to have read. Perhaps the author in fact had no particular text in mind, but simply used the familiar title to name a genre of polemical compositions common in the interreligious controversies of the day; to name such a title lent a note of authenticity to his work.

Similarly, the unnamed monk who is presented as the original author of *Answers for the Shaykh* is not identified. But as the present writer has noted elsewhere, the figure of the monk as the literary protagonist for the Christian side in the Christian-Muslim controversies of the early Islamic period was a commonplace, especially in texts written by Melkites in Jerusalem.³⁸ It is tempting to surmise, along with Rachid Haddad, that the monk was a 'Sabaite',³⁹ the monastery of Mar Sabas having been an important center of Melkite theology in the environs of Jerusalem in the early Abbasid period.⁴⁰

3. *The questions*

The text is divided in the manuscript under the headings of the three questions:

- a. 'Is the eternal being (*jawhar*) one of the hypostases (*al-aqānīm*)?'⁴¹
- b. 'What verification (*sihha*) do you claim for the [hypostatic] union (*ittihād*)?'⁴²
- c. 'What proof is there for the veracity of the claim of verification [for the hypostatic union] from the actions of the Messiah, [and] from what might be affirmed on the basis of what is comparable

Book of Religion and Empire, Manchester, 1922; idem, *Kitāb ad-dīn wa-al-dawla*, Manchester, 1923. On the controversy over the authenticity of this work see M. Bouyges, 'Nos informations sur 'Aliy . . . at-Ṭabariy', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 28, 1949-1950, pp. 67-114; D. Thomas, 'Ṭabari's Book of Religion and Empire', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 69, 1986, pp. 1-7.

³⁸ See Griffith, 'The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*'.

³⁹ See Haddad, *La Trinité divine*, p. 38.

⁴⁰ See Griffith, 'The *Life of Theodore of Edessa*', esp. pp. 58-60.

⁴¹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171v, line 8; the answer extends from f. 171v, line 9-f. 175r, line 4.

⁴² Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 175r, lines 5-6; the answer extends from f. 175r, line 5-f. 178r, line 6.

to the claim.⁴³ The awkwardness of the wording of this question, translated somewhat literally, will hopefully be dispelled in the sequel, as we explore the answer to it.

4. *The conclusion*

The text of the response to the third question stops abruptly, in mid-sentence! The conclusion to the whole tract follows immediately in the same hand, without any indication on the copyist's part that he has obviously skipped a portion of the text. The conclusion says:

The answers are finished—abbreviated, since the testimonies of God's scriptures are abundant. Glory be to Him forevermore, Amen. Praise be to God perpetually.⁴⁴

5. *The copyist's colophon*

The text of the copyist's colophon, appended immediately to his copy of the work, says:

The completion of the copying was on Saturday, the eleventh of *Shawwāl* [in the] year five hundred and thirty-three.⁴⁵ May God have mercy on whoever reads [it] or hears [it], and may he pray for its scribe for mercy and forgiveness from the 'Lord of the Worlds'. Thanks be to God perpetually.⁴⁶

One takes note of the copyist's use here of the Qur'an's divine epithet, 'Lord of the Worlds' (*rabb al-'ālamīn*, as in *al-Fātiha* (1) 2), applied exclusively to *Allāh* in the Qur'an. It is not unlikely that the copyist means it to refer to Christ, a usage prominently attested in another Melkite text emanating from the monastic milieu of Jerusalem, the anonymous *Summary of the Ways of Faith*.⁴⁷

B. *The contents of Answers for the Shaykh*

Already in the copyist's prologue there is the statement that the questions posed by the Muslim shaykh in *Answers for the Shaykh* are

⁴³ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 178r, lines 7-8; the answer extends from f. 178r, line 6–f. 181v, line 3.

⁴⁴ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 181v.

⁴⁵ Equivalent to Saturday/Sunday, 11 June 1139 AD.

⁴⁶ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 181v.

⁴⁷ See Griffith, 'Islam and the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*'. The use of the Qur'an's divine epithet to refer to Christ is to be found throughout the *Summa*; see, e.g., British Library Or. MS 4950, f. 7r *et passim*.

to have what the copyist calls both ‘rational’ and ‘divine’ responses. He meant that each of the monk’s replies includes arguments drawn from the two sources, reason and revelation; it was a standard feature of most apologetic discourse in the early Islamic period, both Christian and Muslim, to offer arguments under both of these headings. But there is no doubt that for the copyist, as for the original writer of *Answers for the Shaykh*, the presentation of proof-texts from the scriptures was to have pride of place. The copyist already speaks of such texts as ‘the light from God’s scriptures by means of which its possessor is exalted’.⁴⁸ But what are most surprising to find in the replies to all three questions are almost as many quotations from and allusions to the Qur’an as there are from the Bible. And throughout the text, even when the writer is referring to specifically Christian ideas or institutions, as often as not he uses the Qur’an’s terminology for them. For example, he repeatedly speaks of Christ’s disciples (*al-ḥawāriyyūn*) as ‘God’s helpers’ (*ansār Allāh*), echoing the Qur’an’s epithet for them (*Āl ‘Imrān* (3) 52).

1. *The answer to the First Question*

a. The argument from reason

According to the plan, in answer to the question about whether or not the eternal being (*jawhar*) is one of the three hypostases (*aqānīm*) that the Christians insist are to be affirmed of the one God, the monk begins by defining his terms. He says that ‘the eternal being (*jawhar*) is the essence (*dhāt*) of God most high’.⁴⁹ He then goes on to explain that God’s being is completely beyond the perception of human beings, which is why in the scriptures He appears to them ‘undercover’ (*fī ḥijāb*),⁵⁰ as when He appeared in the Burning Bush, the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Covenant and the Pillar of Cloud; and latterly, when in human form ‘He became equivalent to us, His creation, in bodiliness (*bi-al-jasadiyya*), while remaining distinct from us in divinity (*bi-al-ilāhiyya*)’.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171r.

⁴⁹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171v.

⁵⁰ As Swanson points out, in virtue of this phrase one may discern echoes from the Qur’an, *al-Shūrā* (42) 51, and its earlier Muslim interpreters in this passage. See Swanson, ‘Beyond Proofexting’, pp. 301-2

⁵¹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, ff. 171v-172r.

As for the hypostases (*al-aqānīm*), the writer gives the following definition. He says,

The *aqānīm* of God's being are the names and attributes (*ṣifāt*) of the essence/self (*dhāt*) of the one God, whose being (*jawhar*) is not three gods. They are neither separate, nor are they divided. They are three names for a single king; selves (*dhawāt*), identities (*ma'ārif*) of the one essence/self (*dhāt*); like the spirit, the mind and the word [in a human being].⁵²

After expatiating on the analogy of the spirit, the mind and the word in the human being, the writer goes on to say that 'the hypostasis (*uqnūm*) does not precede its being (*jawhar*), nor does its being precede it, there being no separation and no distinction of being from being'. And a little further along, after mentioning other analogies, he says, 'There is no distinction by way of posteriority or priority, of separation or division, for the hypostases [of the one God]. Rather, there is a single nature (*tabī'a*) in the names of His glory, not separated.'⁵³ With this brief definition and clarification of terms, together with the citation of traditional analogies like the spirit, the mind and the word in a single human being, or water from three different seas commingled in a single container, the author contents himself, confident that he has convincingly shown from reason how one entity can be named 'three', 'while it is a single nature in its beingness (*bi-jawhariyyatihī*)'.⁵⁴ From this point he turns to testimonies from revelation (*al-shar'*).

b. The argument from revelation

The author avers that it is well known that the Torah teaches that God is a single being (*jawhar wāḥid*), but it is also the case, he argues, that the same scripture 'in many places hints (*ramaza*) at the hypostases (*al-aqānīm*)'. He proceeds to point out that as much can be seen in the passage in the Torah in which God reveals His name to Moses: 'After asserting his one-ness (*tawḥīd*), "I am God", He said, "I am *ehye asher ehye*", *Adōnāy Elōhīm*' (Exodus 3.14).⁵⁵ The apologist then

⁵² Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 172r.

⁵³ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 172v.

⁵⁴ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 172v.

⁵⁵ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 172v. Note the Arabic transcriptions of Hebrew phrases, including '*Adōnāy Elōhīm*'.

explains that ‘the name is plural in number, comprising a pair and a single, and they are the three names, attributes, of His hypostases’.⁵⁶ Furthermore, he points out, in the very next verse in scripture God says, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob’ (Exodus 3.15). So the author asks, ‘Was what He intended not a treasure which He would make known in His own time to his apostles, His helpers (*ḥawārīhi anṣārīhi*),⁵⁷ by means of the Spirit among them?’⁵⁸

The monk/apologist carries on from this point to cite the phrase ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts’ (Isaiah 6.3) which he says Ezekiel identifies as the angels’ acclamation of God. He argues that the three ‘hallows’ indicate God’s ‘selves’ (*dhawāt*), his ‘hypostases’ (*aqānīm*), while their cry ‘Lord Sabaoth’, which he says means ‘king of the armies’ (*malik al-ajnād*), indicates God’s unity or one-ness. He remarks that ‘there are numerous hints (*rumūz*) of this sort in the Torah and the Prophets’,⁵⁹ and he goes on to mention some of them.

Then the monk makes an appeal to the shaykh’s own, Qur’an-inspired religious knowledge. He asks, ‘Was God not described as “living”, “wise”, “rational”, one whose being (*jawhar*) is the Creator, in order to make a distinction from the attributes of the beings (*jawāhir*) of the gods of the Associators (*al-mushrikīn*), of stone, gold or silver, a single being (*jawhar*) whose description (*ṣifa*) is non-living, unwise and unspeaking?’⁶⁰

It was the ‘Word of God’, veiled in our flesh, which God sent among us, the monk claims, who made all these matters clear. And after his resurrection, he commissioned ‘God’s helpers, . . . according to your Qur’an’,⁶¹ to teach the nations. We Christians, the monk says, have accepted what the *anṣār Allāh* taught about God’s being and its hypostases. And he goes on to tell the shaykh that ‘your own scripture (*kitāb*)’,⁶² ‘your own Qur’an’,⁶³ has also taught you the truth about God’s hypostases when it spoke of ‘the Messiah, ʿĪsā ibn

⁵⁶ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 172v.

⁵⁷ These terms are from the Qur’an, *Āl ʿImrān* (3) 52.

⁵⁸ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 173r.

⁵⁹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 173r.

⁶⁰ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 173r.

⁶¹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 173v.

⁶² Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 174r.

⁶³ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 174v.

Maryam, as the messenger of God, and His Word that He cast into Mary, and a Spirit from Him' (*al-Nisā'* (4) 171).⁶⁴

Finally, the monk says that he has given only a brief answer to the shaykh's first question. And he concludes his response with the following remark:

I know that whoever does not read God's revealed scriptures, will, on account of his negligence, put forth what he does not really understand, and it will baffle him. As for the intelligent, reasonable, cultured, scripturally literate man, he will understand it, because I have not put forth anything from my own mind. Rather, it is from God's scriptures, and from what He has taught me by 'His helpers'. To Him is glory forever, Amen.⁶⁵

2. *The answer to the Second Question*

a. The argument from reason

The monk proposes first to answer from reason the shaykh's question about the verification (*ṣiḥḥa*) of what Christians call the 'hypostatic' union (*al-ittiḥād*). In fact, his reasoning involves showing, from his point of view, how the Chalcedonian Christological formula expresses the teaching of the Bible and the Qur'an.

The monk begins by recalling the Christian teaching about how Adam, after his sin and exile from paradise, repented (*tāba*); and how God promised him offspring and that his offspring, as God (*ilāhan*), would be his savior. He says that the attestation to the truth (*taṣḍīq*) of this allegation is in the Qur'an, in the passage that says, 'Adam received words [belonging to God] from his Lord and so he turned back (*tāba*) to Him' (*al-Baqara* (2) 37).⁶⁶ The monk then says that God subsequently sent twenty-four prophets to the people of Israel announcing the coming of Adam's offspring, who would be as a 'temple for God' (*haykalan li-llāhi*), an epithet that the monk says was 'the most often heard of any one of their sayings about him'.⁶⁷ He cites the prophet Isaiah to the effect that, 'The world will not recognize God until the Messiah comes, and the peoples, two com-

⁶⁴ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 174r.

⁶⁵ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 175r. See also n. 50 above.

⁶⁶ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 175r. Note that the phrase in brackets, 'belonging to God (*li-llāhi*)', is not in fact in the Qur'an.

⁶⁷ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 175r.

munities (*ummatayn*), will commingle at his coming.⁶⁸ And the monk adds, 'Just as we see today'.⁶⁹

At this point the monk interjects an important theological statement, in the course of it once again echoing passages from the Qur'an. He says,

The Messiah is the one whom Adam was promised as his savior, God in man, in whom is the very being (*jawhar*) of God, His Word and His Spirit,⁷⁰ veiled (*muhtajib*)⁷¹ so that he could defeat Satan. The Messiah is the being of God, and he will save Adam and his offspring by means of the worship (*ibāda*) of God; his being is the apogee of his identity (*ghāyatu ma'rifatihī*).⁷²

From this point the monk is prepared to give voice to his Christology. He says of Adam's saving offspring, the Word of God, 'He is a single Messiah: the very being of God within; the son of Mary without—united, an unlimited unity (*ittihād*), just like the essential (*jawhariyya*) soul in the fleshly, bodily nature (*tab'ā*).⁷³ And with this affirmation the monk proceeds to offer an explanation of his meaning that the reader will recognize as an effort to invoke the Chalcedonian doctrine of Melkite orthodoxy. He says,

The explanation of the unity (*ittihād*) of the being of God in a body from us is that he has two modes (*naw'ayn*), two natures (*tab'ayn*), a single man (*insān*)—a perfect one (*kāmilun*) in a perfect one, unmingled, unmixed.⁷⁴

The monk says that he will mention in the section on revelation the passages from the prophets that speak of the Messiah, but for now he will cite the Qur'an. He writes,

The Qur'an's statement about him is thus, 'O Mary, God is announcing to you good news of a Word from Him, whose name is the Messiah', and there is no one more 'notable (*wajīhun*)⁷⁵ in this world and the

⁶⁸ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 175r. The reading *ummatayn* in line 15 is uncertain.

⁶⁹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 175v.

⁷⁰ An echo of the Qur'an, *al-Nisā'* (4) 171.

⁷¹ A reprise of the earlier mention of the veil (*hijāb*) behind which God is said to have appeared to the Israelites in the past. See n. 50 above, where the term is shown to be echoing a passage from the Qur'an, *al-Shūrā* (42) 51.

⁷² Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 175v.

⁷³ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 175v.

⁷⁴ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 176r.

⁷⁵ In *Āl 'Imrān* (3) 45 the word actually appears as *wajīhan*.

next' other than God and His Spirit and His Word. The creator of His creatures is the Word of God in the flesh of Mary, the abode of God's wisdom for the world, 'notable in this world and the next' (*Āl Imrān* (3) 45).⁷⁶

The monk weaves his quotation from the Qur'an's report of the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary into a statement of his Christology. And he says that on the basis of this passage one really need not ask any more questions about the Messiah and his hypostatic union. He goes on to point out about Gabriel's reported announcement to Mary that,

Gabriel did not say to her that God is announcing a servant (*abd*) from Him, nor a prophet (*nabi*) from Him, nor a messenger (*rasul*) from Him, but rather a Word from Him, the very being of God united with the son of Mary, to be seen as a single man to whom two modes of action (*fi layn*) pertain. He vivifies the dead by the permission of his own divinity; . . . he eats by the action of his humanity.⁷⁷

Here too the wording of passages from the Qur'an is much in evidence. In fact, the monk is using the Qur'an to correct the Qur'an! He proposes that passages that speak of Jesus, the Messiah, the son of Mary, as a servant (*abd*) such as *al-Nisā'* (4) 172, or as no more than a messenger of God (*rasul Allāh*) such as *al-Mā'ida* (5) 75, must be interpreted in the light of the significance of the Qur'an's further description of him as the 'Word of God' in such passages as *Āl Imrān* (3) 45 and *al-Nisā'* (4) 171. Moreover, he proposes a Chalcedonian, or at least a dyophysite interpretation for the Qur'an's claim that Jesus worked miracles only by God's permission (*bi-idhni llāhi*), when he maintains that he did so 'by the permission of his own divinity' (*bi-idhni lāhūtihi*).⁷⁸

Then, in connection with his mention of Jesus' eating as an action of his humanity (*min fi'li nāsūtihi*), the monk manages both to offer an explanation of an often unrecognized epithet of Christ in the Qur'an and to evoke a Christian, typological interpretation of the story of Abraham and the three visitors in Genesis 18.1-15. First he says of the Messiah, 'He eats by the action of his humanity, just as God, exalted be He, ate in the house of Abraham, the "third of

⁷⁶ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 176r.

⁷⁷ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 176r-v.

⁷⁸ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 176r.

three" (*thālith thalāthatin*) in person (*bi-‘aynihi*) according to the saying of the Qur’an [*al-Mā’ida* (5) 73].⁷⁹ The phrase ‘third of three’ (*thālith thalāthatin*), often a puzzle to commentators on the Qur’an, seems in fact to be an Arabic translation of a fairly common epithet for Christ in Syriac patristic literature; it is a ‘Syriacism’ in the Qur’an’s Arabic, a calque on the Syriac term for ‘one of a triad’ (*thlīthāyâ*),⁸⁰ not just in the sense of ‘one of the Trinity’ as the term is most often understood, but also in the sense of one, like Christ, who is characterized by reference to other triads, such as a troika of types. For example, in his religious poetry St. Ephraem the Syrian spoke of Christ as *thlīthāyâ* within several frames of reference. Several times he spoke of him as ‘the treble one’ in reference to his three-day stay in the grave prior to his resurrection,⁸¹ once probably in this same context calling him ‘God’s own “treble one” (*thlīthāyâ d’Allāhâ*)’.⁸² In another passage Ephraem spoke of Christ as ‘the treble one’ (*thlīthāyâ*) in reference to his threefold role in God’s dispensation as priest, prophet and king.⁸³

Clearly the monk who speaks in *Answers for the Shaykh* is familiar with this traditionally Syriac sense of the epithet that stands behind the Qur’an’s phrase, ‘one of three’ (*thālith thalāthatin*), and he evokes it in connection with another triad, Abraham’s visitors at the Oaks of Mamre, three ‘men’ who mysteriously present themselves as both one and three and whom Abraham addresses as ‘my Lord’, thus allowing Christian exegetes to find in this story in the Torah a foreshadowing of the later revelation in the Gospel of the three persons in the one God.⁸⁴ Exercising his own imagination in regard to what might

⁷⁹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 176v. In the text the second term of the phrase *thālith thalāthatin* is misspelled; it reads *th-l-th*.

⁸⁰ See the forthcoming study by S.H. Griffith, ‘Syriacisms in Early Islamic Diction: Reflections on the Aramean Context of Early Islam; Who Said, “Allāh is Third of Three?”’

⁸¹ See E. Beck, ed. and trans., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Carmina Nisibena*, 4 vols (CSCO 218-219, 240-241 = syr. 92-93, 102-103), Louvain, 1961-1963, hymns I.11; II.5; XLI.16.

⁸² E. Beck, ed. and trans., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, 2 vols (CSCO 186-187 = syr. 82-83), Louvain, 1959, hymn VIII.6. See also Beck’s explanatory note in the translation volume (CSCO 187 = syr. 83), pp. 157-8, n. 9.

⁸³ See E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate*, 2 vols (CSCO 223-224 = syr. 94-95), Louvain, 1962, hymn XVII.5.

⁸⁴ A number of Arab Christian writers present this line of thinking about Gen.

have happened on the occasion of the visit, the monk says that the three honored guests were discovered to be God's three hypostases (*aqānīm*) when they said, 'Salām, salām, salām', and he goes on to say that 'the three means the persons (*ashkhās*), the properties (*amlāk*), the hypostases (*aqānīm*) of the Lord (*al-rabb*)'.⁸⁵

The monk closes the 'rational argument' section of his response to the shaykh's question about the hypostatic union, an argument which in fact has consisted mostly of advancing Christian interpretations of the Qur'an, with the following attestation. He says,

The Messiah (*al-masīh*), Anointing (*māsīh*) and Anointed (*mamsūh*), is the abode of God's Wisdom (*ḥikmatī llāhī*) and of His Word; he was disclosed to the world from where he would do it no harm, since God is not to be seen. Had He appeared without a veil (*bi-lā ḥijāb*)⁸⁶ He would certainly have destroyed human beings (*al-'ibād*). So He became united (*ittahada*) [with his humanity]—a marvel.⁸⁷

b. The argument from revelation

The monk says that proof from revelation (*al-shar'*) comes from the sayings of the prophets. He begins by citing Isaiah 7.14, picking up on the significance of the name Emmanuel, 'God with us', to claim that the prophet has indeed said that 'the one to be born, who would be seen as a man, is our God; the state "with us" is that, as one united (*muttaḥidan*), he would appear to his world.'⁸⁸ And the monk says that the apostles (*al-ḥawāriyyīn*) too spoke of the being (*jawhar*) of God in our humanity, citing the phrase 'The Word became flesh' from the prologue of the Gospel according to John (1.14), and going on immediately to say, 'That is, the Word of God built for himself a temple, without mixture and without mingling.'⁸⁹

Having cited both the Old Testament and the New Testament,

18.1-3 in their apologies for the doctrine of the Trinity in the context of their defense of Christian faith against the challenges of Muslims. See Haddad, *La Trinité divine*, p. 113.

⁸⁵ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 176v.

⁸⁶ See nn. 50 and 71 above, and *al-Shūrā* (42) 51.

⁸⁷ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 176v.

⁸⁸ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 176v.

⁸⁹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 177r. One should recall that earlier the monk had said that the phrase 'temple of God' was the most often heard epithet for the Messiah in the prophets; see n. 60 above. Furthermore, the phrase 'without mixture and without mingling' recalls the Chalcedonian formula also previously seen in the text; see n. 67 above.

and abiding by the methodology that the reader by now has come to expect of him, the monk turns once again to the testimony of the Qur'an. He conflates two passages to yield the following witness. He writes,

The Qur'an says, 'O Zachariah, God is giving you the good news of Yahyā (*Maryam* (19) 7), testifying to the truth of the Word of God (*Āl 'Imrān* (3) 39)⁹⁰ while he was in his mother's womb, a devout man, one of the virtuous ones.⁹¹ It had already been mentioned that John (*Yūḥannā*),⁹² while he was in his mother's womb, had given the good news that the Word of God was concealed (*muḥtajib*)⁹³ in the closed abode of God's pure one,⁹⁴ Mary.⁹⁵

In addition to citing several more passages from the scriptures, the monk comes finally to the mention of the miracles of Jesus as they are recorded in the Gospel, actions such as his revivifying the dead, driving out demons and curing the sick. He reminds the reader that the Qur'an mentions these miracles of Jesus too, along with some that are not mentioned in the Gospel. In fact he cites by name what he calls the *sifru al-Mā'ida* in the Qur'an,⁹⁶ where, in reference to Jesus' miraculous feeding of the crowds that followed him, the text

⁹⁰ The Qur'an actually speaks of 'a Word from God' (*bi-kalimatīn min Allāhi*), and not, as the monk has it, of 'the Word of God'.

⁹¹ Here too the monk's language echoes the Qur'an, which speaks of Yahyā as being 'devout' (*taqīyyan*, in *Maryam* (19) 13) and of Yahyā, along with Zachariah, Jesus and Elijah, as being 'among the virtuous ones' (*min al-ṣāliḥīn*, in *al-An'ām* (6) 85).

⁹² Notable here is the change in the spelling of John the Baptist's name, from the Yahyā of the Qur'an to the Yūḥannā of the Gospel. No doubt the monk is evoking the earlier account of John's testimony by way of his leaping in his mother's womb at the Visitation of Mary, already pregnant with Jesus, as recounted in Luke 1.41.

⁹³ The Arabic term used here, *muḥtajib*, 'veiled' or 'concealed', echoes once again the Qur'an passage cited in nn. 50, 71 and 86 above.

⁹⁴ The Arabic adjective used here, *ṣafīyyatun*, echoes the passage in the Qur'an that quotes Gabriel's message to Mary, 'God has . . . purified you (*iṣṭafāki*)' (*Āl 'Imrān* (3) 42).

⁹⁵ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 177r.

⁹⁶ The monk's designation of *sūrat al-Mā'ida* as a 'book' (*sifri*), like one of the books of the Bible, is curious. It echoes phrases from other Christian texts, such as the section on the Muslims in the *De Haeresibus* section of St. John of Damascus' *Fount of Knowledge*, or the Syriac account of the debate of the monk of Bayt Ḥalē with a Muslim emir around the year 720, in which the writer seems to present some of the *sūras* as somehow independent scriptures. For further details see S.H. Griffith, 'The Qur'an in Arab Christian Texts: The Development of an Apologetic Argument; Abū Qurrah in the *Majlis* of al-Ma'mūn', *Parole de l'Orient* 24, 1999, pp. 202-33, esp. 205-6.

says that Jesus prayed to God to ‘send to us a table (*mā’idatan*) from heaven ... to be a sign from You’ (*al-Mā’ida* (5) 114). The monk says that all these miracles are also a rational proof of the hypostatic union; Jesus accomplished them, he says, echoing another Qur’ānic locution, ‘by the permission of his own divinity’ (*bi-idhni lāhūtihī*),⁹⁷ at the same time that ‘he fully carried out his human mode of acting, except for fleshly desire, since he was not himself from the desire of flesh and blood’.⁹⁸

3. *The answer to the Third Question*

a. The argument from reason

The monk begins with the allegation that the verification of what the apostles, God’s helpers (*al-hawārīyyīn anṣār Allāhī*),⁹⁹ preached throughout the world is to be found in the moral miracle of the conversion of so many unlikely peoples to their message. He wrote,

They brought to very uncouth peoples, without sword, without rod, without wealth, without important people, a difficult doctrine that would drive them out of this world to the work of the next [world], and they responded to it obediently during their lifetimes and after their death. In the name of one crucified they would raise the dead and work every kind of miracle. This indicates a divine power for it, and it is in this Messiah, to whom his signs (*ayyāt*) bear witness that he is the Word of God, His very being (*jawhar*).¹⁰⁰

In this one paragraph the monk manages to combine two arguments often employed at much greater length by Christian apologists in the early Islamic milieu: the appeal to the evidentiary power of the miracles done by Christ or done in his name; and the deployment of a list of motivating factors, functioning as negative criteria, the absence of which in the spread of Christianity could arguably be used as evidence in favor of the veracity of its doctrines.¹⁰¹ From

⁹⁷ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 177v.

⁹⁸ Sinai Arabic MS 434, ff. 177v-178r.

⁹⁹ See *Āl ‘Imrān* (3) 52 and *al-Ṣaff* (61) 14. The monk explains a few lines later that ‘God’s helpers in your scripture are his apostles; there are twelve of them, plus seventy-two.’ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 178v.

¹⁰⁰ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 178r-v.

¹⁰¹ For a discussion of the details of this argument from negative criteria see S.H. Griffith, ‘Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians’, *Proceedings of the PMR Conference* 4, 1979, pp. 63-87, reprinted in S.H. Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period (Variorum Collected Studies Serie (S746), Aldershot, 2002, I.*

this point the monk then calls the shaykh's attention to the incidents mentioned in the Gospel that involve God the Father's testimony in behalf of the Son, specifically on the occasion of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan river and the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. The monk writes,

The Lord (*al-sayyid*), the Messiah, glory be to him, said, 'Whoever testifies in behalf of himself, his testimony is vain. There is another who testifies in my behalf' (cf. John 5.31-32). He means the testimony of his divinity to his humanity at the river Jordan and on Mount Tabor . . . saying, 'This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him' (cf. Mt. 3.17; 17.5).¹⁰²

From this point the monk turns his attention to the Gospel as a record of the signs that testify to the divinity of Christ; he mentions that much of the testimony is in fact also in the Qur'an. And he finds an ingenious way to commend the Gospel record of the evidentiary miracles to the shaykh, using the very terms of the Qur'an to make his point. By the way, he invites the shaykh's fascination by evoking the so-called 'mysterious letters' at the beginning of some of the *sūras*, and specifically at the beginning of *al-Baqara* (2) 1: 'l-m. The monk interprets this first instance of the 'mysterious letters' to mean *al-mīm*, that is the letter 'm', which, he points out, is the first letter of the name 'Messiah'. Here is how he puts it:

The book of the Gospel records his signs abundantly, and the Qur'an testifies to it when it says '*al-Mīm*; that scripture in which there is no doubt guidance for the God fearing' (*al-Baqara* (2) 1-2). The *mīm* begins the name of the Messiah. The ancient scripture for his sayings is the Christian (*al-masīhī*) scripture and his scripture is the one 'in which there is no doubt guidance for the God fearing', his community (*umma*) and those who obey him.¹⁰³

Making reference to Jesus' miraculous signs recorded in the Gospel and in the Qur'an, the monk goes on to ask, 'what is more power-

¹⁰² Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 178v.

¹⁰³ Sinai Arabic MS 434, ff. 178v-179r. This interpretation of the mysterious letters read as *al-mīm*, and interpreted to refer to Christ, is also found in the later work of the Melkite bishop of Sidon, Paul of Antioch (twelfth century), in his *Letter to Muslim Friends*. See P. Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche, Évêque melkite de Sidon (XIIe s.)*, Beirut, 1964, pp. 65 (Arabic), 173 (French). I am indebted to Dr. David Thomas for calling this coincidence to my attention.

ful a proof (*burhānan*) than these proofs?’¹⁰⁴—even here echoing the Qur’an’s advice for those Muslims in conversation with Jews or Christians who say, ‘None shall enter Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian’; the Muslims are told to say to them, ‘Produce your proof, if you are telling the truth’ (*al-Baqara* (2) 111).

In closing this section of his response to the third question, the monk recalls that there were some in early Christian times who spoke of Jesus as a sorcerer: some said he stole God’s names from the temple (*al-bayt*) and conjured with them,¹⁰⁵ others said he conjured with a book of Jewish magic,¹⁰⁶ while yet others, he says, ‘believed, acknowledged and put their faith in him’.¹⁰⁷ The monk says that among the latter were the *‘Īsāwīyya*. In fact, in the monk’s day this term probably indicated a Jewish heretical sect of late Umayyad times whose leader was a man called Abū ‘Īsā al-Īṣfahānī.¹⁰⁸ But there were yet others, the monk goes on to say, who would say that Jesus was the Messiah, but that ‘he was the son of Joseph, not the son of Judah, the true Messiah’.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, in the end the monk claims that ‘their disagreement [still] indicates their acknowledgement [of Jesus]’,¹¹⁰ based on the miraculous signs recorded in the Gospel and affirmed in the Qur’an.

b. The argument from revelation

The monk begins the final section of *Answers for the Shaykh* with the enunciation of a principle. He puts it at the beginning of his

¹⁰⁴ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 179r.

¹⁰⁵ In Jewish anti-Christian tradition there is in fact a legend that speaks of Jesus’ theft of the divine names. See L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5, Philadelphia, 1913-1938, p. 16.

¹⁰⁶ The text actually says that ‘others [say] he was working with *al-Shāmūth*, a book of magic or sorcery (*sihr*) belonging to the Jews’; Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 179r. The otherwise enigmatic *al-Shāmūth*, which has a line drawn through it in the manuscript as if to cancel it, may be an Arabic transcription of the Hebrew name for the Book of Exodus, *Shmōth*, written with a definite article in Arabic. There are other transcriptions of Hebrew words in this text. See n. 55 above. As for the ‘book of magic/sorcery belonging to the Jews’ (*kitābu sihrin lahum li-al-yahūd*) mentioned here, it is probably an allusion to the Qur’an’s charge that when Jesus came to his contemporaries with clear signs they said, ‘This is manifest magic/sorcery’ (*hādha sihrun mubīnun*, in *al-Saff* (61) 6).

¹⁰⁷ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 179r.

¹⁰⁸ See S. Pines, ‘al-‘Īsāwīyya’, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. IV, p. 96.

¹⁰⁹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 179v.

¹¹⁰ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 179v.

argument from revelation, in response to the shaykh's third question. He says,

God, exalted be He, knew that human minds would eschew His becoming incarnate openly among us for our sake, His being (*jawharuhu*), His Word (*kalimatuhu*), so He inspired the wise to give advance notice of His Incarnation. Each one spoke by inspiration in terms he did not understand. Then after that the prophets carried on with what they did understand, and they prophesied about Him.¹¹¹

From this point the monk proceeds to cite figures such as Hermes Trismegistus, some wise men of the Greeks (Socrates among others whose names the present writer cannot for now recognize in the text for sure), along with Balaam and Balak, whose story is told in the biblical book of Numbers (22-4). The monk says of Balaam:

He prophesied about the divinity and the humanity of the Messiah, saying, 'He will appear as a man (*basharan*) from Jacob, and a star from Israel.'¹¹² So the Messiah is from Jacob and from the being (*jawhar*) of God, since the interpretation of Israel is 'secret heart (*sirr*) of God', one of God's names, belonging to Jacob as an exalted title (*laqaban jabīlan*).¹¹³

Then, in attestation of his claim that the biblical prophets foretold the future reality of the hypostatic union, the monk quotes and interprets passages from Deuteronomy, the Psalms, and even from the book of Job. One may get the gist of his exegetical method from his interpretation of Deuteronomy 18.18, a passage that Muslim apologists in the early Islamic period not infrequently cited as a biblical testimony to the future coming of Muḥammad. The monk writes,

Moses said . . . that 'God will raise up for you a man like me, and he will work signs and wonders, and I will settle (*aḥillu*) in him and make my words (*lafẓ*) course on his lips. And the soul that does not believe will perish.'¹¹⁴ It means the appearance of His [i.e., God's] Messiah,

¹¹¹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 179v.

¹¹² The quotation is from Numbers 24.19 and 17, in this order, where the biblical text says, 'A ruler will come out of Jacob . . .' (vs. 19) and 'A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel' (vs. 17).

¹¹³ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 180r.

¹¹⁴ This is a much altered rendering of Deuteronomy 18.18-19. Note that among the many liberties he takes with the text, the monk speaks of a 'man' (*rajulan*) whom God will raise up, and not of a 'prophet', as it says in the Bible's text, and as the Muslims normally (and correctly) quoted it.

a man like Moses, and God will be a presence (*hālan*) in him, speaking (*nāṭiq*) on his lips.¹¹⁵

Finally, evoking the Psalms of David, the monk says that the one granting blessings from Zion is ‘the Messiah, God’s Word, His being (*jawhar*), God present on Zion’, the one producing miraculous signs, transferring power (*quwwa*) ‘from defective Judaism to perfect Christianity (*al-naṣrāniyya*)’.¹¹⁶ All this, according to the monk, is also confirmed in the Qur’an, from which he quotes once again to make his point, altering the text slightly. He says,

According to the Qur’an, ‘A party of the sons of Israel believed and a party disbelieved. We helped the ones who believed and they would be the first to be victorious over their enemies, [to the day of judgment]’ (*al-Ṣaff* (61) 14).¹¹⁷ It means that whoever believed in the Messiah in his time was victorious for the sake of going on to proclaim victory.¹¹⁸

At the end of the section the monk gives a summary of his argument. He says,

The divinity (*lāhūt*) of the Messiah, our Lord, our God and our Savior, to him be glory, has become evident—so too his signs and wonders—on the testimony of God’s helpers¹¹⁹ and of his own works. It is due to the testimony to them of the Qur’an and the Gospel, and the testimony to them of the God-fearing wise men, by means of God’s inspiration. The sayings of the prophets sowed the seed among the messengers (*al-rusul*),¹²⁰ who mowed down unbelief by means of faith and the proclamation of God’s hidden name, and breaking down the idols.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 180r-v.

¹¹⁶ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 181r. The monk seems to intend to evoke such passages as Ps. 132.13, ‘For the Lord has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling’, and Ps. 133.3, ‘From there [i.e., Zion] the Lord bestows his blessing.’ The Arabic text at this point is opaque.

¹¹⁷ The words in brackets are not part of the Qur’an’s text.

¹¹⁸ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 181r.

¹¹⁹ The disciples of Jesus, *al-ḥawāriyyūn* in the Qur’an, are called ‘God’s helpers’ in *al-Ṣaff* (61) 14, quoted just above.

¹²⁰ The Qur’an’s term for a ‘messenger of God’ (*rasūl Allāh*, pl. *rusul*), used in the Qur’an of Moses and Jesus (e.g., in *al-Baqara* (2) 87) as well as of Muḥammad (e.g., in *al-Ahzāb* (33) 40), was widely employed by Arabic-speaking Christians in the early Islamic period to designate Christ’s Apostles, thought of as the successors of the biblical prophets.

¹²¹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 181r.

IV. *Inter-confessional Theology and Apologetic Method in Answers for the Shaykh: Some Historical Observations*

What immediately strikes even the first-time reader of *Answers for the Shaykh* is the prominence of the testimony of the Qur'an in every part of the work. While other Arab Christian writers in the early Islamic period not infrequently spoke of the Qur'an, sometimes censoring it as a flawed scripture, but sometimes also citing it as a text whose verses could somehow be quoted, even out of context and distortedly, in testimony to the truth as Christians perceived it,¹²² none of them came close to investing it with the scriptural authority accorded it by this unknown Melkite writer. In terms of the high incidence of quotations from and allusions to verses from the Qur'an in an Arabic Christian text, the only other roughly contemporary work with which one might readily compare *Answers for the Shaykh* is the somewhat later, also anonymous composition that purports to give an account of Theodore Abū Qurra's defense of Christianity against the arguments of a number of Muslim notables in the *majlis* of the caliph al-Ma'mūn.¹²³ But what a difference in the tone of the two works and in the attitude to the Qur'an manifested in them! Whereas the latter work is polemical in tone and uses the numerous quotations from the Qur'an in an effort to confute the Muslim interlocutors, in *Answers for the Shaykh* the author is manifestly eirenic in his attitude and prepared to include the Qur'an among 'God's scriptures',¹²⁴ to use the phrase of the copyist's prologue to the work. In this respect, the attitude behind the use of quotations from the Qur'an in *Answers for the Shaykh* is close to that of the twelfth-century Melkite writer, Paul of Antioch, who similarly accorded great respect to the Qur'an and used quotations from it for their probative value in his famous *Letter to Muslim Friends*.¹²⁵

In the practice of including quotations from the Qur'an among

¹²² See especially Swanson, 'Beyond Prooftexting', and Griffith, 'The Qur'an in Arab Christian Texts'.

¹²³ See the Arabic text published by I. Dick, *La discussion d'Abū Qurra avec les ulémas musulmans devant le calife al-Ma'mūn: étude et édition critique*, Aleppo, 1999. For a schematic outline of the work see Griffith, 'The Qur'an in Arab Christian Texts', and idem, 'The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*', esp. pp. 38-48.

¹²⁴ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171r.

¹²⁵ See the comments of Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, esp. pp. 83-6.

citations from the Bible in attestation to the truth of the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, *Answers for the Shaykh* is also comparable to the earliest known Melkite theological tract in Arabic, the work entitled by its modern editor *On the Triune Nature of God*.¹²⁶ But in this work the quotations from the Qur'an are clearly supplementary to the quotations from the Bible.¹²⁷ In *Answers for the Shaykh*, addressed as it is to a Muslim reader, the Qur'an is arguably the primary authority to which the author appeals in behalf of the veracity of the Christian doctrines he commends. What is more, the author presents the quotations with every show of respect, and as exactly as possible, albeit sometimes out of context and not without minor mistakes. He speaks of the testimonies of the prophets, the Gospel and the Qur'an as being on a par in their evidentiary value.¹²⁸ In his work there are more than echoes of the Qur'an, allusions to it, and occasional quotations, as there are in any number of works by the other early Melkite writers.¹²⁹ Looking at his work through the interpretive lens of the modern literary theory of intertextuality, the only conclusion a modern reader can reach is that the author must have thought, at least for the purpose immediately to hand in the composition of *Answers for the Shaykh*, that the Qur'an somehow participated virtually as an equal partner in a revelatory discourse.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ See Samir, 'The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity'. The only edition of the Arabic text, with an English translation, remains that contained in M.D. Gibson, *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles, with a Treatise on the Triune Nature of God*, London, 1899. See the Italian translation and study by M. Gallo, *Palestinese anonimo: Omelia arabo-cristiana dell'VIII secolo (Collana di Testi Patristici 116)*, Rome, 1994.

¹²⁷ This is the case in spite of the fact that the author of *On the Triune Nature of God*, as both Samir and Swanson have shown, composed a poetical introduction to his work that by allusion and the choice of words and phrases echoes the diction and style of the Qur'an. See Samir, 'The Earliest Arab Apology', pp. 69-70; Swanson, 'Beyond Proof texting', pp. 305-8, where the author rightly says, "the text simply is profoundly Qur'anic" (p. 308).

¹²⁸ See, e.g., the passage quoted above (at n. 120) from Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 181r.

¹²⁹ See Swanson, 'Beyond Proof texting'.

¹³⁰ It is interesting in this connection to observe that the author of *Answers for the Shaykh* always speaks of *al-shar'* in connection with his arguments 'from scripture' or 'from your Qur'an'; he never uses the term *al-wahy*. In Islamic usage, the former term, while often translated as meaning 'revelation', actually has legal connotations, implying divine law, while the latter term normally bespeaks divine inspiration or revelation.

that the author was prepared to think of as wider in scope than its inscription in the Bible (or, for that matter, in the Qur'an). This aspect of the author's point of view—unacknowledged but discernible all the same—raises further interpretive questions about his estimation of the standing of the Islamic scripture from the perspective of his own Christian theology. Is his use of the Qur'an simply exploitative; is he engaging in an exercise of proof-texting that is ultimately aimed at undermining the Qur'an's Islamic meaning? Does he intend to Christianize Islam? Does he think of the Qur'an, as some other Arab Christian writers did, as a flawed scripture, amenable to Christian teachings in its origins, but corrupted by later Jewish and Muslim collectors and interpreters?¹³¹ Or is he prepared in some unspecified way to recognize the Qur'an in its canonical form as a scripture somehow inspired by God, if not actually on the level of the Bible? The answer to such questions as these, should they ever be attainable, could have interesting implications for modern inter-confessional theology, in the context of the on-going dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

At four points in his discussion of the doctrine of the Incarnation, the author of *Answers for the Shaykh* evoked the image of the veil (*hijāb*), from behind which, according to the Qur'an, God might choose to speak with a human being (*al-Shūrā* (42) 51).¹³² His allusion to this Qur'anic image at a number of points in the text, without actually naming the Qur'an at these points, puts him in continuity with the usage of other major Melkite writers in Arabic of the ninth century, who also took advantage of the Qur'an's language in this verse to suggest that the Incarnation of 'God the Word', the Son of God in Christian parlance, could be thought of as an instance of God's addressing humanity from behind the veil of the humanity that the Word/Son of God assumed from Mary, the pure virgin.¹³³ In *Answers*

¹³¹ For a discussion of the views of some Arab Christian writers who spoke of the Qur'an as a flawed Christian text in its origins, see Griffith, 'The Qur'an in Arab Christian Texts'.

¹³² The full verse of the Qur'an is as follows: 'It is not proper for a human being that God should speak with him, except by way of inspiration (*wahyan*), or from behind a veil (*min warā'i hijābūn*), or He will send a messenger (*rasūlan*), and, by His permission, he will reveal what He wills.' (*al-Shūrā* (42) 51). See the idea of the 'veil' (*hijāb*) or the action of 'veiling' (*ihjāb*) invoked at several points in *Answers for the Shaykh*, as cited in nn. 50, 71, 86 and 93 above.

¹³³ See the fairly detailed discussion of this theme as it appears in the major

for the *Shaykh* the monk first recalled in this connection the fact that in the scriptures God appears to human beings only under cover, i.e., ‘in a veil’ (*fī ḥijābin*), and he cites the biblical instances of the Burning Bush, the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Covenant and the Pillar of Cloud—and latterly the humanity that, in the Christian view, God assumed in the Messiah.¹³⁴ The monk speaks of God, His Word and Spirit, being veiled (*muḥtajīb*) in the Messiah as the savior promised to Adam so that he could defeat Satan.¹³⁵ He says that had the Messiah, God’s Wisdom and Word, appeared without a veil (*bi-lā ḥijāb*), he would have destroyed human beings, who could not have survived direct contact with divinity; so he was united with his humanity in order to appear among them.¹³⁶ Finally, he says that the Word of God was concealed/veiled (*muḥtajīb*) ‘in the closed abode of the pure one, Mary’.¹³⁷ In the Islamic context, the echo of the Qur’an is heard in all these instances, without actually being cited by name; but it is also important to know that, at the same time, the monk’s thinking gives voice to an early Christian typology as well.¹³⁸

At the very beginning of *Answers for the Shaykh*, in the copyist’s prologue, ‘Melkite Orthodoxy’ is put into apposition with the light (*al-daw’*) that comes from ‘God’s scriptures’.¹³⁹ And throughout the tract the citations from the scriptures, the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Qur’an, are marshaled in testimony to the veracity of the distinctive Chalcedonian Christology that is at the heart of Melkite faith. But in the context of the monk’s replies to the shaykh’s questions, one does not find the refinements of theological language

early Melkite texts in Arabic, including *Answers for the Shaykh*, in Swanson, ‘Beyond Proof-texting’, esp. pp. 301-2.

¹³⁴ See Sinai Arabic MS 434, ff. 171v-172r, quoted at n. 50 above.

¹³⁵ See Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 175v., quoted at n. 71 above.

¹³⁶ See Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 176v., quoted at n. 86 above.

¹³⁷ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 177r. The full passage is quoted at n. 93 above.

¹³⁸ In Christian patristic tradition, the image of the veil refers most often to the veil that Moses used to put over his face because his face was radiant after speaking with the Lord (Exodus 34.33-35). In patristic typology this veil was considered to refer to the veiled words of the prophets that foretold the coming of the Lord in the body of the Messiah. See, e.g., this typology at work in the Syriac *mēmrē* of Jacob of Serug (c. 450-520/1), discussed in T. Kollampampil, *Salvation in Christ according to Jacob of Serug*, Bangalore, 2001, pp. 208, 231, 311, 420. The image of a ‘veil’ figures also in Jewish and Muslim discussions of the vision of God. See, e.g., S. Stroumsa, ‘Voiles et miroirs: visions surnaturelles en théologie Judéo-Arabe médiévale’, in É. Chaumont, ed., *Autour du regard: Mélanges Gimaret*, Leuven, 2003, pp. 77-96.

¹³⁹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 171r.

that reflect the so-called ‘neo-Chalcedonian’ or ‘Cyrilline’ views of St. John of Damascus or Theodore Abū Qurra. Rather, in *Answers for the Shaykh* the dyophysitism of the monk’s language seems extreme from a Melkite point of view, almost ‘Nestorian’ in expression. He speaks of ‘two modes (*naw‘ayn*), two natures (*ṭabayn*), a single man (*insān*), a perfect one in a perfect one, unmingled and unmixed’.¹⁴⁰ And he says that a Word from God, the very being (*jawhar*) of God, ‘united with the son of Mary, a single man, to whom two modes of action (*fī layn*) pertain’.¹⁴¹ It is this characterization of Jesus, called ‘son of Mary’ following the Qur’an’s usage, as a ‘single man’ with ‘two natures’ and ‘two modes of action’ that seems somewhat out of step with Melkite orthodoxy, which speaks of two natures in one divine *hypostasis* (*uqnūm*) or ‘person’. In another place the monk did speak of the ‘Word of God veiled in the Messiah’,¹⁴² but nowhere does he speak clearly of Jesus, the Word of God, the Son of God, who, according to the Melkites, became incarnate in two natures and one divine *hypostasis*, as God in person. Perhaps this lack of forthrightness on the monk’s part, concerning the full statement of his Melkite faith, does not necessarily bespeak a diminishment in his orthodoxy, but is rather due to his sensitivity to the Muslim shaykh’s faith in the Qur’an’s dictum that ‘the likeness of Jesus before God is as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then He said to him “Be”, so he would come to be’ (*Āl ‘Imrān* (3) 59). And in this connection it is worth recalling that at one place in the tract, in allusion to this and other verses in the Qur’an, the monk did say, ‘Gabriel did not say to her [Mary] that God is announcing a servant (*‘abd*) from Him, . . . but rather a Word from Him, the very being of God united with the son of Mary.’¹⁴³ Nevertheless, from the modern perspective of what makes for a responsible interreligious dialogue, the monk’s reticence in this matter does seem to be less than forthright.

Finally, from the historical perspective, it is very interesting to find the monk calling the shaykh’s attention to groups in the Jewish

¹⁴⁰ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 176r. See the whole passage quoted at n. 74 above.

¹⁴¹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 176r-v. See the whole passage quoted at n. 77 above.

¹⁴² Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 175v.

¹⁴³ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 176r. See the passage quoted in full at n. 77 above.

community who, as he says, 'believed, acknowledged, and put their faith in' Jesus.¹⁴⁴ As we mentioned above, he named in particular the group called al-ʿĪsāwiyya, a Jewish group who recognized both Jesus and Muḥammad as prophets, who were followers of the Jewish heresiarch Abū ʿĪsā al-Iṣfahānī, who apparently lived in the late Umayyad period, and who claimed himself also to be a prophet.¹⁴⁵ It may be the case, depending on when *Answers for the Shaykh* was first composed, that it is in fact the earliest surviving text to mention the ʿĪsāwiyya.¹⁴⁶ However that might be, it is clear from other indications in the text that the original author was somewhat familiar with things Jewish; there are the transcriptions of Hebrew terms noted above,¹⁴⁷ the allusion to Jewish, anti-Christian legend,¹⁴⁸ the mention of the ʿĪsāwiyya, and the remark, recorded above, that there were some who would say that Jesus was the Messiah, but that 'he was the son of Joseph, not the son of Judah, the true Messiah'.¹⁴⁹ Presumably, the latter were a Jewish or Jewish-Christian group whose identity is now unknown. This level of reference to Jewish information is very rare in Arabic Christian texts. Perhaps it is testimony to the fact that the author really was a Jerusalemite, with access to Jewish informants about these matters. In any case, in the ensemble, these bits of information, especially the mention of the ʿĪsāwiyya, favor the thesis that if *Answers for the Shaykh* really was written in the early Melkite period, and not in the twelfth century when it was copied, then it is likely that it was written in the ninth or tenth century and not in the second half of the eighth century as has been claimed.¹⁵⁰

Another item in the text favoring a date late in the ninth century at the earliest for the original composition of *Answers for the Shaykh* is the fact that in his note to the author, the shaykh mentions that he has read a book called *The Book of the Refutation of the Christians*

¹⁴⁴ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 179r.

¹⁴⁵ In addition to the article cited in n. 108 above, see also S. Pines, *Studies in the History of Religion*, Jerusalem, 1996, esp. pp. 254, 332, 372-5. See also Z. Avneri, 'Abū ʿĪsā al-Iṣfahānī', in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. II, cols 183-4.

¹⁴⁶ The earliest sources otherwise seem to be Qirqisānī (c. 930), al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048), Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) and al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153). See Pines, 'al-ʿĪsāwiyya', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. IV, p. 96.

¹⁴⁷ See nn. 55 and 106 above.

¹⁴⁸ See n. 105 above.

¹⁴⁹ Sinai Arabic MS 434, f. 179v.

¹⁵⁰ See n. 24 above.

(*Kitāb al-radd ‘alā al-naṣārā*). As noted above, the earliest reports of Arabic texts written by Muslims under this title come from the ninth century.¹⁵¹ While it is not impossible that there were earlier ones of which no word has yet reached us, it seems more probable that they did begin to appear in that century. Consequently a date after the middle of the ninth century is a likely date *post quem* for the composition of the tract under discussion here.

Answers for the Shaykh is undoubtedly a unique work, even among the comparable apologetic tracts written in Arabic by Christians in the early Islamic period. The fact that it is known to survive in only one twelfth-century copy testifies to the probability that it did not enjoy a wide popularity, either at the time of its original composition, or at later times in the Melkite community. Nevertheless it is an important record of the attempt of at least one writer in the formative period of the Melkites to approach Islam with an appreciative attitude and with a willingness to take the Qur’an seriously as a witness to religious truth, alongside of the books of the Bible. The fact that he quotes the Qur’an for the purpose of proving the veracity of Christian doctrines, and that he avoids mentioning anything in the Islamic scripture or tradition that could be taken to disapprove of Christianity highlights his purpose to reach a positive accommodation with Islam. As we have seen, he is even willing to stop short of the full and forthright statement of his Melkite Christological formula, presumably in an effort to avoid offending Muslim sensibilities. After all, he is writing to a Muslim. In this matter he departs from the usual practice of the Melkite writers in Arabic, who normally are more than forthcoming in their effort to be clear in their statements of faith. Perhaps the reason is that unlike most other texts written by Christians in Arabic in the early Islamic period, which seem to have anticipated a mostly Christian audience, *Answers for the Shaykh* really was intended to be read by Muslims. In this respect, this short tract can be considered to be an early effort at inter-confessional theology, an enterprise that attempts to do theology in the idiom of another religious community, for the sake of achieving a measure of rapprochement between religions, in an interreligious discourse that respects the parameters of the faith of the other, while at the same

¹⁵¹ See nn. 34-7 above.

time commending the verisimilitude of the doctrines of the writer's own confession in as positive and accurate a way as possible. But here we get well beyond what this interesting Arabic Christian text from the Middle Ages can tell us.

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