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SYRIAN CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUALS IN THE WORLD OF ISLAM:  
FAITH, THE PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE, AND THE QUEST  
FOR AN INTERRELIGIOUS CONVIVENCIA IN ABBASID TIMES



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I

The earliest Christian intellectual on record to enjoy a regular entrée to the highest levels of the Abbasid elite in Baghdad was undoubtedly Patriarch Timothy I (727-823) who for forty-three years (780-743) served as the major hierarch of the so-called 'Nestorian' Church of the East,<sup>1</sup> first in Seleucia-Ctesiphon and then in Baghdad.<sup>2</sup> While the patriarch was no doubt fluent in Arabic, he wrote in Syriac. And among the many works ascribed to him, most of which have not survived to modern times, some fifty-nine letters are still extant, of the approximately two-hundred he is known to have written altogether. While they are addressed to friends, mostly church officials, they are more than personal correspondence, being on the order of public letters, or letter-treatises, perhaps best thought of as essays. They discuss a number of liturgical, canonical and theological topics, and several of them have to do with issues of Muslim/Christian interest, including letters in which Timothy describes in some detail the responses he has given to questions put to him by Muslims or inspired by Muslim con-

cerns.<sup>3</sup> By far the most well-known of these is the patriarch's account of his debate with the caliph al-Mahdī (775-785) on the beliefs and practices of the Christians.<sup>4</sup>

Patriarch Timothy's account of his defense of Christian doctrine and practice in the *majlis* of the caliph al-Mahdī, sometimes listed among his works as Letter LIX, was destined to become one of the classics among the Christian apologies of the early Islamic period. It circulated in its original Syriac in a fuller and in an abbreviated form,<sup>5</sup> and it was soon translated into Arabic,<sup>6</sup> in which language the account of Timothy's day in the caliph's court has enjoyed a long popularity, extending well into modern times. But it is not the only one of the patriarch's letters which takes up what we might call Islamic issues. Several others discuss questions which were obviously posed with Muslim challenges in mind. Several cases in point are: a letter (XXXIV) on the proper understanding of the title 'Servant of God' as an epithet for Christ;<sup>7</sup> a letter in defense of the doctrine of the Trinity (XXXV); and a letter against the opinions of those who demean the majesty of Christ (XXXVI).<sup>8</sup> Another little known letter (XL), which the patriarch addressed to

his former academic colleague Sergius, director of the school of Bashosh and soon to be the bishop of Elam,<sup>9</sup> presents a somewhat detailed account of Patriarch Timothy's colloquy with an interlocutor whom he met one day at the caliph's court; Timothy says the man was a devotee of the philosophy of Aristotle.<sup>10</sup> But the course of the conversation which the patriarch reports, on the ways to know the one God, the three persons of the one God, the doctrine of the Incarnation and the significance of various Christian religious practices, reads much like an account of a conversation with a Muslim *mutakallim*, rather than a philosopher.<sup>11</sup>

The mention of Aristotle and of philosophy calls to mind the fact that Patriarch Timothy was called upon by Muslim patrons to arrange for the production of Arabic translations of Greek logical and scientific texts, often from intermediary translations into Syriac. No less a personage than the caliph himself called upon the patriarch to arrange for a translation of Aristotle's *Topica* into Arabic, and Timothy discussed the undertaking in two very interesting letters which have survived,<sup>12</sup> in which the reader gains a lively sense of the multifaceted processes involved in the enterprise. In this connection, and in connection with the beginnings of Christian involvement in the Abbasid translation project, what John Watt has recently written about Patriarch Timothy's translation is noteworthy. He says: "The earliest unambiguous evidence of interest in Aristotelian philosophy in the upper levels of Abbasid Muslim society is the commission of al-Mahdī to the East Syrian Catholicos Timothy I for a translation of Aristotle's *Topics* from Syriac into Arabic."<sup>13</sup>

This interest on the part of the Abbasid elite in Arabic translations of the logical

works of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, and in Greek mathematical, scientific and medical texts by other writers, ushered in a whole new era for Christian intellectual life in Baghdad. And since the Abbasid caliph's capital was located in the historical heartland of the Assyrian Church of the East, it is no surprise that so-called 'Nestorian' Christians, including Patriarch Timothy himself, found their way into Baghdad to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new intellectual movement. Soon other Christians too, 'Jacobites' and 'Melkites' among them, would appear on the intellectual scene in the Islamic capital. Some were physicians, some were philosophers, and some were logicians, mathematicians, copyists or translators. All of them contributed something to the newly flowering culture of the early days of the first flourishing of Islamic civilization. But in no society-wide enterprise did these 'Nestorian' and other Christians take a more prominent role than they did in the famed translation movement. For, as Dimitri Gutas has rightly noted, the vast majority of the translators of Greek and Syriac texts into Arabic were Christians.<sup>14</sup> As a matter of fact, for some generations previously many Christian scholars had been engaged in a translation movement of their own of texts from Greek into Syriac, and latterly from Greek and Syriac into Arabic.

Interest in Greek learning had been widespread in both the 'Jacobite' and the so-called 'Nestorian', Syriac-speaking communities from the sixth century onward.<sup>15</sup> The story begins back in the days of John Philoponos (ca. 490-ca.570), a 'Jacobite' Christian student of the Neoplatonist Ammonius, son of Hermeias, in Alexandria.<sup>16</sup> Philoponos functioned both as a philosopher and as a defender of Christianity. It was one of

Philoponos' students in Alexandria, Sergius of Resh'ayna (d.536), a fellow 'Jacobite' from the environs of Edessa, who later switched his ecclesial allegiance to the 'Melkites', who became the first-known link between the enthusiasts for Aristotle in Neoplatonist Alexandria and the Syriac-speaking communities in northern Syria.<sup>17</sup> In Syria, the study of the works of "the Philosopher" and of other Greek thinkers always involved translation into Syriac as the first step in the enterprise. From the time of Sergius of Resh'ayna onward, until well into Islamic times, the fortunes of Aristotle and Greek philosophy and science grew steadily in the Syriac-speaking world, initially especially among the 'Jacobites'. One thinks in this connection of scholars such as Severus Sebokht (d.666/7), Athanasius of Balad (d.696), Jacob of Edessa (633-708), George, Bishop of the Arabs (d.724), and Theophilus of Edessa (d.785), to name a few of them.<sup>18</sup>

In the meantime, among the East Syrians and the so-called 'Nestorians', interest in Aristotle and the Greek sciences did not lag far behind that of the 'Jacobites'. Paul the Persian (fl. 531-578), a younger contemporary of Sergius of Resh'ayna who likewise had connections with Alexandria, cultivated a strong interest in Aristotelian thought, and although in the end he became a convert to Zoroastrianism back home in Persia, at the court of Kusrau Anūshirwān (r.531-579), he seems nevertheless to have successfully championed Aristotle and Greek philosophy among the Syriac-speaking, East Syrians in his homeland.<sup>19</sup> Subsequently, it was in the 'Nestorian' school system, in centers such as Nisibis,<sup>20</sup> al-Ḥīra, the monastery of Dayr Qunnā<sup>21</sup> and Jundisābūr<sup>22</sup> that Greek learning flourished. By the mid-eighth century, 'Nestorian' scholars such as the well-

known members of the Bukhtīshū family, with their connections with Jundīsābūr, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (808-873), who hailed from the 'Nestorian' capital of the Lakhmids, al-Ḥīra, and Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d.940), from the flourishing monastery of Dayr Qunnā, not far from Baghdad, who became "the founder of the Aristotelian school in Baghdad early in the tenth century,"<sup>23</sup> all soon came to be among the dominant Christian scholars in the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in early Abbasid times.

It was within this context of the Graeco-Arabic translation movement of Abbasid times that a number of Christian intellectuals involved in the translation enterprise came to the fore in their several communities with a new approach to the Christian encounter with the Muslims. Unlike their predecessors, who were concerned primarily in the Islamic milieu with composing apologetic texts in Syriac and Arabic in response to Islamic challenges, Christian translators and scholars such as Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (808-873) in the ninth century, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (893-974) in the tenth century, and Elias of Nisibis (d.1046) in the eleventh century, to name only those with some name recognition in the modern west, turned their attention also to philosophical, social and ethical questions. In particular, they sought a theoretical way, in tandem with contemporary Muslim thinkers, to commend a philosophical way of life, the cultivation of virtue and the pursuit of happiness, in a way that would promote a measure of *convivencia* in the inter-religious, Islamo-Christian atmosphere in which they lived. They were undoubtedly inspired in this undertaking by the works of early Muslim philosophers such as Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī (ca.800-867) and Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (ca.870-950). This new line of Chris-

tian thinking sought to promote a reason-based, social ethic for the world in which Christians and Muslims lived, which would be open both to the claims of the Christian and the Islamic scriptures, and which would also foster the acquisition of personal and public virtues on the part of the leaders of society, whose charge it was, they argued, to work for the common good of everyone in the body-politic, especially the scholars, ascetics and religious teachers of both the church and the mosque.<sup>24</sup> In what follows we shall briefly consider the contributions of Ḥunayn, Yaḥyā, and Elias to this new undertaking in the Christian response to the pressures of life in the Islamic world.

## II

Unlike Patriarch Timothy, who for all his accomplishments as a Christian apologist was primarily a churchman engaged in ecclesiastical affairs, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq was a professional scholar who circulated in the highest levels of Baghdad's learned elite. While he remained dedicated, like Patriarch Timothy, to the task of the systematic defense of the veracity of Christian doctrine and practice, and made major contributions to Christian apologetic literature in Arabic as well, Ḥunayn was also engaged wholeheartedly in the scientific, medical, and philosophical interests of the contemporary Muslim intellectuals.<sup>25</sup>

Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq is well known to historians as the founder and central figure in a ninth-century Baghdadī school of translators of Greek medical and scientific texts.<sup>26</sup> In his day, he was also celebrated for the doggedness with which he studied the Greek language and pursued manuscripts from city to city, and perhaps even beyond the borders of the caliphate into the territory of the Ro-

mans. As a noted physician, Ḥunayn was a familiar presence in the intellectual circles of the caliph's court from the time of al-Ma'mūn (813-833) to that of al-Mu'tamid (869-892), enjoying a particularly high-profile career during the days of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-861), whose sometime personal physician he was. Ḥunayn was one of the first Christians whose stories are widely told in the Arabic annals of Muslim learning in Abbasid times, by both medieval and modern authors.<sup>27</sup> In short, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq was a public intellectual of record.

Modern scholarship on Ḥunayn and his works has largely focused its attention on his professional activity, his translations of logical, philosophical, medical and scientific texts, and on some of his more colorful personal exploits, the knowledge of some of which is even said to come from his own pen.<sup>28</sup> Relatively little attention has been paid to Ḥunayn's own ideas, either in the realm of philosophy or of theology. And yet there is ample evidence that these were of the greatest importance to him. Like his somewhat older Muslim contemporary, the philosopher al-Kindī (ca.800-ca.867), of whom Gerhard Endress has said that for al-Kindī "philosophy was to vindicate the pursuit of rational activity as an activity in the service of Islam,"<sup>29</sup> so one might say of Ḥunayn that for him the cultivation of science and philosophy was to promote the claims of reason in service of both religion and public life.

Compared to other contemporary Christian intellectuals, Ḥunayn did not write much on religious topics that has survived, but what he did write spoke to the major topics of the day, both Christian and Islamic. It is notable that, unlike other Christian writers of his own time and later, he did

not engage in the church-dividing, inter-confessional, Christian controversies then currently flourishing; he did not, for example and so far as we know, write polemical tracts against the doctrinal views of the 'Melkites' or the 'Jacobites', or in support of the Christological teaching of his own, so-called 'Nestorian' church. Rather, in works which we know for the most part only by title, Ḥunayn addressed himself to issues such as why God created man in a state of need (*muḥtājan*), how one grasps the truths of religion, how to understand God's fore-ordainment of the affairs of the world (*al-qadar*) and the profession of monotheism (*at-tawḥīd*), and what are the criteria according to which the true religion might be discerned. The latter was a particularly important topic for both Muslims and Christians in Ḥunayn's lifetime, as we shall see. In addition, in some sources Ḥunayn is said to have composed a history of the world from Adam to the time of the caliph al-Mutawakkil (d.861), including the kings of Israel, the Roman and Persian kings up to the time of Muḥammad, and the Muslim caliphs up to his own time. Unfortunately, this book has not survived. However, one should not underestimate the apologetic and even the polemic agenda of such books of history in the 'sectarian milieu' of the time, when Muslim authors from Ibn Ishāq (d. ca. 767) and Ibn Hishām (d.834) to al-Ya'qūbī (d.897) were presenting Muḥammad and his prophetic claims in terms of just such biblically inspired, historical narratives.<sup>30</sup> Ḥunayn may well have been the first Christian to write such a history from a Christian perspective in Arabic in the Islamic milieu, an enterprise which would not be taken up again by an Arab Christian writer until the time of the 'Melkite', Eutybios of Alexan-

dria / Sa'īd ibn Baṭrīq (877-940).<sup>31</sup> Later still, Elias bar Shināyā of Nisibis (975-1046), another Christian writer whose works we will discuss below, like Ḥunayn a member of the so-called 'Nestorian' Church of the East, carried on this same tradition of historical writing in Arabic, in his *Chronography* (*Kitāb al-Azminah*).<sup>32</sup>

Luckily, one of Ḥunayn's principal contributions to Christian apologetics in the Islamic milieu, his discussion of the reasons (*al-asbāb*) for which people might consider any given religion to be true or false, has survived in at least two forms, with some variation between them. In one form, the text was preserved by the medieval Coptic scholar, al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl (*fl.* 1230-1260), who included it in his magisterial *Summary of the Principles of Religion*, together with a commentary on it by the twelfth century Coptic writer, Yuḥannā ibn Mīnā, who, according to Ibn al-'Assāl, gathered his material "from the books of the scholars (*ulamā'*) of the Christian *sharī'ah*."<sup>33</sup> The other form of the text is included in Ḥunayn's contribution to a Christian apologetic work in Arabic which presents itself as the correspondence between Ḥunayn and a Muslim friend of his at the caliph's court, Abū 'Isā ibn al-Munajjim (d.888), who had summoned him and their younger 'Melkite' colleague at the court, Quṣṭā ibn Lūqā (d.ca.912), to embrace Islam.<sup>34</sup> It seems to have been the case that contemporary and later Christian apologists, as we shall see below, made use of Ḥunayn's discussion of these matters in their own further and rather original elaborations of the negative criteria, which they claimed are indicative of the true religion. They argued that the true religion is that one of the contemporary options which is not accepted for any one or all of the six or seven, unworthy and

therefore negative reasons for which people might accept a religion.<sup>35</sup>

Finally we must briefly discuss what is perhaps the most significant of Ḥunayn's works from the point of view of highlighting the new element in the intellectual culture of the Christian scholars of Baghdad from the ninth to the eleventh centuries. The work is Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah*, or *Nawādir al-falāsifah*, as it is sometimes called, a composite work, perhaps put together in the abbreviated form in which it has survived by one of Ḥunayn's disciples, the otherwise unknown Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Anṣārī, whose name appears as editor in the two extant manuscripts of the single recension of the text that has survived.<sup>36</sup> Most commentators on this work have characterized it as belonging to a well-known and popular genre of the time, the collection of gnomic, aphoristic sayings attributed to the ancient philosophers and wise men, including Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Galen, the Persian Luqmān, and, in Ḥunayn's case, Solomon, son of David.<sup>37</sup> This characterization is certainly true as far as it goes; Ḥunayn's text is one of a number of Greek and Arabic compilations of wisdom sayings attributed to the ancient sages. The individual aphorisms, which in the ensemble have been the focus of most scholarly attention so far, can indeed be traced from one compilation to another and the contents of the several collections can be compared with one another to show a continuing tradition in the collection of gnomic sayings. But each compilation can also be studied in its own right, with attention paid to each compiler's particular interests and concerns. Often the aphorisms are quoted within the context of an overarching narrative framework which expresses the

principal concern of the compiler of each individual work. In Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq's *Ādāb al-falāsifah*, the narrative speaks of the founding of philosophy, of its various branches, of the coming to be of 'houses of wisdom' among various peoples at the instigation of kings, not only among the ancient Greeks, but also among Jews, Christians and Muslims, and of the sages who transmitted what Ḥunayn consistently speaks of as 'knowledge' (*'ilm*) or 'wisdom' (*ḥikmah*), and 'disciplinary practice' (*adab*). For him, the pursuit of *'ilm* and *adab* constitutes the philosophical way of life; it will bring happiness and harmony for both individuals and society as a whole.<sup>38</sup>

In the context of the burgeoning Christian intellectual life in Arabic in the ninth century, Ḥunayn's *Ādāb al-falāsifah* gave voice to a new line of thinking which would be developed even further by Christian intellectuals in the next generations, as we shall see. In addition to the customary apologetic concerns, it involves the appropriation of the Late Antique ideal of the philosophical way of life, as commended by the Neoplatonic Aristotelians of Athens and Alexandria in the sixth Christian century, as part and parcel of the Christian intellectual agenda in the caliphate. Now Christian thinkers would be taking part in a conversation with contemporary Muslim intellectuals who were similarly developing an interest not only in the improving literature of the old 'mirror for princes' tradition, but in moral development, the acquisition of virtues, and the beginnings of a political philosophy,<sup>39</sup> which would eventually bear fruit in such works as the philosopher al-Fārābī's *Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*,<sup>40</sup> and in the growth in the tenth and eleventh centu-

ries of what modern commentators have called Islamic humanism.<sup>41</sup>

### III

A generation after the time of Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, the Christian logician and translator of the works of Aristotle and his commentators, Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d.940), a 'Nestorian' from the monastery of Dayr Qunnā, became one of al-Fārābī's two Christian teachers of logic and philosophy, the other one being Yuḥannā ibn Ḥaylān (d.910). Abū Bishr was also the teacher of one of al-Fārābī's own star pupils, the 'Jacobite' Christian, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (893-974). Modern scholars claim Abū Bishr as the real "founder of the Aristotelian school in Baghdad early in the tenth century."<sup>42</sup> As such he is often remembered as the defender of philosophy and of the universal validity of Aristotelian logic against the counter claims of contemporary Muslim *mutakal-limūn* in a debate with their spokesperson, Abū Sa'īd as-Sīrāfī in the *majlis* of the caliph's vizier in the year 937/8.<sup>43</sup> Then in the tenth century, Abū Bishr's student, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, became for a time Baghdad's most notable Christian intellectual and, like Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq in the previous century, Yaḥyā was one of the major proponents of the philosophical way of life as a guarantor of interreligious harmony and of logic and philosophy as the most important tools for the Christian theologian and apologist in the Islamic milieu.

By the mid-940's Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī had become a major figure in a new generation of intellectuals in Baghdad. While he earned his living as a professional scribe, he was also for a while one of the leading exponents of the 'Peripatetic' school of thought

founded by his teacher Abū Bishr in the caliph's capital city. He attracted numerous disciples of his own, both Christian and Muslim, not a few of whom went on to become eminent scholars in their own turn. Because of this obviously successful scholarly career, Yaḥyā and his circle of intellectual associates have come to be seen by later historians as important participants in the cultural revival during the Buyid age that Joel Kraemer has described as the humanistic renaissance of Islam in its fourth century.<sup>44</sup> And it is for this reason that bibliographers both medieval and modern have made every effort to keep track of Yaḥyā's works. In the tenth century his friend, the Muslim bio-bibliographer of culture in the world of Islam, Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ibn an-Nadīm (d.995) recorded Yaḥyā's works and discussed his many scholarly accomplishments in his famous reference work called simply the *Fihrist*, or 'the catalog'; and in 1977, Gerhard Endress published a very helpful, analytical inventory of all the known works of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to his work as a translator and as a philosopher and logician, who translated many Greek works of Aristotle and his commentators from Greek and Syriac into Arabic, Yaḥyā also wrote original works in philosophy and theology. Like Ḥunayn, his concerns included issues of public morality, the ethical value of the Christian practice of celibacy, and the larger question of the human pursuit of happiness and the avoidance of sorrow. Of particular interest in this connection are his treatise on the improvement of morals, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, and his colloquy on sexual abstinence and the philosophical life.<sup>46</sup> But of course, in addition to his philosophical work Yaḥyā was also a prolific writer in the more

traditional areas of Christian theology and apologetics.<sup>47</sup> While many of Yaḥyā's theological works have received considerable attention from modern scholars, especially those in which he addressed the traditional topics of Christian theology and apology in the Islamic milieu, this has not been the case with his ethical texts and his ideas about the philosophical way of life. Yet it is in them in particular that we can follow in more detail his engagement with other public intellectuals in Baghdad in his day.

In his *Reformation of Morals*, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī promoted the cultivation of virtue ethics toward the realization of an ideal which he called simply 'humanity' (*al-insāniyyah*),<sup>48</sup> by which he meant not 'humanism' in the modern sense of the term, but, following his teacher al-Fārābī's understanding of the word, he meant "the quality that human beings have in common, or human nature; ... being truly human, in the sense of realizing the end or perfection of man qua man, often synonymous with the exercise of reason."<sup>49</sup> Yaḥyā in fact viewed the cultivation of the life of reason as the very summit of human perfection. He speaks of mankind's distinguishing virtue and defining form as the rational power or soul,<sup>50</sup> and according to Yaḥyā its perfection consists in the acquisition of what he calls 'true science' (*al-'ulūm al-ḥaqīqiyyah*)<sup>51</sup> and 'godly wisdom' (*al-ḥikmah al-ilāhiyyah*), or as he sometimes also put it, "the acquisition of science (*al-'ulūm*) and knowledge (*al-ma'ārif*) in act," this being the virtue, he says, which "brings one closest to God."<sup>52</sup> Yaḥyā's clear avowal of his devotion to the life of reason as the highest human good raises the question of his thought on the relative claims of reason and revelation in the exposition of Christian doctrine. This issue was in fact one which

posed considerable difficulties for the new Christian intellectuals of Abbasid Baghdad, as well as for those Muslims of the time who were engaged in the serious study of philosophy.

In the *Colloquy on Sexual Abstinence*, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī entered into a debate with contemporary Muslim scholars about the place of sexual abstinence among the spiritual exercises proper for the philosophical life. In fact, the issue of acceptable sexual behavior and sexual morality more generally was one of the major, divisive issues between Muslims and Christians, albeit that for the most part it figured in the earlier controversial texts only among the polemical barbs which Christian writers aimed at the Muslims<sup>53</sup> and it had no place in the more doctrinal discussions. Yet on the practical level this issue remained a major one, especially sexual abstinence for religious reasons, and the concern of the new Christian intellectuals for cultivating public and private morality offered them the opportunity to discuss this matter in a forthright way and on the basis of a shared interest in philosophy. As we shall see, it was in the generation after Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī that the 'Nestorian' Elias of Nisibis (975-1046) addressed this same issue in some detail in his *Risālah fī faḍīlat al-'afāf*.<sup>54</sup>

#### IV

In his own time, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī became the central figure of a philosophical circle in Baghdad which included Muslims as well as Christians of all denominations among his colleagues and disciples.<sup>55</sup> Some of them, like the 'Jacobite' 'Īsā ibn Zur'a (943-1008), followed closely in Yaḥyā's wake. He became a public, Christian intellectual like his

master, with an interest in science, philosophy and the systematic defense of Christian doctrines against the challenges of Muslims and Jews, as well as being himself an ardent apologist for the orthodoxy of his own church's 'Jacobite' Christology.<sup>56</sup> But one of the most accomplished Christian intellectuals of the eleventh century in the Islamic milieu was undoubtedly the 'Nestorian' Elias Bar Shinaya, the bishop of Nisibis (975-1046).

Although he was one of the most creative and productive of Christian authors in the Arabic language, Elias of Nisibis has not received nearly as much attention from modern scholars as his works deserve. His bibliography includes a world chronicle, as we mentioned above, numerous treatises, letters and commentaries on all the major topics of interest to Christians, and most of them seem to have enjoyed a wide circulation in medieval times. Born in the year 975, Elias was ordained a priest in the year 994. After a number of years of study in the monastic communities of northern Mesopotamia, notably in and around Mosul, he was consecrated bishop of Bayt Nûhadrâ in the year 1002. Then, on December 26, 1008, Elias was nominated the metropolitan of Nisibis for the 'Nestorian' Church of the East, and from this date, until his death on July 18, 1046, Elias was actively engaged in the task of commending Christian doctrine and practice in Arabic, in response to the multiple challenges of Islam.<sup>57</sup>

Undoubtedly, Elias' most notable work in connection with Christian/Muslim controversy is the one entitled *Kitâb al-majâlis*. It is a compendium of Christian apologetics, cast in the literary form of seven accounts of as many conversations on Christian doctrines and other matters between Elias and

the vizir Abū l-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī al-Maghribī (981-1027), a notable scholar in his own right, who was in the service of the Buwayhid emir of Diyârbakr and May-yâfâriqîn, Naṣr ad-Dawlah Aḥmad ibn Mar-wân, when Elias was metropolitan in nearby Nisibis.<sup>58</sup> The sessions are said to have been held in Nisibis in July of the year 1026, with subsequent meetings in December 1026 and June 1027. In the ensemble, this work, which is still not completely published in a modern critical edition, is a masterpiece of popular, Christian controversial literature in Arabic; it seems to have had a wide circulation among Arab Christian readers well into modern times.<sup>59</sup> But for the present purposes, two other works of Elias of Nisibis will claim our attention, the aforementioned *Treatise on the Virtue of Chastity* and his book *On Dispelling Anxiety*. In these texts Elias joins the ranks of the Christian intellectuals in the caliphate who in dialogue with their Muslim contemporaries promoted the exercises of the philosophical way of life as a humane program for interreligious harmony in the body politic.

Elias of Nisibis' *Kitâb daf' al-hamm*, the Book on Dispelling Anxiety, is in the form of an extended essay of twelve chapters, dedicated to the same vizir, Abū l-Qāsim al-Maghribī, with whom Elias had been in conversation in the sessions reported in the *Kitâb al-majâlis*. As a matter of fact, Elias mentioned his work on the text of 'Dispelling Anxiety'<sup>60</sup> in his correspondence with the vizir al-Maghribī, a circumstance which has allowed Samir Khalil Samir to conclude that Elias was busy composing the treatise in August of the year 1027, but that when the vizir died in October of that year the text was still unfinished. In Samir's judgment, Elias fin-

ished the work in November or December of 1027.<sup>61</sup>

Immediately upon the modern publication of Elias' treatise on 'Dispelling Anxiety' in 1902, a colorful controversy developed among scholars about its authenticity as a work of Elias of Nisibis; some, led by the formidable Louis Cheikho, were convinced that its true author was Gregory Abū l-Faraj Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286) and that the text attributed to Elias was but the Arabic version of Bar Hebraeus' well-known Syriac work, *The Book of Laughable Stories*.<sup>62</sup> In fact, as Samir Khalil Samir has shown, Cheikho and his associates were misled on this point by a careless copyist's gloss on a list of Bar Hebraeus' works copied in the sixteenth century. Now, due to Samir's detailed studies, the attribution of the *Kitāb daf' al-hamm* to Elias of Nisibis is once again secure.<sup>63</sup>

In the introduction to the *Kitāb daf' al-hamm*, Elias explains that he was inspired to compose this work as a result of his meditations on the themes raised by the Muslim philosopher Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī (ca. 800-ca.867) in his widely-read and very influential essay called, *Risālah fī ḥīlah li daf' al-aḥzān*, or 'The Art of Dispelling Sorrows'.<sup>64</sup> As a matter of fact, a number of other Christian thinkers had also read al-Kindī's work before Elias and at least two of them also wrote works of their own in Arabic on the same subject. Their principal purpose was to introduce Christian religious themes into the consideration of the best means of dispelling anxiety.<sup>65</sup> Elias explains that he composed his treatise on the subject at the insistence of the vizir al-Maghribī, who had requested that he address himself to the topic of the rational management of human anxieties. The point to emphasize in

the present context is that in his *Kitāb daf' al-hamm*, Elias of Nisibis, at the request of a Muslim notable, wrote in response to a work on the same topic by a Muslim philosopher, and that in his work Elias, like al-Kindī, appeals to reason as the rightful arbiter not only of one's personal behavior but of public morals as well.

Similarly, in his *Treatise on the Virtue of Chastity*, Elias addresses himself to a subject broached originally by a Muslim author, this time the famed essayist, Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Bahr al-Jāḥiẓ (777-868). In July 1026, at the time of his first session in the *majlis* of the vizir al-Maghribī, Elias addressed the new treatise to his own brother, Abū Sa'īd Maṣṣūr ibn 'Īsā, who was a physician in the entourage of the emir Naṣr ad-Dawlah of Diyārbakr.<sup>66</sup> Abū Sa'īd had read a passage in the famous book *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* in which al-Jāḥiẓ spoke of a well known eunuch, Abū l-Mubārak aṣ-Ṣābī by name, who had boasted that throughout his long life, in spite of his emasculation, he never ceased to be aroused by the longing for women. In his book, al-Jāḥiẓ recalled the story to support his contention that lifelong sexual continence is impossible. Furthermore, he argued that such a practice is against God's will. He said,

God, who is most compassionate toward His creatures and most just toward His servants, is too exalted to encumber them with foregoing anything He had bestowed on their hearts and confirmed.<sup>67</sup>

Disturbed by this argument, Abū Sa'īd wrote to his brother, the metropolitan of Nisibis, for guidance in regard to al-Jāḥiẓ' seeming anti-Christian contention and Elias responded with the treatise, 'On the Virtue

of Chastity'. In it he argued systematically, with an appeal to reason and to historical human experience that the virtue of chastity is both possible and even preferable for anyone who would lead a life of reason and the pursuit of wisdom. With this treatise Elias entered a controversy already underway among Muslim philosophers about the requisite degree of the suppression of the natural appetites that could be considered consistent with one's determination to acquire knowledge and to practice virtue, which is to say, to live the philosophical life. For example, one finds this discussion most eloquently put already in Abū Bakr Muḥammad ar-Rāzī's (850-925) *Kitāb as-sīrah al-falsafiyah*.<sup>68</sup> Here ar-Rāzī defends himself against a charge leveled against him by his adversaries to the effect that his lifestyle was not characterized by a sufficient degree of asceticism and the requisite suppression of the appetitive and irascible desires necessary to qualify him as a true philosopher and disciple of Socrates. Like Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī before him, Elias entered this discussion and argued that the doctrines and practices of Christianity are actually more likely to dispose a person to the life of reason than any other religious allegiance.

## V

The new Christian intellectuals of Baghdad in early Abbasid times, who came to prominence in the heyday of the translation movement, made an unprecedented bid to participate in the intellectual life of the larger Islamic society of their day. It was the translation movement itself which provided them with the opportunity. Heretofore, modern scholars have certainly recognized the fact that the opportunity was one which allowed

Christians like Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq and his associates to hire out their translation services to Muslim patrons who bought their contributions to Islamic scientific and philosophical interests.<sup>69</sup> But historians have been slower to recognize that these same Christian translators were also building on earlier traditions in their own communities. They used their skills not only to translate, but also to employ philosophical and logical thought in support of their faith commitments and to commend the philosophical life itself as a fruitful development which might provide the social possibility for harmony between Christians and Muslims in the caliphate.

According to Gerhard Endress, "The undisputed master of philosophy for the Christian schools of late Hellenism as well as for the Muslim transmitters of this tradition, was Aristotle: founder of the paradigms of rational discourse, and of a coherent system of the world."<sup>70</sup> This was certainly a point of view shared by a medieval Syriac-speaking chronicler from the 'Jacobite' community about the role of Aristotle among his fellow 'Jacobites' long before Islamic times. At the point in the anonymous Syriac *Chronicon ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens* at which the chronicler comes to the discussion of what he calls the 'era of the Greeks', by which he means the time of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) and his Seleucid successors in the Syriac-speaking frontier lands between the Roman and Persian empires, he has this to say about Aristotle and the importance of his works for the Christians:

At this time, Aristotle, 'the Philosopher', collected all the scattered kinds of philosophical doctrines and he made of them one great body, thick

with powerful opinions and doctrines, since he separated the truth from falsehood. Without the reading of the book of logic [*mlilūthā*] that he made it is not possible to understand the knowledge of books, the meaning of doctrines, and the sense of the Holy Scriptures, on which depends the hope of the Christians, unless one is a man to whom, because of the excellence of his [religious] practice, the grace of the Holy Spirit is given, the One who makes all wise.<sup>71</sup>

In Abbasid times there were more Christian thinkers interested in the philosophies and sciences of the Greeks than just those Aristotelians among the ‘Jacobites and the ‘Nestorians’ who took their texts and commentaries from the Alexandrian tradition. And there were more Muslims whose philosophical and scientific interests reached well beyond a single-minded devotion to Aristotle. Nevertheless these were the Christian and Muslim philosophers who shaped the intellectual milieu in which Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq and Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī pursued their careers. And just as the Muslims among this generation of philosophers wanted “to vindicate the pursuit of rational activity as an activity in the service of Islam,” so did Ḥunayn and Yaḥyā and their Christian associates intend to vindicate with the same philosophy the doctrines and practices of the Christians and the Christology of the ‘Nestorians’ and the ‘Jacobites’ respectively.<sup>72</sup>

What one notices as different in the works of Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī, and Elias of Nisibis, by comparison with the works of earlier and contemporary Christian apologists and theologians who wrote in Arabic, is their venture beyond the range of the logical works of Aristotle. The *Organon* and Porphyry’s *Eisagoge* had long been used

by Christians in the explication of the terms of their various doctrinal formulae and the systematic defense of their several theologies. Ḥunayn, Yaḥyā and the others moved beyond the *Organon* into a larger Aristotelian, philosophical frame of reference which put a premium on the philosophical life itself, on the primacy of reason and the pursuit of happiness not only personally and individually but socially and politically as well. This was a new philosophical horizon for Christians in the east, which under the impetus of the translation movement seems to have opened in the Baghdad intellectual milieu with the importation of Neoplatonic thought into the world of Arabic-speaking Aristotelianism. Perhaps its most eloquent marker is the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, a paraphrase of portions of Plotinus’ *Enneads*, which also included some commentary and a collection of wisdom sayings.<sup>73</sup> Its likely origins in its Arabic dress are probably to be sought in the circle of the Muslim philosopher al-Kindī and his Syrian Christian translators and associates. But the Muslim scholar whose person and works most readily embodied the new intellectual profile was undoubtedly the ‘Second Master’ (after Aristotle himself), Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (ca.870-950).<sup>74</sup> Among Christian intellectuals, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī inherited al-Fārābī’s mantle.

The Muslim religious establishment came ultimately to distrust the philosophers. In the time frame of our considerations, this distrust was expressed most notably in Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī’s (1058-1111) *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*,<sup>75</sup> where his contempt for what he perceived to be the arrogant rationalism of the Muslim philosophers in matters of religious belief and practice is abundantly clear.<sup>76</sup> But among Christians as well, not everyone was

happy with the new direction in Christian intellectual culture which the Baghdad scholars introduced into their world.<sup>77</sup> Evidence for this displeasure is recorded in a work of the late Mu'tazilī scholar, 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamdhānī (d.1025). In the course of his own remarks against the influence of the philosophers, he mentioned Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq and Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī by name, along with the names of other prominent Christian translators of originally Greek texts into Arabic, whom he accused of helping to subvert the faith of the Muslims by the introduction of the books of Plato, Aristotle and others into Islam. He says these Christian translators were few in number and he says that "they hide under the cover of Christianity, while the Christians themselves do not approve of them."<sup>78</sup> What is more 'Abd al-Jabbār names a Christian source, the otherwise unknown Yūḥanna al-Qass, a lecturer on Euclid and a student of the *Almagest*, who, according to 'Abd al-Jabbār, offered this criticism of the Christian translators:

Those who transmitted these books left out much of their error, and the

worst of their coarseness, out of a sense of solidarity with them, and to spare them. They gave them, as it were on loan, Islamic meanings and interpretations which they did not have.<sup>79</sup>

Obviously, Yūḥanna al-Qass did not approve of the solidarity which the Christian philosophers associated with the translation movement felt for Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. How widely this feeling was shared among other Christians of the time is impossible to know at this remove. What we do know is that some modern commentators on the works of the likes of Ḥunayn, Yaḥyā and their colleagues have perceived problems with the relationship between the claims of faith and reason in their thinking. Nevertheless, all are agreed that some prominent Christian intellectuals of Baghdad from the ninth to the eleventh centuries did think for a season that on the basis of reason and the philosophical life, a measure of peaceful *convivencia* between Christians, Muslims and Jews could be attained in the World of Islam they all shared.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Sebastian P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester* 78 (1996) 23-35.

<sup>2</sup> See Hans Putman, *L'église et l'islam sous Timothée I (780-823): Étude sur l'église nestorienne au temps des premiers 'Abbāsides, avec nouvelle édition et traduction du dialogue entre Timothée et al-Mahdī* (Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq Éditeurs, 1975); Harald Suermann, "Timotheos I, +823," in Wassilios Klein (ed.), *Syrische Kirchenväter* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2004), pp. 152-167.

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas R. Hurst, "The Syriac Letters of Timothy I (727-823): A Study in Christian Muslim Controversy," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1986 – University Microfilms International, #8613464); Harald Suermann, "Der nestorianische Patriarch Timotheos I. und seine theologischen Briefe im Kontext des Islam," in Martin Tamcke & Andreas Heinz (eds.), *Zu Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartsfrage der syrischen Kirchen* (Studien zur Orientalischen Kirchengeschichte, vol. 9; Münster: Lit Verlag, 2000), pp. 217-230.

<sup>4</sup> See Alphonse Mingana, "Timothy's Apology for Christianity," *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic and Garshuni; Edited and Translated with a Critical Apparatus* (vol. II; Cambridge: Heffer, 1928), pp. 1-162; *idem*, "The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph al-Mahdī," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester* 12 (1928) 137-226.

<sup>5</sup> See Albert van Roey, "Une apologie syriaque attribuée à Elie de Nisibe," *Le Muséon* 59 (1946) 381-397.

<sup>6</sup> See Putman, *L'église et l'islam*.

<sup>7</sup> See Thomas R. Hurst, "The Epistle Treatise: An Apologetic Vehicle: Letter 34 of Timothy I," in H.J.W. Drijvers *et al.* (eds.), *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac*

*Literature* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 229; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), pp. 367-382.

<sup>8</sup> For brief descriptions of these letters see Hurst, *The Syriac Letters of Timothy I*, esp. pp. 43-68. See also Sidney H. Griffith, "The Syriac Letters of Patriarch Timothy I and the Birth of Christian Kalām in the Mu'tazilite Milieu of Baghdad and Baṣrah in Early Islamic Times," forthcoming in the Gerrit Reinink Jubilee vol. (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta; Leuven: Peeters, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> See Harald Suermann, "Timothy and his Concern for the School of Bašoš," *The Harp* 10 (1997) 51-58.

<sup>10</sup> See Hanna P. J. Cheikho, *Dialectique du langage sur Dieu: Lettre de Timothée I (728-823) à Serge; étude, traduction et édition critique* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> See Sidney H. Griffith, "Patriarch Timothy I and an Aristotelian at the Caliph's Court," Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (6 vols.; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991-1997), vol. III, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> See Sebastian P. Brock, "Two Letters of the Patriarch Timothy from the Late Eighth Century on Translations from Greek," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9 (1999) 233-246.

<sup>13</sup> John W. Watt, "Syriac Translators and Greek Philosophy in Early Abbasid Iraq," *The Canadian Society for Syriac Studies Journal* 4 (2004) 15-26, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> See Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 136.

<sup>15</sup> John Watt, "Grammar, Rhetoric, and the Enkyklios Paideia in Syriac," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 143 (1993) 45-71.

<sup>16</sup> See H.-D. Saffrey, "Le chrétien Jean Philopon et la survivance de l'école d'Alexandrie au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Revue des Études Grecques* 67 (1954) 396-410.

<sup>17</sup> See Henri Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d'Aristote du grec au syriaque: Études sur la transmission des textes de l'Organon et leur interprétation philosophique* (Textes et Traditions, no. 9; Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> See Khalil Georr, *Les catégories d'Aristote dans leurs versions syro-arabes* (Beirut: Institut Français de Damas, 1948), esp. pp. 1-32; Hugonnard-Roche, *La logique d'Aristote*.

<sup>19</sup> See Dimitri Gutas, "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Bagdad," *Der Islam* 60 (1983) 231-267; Javier Teixidor, *Aristote en syriaque: Paul le perse, logicien du VIe siècle* (Paris: CNRS, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> See G.J. Reinink, "'Edessa Grew Dim and Nisibis Shone Forth': The School of Nisibis at the Transition of the Sixth-Seventh Century," in J.W. Drijvers & A.A. MacDonald (eds.), *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East* (Studies in Intellectual History, 61; Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 77-89; Joel Walker, "The Limits of Late Antiquity: Philosophy between Rome and Iran," *Ancient World* 33 (2002) 45-69; Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> See Louis Massignon, "La politique islamo-chrétienne des scribes nestoriens de Deir Qunna à la cour de Bagdad au IXe siècle de notre ère," *Vivre et Penser* 2 (1942) 7-14, reprinted in L. Massignon, *Opera Minora* (ed. Y. Moubarac, 3 vols.; Beirut: Dar al-Maaref, 1963), vol. I, pp. 250-257.

<sup>22</sup> See Heinz Herbert Schöffler, *Die Akademie von Gondischapur: Aristoteles auf dem Wege in den Orient* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1980).

<sup>23</sup> Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> It is notable that we find scant reference in Christian texts in Syriac and Arabic composed in

this period to the works of contemporary Jewish scholars in the same Islamic milieu of Baghdad. For example, in addition to some Arabophone apologetic and polemic writers of the earlier period, Sa'adyah Ga'on Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī (882-942), who was a contemporary of noted Christian thinkers such as Abū Bishr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d.940) and Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (893-974), wrote his famous *Book of Beliefs and Practices* in this period, a book which discussed many of the same topics we find in the works of his Christian coevals, but they make no mention of it. See Samuel Landauer (ed.), *Kitāb al-amānāt wa l'itiqādāt von Sa'adja b. Jūsuf al-Fajjumi* (Leiden: Brill, 1880); Samuel Rosenblatt (trans.), *Saadia Gaon: The Book of Beliefs & Opinions* (Yale Judaica Series; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948).

<sup>25</sup> On Ḥunayn's life and works, see G.C. Anawati, "Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq al-'Ibādī, Abū Zayd," in Charles Coulton Gillispie (ed.), *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (vol. 15, supplement, 1; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), pp. 230-234, and Albert Z. Iskandar, "Ḥunayn the Translator," & "Ḥunayn the Physician," in Gillispie, *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, pp. 234-249; Bénédicte Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans en Irak: Attitudes Nestoriennes vis-à-vis de l'islam* (Études Chrétiennes Arabes; Paris: Cariscript, 1994), pp. 66-71.

<sup>26</sup> See Myriam Salama-Carr, *La traduction à l'époque abbaside: l'école de Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq et son importance pour la tradition* (Paris: Didier, 1990).

<sup>27</sup> A case in point is the recent book published by a Muslim scholar in Saudi Arabia: Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh Dabyān, *Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq: Dirāsah tarīkhiyyah walughawīyyah* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Wataniyyah, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> For an English translation of portions of Ḥunayn's so-called 'autobiography', see Dwight F. Reynolds *et al.* (eds.), *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 212 pp.

<sup>29</sup> Gerhard Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindī: Early Arabic Translations from the Greek and the Rise of Islamic Philosophy," in Gerhard Endress & Remke Kruk (eds.), *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism: Studies on the Transmission of Greek Philosophy and Sciences* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies, 1997), p. 50.

<sup>30</sup> Already in the Syriac-speaking tradition, in the context of the doctrinal controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries, historians and chronographers were producing texts in this vein, a development which may well have inspired Muslim authors to buttress their religious claims in the same manner. See, e.g., the studies of Witold Witakowski, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahrē: A Study in the History of Historiography* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Semitica Upsaliensia, 9; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987); Jan J. van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus: A Monophysite Historian in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1995). This tradition continued among Syriac-speaking Christians well into the Middle Ages, with such works as the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian, the *Chronicon ad annum 1234*, and the *Chronicle* of Bar Hebraeus.

<sup>31</sup> See Sidney H. Griffith, "Apologetics and Historiography in the Annals of Eutychios of Alexandria: Christian Self-Definition in the World of Islam," in Rifaat Ebied & Herman Teule (eds.), *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage: In Honor of Father Prof. Dr. Samir Khalil Samir* (Eastern Christian Studies, 5; Leuven: Peeters, 2004), pp. 65-89.

<sup>32</sup> See Samir Khalil Samir, "Élie de Nisibe (Iliyyā al-Naṣībī) (975-1046)," *Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien*, *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977) 283-284.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Sbath (ed.), *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologetiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens du IXe au XIVe siècle* (Cairo: H. Friedrich et Co., 1929), p. 186. Ḥunayn's text is republished in a modern, critical edition by Samir Khalil

Samir, "Maqālah Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq fī kayfiyyat idrāk ḥaqīqat ad-diyānah," *al-Machriq* 71 (1997) 340-363.

<sup>34</sup> Khalil Samir & Paul Nwyia (ed. & trans.), *Une correspondance islamo-chrétienne entre Ibn al-Munaḡḡim, Hunayn ibn Ishāq et Qusṭā ibn Lūqā* (Patrologia Orientalis, tome 40, fasc., 4, no. 185; Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), pp. 686-701.

<sup>35</sup> See Sidney H. Griffith, "Comparative Religion in the Apologetics of the First Christian Arabic Theologians," *Proceedings of the PMR Conference: Annual Publication of the Patristic, Mediaeval and Renaissance Conference*, 4 (1979) 63-87.

<sup>36</sup> See Abdurrahman Badawi (ed.), *Hunayn ibn Ishāq: Ādāb al-Falāsifa (Sentences des Philosophes)* (Safat, Koweit: Éditions de l'Institut des Manuscrits Arabes, 1985).

<sup>37</sup> See Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation: A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia* (American Oriental Series, vol. 60; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1975), esp. pp. 38-40.

<sup>38</sup> See Jean Jolivet, "L'idée de la sagesse et sa fonction dans la philosophie des 4e et 5e siècles," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 1 (1991) 31-65, esp. 45-47.

<sup>39</sup> See Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam; Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 148-196.

<sup>40</sup> Muhsin S. Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001). On the intriguing suggestion that the ninth-century, Christian intellectual Anton of Tagrit could have paved the way for Alfarabi's work, see John W. Watt, "From Themistius to al-Farabi: Platonic Political Philosophy and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in the East," *Rhetorica* 13 (1995) 17-41.

<sup>41</sup> See Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age* (Leiden: Brill, 1986); Lenn E. Goodman, *Islamic Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 14. See also G. Endress, "Mattā b. Yūnus (Yūnān) al-Ḳunnāṭī, Abū Bishr," in *EI*, new ed., vol. VI, pp. 844-846.

<sup>43</sup> See Gerhard Endress, "Grammatik und Logik: Arabische Philologie und griechischer Philosophie in Widerstreit," in Burkard Mojsisch (ed.), *Sprachphilosophie in Antike und Mittelalter* (Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie, 3; Amsterdam: Gruner, 1986), pp. 163-299.

<sup>44</sup> See Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, pp. 104-139. For a brief survey of the Christian participants in this movement see Khalil Samir, "Rôle des chrétiens dans les renaissances arabes," *Annales de Philosophie de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 6 (1985) 1-31.

<sup>45</sup> See Bayard Dodge (ed. & trans.), *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture* (2 vols.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), vol. II, pp. 631-632 and *sub nomine*; Gerhard Endress, *The Works of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī: An Analytical Inventory* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1977).

<sup>46</sup> Samir Khalil Samir & Sidney H. Griffith (ed. & trans.), *Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī: The Reformation of Morals* (Eastern Christian Texts, vol. I; Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002); Vincent Mistrh, "Traité sur la continence de Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī; édition critique," *Collectanea* (no. 16, Études-Documents; Cairo: Studia Orientalia Christiana, 1981); Sidney H. Griffith, "Yaḥyā B. 'Adī's Colloquy on Sexual Abstinence and the Philosophical Life," in James E. Montgomery (ed.), *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: from the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 152; Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2006), pp. 197-331.

<sup>47</sup> See in particular the numerous studies of Emilio Platti, especially E. Platti, "Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, philosophe et théologien," *MIDEO* 14 (1980), pp. 167-184; *idem*, "Une cosmologie chrétienne," *MIDEO* 15 (1982), pp. 75-118; *idem*, *Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī: théologien chrétien et philosophe arabe; sa théologie de l'incarnation* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 14; Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Departement

Orientalistiek, 1983); *idem*, *Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī: de l'incarnation* (CSCO, vols. 490 & 491; Louvain: Peeters, 1987).

<sup>48</sup> He uses the term in two places in the book, Ibn 'Adī, *The Reformation of Morals*, 2.15 & 5.14, pp. 26 & 106.

<sup>49</sup> Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, p. 10, n. 14, defining al-Fārābī's understanding of the term.

<sup>50</sup> Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī, following the Neoplatonic tradition he inherited, distinguishes three faculties or powers (*quwā*) in the human soul, which powers he says "are also named souls: the appetitive soul, the irascible soul, and the rational soul." Ibn 'Adī, *The Reformation of Morals*, 2.1, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Ibn 'Adī, *Traité sur la continence*, 1.3-4, 65.4, pp. 14 & 37 (Arabic); 65 & 99 (French).

<sup>52</sup> See Ibn 'Adī, *Traité sur la continence*, 33.2-3 & 34.5-7, pp. 25 (Arabic); 81-82 (French).

<sup>53</sup> Christian polemicists often claimed that Muḥammad and Islam encouraged licentious behavior. Typically the topic came up in discussions of the criteria for recognizing the true religion. See, e.g., the listings under this heading in Paul Houry, *Matériaux pour servir à l'étude de la controverse théologique islamo-chrétienne de langue arabe du VIIIe au XIIIe siècle* (4 vols., Religionswissenschaftliche Studien, 11/1-4; Würzburg: Echter Verlag; Altenberge: Telos Verlag), vol. 1, pp. 190-300. See the motif also discussed in Jason Zaborowski, *The Coptic Martyrdom of John of Phanijōit: Assimilation and Conversion to Islam in Thirteenth-Century Egypt* (The History of Christian-Muslim Relations, vol. 3; Leiden: Brill, 2005), esp. pp. 11-31.

<sup>54</sup> The text is edited by George Raḥmah, "Risālah fī faḍīlat al-'afāf li Ḥilīyah an-Naṣībīnī," *al-Machriq* 62 (1968) 3-74.

<sup>55</sup> See Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, pp. 104-139.

<sup>56</sup> See Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (vol. II, Studi e Testi, 133; Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1947), pp. 252-256; Cyrille Haddad, *'Īsā ibn Zur'a: Philosophe arabe et*

*apologiste chrétien* (Beirut: Dar al-Kalima, 1971); Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam*, pp. 116-123.

<sup>57</sup> On Elias of Nisibis and his works, see G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (vol. II, Studi e Testi, 133; Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1947), pp. 177-188; Emmanuel-Karim Delly, *La théologie d'Elie bar Šénaya: étude et traduction de ses entretiens* (Studia Urbaniana; Rome: Apud Pontificiam Universitatem Urbanianam de Propaganda Fide, 1957); Bénédicte Landron, *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak: Attitudes Nestorienne vis-à-vis de l'islam*, pp. 112-120. See especially the collected studies of Samir Khalil Samir, *Foi et culture en Irak: Elie de Nisibe et l'Islam* (Variorum Collected Studies Series, 544; Aldershot, Hamps.: Ashgate Publishing, 1996).

<sup>58</sup> See the brief excursus on the vizir and his background in Samir Khalil Samir, "Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien: Élie de Nisibe (Iliyyā al-Naṣībī) (975-1046)," *Islamo-christiana* 3 (1977), p. 259; the article is included in Samir, *Foi et culture en Irak*. See also the excursus on the emir Naṣr ad-Dawlah in Samir Khalil Samir, "Note sur le médecin Zāhid al-'Ulamā', frère d'Elie de Nisibe," *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985) 168-183, particularly pp. 181-183; reprinted in Samir, *Foi et culture en Irak*, no. V.

<sup>59</sup> For the manuscripts and publishing history of this work, see Samir, *Foi et culture en Irak*, I, pp. 259-267. For its comparison with other works in the same genre see Sidney 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 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh et al. (eds.), *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), pp. 13-65, esp. pp. 48-53.

<sup>60</sup> The full Arabic text is published in Constantin Bacha, *Kitāb daf' al-hamm li Ilīyyā al-Naṣtūrī muṭrān Naṣībīn* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah al-Ma'ārif, 1902).

<sup>61</sup> See Samir Khalil, "Le 'Daf' al-Hamm' d'Elie de Nisibe: Date et circonstances de sa rédaction," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 18 (1987) 99-119; reprinted in Samir, *Foi et Culture en Irak*, no. IV.

<sup>62</sup> See E.A. Budge, *The Laughable Stories Collected by Mār Gregory John Bar Hebraeus: The Syriac Text Edited with an English Translation* (London: Luzac, 1897).

<sup>63</sup> See Samir Khalil, "Bar Hebraeus, le 'Daf' al-Hamm' et les 'Contes Amusants'," *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980) 136-160; reprinted in Samir, *Foi et culture en Irak*, no. III.

<sup>64</sup> The text is published, with an Italian translation, in H. Ritter & Richard Walzer, "Studi su al-Kindī II: Uno scritto morale inedito di al-Kindī (Temistio *Peri alupias*?)," *Atti della Reale Accademia Nazionale de Lincei* (Memorie della Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche, ser. 6, vol. 8; (1938), pp. 5-62; Abdurahman Badawī, *Rasā'il Falsafiyya li al-Kindī wa al-Fārābī wa Ibn Bājjā wa Ibn 'Adī* (Beyrouth: Dār al-Andalus, 1973), pp. 6-32. The most recent study, with a translation into French is, Al-Kindī, *Le moyen de chasser les tristesses et autres textes éthiques* (intro. & trans. Soumaya Mestiri & Guillaume Dye, Bibliothèque Maktaba; Paris: Fayard, 2004). An English translation is available by Charles E. Butterworth, "Al-Kindī and the Beginnings of Islamic Political Philosophy," in C.E. Butterworth (ed.), *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 11-60, esp. pp. 32-52.

<sup>65</sup> See Sidney H. Griffith, "The Muslim Philosopher al-Kindī and his Christian Readers: Three Arab Christian Texts on 'The Dissipation of Sorrows'," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78 (1996) 111-127.

<sup>66</sup> See Samir, "Note sur le médecin Zāhid al-'Ulamā'."

<sup>67</sup> Al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* (vol. I; Cairo: Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Ḥalabī, 1938), p. 128.

<sup>68</sup> Charles E. Butterworth (trans.), "Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā's *The Book of*

*the Philosophic Life*,” *Interpretation* 20 (1992), pp. 227-257.

<sup>69</sup> See Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, esp. 136-141.

<sup>70</sup> Endress, “The Circle of al-Kindī,” in Endress & Kruk, *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, p. 52.

<sup>71</sup> I.-B. Chabot (ed.), *Anonymi Auctoris Chronicon ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens* (CSCO, vols. 82 & 109); Paris: J. Gabalda, 1920 & Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1952), vol. 81, pp. 104-105 (Syriac), vol. 109, P. 82 (Latin). It is interesting to note the similar line of thinking voiced about the science of logic in Sergius of Resh‘ayna’s still unpublished introduction to Aristotle’s *Categories*: “Without all this neither can the meaning of writings on medicine be grasped, nor can the opinions of the philosophers be known, nor indeed the true sense of the divine scriptures in which the hope of our salvation is revealed—unless a person receive divine power as a result of the exalted nature of his way of life, with the result that he has no need of human training. As far as human power is concerned, however, there can be no other course or path to all the areas of knowledge except by way of training in Logic.” Quoted from Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom*, p. 147, who in turn quoted the passage from Sebastian Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (Moran Etho, 9; Kottayam, Kerala: Saint Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 1997), p. 204.

<sup>72</sup> See John W. Watt, “The Strategy of the Baghdad Philosophers: The Aristotelian Tradition as a Common Motif in Christian and Islamic Thought,” in J. J. van Ginkel *et al.* (eds.), *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*

(Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 134; Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2005), pp. 151-166.

<sup>73</sup> See F. W. Zimmerman, “The Origins of the So-Called *Theology of Aristotle*,” in J. Kraye *et al.* (eds.), *Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts* (XI, Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages; London: Warburg Institute, 1986), pp. 110-240; E.K. Rowson, “The *Theology of Aristotle* and Some Other Pseudo-Aristotelian Texts Reconsidered,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112 (1992), pp. 478-484; Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the Theology of Aristotle* (London: Duckworth, 2002).

<sup>74</sup> See I.R. Netton, *Al-Farabi and His School* (Arabic Thought and Culture Series; London & New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>75</sup> See al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers: A Parallel English-Arabic Text* (trans. Michael E. Marmura; Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1997).

<sup>76</sup> See Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), esp. pp. 172-176, 200-208.

<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, even prior to the rise of Islam, and in the very early Islamic period, there was some tension among the East Syrians between the academic philosophers in the ‘Nestorian’ school system and the more spiritually inclined scholars of the monastic communities. See Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom*, pp. 178-194.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Hamdḥānī, *Tathbūt dalā’il an-nubuwwah* (2 vols., ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān; Beirut: Dār al-‘Arabiyyah, 1966), vol. I, p.76; see also pp. 75-76 & 192-193.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbūt dalā’il an-nubuwwah*, vol. I, p. 76.