From Apocalyptic to Apologetics:
Early Syriac Reactions to Islam

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There will be deniers of the truth, who do not know God and who are defiled by lasciviousness, people who provoke God to anger. And then, suddenly, the prophecy of Daniel, the pure and the desired, shall be fulfilled, who spake: God shall send forth a mighty wind, the southern one. And there shall come from it a people of hideous aspect with the appearance and manners like those of women. And there shall rise up from among them a warrior, whom they call a prophet. And there shall be brought forward by him [things] such as which there have not been in the world nor do there exist their like, so that everyone who hears [these things] shall shake his head and mock and say: Why does this [man] speak thus? And God will see [it] and disregard [it].

1 This is not a literary quotation from the Book of Daniel, but a compound of different motifs from Daniel. In this passage, the author of the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles seems to refer to one of the four winds in Dan. 7:2, which he calls “the southern one”, connecting it with the motif of the “King of the South” in Dan. 11. According to the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles the Islamic Arabs finally will be defeated by the “man of the North” (cf. the “King of the North” in Dan. 11), with whom the Byzantine emperor is meant (see further below, n. 13).

2 Rendel Harris’s translation “and they shall be brought into his hands…” (The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, p. 36 [transl.], cf. below n. 3), adopted by other scholars (Suermann, Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion [cf. below n.3], p. 102; Drijvers, “The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles” [cf. below n. 3], p. 202), has to be corrected. The subject of the verb “shall be brought forward” is to-day illegible in the manuscript Harris 85, f. 56r (this manuscript is – under the number 93 – now in the Harvard College Library; cf. M.H. Goshen-Gottstein, Syriac Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library. A Catalogue [Harvard Semitic Studies, 23], Missoula 1979, pp. 75–76). The first word of the first line of f. 56r is lost through damage to the manuscript. As appears from the following relative sentence the subject must have been a word like f.e. petgâmê or ıarbê, which may be translated with “words” or with the more neutral “things”.

The Arab says: …tell me the truth, how is Muḥammad, our prophet, considered in your eyes?

The monk says: A wise and God-fearing man, who has set you free from the veneration of the demons, and made known to you one true God.4

The first quotation is taken form the so-called Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, together with the Apocalypses of Each One of Them. This apocalyptic text was written in Edessa in the 690s,5 either in the last days of the Second Arab Civil War (682–692 AD), or not long after the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik’s final victory over his rival in Mecca (692 AD).6 Whichever of these datings

4 Bet Hale Disputation, Diyarbakir 95, item 35, f. 5r; more below.
5 Its author undoubtedly belonged to Syriac-speaking monophysite circles. The name of Jesus is explained as “the Saviour, the Ruler and the God who is over all” (ed. Rendel Harris (cf. n. 3), p. 2 [text], p. 25 [transl.]). The apostles call Jesus “our Lord and our God” (ed. Rendel Harris (cf. n. 3), p. 5 [text], p. 28 [transl.]), “our God…our Lord…Saviour” (ed. Rendel Harris (cf. n. 3), p. 8 [text], p. 30 [transl.]). In the revelation of Simon Peter those who shall “divide our Lord” (the Christians who adhere to the dyophysite Chalcedonian confession) are opposed to the “few who shall be scattered in the countries, who confess the Son in the way that is right for them to do” (the Christians of the author’s monophysite community); the Chalcedonians will suffer all kinds of evils “until they shall return and become one true flock and one Holy Church, and they shall confess our Lord according as we received from Him, and according as we believed in the Son the Life-Giver and Saviour of the world” (ed. Rendel Harris (cf. n. 3), pp. 11–13 [text], pp. 32–33 [transl.]. The Edessene origin of the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles is generally accepted (cf. the articles mentioned in n. 3).
6 Since the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles seems to show influence from the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, the work must be written in or after 692 AD. Suermann, Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion (cf. n. 3), p. 191, suggests about 700 AD as the date of its composition. The same date is proposed by H. Möhrig, Der Weltkaiser der Endzeit (Mittelalter-Forschungen, 3), Stuttgart 2000, p. 57. In his article “Christians, Jews and Muslims” (cf. n. 3), p. 74, Drijvers proposes a date after 692 AD (ʿAbd al-Malik’s victory over the anti-caliph ʿAbd Allah b. al-Zubayr) and before 705 AD (death of ʿAbd al-Malik), preferring a date closer to 692, “when during the aftermath of Ibn al-Zubayr’s revolt there was still fighting between rival Muslim groups in North Mesopotamia”. In his article “The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles” (cf. n. 3), p. 208, n. 44, p. 213, Drijvers opts for a date shortly after the end of the seventh century. His argument, however, that the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles alludes to the founding of the city of Wāṣit on the Tigris in 702–705 is based on a mistranslation by Rendel Harris. Rendel Harris translates the words ḏudkt ḏglt šm with “in the place named Diglath” (Diglath is the river Tigris) (ed. Rendel Harris (cf. n. 3), p.21 [text], p. 39 [transl.]). However, the words ḏglt šm should be vocalized as ḏaggâlat šmā, which means “(in the place) with a false name”, which is perhaps an allusion to Medina, the city of the prophet Muḥammad. In my view the three apocalypses, Pseudo-Methodius, the Edessene Apocalypse (see below) and the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, must have been written in a very short space of time, when the Second Arab Civil War still could be considered as initiating the ruin of the Arab domination.
may be correct, it is evident that the author of the text – just like the authors of other contemporary Syriac sources\(^7\) – still considers the inter-Arab conflicts of the Second Civil War to be the very beginning of the end of the Arab rule.\(^8\)

As far as I know, the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* is the first Syriac text in which the name “prophet” is used in connection with Muḥammad\(^9\) – although, at a slightly earlier date, the East Syrian monk and author John bar Penkaye knows about Muḥammad’s religious leadership.\(^10\) The *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, however, without mentioning the name of Muḥammad itself and without giving any concrete information about Muḥammad’s pronouncements, gives a highly negative image of the prophet of the Arabs. God only

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\(^8\) Ed. Rendel Harris (cf. n. 3), p. 20 (text), p. 38 (transl.). Drijvers, “Christians, Jews and Muslims” (cf. n. 3), p. 73; *idem*, “The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles” (cf. n. 3), p. 207, even thinks that the battle between the two parties which according to this apocalypse will take place “at the fountain of waters”, refers to the fountain Zamzam at Mecca, and that this may point to Ibn al-Zubayr’s defeat and death in October 692 AD.

\(^9\) Although the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* does not actually mention the name of Muḥammad, it is clear that the author in speaking of the “warrior whom they call a prophet” refers to Muḥammad. For the view of Muḥammad as being the military leader of the Arabs in Christian sources, see R. G. Hoyland, “The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: an Appraisal”, in H. Morzecki (ed.), *The Biography of Muḥammad. The Issue of the Sources* (Islamic History and Civilization, 32), Leiden/Boston/Köln, 2000, pp. 277–281. For the name of “prophet”(*nbīyā¯*) and “messenger” (*rasūlā¯*) of God for Muḥammad in eighth-century Syriac sources, see Hoyland, “The Earliest Christian Writings”, pp. 285–286.

tolerates Muḥammad’s “absurd” pronouncements because He wants to use the Arabs for some time as an instrument with which to punish the earth. After a fixed period of time, which is defined as “one great week and the half of a great week”,11 God’s covenant with the Arabs shall come to an end. The ruin of their empire is caused by the Arabs themselves, for in the final period of their domination the Arabs shall heavily oppress everybody under their sway. In particular, the people “who confess our Lord Christ” shall suffer tribulation, since the Arabs “finally shall hate the name of the Lord”, and, in doing so, “they shall bring to nought His covenant”.12 Internal strife and the ensuing military intervention of Daniel’s “Man of the North”, viz. the Byzantine emperor, shall drive them back to their homelands, where they are destined to meet an inglorious end.14

The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles predicts a heavy suppression of the Christians by the Arabs for religious reasons. The statement that the Arabs “finally shall hate the name of the Lord” is a clear allusion to Jesus’ words in Matth. 10: 22: “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake”, and in particular to Jesus’ words in the apocalypse of Matth. 24: “and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake” (Matth. 24: 9). Is not the man whom the Arabs call a “prophet” in the opinion of the author of the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles one of the false prophets who shall rise at the end according to Matth. 24: 11? And is not the fate of the Arabs predicted by the angel

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11 Ed. Rendel Harris (cf. n. 3), p. 19 (text), p. 37 (transl.). The number is symbolic for the whole period of Muslim domination (pace Drijvers, “Christians, Jews and Muslims” [cf. n. 3], p. 73, who relates the number to the period of rivalry between the Arabs themselves). Its source seems to be Dan. 9: 27 (Pes.: “And he shall strengthen the covenant for many for one week and half a week”, God being taken as the subject of the verb nāṣṣen, “he will strengthen (or: make hard, make strong)”. For the use of the concept of “covenant” in the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, see below n. 12.

12 Ed. Rendel Harris (cf. n. 3), p. 21 (text), p. 38 (transl.). Suermann, Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion (cf. n. 3), p. 185, sees in the bringing to nought of God’s covenant an allusion to a future ban on the Christian cult imposed by the Arabs. However, this explanation is not very likely. The author of the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles considers the “covenant” as the temporary alliance into which God entered with the Arabs, in order to punish mankind (ed. Rendel Harris [cf. n. 3], p. 19 [text], p. 37 [transl.]). The Arabs themselves are to be blamed for God’s making an end to His covenant with them, since they finally shall hate the name of the Lord. Rendel Harris’s translation “and God shall bring to nought their covenant with them” (p. 37) has to be corrected into “and God shall bring to nought His covenant with them”.

13 Cf. above n. 1. For the identification of the “Man of the North” with the Christian emperor of Byzantium, see ed. Rendel Harris (cf. n. 3), pp. 16–17 (text), p. 35 (transl.), where the author in connection with the “Kings of the North” refers to Constantine the Great, who “will subdue all peoples by the miraculous sign that appeared to him in the sky”.

14 Ed. Rendel Harris (cf. n. 3), p. 21 (text), pp. 38–39 (transl.).
Gabriel’s words to the Virgin in the same *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, where he says that those people who will not confess the Saviour shall perish? It is likely that the author of this apocalypse has more in his mind than a hackneyed eschatological topic related to the persecution of the Christians at the end of times. For the author’s statement that the Arabs shall hate the name of the Lord does not mean that they hate the name of Jesus or the name of Messiah, but the name of God or rather the name of God in connection with the Saviour who is God, whose “authority is in the lofty heights” and whose “kingdom does not pass away”, as this apocalypse formulates it in Gabriel’s message to the Virgin. It is very likely, indeed, that the author of the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* is here alluding to the Muslim rejection of the divinity of Christ.

The *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* is not the only apocalyptic work dating from the end of the seventh century that adopts a strongly politico-religious polemical attitude towards the Arab conquerors. The *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* (in 691/2 AD), written shortly before the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*, characterizes the Christians who defect to Islam as followers of the “doctrine of the demons”, who reject the Cross, the Christian sacraments and Christ. Pseudo-Methodius’ description of the “sons of Ishmael” as barbarous and pagan “tyrants” does not mean that he was not, or was hardly, aware of some tenets of early Islam. It is for polemical reasons that he presents the Arabs as *kāpurē* (“unbelievers”), arguing that apostasy and defection to Islam

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15 Ed. Rendel Harris (cf. n. 3), p. 1 (text), p. 25 (transl.).
16 For the author’s monophysite allegiance, see above n. 5.
17 Ed. Rendel Harris (cf. n. 3), p. 1 (text), p. 25 (transl.).
18 Suermann, *Die geschichtstheologische Reaktion* (cf. n. 3), p. 185, rightly concluded that the author of the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* expresses “daß die Muslime besonders...die Christen bedrängen, weil sie sich zum Messias bekennen”, and that “die Gottessohnschaft Jesu, die von den Christen bekannt wird, (...) von den Musulmen aufs schärfste abgelehnt (wird)”.
19 Edition and German translation by G.J. Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius* (CSCO, 540 [text], 541 [transl.]), Louvain, 1993. For the discussion of the date of the composition, see ed. Reinink, XII-XXV (transl.).
is hardly more than a relapse to pre-Christian paganism. However, Pseudo-Methodius cannot conceal that it is in particular the denial of Christ which makes the Arabs käpürē. When the Arabs haughtily blaspheme that “the Christians do not have a Saviour”, they transgress the limit for the Christian emperor of Byzantium. In a blitzkrieg he destroys the Arab rule, after which, in a terrible act of revenge, he vents his fury upon the Christian käpürē, who have denied Christ.

In similar fashion, the so-called Edessene Apocalypse, which was composed shortly after the Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse, makes mention of the kpuryā (“denial”) of the “sons of Ishmael” as preceding the military intervention of the Byzantine emperor. Although the Edessene Apocalypse does not define this kpuryā, the term has a strongly polemical religious meaning. Since the author of the Edessene Apocalypse used Pseudo-Methodius as one of his sources, it perhaps is not too bold to assume that in particular the Muslim rejection of Christ’s divinity is involved.

In a number of publications I have argued that the sudden appearance of fierce anti-Islamic polemics in the Syriac apocalypses from the end of the seventh century may be explained as Christian responses to anti-Christian Muslim polemics. In particular, the Islamization policy which was initiated by the Umayyad caliph ʿAbd al-Malik in the 690s provoked violent reactions in the Christian communities of the Middle East. ʿAbd al-Malik’s politico-religious proclamations, which propagated Islam as the religion of the state, as the successor of Christianity and as superior to it, became widely known in society through the public use of Qur’anic texts and slogans with a strong anti-

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28 Cf. R. Payne Smith, Thesaurus Syriacus, I, c. 1800, sub käpürē and kpuryā. Jews and pagans are called käpürē.
30 For a recent summary, see my “Following the Doctrine of the Demons” (cf. n. 20), pp. 130–132.
Christian tendency on buildings, on cloth, on coins and other official documents, and even in literary documents. I shall not repeat my arguments here, but should only like to point out that also in non-apocalyptic texts from this period can we find comparable anti-Islamic polemics in response to public Islamic anti-Christian slogans. In one of the exegetical homilies of the East Syrian author Mar Aba of Kashkar, for example, this bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon calls the Arabs “deniers”, whom the Lord may remove “from the company of the living”, since they reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. It is most likely that Mar Aba is responding here to the text of Qur’an 112, which in his days appeared as a confession of faith on ‘Abd al-Malik’s post-reform epigraphical coins.


36 Mar Aba may have written his exegetical homilies about 700. In the last decade of his long life (641–751 AD) Aba was the Catholicos of the East Syrian Church. For Aba’s life and works, see G.J. Reinkin, Studien zur Quellen- und Traditionsgeschichte der Gannat Bussame (CSCO, 414), Louvain, 1979, pp. 70–76.

37 Text and English translation of Aba’s exegesis of Matth. 1: 25 in G.J. Reinkin, “An Early Syriac Reference to Qur’an 112?”, in H.L.J. Vansiphout et al., All Those Nations…Cultural Encounters within and with the Near East, Groningen 1999, p. 123 (repr. in Reinkin, Syriac Christianity [cf. n. 7], no. XVI).

38 Cf. Reinkin, “An Early Syriac Reference” (cf. n. 37), passim; reference to Qur’an 112 (God does not beget nor is He begotten) also in ‘Abd al-Aziz’s posters and in the
We shall now turn to the second passage quoted at the beginning of this paper. In this quotation an image of the prophet of the Arabs is presented which is totally different from that in the *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*. The Christian monk, answering the Arab’s question about his (the monk’s) opinion of Muhammad, completely ignores the name of prophet used by his Arab interlocutor, but nevertheless professes his high estimation of the “God-fearing man” who freed the Arabs from pagan polytheism and introduced them to Abrahamic monotheism.\(^{39}\) To this extent, the monk’s opinion of Muhammad does not differ much from the view of his co-religionist John bar Penkaye at the end of the 680s.\(^{40}\) The monk, however, makes an important step forward. Whereas John bar Penkaye, like other Syriac sources before the 690s, does not seem to have much (if any) knowledge of Muslim ideas about Jesus the son of Mary or of Muslim criticisms of the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ,\(^{41}\) the monk, on the contrary, really is informed about the existence of the Qur’an\(^ {42}\) and about the Qur’anic view of Jesus.\(^ {43}\) What is even

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\(^{39}\) See above, p. 76. For the stress on the Abrahamic background of early Islam in the *Disputation between a Monk of Bêt Ḥalē and an Arab Notable*, see 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 Interpretation* (Themes in Biblical Narrative, 4), Leiden/New York/Köln 2002, pp. 123–124 (repr. in Reinink, *Syriac Christianity* [cf. n. 7], no. XV).

\(^{40}\) See above, n. 10.


\(^{43}\) The monk makes the Arab define “Isa son of Maryam” as “Word of God and His Spirit” (Qur’an 4: 171). According to the monk, Muhammad took this definition, which testifies that Christ is the Son of God, from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1: 30) (*Bet Hale*)
more striking, is that he represents Muḥammad as a crypto-Christian who was very well instructed in the Christian trinitarian doctrine, but who kept it back from the Arabs, since he feared that they were not yet ripe for the mystery of the Trinity, would misunderstand it, and would lapse back into their former polytheism.44

The unpublished *Disputation between a Monk of the Monastery of Bet Hale and an Arab Notable*, from which the quotation is taken, is a unique document; not simply because it is the oldest known East Syrian example of the genre of the apologetic dialogue between a Christian and a Muslim,45 but especially because it represents a transitional phase between the apocalypses and polemical responses of the 690s and the later Syriac apologetic literature, in which the Christian faith is defended against the claims of Islam.46 There are two distinctive features through which the *Disputation* stands out in comparison with the representatives of the apologetic genre from Abbasid times.

First, the *Disputation*, which is a highly artificial scholarly work,47 places the conversation between the monk and the Arab notable in a historical

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44 *Bet Hale Disputation*, Diyarbakir 95, item 35, f. 4v. At the beginning of the eighth century Jacob of Edessa quotes the same words, arguing that they demonstrate that the Muslims cannot distinguish properly between the “Word” and the “Spirit”, as they also are not able to accept calling the Messiah “God” or the “Son of God”; cf. Reinink, “Beginnings” (cf. n. 41), p. 170; R.G. Hoyland, “Jacob of Edessa on Islam”, in G.J. Reinink/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. 155–156. It is interesting to note that Qur’an 4: 171 also belongs to ‘Abd al-Malik’s anti-Christian texts in the Dome of the Rock; cf. Blair, “What is the Date?” (cf. n. 32), pp. 86–87; Grabar, *The Shape* (cf. n. 32), p. 60.

45 Three manuscripts of the *Disputation between a Monk of the Monastery of Bet Hale and an Arab Notable* are known to exist or to have existed: Siirt 112 (probably from the fifteenth century), Diyarbakir 95 (early eighteenth century) and Mardin 82 (1890 AD). The work is accessible to me through photos of Diyarbakir 95. I am currently preparing an edition of this work, with an English translation.


context, one which betrays the social issues of the apocalyptic and other Syriac sources dating from the 690s. These issues were generated through the assertive religious propaganda of the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, which was vigorously pursued by his successors in the first decades of the eighth century. One public medium through which Islamic propaganda was diffused consisted of ‘Abd al-Malik’s epigraphical coins. As was stated above, these coins proclaimed a strongly politico-religious message. Their obverse field contained the message: “There is no god but God alone. He has no partner”, while the reverse field has the text of Qur’an 112: “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): “Muhammad is the messenger of God whom He sent with guidance and the religion of truth in order to make it victorious over all religions though the polytheists detest [it].” The latter text forms the framework in which the whole Disputation is set. The claim of Islam to be better than all confessions in the world, including Christianity, which is raised by the Arab at the beginning of the Disputation, is the point of departure of the whole conversation; it is equally its concluding point. Just as in the text on the coins, the idea of the superiority of Islam is connected with that of the political superiority of the Arabs. The Arab notable takes the view that the authority of the Arabs over all religions and over all nations proves that God loves the Arabs and agrees with their religion. In doing so, he represents the official position of the Arab authorities, to whom he himself belonged, for the Arab notable was, as the author of the Disputation states, one of the dignitaries of the emir Maslama, the son of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, who was governor of both Iraqs during the period 720–721 AD.

49 See Klat, Catalogue (cf. n. 34), p. 11; Walker, A Catalogue (cf. n. 34), p. 84.
50 Bet Hale Disputation, Diyarbakir 95, item 35, f. 1v: “I know that his belief is dear to everyone, but say now the truth to me: Is our confession not better than all confessions there are on earth?” At the end of the disputation the Arab admits that Christianity is the superior religion; nevertheless he returns to the initial burning question of the discussion, viz. the question of the relation between political power and right religion (f. 8r): “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 to the king’s burdens night and day, more bitter than death?”
51 Bet Hale Disputation, Diyarbakir 95, item 35, f. 1v: “And this is the sign that God loves us and agrees with our confession, that he gave to us authority over all religions and over all nations. And see: they are slaves subject to us.”
Of course, the author of the Disputation wants to show that the Arab’s view is based on a fundamental misunderstanding, and it is here that the second distinctive element of the Disputation stands out in comparison with the later Syriac apologetic works. The author uses the arguments of the most influential apocalypse of the 690s, the Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse, to demonstrate that the Arab is on the wrong track in his argumentation concerning Islam’s politico-religious superiority. In its refutation of the Arab’s premise the Disputation closely follows Pseudo-Methodius’ arguments:

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.’ And you also reigned for a period of sixty years, and you were driven away by Gideon the Hebrew. And he killed four kings from among you: Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna ... 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.’ Our God, good and merciful, wants to chastise us in this transitory world of short and brief life, in order that He may make us inherit there eternal life.

The references and rendering of the biblical texts of Deut. 9: 4–6 and Hebr. 12: 8, the identification of the Midianites with the “sons of Ishmael”, the reference to Gideon and the four Midianite kings (Judg. 7: 25; 8: 21), the remarkable number of sixty years of Midianite supremacy, and indeed the whole argumentation is taken from Pseudo-Methodius. There is, however, one very striking difference between the Disputation and Pseudo-Methodius and the other apocalypses from the 690s. The figure of an idealised Christian emperor who as a revenging instrument in God’s hand will destroy the Arab kingdom is totally absent in the Disputation. The politico-religious

53 Bet Hale Disputation, Diyarbakir 95, item 35, f. 8r-8v.
54 Cf. Deut. 9: 4–6.
55 Hebr. 12: 8.
59 Ibidem.
60 Pseudo-Methodius V,5, ed. Reinink (cf. n. 19), p. 9 (text), p. 12 (transl.). According to Judg. 6:1 Israel was dominated by the Midianites for a period of seven years. For the typological background of the number sixty in Pseudo-Methodius, see n. 2 at Pseudo-Methodius V,5, transl. Reinink, p. 13.
61 For Pseudo-Methodius, see G.J. Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam”, Cameron/Conrad (eds.), The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East (cf. n. 3), p. 176 (repr. in Reinink, Syriac Christianity (cf. n. 7), no. IX); for the Edessene Apocalypse, see Reinink, “Der edessenische ‘Pseudo-Methodius’” (cf. n. 7), p. 41;
message of the apocalypses, predicting a Golden Age of Christian world
dominion, is replaced by the de-politicised message of the heavenly kingdom
which will be inherited by the people whom God really loves: those who
belong to the Christian confession. The fierce polemical tone of the
apocalypses is replaced in the Disputation by an attitude of politeness and
mutual respect.

Still, the final goal of the polemical apocalypses and the apologetic works
and texts is one and the same: they all want to combat the increasing fear of
mass conversion of Christians to the religion of the conquerors, a fear that was
greatly quickened in late Umayyad times through the assertive religious policy
of the Arab authorities. But the apocalypses and the apologetic texts follow
different methods in order to attain this goal. In the apocalypses the prediction
of the imminent military intervention of the Christian emperor of Byzantium
should keep the Christians from apostasy. In the apologetic texts, on the other
hand, the theological discussion and explication concerning the most
important differences between Christianity and Islam is intended to provide
the Christians with the weapons to combat Muslim criticism of Christian
tenets, rituals and practises. The explanation of these disputed matters served
to confirm the Christians in their opinion that Christianity was, is and will
always be the only religion that represents the divine Truth. The Arab notable
in the Disputation has to admit the superiority of Christianity, and he is even
made to say that many people would convert to Christianity, if they were not
prevented by fear of the government and shame before men.

Summarising, we may conclude that, although the apocalyptic texts of the
690s chronologically precede the apologetic texts, both genres, as to their
ultimate goal, represent two sides of the same picture: the reinforcement of
their own religious community against the religion of the rulers. Later on, in

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62 For Pseudo-Methodius, see Reinink, “Ps.-Methodius” (cf. n. 61), pp. 169–170; for the
Edessene Apocalypse, see Reinink, “Der Edessenische ‘Pseudo-Methodius’” (cf. n. 7),
pp. 42–43; for the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, see Drijvers, “The Gospel of the Twelve
Apostles” (cf. n. 3), p. 213.

63 See, in particular, Reinink, “Following the Doctrine of the Demons” (cf. n. 20),

64 The topics discussed in the Disputation concern the Muslim criticism of the Trinity, the
Divinity of Christ, baptism and eucharist, the Christian veneration of the Cross, the
icons and the relics of the martyrs, and the Christian direction of prayer toward the East,
being the standard topics of later Arab Christian apologetical texts; cf. Griffith, “Disputing” (cf. n. 42), p. 12.

65 Bet Hale Disputation, Diyarbakir 95, item 35, f. 8v.