PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS ON DIONYSIUS BAR ŠALĪBĪ'S ISLAMIC SOURCES

BERT JACOBS

KU LEUVEN

THE LOUVAIN CENTRE FOR EASTERN AND ORIENTAL
CHRISTIANITY (LOCEOC)

ABSTRACT

Though Dionysius Bar Šalībī (d. 1171) wrote his Disputation Against the Arabs during the so-called 'Syriac Renaissance' (c. 1026-1318), a period characterized by an increased Christian awareness of Islamic literary culture, to date no sustained appeal has been made for a direct use of Islamic sources in composing this work. This situation seems largely influenced by Alphonse Mingana who categorically rejected Bar Šalībī's knowledge of Islamic literature, particularly the Arabic Qurʾān. This article proposes to take a fresh look at the potential traces of Islamic sources the work displays. Such a reading reveals traces of at least five other Islamic literary genres besides the Qurʾānic excerpts for which the work is well known: Muḥammad's biography (sīra), heresiography, exegesis (tafsīr), prophetic traditions (ḥadīth), and the so-called 'stories of the prophets' (qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'). To prepare the way for a closer assessment of Bar Šalībī's Islamic sources, the aim of this paper is to survey the various allusions to and quotations of the material

reminiscent of these five additional literary genres, and to reflect on their significance with regards to Bar Ṣalībī's interculturality.

Though the earliest interactions between Syriac Christians and Muslims within the nascent Islamic empire may have been characterized by more hybridity and ill-defined borders than was once suspected,¹ the religious borderlines soon became increasingly delineated. An activity particularly instrumental to this development was the production of apologetic/polemic texts on both sides clearly manifesting the depths of the Christian-Muslim theological divide. Though the earliest examples of such works on the Christian side were still composed in Syriac, such as *The Disputation between Patriarch John and an Emir*, *The Disputation between a Monk of Bēt Ḥalē and a Muslim*, and *The Disputation between Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī*, from the early 'Abbāsid period onwards the use of Syriac as the primary literary language of theological discourse and debate gradually declined in favor of the official language of the Caliphate, Arabic.² In the period of the so-called 'Syriac

* This article presents some intermediary results of my current PhD project on the apologetic theology and sources of Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī's *Disputation Against the Arabs*, particularly his use of the Qur'ān and other Islamic texts. I thank the FWO for generously supporting my research. I also wish to thank James E. Walters for his patience with me and for checking my English.

¹ Thus the thesis of Michael P. Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christianity and the Early Muslim World* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

² For overviews of the Syriac apologetic texts in response to Islam, see Sidney H. Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: From Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)," in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien 4, ed. B. Lewis and F. Niewöhner (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992), 251-273; id., *Syriac Writers on Muslims and the Religious Challenge of Islam* (Kottayam: SEERI, 1995); Barbara Roggema, "Pour une lecture des dialogues islamo-chrétiens en syriaque à la lumière des controverses internes à l'islam," in *Les controverses religieuses en syriaque*, Études syriaques 13, ed. F. Ruani (Paris: Geuthner, 2016), 261-294. For early Muslim polemics against Christianity, see e.g. David Thomas,

Renaissance' (c. 1026-1318), however, one more Syriac work specifically devoted to refuting Islam would appear. Of all Syriac refutation texts, this one perhaps most sharply draws the lines between the truth of Christianity and the falsehood of Islam: *The Disputation Against the Arabs* (ōru'utō luqbal 'amō d-Arābōyē) composed by Dionysius Bar Šalībī (d. 1171), the West Syrian Metropolitan of Amīd (present-day Diyarbakir).³

Part of a larger encyclopedic work that also includes a theological compendium and disputations against the Jews, Nestorians, Chalcedonians, and Armenians, *Against the Arabs* is a quite significant hallmark in the history of Christian-Muslim relations.⁴ It is not only the latest disputation against Islam to

"Early Muslim Responses to Christianity," in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq*, The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 1, ed. D. Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 231-254.

³ A critical edition based on five manuscripts together with an English translation was published in 2005 by Joseph Amar, *Dionysius Bar Šalībī: A Reponse to the Arabs*, CSCO 614-615 (Leuven: Peeters, 2005). I have checked Amar's edition against the oldest manuscript from the year 1207, *Ms. Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate 160* (ff. 245a-278b). Amar's translation is the basis for the citations occurring in this paper, but I regularly applied changes were deemed necessary. For Bar Šalībī's bio-bibliography, see Stephan D. Ryan, *Dionysius bar Salibi's Factual and Spiritual Commentary on Psalms 73-82*, *Cahiers de revue biblique* 57 (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 2004), p. 1-14. On the period of the 'Syriac Renaissance', see Herman Teule, "The Syriac Renaissance," in *The Syriac Renaissance*, Eastern Christian Studies 9, ed. H. Teule *et al.* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 1-30. Other writers of this period engaged Islam as well in their theological writings, but none of them is credited for having composed a separate work in response to Islam. Some studies on these author's apologetics are Herman Teule, "Jacob bar Šakkō, the Book of Treasures and the Syrian Renaissance," in *Eastern Crossroads. Essays on Medieval Christian Legacy*, Gorgias Eastern Christianity Studies 1, ed. J.-P. Monferrer-Sala (Piscataway, NJ: Georgias Press, 2007), 143-154; Salam Rassi, *Justifying Christianity in the Islamic Middle Ages: The Apologetic Theology of 'Abdišo' bar Brīkhā (d. 1318)* (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2015); Bert Jacobs, "Unveiling Christ in the Islamicate World: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Prophetology as a Model for Christian Apologetics in Gregory Bar 'Ebrōyō's Treatise on the Incarnation," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 6/1&2 (2018), 187-216.

⁴ See my PhD dissertation for a discussion of the larger literary context. On the content and significance of the *Disputation Against the Arabs*, see also

be composed in Syriac, but also the lengthiest and most comprehensive work of its kind, covering all the major issues of Christian-Muslim controversy in thirty chapters divided over three *mimrē* or tracts. The primary topics of dispute, the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, are most prominently present, though various secondary themes have their place as well. *Mimrō* I (chs. 1-8) is principally devoted to refuting Muslim objections against Trinitarian doctrine, but also has an introductory chapter on the origins and teachings of Islam, and one on the divisions in the early Muslim community. The doctrine of the Incarnation is the central theme of *mimrō* II (chs. 9-24), but several chapters also discuss Muḥammad's prophetic status, the legitimacy of Christian spiritual practices, the scriptural integrity of the Bible and the Qur'ān, and the proper conception of Paradise.

In these first two *mimrē*, Bar Ṣalībī relies on four types of arguments to uphold the veracity of Christianity. Besides the usual use of arguments from 'nature and scripture', he also presents testimonies from the pagan sages,⁵ and more importantly, arguments from the Qur'ān, which is cited in a Syriac translation. Conforming to a widespread Christian approach to the Qur'ān, his quotes serve either to demonstrate the Qur'ān's flawed character or conversely, to find support in it for Christian teachings.⁶ This reading of the Qur'ān is fully

the overviews of Syriac apologetic texts in nr. 2, as well as Sidney H. Griffith, "Dionysius bar Ṣalībī on the Muslims," in *IV Symposium Syriacum: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 229, ed. H. Drijvers *et al.* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), p. 353-365; Herman Teule, "Dionysius Bar Ṣalibi," *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 665-70, p. 667-70.

⁵ Bar Ṣalībī provides two such testimony lists: in chapter 8 concerning the Trinity, and in chapter 19 for the Incarnation. Only the latter list was studied in Sebastian P. Brock, "A Syriac Collection of Prophecies of the Pagan Philosophers," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 14 (1983): 203-246; id., "Some Syriac Excerpts from Greek Collections of Pagan Prophecies," *Vigilae Christianae* 38 (1984): 77-90.

⁶ On early Christian approaches to the Qur'ān, see Mark Beaumont, "Early Christian Interpretation of the Qur'ān," *Transformation* 22/4 (2005):

developed in *mimrō* III (chs. 25-30), undoubtedly the most original part of the work. In these final six chapters, Bar Ṣalībī divides the pages into two sections: one containing excerpts from the Qurʾān and the other section providing his commentary, i.e. his apologetic and polemic interpretations of the cited material. The themes that are discussed in the six chapters are revelation and creation (25), Adam (26), Noah (27), the Patriarchs (28), Mary and Jesus (29), and concludes with a chapter clustering Qurʾānic verses on a wide range of topics (30).

THE ISSUE OF THE SOURCES

Like other writers of the Syriac Renaissance, Bar Ṣalībī's favored method of composition, as displayed in *Against the Arabs*, is to compile previous works and combine, edit, and shape them to his own purposes. The identification of his sources and the assessment of how he makes uses of them, however, is still largely uncharted territory. That he principally draws, as might be expected, on Syriac and Christian Arabic sources has recently received some initial attention.⁷ However, whether he also made use of Islamic sources, a marked trait of

195-203; Sidney H. Griffith, "The Qurʾān in Arab Christian Texts; the Development of an Apologetical Argument: Abū Qurrah in the *Maǧlis* of al-Maʾmūn," *Parole de l'Orient* 24 (1999): 203-233; id., "Christians and the Arabic Qurʾān: Proof-texting, Polemics, and Intertwined Scriptures," *Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 2 (2014): 243-266; Clare E. Wilde, *Approaches to the Qurʾān in Early Christian Arabic Texts* (750CE-1258 CE) (Palo Alto, California: Academica Press, 2014).

⁷ See Martin Heimgartner, *Timotheos I., Ostsyrischer Patriarch: Disputation mit dem Kalifen Al-Mahdī*, CSCO 631-2 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), tr., p. xxvii (nr. 105); Shabo Talay, "Aus dem polemischen Genre des Syrischen: Die luqbal-Schriften von Bar Ṣalībī und Bar Šūšan," in *Orientalia Christiana, Festschrift für Hubert Kaufhold zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. P. Bruns and H. O. Luthe (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 511-521, p. 517-8. On Bar Ṣalībī's use of the now lost *Chronicle* of Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē (d. 845) in the opening chapter of the *Disputation*, see Bert Jacobs, "Tentative Reconstruction of Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē's Account of the Rise of Islam through Three Dependant Texts," forthcoming.

Syriac Christian writers during his period,⁸ remains completely elusive to date. Despite the fact that several recent studies have called attention to the originality of Bar Ṣalībī's knowledge of Islamic history and the Qur'ān, little to no appeals for a direct reliance on Arabic Islamic sources have been made so far.

This state of affairs appears to be largely indebted to the first modern scholar to have dealt with the text, Alphonse Mingana (1878-1937), who in 1925 not only rejected Bar Ṣalībī's knowledge of the Arabic Qur'ān, but also of Islamic literature altogether. Basing his argument solely on *mimrō* III, Mingana was arguing for Bar Ṣalībī's reliance on a late seventh or early eighth-century Syriac translation of a pre-standardized recension of the Qur'ān, or as he called it, "an ancient Syriac translation of the Qur'ān [sic] exhibiting new verses and variants."⁹ It was in the context of postulating a dependence on such a translation that Mingana provided several arguments for why Bar Ṣalībī could not himself have translated the Qur'ānic excerpts from the Arabic. His boldest move occurs at the very end of the paper, where he argues that Bar Ṣalībī simply was unqualified for the task, due to his seemingly "extremely meagre" knowledge of Islamic works.¹⁰

Though Mingana's claim of having unearthed evidence of a non-canonical Qur'ān was soon rejected by prominent contemporary Qur'ānic scholars such as Gotthelf Bergsträßer,

⁸ See Teule, "The Syriac Renaissance," p. 23-8.

⁹ Alphonse Mingana, "An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Qur'an Exhibiting New Verses and Variants," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 9/1 (1925): 188-235; reprinted with minimal corrections and additions in Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1925, 3-50. The current paper cites from Mingana's final version. Recently, Mingana's study has been reprinted in a volume seeking to challenge the Qur'ān's traditional status in Islam, *Which Koran?: Variants, Manuscripts, Linguistics*, ed. Ibn Warraq (Amherst, Prometheus Books, 2008; 2011). Mingana's study and translation of the quotation section of *mimrō* III was based on a single manuscript, *Mingana Syriac* 89 (1715 AD). After completion of his study, he was able to compare this manuscript with *Harvard Syriac* 91 (1898 AD), the results of which he described in a supplementary note appended to the paper.

¹⁰ Mingana, "An Ancient Syriac Translation," p. 29-30.

Theodore Nöldeke, and Arthur Jeffery, and largely ignored by Islamicists ever since, to date no conclusive alternative account for the provenance of the Qurʾānic translations in Bar Ṣalībī's work has been advanced.¹¹ Yet one interesting hypothesis worthy of further exploration has already been put forth a while ago by Sidney Griffith, who suggested that Bar Ṣalībī himself "made the translations to suit his own apologetic/polemic purposes, and that the variants are to be explained as distortions, rather than as evidence of 'an ancient Syriac translation'."¹² Before reexamining Bar Ṣalībī's potential translation work, however, it may be wise to first clarify the more fundamental issue of his interculturality, as someone with no affinity whatsoever with Islamic literary culture is indeed not very likely to be a Qurʾānic translator.

As we shall see, Mingana's 'extremely' low estimation of Bar Ṣalībī's interculturality was not only founded on a flawed manuscript basis, but a fresh reading of the work brings to light traces of at least five other Islamic literary genres in addition to the Qurʾān. Some of these materials had been noted by Mingana and were (mistakenly) interpreted as "new verses and variants [from the Qurʾān]," other materials he missed due to his neglect of both *mimrē* I-II and the commentary section of *mimrō* III.¹³ For the sake of convenience, these materials will be surveyed according to their characteristic literary genres, though one has to bear in mind that none of the materials under review are limited to works of one particular genre alone.

¹¹ Gotthelf Bergsträßer, "Die Geschichte des Qurāntexts," in T. Nöldeke, F. Schwally, G. Bergsträßer, and O. Pretzl, *Geschichte des Qurāns*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1909, 1919, 1938), Vol. 3, p. 100-2. For Nöldeke's brief epistolary response from April 13, 1925, see *ibid.*, p. 102 (nr. 1). Bergsträßer's view that the variants presented by Mingana are unrelated to the non-canonical variants known from Muslim sources was endorsed by Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān: The Old Codices* (Leiden: Brill, 1937), p. 14-15 (nr 1).

¹² Griffith, *Syriac Writers on Muslims*, p. 25.

¹³ See my PhD for a full assessment of Mingana's proposals.

CLASSIFICATION OF ISLAMIC MATERIAL BY LITERARY GENRE

Sīra

Although not the first trace of Muslim literature in the work, we begin our survey with a passage in the commentary section of chapter 25 dealing with works on Muḥammad's life, since the first half of it was the sole basis for Mingana's claim that Bar Ṣalīb's knowledge of Islamic works was "extremely meagre." According to Mingana's reading of the passage, Bar Ṣalīb would have thought that Muslims have *only* two books in addition to the Qur'ān, the *Maghāẓī* and the *Mukbtāra*.¹⁴ If that were what he actually believed, one could indeed rightly criticize him for being in a complete state of ignorance of the ambient Muslim culture. What Mingana fatally overlooked, however, is that the single manuscript he is relying on displays a large gap in the passage under consideration.¹⁵ This lacuna appears to be of an early date, since it is also present in all the manuscripts consulted by Amar.¹⁶ Fortunately, the oldest manuscript, *Ms. Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate* 160 from the year 1207 AD, fills in the missing relative clause qualifying Bar Ṣalīb's statement (see italics):

¹⁴ Mingana, "An Ancient Syriac Translation," p. 29-30: "[...] his own knowledge of Muslim religious and historical books seems to have been extremely meagre. [...] Of the innumerable Muslim works of *ḥadīth* and history, preceding the twelfth century, the author had apparently heard only of the *Maghāẓī* and the *Mukbtāra* (!), and even these he had not seen and read; he was aware of their existence only through hearsay: 'the Muslims say that they have ...' A man of this calibre would hardly be able to translate the Qur'ān [sic] or to use the early works of tradition in a controversial work between Christians and Muslims." (Mingana's italics)

¹⁵ *Ms. Mingana Syriac* 89, f. 76a. This manuscript is nowadays easily consultable online, see http://vmr.bham.ac.uk/Collections/Mingana/Syriac_89.

¹⁶ Bar Ṣalīb, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 111; tr. 103. Amar's manuscripts include *Harvard Syriac* 91, the manuscript which Mingana later used for comparison in his supplementary notes.

The Muslims say that they have two other books in addition to the Qurʾān *by which the lifespan of Muḥammad is known* (*da-b-hūn metīda yubōlō d-Mwḥmd*): the *Maghāzī* (ܡܓܗܙܝ), which records the actions of Muḥammad in battle, and (also) at the end of the book which they call the *Mukhtāra* (ܡܟܬܪܐ), they report on the lifespan (*yubōleh*) of Muḥammad.¹⁷

Thus, the mentioned “two other books” do not at all refer to Muslim literature in general, as Mingana understood it, but only to *particular* works narrating the life of Muḥammad. Apparently, Bar Ṣalībī acquired this knowledge from Muslim informants, presumably orally or through a writing. As for the first work referred to, there are numerous Islamic writings entitled *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* (*Book of Expeditions*) reporting on Muḥammad’s raids and military campaigns during the Medinan period, such as those of Ibn Ishāq (d. c. 770) and al-Wāqidi (d. 823), to name only two important writers.¹⁸ The writing that answers to the name *Mukhtāra* is more doubtful. One possibility is that it refers to a *sīra* work that has *al-mukhtār*, ‘the chosen one’, in its title, such as for instance al-Baghawī’s (d. 1117) *Kitāb al-Anwār fī shamāʾil al-Nabī al-Mukhtār* (*Book of Elucidations on the Good Qualities of the Chosen Prophet*).

Although Bar Ṣalībī only refers to *sīra* works the Muslims say they have in their possession, without claiming any direct affinity with them, he does appear to be familiar with the basic Muslim narrative of Muḥammad’s early years as seen from the account that follows immediately thereafter, which was completely ignored by Mingana:

¹⁷ Ms. *Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate* 160, f. 271a-b. Cf. Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 111, tr. p. 103-4. Also the word *yubōleh* occurring at the end of this passage appears to be a better reading than *yūqneh*, ‘his image’, the reading attested in the manuscripts consulted by Amar.

¹⁸ See the works surveyed by F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 237-56, 275-302; and more generally M. Hinds, “Al-Maghāzī,” *EF* 5 (1986): 1161-6.

They also call him Aḥmad (cf. Q 61:6), as if it is the same as Muḥammad, son of ‘Abdallāh, son of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib. When his father died, his uncle Abū Ṭālib raised him, and his foster mother was called Ḥalīma. When he was forty years old, he went around saying that two angels had come, tied up his stomach, washed his heart, and restored it to his body. He also saw along the road a tree and a rock that greeted him. One day he saw an angel who tried to strangle him three times, saying to him: ‘Recite in the name of your Lord, who made man from clay. Recite by your honorable Lord, who instructed with the pen that wrote’ (Q 96:1-4).¹⁹

Very similar descriptions of Muḥammad’s genealogy, his upbringing as an orphan, the miraculous events prefiguring his prophetic mission, and the first revelation said to be brought to him by the angel Gabriel at mount Ḥirā’, are readily found in the *sīra* literature.²⁰ The Islamic character of this account is further emphasized by the fact that a very different, much more polemic portrayal of Muḥammad’s career, drawn from the *Chronicle* of Dionysius of Tell-Mahrē (d. 845), was included in Bar Ṣalībī’s opening chapter.²¹

¹⁹ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 111, tr. p. 103-4. Amar misread several proper names at the beginning of this passage. The oldest manuscript has an additional sentence which adds a somewhat polemical twist to the narrative: “Muḥammad and his foster mother put him [the angel] down, as he [the angel] was about to choke him with the pen that wrote”, see *Ms. Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate* 160, f. 271b.

²⁰ See e.g. Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muḥammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishāq’s Sīrat rasūl Allāh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 69-72 (on his birth, foster mother, and the washing of his heart by two men in white when he was an infant); p. 79 (Abū Ṭālib becomes Muḥammad’s guardian after the death of his grandfather); p. 104-106 (on the stones and trees greeting him and the first revelation he received, i.e. Q 96:1-5). Note the slight discrepancy that Abū Ṭālib became Muḥammad’s guardian after the death of his grandfather ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, not after the death of his father, as Bar Ṣalībī wrote.

²¹ See n. 7 for my forthcoming study on this chapter.

Heresiography

The earliest trace of Islamic literature in the work is found as early as chapter two, which discusses the divisions that arose in the early Muslim community. Bar Ṣalībī writes that “approximately 73 heresies (*heresēs*)” belonging to four principal sects sprang up among Muḥammad’s people after his death. These four ‘mother’ sects call themselves *al-Shi‘a*, *al-Khawārij*, *al-Mu‘aẓẓila*, and *al-Sunna*, but their opponents call them respectively *al-Rawāfiḍ*, *al-Ḥarūriyya*, *al-Qadariyya*, and *al-Murji‘a*. For all of these Arabic appellations Bar Ṣalībī also provides Syriac equivalents.²² This terminological overview then proceeds with a sketch of the enmity and discord among them concerning the issues of rightful leadership and divine providence. During this discussion, Bar Ṣalībī also quotes some Qur’ānic verses and *ḥadīth* said to be used against one another by these four sects.²³

The originality of this account among Syriac Christian texts on Islam has been pointed out by scholars as Sidney Griffith, Herman Teule, and Barbara Roggema.²⁴ What is yet to be explored, however, are the remarkable parallels with works of Islamic heresiography, such as those written by al-Nawbakhtī (d. 912), al-Ash‘arī (d. 936), al-Malaṭī (d. 987), al-Baghdādī (d. 1037), and al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153), to name only some of the most prominent. Following explicitly or implicitly a *ḥadīth* about the division of the *umma* into 72 or 73 sects, all the named authors classify, just as Bar Ṣalībī did, the various sects of Islam under the four headings of *Shi‘a*, *Khawārij*, *Mu‘aẓẓila*, and *Murji‘a*, and discuss their internal disputes.²⁵ At least one

²² See Talay, “Aus dem polemischen Genre,” p. 516-7.

²³ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 5-8, tr. p. 2-9. In his Arabic Chronicle, Bar ‘Ebrōyō includes a similar but more elaborate account of early Islamic schisms, undoubtedly borrowed from (a) Muslim source(s), see Bar ‘Ebrōyō, *Ta’rikh mukhtaṣar al-duwal*, ed. Ṣalhānī, p. 164-7.

²⁴ See the works cited in nr. 2 and 4.

²⁵ Henri Laoust, “La classification des sectes dans le *Farq* d’al-Baghdādī,” *Revue des Études Islamiques* 29 (1961): 19-59; reprinted in *Pluralismes dans l’islam* (Paris, 1983), 135-75; id. “La classification des sectes

major scholar of Islamic heresiography has recently drawn attention to the apparent influence of this literature on Bar Ṣalībī's presentation of the sects of Islam.²⁶

According to al-Shahrastānī, the divisions between Muslims boil down to four fundamental issues: (1) the divine attributes (*ṣifāt Allāh*); (2) faith and eschatology; (3) divine determinism (*qadar*); and (4) the issue of rightful leadership (*imāma*).²⁷ In Bar Ṣalībī's account, however, only the final two topics appear to be of interest and most of all the issue of divine determinism. He goes to some lengths to describe the four sects' opinion on whether good and evil come from God or from human freedom. This information has a distinct purpose in his discourse, as it allows him to thereafter refute Sunnī determinism and reaffirm the proper Christian understanding of divine providence and human free will. It is not surprising to encounter this theme this early in the work. In the aftermath of the shocking Zangid destruction of the 'blessed city' of Edessa in 1144 and 1146, making sense of divine providence was a very heavily debated topic within the West Syrian community, a debate in which Bar Ṣalībī played a prominent role, although still only a deacon at the time.²⁸

dans l'hérésiographie ash'arite," *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb*, ed. G. Makdisi (Leiden 1965), 377-86.; id., "L'hérésiographie musulmane sous les Abbassides," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 38 (1967), 157-178; Dominique Sourdel, "Les classification des sects islamiques dans le *Kitāb al-Milal* d'al-Šahrastānī," *Studia Islamica* 31 (1970): 239-247; Claude Gilliot, "Islam, 'sectes' et groupes d'opposition politico-religieux (VIIe-XIIe siècles)," *Rives nord-méditerranéennes* 10 (2002): 1-13.

²⁶ Josef van Ess, *Der Eine und das Andere. Beobachtungen an islamischen haresiographischen Texten*, 2 vols (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2011), Vol. 1., p. 77.

²⁷ Laoust, "L'hérésiographie musulmane sous les Abbassides," p. 171.

²⁸ Teule, "Dionysius Bar Ṣalibi," p. 665. The *Disputation* as a whole may even be written in response to the Muslim destruction of Edessa. After having upheld the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation to his own satisfaction, Bar Ṣalībī somewhat triumphantly writes that, through his efforts, "the proclamation of Christianity has achieved victory over the people that has overpowered us because of our sins (*ʿamō d-men ʿelat ḥṭobayn*

Tafsīr

In the commentary section of *mimrō* III, Bar Šalībī twice refers to opinions of Qurʾānic commentators, whom he calls *mḡashqōnē*. His first reference to Islamic exegetical literature is on the subject of the odd so-called ‘disconnected letters’ (*al-ḥurūf al-muqattaʿa*) occurring at the beginning of the second sūra: “Alif Lam Mim. That is the Book, wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the godfearing” (Q 2 :1-2, Arberry). In commenting on these verses, Bar Šalībī writes:

(The Qurʾān reads here) ‘that’ (*haw*) book and not ‘this’ (*hōnō*) book.²⁹ What sort of book is this? Their exegetes (*mḡashqōnē dālḥūn*) interpret these letters in many different ways. Some of them say that these letters are the numbers of the years of Muḥammad[’s community]³⁰. And there are those who interpret them according to the name of their God. Therefore he wrote and added after the letters, saying: ‘That is the great tablet (*lawḥō rabtō*) which is in heaven, raised up before the eyes of the angel Michael’, which they call in Arabic (*b-Ṭayyōyōʾil*), the ‘Preserved Tablet’ ([*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*, ٱلْوَحْدُ ٱلْمَحْفُوظ]).³¹

Muslim exegetical literature reports a wide range of possible interpretations for the ‘disconnected letters’ appearing at the beginning of some 29 sūras.³² Within this large spectrum of

et ʿašan ʿayn”). This important allusion to the fall of Edessa was mistranslated by Amar, see Bar Šalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 81, tr. p. 74.

²⁹ Bar Šalībī may allude here to the fact that although Muslim exegetes usually interpret *dhālika l-kitāb* (Q 2:2) to mean ‘this book’, i.e. the Qurʾān, it literally says ‘that book’. This sentence was not included in Amar’s translation, though it is present in his edition.

³⁰ My emendation.

³¹ Bar Šalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 112, tr. p. 104.

³² On the large spectrum of interpretations within Sunnī *tafsīr*, see Martin Nguyen, “Exegesis of the *ḥurūf al-muqattaʿa*: Polyvalency in Sunnī Traditions of Qurʾānic Interpretation,” *Journal of Qurʾānic Studies* 14/2 (2012): 1-28.

Q 40:7. Although in the citation provided by Bar Ṣalībī, “They bear the Throne of your Lord above them *on the eighth day* (*b-yawmō tmīnōyō*),”³⁷ the reference to the amount of angels was obscured possibly as a result of misunderstanding the elliptic ending of the Arabic “they will bear the Throne of your Lord above them *on that Day, eight [of them]* (*yawma’idh thamāniya*),” Bar Ṣalībī clearly is aware of Muslim interpretations of this verse: “Their exegetes say that four angels bear the Throne of God, but then they add (*awsefū*) another four which makes eight. Perhaps, the first four grew tired?”³⁸ In this piece of rhetoric, Bar Ṣalībī appears to ridicule Muslim exegetes who acknowledge four Throne bearers but later double their number. To harmonize the fact that Q 69:17 mentions eight angels while some *ḥadīth* report only four, some exegetes indeed have taken the position that the Throne is currently carried by four angels, but on the Day of Resurrection by eight.³⁹ A specific *ḥadīth* is often adduced in support of this view: “Four carry Him today, eight (will carry God) on the Day of Resurrection.”⁴⁰

The reason why Bar Ṣalībī found such a doubling of angels absurd is obviously determined by the Biblical lens through which he reads the Qur’ān. As such, he certainly knew that in Ezekiel’s vision only four creatures carry the divine Throne (Ezek 1). He thus indirectly appears to be criticizing Muslim exegetes, and by extension the Qur’ān, for contradicting the Bible, a polemic made repeatedly in the *Disputation*.

³⁷ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. 110, tr. p. 103.

³⁸ Ms. *Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate* 160, f. 272b. The manuscripts consulted by Amar read ‘to add’ in the singular (*awsef*) which is taken to mean that it is the Qur’ān that adds four angels, see Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. 113, tr. p. 106. Mingana derived a rather bizarre argument against Bar Ṣalībī’s translatorship from this comment, see Mingana, “An Ancient Syriac Translation,” p. 6-7.

³⁹ Stephen R. Burge, *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s al-Ḥabā’ik fī akhbār al-malā’ik*, Culture and Civilization in the Middle East 31 (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), p. 43-4.

⁴⁰ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, ed. Cairo, p. 229; Burge, *Angels in Islam*, p. 146.

Ḥadīth

Three direct citations of prophetic sayings of Muḥammad recorded in the major Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections occur among the Qur'ānic excerpts in *mimrō* III. Among the verses dealing with creation in chapter 25, Bar Ṣalībī quotes a well-known *ḥadīth* transmitted in various forms about what God created first:

Disputation, XXV

And when he [i.e. Muḥammad] wished to speak of creation, he said: 'First He created the pen of the scribe (*qnaḡō d-sōfrō*). He said to the pen: 'Walk and write!' But the pen answered: 'What should I write?'. He said: 'Write concerning what will happen until the end'.⁴¹

Sunan Abū Dāwūd

[...] I heard the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) say: 'The first thing God created was the pen (*al-qalam*)'. He said to it: 'Write!' It asked: 'What should I write, my Lord?' He said: 'Write what was decreed about everything until the Last Hour' [...].⁴²

The reason why Bar Ṣalībī found this saying important enough to include is seen from his commentary, in which he makes the error of Muḥammad's teaching apparent by contrasting it with the Biblical account of creation:

Moses wrote: 'In the beginning, God created heaven and earth' (Gen 1:1). He said this before [writing that] (God) created the *qalam*, that is, the pen (*qnaḡō*) of the scribe! And how is God in need of writing, unless he fears to forget something?!⁴³

On another occasion, in chapter 30, Bar Ṣalībī introduces a saying of Muḥammad concerning his community with the words 'Muḥammad said':

⁴¹ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 110, tr. p. 102.

⁴² *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, ed. *Dār al-salām*, Vol. 5, book 42, 4700, p. 213 (translation slightly adapted). For other versions, see 'creation' in A. J. Wensinck, *A Handbook of Early Mohammadan Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1927), p. 49.

⁴³ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 113, tr. p. 105. Note Bar Ṣalībī's use of the Arabic term for pen, *qalam*.

Disputation, XXX

Muḥammad said: 'My community is among the nations as a white spot on a black ox (*umtō dily baynōt 'amme ak oṭō ḥwōrtō b-tawrō ukōmō*)'.⁴⁴

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī

[...] (Muḥammad) said: 'My community is among the nations as a white hair on a black ox (*inna ummati fī l-umam k-al-sha'ara al-bayḍā' fī l-thawr al-aswad*)'.⁴⁵

Muḥammad's apparent admittance of the insignificant position of his community apparently was of value to Bar Ṣalīb's polemics, for this is what one reads in his commentary: "Your own prophet testifies that (Muslims) are few in the world. Christians, however, are numerous and this is why they are strong."⁴⁶

With the words "Prayer of the *Tayyōyē*," Bar Ṣalīb cites one final *ḥadīth* in chapter 30. This prayer is the well-known 'Abrahamic prayer' (*al-ṣalāt al-Ibrāhīmīyya*) reported in various *ḥadīth* collections, which serves as the closing supplication of the five-daily Muslim prayer:

Disputation, XXX

Prayer of the Muslims: 'O God, pray (*ṣalō*) for Muḥammad and the sons of his people. And bless (*barek*) Muḥammad and the sons of his people as you prayed for (*ṣlayt*), blessed (*barekt*), and had mercy (*w-ḥōnt*) on Abraham and the sons of his people. For he [i.e. Muḥammad] is praiseworthy and exalted (*mshabḥō w-a-mraymō*)'.⁴⁷

Sunan Abū Dawūd

[...] So he [i.e. Muḥammad] said: 'O God, send your *ṣalāt* (*ṣallī*) upon Muhammad, and the family of Muhammad, as you have sent your *ṣalāt* (*ṣallayta*) upon Abraham. And send your blessings (*bārik*) upon Muhammad, and the family of Muhammad, as you have sent your blessings (*bārakta*) upon the family of Abraham.

⁴⁴ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 128, tr. p. 122.

⁴⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. *Dār al-salām*, Vol. 8, book 81, 6529, p. 287 (translation slightly adapted).

⁴⁶ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 135, tr. p. 130.

⁴⁷ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 132, tr. p. 127. Mingana was unable to identify this passage, perhaps because he read '*ameh*, 'his people' as '*ambu*, Arabic for 'his paternal uncle', see Mingana, "An Ancient Syriac Translation," p. 45 (nr. 3).

Indeed, you are the praiseworthy
(*ḥamid*), the glorious (*majid*).⁴⁸

Though Bar Ṣalībī provides no comment for this quotation, his motive for including it most likely is linked to an earlier debate on the meaning of Christ's prayer and the Muslim's prayer for Muḥammad, in which Bar Ṣalībī argued that "because you pray for your prophet, you seem to be better than he is since you petition God to forgive him his wrongdoing".⁴⁹ This polemic background may also explain (assuming that Bar Ṣalībī is the translator at work) why the Arabic verb *ṣallā*, which can mean 'to pray' or 'to bless' (usually the latter in this context) is rendered by its Syriac cognate having only the meaning 'to pray'. Even more pertinent, this background could also provide an explanation for the distorted concluding doxology which addresses the prayer not to God, but to Muḥammad.

In addition to these three direct quotations of prophetic *ḥadīth*, Bar Ṣalībī also twice alludes to Muslim traditions on the collection of the Qur'ān. In chapter 23, in response to the Muslim critique that the Gospels are unreliable since they were written by the apostles and not by Christ himself, Bar Ṣalībī retorts by arguing that such a critique applies as well to the Qur'ān, which was not written down by Muḥammad himself, but was collected for the first time into a single codex by his cousin 'Alī ibn Abū Ṭālib:

Against them we say: Consider that when Muḥammad died, the Qur'ān was neither written down. So his cousin 'Alī ibn Abū Ṭālib – others of them say: 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān – swore that he would not put on the cloak (*marṭūtō*) until their scripture was collected and its parts joined together. For they were scattered here and there among various individuals during the life of Muḥammad. So 'Alī collected it and made it into

⁴⁸ *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, ed. Dār al-salām, Vol. 1, book 177/8, 976, p. 571-2 (translation slightly adapted).

⁴⁹ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 72, tr. p. 65.

a single codex (*ḱtōbō*), and he called it ‘Qur’ān’ because he joined, that is, bound together (*aqrana awḱāt dabaq*) (the fragments). Therefore ‘Qur’ān’ means: ‘volume and collection of disparate fragments’.⁵⁰

Although the standard Muslim account ascribes the first collection of the Qur’ān to the initiative of Caliph Abū Bakr, several traditions recorded in both Sunnī and Shī‘ī sources indeed contain reports that it was ‘Alī who first collected the Qur’ān after Muḥammad’s death. Interestingly enough, such reports also mention ‘Alī’s act of swearing not to put on the cloak, that is, not to leave the house, until the Qur’ān was fully collected. For instance:

‘Abd Khayr reported from ‘Alī that when he saw people in despair and frustration at the death of the Prophet, he swore that he would not wear his cloak on his back until he had collected the Qur’ān. Then he sat in his house and collected the Qur’ān. So it was the first *muṣḥaf* in which the Qur’ān had been collected – collected from his heart and this [*muṣḥaf*] is with the descendants of Ja‘far.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 98, tr p. 90-1. Amar misread the part on the swearing, reading it as though ‘Alī swore that ‘Uthmān would not put on the cloak. Note that Bar Ṣalībī implies that the term ‘Qur’ān’ is etymologically derived from the Arabic verb *aqrana*, ‘to join together, to combine’, from the root *q-r-n*, rather than from the root *q-r-ʿ*, ‘to read, to recite’, which is the standard explanation. Though Bar Ṣalībī’s take on it is manifestly polemical, this alternative etymology is not as “fanciful” as Amar suggested, for the root *q-r-n* is discussed by Arab lexicographers among the possible meaning of ‘Qur’ān’, see Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même: Vocabulaire et argumentation du discours coranique autoréférentiel* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 41-3.

⁵¹ Quoted in Shehzad Saleem, *Collection of the Qur’ān: A Critical and Historical Study of Al-Farābī’s View* (PhD diss., University of Wales Lampeter, 2010), p. 239. For the narratives of ‘Alī’s collection of the Qur’ān, see *ibid.*, p. 236-279; Seyfeddin Kara, “The Suppression of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib’s Codex: Study of the Traditions on the Earliest Copy of the Qur’ān,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 75/2 (2016): 267-289.

Bar Ṣalībī also remarks that Muslims differ on who collected the Qurʾān for the first time: was it ʿAlī ibn Abū Ṭālib, or as “others of them say” ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān? This ambiguity is also reflected in Islamic sources, although there not only a difference is to be noted on whether the first collection of the Qurʾān was made by ʿAlī or ʿUthmān, but “each of the first four caliphs is reported to have been the first person to collect the Qurʾān [sic].”⁵²

According to the most widespread Sunnī account, the final consonantal text was established during the reign of Caliph ʿUthmān who was confronted with the need of uniting the Muslim community around one unified, official text. The Caliph obtained the Qurʾānic collection commissioned by Abū Bakr now in the possession of Ḥafṣa, and appointed a commission to copy it into several volumes which then were sent to the main cities of the empire. Due to ʿUthmān’s initiative in the establishment of an official, unified text, it came to be called *al-muṣḥaf al-ʿUthmānī*, ‘the ʿUthmānic Codex’. Bar Ṣalībī also seems to know of this subsequent stage of the Qurʾān’s textual history. To refute the Muslim claim that the revelation of the Qurʾān is similar to that of the Law and the Gospel, Bar Ṣalībī points out that, unlike Moses’ writing of the Law and the apostles’ writing of the Gospel, Muḥammad did not write down the Qurʾān himself, but ʿUthmān did it, which is why the book is called the ʿUthmānic Codex (*ktōbō ʿUthmānī*):

As for you, from where was the scripture revealed to your prophet, although he [i.e. Muḥammad] died without writing (it)? Abū Bakr ruled after him and did not write anything down, neither did ʿUmar write the scripture. ʿUthmān collected (*kanesh*) your scripture which had been collected by your elders (*sobe*) and he made them swear to say whatever they heard from the

⁵² Welch, “Qurʾān,” *EF* 5 (1986), p. 405. See also John Burton, *The Collection of the Qurʾān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 138-159.

prophet. He wrote this down, and it was called ‘the ‘Uthmānic Codex’ (*ktōbō ‘Uthmānī*).⁵³

The oldest manuscript has also here preserved an additional sentence, in which reference is made to other Muslim works narrating the Qur’ān’s textual history: “The Muslims say they have two other books [in which] the story of the codices is written (*Ōmrin Ṭayyōyē d-it l-hūn trēn ktōbē ḥronē. Ktib sharbō da-ktōbē*).”⁵⁴

Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’

As the Qur’ān narrates the lives and deeds of the prophets before Muḥammad only in a very cursory manner, Muslim commentators soon began to reconstruct the narratives by drawing on Jewish and Christian traditions, the so-called *Isrā’īliyyāt*,⁵⁵ which led to the emergence of collections of ‘stories of the prophets’ (*Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*). These collections were included in the early sections of Muslim historiographies, or were transmitted in separate works of *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*. Though the latter works were produced from early on, it was in the eleventh century, just before Bar Ṣalībī’s lifetime, that major works were composed, such as those by Abū Ishāq al-Tha‘labī and Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallāh al-Kisā’ī. Both were very popular, comprehensive collections of traditions on the prophets, ordered chronologically from creation to the time of Jesus.⁵⁶ There are two passages in *mimrō* III that recall the often rather legendary character of the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* genre.

In the context of the Adam narratives of chapter 26, Bar Ṣalībī quotes a peculiar account of Adam’s creation according

⁵³ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 111, tr. p. 103. Note Bar Ṣalībī’s use of the *nisba* adjective *‘Uthmānī*.

⁵⁴ Ms. *Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate* 160, f. 271b.

⁵⁵ On this term, see Roberto Tottoli, “Origin and Use of the Term *Isrā’īliyyāt* in Muslim Literature,” *Arabica* 46 (1999): 193–209.

⁵⁶ On this genre in general, see Tilman Nagel, *Die Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’. Ein Beitrag zur Arabischen Literaturgeschichte* (PhD diss., University of Bonn, 1967); Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur’an and Muslim Literature*, Routledge Studies in the Qur’an (London/New York: Routledge, 2001).

to which he would have laid soulless on the earth for forty years. A very similar tradition was already reported by al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) in both his *Tafsir* and *History*:

Disputation, XXVI

Adam was formed and lay on the earth for forty years without a soul. The angels passed by him and saw him.⁵⁷

Ṭabarī, *Tafsir/Ta'rikh*

So God shaped Adam into a human being, and he remained a figure of clay for forty years, corresponding to the day of Friday. The angels passed by him and were seized with fear by what they saw, and *Iblīs* felt fear most.⁵⁸

The idea behind this waiting period appears to be that a certain time was needed for Adam's clay body to dry before God could breathe a soul into it.⁵⁹ Such a time interval is, of course, totally alien to Bar Ṣalībī's biblical frame of reference, which is exactly the point he draws out in his commentary:

Although scripture says that Adam was created on the sixth day (cf. Gn 1:26-31), this scripture says that Adam was formed and was lying without a soul in the dust of the earth for forty years!⁶⁰

In chapter 27 on Noah and the flood, Bar Ṣalībī at one point interrupts the flow of Qur'ānic verses with a lengthy report on a giant named Og, son of 'Anaq (*ʿAng/ ʿUg bar*

⁵⁷ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 115, tr. p. 108. Note that the mention of the angels' fear is absent from Bar Ṣalībī's version, possibly because it was irrelevant to the point he seeks to make.

⁵⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'nīl āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Cairo, p. 459; Franz Rosenthal, *The History of al-Tabarī, Vol. 1: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood* (Albany: Suny Press, 1989), p. 262. On the process of the creation of Adam, see Cornelia Schöck, *Adam im Islam. Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Sunna* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1993), p. 74-8. This aspect of the creation of Adam was not discussed in Kisters' study of Adamic legends in Islam, see M. J. Kister, "Ādam: A Study of Some Legends in *Tafsir* and *Ḥadīṭ* Literature," *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993): 113-74.

⁵⁹ Schöck, *Adam im Islam*, p. 75.

⁶⁰ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 116, tr. p. 109.

‘*Anaq*), said to have survived the flood and who was later killed by Moses. The purpose of this report, as his comment shows, is clearly to ridicule the silly stories given credence by Muslims.⁶¹ As the many legendary embellishments in this Og story very specifically points to a *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* work, it is worth quoting in full:

(God) did not set apart men, except Noah and those who were with him in the ark, and Og, son of ‘*Anaq*, as the readers of the scriptures (*qōryay ktōbē*) say. Og was the son of Sayhan and his mother ‘*Anaq*, and Og was a giant. As he was created by God, his stature was so great in creation that no one was able to describe it. And he was an enemy of the Muslims (*b’eldbōbō d-mashlmōnē*) and those who are like them. His mother, ‘*Anaq*, was a woman of the daughters of Adam, and, as they say, she was beautiful to behold. But the readers of the scriptures say that at his birth he was already huge, in a way that is impossible to relate. On the waist of the giant there was a belt, and he used to stretch out his hand into the sea to take hold of a big fish from the bottom of the sea and he would hold it up to the sun to roast and eat it. He lived for 3600 years. He was born in the days of Adam, and lived until (the time of) Moses who killed him.

They say that he was killed as such: The giant looked from a distance upon the Children of Israel (*bnay Īsrō’īl*) as they were praying in their camp, and determined that the circumference of the camp was about two hours away. So the giant approached a big mountain and broke off a rock as big as the circumference of the camp. He put it above his head intending to hurl it on them to kill them then and there. But immediately, God sent a common bird, a hoopoe, to show His

⁶¹ Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 119, tr. p. 112: “Observe that also this story is unbelievable, dull, and very foolish”.

power to His servant. And it took hold of a palm branch and a rock the size of the head of the giant. And when the hoopoe pierced the rock, it fell on the giant's neck who collapsed to the ground.⁶²

In the Old Testament, Og is only scantily mentioned as the Amorite king of Bashan, a last descendant of a race of giants who was defeated by Moses (cf. Nu 21:33-35; Dt 1:4; 3:11; 4:47). In early rabbinic writings, these disparate verses gave rise to legendary elaborations which later found their way to Muslim sources.⁶³ In the story itself, as cited by Bar Ṣalībī, clues are found that it was indeed taken from a Muslim source, namely the reference to “the readers of the scriptures” which is how *ahl al-kitāb*, the Muslim designation for Jews and Christians, is usually translated in the *Disputation*; the appellation of Moses' people as *bnay Isrāʾīl*, the cognate of the Qurʾānic appellation *banū Isrāʾīl*; and the fact that the giant is portrayed as “an enemy of the Muslims”.⁶⁴

Indeed, very similar narratives, including specific details are reported in popular works of *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* such as those by al-Thaʿlabī and al-Kisāʿī.⁶⁵ The enduring popularity of the story of Og and Moses is further testified by the fact that historiographical works from the Mongol and later periods

⁶² Bar Ṣalībī, *Against the Arabs*, ed. p. 118-119, tr. p. 111-2.

⁶³ B. Heller and S.M. Wasserstrom, “Üdj,” *EP* 10 (2000): 777-8. See also Admiel Kosman, “The Story of a Giant Story: The Winding Way of Og King of Bashan in the Jewish Haggadic Tradition,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 73 (2002): 157-190; Ján Pauliny, “‘Üg ibn ‘Anāq, ein sagenhafter Riese: Untersuchungen zu den islamischen Riesengeschichten,” *Craecolatina et Orientalia* 5 (1973): 249-268.

⁶⁴ Gutmann remarks that Og, who was among the earliest biblical figures depicted in Islamic art, fascinated Muslims “as he symbolized the accursed, evil infidel who is vanquished by such true believers as Moses”, see Joseph Gutmann, “More about the Giant Og in Islamic Art,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 3 (1989): 107-114, p. 111.

⁶⁵ al-Thaʿlabī, *Arāʾis al-majālis fi qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, tr. Brinner, p. 99-100, 399-403; al-Kisāʿī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, ed. Eisenberg p. 233-5, tr. Thackston, p. 251-3.

sometimes include illustrations of scenes of the narrative.⁶⁶ An early example is found in Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī's (d. 1283) *ʿAjaʿib al-Makhlūqāt wa-gharāʾib al-manjūdāt* (*Marvels of Creatures and Strange Things Existing*):

Image: *Ms. Walters 659*, f. 143b⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Joseph Gutmann and Vera B. Moreen "The Combat between Moses and Og in Muslim Miniatures," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 1 (1987): 111-21. On the important place of the story of Og in *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* manuscripts from the sixteenth century, see Naʿama Brosh and Rachel Milstein, *Biblical Stories in Islamic Painting* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1991), p. 39-40, 97-9; Rachel Milstein, Karin Rührdanz, and Barbara Schmitz, *Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* (California: Mazda Publishers, 1999), p. 131, 191.

⁶⁷ *Ms. Walters 659*, f. 143b, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Muhammad_ibn_Muhammad_Shakir_Ruzmah-%27i_Nathani_The_Demon_%27Uj_ibn_%27Unuq_Carries_a_Mountain_with_which_to_Kill_Moses_and_His_Men_-_Walters_W659143B_-_Full_Page.jpg

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Almost a century after Mingana's paper on the *Disputation Against the Arabs*, a new start was made in the present article in tracing the potential Islamic sources Bar Ṣalībī relied upon in composing the work. Mingana's swift claim that Bar Ṣalībī's knowledge of Islamic works was "extremely meagre" has proven to be 'extremely' inaccurate, not only because it rests on a flawed textual basis, but also because it combines with a highly selective reading of the text. The fact that little of the material discussed above is paralleled in other known Syriac (or Christian Arabic) texts leads one to suspect very strongly that Bar Ṣalībī was drawing directly on Islamic sources, incorporating material as he saw fit to his apologetic and polemic purposes at hand.

However, one should not fall in the opposite extreme of saying that his knowledge of Islamic sources was 'extremely rich'. Given the fact that one finds in many Islamic works material on Muḥammad's life, the sects of Islam, *tafsīr*, the *ḥadīth*, and the stories of the prophets, a limited number of *Vorlagen* could already suffice to account for all the material under review. The specificity of the material of the heresiography and *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* genres may warrant first and foremost further exploration along these lines. Particularly the prospects of a reliance on a work of *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* seems promising, as the use of such a *Vorlage* not only could explain the origin of his legendary accounts on Adam's creation and Og the giant, but potentially also account for his notices on Muḥammad's life and Muslim exegesis as well as his direct citations of *ḥadīth* material. Even more fascinating – to go already one step further – it may possibly also go to some lengths in explaining where the thematically arranged collection of Qur'ānic excerpts included in *mimrō* III came from in the first place. All of this, however, is a subject for some other time.

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