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CHRISTIANITY IN THE EYES OF THE MUSLIMS OF THE JAZĪRAH AT THE END OF THE EIGHTH CENTURY¹

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A. INTRODUCTION

Part IV of the 8th-century Syriac Chronicle of Zuqnīn² ends with the Martyrdom of Cyrus of Ḥarrān at the hands of the Muslims, which took place in 769-770 (Seleucid 1081)³. The Martyrdom is in fact a continuation as well as the conclusion of the major theme of Part IV of the Chronicle: The overtaxation of the Jazīrah by the Muslims, namely the early ʿAbbasids, which had generated great hardships for the people of the Jazīrah, Muslims and Christians alike. The hardships led a countless number of Christians from such important and predominately Christian cities as Edessa, Ḥarrān, Tella, Rēsh-ʿAynā, Dara, Nisibis, Sinjār and Callinicum⁴, to apostatise to Is-

1) This research has been supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

2) Edition *Incerti Auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, edidit I.-B. CHABOT, I-II, CSCO, SS ser. 3: t. 1-2, T (Paris, 1927-1933) (= CHABOT, *Chronicon*). Translations: *Incerti Auctoris Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum*, I, interpretatus est I.-B. CHABOT, CSCO, SS ser. 3, t. 1, V (Lovanii, 1949) (Latin translation of Parts I & II). *Chronique de Denys de Tell-Mahré*. Quatrième partie publiée et traduite par J.-B. CHABOT. «Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études. Sciences philologiques et historiques», 112 (Paris, 1895). Parts III & IV are translated into French by Robert HESPEL, *Chronicon Anonymum Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum II*, CSCO 507, SS 213 (Lovanii, 1989) (= HESPEL, *Chronicon*). For an English translation of Parts III & IV see Amir HARRAK, *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn*. Parts III & IV (forthcoming). About the Chronicle and its anonymous author see Witold WITAKOWSKI, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahrē: A Study in the History of Historiography* (Uppsala, 1987).

3) Michael the Syrian offered a very brief account about the martyrdom of Cyrus, which he dated to 768-769 (A.G. 1080). The 12th-century chronicler wrote that Cyrus, after apostatising to Islam, returned to his Christian faith, a reason for which he was decapitated and his body burned down; see *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, ed. J.-B. CHABOT, vol. II (Paris, 1901) 527 (= CHABOT, *Michel le Syrien*).

4) CHABOT, *Chronicon II*, p. 385.

lam. In contrast to the apostates, Cyrus, a native of Ḥarrān, defended his Christian faith before the Muslim governor of Ḥarrān, Ḥumayd son of Qaḥṭabah⁵, and later suffered martyrdom at the hand of ʿAbbās (ibn Muḥammad), brother of Caliph al-Manṣūr and the successor of Ḥumayd⁶. Unfortunately, the account of the martyrdom of Cyrus is very damaged and only fragments of it have survived⁷. Less damaged is the account about apostasy, which precedes the account on Cyrus, although some passages in it have lacunae of various sizes.

The present paper aims at discussing three passages of unequal length, dealing with views the Muslims of the Jazīrah had of Christianity. The first passage, unique of its kind, consists of a profession of faith made by a Syrian Christian apostate before a Muslim official in the city of Ḥarrān. The profession of faith not only tells us about the creed of the Muslims with regard to Jesus, but also about the step-by-step process of passing from one religion (Christianity) to another (Islam). Two damaged passages dealing with the way the Muslims of the Jazīrah viewed the Christian faith will be reconstructed⁸. If the reconstructions are acceptable, they will shed new light on Muslim-Christian relations in that region at a quite early stage of Islam. Before discussing these passages, one ought to outline the context in which they are found in the Chronicle.

B. MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS IN THE JAZĪRAH ACCORDING TO THE CHRONICLE OF ZUQNĪN

The Chronicler of Zuqnīn did not write a thesis on Christian-Muslim relations in the Jazīrah during the late 8th century. Rather, he fitted details on the subject in a long and sometimes verbose discussion of the economic policy of the early ʿAbbasids in that part of the Near East, namely between

5) Ḥumayd was governor of the Jazīrah between A.D. 754 and 759. He is only once mentioned in the Chronicle of Zuqnīn, in the account of Cyrus.

6) CHABOT, *Michel le Syrien*, II, p. 527.

7) Amir HARRAK, «Piecing Together the Fragmentary Account of the Martyrdom of Cyrus of Ḥarrān» (paper presented at the Syriac Studies Symposium II, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, June 8-19, 1995). (To be published).

8) Although CHABOT's edition of the Chronicle of Zuqnīn appeared more than half a century ago, no scholar had dealt with the damaged passages which form the subject of the present paper. HESPEL, who translated Part IV of the Chronicle of Zuqnīn, left the lacunae without reconstruction, as did CHABOT when he edited the Syriac text.

770 and 773⁹. The hardship, which was created by overtaxation and extortions during the time of Caliph al-Manṣūr (754-775), was endured not only by Christians, but also by Muslims, Zoroastrians and Jews; according to the Chronicler, the Muslims suffered hardship even more than the rest of the Jazīrite population¹⁰. Nevertheless, hardship led many Christians to defect to Islam, hoping to benefit economically by avoiding to pay the *jiziah* (poll-tax)¹¹. Some others defected for no specific reason, being «driven by no one other than Satan»¹².

The main details about Christian-Muslim relations in the Jazīrah, of interest to the historian of religion¹³, are found in Part IV of the Chronicle in two main sections:

1 – SECTION ON APOSTASY

This section has an unrelated title: «The year one thousand and eighty one (of the Greeks, which corresponds to 769-770 A.D.): Saint and martyr Cyrus of Ḥarrān was martyred» (381:8-9)¹⁴. The content of the section relates in fact to the question of apostasy as the following subsections show:

a) Introduction: The poll-tax and extortions weighed heavily on the Christians, and as a consequence the door to «paganism»¹⁵ opened for them (381:18-29).

b) Commentary, based mainly on the Scriptures, on how the apostates gave up on Jesus and followed Satan, and their abandonment by God as a consequence of their apostasy (381:29-384:8).

(Lacuna)

9) The economic policy was pursued in the Jazīrah by the governor of Mosul, Mūsā son of Muṣʿab, whom the Chronicler had much denigrated.

10) CHABOT, *Chronicon* II, pp. 298-299.

11) The economic factor behind apostasy to Islam is made clear by the Chronicler of Zuqnin; see CHABOT, *Chronicon* II, p. 381:18-20, 26-29.

12) CHABOT, *Chronicon* II, p. 390:28.

13) No one seems to have fully exploited the details in the Chronicle of Zuqnin about Christian-Muslim relations during the 8th century; for a short discussion see A. SEGAL, *Edessa 'the Blessed City'* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970) 206f. On the economic conditions see Cl. CAHEN, «Fiscalité, propriété, antagonismes sociaux en Haute-Mésopotamie au temps des premiers 'Abbasides d'après Denys de Tell-Mahré», in *Arabica* 1 (1954) 136-152.

14) The numbers refer to pages and lines in CHABOT's edition.

15) For the Chronicler, any religion other than Christianity was «paganism». The term refers to Islam in the context given above.

c) More quotations from the Scriptures (384:10-24).

d) Hundreds of Christians from prominent cities of the Jazīrah apostatised in Ḥarrān¹⁶. Upon their return they questioned the faith of the remaining Christians; see section C. b. below (385:5-13).

e) The apostates became odious to the community; they were neither fish nor fowl (385:18-388:17).

f) Jesus in Islam: Spirit and Word of God but still a man. Discussion of the term «Word» from the Christian point of view; (388:21-389:18).

g) Apostasy of a cleric from Edessa. The Chronicler offered what may prove to be the first profession of faith made by a Christian apostate before a Muslim official ever recorded (389:25-390:26)¹⁷. Remorse of the apostate (391:2-28). Remorse of another apostate (391:28-392:6).

h) Nickname of the apostates: 'YDWLY'¹⁸ (392:15-24). End of the section on apostates (392:24).

2 – SECTION ON THE MARTYRDOM OF CYRUS

This section has a pertinent title: «Also concerning the martyr Cyrus, who is the subject of this account» (392:25-26).

a) A long introduction of didactic nature. Because of the damaged condition of the manuscript the text ends abruptly (392:26-394:18).

b) Fragmentary account of the martyrdom of Cyrus (395-399).

The damaged passages, which form the subject of the present paper, are found within the plan shown above. The following sections will discuss the confession of faith of a Christian apostate, and reconstruct the passages in question, using Islamic sources, including the Koran, and Syriac literature.

16) Ḥarrān was the seat of the ʿAbbasid governor of the Jazīrah, hence conversions were made before a state official. The city was previously the capital of the Umayyad Marwān II, where he transferred the caliphal treasury; for the latter detail see CHABOT, *Chronicon* II, 190:12-26.

17) See section C.a. below.

18) This term is difficult to analyse. It may have connection with the Arabic term *mawālī* given to non-Arabs, who converted to Islam.

C. SYRIAC PASSAGES DEALING WITH MUSLIM VIEWS OF CHRISTIANITY

The passages to be discussed in this section deal with Christian-Muslim relations described in Part IV of the Chronicle of Zuqnin, in a section devoted to apostasy. The first passage, unique of its kind, is a profession of faith made by a deacon from Edessa passing to Islam. The profession does not only contain a traditional view the Muslims had about Jesus, it also tells about the process that the apostate went through before becoming a Muslim. Two damaged passages are to be reconstructed. The first one is an accusation based on the Koran, made by the Muslim converts against their former Christian co-believers. The second damaged passage, also a statement made by the Muslims, explains through an interesting analogy, how Jesus was born without the intervention of a male. We will refer to these passages on the basis of Chabot's edition (see note 2), which has been collated by the present author.

a. Chabot 390:8-391:2: The Profession of Faith of an Apostate

The Chronicler of Zuqnin heard people saying before him and before everyone, that a deacon from the region of Edessa «slipped into the pit and gulf of perdition», that is apostasy. Talk, fervent pleas, and gifts offered by fellow Christians did not stop the man from going to a Muslim official in Ḥarrān, to apostatise at his hands. According to the Chronicler, the official «did not pressure him; on the contrary, he asked him not to do so lest he should regret one day or another and return to his first faith, in which case great tortures would be inflicted upon him». The Christian man insisted to apostatise, claiming that God indicated the conversion to him. The process of apostatising follows in the form of questions and answers:

«Do you renounce Christ?» Asked the Arab.

«Yes». The Deacon replied.

«Do you renounce Baptism?»

«I renounce it».

«Do you renounce the Cross, the Eucharist and everything in which Christians profess?»

«I renounce them».

At this point, the Chronicler tells us that the apostate («the son of Devil») added to his renunciation of faith insults against the Christian faith not even requested by the Arab. At any rate, after the Arab made him re-

nounce «everything in his good will», he proceeded to make him profess Islam, in the following manner:

«Do you believe in Muḥammad as the messenger of God, and in the Book that descended upon him from Heaven?» Asked the Arab.

«I believe». The Deacon answered.

«Do you believe that Jesus (written: ʿĪsā) is the Word and Spirit of God, that he is a prophet, and that he is not God?»

«Yes».

After the Arab made the Christian apostate his faith, he ordered him, saying:

«Untie your belt and pray toward the south».

Although our aim is to highlight the views of the Muslims of the Jazīrah about the Christian faith, a word should be said about the sentence «untie your belt». The sentence is rendered in Syriac as ܡܠܘܕܢܝܢܝܢ. The wording of this Syriac sentence is attested elsewhere in the account dealing with apostasy, although the verb there is in the perfect¹⁹, whereas the sentence under discussion gives the imperative. Syriac ܡܠܘܕܢܝܢܝܢ «to tear, cut, cease, etc.» does not give the meaning «to untie» as translated above. Although Hespel translated it in the sense «to bend, prostrate (the loins)»²⁰ (so as to pray), this sense is rendered elsewhere by the Chronicler of Zuq̄n̄in with the familiar ܡܠܘܕܢܝܢܝܢ.²¹

About half a century ago, Ḥabīb Zayyāt published an extensive study about specific marks borne by the *Dhimmīs* (Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians) to distinguish them from the Muslim majority²². Among the signs borne by the Christians was a belt, Arabic *zunnār* (from Greek ξυνάριον, through Syriac ܡܠܘܕܢܝܢܝܢ), made of wool, cotton, leather or silk. The belt became the most important sign (after the cross), identifying the Christians, to such an extent that the expression «tying the belt» meant to convert to Christianity, and «untying the belt» referred to apostasy committed by the Christian²³. The verb in the last mentioned expression was rendered in Arabic with قَطَعَ, and,

19) CHABOT, *Chronicon* II, 391:13, 29.

20) HESPEL, *Chronicon*, 318:34.

21) CHABOT, *Chronicon* II, 391:14, 392:2.

22) Ḥabīb ZAYYĀT, «Simāt al-Naṣārā wal-Yahūd fi l-Islām», (*Distinctive Marks of the Christians and the Jews in Islam*), *al-Mashriq* 43 (1949) 161-252 (= ZAYYĀT, *Simāt*).

23) ZAYYĀT, *Simāt*, p. 205.

therefore, the verb in the Syriac sentence **ܩܦܥܘܢܝܢ ܩܦܥܘܢܝܢ** must be an Arabism: **قطعت**.

The sentence «Jesus (written: ʿĪsā) is the Word and Spirit of God» reflects the traditional Muslim identification of Jesus, based, as is clear, on the Koran: «The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, is no more than a messenger of Allah, his Word which he conveyed to Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from him» (*sūrat al-Nisāʿ* [4] 171); «O Mary, Allah announces you with a Word from him: his name shall be Messiah, Jesus son of Mary» (*sūrat āli-Imrān* [3] 45). As for the belief «he (= ʿĪsā) is a prophet, and that he is not God», it is reflected in another passage in the Chronicle: «They (= the Muslims) call him (= Jesus) the Word and Spirit of God, and prophet» (390:25-26), although «he (= Jesus) was not born from human seed like anyone else is» (389:11-12) «but God ordered Mary and she conceived him» (389:14-15).

The views of the Muslims about Jesus as described above may now assist us in reconstructing two badly damaged passages found in the Chronicle. Once reconstructed, the passages in question will certainly add more details about the attitudes of the Muslims of the Jazīrah toward Jesus and the Christian faith.

b. The Damaged Passage in Chabot 385:11-12: Sūrat al-ʿAnkabūt (29) 41?

After apostatising to Islam, the new Muslims assailed the Christians of their towns and villages for their beliefs in Jesus. The Muslims believed that Jesus was a prophet, «like Moses, Elijah and Muḥammad (...), a prophet, like any one among the prophets, a man like you and me»²⁴. As the Muslims denied the divinity of Jesus, they took the Christians for *lō aloh* «godless», since the latter worshipped the man Jesus. This statement is reflected in the following damaged passage:

ܩܦܥܘܢܝܢ ܩܦܥܘܢܝܢ ܩܦܥܘܢܝܢ ܩܦܥܘܢܝܢ [...]

«You are godless and [...] of the spider»

The first part of this Syriac passage offers no difficulty of comprehension, although the *yōdh* of **ܩܦܥܘܢܝܢ** (absolute state) is superfluous²⁵. Nonetheless, the role of the phrase «of the spider» in the second part of the statement

24) CHABOT, *Chronicon* II, 389:8-11.

25) On this type of *yōdh* see Theodor NÖLDEKE, *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, translated by James A. CRICHTON (London, 1904), # 50 B.

is puzzling, and nothing in the general context in which the statement is found hints at an acceptable reconstruction of the phrase. Nevertheless, the statement is clearly made by (new) Muslims, and, as a consequence, it may have been based on the holy book of Islam, the Koran. Indeed, the Koran contains one *sūrah* named *al-Ankabūt* «the Spider» (*sūrah* 29), which may help to reconstruct the Syriac damaged passage. Verse 41 of the *sūrah* says as follows:

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ كَمَثَلِ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ اتَّخَذَتْ بَيْتًا وَإِنَّ أَوْهَنَ الْبُيُوتِ
لَبَيْتُ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ.

«The likeness of those who have taken lords other than Allah, is the likeness of a spider, which makes itself a dwelling; and the weakest of all dwellings is the dwelling of a spider»²⁶.

There seems to be a connection between the content of the Syriac damaged passage and the Koranic verse quoted above, although the Syriac passage does not translate the Koran word for word. The first part in each of the two texts refers to the same category of people: «godless» in Syriac and «those who have taken lords other than Allah» in the Koran. Since the absolute oneness (*tawhīd*) of God is unequivocal in Islam, the people «who have taken lords other than Allah» are necessarily «godless». The Koranic verse continues in claiming that the faith of these people is as weak as the dwelling of the spider. As is well-known, the dwelling of the spider, whether the tubular type or the tent-like type with its radiating threads extended to all directions, or any other type for that matter, is made of fine silk threads and prone to utter destruction by mere wind, rain, or man's finger.

The second part of the Syriac passage is problematic, because of the lacuna existing in it. The lacuna in the manuscript is too small to fit in it more than two words. Since the connection between the first part of the Syriac passage and the beginning of the Koranic verse has been suggested above, one is tempted to connect the lacuna in the Syriac passage with the analogy of the spider in the Koranic verse. The phrase «of the spider» (genitive phrase with the relative particle *d-*), which immediately follows the lacuna, has a counterpart in the Koranic verse, «(the dwelling) of the spider» (bound phrase). The Syriac word for «spider» is often found bound with the

26) For the English translation of Koranic verses in this article see The Holy Qur'ān, translated by S. Abul A'ālā MAUDŪDĪ (Lahore, Islamic Publications (PTV.) Limited, 1987), and *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, new edition with Revised Translation and Commentary by 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'ALĪ (Brentwood, Maryland, Amana Corporation, 1991).

«web»²⁷. Therefore, one might reconstruct [... *nwl'*] *d-gwgy* «spider's [web]», a phrase which corresponds to Koranic *bayt al-ʿankabūt*.

The two letters just before the lacuna, following the conjunction *wāw*, must belong to a verb, whose first and second radicals are *lomadh* and *beth*. Not too many verbs are known in Syriac with these initial and medial radicals. The known ones are:

√LBB	(Pael) «to encourage»
√LBD	«to thicken»
√LBṬ	(Pael) «to instigate»
√LBK	«to take hold, grasp, to hold onto»
√LBN	(Pael) «to lay bricks»
√LBŠ	«to wear».

Among the roots listed above, only √LBK might fit the context, as will be shown below. Since the independent pronoun in the first part of the Syriac passage is 2nd person masculine plural, one might tentatively reconstruct the verbal form as [... *ܠܒܬܝܢܝܢ*] «and you are holding onto ...», a present (composite tense) 2nd person masculine plural. √LBK is a transitive verb and, therefore, one might reconstruct the second part of the whole sentence as *ܠܒܬܝܢܝܢܝܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢ* «and you are ho[lding, as it were, onto a] spider [web]». The whole reconstructed passage would then be as follows:

ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢܝܢ ܠܗܘܢܝܢ ܠܗܘܢܝܢ ܠܗܘܢܝܢ ܠܗܘܢܝܢ ܠܗܘܢܝܢ

«You are godless and you are ho[lding, as it were, onto] a spider's [web]»

The weakness of the spider web was referred to above. The spider web also symbolises anything which is futile and flimsy, as also indicated in Job 8:14. According to the reconstructed passage, the Christian faith is as weak and as futile as the spider's web, since it is based on the worship of Jesus, who is no God. This type of claim is also made by a 14th century commentator of the Koran, although in this particular claim the Christian faith is not necessarily the main target. Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar ibn Kaṭīr (died A.D. 1372) commented on verse 41 of *sūrat al-ʿAnkabūt* (29), as follows²⁸:

27) R. PAYNE SMITH, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford, 1879-1901), vol. II, col. 2321 (= PAYNE SMITH, *Thesaurus*); J. P. MARGOLIOUTH, *Supplement to the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith, S.T.P.* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1927) 207.

28) Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar ibn KAṬĪR (died Hijrah 774), *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm*, vol. V (Beirut, Dar-al-Fikr, 1970) 325 (= Ibn KAṬĪR, *Tafsīr*).

هذا مثل ضربه الله تعالى للمشركين في اتخاذهم آلهة من دون الله يرجون نصرهم وورزقهم ويتمسكون بهم في الشدائد، فهم في ذلك كبيت العنكبوت في ضعفه ووهنه فليس في أيدي هؤلاء من آلهتهم إلا كمن يتمسك ببيت العنكبوت فإنه لا يجدي عنه شيئا فلو علموا هذا الحال لما اتخذوا من دون الله أولياء.

«This is a parable given by God the Most High for the polytheistic people who have taken deities other than Allah, seeking from them help and blessing and holding onto them in time of difficulties. For in this regard they are like the spider's web in terms of its weakness and flimsiness, since they get nothing from their deities, just as the spider's web is of no use whatsoever to the one who holds onto it. Nonetheless, had they been aware of this, they would not have taken lords other than Allah»²⁹.

What is of special interest to our discussion in the commentary of Ibn Kaṭīr is Arabic $\sqrt{\text{MSK}}$ «to hold onto» in the phrase كمن يتمسك ببيت العنكبوت ... «like someone who holds onto a spider's web», which translates Syriac $\sqrt{\text{LBK}}$ in the reconstructed passage suggested above. The usage of $\sqrt{\text{LBK}}$ seems therefore possible, and one might consider the reconstruction as a translation of an Arabic original, more or less similar to the Arabic sentence of Ibn Kaṭīr encountered above. It is worth adding that the same root, in the sense «to take for, to consider», is found elsewhere in the Chronicle of Zuqnīn, in what seems to be another translation of an Arabic original. The Chronicler talked at length about the overtaxation of the Jazīrah by the agents of Caliph al-Manṣūr, who used to levy the tax owed by poor provinces from the more fortunate ones, and the same practice was applied on villages as well as on individuals, depending on their wealth or lack of it. Nonetheless, this questionable practice was abolished by a new tax agent, who came to the Jazīrah, claiming the following: **ܠܐ ܟܚܝܬܐ ܟܚܝܬܐ ܟܠ ܫܝܘܬܐ ܟܠ ܫܝܘܬܐ** «I am not taking a province for another province, or a village for another village, or a man for another man»³⁰. Theodor Nöldeke previously called attention to this unidiomatic Syriac sentence, which this Semitist had considered as a translation of Arabic³¹: لا (ما، لست...) آخذ الإقليم بالإقليم (أو القرية بالقرية أو

29) See also in this direction Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (10th century) in *Muḥtaṣar Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, edited by M. Ṣ. al-Ṣābūnī and Ṣ. Ṣ. al-Riḍā (Beirut, 1983), vol. II, p. 171; Abū Faraj ibn al-Jawzī (12th century) in *Zād al-Masīr fī Ḥim al-Tafsīr* (Beirut, 1965), vol. VI, p. 272 (= Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr*).

30) CHABOT, *Chronicon* II, p. 303:13-15.

31) Th. NÖLDEKE, review of CHABOT, *Chronique de Denys de Tell-Mahré*, in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 10 (1896) 165.

الرجل بالرجل).

It seems that the Chronicler was aware of the claim made by the new Muslims against those in the Jazīrah who preferred to remain Christians. For he too described as «weak» (Koranic *وهن* = *مسكين*) the faith of the people, who professed that «Jesus is the Word and Spirit of God» (see C.c. below), but failed to recognise his divinity. Moreover, he compared this faith, not with a spider's web, but with the «ruined cistern»³² that can slake no man's thirst. He borrowed this analogy from Jeremiah 2:13.

The role of the word «spider» in the Syriac damaged passage is unintelligible, and it will remain so unless it is explained by the analogy of the spider found in the second part of the Koranic verse. The first part of the Syriac passage seems to be a rendering of the first part of the Koranic verse, and one would assume that the second part of the Syriac passage is also a rendering of the second part of the Koranic verse. The fact that those who made the statement were Muslims, as mentioned above, makes the connection between the Syriac passage and the Koranic verse plausible.

c. The Damaged Passage in Chabot 389:15-17: Islamic Analogy for the Exceptional Conception and Birth of Jesus ?

The passage referred to in this section is part of the Chronicler's description of how the Muslims viewed Jesus. The Chronicler claimed that the Muslims made about Jesus specific statements that befitted his divine nature, but they still believed that he was a mere man.

As mentioned above, the Syriac Chronicler complained that, though the Muslims confessed that Jesus was the «Word» and «Spirit» of God, they did not understand the full sense of these two predicates. For him, Koranic «Word of God» should be understood in light of the Gospel of John: «In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made» (John 1:1)³³. He also associated the temporal clause «in the beginning» found in the Gospel of John with the same clause found in Genesis 1:1: «In the beginning (God created ...)»³⁴. In another context and before the time of the Chronicler of Zuqñin by two and a half centuries, James of Sarug (died in 521) also asso-

32) CHABOT, *Chronicon* II, p. 389:17-18.

33) CHABOT, *Chronicon* II, p. 389:1-5.

34) CHABOT, *Chronicon* II, p. 388:1.

ciated John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1; he also associated these two verses with Psalm 111:10. It is in this apologetic context that an analogy is unexpectedly found in the Chronicle of Zuqnīn, through which the Muslims tried to explain how Jesus «was not born from human seed like anyone else». Unfortunately, the context in which this analogy is found is seriously damaged, as it appears in Chabot's edition:

פנה ארמא לחורג חקלמס אטי הקלע א[... חבב-] ארמא הלא הלא
 ה ה רמא כלע .

«God ordered Mary and she conceived him, as [...] [...] conceive without the intervention of a male, for they are conceived by the Spirit / wind».

Chabot left this damaged passage without reconstruction. He also misread the remnant of the 8th word as חבב, although the supposed *qōf* in the manuscript is actually a *beth*. The passage in question may be reconstructed as follows:

פנה ארמא לחורג חקלמס אטי הקלע א[ת[רעס] חבב-] ארמא הלא
 הלא ה ה רמא כלע .

«God ordered Mary and she conceived him as the t[rees] are pollinated to pro[duce frui]ts without the intervention of a male, for they are pollinated by the wind».

Since the Chronicler placed the analogy reconstructed above in the mouth of the Muslims, one would assume that this analogy was translated by the Chronicler from Arabic into Syriac. This assumption leads us to two questions. *First*, whether or not the wording of the Syriac passage in which the analogy is found makes sense with regard to the Syriac language and literature. *Second*, whether or not the reconstructed passage reflects the Muslim view on Jesus. Let us deal with the first question.

The root BṬN «to conceive, beget», employed twice in this partially reconstructed passage, is attested in Syriac sources only in reference to humans and animals³⁵. It refers to Mary in the first part of the above passage. Although the verb is used metaphorically to refer to such things as the wind which brings (lit. «bears») rain³⁶, no modern dictionary of Syriac gives examples in which the same verb is used in connection with trees. Reconstructing the word t[rees] may therefore seem unfounded. Nevertheless, √BṬN «to conceive» could well refer to trees for the following reasons:

35) See PAYNE SMITH, *Thesaurus*, vol. I, cols. 513-514.

36) See PAYNE SMITH, *Thesaurus*, vol. I, cols. 513-514.

1) The Syriac root BṬN is also attested in Mandaic, an Eastern Aramaic dialect like Syriac, in connection with trees, as in *baṭnia lania* «the trees are pollinated (lit. impregnated)», and *uṭuna baṭnia* «they (= the trees) are laden (lit. «pregnant») with a burden (of fruits)»³⁷. Otherwise the same root is used in Mandaic mainly in connection with humans and animals.

The root BṬN is also used in Syriac for things other than trees. St Ephrem the Syrian (4th century), in his Hymn on Faith LXV:7³⁸ talked about the olive as a fruit, using the root in question:

ܡܢܗ ܕܢܘܢ ܕܠܘܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܫܠܚܐ ܕܡܢܗ ܡܢ
 ܡܢܗ ܕܢܘܢ ܕܠܘܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܫܠܚܐ ܕܡܢܗ ܡܢ
 ܡܢܗ ܕܢܘܢ ܕܠܘܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܫܠܚܐ ܕܡܢܗ ܡܢ
 ܡܢܗ ܕܢܘܢ ܕܠܘܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܫܠܚܐ ܕܡܢܗ ܡܢ
 ܡܢܗ ܕܢܘܢ ܕܠܘܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܫܠܚܐ ܕܡܢܗ ܡܢ

«Who has not observed³⁹ the olive which, though regarded as on single tree produces (*mawled*, lit. «gives birth to») leaves of dissimilar shape, branches of different colour, wood of varied grain and olives of distinct flavour?

Indeed in each individual olive three things are produced (*beṭmīn*, lit. «conceived»),

for when pressed, it oozes (*mawled*, lit. «gives birth to») water, milk and oil».

2) In Syriac literature trees can be referred to by a cognate of √BṬN, although this verb is essentially used in connection with humans and animals. Thus St Ephrem, in his Hymn on Faith LXV:7 quoted above, used √YLD «to beget» to refer to the olive-tree, and in his Hymn XIII:9⁴⁰ he used the same root to refer to trees in general: ܡܢܗ ܕܢܘܢ ܕܠܘܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܫܠܚܐ ܕܡܢܗ ܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܢܘܢ ܕܠܘܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܫܠܚܐ ܕܡܢܗ ܡܢ ܡܢܗ ܕܢܘܢ ܕܠܘܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܫܠܚܐ ܕܡܢܗ ܡܢ «Who ever saw a tree that produced (lit. gave birth to) one fruit only?».

37) See E. S. DROWER and R. MACUCH, *A Mandaic Dictionary* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1963) 58 (= DROWER-MACUCH, *Dictionary*).

38) Edition Edmund BECK, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*, CSCO 154, SS 73 (Louvain, 1955) 202. German Translation Edmund BECK, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*, CSCO 155, SS 74 (Louvain, 1955) 177 (= BECK, *De Fide*).

39) Lit. «who has observed ...».

40) BECK, *De Fide*, p. 61.

3) Syriac applies the root *bṭn* to inanimate beings. Note the usage of this root, as well as of other terms (*ʿūbō* «womb», *ḥēblō* «pangs», and the root YLD «to give birth to»), all proper to human and animal procreation, applied to the sun, in the following stanza from the Hymn on Faith XLII:7 by St Ephrem⁴¹:

בְּרִיחַתָּא נִרְיָא	בְּרִיחַתָּא נִרְיָא
בְּרִיחַתָּא נִרְיָא	בְּרִיחַתָּא נִרְיָא
בְּרִיחַתָּא נִרְיָא	בְּרִיחַתָּא נִרְיָא
בְּרִיחַתָּא נִרְיָא	בְּרִיחַתָּא נִרְיָא

«The ephemeral fire places you in a state of wonder,
how it lies conceived (*bēṭnō*) and concealed within the sun,
and hidden in the bosom (*ʿūbō*, lit. «the womb») of its rays;
inscrutable are the pangs that give it birth!».

4) Syriac literature applies to trees other terms also referring to human and animal organs of procreation. One such term is *ʿūbō* «womb» attested in Hymn on Faith LVIII:1: *מִי שֶׁרָא בְּרִיחַתָּא דְּאֲרֵי* «Who ever saw sap (lit. water) in the fibres (lit. womb) of the trees?». The phrase «womb of the tree» recurs in the Hymns on Paradise IX:4 and XV:9 by St Ephrem⁴², whereas the phrase «womb of the rays (of the sun)» is found in the Hymn on Faith XVII:7 quoted above (see C.b.3). In Hymn on Faith X:17, the same term is used, as expected, to refer to Mary: *מִי שֶׁרָא בְּרִיחַתָּא דְּאֲרֵי* «Behold the fire and wind in the womb of the one who begot you». The other Syriac term for «womb» (lit. belly) is *karsō*. In the Hymn on Faith XX:2 St Ephrem used this term to refer to the human organ: *כִּי־כִּי־כִּי־כִּי* «If the womb holds back the child, then both (mother and child) die». In Hymn XX:3 *karsō* is applied to trees: *כִּי־כִּי־כִּי* «but if fruit buds appear from the womb of the tree ...».

There are therefore enough reasons to believe that the reconstruction *bṭnyn* [*ʾyln*] suggested above is not only possible but probable.

The reconstruction of the verb *כִּי* «to make» and of the noun *פְּרִיחַתָּא* «fruits», both used to give the sense of «producing fruit», should not be

41) BECK, *De Fide*, p. 137.

42) Edmund BECK, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrerers Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum*, CSCO 174, SS 78 (Louvain, 1957).

problematic. This combination of words is also attested in Genesis 1:11-12 of the Peshittā; here $\sqrt{C}BD$ refers to the fruit trees which God had created on the third day of creation. In Mandaic \sqrt{T}^cN «to bear» is used as a parallel of $\sqrt{C}BD$ in the second part of the sentence given above: *batnia Jania utuma taina* «the trees are pollinated (lit. impregnated) and are bearing fruits»⁴³.

As for Syriac ܠܘܗܐ found in the passage under discussion, it has both the meaning of «spirit» and «wind», as is indeed the case in biblical Hebrew רוח and Greek πνεῦμα. The word comes in connection with $\sqrt{b}tn$ in the commentaries of Genesis and Exodus by St Ephrem. He commented on the two daughters of Lot, who became pregnant after they had intercourse with their drunk father (Genesis 19:30-36)⁴⁴. Once the pregnancy became known, the younger sister, fearing her father would learn the real cause of it, complained to her older sister as follows:

ܐܬܝܢ ܠܝܗܘܐ ܠܡܗ ܕܘܨܬܐ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ
 ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ
 ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ
 ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ ܕܥܠܝܗ

«For what excuse will we have to offer him, when he will judge us, and what answer will we give him when he will be about to kill us? He will say: 'I (previously) stated that *no man of Sodom had known the girls*'⁴⁵. Who is then the one who had known them on the hill?' Will we say that we are pregnant with spirit/wind? And when we are ready to give birth, what will we do?».

There is no indication in the above passage that St Ephrem invoked the image of the tree being pollinated by the «wind» when he placed the words «Will we say that we are pregnant with spirit/wind?» in the mouth of the younger daughter of Lot. He was not interested in the cause of their pregnancy but rather in what they carried in their wombs. It is also unlikely that by *rūhō* he referred to «spirit», since spirit for St Ephrem is not a physical entity that can be detected through pregnancy. That the daughter of Lot sought to deny the fact of her pregnancy, and that of her sister, is beyond any doubt. By saying *rūhō bōtnīn ḥman* she may have meant that they were not pregnant, but simply «inflated by (internal) wind». She, of course, ques-

43) DROWER-MACUCH, *Dictionary*, p. 58.

44) Edition R.-M. TONNEAU, *Sancti Ephraem syri in genesim et in exodum commentarii*, CSCO 152, SS 71 (Louvain, 1955) 79-80. Latin Translation R.-M. TONNEAU, *Sancti Ephraem syri in genesim et in exodum commentarii*, CSCO 153, SS 72 (Louvain, 1955) 65.

45) Genesis 19:8.

tioned the credibility of her own answer: «Will we say that we are inflated by (internal) wind?». At any rate, the wording in the expression *rūḥō bōṭnīn ḥnan* in the commentary of St Ephrem is strikingly reminiscent of the wording in the expression *men rūḥō bōṭnīn* of our reconstructed passage.

The wind as a means to become pregnant, or rather fertilised, is also applied by St Ephrem to pigeons. In his Hymn on Faith XVIII:16⁴⁶, the following passage is found:

אֵץ מֵ, הַרְבֵּם כְּבֵם מֵהַאֵץ
 כִּי בִבְטֵן מֵ רֵחַ הַזֵּמֵר לְבִטְנֵי⁴⁷
 מִלְּבָא לְבָא הַלֵּא וְהַלֵּא
 מֵא כֵן בְּלֵא מֵהַזֵּמֵר הַזֵּמֵר.

«The (pigeon's) egg (lit. «womb») is fertilised chastely within her nest, through the wind of her fluttering wings, (thus) producing offspring (lit. «giving birth to a new-born») without copulation.

Lo! an image of Mary within her house».

The wind as the means for pregnancy or fertilisation is made clear by St Ephrem through specific words found in the above stanza. The adverb *מֵהַאֵץ* (lit. «saintly») underlines the fertilisation of the pigeon's egg without copulation, as does the phrase *לֵּא וְהַלֵּא* (lit. «without marriage»). There is, therefore, a correlation between the wording of this stanza and that of our reconstructed passage, in that no male was involved in the following cases: the fertilisation of the pigeon's egg, the pollination of the tree, and the conception of Mary. It is worth adding that St Ephrem invoked the image of the dry wood that sprouted and produced fruit (Numbers 17:1-11) on its own as the symbol of the conception of Mary, which occurred without the intervention of a man either. In the Hymn on Nativity⁴⁸ it is said:

הַאֵץ, מֵהַאֵץ בְּבֵן
 הַבְּחַלֵּא בְּהַלֵּא הַאֵץ מֵהַאֵץ
 עֲבָלֵת הַאֵץ אֵץ מֵהַאֵץ
 אֵץ מֵהַאֵץ אֵץ

46) BECK, *De Fide*, p. 71.

47) In another version: *בְּבֵן*.

48) Edition Edmund BECK, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, CSCO 186, SS 82 (Louvain, 1959) 3. German Translation Edmund BECK, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)*, CSCO 187, SS 83 (Louvain, 1959) 3.

«The staff of Aaron sprouted, and the dry wood bore fruit⁴⁹
Its mystery has been revealed today: It is the virgin womb that gave birth».

The author of the story of the staff of Aaron seems to highlight the miracle behind it, since God is the cause of its renewed life. St Ephrem exploited this image to stress the belief that Mary conceived and gave birth without the intervention of a man, but «from the Holy Spirit»⁵⁰. Nevertheless, the parallelism between the dry wood bearing fruit on the one hand, and the virgin womb giving birth, on the other hand, echoes the parallelism found in the reconstructed passage under discussion: the tree pollinated by the «wind» and Mary's conceiving by the «Spirit».

On the basis of what has been said above, the wording of the Syriac passage in which the analogy of the tree being pollinated by the wind is found, is acceptable from the point of view of Syriac language and literature. St Ephrem himself had notably exploited terms related to human conception, which he applied to humans, animals and agriculture. A list of such terms and their application on the various beings is worth compiling:

YLD «to give birth»	Olive trees (to leaves, branches and fibre) Olives (to water, milk, and oil) Trees (to fruit) Rays of the sun (to fire) Pigeons (to offspring)
BṬN «to conceive»	Olives (with water, milk, and oil) Sun (with fire) Daughters of Lot (and wind)
ʿūbō or karsō «womb»	(of the) rays of the sun (of the) trees

Our next question is whether the analogy of the tree could have been used by Muslims of the Jazirah to explain the Koranic verses according to which Jesus was born without the intervention of a man.

The analogy of the tree in the reconstructed Syriac passage claims that through the blowing of the «wind» (*rūḥō*) the tree was pollinated. Furthermore, the passage claims that Mary was «ordered» by God and she conceived without the intervention of a male. The Syriac word for «wind»⁵¹

49) Numbers 17:1-11.

50) Matthew 2:18.

51) In Syriac, wind and Spirit are referred to with the same word, *rūḥō*.

reminds one of several Koranic verses in which Arabic *rūh* «Spirit» occurs along with the verb نفخ *√* «to blow, breath into». Two of such verses deal with the conception of Jesus in Mary, and one concerns the creation of man: «We breathed into her of our Spirit» (*sūrat al-Anbiyā'* [21] 91); «... and Mary the daughter of ʿImrān who had guarded her chastity, so we breathed into her body of our Spirit...» (*sūrat al-Taḥrīm* [66] 12); «then he (= God) shaped him (= Adam) and breathed into him his Spirit» (*sūrat al-Sajdah* [32] 9). The blowing wind causing the fertility of the tree and the breathing (literally «the blowing») into Mary so as to make her conceive are two statements leading to one and same outcome: fertilisation occurring without the intervention of a man. The tree was pollinated by the wind, whereas Mary conceived through the breathing into her body of God's Spirit. The correlation between both occurrences is clear.

The analogy of the tree does not seem offensive to the belief in Islam that Jesus was conceived without the intervention of a male, but through God's breathing into Mary's body. In fact Muslim commentators of the Koran used images to explain this exceptional conception. Thus, the theologian al-Ḥusayn al-Baghāwī (died A.D. 1122) of Khurasan wrote that Gabriel the Angel «breathed into the slit of Mary's garment» so as to make her conceive⁵²:

«فنفختنا فيها من روحنا» أي أمرنا جبرائيل حتى نفخ في جيب درعها وأحدثنا بذلك النفخ المسيح في بطنها».

«'We breathed into her of our Spirit' (*sūrat al-Anbiyā'* [21] 91), that is we ordered Gabriel so he breathed into the slit of her garment⁵³ and through that breathing action we caused her to conceive the Messiah».

The other commentator of the Koran whom we encountered before, Isma'īl ibn ʿUmar ibn Kaṭīr (died A.D. 1372), wrote in similar terms what follows⁵⁴:

«ومريم ابنة عمران التي أحصنت فرجها» أي حفظته وصاتته والاحصان هو العفاف

52) *Tafsīr al-Imām al-Baghāwī*, in al-Ḥāfiẓ ibn Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. V (Cairo, A.H. 1347) 528 (= Ibn KATHĪR, *Tafsīr*).

53) That is the slit in the neck of her garment. This image may have possibly originated in seeing the vertical V-shaped slit of the garment, extending from the neckline down to the breastbone, as a symbol for the female pudenda. At any rate, al-RĀZĪ already associated the meaning of *jayb* with that of *farj*; see *Tafsīr al-RĀZĪ*, edited by M. R. al-DĀIAH (Beirut and Damascus, Dar al-Fikr, 1990) 340.

54) Ibn Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. VIII (Cairo, A.H. 1347) 421.

والحرية. «فنفخنا فيه» أي بواسطة الملك وهو جبريل فإن الله بعثه إليها فتمثل لها في صورة بشر سوي وأمره الله تعالى ان ينفخ في جيب درعها فنزلت النفخة فوجلت في فرجها فكان منه الحمل بعيسى عليه السلام.

«Imrān, who had guarded her chastity' (*sūrat al-Tahrīm* [66] 12), that is she guarded it and protected it and protection means chastity (*al-ʿafāf*) and freedom (*al-ḥurriyyah*)⁵⁵. 'So we breathed into her body' that is through Gabriel the Angel, for God had sent him to her in the form of an ordinary human being. God the Most High ordered him to breath into the slit of her garment⁵⁶, and so the air moved down and penetrated her, which resulted in the conception of ʿĪsā, peace be on him».

Al-Rāzī, a 13th-century commentator (died A.D. 1210), used an analogy (other than the pollination of the tree) to explain the breathing of God into the body of Mary. Discussing the sentence «and we breathed into her of our Spirit» (*sūrat al-Anbiyāʾ* [21] 91), he compared God's breathing with the breathing of the musician into his wind instrument⁵⁷, (thereby creating beautiful sounds). Other Muslim commentators saw in the palm tree, which gave Mary fresh dates (see *sūrat Mariyam* [19] 25), a miraculous proof of her conception without the intervention of a male. For that tree was either dry⁵⁸, or gave fruits «without pollen» in winter⁵⁹. The first case reminds one of St Ephrem who saw in the staff of Aaron that sprouted – a dry wood that bore fruit – an analogy of the virgin womb of Mary that gave birth (see above).

There seems to be a parallelism between breathing into the body of Mary (*sūrat al-Anbiyāʾ* [21] 91) for the purpose of impregnating her with Jesus, the breathing into a wind instrument so as to create musical sounds (al-Rāzī's analogy), and the blowing of the wind, pollinating the trees so as to produce fruits (analogy of the Chronicle of Zuqnīn). The analogy of the tree as reconstructed in the damaged Syriac passage is clearly plausible.

The claim about Mary's conception as described in the Chronicle of Zuqnīn comes from the mouths of former Christians, some of whom were

55) Although this word is attested in two different editions of Ibn KATHĪR's *Tafsīr* (cf. vol. II [Cairo, 1927], p. 394, and vol. V [Cairo, A.H. 1347], p. 421, its role in this passage is not clear.

56) That is the slit in the neck of her garment.

57) Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-RĀZĪ, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. XXII (Cairo, no date) 218.

58) Ibn al-JAWZĪ (died A.D. 1201), *Zād al-Masīr*, vol. V (Beirut and Damascus, 1965) 222.

59) See also al-ṬABARĪ (died A.D. 923), *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. XVI (Beirut, Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1972) 54.

deacons and priests. Given this fact, and since the wording of the analogy of the tree can unquestionably be supported by the Syriac language and literature, could this analogy have been of Christian origin? There is no doubt that Syriac authors used analogies to explain the conception of Mary without the intervention of a male. As seen above, St Ephrem compared the staff of Aaron that sprouted – a dry wood that bore fruit – with the virgin womb that gave birth to Jesus. He saw in the pigeon's egg «fertilised through the wind of her fluttering wings» another image of Mary conceiving from the Holy Spirit. In his *mēmṛā* on Nativity 446-447, Narsai, another great Syriac author (died 502), compared Mary with the ground, for Adam was made from its dust (Genesis 2:7) and not as a consequence of human copulation. The tree pollinated by the wind may well have been an existing Syriac analogy used by Christian apostates versed in Syriac literature to confirm the belief in Islam that Jesus was born through God's breathing into Mary's womb.

Nonetheless, the expression «God ordered Mary and she conceived» is unusual in Christian theology. Mary was not «ordered» to conceive Jesus⁶⁰, but the conception of Jesus was announced to her because she had «found favour with God» (Luke 1:30). Moreover, Mary questioned this conception: «How shall this be, since I have no husband?» (Luke 1:34), and her submission was of her free will: «Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word» (Luke 1:38). If the analogy of the tree is Christian in origin, the passage in which it is found is certainly not Christian.

D. CONCLUSION

We have discussed a rare profession of faith made by a Christian apostate passing to Islam. We have also attempted to reconstruct two damaged passages in the Chronicle of Zuqnīn dealing with views Muslims had of the Christian faith. In this case, textual problems in the 8th-century Chronicle of Zuqnīn, caused by unfortunate lacunae in the manuscript, were solved, with the help of Arabic and Syriac religious sources. The profession of faith and the textual reconstructions, if accepted, shed light on Christian-Muslim relations during the 8th century. The fact that written sources dealing with this particular subject in such an early stage of Islam are rather rare, the discussions initiated by the Chronicle of Zuqnīn acquire more literary importance.

60) Perhaps the Chronicler confused the direct object of the verb *pqd* (in *p^eqad alohō l^emarīam*). In Islam it was Gabriel the Angel, not Mary, who was «ordered» by God to breath into the slit of Mary's garment, as ibn KATHĪR also commented.