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### The Legend of Sergius Bahira: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam

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provoking study, which time and time again puts together a large number of discrete pieces of evidence to form a pattern that makes one see things in a new way.

JOHN MOORHEAD, University of Queensland

BARBARA ROGGEMA, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*. (History of Christian-Muslim Relations, 9.) Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009. Pp. xii, 579; black-and-white figures and 1 table. €169.  
doi:10.1017/S0038713410002575

This latest volume in Brill's History of Christian-Muslim Relations series, devoted to "improved recognition between Christians and Muslims in the future," focuses on the story, found in both Christian and Muslim sources, of Muhammad, in his early years, meeting a Christian monk, variously called Sergius or Bahira, who taught him about matters of faith and who also recognized him as a prophet. The story is found in Ibn Ishaq's *Life of the Prophet* (English translation by Alfred Guillaume, pp. 79–81), where it is located geographically in Syria and chronologically shortly before Muhammad's marriage to Khadija.

Alongside this Muslim account, which dates from the second century of Islamic history (815–912 c.e.), there are four Christian accounts, which are the main focus of this study. Two are in Syriac, one eastern ("Nestorian") and one western Syrian ("Jacobite"), and two are in Arabic, one shorter (and closer to the Syriac versions, these three being referred to by the author as "synoptic recensions" and all dated from the first 'Abbasid century [750–850 c.e.]) and one longer (and rather different from the others) and dated later than the others but still before 1250 c.e. All four versions are edited and translated in part 2 of the book, which is a slightly revised Ph.D. dissertation prepared at the University of Groningen under the supervision of Prof. Gerrit J. Reinink and submitted in 2007.

Part 1 (pp. 9–208) concentrates on the background to the story. Chapter 1 looks at Christian-Muslim interaction and debate in quite general terms, explaining the Qur'an's claim that its message follows on from that of earlier Jewish and Christian prophets, from which the believers in those prophets have strayed, and the Christians' attempt to respond to these accusations, for example, in the work of John of Damascus (d. 750 c.e.). The full range of Christian arguments is summarized and discussed, with the author's main thesis being that a Muslim argument—that Muhammad met a monk in the Syrian desert, who recognized him as a prophet—is turned round, in a kind of counterhistory, to prove that Muhammad derived much of his teaching from this Christian monk. Chapter 2 then investigates the Muslim accounts of Bahira in more detail, and chapter 3 focuses on the apocalyptic dimensions of the accounts, including an interesting discussion of seven figures who are presented as having a particular role in them (see the helpful summary table on p. 66).

Chapter 4 summarizes the teachings of Bahira in the four accounts, including his Christology (pp. 104–13), and his role in explaining Sura 5.82 of the Qur'an (the statement that the Christians are "the nearest in affection to those who believe"; pp. 113–21). Chapter 5 then looks at Christian views of the Qur'an, under the intriguing title "The Qur'an against Islam," and outlines Christian attempts to argue that the Qur'an does in fact support many central Christian affirmations, a view that, it is then argued, has significant implications for the way in which Muslims should treat Christians, namely, positively. Chapter 6 investigates the "legend outside the Legend," in other words, the other traditions about Bahira that are found in Byzantine and Western Christian sources, with their references to Bahira as a "heretic," Arian monk, Nestorian, Jacobite, false witness, and victim, again explaining how Muhammad drew on a Christian source but, in the view of these accounts, an erroneous one. The chapter also includes a discussion of Jewish traditions about Bahira and a brief discussion of Bahira as forecaster of the coming of the prophet Muhammad (pp. 200–201).

Chapter 7 (pp. 203–8) is a brief summary of and conclusion about all the data discussed so far, outlining the essential purpose of the legend, which was to provide Christians with an authoritative and meaningful interpretation of the coming of Islam, namely, that it was, on the one hand, a fulfillment of divine promises to the children of Ishmael and, on the other hand, a transient phenomenon, which would ultimately fall. There is also a helpful summary of the ways in which the much later version of the story differs from the earlier “synoptic” accounts, given that after several centuries it was clear that the demise of Islam was not imminent.

Part 2 (pp. 209–527) provides a discussion of the recensions of the four versions and the relationships between the manuscripts (pp. 211–51); it then gives texts and translations of the eastern Syrian recension (pp. 253–309), the western Syrian recension (pp. 311–73), the short Arabic version (pp. 375–431), and the long Arabic version (pp. 433–527). A thorough bibliography, an index of scriptural quotations (from all three scriptures), and a general index conclude the volume.

Overall, the book is a thorough analysis of an interesting and informative set of texts, which provide a fascinating set of insights into the efforts of Middle Eastern Christians to interpret the coming of Islam in the light of their own experience of it and, in particular, to drive a nail into the argument that the power and success of Islam was evidence of its truth. This example of the different ways in which a story from the period after the coming of Islam could be interpreted is rather similar to the way in which earlier stories are recounted rather differently in the Bible and the Qur’an.

HUGH GODDARD, University of Edinburgh

JOËLLE ROLLO-KOSTER, *Raiding Saint Peter: Empty Sees, Violence, and the Initiation of the Great Western Schism (1378)*. (Brill’s Series in Church History, 32.) Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008. Pp. ix, 265. €99.  
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The Great Schism in the Western church began when the mostly French College of Cardinals, brought from Avignon to Rome in 1377 by Pope Gregory XI, met there after his death in 1378 and on 8 April, under pressure from the Roman people demanding one of their own, elected the Neapolitan noncardinal Bartholemy Prignano as Pope Urban VI, hoping that he would govern acceptably under the norms of the Avignon system and respect the power and status of the cardinalate. After it became clear that he would not, they alleged their election to have been coerced, withdrew to Anagni, declared the election invalid, and, in Fondi on 20 September 1378, elected Cardinal Robert of Geneva as Pope Clement VII. The schism took shape when Europe’s rulers chose one or the other as pope; it lasted in its original form until 1409, when the Council of Pisa deposed both contenders and elected Pope John XXIII. His failure to secure universal recognition, however, led to the Council of Constance, which deposed two of the papal contenders, secured the abdication of the third, and elected the Roman noble Cardinal Odo Colonna to be Pope Martin V, ruling a mostly united church. While the papacy has not declared which of the competing papal lines was the true one, there is a consensus among most Catholics in favor of the Roman line, which indeed later reused the papal names and numbers of its Avignon competitors. So much for the background to the book under review, whose focus lies in the events of 1378, specifically the actions of the Roman people preceding and just after Urban VI’s election.

Those who have dealt with these events before, including the present reviewer, have offered one or another variant of the standard narrative just summarized, differing chiefly in how much coercion by the Romans they focused on. Was it enough to invalidate the election? It remains a matter of opinion, even though scholars on both side have tried to make it