

Makkīkhā ibn Sulaymān al-Qankānī

DATE OF BIRTH 11th century
PLACE OF BIRTH Baghdad
DATE OF DEATH 17 March 1109
PLACE OF DEATH Baghdad

BIOGRAPHY

Makkīkhā ibn Sulaymān, chief-sacristan (*qankānī*) possibly of the church of the East Syrian ('Nestorian') patriarchal see in Baghdad (Fiey, 'Le patriarche nestorien Makkiha I^{er}', p. 451), studied in his native city Baghdad and was attracted to the monastic life. For some time he also practiced as a physician. After serving as a priest in one of the churches of Baghdad he was appointed bishop of Tīrhān/Tayrhān in central Iraq, where he became popular because of his oral translations into Arabic of the scriptural texts read in Syriac during the liturgy. After 20 years, in 1085/6, he was appointed metropolitan of Mosul and Ḥazza (Irbil), and in 1092 patriarch of the Church of the East.

His term as patriarch is characterized by a long-standing conflict with Ibn al-Wāsiṭī, a priest and the personal physician of the Caliph al-Mustazhir (r. 1094-1118). The conflict was about certain liturgical reforms introduced by the patriarch, which the priest-physician refused to implement. The conflict ended with Ibn al-Wāsiṭī's excommunication, but eventually the vizier 'Amīd al-Dawla ibn Jahīr succeeded in reconciling the two men.

The patriarchal chronicle in the *Kitāb al-majdal* (q.v.) emphasizes the many miracles performed by the patriarch. The same chronicle gives the text of the diploma delivered from the *diwān* of the Caliph al-Muqtadī (r. 1075-94), mentioning the rights and obligations of Makkīkhā as leader of his community.

Makkīkhā is the author of several apologetic writings, presented below, some of which were incorporated into the theological encyclopaedia *Asfār al-asrār* ('The books of secrets').

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

Patriarchal Chronicle of *The tower*: H. Gismondi (ed.), *Maris Amri et Slibae De patriarchis Nestorianorum commentaria. Pars prior. Maris textus Arabicus; Maris versio Latina*, Rome, 1899, pp. 130-31, 137-52 (Arabic), 114-15, 117-29 (Latin trans.)

Patriarchal Chronicle of the *Books of mysteries*: H. Gismondi (ed.), *Maris Amri et Slibae De patriarchis Nestorianorum commentaria. Pars altera. Amri et Slibae textus*, Rome, 1896; *Amri et Slibae versio*, Rome, 1899, pp. 102 (Arabic), 59 (Latin trans.)

Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon ecclesiasticum, ed. J.-B. Abbeloos and T.J. Lamy, vol. 3, Paris, 1877, pp. 309-12

Secondary

B. Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans*, pp. 126-28

J.M. Fiey, *Pour un Oriens Christianus novus. Répertoire des diocèses syriaques orientaux et occidentaux*, Beirut, 1993, p. 112

J.M. Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbassides, surtout à Bagdad (749-1258)*, Louvain, 1980, pp. 221-30

S.K. Samir, 'Bibliographie', *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976) 201-42, pp. 221-23

J.M. Fiey, 'Le patriarche nestorien Makkiha I^{er} (1092-1110) et Ibn al-Wāsiṭī', *Le Muséon* 91 (1978) 449-71

Graf, *GCAL* ii, pp. 196-97

J.A. Assemani, *De catholicis seu patriarchis chaldaeorum et nestorianorum*, Rome, 1775, p. 155

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Kitāb fī ḥaqīqat al-dīn al-Masīhī, 'Letter on the truth of the Christian religion'

DATE Between 1085/6 and 1092

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

This letter, which Makkīkhā wrote when he was metropolitan of Mosul and Irbil (as is mentioned in the introduction), is addressed to a Christian leader of Iṣfahān, 'a venerable elder' and 'pure deacon'. It is preserved in the 13th/14th-century theological encyclopaedia *Asfār al-asrār*.

It is an answer to a request by the unnamed Christian leader to give a summary of words and ideas contained in the ecclesiastical books

in order to strengthen the orthodox faith and to give consolation in times when 'atrocious matters' had unexpectedly affected the life of the Christians. This is possibly an allusion to al-Muqtadī's imposition of strict clothing rules on *dhimmīs*, as is suggested by the editor, or to some unknown incident that had occurred in Iṣfahān.

The author exhorts the Christians of this city to remain steadfast and (referring to Matthew 10:16) to be cunning as serpents, protecting their heads (which for the Christians means their faith), but to be prepared to give up their bodies.

Makkīkhā then refers to a number of New Testament passages which show that eternal life in Christ is preferable to the present perishable life. The truth of Christianity and the right choice made by the apostles and martyrs appears from the many miracles they performed, such as the miracle of the candle flame in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on Holy Saturday, or the miracles that take place in the monasteries as a result of prayers. The faith and perseverance of the forefathers and martyrs should serve as an example, especially the victims of the Roman and Persian persecutions, such as the famous Patriarch Ibn Sabbā'ē, or the attitude of the holy fathers and doctors imprisoned or killed on account of their struggle for the true faith.

The author ends with a reference to a contemporary event in Mosul, where three Christians were martyred for their faith in Christ, interpreted by Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans*, p. 295, as an allusion to the re-conversion to Christianity of some originally Christian officials who had become Muslims for the sake of their career.

SIGNIFICANCE

The letter is basically a work of exhortation to hold on in difficult times. Islam is nowhere explicitly mentioned, but it is possible that the 'atrocious matters' that had disturbed the life of the Christians of Iṣfahān are related to difficulties in relations between Christians and Muslims. The Islamic context of the letter also appears from the fact that, for his description of the unique character of Christian martyrdom as opposed to that of other religions (§§ 88-94, 105), Makkīkhā relies on the letter of the famous Christian apologist 'Abd al-Masīh al-Kindī (q.v.).

MANUSCRIPTS

See Gianazza, 'Lettre de Makkīhā', pp. 498-99. It is not certain whether the inaccessible MSS referred to in Sbath, *Fihris* i, p. 64, no 519 (now preserved in a private collection in Aleppo) contain the same text.

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

G. Gianazza, 'Lettre de Makkīhā sur la vérité de la religion chrétienne' (in S.K. Samir, *Actes du 5^e Congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes [Lund, août 1996]*), *Pd'O* 25 (2000) 493-555

G. Gianazza, 'Risālat Makkīkhā (+1109) fī Ḥaḳīqat al-diyāna', in G. Gianazza, *Nuṣūṣ mukhtāra min kanīsat al-Mashriq (al-qurūn 11-14)*, Baghdad, 1999, pp. 76-120 (edition)

Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans*, pp. 294-95 (French trans. of §§138-45 of Gianazza's edition)

J.S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca orientalis* iii.1, Rome, 1925, pp. 552-54 (extracts)

STUDIES

H. Teule, 'A theological treatise by Iṣō'yahb bar Malkon preserved in the theological compendium *Asfār al-asrār*', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 58 (2006) p. 242

Gianazza, 'Lettre de Makkīhā', pp. 495-504

Gianazza, 'Risālat Makkīkhā', pp. 76-82

Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans*, p. 122

S.K. Samir, 'Bibliographie', *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976), p. 222

Graf, *GCAL* ii, pp. 196-97

Sbath, *Fihris* i, Cairo, 1938, p. 64

Assemani, *Bibliotheca orientalis* iii 1, pp. 552-54

Qawl mukhtasar fī l-ubuwwa wa l-bunuwwa 'alā madhhab dīn al-Naṣrāniyya, 'Short treatise on fatherhood and sonship according to the doctrine of Christianity'

DATE Between 1092 and 1109, the years of Makkīkhā's patriarchate

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

The first theme of this treatise, which is preserved in the *Kitāb asfār al-asrār*, is the Trinity. Makkīkhā explains that the eternal fatherhood

and sonship applied to God and his Son are unlike fatherhood and sonship between corporeal and temporal beings. He then gives some classical Trinitarian analogies that are also found in earlier Christian Arabic treatises (e.g. the sun with its light and heat), and explains that God is one substance (*jawhar*) in three hypostases (*aqānīm*).

The second theme is the Incarnation of the Word. Here Makkīkhā presents the classical Christology of the Church of the East and gives some analogies of the relationship between Christ's divinity and humanity, which he thinks is too subtle to be exactly defined with the help of intellectual concepts.

He then concludes with the enumeration of seven forms of 'natural', non-eternal fatherhood and sonship, such as the corporeal fatherhood common to human beings and animals, or spiritual fatherhood, such as the titles given to bishops and priests.

SIGNIFICANCE

This vigorous defence and explanation of eternal fatherhood and sonship, in response to the classical Muslim reproach that these physical categories are not applicable to God, shows that Christians at this time were required to give as good an account of their beliefs as any of their predecessors, and also that they were able to draw on substantial resources. Makkīkhā's refusal to shift from the traditional position of his church suggests both confidence in his ancestral beliefs, and possibly a measure of reluctance to produce changes in explanation simply for the sake of a Muslim audience.

MANUSCRIPTS —

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS —

STUDIES —

*Kitāb fī ḥaqīqat dīn al-Naṣrāniyya li-aḥad
'ulamā' al-Muslimīn*, 'Treatise on the truth of
the Christian religion, for one of the Muslim
religious doctors'

DATE Before 1109

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

This work appears to have been a justification of Christian teachings in the light of Muslim criticisms, and is likely to have contained defenses of the Trinity, the unity of the divine and human natures in Christ, and Christian scripture, among other recognized matters of disagreement.

SIGNIFICANCE

It is difficult to say what the significance of the work was.

MANUSCRIPTS

MS Aleppo – Rizq Allāh Bāsīl Collection (inaccessible MS in private collection; see Sbath, *Fihris* i, p. 64, no. 520)

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS —

STUDIES

Samir, 'Bibliographie, p. 222

Sbath, *Fihris* i, p. 64

Herman G.B. Teule