

Yūḥannā ibn Mīnā

DATE OF BIRTH	Unknown; possibly 12 th century
PLACE OF BIRTH	Unknown; probably Egypt
DATE OF DEATH	Unknown; possibly 12 th century
PLACE OF DEATH	Unknown; probably Egypt

BIOGRAPHY

Almost nothing is known about Yūḥannā ibn Mīnā, the author of an appendix (or supplement) to the treatise *Kayfiyyat idrāk ḥaqīqat al-diyāna*, ‘How to discern the truth of a religion’, by the 9th-century translator and author Ḥunayn ibn Iṣḥāq (q.v.). Yūḥannā was probably a Copt: ‘Mīnā’ is a common name among the Copts, and the appendix was known to Coptic Orthodox writers, e.g. al-Shams ibn Kabar (d. 1324).

Sbath claims that MS Sbath 1001, one of the manuscripts containing the work, dates to the 11th century – but elsewhere suggests that Yūḥannā should be considered a writer of the 12th century (*Vingt traités*, p. 181, n. 2 [of the Arabic text], but cf. p. 6 [of the French introduction]). For now, we can only say for certain that Yūḥannā wrote his appendix sometime between the 9th century (when Ḥunayn [809-73] wrote his treatise) and 1249, the date of the earliest dated manuscript. Further study of MS Sbath 1001 is required; unfortunately, this manuscript must now be considered lost (F. del Río Sánchez, *Catalogue des manuscrits de la fondation Georges et Mathilde Salem (Alep, Syrie)*, Wiesbaden, 2008, p. 335). Another possibility is that a careful study of the text will elucidate Yūḥannā’s sources, which will allow for a more certain dating.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary —

Secondary

See below

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Untitled appendix to Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq,
Kayfiyyat idrāk ḥaqīqat al-diyāna, 'How to
 discern the truth of a religion'

DATE Unknown; possibly 12th century

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

Yūḥannā's treatise is not so much a 'commentary' on Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq's *Kayfiyyat idrāk ḥaqīqat al-diyāna* as a supplement that, in Yūḥannā's view, completes Ḥunayn's argument. Ḥunayn, one remembers, had posited ten reasons (*asbāb*) for accepting a religion. Six of them were reasons for which one might accept *falsehood*: (1) coercion; (2) desire for ease of life, (3) or for honor and power; (4) the preacher's trickery, (5) or his exploitation of ignorance; and (6) family or tribal solidarity. But there were four reasons for accepting the *truth*: (1) evidentiary miracles, (2) consistency between outward manifestations and inner reality, (3) compelling demonstration (*burhān*), and (4) correspondence between ends and beginnings. While Ḥunayn had devoted some lines to showing that the six reasons for accepting falsehood were absent from the earliest spread of Christianity, he had left the four reasons for accepting the truth without comment.

Yūḥannā feared that that a reader might not understand that, by eliminating the reasons for accepting falsehood from the explanation for the early spread of Christianity, Ḥunayn had, in fact, fashioned a positive demonstration of Christianity's truth; thus he provided a supplement to Ḥunayn's argument. He took each of Ḥunayn's four reasons for accepting the truth, and, subdividing each of the four reasons into four *bayānāt* or 'elucidations', argued that each of the four reasons was indeed applicable to Christianity: to the career of Christ himself in the first place, and then to his disciples. For example, specifically with regard to Christ: (1) he performed miracles (as Yūḥannā reports in a beautiful passage in rhymed Arabic prose); (2) his actions and teaching were entirely consistent; (3) his coming was foretold by the prophets (who thus provide a demonstration or *burhān*); and (4) the end of his earthly life rhymes perfectly with its beginning.

The Prophet Muḥammad or the Muslim community are never explicitly named in the treatise, although, as is usually the case in

Christian Arabic ‘true religion’ apologies, Christian understandings and experiences of the spread of Islam serve as a foil for the claims that are made for Christianity. One senses a number of ‘Let the reader understand’ moments, where Christ is to be compared with Muḥammad, or the spread of Christianity with the spread of Islam – always, of course, to the advantage of Christianity.

SIGNIFICANCE

Yūḥannā’s work may represent an important stage in the transmission to the Copts of an important Christian Arabic apologetic genre, the ‘true religion apology’, from the Melkite, West Syrian, and East Syrian apologists among whom it first flourished in the 9th century. The work is also interesting as an example of how Ḥunayn’s text was understood by Christian readers. One wonders, for example, whether Ḥunayn would have been happy with Yūḥannā’s interpretation of *burhān* (‘demonstration’) as that offered by Old Testament *testimonia*, or whether he had a rather more Aristotelian form of demonstration in mind.

MANUSCRIPTS

According to Samir, ‘Yūḥannā b. Mīnā’, four MSS are known. Unfortunately, two are lost and another incomplete.

MS Sbath 1001 (11th century?), pp. 325-38 or 39 (the MS has been lost)

MS Sbath 1589 (1249), pp. 17-27 (the MS has been lost)

MS Paris, BNF – Ar. 173 (14th century), fols 168r-170r (incomplete)

MS Aleppo, Fondation Georges et Mathilde Salem – Ar. 238 (Sbath 1040) (1787), pp. 173-86 or 87

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

Samir (‘Une correspondance’, p. 525) indicates that he has prepared a new edition and French translation, but (to the best of the present writer’s knowledge) this has not yet been published.

This leaves the older edition:

P. Sbath, *Vingt traités philosophiques et apologétiques d’auteurs arabes chrétiens du IX^e au XIV^e siècle*, Cairo, 1929, pp. 186-200 (edition using MS Sbath 1589 as base)

STUDIES

[S.]K. Samir, ‘Yūḥannā b. Mīnā’, in ‘Bibliographie’, *Islamochristiana* 2 (1976) 201-42, pp. 227-28

[S.]K. Samir and P. Nwyia, *Une correspondance islamo-chrétienne entre Ibn al-Munağğim, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq et Qusṭā ibn Lūqā* (PO 40.4 = no. 185), Turnhout, 1981, p. 525 (= p. [7])
Graf, *GCAL* ii, pp. 127-28

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