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On 'THE BOOK OF
RELIGION *and* EMPIRE'
by 'ALI B. RABBAN AL-TABARI

BY
D. S. MARGOLIOUTH
Fellow of the Academy

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FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE
BRITISH ACADEMY. VOLUME XVI
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BY ALL E. RABBIAN AL-TABARI

D. S. MARGOLIS



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AN edition of this work, from a copy known to have been in the Crawford collection in 1843,¹ and now in the John Rylands Library, Manchester, was issued by Dr. A. Mingana with English translation in the years 1922 and 1923. Its author, who designates himself 'Alī son of Rabban of Ṭabaristan, client of the Prince of Believers, states that having originally been a Christian, he had been converted to Islam by the Caliph Mutawakkil (232-47 A.H.), who favoured the publication of treatises in support of the latter system. He mentions an uncle Abu Zakkār Yaḥya b. al-Nu'mān, as the author of a treatise called *Answer to Adherents to Religions*,² who is likely to be identical with Yaḥya b. al-Nu'mān, the Christian, whose work on the Magians is cited by al-Beruni.³ This account agrees for the most part with what is known of Ibn Rabban al-Tabari from other sources, though the author of the *Fihrist* names Mu'taṣim (218-27 A.H.) as the Caliph who converted him, in lieu of Mutawakkil. The confusion is probably due to the fact that Ibn Rabban was in the employment of Mu'taṣim before he entered that of Mutawakkil; according to Ibn Isfandiyar⁴ after the death of Māziyār (in 225 A.H.)⁵ the Caliph (Mu'taṣim) put him in charge of the *Diwan al-Inshā* in Māziyār's place. The author gives the date of his work as A.D. 867, which synchronizes (according to the ordinary reckoning) with 253 A.H., six years after the death of Mutawakkil, who is described in the work as a reigning

¹ H. Guppy, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, Jan. 1930, p. 122.

² *Al-radd 'alā ahl al-adyān*.

³ *Chronology of Ancient Nations*, transl. Sachau, p. 191.

⁴ Transl. E. G. Browne, p. 43.

⁵ Ibn Khaldun, *History*, iii. 265.



sovereign. The editor has offered suggestions in explanation of this difficulty, one or other of which is likely to be right. It is to be regretted that the author did not furnish a hijrah date, since the employment by Muslim authors of another calendar frequently occasions difficulty.

When this work was first published it probably occurred to few to question the correctness of the ascription, since the motives which ordinarily lead men to fabricate appear to have no place here. The ostensible author, Ibn Rabban al-Tabari, enjoyed a certain amount of fame in the third and fourth Islamic centuries; his work *Firdaus al-Hikmah*, which has recently been published by Dr. M. Z. Siddiqi, was kept by the historian Tabari under his praying mat,¹ and counted as a classic in the fourth century.² It is occasionally cited for curious matter both in that century as by Mas'ūdi, and in the seventh by the Geographer Yaqut, who though he describes him as an accurate man of science, who wrote on numerous subjects,³ does not admit him into his *Dictionary of Learned Men*. Nor is this treatise (*The Book of Religion and Empire*) named in the list of his works given in the *Fihrist*,⁴ the incompleteness of which is indicated by the mention of another work by the author in a different context.⁵ Good evidence of the author's obscurity in later centuries is to be found in the fact that his name is generally misspelt, and indeed in a variety of ways; Dr. Mingana has the merit of having fixed the correct spelling. Moreover, the contents of the book suit what is known of this personage exceedingly well. He abandoned Christianity for Islam, and enjoyed the favour of the Caliph Mutawakkil, who made him one of his 'messmates' (*nadīm*); what more natural than that he should compose an *Apologia* with the view of inducing other Christians to follow his example, and dedicate the work to a fanatical Caliph?

However, Father Peeters, reviewing the work in the *Analecta Bollandiana* for 1924, asserted that it must be

¹ *Irshad al-Arib*, vi. 429.

² *Ibid.* ii. 279.

³ *Mu'jam al-Fuldān*, ii. 608.

⁴ p. 296, 13-15.

⁵ p. 316, 20.

'provisionally regarded as a literary fraud', apparently on the ground that according to Mingana¹ 'from the footnotes of pp. 97, 106, 131, etc., and from some passages of the text, it would appear that the MS. is a transcript from a first or rough draft made by the author', and a work in such a condition could not be presented to a Caliph. Now the writer does not claim to have actually presented it. Since we cannot fix the hijrah date given in the work with accuracy, it is even permissible to suppose that the author's intention of presenting it to the Caliph was frustrated by the assassination of the latter, the suddenness of which is emphasized in Buḥturi's powerful dirge.²

An endeavour was made by Father Maurice Bouyges, S.J., to produce some evidence in favour of Father Peeter's theory in a pamphlet published in Beyrut, July 1924, with the title *Le Kitab ad-din wa'd-daulat est il authentique?* Some of the suggestions in this pamphlet have been already refuted (with just indignation) by Mr. Guppy, Librarian of the J. Rylands Library. The first serious argument is that he has difficulty in believing that a good Arabic writer of the ninth century A. D. could have used certain expressions. But is Ibn Rabban *un bon écrivain arabe?* Let us hear the opinion of Ibn Rabban's contemporaries on this matter and his own. This is what Ibn Isfandiyar records:

After his (Maziyar's) death the Caliph put 'Ali b. Zayn (for Rabban) in his place at the foreign office, but the despatches written by him were less rich in meaning than those penned by Maziyar. They asked him why this was so. He replied: He wrote in his own language; I translate into Arabic.³

He admitted, then, that he wrote Arabic like a foreigner. Some signs of this are to be found in the work before us, and are assuredly evidence of genuineness rather than of the contrary. Thus on p. 5, line 3 a.f. he makes the word *mala-kūt* feminine, which is correct in Syriac, the language with which Ibn Rabban appears to have been most familiar,

¹ Preface to Translation, p. xvii.

² *Diwan*, ed. Const., i. 28.

³ E. G. Browne's translation, p. 43.

whereas these borrowed words regularly become masculine in Arabic.¹

An argument which he regards (perhaps with justice) as *plus grave* is drawn from the fact that whereas Matt. iv. 3-4 is cited p. 128 from the *second* section of the Gospel, Matt. iv. 18-20 is cited, p. 125, from the *fourth* section, which agrees with the modern division of chapters. Similarly, p. 126, Matt. xii. 39, is cited from the *twelfth* section, which agrees with the modern division, whereas according to the old division it should be the *eleventh*. The suggestion appears to be that the forger, by a lapse of memory in these cases, quoted according to the modern division instead of looking up the old division.

This argument is invalidated by the circumstance that in some cases the citation agrees with neither system. Thus, on p. 148, not only is Matt. iv of our division cited as from the *fourth* section, but Matt. ix of our division is cited from the same *fourth* section. On p. 150 Matt. xxvi of our division is cited from the *sixth* section, whereas Matt. xxi is cited from the *sixteenth* section. On p. 160 Matt. xii and Matt. v of our division are both cited from the *thirteenth* section. The explanation which suits all these places is that the author trusted to his memory and failed to verify his references.

For the fact that the work remained in obscurity, and has been preserved in one copy only, it is possible to find reasons. In the first place the author addresses his arguments to Christians, who would be unlikely to preserve it; and in the second, its most important line of reasoning, the collection of passages in the Bible which foretell the mission of Muhammad, is not popular with Muslim theologians, who hold that the Christian Scriptures are so seriously corrupted that it is best to leave them alone. Polemical writers of our time adopt this line, and quote traditions wherein the Prophet forbade the perusal of these Books.² The historian

¹ Fleischer, *Kleinere Schriften*, i. 172. *tahāwun* in the same line is to be emended *tahāwur*.

² See 'Abd al-Bāqī Surūr Nu'aim, *al-Islām māḍīhi wa-ḥādīruhu*.

and preacher Ibn al-Jauzi cites as a commendable example of astuteness the case of a Muslim who, when asked by a Jew whether he recognized the Torah, replied that he only recognized a Torah which foretold the mission of Muhammad, not that which was in the hands of the Jews.¹ Those who adopt a less hostile attitude treat these Books somewhat as the sixth Anglican Article regards the Apocrypha: 'to be read for example of life and instruction of manners, but not to establish any doctrine'. Hence citations from them are chiefly to be found in homiletic works, where they are frequently adduced by oral tradition and mixed up with alien matter. Thus the chapter *Zuhd* (asceticism) in Ibn Qutaibah's *Uyūn al-Akhbār* contains some genuine citations from both Testaments, but a number of sayings attributed to 'Uzair, 'Īsā, and Dāwūd, which are evidently Islamic fabrications.² The sayings quoted from the *Isra'īliyyāt* in the *Qūt al-Qulūb* are with scarcely an exception of this latter type.

The theory that the Christian and Jewish scriptures are wilfully corrupted is of great importance legally, since members of those communities are not allowed to give evidence in Muslim courts on the ground of their untrustworthiness as exhibited in this procedure. Now to treat the same books as genuine for one purpose, but as spurious for another, obviously involves difficulties. Thus the Biblical evidence adduced by Ibn Rabban in favour of Islam is likely to have aroused little enthusiasm among Muslim theologians.

Hence we find that later writers are careful to state that though they refute the Jews and Christians out of their own approved translations of the Torah and the Injil, they are convinced that those communities have in their hands only such portions of the Books as their unscrupulous doctors chose to select. Su'ūdī faces the objection boldly. If, as he holds, the Old Testament contains no fewer than twenty-seven announcements of the mission of Muhammad (in

¹ *Kitab al-Adhkiya*, p. 103.

² Cairo edition, ii. 261 foll.

some cases mentioning him by name) and the Arab empire, what becomes of the charge of falsification? His reply is that the People of the Book removed all the clearest prophecies about, and descriptions of, Muhammad; owing to their stupidity they did not notice the import of a considerable number of passages and so left them unaltered. Thus they omitted mention of the Paraclete from all the Gospels save that of St. John; and even in this case denied that the person meant was Muhammad.

It is noteworthy that in the work of Ibn Ḥazm recently translated into Spanish by Asin Palacios the suggestion that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures contain promises of the mission of Muhammad finds little favour.¹ Jews and Christians, he asserts, are agreed that their Scriptures contain no allusion whatever to the Islamic Prophet. Now the Qur'an cites these Scriptures for certain matters which are not to be found in the Jewish and Christian texts. To accept these texts as genuine implies rejection of the statement of the Qur'an. The expedient of supposing that the same texts are partly genuine and partly spurious is contradictory.

Those who are willing to cite 'Announcements' from the Jewish or Christian Scriptures suppose the veto on the perusal of those works to have been confined to persons unable to distinguish the passages which are abrogated or have been falsified from the rest; or to be a warning against wasting time in their study.² The fact that Ibn Rabban makes no allusion to the supposed corruption of the text may have rendered his work unpopular.

It is possible to compare Ibn Rabban's work with earlier and later treatises on the same theme. Somewhat, though only a little, earlier is the *Refutation of the Christians* by Jāḥiẓ of Basrah, who died 255 A.H., recently edited by J. Finkel.³ It appears to be fragmentary, whence we cannot

¹ Ibn Ḥazm, i. 215; Asin, ii. 377. He quotes some texts i. 111, 112.

² Zurqāni, *loco citando*, vi. 232, who follows Khafāji in his Commentary on the *Shifā* of Qāḍi 'Iyād, i. 204.

³ Cairo, Salafiyyah Press, 1344.

say with certainty what it contained. The line of argument is quite different from that pursued by Ibn Rabban. Its method is not defence of Muslim beliefs, but confutation of Christian doctrine and abuse of Christian practice. The author occasionally quotes both the Old and the New Testaments, but it is not for the purpose of discovering prophecies of the mission of Muhammad or the Islamic empire. The interest of this pamphlet lies less in its contribution to the controversy than in what it reveals of the social position of the Jews and Christians in the author's time. He tells us that the Christians monopolized most of the professions, and were sufficiently influential to be able to neglect ordinances which were intended for their humiliation. The Jews, on the other hand, formed a lower stratum of society, and followed such callings as those of dyer or tanner. They were besides illiterate: 'they hold', he says, 'that the study of philosophy is unbelief, that religious discussion is innovation and can only lead to doubts; that there is no knowledge save what is to be found in the Torah and the Books of the Prophets; that trust in medicine or belief in astrology is a cause of atheism and apostasy'.

It is clear that the position of the Jews in the Abbasid empire must have improved considerably in the course of the third century A.H. For whereas Jāḥiẓ makes the banking business a monopoly of the Christians, by the end of the century it is largely in the hands of Jews. Further, Sa'adyah (892-942) gave the Jews at least one philosophical treatise in Arabic. The poet Buḥturi (ob. 284 A.H.) speaks of both communities as favoured by fortune.¹

The works—other than Ibn Rabban's—which contain collections of passages from the Old Testament, announcing, it is claimed, the mission of Muhammad, are, so far as they are at present accessible, much later than Jāḥiẓ. One comment of the sort on a Biblical passage is indeed quoted by Ibn Taimiyyah and some others from a treatise by the well-known Ibn Qutaibah (ob. 270 or 278 A.H.). The work

¹ ii. 18.

is called *A'lām al-nubuwwah* by Qaṣṭalāni in his *Mawāhib Laduniyyah* (vi. 238). H. Khalifah mentions several books which bore that name, none of them by Ibn Qutaibah; perhaps the treatise by him called in the *Fihrist* *Dalā'il al-Nubuwwah* is meant. Certain texts from the Pentateuch and Isaiah which announce the mission of Muhammad are cited by the great al-Beruni (ob. 430) in his *Chronology of Ancient Nations*.¹ The earliest extant treatise on the subject appears to be one called *Khair al-Bishar bikhair al-Bashar* by the Sicilian writer Abū Hāshim or Abū 'Abdallah Muhammad b. 'Abdallah, generally known as Ibn Zafar.² The author gives its date as 566. It was lithographed in Cairo, 1280 A.H. Not many years later is the *Ten Questions* of Ṣāliḥ b. al-Ḥusain al-Ja'fari, who asserts that in the year 618 various questions were addressed by the tyrant of Rum to the Ayyubid al-Malik al-Kāmil, ruler of Egypt, in reply to which this treatise was composed. It is, he says, an abridgement of a larger work by himself called *al-Takhjil liman harrāfa' l-Injil* (Confutation of those who corrupted the text of the Gospel), said to be preserved in Constantinople. Of the abridgement there is a MS. in the British Museum (Add. 16661). The larger work was utilized by Abu'l-Faḍl al-Su'ūdī, whose work (942 A.H.) was edited by F. J. van den Ham, Leiden 1877-90, with the title *Disputatio pro Religione Mohammedanorum adversus Christianos*. Between these two comes Ibn Taimiyyah (ob. 728) whose work *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ liman badala dīn al-Masīḥ* (Sound Reply to those who altered Christ's Religion) was published in four parts, Cairo 1905, while another work dealing with the same matter, called like his predecessor's *al-Takhjil*, is preserved in a Bodleian MS. He, as will presently be seen, seems to have used Ṣāliḥ's work, though he does not mention it; on the other hand he quotes Ibn Qutaiba and Ibn Zafar. Ibn Taimiyyah's material is used by Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah (ob. 751) in his *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā min al-Yahūd*

¹ Transl. Sachau, pp. 22, 23.

² See Amari's *Bibliotheca Arabo-Sicula*, p. 666.



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wal-Nasārā (Guide of the Perplexed among Jews and
Christians, Cairo, 1323).

Now it should be noted in the first place that Ibn Rabban's collection includes all the O. T. texts utilized by the others except what are clearly fabrications. Thus Su'ūdi, who has some thirty citations from the O. T., has none from Ezekiel, Hosea, or Micah; Ibn Zafar omits Hosea and Micah, Zephaniah and Zechariah, but cites Ezekiel; Ṣāliḥ on the other hand omits Ezekiel, but cites the others. Su'ūdi has eleven citations from Isaiah, of which nine are genuine; all these nine are to be found in Ibn Rabban. Ibn Zafar has five from this Prophet, Ṣāliḥ five, of which one is spurious. All the genuine citations are to be found in Ibn Rabban's work. It would seem, then, that this was the mine whence the rest drew their information.

Secondly it must be observed that the later writers (except perhaps Al-Beruni) have no real acquaintance with the texts in any language but Arabic, though both Ibn Zafar and Su'ūdi at times cite the Hebrew original. How much Hebrew Ibn Zafar knew is illustrated by his recording that the Hebrew מאד מאד (which he slightly mis-spells) is variously rendered *jiddan jiddan* (which is correct), *ṭayyib ṭayyib* (a rendering of the Syriac translation), *ḥaqqan ḥaqqan*, *ḥamd ḥamd*. The last two renderings appear to be wild guesses. Su'ūdi repeatedly reproduces the Hebrew of Genesis in Arabic characters; the corruption in these cases is serious, but it may be due to copyists. His references to the Hebrew original do not affect the sense. Ibn Zafar states that he read in a translation undertaken, 'they assert', by three hundred doctors, the following rendering of Gen. xvi. 4:

فطاف ابراهيم بهاجر فحملت فلما رات انها حامل خفت ربتها في عينها

The euphemism of this rendering is unusual. He then quotes another translation.

Thirdly, in the most important passages, those wherein Muhammad is supposed to be mentioned by name, the text followed can only be that of the Peshitta Syriac; for

this version contains the word *mshabhā* 'praised' which is regarded as the equivalent of *Muhammad*, whereas the Hebrew and the Greek have nothing corresponding. The passages in which this word occurs appear in about the same translation in the different treatises. Now Ibn Rabban did know Syriac, which was not an accomplishment of his successors, and informs us that the rendering of *mshabhā* by Muhammad had been questioned, and he defends it by asking how the words *al-ḥamdu lillah* would be rendered in Syriac. It would seem, then, likely that these translations of the Syriac are his own, since it is most improbable that any Christian would have produced a rendering which so clearly furnished the Muslims with an argument, whereas a Christian converted to Islam would be likely to render the passages in this way. Ibn Rabban mentions an earlier treatise wherein he had refuted the Christian sects, and the criticism which he endeavours to refute may well have been elicited by that work.

Fourthly, it may be observed that in some cases the argument as it appears in the later writers shows some advance on the form in which Ibn Rabban states it. He, indeed, admits that his collection is not the earliest, though he claims to be fuller than his predecessors. Ibn Taimiyyah states that the Announcements collected exceed a hundred,¹ which seems to be considerably more than even Ibn Rabban is able to produce.

On p. 74 Ibn Rabban cites from chapter XX of the Fifth Book of the Torah (Deut. xxxiii. 2) the verse

ان الرب جاء من طور سينين وطلع لنا من ساعير وظهر من جبل فاران ومعه عن يمينه
بوات القديسين فمنهم العز وحبهم الى الشعوب ودعا بجمع قديسه بالبركة

This is evidently a rendering of the Peshitta Syriac. The author proceeds to argue that Faran (Paran) is the place where Ishmael dwelt, as we learn from Gen. xxi. 21. Now every one knows that Ishmael dwelt in Meccah. His descendants there and in its neighbourhood are acquainted with

¹ *Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīh*, iii. 277.

their ancestor's residence. Indeed, they could not be ignorant of it. When, therefore, we read in this text *The lord appeared from the mountain of Faran*, let people show us any lord who has appeared from Faran. Obviously the *lord* of the text is the Prophet Muhammad, since this word *lord* and its equivalents in other languages are both used for God and His servants, as when you say 'The lord of the house', in Syriac *mar*.

This last observation is incorrect. The Syriac has here the Syriac tetragrammaton ܡܘܨܝܘܢ, only used for the Deity. What is to be noted is that Ibn Rabban's argument is merely that 'the lord appearing from Faran' must mean Muhammad appeared from Meccah, because elsewhere in the Torah Faran must mean Meccah. He does not make himself responsible for the statement that Meccah or some place in the neighbourhood is called by the inhabitants Faran, but infers from the story of Ishmael that it must be a name for Meccah in the Torah.

If Diyarbakri (ob. 982) is to be believed, a contemporary of the Prophet, 'Abdallah b. Salām, called attention to this verse.¹ The rendering employed is different:

جاء الله (وفى المواهب اللدنية تجلى) من طور سينا واشرف من ساعير واستعلن من
جبال فاران

He then endeavours to locate Faran among the mountains of Meccah. The geographer Hamdani² similarly mentions Faran as a name for the Ḥaram which is found in the Torah where the Mountains of Faran are mentioned.

The comment of Ibn Qutaibah, who is about a generation later than Ibn Rabban, which is cited by Ibn Taimiyah,³ Qaṣṭalāni, and Diyarbakri, shows considerable advance. 'To one who reflects there is here no obscurity of any kind. The coming of God from Mount Sinai is His revealing the Torah to Moses from Mount Sinai, as we both (Muslims and Christians) agree. Likewise His shining from Sa'ir must be His revealing the Gospel to the Messiah,

¹ *Ta'riḫ al-Khamis* i. 27, 8 a.f. ² Ed. Müller, 170, 10. ³ iii. 282.

for the Messiah was from Sa'ir the country of Abraham, in a village called Nāṣirah, after which his followers are called Naṣārā. And as His shining from Sa'ir must refer to the Messiah, so His displaying Himself from the mountains of Faran must mean His revealing the Qur'an to Muhammad. There is no dispute between the Muslims and the people of the Book about Faran being Meccah.'

This exegesis shows considerable advance on Ibn Rabban's. His theory that *The Lord* means Muhammad has been abandoned; all three expressions refer to Divine Revelation. Further it has been discovered that Seir had something to do with the Messiah, so that the three clauses refer to the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an respectively.

This same text is cited by Al-Berūnī, whose comment is identical with Ibn Qutaibah's, and further implies polemic against someone. 'The terms of this passage are hints for establishing the proof that the qualities of which people take hold do not suit the nature of the Deity nor can be associated with His qualities.' The person attacked is not Ibn Rabban, whose solution of the difficulty is, as has been seen, different.

Ibn Zafar (like Ibn Ḥazm) quotes the text in the same form as Ibn Qutaibah, noticing a variety in the first verb, and adopts Ibn Qutaibah's comment. Ṣāliḥ adopts it also. Su'ūdi does the like, but uses a different version:

أقبل الله من سينا وتجلي من ساعير وظهر من جبال فاران

Ibn Taimiyyah adds as an observation of his own that near Bethlehem, where the Messiah was born, is a village called Sa'ir to this day, having mountains also called by that name. The mountain of Faran, of which Moses speaks, is Mount Ḥirā, where Muhammad's revelation commenced; there is no mountain of those round Meccah, said to be ten thousand in number, higher than mount Ḥirā; and the place is called Faran to this day, and the desert which is between Meccah and Mount Sinai is called the Desert of Faran.

Yaqut (ob. 626) quotes for the prophecy Part X of the Fifth Book of the Torah. Sa'ir, he says, is a village of

Nāṣirah between Tiberias and Acre. The translation which he cites is identical with that used by Ibn Zafar (1) and Ibn Qutaibah.¹ In the article on Faran he says first that it is a name of Meccah; then he quotes Ibn Mākulā (ob. 473) for the statement that the mountains of Faran are the mountains of the Ḥijāz; and finally that they are the mountains of Palestine.² In another article he states that the mountains of Faran are south of Kerak.³

Ibn Taimiyyah's contemporary Dimishqī, who cites the text of Deuteronomy in the same form as Ibn Qutaibah and Yaqut, says that Faran and the desert of Faran mean Meccah and the Hijaz.⁴

It is clear that Ibn Rabban's work exhibits an earlier stage of the argument than that which is represented by the later apologists. The later authorities consulted translations of the Torah and so quoted a different text from his. They reject his view that *The Lord* of the verse means Muhammad, for that is inadmissible; they suppose the phrase to mean the divine revelation. Whereas he infers the identity of Faran with Meccah in the manner cited above, they assert that Faran is known to be a name of either Meccah itself or some place in the neighbourhood. If Wüstenfeld's index to his *Historians of Meccah* is to be trusted, only one of the latest (ob. 990 A.H.) mentions Faran among the names of the city. Further the identification of Sa'ir with Nazareth or some place connected with the origins of Christianity is not found in Ibn Rabban, though it was known to Ibn Qutaibah.

Ibn Zafar's first Announcement is Ibn Rabban's second, viz. Genesis xvi. 12. For this Ibn Zafar cites three translations, one from a translation undertaken, they assert, by three hundred doctors, rendering the words

يكون هو وحشي الناس يده على كل يد ويد كل به ويحكي على منتهى اخوته كلهم

Another rendering:

وهو يكون عظيما في الامم ويده على كل يد

Another:

وتكون يده فوق الجميع ويد للجميع مبسوطة اليه

¹ iii. 11.

² iii. 834.

³ iii. 259.

⁴ Ed. Mehren, p. 212.

Ibn Taimiyyah (iii. 294) like Ibn Rabban (p. 67) quotes this text from the ninth chapter of the first Book of the Torah, in a text which agrees with none of these three:

وولدك يكون وهي الناس ويكون يده فوق للجميع ويد الكل به ويكون مسكنه على
تخوم جميع اخوته

Ibn Rabban's text

وهو يكون غير الناس وتكون يده فوق للجميع ويد الجميع مبسوطة اليه ويكون مسكنه
على تخوم كل اخوته

corresponds most closely with Ibn Zafar's third.

So far as this verse can be used as an announcement of the Arab empire, the forms which it has assumed are traceable to the Peshitta Syriac; for whereas both the Hebrew and the Greek use the same preposition after the word *hand* in both cases, *his hand at every man and every man's hand at him*, the Syriac has for the first preposition one which may mean *against* or *above*, for the second one meaning *in* or *at*. The translations employed by Ibn Rabban's successors, which substitute *savage* for *wild ass*, are evidently influenced by the LXX, which substitutes ἄγροικος. Ibn Rabban's rendering *His hand shall be above all, and the hand of all stretched unto him* would seem to be his own paraphrase and the source of Ibn Zafar's third rendering. It is too paraphrastic and too partisan a rendering to have occurred to different translators independently. Since St. Ephraem interprets the Syriac in the ordinary way, viz. as meaning that Ishmael will be constantly at war with his neighbours, some justification is required for Ibn Zafar's emphatic assertion that he has employed the actual words of translations chosen and inserted in their own books by the Christians themselves. It is possible that the explanation of this assertion is that Ibn Rabban, or whoever first pointed out these 'Announcements', had originally been a Christian. And indeed Ibn Taimiyyah asserts that many Christians were converted to Islam by reference to these passages.

Two 'Announcements' which are regarded by Ibn Taimiyyah as of great importance are found in the Book of

Habakkuk; these are quoted in all the works enumerated, though it must be admitted that serious carelessness is shown. Ibn Rabban quotes them in the following form:

ان الله جاء من التيمن والقدوس من جبل فاران لقد انكسفت السماء من بهاء
محمد وامتلات الارض من حمدة
ركبت للخيول وعلوت مراكب الانقاذ والغوث وستترع في قسيك اغراقا وترعا وترتوى
السهام بامرك يا محمد ارتواء

These are renderings of the Peshitta Syriac of Habakkuk iii. 2 and 8. Ibn Zafar, who first cites the first of these verses from the words of 'Shim'un on whom be peace' in the words that they themselves approve, wherein, however, the name of Muhammad does not occur, afterwards cites it 'from the ancient historians, who record that Habakkuk said'

جاء الله من اليمين وظهر القدس من جبال فاران وامتلات الارض من تحميد احمد
Ṣāliḥ cites both verses thus:

جاء الله من التيمن والقدوس من جبال فاران لقد اضاءت السماء من بهاء محمد
وامتلات الارض من حمدة
ثم قال زجرك في البحر واحتدام صولتك في البحار وستبرع في قسيك اعراقا وبرعا
وترتوى السهام بامرك يا محمد ارتوى

Ibn Taimiyyah (iii. 294) cites the first of the verses in the form given by Ibn Zafar, and presently both in the form given by Ṣāliḥ (iii. 310-311). Afterwards he cites the second in the latter form, as from Daniel (iv. 2). The author of the Persian *Shawāhid al-Nubuwwah*¹ cites a loose paraphrase of the first verse from Habakkuk:

از ينجمله آنست كه حيقوق نبى گفته است وتوريت بان ناطقتست كه جا الله بالبيان
من جبل فاران وامتلات السماوات من تسبيح احمد وامته تحمل خيله في البحر كما
يحملة في البر ياتينا بكتاب جديد يعرف بعد خراب بيت المقدس

Finally, Su'udi cites the verses from Habakkuk in a form similar to that given by Ṣāliḥ, and the second of the verses also from Daniel.

¹ Brit. Mus. Add. 25850.

It is very clear that all the authorities except Ibn Rabban are quoting at second hand. Ibn Zafar, Ibn Taimiyyah, and the Persian writer, introduce the name *Aḥmad* in the first verse. Now it might be maintained that the Syriac *mshabḥā* is the equivalent of Muhammad, but it is clearly not the equivalent of Aḥmad; and though Ṣāliḥ comes nearer the Syriac, his substitution of 'shone' for 'is eclipsed' in the first verse indicates that he is citing at second hand.

It has been noticed that Ibn Rabban (p. 113) records an objection on the part of a contumacious person that the Syriac *mshabḥa* need not necessarily be rendered by Muhammad, as there are other synonyms, and replies that such an objector should be asked what is the Syriac for *al-ḥamdu lillah*. He would reply *shubḥa lalaha*; since, therefore, *shubḥa* is equivalent to *ḥamd*, *mshabḥa* is equivalent to Muhammad. This passage is reproduced by Qaṣṭalani (vi. 227) thus:

وكيف يغنى عنهم انكارهم وهذا اسم النبي بالسريانية مشفح فمشفح محمد بغير
شك واعتباره انهم يقولون شفحا لاما اذا ارادوا ان يقولوا الحمد لله واذا كان الحمد
شفحا فمشفح محمد

The argument is Ibn Rabban's, but it does not come to Qaṣṭalani directly from Ibn Rabban, as is shown by the substitution of *F* for *B* in the Syriac words, which is due to the double pronunciation of the Syriac letter; the intermediary must have known some Syriac, and for some reason preferred a different transliteration.

A sign of the period at which Ibn Rabban's work was composed is to be found in the term of abuse applied to an opponent, *Jarmaqāni*. This means 'connected with Jarmaqaṇ or Sharmaqaṇ' said to be 'a small place in Khorasan, in the district of Isfarain, four days journey from Nisabur'.¹ The only reason why it should be used as a term of abuse would seem to be that the name sounds like 'worst in place', a phrase repeatedly occurring in the Qur'an.² We find it used several times in anecdotes of the early Abbasid

¹ Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-Buldan*, iii. 281.

² Surah xii. 27, etc.

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 period. In the *Aghāni* (v. 61, line 4 a.f., first edition) Ibrahim ibn al-Mahdi, who died 224 A.H., is asked a question by some one prompted by the musician Ishāq al-Mauṣili, which the former regards as offensive. He retorts: 'This is not your language, but that of the *Jarmaqānī*, son of the . . .'. The retort is communicated to Ishāq, who says: 'The *Jarmaqānī* among us is the person whose speech most resembles that of the people of Jarmaqan', the grammatical error which he had noticed being said to resemble Nabataean. In another passage of the same volume (p. 26, line 9 a.f.) it is Ibrahim ibn al-Mahdi who is called 'son of the woman of Jarmaqan'. Since this Ibrahim's mother was a negress it is clear that the term is simply one of abuse. In the next volume (vi. 24) we are told how one Yaḥya of Meccah communicated a tune to Ibrahim of Mauṣil, on condition that the two should share the honorarium given by Harun al-Rashid. A rival musician, Ibn Jāmi', goes to Yaḥya and asks how he could teach the tune to that *Jarmaqānī* (blackguard). It would appear to be slang in use at this period in Baghdad or Samarra, and that afterwards it fell into disuse. For neither the Eastern nor the Western lexicographers are acquainted with the word in this sense.¹

In order to ascertain the exact place occupied by Ibn Rabban's work in the history of controversy it would be necessary to have access to works which have been lost as well as to some which though apparently in existence are not as yet easily accessible. It would seem clear that in the early days of Islam persons who read the Bible in Syriac found in it a number of passages which they referred to the rise of Islam, and Ibn Rabban, while adopting these, or some of them, is likely to have added others. His collection then formed a sort of armoury, whence weapons could be taken, and it is clear that some of the controversialists verified the quotations in such versions of the Scriptures as were at their disposal; but the widespread belief that both

¹ I owe some of these references to the late H. F. Amedroz.

Jews and Christians tampered with their Scriptures in order to discredit Islam seemed to justify them in reproducing quotations which they were unable or took no trouble to verify. Hence we find that Su'udi, who ostentatiously quotes the Hebrew in certain cases where the Syriac agrees with it, makes no reference to it in places where the argument rests entirely on the Syriac text. In Ibn Rabban's work we are brought to the fountain head, for there is no doubt of his acquaintance with and employment of the Syriac version of the Bible.

The doubts which have been cast on the correctness of the ascription of the work to Ibn Rabban appear to be quite gratuitous. Dr. Siddiqi in his edition of the *Firdaus* is therefore quite right to neglect them.

There is besides one indication of date which to most people will seem conclusive. The author finds that the numbers of Daniel 'Blessed is he that waiteth and cometh to the 1335 days' refer to 'the present Abbasid dynasty', within about thirty years. As Mingana observes, 32 years would be the exact number, as the author makes the whole number from Daniel to his time of writing 1367. Since Mutawakkil came to the throne in 232 A. H., at the age of twenty-five, this is a delicate way of proving that the time of Mutawakkil was the blessed period which the Prophet Daniel foresaw. It is really unthinkable that any one would have produced this interpretation except one who hoped to be rewarded by the Caliph who profited by the discovery. In the following century a fabricator of oracles which he ascribed to Daniel produced one to the effect that if a person of a particular description became vizier to the eighteenth Abbasid, that Caliph would be successful in all his affairs.¹ The person indicated was identified, and appointed vizier by Muqtadir (the eighteenth Caliph), and the oracle-monger was liberally rewarded. Such efforts belong to the particular time in which those who make them have an interest.

¹ *Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, i. 216.





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