David Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies 29 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011). Pp. xii + 285; paperback, $37.50.

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Severus b. al-Muqaffaʿ, the tenth-century debater-luminary of the Copts, was in the company of the chief judge on a Friday, when a dog walked past. The Muslim asked: "What do you think about this dog, Severus? Is it Christian or Muslim?" Severus suggested a test: on Fridays Christians eat no meat, but drink wine, while Muslims eat meat, but drink no wine. "Put meat and wine before the dog. If it eats the meat, it is Muslim. If it does not eat the meat, but drinks the wine, it is Christian." The narrator, being a Christian, depicts Severus as masterfully turning the taunt against his host and making the dog, a reviled animal in the Middle East, appear to be Muslim.[1] Impromptu exchanges between Christians and Muslims like this must have been a feature of everyday life in the medieval Islamic world. Within the walls of palaces, however, a more structured sort of questioning also took place: caliphs, emirs, and viziers occasionally educated and entertained themselves with sessions of religious debates. For such debates the dignitaries sometimes invited, according to a dismayed Muslim observer, not only Muslims of various stripes, but infidels too: Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, Manichaeans, and materialists.[2]

Both organized and spontaneous encounters left manifold traces in the literary record, often as texts claiming to be straightforward accounts of them. It is such accounts that David Bertaina takes on in his book, the first monograph on Christian-Muslim religious debates from the medieval Islamic world. He discusses twenty texts, nine of Christian and eleven of Muslim provenance, most set between the seventh and the ninth century. Five of the

[1] See the *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church, Known as the History of the Holy Church*, ed. and trans. Aziz Suryal Atiya, Yassā ʿAbd al-Masīḥ, and O. H. E. Burmester, vol. 2/2, Publications de la Société d'archéologie copte (Cairo, 1948), 93 (Arabic text). For an English version of the full story, see *ibid.*, 138.

[2] See Michael Cook, "Ibn Saʿdī on Truth-Blindness," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 33 (2007), 169–178 (here p. 170).

Christian debates were written by East- or West-Syrian authors. The remaining four were composed in Arabic by Melkites; at least two of these reached readers in churches of Syriac heritage as well.

The book is introduced with a brief theoretical overview of religious debates in the modern and the medieval context. The opening two chapters further prepare the ground: the first by discussing the history of dialogues from the Sumerians to late antiquity, with special attention to dialogues in the Bible, the second by examining the Qurʾān as a repository of debates with Christians. In the third chapter Bertaina discusses Christian and Muslim encounters set soon after the Arab conquests. From the fourth to the seventh chapter he turns to groups of debates he regards as competing historiographies, tools of theological education, hagiographies, or reinterpretations of scriptures, respectively. In lieu of conclusion, the book ends with a chapter entitled "The End of Dialogue?" which surveys the typical topics and the probable uses of Christian and Muslim dialogues. Throughout, Bertaina correctly emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between literary debates and lived experience: authors drew inspiration from historical debates and wrote, among other reasons, in order to prepare their audiences to participate in them.

Bertaina provides valuable service by drawing attention to several debates barely known even to scholars. Unfortunately he never clarifies the criteria for selecting his sources. Eight Shīʿite texts feature among the eleven-strong Muslim sample. Is the Shīʿite preponderance accidental or were Shīʿite authors more likely than their Sunnī counterparts to write about their encounters with Christians? We look in vain for answers in the book. It is also a shame that Bertaina never defines what he means by debate, dialogue, and disputation. Several Muslim texts discussed in the book hardly fit any of the categories: some describe an encounter during which a single question is answered, while others recount the solution of a riddle posed by a Christian.

However selected, it is instructive to consider both Christian and Muslim accounts of Christian-Muslim debates within the same cover. Bertaina focuses on the similarities, the shared purposes and topics, but it is worth reflecting on the differences too. The power relations of real life, for example, are vividly illustrated: none of the Muslim debaters converts to Christianity in the Christian texts, but most Muslim texts end with the Christian debater's conversion to

Islam. The length and the transmission of the debates also differ: the Muslim ones are much shorter than their Christian counterparts (the longest Muslim debate, of Wāṣil of Damascus in the Byzantine court, is barely longer than the shortest Christian one, John Sedra's encounter with the Muslim emir) and, with one exception, the Muslim texts have only been transmitted as parts of longer works, while the Christian ones all survive as independent compositions. One possible reason for these differences is that Christian-Muslim debates loomed far larger in the collective memory of Christian communities than in that of Muslims. For the former, recollections of successful debates provided much-needed reassurance of the truth of their religion, but the dominant position of the latter rendered memories of won debates less consequential.

Theodore Abū Qurra, an important Christian character in the book, was for the Melkites who Severus b. al-Muqaffaʿ was for the Copts: bishop, master-debater, and prolific author, among the first in his community to pen original writings in Arabic. Muslims also took notice of him: a contemporary wrote a refutation of his work and two later authors mention him.[3] Abū Qurra features twice in Bertaina's book, in connection with two Christian texts: his debate in the court of the caliph al-Maʾmūn (reg. 813–833) and a collection of unpublished shorter exchanges (pp. 182–190 and pp. 212–228). Or does he in fact feature twice more? Halfway through we find two Shīʿite texts in which John (Yūḥannā) Abū Qurra and a certain Ibn Qurra discuss Christianity with ʿAlī l-Riḍā (pp. 159–165). Bertaina does not speculate about Ibn Qurra, but proposes that John Abū Qurra belonged to the Church of the East, because of an East-Syrian presence in the two cities, Merv and Baghdad, where al-Riḍā is known to have stayed. Assuming that the debates did take place, I doubt that Merv and Baghdad are the only possible locations—al-Riḍā surely traveled elsewhere too. More importantly, it seems plausible to me that John Abū Qurra and Ibn Qurra are none other than distant echoes of Theodore Abū Qurra's activity as an apologist for Christianity in Shīʿite literature. Qurra is a rare part of a name and therefore likely to be remembered, John is common enough to stand in for a forgotten Christian *ism*, and *abū* can easily be mistaken for *ibn* even in a tidily

[3] See John C. Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abu Qurra*, Library of the Christian East 1 (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), xvii.

written manuscript. If this is so, thanks to Bertaina we now have two very different literary portrayals of Theodore Abū Qurra as a debater, one from his own Christian and another from his opponents' perspective.

But despite its important subject matter and fascinating collection of sources, it is hard to be enthusiastic about this book. Its stated audience includes non-specialists (p. ix), but consideration for them barely goes beyond omitting diacritics from Arabic names. The editing leaves much to be desired, to the extent that the argument of a chapter is hidden in a footnote (p. 47, n. 93). It is obvious already from the opening pages that clarity of language is not a forte of the book. Some formulations are simply confusing. For example, the title of the third chapter, "Dialogue as Conquest and Conversion," is surely not the same as "dialogue in response to conquest and conversion" which it stands for according to its contents. Venturing further, it becomes clear that the lack of precision sometimes goes beyond language. For example, Karl Vollers never edited the *Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias* (p. 17, n. 25; he only translated it into German), none of the recensions of the Christian *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* call Muhammad's monk-teacher Sergius-Baḥīrā (pp. 124–125; they call him either Sergius or Baḥīrā), and the *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* was never translated into Armenian and Hebrew (p. 125; the Hebrew and Armenian Baḥīrā legends are distant relations of the Christian Arabic and Syriac texts),[4] etc.

Worst of all, Bertaina's grasp of Arabic seems tenuous. His citations are as good as the translations he uses. When discussing the *Disputation of the Monk Abraham of Tiberias* (pp. 199–212), for example, Bertaina claims to translate from Giacinto Būlus Marcuzzo's edition of recension *alpha*, yet sometimes clearly follows N. A. Newman's English version instead. Newman, however, was unaware of Marcuzzo's edition and rendered Karl Vollers' German translation of recension *beta* into English. In one passage, Bertaina describes Manẓūr b. Ghaṭafān al-ʿAbsī, one of the Muslim debaters, as a 'lawyer' (p. 205). This does not come from Marcuzzo's edition—there Manẓūr is said to be simply 'a

[4] Although the Latin *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* is closer to the Syriac recensions than either the Hebrew or the Armenian stories, it is incorrect to describe even that as a translation—it is a paraphrase at best.

man' (*rajul*).[5] Bertaina anglicizes Newman's (and Vollers') 'faqih' here,[6] yet refers to Newman only at the beginning of the chapter and solely to Marcuzzo throughout the detailed description of the debate, including twice on p. 205.[7]

It is the summaries of the Muslim debates that suffer most. Six out of the eleven Muslim texts that Bertaina discusses have never been translated into English and in these cases he works from the Arabic originals. He distorts all of them. In summarizing and translating the debate of ʿAlī and the Byzantine monk (pp. 95–98), for example, Bertaina commits more than thirty mistakes:[8]

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[5] See Giacinto Būlus Marcuzzo, *Le Dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī à Jérusalem vers 820*, Textes et études sur l'Orient chrétien 3 (Rome, 1986), 339 (vv. 144–145).

[6] See N. A. Newman, *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632 – 900 A.D.)* (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), 294 and Karl Vollers, "Das Religionsgespräch von Jerusalem (um 800 AD)," *ZKG* 29 (1908), 29–71 and 197–221 (here p. 49).

[7] For another, longer example, compare Bertaina, *Dialogues*, 211; Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, 505 (v. 516); and Newman, *Dialogue*, 334.

[8] Bertaina's and my own version of the story should be read together with the Arabic text and my notes in the second table. I used different fonts in order to distinguish between the free summary and the translation in Bertaina's version. The underlining signals his deviations from the Arabic original. The Arabic text below is taken from the edition referred to by Bertaina: al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj* (Najaf: Dār al-Nuʿmān, 1966), vol. 1, 307–308. Bertaina, like many other scholars, reads the author's name as al-Ṭabarsī; in vocalizing it as al-Ṭabrisī, I follow Etan Kohlberg's entries on the two Shīʿite scholars with this name in the *Enc. of Islam* (2nd ed.). To al-Ṭabrisī's text I added notes indicating significant variants in al-Majlisī's version in his *Biḥār al-anwār* (Tehran: Dār al-kutub al-islāmiyya, 1957–1985), vol. 10, 52–54. In my translation I left the pronouns as ambiguous as they are in Arabic; it should be possible to understand their referents from the context. In general, I tried to follow the Arabic text as closely as possible without compromising intelligibility in English. The dictionaries cited below are Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1863–1893); Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (Arabic-English)*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, 1979); and Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān al-ʿarab*. The latter has been printed several times in the Arab world and is freely accessible online at www.alwaraq.net.

Bertaina's version		My translation
In the dialogue between ʿAli and the Byzantine monk, the story begins with a Byzantine delegation visiting Medina to meet Abu Bakr. A Christian monk is part of the entourage, and he goes to the mosque where Muhammad was buried, bringing with him gold and silver.	1	It has been related that a deputation came to Medina from the land of the Romans in the reign of Abū Bakr, among them a Christian monk. He came to the Mosque of the Messenger of God, may God bless him and his Family, with a camel laden with gold and silver. Abū Bakr was present and a group of Emigrants and Helpers with him.
After meeting Abu Bakr and the Medinans and the Meccans in his party, the monk asks him: "Are you the successor of your prophet the messenger of God, and representative of your religion?"	2	He entered, greeted them, examined their faces, and then said: "Which one of you is the successor of the Messenger of God and the one entrusted with your religion?"
Abu Bakr replies by asking for the monk's name,	3	They pointed to Abū Bakr. He himself approached him, and said: "Sheikh, what is your name?"
to which he answers that it is ʿAtiq — which means "old man" in Arabic.	4	He said: "ʿAtīq."
	5	He said: "Then what?"
	6	He said: "Ṣiddīq."
When Abu Bakr asks him why he had such a name,	7	He said: "Then what?"
he replies that he is so old that he knows no other name by which he is called.	8	He said: "I know of no other name for me."

9 He said: "You are not my master."

At this point, Abu Bakr asks him what he wants to debate, signifying the special place of the court for theological discussion.

10 He said: "And what do you want?"

The monk replies with a test for his Islamic audience:

"I am from Byzantine territory. I came from it with a respectable amount of gold and silver. Therefore I would like to ask the representative of this community a question. If he answers me regarding it, then I will convert to Islam. Whatever he commands me, I will agree to, and I will split this money between you. But if he is unable to answer it, I will return home with what I have and I will not convert to Islam."

11 He said: "I am from the land of the Romans. I came from there with a camel laden with gold and silver in order to ask the one entrusted with this community a question. If he correctly answers it, I will convert to Islam, obey him in everything he commands me, and distribute this money among you. But if he is unable to answer, I will go back with what is with me and do not convert to Islam."

Upon hearing this challenge, Abu Bakr asks him to initiate the debate.

12 Abū Bakr said to him: "Ask whatever you deem fit."

However, the monk refuses to begin the discussion, since he argues that they would not believe him on account of their pride and their numerical strength.

13 The monk said: "By God, I will not start speaking until you guarantee that I am safe from your and your companions' attack."

Following the protocol of Christian-Muslim dialogue, both parties agree that no physical action will take place against the weaker member. When Abu Bakr gives the monk a guarantee that he is safe and no harm will come upon him,

14 Abū Bakr said: "You are safe—you will see no harm. Say whatever you want."

the monk offers his riddle:

"Tell me about something that God does not have, and is not from God, and God does not know of it."

15 The monk said: "Tell me something that God does not have, that does not come from God, and that God does not know."

According to the dialogue, the caliph Abu Bakr trembles and does not offer an answer to the Christian monk. After a time of silence, Abu Bakr calls for ʿUmar to enter the debate, who was an important figure and the second caliph after Abu Bakr's death.

16 Abū Bakr trembled and did not answer. After a while he said to one of his companions: "Bring Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar to me."

17 He brought him. He sat down with him. Then he said: "Monk, ask him."

When he too is unable to respond,

18 He himself approached ʿUmar and said to him what he said to Abū Bakr, but he did not answer.

ʿUthman (the future third caliph) is brought in and the same thing happens again.

19 Then he brought in ʿUthmān. What had taken place between the monk and Abū Bakr and ʿUmar took place also between the monk and ʿUthmān: he did not answer.

In response to their incapacity to answer him, the monk asks:

"Are the noble shaykhs speechless for Islam?" and when he gets up in order to leave,

20 The monk said: "Noble sheikhs, tongue-tied for Islam." Then he stood up to leave.

Abu Bakr exclaims,

"Enemy of God, were it not for the promise, then the earth would be colored with your blood!" [...]

21 Abū Bakr said: "Enemy of God! Were it not for the pledge of safety, I would dye the earth with your blood."

The dialogue presumes that a number of other prominent Muslims were present for this important event, including Salman the Persian, an important transmitter of oral traditions for Shiʿites. In the story, he goes to ʿAli b. Abi Talib who was sitting outside with his sons Hasan and Husayn.

22 Salmān the Persian, may God be pleased with him, got up, came to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, peace be on him, who was sitting in the courtyard of his house with Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, peace be on them, and told him what happened.

Then ʿAli enters the mosque where the discussion is taking place,

23 ʿAlī, peace be on him, got up, went out together with Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, peace be on them, and came to the mosque. When the people saw ʿAlī, peace be on him, they glorified and praised God. They all stood up for him. ʿAlī, peace be on him, entered and sat down.

24 Abū Bakr said: "Monk, ask him, for he is your master and the object of your desire."

and the monk asks for his name.

25 The monk himself approached ʿAlī, peace be on him, and said: "Young man, what is your name?"

Foreshadowing his special knowledge and charisma, ʿAli replies:

"My name among the Jews is Elijah, and among the Christians Elias, and among my children ʿAli, and among my community Lion (Haydara)."

26 He said: "The Jews address me as Elijah, the Christians as Elias, my father as ʿAlī, and my mother as Lion."

27 He said: "What is your relationship to your Prophet?"

When the monk learns of his relationship to the Prophet,

28 He said: "My foster-brother, my father-in-law, and my cousin on my father's side."

he tells him his companion is Jesus, and then asks the same riddle.

29 The monk said: "By the Lord of Jesus, you are my master! Tell me something that God does not have, that is not from God, and that God does not know."

Unlike the others, however, ʿAli demonstrates knowledge and authority in his response — immediately effecting the conversion of the Christian monk:

ʿAli replied: "You made an error concerning the Knowing One. As for your statement 'what God does not have', God is one and he has no companion and no child. As for your statement 'it is not from God', there is nothing of God's

30 He, peace be on him, said: "You have come across someone who is knowledgeable. As for your words 'what God does not have'—God, may He be exalted, is one and has neither companion nor child. As for your words 'and what does not come from God'—injustice never comes from God to anyone. As for your words 'God does not know it'—God knows no one

oneness that is unjust. As for your statement 'God does not know it', he does not know any partners he has in the kingdom.'"

sharing with him in his kingship."

Then the monk got up and cut off his belt and grabbed his head, and his eyes acknowledged what [ʿAli] had clarified. He said, "I testify that there is no god but God and I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God, and I testify that you are the successor and the leader of this community, and the treasure trove and wisdom of religion, and the preeminent source of proof,

31 The monk stood up, cut his belt, grabbed his head, kissed him on his forehead, and said: "I testify that there is no God except for God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. I testify that you are the successor and the one entrusted with this community, quarry of religion and wisdom, and fountainhead of the proof.

for I recited your name in the Torah as Elijah, and in the Gospel as Elias, and in the Qurʾan as ʿAli, and in the books of the forefathers as Lion, and I found you as regent after the prophet, and the authoritative emir, and I proclaim the truth to this gathering of others. Tell me, what do you and the people want?

32 "I have read your name in the Torah as Elijah, in the Gospel as Elias, in the Qurʾān as ʿAlī, and in the earlier books as Lion. I found you legatee of the Prophet and the true ruler. You have more right to this assembly than anyone else. Tell me: What is the matter with you and the people?"

Following the monk's conversion,

33 He replied him something. The monk got up and gave him all the money.

he fulfils his promise to distribute his possessions among the poor and needy in Medina, never returning to Byzantine lands.

34 ʿAlī, peace be on him, did not move from his place until he distributed it among the poor and needy of the people of Medina. The monk departed to his people as a Muslim.

al-Tabriṣī, *al-Iḥtijāj*

وروي أنه وفد وفد من بلاد الروم إلى المدينة على عهد أبي بكر وفيهم راهب من رهبان النصارى فأتى مسجد رسول الله صلى الله عليه وآله ومعه بختي موقر ذهبا وفضة وكان أبو بكر حاضرا وعنده جماعة من المهاجرين والأنصار

فدخل عليهم وحياهم ورحب بهم وتصفح وجوههم ثم قال أيكم خليفة رسول الله[1] وأمين دينكم [1 المجلسي يزيد نبيكم]

Notes

1 It is anachronistic to refer to the Mosque of the Prophet as the place where Muhammad was buried in a narrative set in the reign of Abū Bakr (reg. 632–634). Muhammad was buried in the house of his wife, ʿĀʾisha, and the mosque incorporated his tomb only after its expansion in the reign of al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik (reg. 705–715).

The 'land of the Romans' (*bilād al-rūm*) here of course refers to Byzantium, as Bertaina renders it in his summary.

2 The monk addresses not only Abū Bakr, but all the Muslims present, as the use of the plural interrogative particle *ayyukum* ('which one of you?') makes it clear.

The phrase 'your prophet' is missing from the version of al-Tabriṣī, but that of al-Majlisī's *Biḥār al-anwār* has it.

In the translation of *amīn* it is perhaps better to follow Lane's *Lexicon* and Claude Cahen's entry in the *Enc. of Islam* (2nd ed.): 'he to whom something is entrusted.' Bertaina's 'representative' implies too limited authority in this context.

فأومي إلى أبي بكر فأقبل إليه بوجهه ثم قال أيها الشيخ ما اسمك	3	It is actually the monk who asks Abū Bakr's name, as the responses below make it clear.
قال عتيق	4	The word *ʿatīq* does mean 'old' in Arabic, but it is the name of Abū Bakr, not the monk. On Abū Bakr's names, see W. Montgomery Watt's entry in the *Enc. of Islam* (2nd ed.) or, from a Shīʿite perspective, that of Hadi Alemzadeh in the *Enc. Islamica*. Abū Bakr was probably in his sixties when he assumed power.
قال ثم ماذا	5	
قال صديق	6	This response is yet another clue that the discussion concerns Abū Bakr's names: he is known to Sunnīs as Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq ('Abū Bakr the Truthful').
قال ثم ماذا	7	It is not clear to me where Bertaina finds the basis for his translation of this question.
قال لا أعرف لنفسي اسما غيره	8	Abū Bakr indeed denies having other names here, yet it is unclear where Bertaina finds 'he is so old' in this passage.
فقال لست بصاحبي	9	
فقال له وما حاجتك	10	Here or later during the conversation, Abū Bakr makes no reference whatsoever to debating.

قال أنا من بلاد الروم جئت منها ببختي موقر ذهبا وفضة لأسأل أمين هذه الأمة من[2] مسألة إن أجابني عنها أسلمت وبما أمرني أطعت وهذا المال بينكم فرقت وإن عجز عنها رجعت إلى الوراء بما معي ولم أسلم

[2 المجلسي: عن]

11 The expression Bertaina renders 'with a respectable amount of gold and silver' should be translated 'with a camel laden with gold and silver' (*bi-bukhtiyyin muqarin dhahaban wa-fiḍḍatan*).

'Therefore I would like to ask' is not a precise translation for *li-asʾala*—the monk came 'in order to ask'.

For 'the land of the Romans' and 'representative', see above, pars. 1 and 2.

فقال له أبو بكر سل عما بدا لك

12

فقال الراهب والله لا أفتح الكلام ما لم تؤمني من سطوتك وسطوة أصحابك

13 The monk's worry here is not whether the Muslims will believe him—he asks Abū Bakr to guarantee his safety. The verb *āmana* means both 'to believe' and 'to guarantee safety', but the reference to the 'attack, assault, impetuosity' (*saṭwa*) and the response of Abū Bakr makes it clear that the discussion concerns safety. Furthermore, the subject of *tuʾminnī* cannot be the Muslims, as the form is in the singular.

Bertaina must have found the meanings 'pride' and 'strength' for *saṭwa* in Wehr's dictionary of modern Arabic. These meanings are unattested in dictionaries of premodern Arabic (see the entries for *s-ṭ-w* in Lane and the *Lisān al-ʿarab*) which in itself makes his choice questionable.

فقال أبو بكر أنت آمن وليس عليك بأس قل ما شئت

14 In an encounter between a Muslim dignitary and a non-Muslim, it is the Muslim, the only party with power, who guarantees the non-Muslim's safety—as it indeed happens here.

فقال الراهب أخبرني عن شئ ليس لله ولا من عند الله ولا يعلمه الله

15

فارتعش أبو بكر ولم يحر جوابا فلما كان بعد هنيئة قال لبعض أصحابه ائتني بأبي حفص عمر[3]

[3 المجلسي: بأبي حفص]

16

فجاء به فجلس عنده ثم قال أيها الراهب سله

17

فأقبل بوجهه إلى عمر وقال له مثل ما قال لأبي بكر فما يحر جوابا

18

ثم أتى بعثمان فجرى بين الراهب وعثمان مثل ما جرى بينه وبين أبي بكر وعمر فلم يحر جوابا

19

فقال الراهب أشياخ كرام ذووا فجاج[4] لإسلام ثم نهض ليخرج

[4 المجلسي: رتاج]

20 The sentence is not interrogative, but declarative—the *alif* of *ashyākh* is part of the plural, not an interrogative particle. Also, the phrase *ashyākh kirām* ('noble sheikhs') has no definite article.

The word *fijāj* or *fujāj* poses real difficulty. If the word is plural, as it must be in the context, its

singular is *fajj* which means 'a wide road between two mountains' (see Lane and the *Lisān al-ʿarab*). This would make no sense here. However, the version of the story given by al-Majlisī corrects the word to *ritāj*. In his gloss, al-Majlisī connects the word to the verb *rataja* and explains it in various ways. The interpretation that fits best here is 'to be impeded in speech, unable to speak, tongue-tied'. Bertaina, therefore, is correct in rendering the word as 'speechless', but he never refers to al-Majlisī or indeed explains why he does not follow al-Ṭabrisī's text.

فقال أبو بكر يا عدو الله لولا العهد لخضبت الأرض بدمك

21 The verb of the last sentence can be translated both in active and passive voice: *la-khaḍabtu* ('I dyed') and *la-khuḍibat* ('it was dyed').

فقام سلمان الفارسي رضي الله عنه أتى علي بن أبي طالب عليه السلام وهو جالس في صحن داره مع الحسن والحسين عليهما السلام وقص عليه القصة

22 ʿAlī is not sitting 'outside' (i.e., outside the mosque), but 'in the courtyard of his house' (*fī ṣaḥni dārihi*).

فقام علي عليه السلام وخرج ومعه الحسن الحسين عليهما السلام حتى أتى المسجد فلما رأى القوم عليا عليه السلام كبروا الله وحمدوا الله وقاموا إليه

23

أجمعهم فدخل علي عليه السلام وجلس

فقال أبو بكر أيها الراهب سله فإنه صاحبك وبغيتك

24 The author here makes Abū Bakr acknowledge that ʿAlī is the true successor of Muhammad, with the implication that his own rule is not legitimate.

فأقبل الراهب بوجهه إلى علي عليه السلام ثم قال يا فتى ما اسمك

25 The monk addresses ʿAlī as 'young man'. He was probably in his thirties at the time.

قال اسمي عند اليهود إليا وعند النصارى إيليا وعند والدي علي وعند أمي حيدرة

26 Bertaina's 'my children' should be corrected to 'my father' (the Arabic has *wālidī*, not *wuldī*).

Bertaina should not have corrected the edition's *ummī* ('my mother') to *ummatī* ('my community'): according to a Shīʿite tradition, ʿAlī's mother wanted to name him Ḥaydara (Lion), but his father decided to call him ʿAlī. On this topic, see the section on ʿAlī's names by Faramarz Haj Manouchehri in the entry on ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib in the *Enc. Islamica*.

قال ما محلك من نبيكم

27

قال أخي وصهري وابن عمي لحا[5]

[5 المجلسي: عمي]

28 According to the Muslim Tradition, ʿAbdallāh and Abū Ṭālib were sons of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib which makes their sons cousins. After the death of ʿAbdallāh, Muhammad was taken in by ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib and after the latter's death by

Abū Ṭālib. ʿAlī later married Fāṭima, Muhammad's daughter.

قال الراهب أنت صاحبي ورب عيسى أخبرني عن شئ ليس لله ولا من عند الله ولا يعلمه الله

29 Jesus is not the 'companion' (or 'master', *ṣāḥib*) of anyone here. Instead, the monk swears 'by the Lord of Jesus' (*wa-rabbi ʿīsā*) when recognizing that ʿAlī is his master.

قال عليه السلام على الخبير سقطت أما قولك ما ليس لله فإن الله تعالى أحد ليس له صاحبة ولا ولد وأما قولك ولا من عند الله فليس من عند الله ظلم لأحد وأما قولك لا يعلمه الله فإن الله لا يعلم له شريكا في الملك

30 It is not clear why Bertaina rendered the beginning of ʿAlī's answer as he did: *al-khabīr* refers to ʿAlī, not to God, and *saqaṭa ʿalā* means 'to stumble on, light on, come across'.

The *aḥad* of the second part of the answer should be translated differently from the *aḥad* of the first part. The first *aḥad* indeed refers to God's oneness, following the usage in Q 112: 1, but the second *aḥad* carries its regular meaning, 'someone, anyone'.

فقام الراهب وقطع زناره وأخذ رأسه وقبل ما بين عينيه وقال أشهد أن لا إله إلا الله وأن[6] محمدا رسول الله وأشهد أنك أنت الخليفة وأمين هذه الأمة ومعدن الدين والحكمة ومنبع عين الحجة

[6 المجلسي: وأشهد أن]

31 The monk grabbed not his own head, but ʿAlī's, and 'kissed him on his forehead' (*wa-qabbala mā bayna ʿaynayhi*). The expression *mā bayna ʿaynayhi* (literally 'what is between his eyes') simply means 'forehead.'

ʿAlī is not 'the treasure trove and wisdom of religion' (it would be *maʿdin wa-ḥikmat al-dīn*), but 'the treasure trove of religion and wisdom.' Perhaps *maʿdin* is better translated 'mine,' or even 'source, quarry'.

Although the modern Arabic dictionary of Wehr gives the meaning 'treasure trove' for it, Lane's medieval *Lexicon* does not.

Christians were obliged to wear a belt (*zunnār*) under Muslim rule. Cutting it symbolized conversion to Islam.

لقد قرأت اسمك في التوراة إليا وفي الإنجيل إيليا وفي القرآن عليا وفي الكتب السابقة[7] حيدرة ووجدتك بعد النبي وصيا وللإمارة وليا وأنت أحق بهذا المجلس من غيرك فخبرني ما شأنك وشأن القوم

[7 المجلسي: السالفة]

32 The phrase *al-kutub al-sābiqa* is not a genitive construction, but an adjectival phrase: it is not 'the books of the forefathers', but 'the earlier books'.

It is not clear how Bertaina arrived at 'I proclaim the truth to this gathering of others' from *wa-anta aḥaqq bi-hādhā l-majlis min ghayrika*.

Translating *waṣī* as 'regent' implies actual reign which was certainly not the case for ʿAlī in the time of Abū Bakr. The word is best translated 'legatee' (see Etan Kohlberg's entry on *waṣī* in the *Enc. of Islam*, 2nd ed.).

فأجابه بشئ فقام الراهب وسلم المال إليه بأجمعه

33

فما برح علي عليه السلام مكانه حتى فرقه في مساكين أهل المدينة ومحاويجهم وانصرف الراهب إلى قومه مسلما

34 It is not the monk who distributes the money, but ʿAlī, to whom the monk had just given it, as is clear from the previous passage.

Surprising as it may be, according to the story the monk returned to Byzantium.

Three mistranslations of al-Ṭabriṣī's text stem from lack of revision: Bertaina, it seems, originally worked from another source, probably the *Biḥār al-anwār* of al-Majlisī (d. 1699),[9] and never modified his translation to match al-Ṭabriṣī's *al-Iḥtijāj*, although in his footnotes to the story he refers only to the latter and never as much as mentions the former. The remaining deviations from the Arabic original are translation errors plain and simple.

Some mistakes are perhaps inevitable when rendering a medieval Arabic text into a modern language. Classical Arabic is not the mother tongue of anyone and the gap between medieval Islamic and modern culture easily obscures the assumptions and thought processes of the author, occasionally making it impossible to establish the precise meaning of a word or phrase. Yet the chasm between the worlds of Bertaina and al-Ṭabriṣī does not explain this proliferation of inaccuracies in the translation of a two-page Arabic text—an insufficient grasp of the language exacerbated by hasty work, however, does so.

It is astounding to find a host of mistakes in a peer-reviewed academic publication. Sadly, the material examined above is not unusual; it is representative of Bertaina's poor understanding of the six Muslim debates that were available to him only in the Arabic original. His multiple errors and imprecisions render the summaries of his sources fundamentally untrustworthy and any arguments based on them of questionable value.

[9] For this version, see al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 10, 52–54. Three deviations point to the work of al-Majlisī: 'your prophet' in v. 2, 'speechless' in v. 20, and the addition of 'I testify' before 'that Muhammad is the messenger of God' in v. 31.