

Muslim Exegesis of the Bible in Medieval Cairo: Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī's (d. 716/1316) Commentary on the Christian Scriptures, (A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation with an Introduction) by Lejla Demiri (History of Christian-Muslim Relations, 19) (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2013), xv + 566 pp., ISBN: 978-90-04-24316-3, €158 / \$220 (hb)

Al-Ṭūfī, a Ḥanbalī jurist, theologian, and exegete, was born around 670/1271-2 in the area of Baghdād and was initially educated there. He moved to Damascus in 704/1304-5 to study with Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), then to Cairo in 705/1306 to work as a teacher. He was expelled from there in 711/1311 and subsequently lived elsewhere in Egypt, went on the *ḥajj* in 714/1315, and died in Hebron in 716/1316. His troubles in Cairo appear to have stemmed from accusations of having Shīʿī sympathies. He was also associated with Sufism, in keeping with the scholastic and religious expectations of Cairo at the time. As a jurist he has gained fame especially in modern times for his conception of public interest (*maṣlaḥa*) in matters of civil transactions, a principle that is seen to act as an independent source of law despite the absence of rigorous criteria by which its applicability may be assessed.

Al-Ṭūfī's interest in Christianity reflects Mamlūk society of his era – the post-Crusade period – highlighting both the active trade relationship with Europe and the polemical tone of the interchanges. It was a vibrant era for Muslim-Christian interaction and many of the more virulent attacks seem to have their basis primarily in social and financial aspects of the overall relationship. Al-Ṭūfī himself is often described a free thinker and his work as presented here by Lejla Demiri gets to the heart of the Muslim-Christian divide through a close examination of many theological points of potential difference. In writing his book, al-Ṭūfī worked in full knowledge of the discussions that had gone before him involving Muslim approaches to Christianity; however, his attention to the text of the Bible is unique, as is his status as the first Muslim to write both a commentary on the Qurʾān (*al-Isbārāt al-ilābiyya ilā l-mabāḥiṯh al-uṣūliyya*) and on the Bible.

Al-Ṭūfī wrote his Bible commentary, *al-Taʿlīq ʿalā l-Anājil al-arbaʿa wa-l-taʿlīq ʿalā l-Tawrāt wa-ʿalā gḥayriḥā min kutub al-*

anbiyā', as preparation for his composition of his full refutation of Christianity and defense of Islam; that book, called *al-Intiṣārāt al-Islāmiyya fī kashf shubuh al-Naṣrāniyya* was written in 707/1308. His goal in the commentary was to expose how Christian doctrines were not supported by scripture. In al-Ṭūfī's view, misinterpretation was the main culprit in bringing about mistaken Christian understandings, but intentional forgery (changing or inserting pieces of text into the Bible) was the only thing that could explain how some portions of the Christian Bible could possibly say what they do.

Al-Ṭūfī first makes it clear that he does not consider the Christian Gospels to be the equivalent of the Qur'ān's Injil: as a result of that fact the possibility of forgery exists because the Christian text was clearly the result of human writing about Jesus and not purely the message that was transmitted via Jesus from God. The inconsistency between the four Gospels, he suggests, is the plain evidence of this. He argues in his introduction that the notion of the Trinity and the idea of God's incarnation in Jesus are false by the evidence of both scripture and reason. Jesus' humanity is quite apparent to al-Ṭūfī on the basis of his metaphoric understanding of certain portions of the Gospels (for example when Jesus calls God "My Father").

The text of the Gospels that al-Ṭūfī examines was likely received via the Coptic version known as the Alexandrian (also known as the Egyptian) Vulgate; Demiri provides a convincing and well-documented argument for this (see pp. 62-70). Notably al-Ṭūfī uses an ancient chapter and verse division system in making reference to this version although the edition has been provided with the modern format and numbering in the footnotes.

Al-Ṭūfī proceeds in his examination of the Bible verse-by-verse in thematically selected segments. In his analysis of the Gospels al-Ṭūfī does provide some distinctive (although not necessarily unique) understandings in certain places. Demiri draws attention especially to matters such as his arguments about the angelic nature of Jesus (text paragraph 261) and the resurrection of Jesus (para. 152). Al-Ṭūfī also raises many other interesting topics, reflecting both Muslim and Christian understandings of various issues at the time: examples may be seen in the treatment of divorce (para. 108) in which the question is raised of how it could be that Jesus is credited with equating adultery and divorce (a clear case of an impossible text for al-Ṭūfī), and the arguments surrounding the lack of *tawātur* (uniform and ubiquitous

transmission) for the crucifixion (para. 149 and see the editor's comments in footnote 155).

While a majority of the text (para. 4 to 326) focuses on the four Gospels, a good portion of it (up to para. 606) studies sections of the Hebrew Bible, specifically passages from the books of Isaiah, Hosea, Jonah, Habakkuk, Malachi, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Genesis. Most of the material that al-Ṭūfī examines in those books focuses on specific issues of Christian importance and Muslim contestation related to the nature of Jesus as divine and predictions of the coming of Muḥammad. On the first matter al-Ṭūfī pays no attention to variation in Christian dogma among various groups; Christianity is presented as a singular entity. There is limited attention to legal matters, reflecting the fact that Muslims and Christians had worked out a system of mutual acceptance on such day-to-day differences. However, the compatibility of the Bible and the Qurʾān is a major concern and that theme is particularly prominent in the comments on the Book of Genesis where most of the verses that al-Ṭūfī treats raise issues related to a very general comparison of the contents of the Bible to that of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. Worthy of note because of its frequent citation in Muslim sources is al-Ṭūfī's analysis of the "three lies of Abraham" (para. 512) and the fact that a *ḥadīth* report appears to support the idea that Abraham did lie. Al-Ṭūfī suggests that the report may be speaking of "metaphorical lies" and not "real and absolute lies" and, thus, calling Sara his sister, for example, could be interpreted here as a "sin" of omission: that is Abraham simply did not say explicitly "She is my wife." However, the invocation of *taḥrīf* does sometimes become a necessary method for al-Ṭūfī to solve these textual conflicts, as in the case of Paran being understood at Beersheba and not Mecca in Genesis 21 (para. 515). These comparisons of the Book of Genesis and the Qurʾān do lead in Christian directions on occasion: para. 546 deals with the Christian reading of Genesis 32 and the wrestling with God as proof of the possibility of divine manifestation in many forms including that of a human. Al-Ṭūfī points out that the text does not actually say that it was God who wrestled with Jacob, so no proof may be located there.

Al-Ṭūfī's text is presented here in both a well-edited Arabic version and an English translation on facing pages. The Arabic is based on two Istanbul manuscripts, Süleymaniye Şehid Ali Paşa 2315/4 and Köprülü Fazıl Ahmed Paşa 795/2, and is lightly annotated with textual

variants. The English translation provides the references to the quoted Bible passages, the names of other books that are cited in the text (providing a good sense of al-Ṭūfī's debt to his predecessors and contemporaries), and a few assorted notes. No attention is paid in the annotations to the Christian background of the doctrines being critiqued and their significance in the Christian context; it is presumed that the reader will understand why these matters are important to Christians (al-Ṭūfī makes the Muslim position quite explicit). The Arabic text is well presented and divided into numbered paragraphs (mirrored in the translation) that make reference easy. The translation is well done overall, although a few awkward elements do remain such as in the rendering of *lā ... illā* literally as "not ... except" (e.g., para. 431), a double negative that inhibits the easy flow of English. Overall, this a valuable edition of a fascinating text that significantly broadens our appreciation of Muslim approaches to the Bible and the Qur'ān.

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