David of Damascus

DATE OF BIRTH Presumably in the early decades of the 9th century
PLACE OF BIRTH Unknown
DATE OF DEATH Sometime after 884
PLACE OF DEATH Perhaps Damascus

BIOGRAPHY
David was a 9th-century Melkite metropolitan of Damascus. In the year 884, a controversy between him and his patriarch occasioned an exchange of letters, some written by him, others written in his defense. Taken as a whole, these letters show David to have been a figure of some standing in the church, able not only to resist the will of his patriarch, but also to summon the assistance of a variety of powerful allies, including the patriarchs of Jerusalem and Alexandria and the most powerful laymen of Antioch itself. Given the political influence David was able to wield, he was likely a senior figure in the church by the year 884, and thus presumably of a fairly advanced age. If this supposition is correct, David would likely have been born in the early decades of the 9th century. As the patriarch’s efforts to depose David were almost certainly ineffective, it may be presumed that David retained the episcopacy of Damascus until his death, which must have occurred after 884, the year of the controversy and exchange of letters. Apart from these letters, no other record of David appears to have survived.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary
MS Milan, Ambrosiana – X 201 supp., fols 94r-137v (c. 1000; the corpus of letters concerned with the controversy between David and Patriarch Symeon)

Secondary —
WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

No title, though the scribe introduces the corpus of letters as follows: *Nuskhat al-shakwā alladhi ishtakāhu anbā Dāwīd maṭrabulīṭ Dimashq ilā anbā Mīkhāyil [Mikhāʾīl] baṭriyark al-Iskandariyya wa-ilā anbā Iliyyā baṭriyark Bayt al-Maqdas min fiʾl anbā Simiyūn baṭriyark Anṭākiyya, wa-mā ḥakamā bihi fi dhālika wa-athbata khūṭūtahumā fihi, ‘A copy of the complaint that Abba David, the metropolitan of Damascus, presented to Abba Michael, the patriarch of Alexandria, and Abba Elias, the patriarch of Jerusalem, concerning the action of Abba Symeon, the patriarch of Antioch, as well as what the two of them ruled on the matter and that to which they affixed their signatures’

DATE 884
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION
This letter is the first of a series exchanged between David, Melkite metropolitan of Damascus, Elias, the patriarch of Jerusalem, and Michael, the patriarch of Alexandria. Other letters were written by the two patriarchs to Symeon, their colleague in Antioch. Yet another letter (a petition of commendation and support for David) is addressed to the same by the Christian notables of Antioch. All of these letters concern the recent behavior of Symeon, the patriarch of Antioch. They constitute, in effect, a legal dossier, describing Symeon’s recent visit to Damascus, his interference in the finances and discipline of the church there, and his attempt to depose David. The letters further record David’s efforts to rally the support of the other two patriarchs, the decisions of the latter as to the non-canonical nature of Symeon’s behavior, and the response of the people of Antioch to the imperious behavior of their patriarch.
The majority of the corpus treats matters of canon law, particularly whether and to what extent metropolitans are independent of their patriarchs. However, the first letter, David’s account of Symeon’s behavior, stands apart from the rest for its detailed description of the events that precipitated the controversy. It offers unique documentary insight into the affairs of the church of Syria in the second half of the 9th century: the financial affairs of the church of Damascus, the distribution of its estates and their management, the names and sees of Syrian bishops, and the identity of various factions of notable Christians, both lay and clerical. No other similar text has been preserved from this period, for this region. Indeed, the text may well be the only such document to have survived between the time of the Muslim conquests and the Byzantine reconquest of Syria.

Of particular concern to the issue of Christian-Muslim relations is the central part of the first letter (fol. 96r-100r), which gives a detailed account of competition between Muslims and Christians in Damascus for control of the production and distribution of bread. We are told at length how Symeon, during a visit to Damascus, undertook a detailed investigation of the church’s finances and properties. Of these, the bakery was of especial interest, seemingly because of the large revenue it brought the church. Prior to David’s metropolitanate, this bakery had been leased by the church to certain Muslims. The holders of the lease were responsible for the production and sale of sāj (a type of flatbread) and for the upkeep of the premises. For their efforts, they were entitled to whatever monies remained after payment of the annual lease of 40 dinars. The bakery operated, at least in part, as a charitable foundation. The holders of the lease were thus contractually obliged to sell at below-market rates, the price of their bread being fixed at two-thirds of the price of bread sold in the local markets.

Through a long and difficult process, David had managed to transfer the lease back into Christian hands, seemingly employees of the church itself. While the text is oblique as to the reasons for the transfer, there are some indications that the prior holders of the lease had been charging more than was allowed by the terms of the contract. Whatever the case, David was able to boast that the discounted price of bread was restored and that the direct administration of the bakery had resulted in a nearly fivefold increase in its revenue (now 230 dinars per year).
The transfer of the lease was not unopposed. David’s action angered a substantial number of powerful Christian laymen in Damascus, as well as the former holders of the lease. It was in fact they, David claims, who were responsible for the slander that roused the patriarch to anger. Be that as it may, shortly after his arrival in Damascus, Symeon took possession of David’s episcopal residence and renegotiated both this and other contracts. In turn, David was forced to leave Damascus in search of support, going first to Jerusalem and then to Alexandria. During his absence, Symeon assumed complete control of the church in Damascus: he offered the Eucharist in the cathedral church; within David’s metropolitanate, he ordained some bishops and deposed others; and he suppressed David’s remaining supporters, even denouncing some to the city’s ruler, with the result that they were imprisoned and tortured and not released until the church had paid certain monies.

SIGNIFICANCE

David’s letter offers a unique documentary glimpse into the life of the Melkite Church in Syria in the later decades of the 9th century. It provides a number of tantalizing hints as to the practical realities of Muslim-Christian relations. These include: the business interests in which Muslims and Christians shared and for which they competed; the factional alignment of Christians and Muslims in pursuit of common goals; the invocation of Muslim executive authority by members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy; and the ease of communication and travel between the three patriarchates. Further, taken as a whole, the corpus provides our most detailed evidence for the question of institutional continuity of the Melkite Church in 9th-century Syria. Of particular importance are the long lists of signatories and witnesses, whose names are attached to the various letters and petitions of the dossier. Dozens of officials are mentioned by name, almost all of them otherwise unknown.

MANUSCRIPTS

MS Milan, Ambrosiana – X 201 supp., fols 94r-137v (c. 1000)

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

The text is unpublished. An edition and English translation are currently being prepared by J.C. Lamoreaux and A.M. Saadi.

STUDIES

John C. Lamoreaux
The disputation of Abū Isḥāq and a Jew

Unknown author

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE OF BIRTH</th>
<th>Unknown; possibly late 9th century</th>
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<tr>
<td>PLACE OF BIRTH</td>
<td>Possibly Syria, Homs in particular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATE OF DEATH</td>
<td>Unknown; possibly 9th or 10th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLACE OF DEATH</td>
<td>Possibly Syria, Homs in particular</td>
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BIOGRAPHY
The author of this text cannot be identified. Given the geographical focus of his work, he may have been a Syrian, or perhaps from the city of Homs itself. He was likely a Melkite, as the Melkites alone have preserved his work. As argued below, he may have been writing after about 800, the possible *floruit* of one of the characters mentioned in the disputation. At the same time, he must have been writing before about 1000, the date of the only manuscript that preserves his work. The disputation gives every indication of having been an original composition in Arabic.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

*Primary*  —  
*Secondary*  —  

THE DISPUTATION OF ABŪ ISḤĀQ AND A JEW

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Unknown; a scribal note in the MS reads: Hadhihī mujādala bayna l-Naṣārā wa-l-Yahūd, wa-dhālika kāna rajul Naṣrānī wa-Yahūdī kānā bi-Ḥims, wa kānū yatajādalūna fīmā baynahum, ‘This is a disputation between the Christians and the Jews – that is to say, there was a certain Christian and a certain Jew [who] were in Homs and were disputing with one another, The disputation of Abū Iṣḥāq and a Jew, in the presence of the Muslim notable Junāda ibn Marwān of Homs’

DATE Unknown, possibly 9th or 10th century

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Arabic

DESCRIPTION

The account of the disputation between Abū Iṣḥāq and his unnamed Jewish interlocutor is a relatively short text, some 13 folios in the unique manuscript in which it has been preserved. While the disputation treats of Jewish-Christian theological concerns, the presentation is framed with reference to the Muslims of Homs, under whose auspices the disputation takes place and who are responsible for determining the victor.

An approximate date of composition is determined by the following items. The text mentions a certain Junāda ibn Marwān of Homs and his brother ‘Abdallāh. This Junāda may be none other than the minor and poorly reputed muḥaddith Junāda ibn Marwān al-Ḥimṣī (that is, of the city of Homs), who flourished around 800 (al-Dhahabī, Siyar, xv, p. 482, with the additional references there cited). ‘Abdallāh, on the other hand, may be the relatively obscure Syrian transmitter of apocalyptic traditions, ‘Abdallāh ibn Marwān. He too flourished around 800 and was closely associated with the city of Homs (see Madelung, ‘Sufyānī between tradition and history’, pp. 21, 42-45). At the same time, the text must have been written before 1000, the date of its unique manuscript witness. Given the legendary and folkloric quality of the disputation, a date nearer 1000 may be preferable.
The disputation contains few concrete details. It is thus difficult to determine whether and to what extent it evinces a kernel of historicity. That said, if the proposed identifications of Junāda and ‘Abdallāh are correct, it is unlikely that the text is totally without historical foundation. It is simply too difficult to imagine why a later author would choose to frame his account by reference to such obscure figures.

The disputation opens with an account of how Abū Ishāq, a Christian of Homs, had humiliated the local Jews through his logical prowess. The Jews, we are told, summon from Damascus the most skillful of their coreligionists, a figure who remains unnamed. On his arrival, the rules of the debate are settled on terms acceptable to both Christians and the Jews, as well as to the Muslims Junāda and ‘Abdallāh. It is decided, in particular, that the loser is to put a halter on his neck and a saddle on his back, and allow himself to be ridden around the streets of Homs by a young man from the winner’s community. Junāda then appoints his brother ‘Abdallāh as arbiter of the disputation.

As for the theological topics treated, the dispute is divided into seven well-defined sections. Each serves to demonstrate that the Jews are not now, nor ever were, the chosen people of God. The point is argued largely through an analysis of the events surrounding the exodus and the early history of the Jewish people in Israel. In every case, the author takes a familiar episode from the Torah and inverts its seeming significance. The exodus, for instance, shows not God’s love for the Jews, but his hatred, as he allowed them to suffer slavery for over 400 years. Similarly, it was not out of love for Israel that God destroyed the Egyptians at the Red Sea, but rather on account of the misdeeds and idolatrous practices of the Egyptians. Or again, for 40 years the clothes and shoes of the Israelites were miraculously preserved from corruption during their wandering in the desert. While this might seem a blessing, it was actually a curse: ‘so that you Jews would spend forty years in a single dirty shift, amongst lice and filth, spending both your sleeping and your waking hours in it, having relations with your women in it – such clothes reeking of the sepulcher, permeated through and through with the blood and grease of quail, as well as the odor of the filth of manna.’ The mark of God’s hatred for the Jews is lastly demonstrated by the manner of their punishment for their having failed to acknowledge Christ. Jerusalem was destroyed. The priesthood came to an end. The monarchy ceased. The Jewish nation was deprived of political autonomy. Individual Jews were
subjected to disgraceful occupations, becoming 'tanners, cleaners of cesspools, makers of sieves, and glaziers, in every case [occupations] marked by shame and stench'.

In the end, the Jewish interlocutor is forced to recognize the truth of Abū Iṣḥāq’s arguments. So, too, the Muslim judge proclaims that victory belongs to the Christians. The Jews of Homs gather before Junāda and ʿAbdallāh, and tearfully beg that their community be saved from the shame that would result from the execution of the stipulated punishment. Junāda and ʿAbdallāh, in turn, intercede with Abū Iṣḥāq. He consents to cancel the stipulated punishment. A document attesting his victory is then drawn up, with the signatures of 30 witnesses from the local Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities. Immediately on mention of this document, the disputation comes to an end.

**Significance**

The text is a fine (if noxious) example of a particular type of Christian-Jewish disputation literature from the early medieval Middle East. This literature is usually presented in the format of a dialogue, with debate occurring in the presence or under the auspices of one or more Muslim officials. Some such texts culminate in a thaumaturgic contest. At times, the disputations are presented as winning political concessions from the Muslims, or even their conversions. Roughly contemporary examples include: the *Life of Theodore of Edessa* (q.v.); the *Disputation of Patriarch John* (q.v.); and the *Life of John of Edessa* (q.v.).

**Manuscripts**

MS Milan, Ambrosiana – X 201 supp., fols 214v-227r (c. 1000)

**Editions & Translations**

The text is unpublished. An edition and English translation are currently being prepared by J.C. Lamoreaux.

**Studies**


W. Madelung, 'The Sufyānī between tradition and history', *Studia Islamica* 63 (1986) 4-48 (for the identity of ʿAbdallāh ibn Marwān)

**John C. Lamoreaux**
Ibrāhīm ibn Yūhannā al-Anṭākī

**Date of Birth**  Mid-10th century  
**Place of Birth**  Possibly Antioch  
**Date of Death**  About 1025 or shortly thereafter  
**Place of Death**  Possibly Antioch

**Biography**
Ibrāhīm Ibn Yūhannā al-Anṭākī was born in the middle of the 10th century. He may have been a native of Antioch; he was certainly already present there as a child. He was fluent in both Greek and Arabic. His must have been an influential family, as both he and his father were designated as *protospatharioi* (an imperial title of great dignity). Ibrāhīm is best remembered for his many labors as a translator of Greek patristic works into Arabic. He was also the author of a number of hagiographical works, on saints living in and around Antioch in the second half of the 10th century. These works appear not to have survived, with one exception: his account of the life and death of Christopher, the patriarch of Antioch (d. 969). Ibrāhīm must have died around or shortly after 1025 (see below).

**Main Sources of Information**

*Primary*
The main sources for Ibrāhīm’s life are a few items of autobiographical information in his account of the martyrdom of Christopher (on which, see below) and the colophons and titles to his various translations. The latter have been systematically surveyed in J. Grand’Henry, ‘La méthode de révision d’une version patristique arabe ancienne chez Ibrāhīm fils de Yūhannā d’Antiochē’, in G. Anawati, R. Arnaldez, and M. Bredy (eds), *Annales du département des lettres arabes. In memoriam Prof. Fiey*, 2 vols, Beirut, 1996, i, 161-72.

*Secondary*
J. Nasrallah, ‘Deux auteurs melchites inconnus du Xe siècle’, *OC* 63 (1979) 75-86, pp. 75-82
Nasrallah, *HMLEM* iii,1, pp. 289-305
Graf, *GCAL* ii, p. 45-48
Works on Christian-Muslim Relations

Qīṣṣa sīrat al-baṭriyark ʿalā Anṭākiyya al-shahīd Kharistūfūrūs wa-shahādatihī biḥā, allafahā ʿIbrāhīm ibn Yūḥannā [sc. Yūḥannā] al-ibrūtusbāthār al-Malākī biḥā yūnāniyyan thumma naqalahā ayyān ʿarabiyyan, ʿAn account of the life of the patriarch of Antioch, the martyr Christopher, and his martyrdom in it [Antioch], which Ibrāhīm ibn Yūḥannā, the Melkite protospatharios, wrote in it [Antioch] in Greek [and] then also translated into Arabic (title in the Sinai MS; Zayat’s edition bears no title)’

Date  About 1025 or shortly thereafter
Original Language  Arabic

Description
Ibrāhīm begins his Life of Christopher with a brief account of his hero’s birth and upbringing in Baghdad, and then of his relocation to Aleppo. It was there that Christopher entered into the service of the Ḥamānid ruler Sayf al-Dawla (r. 945-67), who employed him as secretary to one of his emirs. The author then recounts how Christopher sought from Agapios, the Patriarch of Antioch, ordination as catholicos of the eastern portions of the patriarchate – a request that led to much contention. Following the death of Agapios, Christopher received the patriarchal see, amidst controversy and only with the support of Sayf al-Dawla. The author then surveys Christopher’s religious zeal, his learning, his ecclesiastical administration, and his winning of tax concessions from Muslim officials. The narrative continues with an account of the disturbances in Antioch in the 960s: first, because of Byzantine advances towards Antioch; second, because of a revolt against Sayf al-Dawla. In the course of this revolt, Christopher showed himself faithful to his patron and was exiled from the city. He took refuge at the monastery of St Symeon the Elder. Eventually, Antioch was retaken and Christopher restored. Shortly thereafter, he was murdered by Sayf al-Dawla’s opponents (22 May 967). The text
closes with an account of the chastisement visited on Christopher’s murderers, a brief series of encomia, and a valuable list of the saint’s disciples and the offices to which they were appointed. Toward the close of the text, the author includes an account of the interment of the saint’s remains: first in the monastery of Arshāyā, near Antioch; later in the Cathedral Church of Antioch; and finally in the House of St Peter itself. As this last translation took place under the Patriarch Nicholas II (1025-30), the Life must have been composed around this date, or shortly after; it will be noted that the author would already have been some 75 years old by 1025. Perhaps the aged Ibrāhīm wrote his account for the celebration that would surely have attended the final translation of Christopher’s remains.

SIGNIFICANCE
The Life of Christopher is the only surviving biographical account of a Melkite patriarch from the medieval period. Its value is further enhanced by its author’s personal familiarity with his subject’s life and intimate acquaintance with the events leading up to his death. The text provides a vivid account of the last years of Ḥamdānid rule in northern Syria, the final days of Sayf al-Dawla, and the political and religious life of Antioch, both before and immediately after the Byzantine reconquest. It may be noted that Christopher was killed not because he had supported his co-religionists of Byzantium, but because of his fidelity to his long-time patron, Sayf al-Dawla.

MANUSCRIPTS
MS Sinai – Ar. 405, fols 111v-131r (1335)
MS Zayat – the basis for Zayat’s edition of 1952. Upon Zayat’s death (Nice, 1 Feb. 1954), many of his books and MSS were bequeathed to the Bibliothèque Orientale (Beirut). It is unknown whether the present MS was included in his bequest. Cf. Nasrallah, HMLEM iv.1, pp. 222-23

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS
J. Nasrallah, ‘Deux auteurs melchites inconnus’, pp. 79-80 (important re-edition of the text’s closing paragraph from Sinai Ar. 405, with a comparison to the corresponding text of Zayat’s edition)
H. Zayat, ‘Vie du patriarche melkite d’Antiocyte Christophore (d. 967) par le protospathaire Ibrahim b. Yuhanna. Document inédit du Xe siècle’, Proche-Orient Chrétien 2 (1952) 11-38, 333-66 (ed. with French trans. from a MS in Zayat’s personal possession. As noted by the editor, pp. 13, 15, this MS was descended from a copy that was very old, but was lacking diacritical points, was poorly written, damaged, and missing a number of passages)

STUDIES


S. Moiseeva, ‘“Zhitie Antiokhiııskogo patriarkha Khrystofora” i Vizantiııskaja agiografiıı’ [The Life of the Patriarch Christopher and Byzantine Hagiography], Vestnik PSTGU. Series III. Philology 3.2 (2006) 169-180

C. Holmes, Basil II and the governance of empire (976-1025), Oxford, 2005, p. 337


J.-M. Fiey, ‘“Rūm” à l’est de l’Euphrate’, *Le Muséon* 90 (1977) 365-420, pp. 368-72, 393-95


J. Jarry, ‘Trouvailles épigraphiques à Saint-Syméon’, *Syria* 43 (1966) 105-15, pp. 107-8 (an inscription with mention of Christopher, perhaps dating from the time of his exile)


M. Canard, ‘Une vie du patriarch melkite d’Antioche, Christophore’, *Byzantion* 23 (1953) 561–69

N. Edelby, ‘Note sur le catholicosat de Romagyris’, *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 2 (1952) 39-46

John C. Lamoreaux