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Re-planting Christianity in new soil: Arabized Christian religious identity in twelfth-century Iberia

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This article considers inter-religious adaptation in a medieval Iberian context. With Islam's entry into the peninsula, certain Christian communities underwent change as they encountered new religious and cultural influences. Some of these Christians adapted to their Islamic environment in a process of Arabization. Members of these Christian communities exhibit a number of non-Christian influences in their attempts to elucidate their religious identity. How did they manage this adaptation in a context of apparent religious contrast? This study seeks to answer that question by examining a small corpus of twelfth-century texts written by Arabized Christian authors in twelfth-century Iberia. Particular attention is given to the authors' use of the Qur'an and ancient Christology in their effort to distinguish Christian religious identity in an Islamic context.

Keywords: Iberia; Arabized Christians; Islam; religious identity; medieval Spain

Introduction

In his tenth-century *Kitāb al-quḍāt bi-Qurṭuba*, Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Khushanī relates the story of a unique gift offered to 'Abd al-Raḥmān I (d. 788), amir of al-Andalus. According to al-Khushanī:

> when Mu'āwiya b. Ṣāliḥ returned to Cordova, he presented to 'Abd al-Raḥmān I some gifts that the monarch from Syria had given him. . . . Among these gifts was the pomegranate that is now known in Spain as the *safarī* pomegranate. The courtiers of al-Raḥmān I spoke of Syria, showing nostalgia for the memory of their homeland. Among these courtiers there was one named Safar who took a sprig from the [pomegranate tree], cared for it and planted it until it could successfully take root and bear fruit. The pomegranate that today is known by the name of *safarī* took its name from this Safar.[1]

The tender care Safar displays towards his pomegranate sprig has important metaphorical implications for the study that follows. In fact, these agronomic reflections are of particular interest because they are the first known reference to the 'deliberate and controlled [acclimatization] of an exotic species' (Ruggles 2006, 17). As such, they demonstrate that two entities previously unknown to one another – in our case, an Eastern fruit grown in Western soil – can be brought together through various means so that they both might thrive.[2] But most important to this study, the process by which flora from one environment might be made to adapt, survive, and even flourish in another, mirrors a similar process of human adaptation (cf. Ruggles 2006, 14).

With the emergence of Islam in medieval Iberia, the peninsula's Christian communities experienced varying degrees of change. Some of these Christians grew increasingly Arabized and became very much at home in their Islamic milieu.[3] Some of them even spoke Arabic and enjoyed various aspects of Muslim culture. Members of such Arabized Christian communities remind us of Safar's pomegranate: they exhibit influences from both Islam and

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Christianity that are both foreign and familiar, the controlled conjoining of which helped them to flourish in the twelfth century.[4] How did they manage this adaptation in a context of apparent contrast?

Religious polemic as a tool for acclimatization

There is an extant body of texts written by members of various Arabized Christian communities in medieval Iberia that is capable of helping us answer this question. Among the most important of these are two brief, twelfth-century apologetic and anti-Islamic works in Arabic that have been preserved and refuted in Muslim works. One is a letter written by an anonymous priest from Toledo, whom we shall refer to as al-Qūṭī, and the other is an anonymous tract known as *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya* (Trinitizing the unity [of God]).[5] A much longer work, also highly polemical and probably originally written in Arabic, comes to us in the early twelfth-century and is known as the *Liber denudationis* (The book of denuding).[6]

Though each of these texts contains a measure of apology for Christian doctrine in light of Islam, they are infused with anti-Muslim polemic. For this reason, they may at first seem like odd choices for our study of Christian–Muslim adaptation and cooperation, given their proclivity for vehement, anti-Muslim rhetoric. Indeed, much medieval polemic was used to proscribe Christian–Muslim interaction. Keeping in mind our agronomic metaphor, one community could use polemic as a sort of pesticide to drive the other community away. Two Christians living in ninth-century Cordova can serve as an example of this approach. The writings of Eulogius and Paulus Alvarus, though they are hardly representative of the Christian communities living in the city at the time, condemn the notion of a Christian who might mix in with his or her religious identity elements of Islam, Muslim culture, or Arabic. Using their own sort of agronomic language, such Christians appear in both authors' texts as worthless trees incapable of producing fruit; armed with the Gospel as an axe, the Church was meant to cut down such 'wayward' Christians, leaving them to the fires of hell.[7] Thus, Christians were not to cooperate at all with Muslims.

Yet as regrettable as medieval anti-Muslim polemic may be, other authors, such as those we shall discuss below, seem to use it not to proscribe, but to control Christian–Muslim relations by outlining for their readers a religious identity that helped them to navigate inter-religious living. How *could* they cooperate with Muslims? What aspects of Islam might they make use of in order to acclimatize to a new environment? Having done this, how could they maintain their unique identity and thrive as Arabized Christians without simply converting to Islam? By answering these questions, the authors we shall examine become metaphorical agronomists, planting their readers in Muslim soil, nursing them until they bore the fruit of a new identity that made the best use of both Muslim and Christian influences. By helping their readers to adapt in this way, our authors were able to assert some measure of control over Christian–Muslim relations and nourish those Christian communities that grew in Islamic soil.

The Qur'an and Arabized Christian identity in twelfth-century Iberia

In his book *Religious polemic and the intellectual history of the Mozarabs*, Thomas Burman (1994) provides much evidence suggesting that our authors made use of a number of different sources in their explication of Christianity in an Islamic context. Among these are various Islamic sources (Burman gives greatest attention to the Hadith), but also Eastern Christian (e.g. Nestorian, Melkite, or Jacobite) and Latin Christian sources as well.[8] In this section, we shall attempt an advancement of Burman's thesis by giving greater attention to some of the ways our authors interact with the Qur'an.[9] Moreover, we shall also explore how this interaction

is guided by an Eastern Christian pattern of argumentation.[10] In all of this, our discussion should demonstrate that these authors were cooperating with a number of unexpected sources, the Qur'an in particular, in their effort to help Christian identity adapt to an Islamic environment.

For Eastern Christians, the development of a new and distinctive argumentative methodology among Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*) beckoned and perhaps even forced them to find ways of conveying their theology and identity according to new Islamic forms of discourse (cf. Thomas 2005, 132; Griffith 1994, 3–4). So it was for various Arabized Christians living amid Islam on the Iberian Peninsula. Consequently, whilst our authors are clearly influenced by Islamic sources, their use of them is guided by Eastern Christian sources, the authors of which had already set themselves the task of adapting Christianity to an Islamic context.

In this light, some of our authors made use of *kalām* (Islamic philosophical theology) in their efforts to assert an Arabized Christian identity (Burman 1994, 168–84; Burman 1995; Burman 1996). The use of *kalām*, though, is but one example of Christian communities acknowledging their need to adapt theological method to new contexts. For this reason, it is our authors' willingness to turn to the Qur'an as a source of Christian truth that deserves special attention here. Their use of this Islamic source forms the basis for a new way of speaking as Christians. As a result, our authors are able to assert a new identity that is as much built upon Islam as it is intended to distinguish itself from Islam.

This new way of speaking is immediately noticeable with the *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya*. Within its very title we see a way of referring to the Trinity (*al-tathlīth*) that is rather curious, for *tathlīth* quite literally means 'to make, or call, three'. In the same way, then, that Muslims express divine unity, i.e. *tawḥīd*, or 'to make one', so *al-tathlīth* would be applied by Muslims to the Trinity (Thomas 1965, 373). It is clearly problematic, for it is hardly an accurate expression of the doctrine. Nevertheless, Eastern Christians employed the term themselves as a starting point, forgoing linguistic precision in favour of pursuing more philosophical means of articulating *tathlīth* as a divine Trinity in unity. Many Arabized Christian communities in Iberia followed suit, and so acceptance of the term seems to have received almost wholesale approval by Arabic-speaking Christians.

The author of the *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya* most likely gleaned the term from his use of Eastern Christian sources or else he simply learned it from discussions with Eastern Christians or Muslims. In either case, he has altered his manner of speaking in order to accommodate new vocabulary that can express his identity as a Christian. In this sense, the author asserts his Christian identity in a very new and rather Islamic way by virtue of this shift in vocabulary.

The same shift is observable in the introductory remarks in al-Qūṭī's letter. Here the author begins his text with what can best be described as a Christianized version of the *basmala*: 'In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God'.[11] The *Liber denudationis* employs a similar, but extended version: 'In the name of the Father . . . and of the Son . . . and of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life to those who are in tombs: a unity in Trinity, a Trinity in unity' (*Liber denudationis* 1.1; Burman 1994, 240–1). Laudatory remarks are common in texts of this nature, but in these cases the authors are introducing their treatises, *mutatis mutandis*, in much the same way Muslims would. The authors remain very much Christians – their *basmalas* reflect their belief in a Trinity in unity – but they have incorporated an Islamic starting point for the elucidation of Christian doctrine.

Similarly, in more than one passage al-Qūṭī follows references to Christ with traditional honorifics normally reserved in Islam only for God. Thus, where a reader might expect to see 'peace be upon him' (*'alayhi al-salām*) in reference to Christ as prophet, al-Qūṭī employs 'may he be exalted and sublime!' (*'azza wa-jall*) and 'praise be upon him' (*subḥān*) when he speaks of Christ as God incarnate (Khazrajī 1975, 32 §3 and 38 §10). In this, al-Qūṭī is voicing a bold, albeit succinct and implicit, assertion about Christ's divinity in language found in the Qur'an.[12]

Likewise, just after al-Qūṭī's *basmala* he says of Jesus 'the Messiah our God' (*al-Masīḥ ilāhanā*) that it was he 'who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them'.[13] The author of the *Liber denudationis* employs the same expression in his exposition of Christ as the eternal Word of God (*Liber denudationis* 10:10; Burman 1994, 350–1). To speak of Christ in this way is not theologically surprising, but since such descriptions are applied by the Qur'an to God alone, these authors' application of them to Christ is unique. In this sense, we see these Arabized Christian authors taking language found in the Qur'an and making it speak for Christian identity.[14]

In much the same way, near the beginning of his letter al-Qūṭī says that Christ, 'the Messiah son of Mary' (*al-Masīḥ ibn Maryam*) – in itself a very qur'anic phrase – was 'our God and our Creator and our Provider and the one who causes us to die and the one who gives life to us'.[15] The *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya* echoes this statement, referring to God 'in his creation and in his sustaining [of his creation] through his lordship'.[16] In the *Liber denudationis*, it is the Holy Spirit that is 'the giver of life' (*Liber denudationis* 1.1; Burman 1994, 240–1. See also, *Liber denudationis* 10.22; Burman 1994, 362–3). Again, any shift in theology is absent, but in Islam each of these descriptions represents one of God's most beautiful names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*). In the Qur'an, he is the Creator (*al-Khāliq*), the Provider (*al-Razzāq*), the Giver of Life (*al-Muḥyī*), and the Bringer of Death (*al-Mumīt*). In this case, our Christian authors make the names their own and apply them to Christ as an assertion of his divinity, and, concomitantly, an assertion of their unique Christian identity.

In the same way, though they disparage the Qur'an at times, both al-Qūṭī and the author of the *Liber denudationis* go on to use it to support their claims for Christ's divinity. Customarily, both note that the Qur'an calls Jesus a spirit and a word from God (Khazrajī 1975, 31 §3 and *Liber denudationis*, 10.4, 8–10; Burman 1994, 342–3, 346–51). This observation is common in medieval Christian texts concerning Islam; even Eulogius and Alvarus, the ninth-century Cordovan Christians briefly mentioned earlier, make note of it.[17] But in these twelfth-century texts such references occur with greater regularity and precision. The author of the *Liber denudationis* is able to quote the relevant qur'anic passages with their *sūra* titles.[18] Al-Qūṭī is able to reference Christ's unsurpassed eminence and closeness to God – also quoting directly from the Qur'an[19] – and the qur'anic evidence of his miracles (e.g. Q 3.49 and Q 5.110).

Other authors were content to cite qur'anic references such as these as points of common ground on which to launch more complex arguments for Christian Christology dependent upon biblical material. It is most intriguing, then, that our authors continue their arguments for a divine Christ whilst remaining within qur'anic boundaries. The author of the *Liber denudationis*, for instance, relies almost exclusively on the traditional qur'anic passages just noted (Q 3.45 and Q 4.171), but explicates Christian Christology based upon them. In so doing, he insists that what is revealed in the Qur'an remains true in an 'exterior sense' (*exterius dicatur*), but that 'interior unfaithfulness' (*interius infidelitas*) forced a 'bad understanding [of what was revealed]' (*Liber denudationis* 10.10; Burman 1994, 350–1). Presumably, this 'interior unfaithfulness' described Muhammad's failure to understand God's message followed by his unwarranted addition that 'Jesus in the eyes of God is just like Adam whom he created from clay'.[20] This alleged misapprehension, in turn, formed the essential difference between Christian and Islamic Christology.

In other words, covering over a kernel of truth were layers of confusion; the Prophet's supposed failure to fully comprehend Christ's divinity led to incorrect doctrine and a completely human Christ. The author of the *Liber denudationis* thus purports to unravel the confusion by sweeping away the layers of Muhammad's bewilderment. In so doing, he claims to disclose the innate truth of a divine Christ in the Qur'an. Confining his argument to the qur'anic text, the author suggests that the Islamic claim that Christ is a word and a spirit of God logically

necessitates his divinity. If God is eternal, then his word and spirit must be eternal as well. To suggest that God's word and spirit were created like Adam or a piece of clay implies that God himself was created. Since God is divine, his word must be divine, so the author argues, and therefore the divinity of Christ logically follows.

In this way, the author seeks to clear away Muhammad's confusion (the 'interior unfaithfulness') whilst at the same time taking as his starting point for Christian identity the same texts as a Muslim would employ. He simply re-directs the texts towards an orthodox Christian end.

A final striking set of examples lies subtly nestled in the introductions of two of our texts. In the *Liber denudationis*, after professing God's triune nature, the author asserts that it was this Trinity in unity that:

> created us from earth, and carried us forward through begettings and loins, and fashioned us in wombs and established for us senses … and made us to be among the best of men, when He showed us His miracles … (and on account of this we have believed with certainty), and taught us the paths of truth, and displayed to us the signs of His power and the occasions of His wisdom. (*Liber denudationis* 1.1; Burman 1994, 240–1)

In essence, it was through a triune God that Christians were created and evolved (*transtulit*). Through his miracles they firmly believed in the Christian faith and were thus made 'to be among the best of men' (ibid.).

This introductory comment is a robust statement of Christian belief and identity, but it is also curiously similar to Q 3.110. It might even be said to be an amplified paraphrase turned on its head so that it might communicate Christian identity. Indeed, the author of the *Liber denudationis* seems merely to take the qur'anic passage and expound upon it, for the verse more succinctly asserts that it is not Christians who are the best believers, but Muslims who: 'are the best of peoples evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in God'.[21]

In both cases, it is those who correctly believe in God and correctly follow him that are raised above and brought beyond the rest of humanity. By virtue of their belief, they are better than non-believers; indeed, they are the best of all people. In one sense, then, what clearly seems to be the author's use of the Qur'an here is very nearly a taunt of Muslim readers, for the very words intended to make Muslims unique become in the mouth of this author the markers of Christian identity and religious distinction. In another sense, to Arabized Christians, the author has simply appropriated the qur'anic notion of divine favour from a source that at least some of them would have been familiar with. In either case, that he is able to draw close his Christian identity and his familiarity with Islam is testament to a unique use of two seemingly contrasting elements.

Al-Qūṭī makes a very similar assertion in his introduction, where he praises a triune God who 'guided us to his religion and helped us with his right hand and favoured us with … the Messiah our God ' (Khazrajī 1975, 30 §2).[22] By this grace of God, al-Qūṭī believes that Christians were 'rightly guided' (*tarshad*) (ibid., 31 §2). Here, he takes three very qur'anic concepts and weaves them together to form a tightly compacted assertion of Christian identity. In the Qur'an, it is Muslims whom God has guided to his religion (Q 14.12); as such, they are rightly guided (Q 6.56) and in paradise will be among the companions of the right hand (Q 90.17–18).[23] In all of this, it is Muslims who receive God's favour, for they are the best of all people (Q 3.110).

Much like the author of the *Liber denudationis*, al-Qūṭī repositions these statements and points them towards an identity for Arabized Christian communities. For him, Christianity was, in reality, what the Qur'an claimed Islam to be. By paralleling their arguments to Muslim ones, *mutatis mutandis*, they are able to assert Christian identity, as Sydney Griffith has said, 'in the very Arabic idiom that on Muslim tongues seemed to call it into question' (1994, 4; cf. 1990). In doing so, these Arabized Christian authors in Iberia cooperated with

seemingly unexpected source material and allowed themselves to be guided by others who had done so before. This helped them assert a unique religious identity capable of thriving in their new environment.

Christology and Arabized Christian identity in twelfth-century Iberia

As remarkable as these authors' theologizing is at times, they were not always adept religious 'agronomists'. On occasion, they neglected the nuances present in their new environment. As a result, there were areas where the Christian identity they asserted was not planted deep enough for their readers to thrive in an inter-religious environment.

A handful of Christological statements in the *Liber denudationis* serve as a case in point. These appear within the author's refutations of two common Islamic objections to the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ. In the first objection, Muslims ask how it can be possible to contain God – 'the one whom heaven and earth are not able to contain' – in the womb of Mary (*Liber denudationis* 10.14–17; Burman 1994, 354–9). In response, the author asserts: 'the boundless God united to flesh in the womb of the Virgin was circumscribed by flesh alone, the infinity of His own divinity in no way having been diminished (*Liber denudationis* 10.14; Burman 1994, 354–5).

With this answer, the author avoids the Muslim allegation that in some way God was implicated in human confinement with all of its suffering and degradation. According to the author, this was restricted to Christ's human nature. His intent to safeguard Christ's divinity from human implication is further suggested by two similar comments in the treatise where he re-confirms that these actions were 'by flesh alone' and 'according to the flesh' (*Liber denudationis* 10:15; Burman 1994, 356–7; and *Liber denudationis* 10:19; Burman 1994, 360–61 respectively).[24]

The author argues similarly elsewhere in the text when he points his finger at Muhammad and declares that the Prophet lacked prophetic witness. 'But Christ', the author lauds, 'sent as his heralds all the [Old Testament] prophets who foretold most clearly … [his] divine nature which worked miracles' (*Liber denudationis* 3.5; Burman 1994, 256–7). He seems intent here not only to demonstrate Christ's prophetic heritage, but also to ensure that his readers understand which of Christ's two natures worked miracles. In this case, it was his divine nature at work, not his human nature.

In the second objection, Muslims inquire how it might be possible that God 'deign to be mocked or … crucified or die' (*Liber denudationis* 10.18; Burman 1994, 358–9). According to the author: 'Christ in suffering and death redeemed [his followers] from eternal death, and the divinity did not sustain any of the injury which lay hidden in the flesh' (ibid.). Again, the author takes care to distinguish between the actions attributed to each of Christ's two natures. In this case, only Christ's human nature suffered and died, certainly not his divine nature.[25]

The responses to these objections are intriguing. Centuries earlier, such Christological concerns were addressed at Church councils.[26] The author of the *Liber denudationis* deploys the same responses that early Church Fathers used to clarify Christ's natures, but the discussion enters here in the twelfth century a completely new field of debate. For in twelfth-century Iberia, the possibility that only Christ's human nature suffered leaves a door open for Muslim attack. Whilst the author may have overcome the Muslim charge that the divine Son suffered, died, or was made subject to the human body's confinement, it remains unclear how exactly these actions were isolated to his human nature. So, perceptive Muslims could seize the opportunity to retort that if the two natures did not endure confinement, suffering, or death equally, then Christ's divine nature must surely have ceased to exist.[27] In this way, the author's Christological

statements would seem to be rather short-sighted solutions only able to briefly satisfy Muslim objections.[28]

How might we explain this sudden bout of absent-mindedness in a context of otherwise innovative thought? Perhaps his responses, forced as they were to defend Christ in a relatively Islamic context, descended into a pattern of what could or could not be said of Christ without consideration for how they might be countered. Treatises like the *Liber denudationis* were, after all, often designed to meet the functional needs of their readers, not necessarily offer comprehensive, fundamental theology. Perhaps the author felt his answers were enough to satisfy the concerns of his readers, likely members of Arabized Christian communities. Or maybe the author of the *Liber denudationis* included in his sources an Eastern Christian apology for the incarnation that conveniently matched his inter-religious context. Indeed, the works of Theodore Abū Qurra, ninth-century Melkite Bishop of Ḥarrān, were widely known.[29] One of them in particular includes a Christological discussion that is a near match to the one found in the *Liber denudationis*. In Abū Qurra's treatise, he is asked by an unnamed interlocutor how it is that the divine Christ could be limited and confined within a human body. Abū Qurra responds:

> the eternal Son is in every place without limit . . . but that in his compassion for the need in us humans of salvation, the blessed one became located [*ḥulūl*] in the body which he took from Mary the pure virgin, and exposed it [the body, i.e. the human nature] to the sufferings and pain. (Bacha 1904, 182.15–20; see also, Thomas 2005, 137)

Abū Qurra is also careful to restrict Christ's sufferings to his human nature alone. By doing so, he overcomes the Muslim objection that the divine Son suffers or is subject to the human body's confinement. Might the author of the *Liber denudationis* have used a text like Abū Qurra's as a source?[30]

Yet Abū Qurra's discussion is as short-sighted as those found in the *Liber denudationis* and vulnerable to the same Muslim rebuttals. In this light, a more likely explanation for the absent-mindedness of such responses may be that many Christians in general were forced to take a step backwards when it came to Muslim objections to Christ's incarnation. In fact, these responses focus on the manner in which God became incarnate – the usual focus of intra-Christian debate – and in this way reflect the concerns of the early Church. Muslims did not share Christians' concern for *how* Christ became incarnate; in their minds he was only ever a human prophet, and so the incarnation simply did not occur. Consequently, Muslim objections to the doctrine operated from a completely different perspective, from which the incarnation was not, then, primarily a Christological dilemma, for it compromised more than anything else the essence of God's unity (*tawḥīd*) (cf. Q 112 and Reynolds 2001, 167). It was at this latter level, not the former, that the problem lay for Muslims, and for this reason Christian responses like those we see in the *Liber denudationis* bypassed Muslims' primary concerns.

Furthermore, the incarnation was unnecessary in Muslim minds and so they questioned its theological value. For Christians, it spoke rather clearly to the biblical concept of redemptive suffering and God's love for and intimacy with humanity. Yet for Muslims, any such notion violated the qur'anic concept of God's justice, his consistent triumph over evil, and his magisterial transcendence. In the incarnation, then, Muslims did not see an act of divine love, but an insult to divine omnipotence.[31] In Muslim objections, the Christian doctrine was thus marginalized and emptied of its significance. This scenario should have forced Christians to find new ways of defending the basis for their doctrine rather than a preferred way in which to articulate it.

Authors like the writer of the *Liber denudationis* were thus seemingly unaware that such a central theological point as the incarnation had a very different history and basis of

understanding for Muslims (ibid., 180). Perhaps unaware of the new ground upon which Muslims made their objections, he felt little need to reformulate his argument for the incarnation. And so he forces a series of provocative, yet ultimately inadequate metaphors to support the rest of his argument (*Liber denudationis* 10.18–19; Burman 1994, 358–61).[32] As a result, he has deployed the usual defence for the doctrine – one that previously addressed matters of historical Christian concern – and in essence provides an answer to a different question. Standing on the same ground as the Church Fathers who formulated the early Christological creeds, the author hastily deploys the solution to a fifth- and sixth-century Christian problem, perhaps not fully realizing the extent to which his twelfth-century Islamic context differed (cf. Thomas 2005, 133–40). In all of this, the author of the *Liber denudationis* failed to deeply root his readers in the soil of a Christological identity that might withstand Muslim objections. This shortfall may have impeded the author's ability – and that of any readers who followed him – to fully adapt to his inter-religious environment.

Conclusion

Returning to the agronomic metaphor with which we began our study, how might we summarize these twelfth-century Arabized Christian authors' attempts to firmly plant their faith in the soil of their day so that it might thrive as distinctly Christian? Taking the three texts we have chosen, there is overwhelming evidence that their authors' assertion of Christian identity is often coupled with the look and sound of Islam. Yet despite the many ways in which our authors' culture, language, sources and vocabulary impinge on Islamic and qur'anic thought-forms, they are hardly religious accommodationists. By taking an Islamic starting point for their assertion of Arabized Christian identity, they attempted to explain their beliefs to Muslims and assure their Christian community of them with the language and methodology that was most appropriate. And they were guided in this process, after all, by their Christian forebears. As a result, their theological elucidations function as both apologetic – a defence of Christian doctrine in an Islamic context – and innovation – the result of making Christian doctrine translatable to new contexts so that its adherents might cling to it with fresh and lasting vigour (ibid., 133). By conforming to the dominant cultural context surrounding them, they were able to assert and maintain a distinct religious identity. Or to put it another way, they re-planted Christianity in new soil.

This strategy of religious acclimatization can also be described as the means by which our authors differentiated between condemning Islam as a religion on the one hand and celebrating its culture and language on the other. For them, the latter elements were no longer exclusive to Muslims or subservient to Muslims' application of them. In our authors' hands, Arabic language and culture were made to serve their doctrinal discussions and religious distinction. As a result, portions of the Qur'an are made to do an about-turn. They no longer looked towards the *umma*, describing Muslims and Islam; now they could also look towards these Christians and help to describe their identity.

As we have seen, it would appear that our authors were not always successful in this endeavour. The author of the *Liber denudationis* in particular falls short in his attempt to provide readers with an innovative response to Muslims' Christological objections. In fact, he simply reaches back into history for an explanation of Christ's incarnation and, in so doing, only provides answers to Christological dilemmas from well before the twelfth century. Yet even though he seems to have missed the very subtle differences in how Christians and Muslims viewed God and humanity, we nevertheless see him, like our other authors, trying to help his Christian heritage and religious distinction cooperate with the pervading Islamic environment of his day.

Notes

1. '*. . .cuando Moavia volvió a Córdoba, presentó a Abderrahmen I algunos regalos que para el monarca le habían entregado. . . . Entre esos regalos se hallaba el granado que ahora es conocido en España con el nombre de granado assafarí. Los contertulios de Abderrahmen I se pusieron a hablar de Siria y a manifestar la nostalgia que sentían al recordar su país natal. Entre esos contertulios había uno que se llamaba Safar, el cual cogió una rama de aquel granado, la cuidó y plantó, hasta que pudo arraigar y prender muy bien y dar fruto. El granado que hoy se conoce con el nombre de assafarí tomó el nombre de ese Safar*' (Ribera 1914, 41). The same account is expanded by Ibn Sa'īd in his thirteenth-century *Kitāb al-mughrib fī ḥula 'al-Maghrib* and quoted in the seventeenth-century by Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maqqarī in his *The history of the Mohammedan dynasties in Spain* (1840, 210–11).
2. The same can be said for Andalusī Muslim agronomy in general. In fact, aggressive Muslim acclimatization and agronomy introduced numerous plants to the peninsula – nearly 100 additional varieties are listed by Yaḥya ibn Muḥammad ibn al-'Awwām in his twelfth-century *Kitāb al-filāḥa al-Andalusiyya* than in Palladius' fourth-century *Opus agriculturae* (see Harvey 1992, 72; Glick 2005, 71–2). Nevertheless, the relationship of Andalusī Muslims as effective agricultural patrons with medieval Iberia as an 'already receptive host environment' (Ruggles 2006, 14) must not be under-emphasized. In other words, the transformation of Iberia from a relatively derelict landscape to a lush and prosperous one in the Middle Ages was realized at the hands of Muslims, but was certainly the fruit of a land with already inherent potential. The model of an environment coerced towards vitality is thus helpful to our understanding of human adaptation whereby successful change is realized through the vitality of both host and patron.
3. Many such Christians can be called 'Mozarabs', a term most likely derived from the Arabic passive participle *musta'rab*, meaning 'Arabized' (it could also come from *musta'rib*, the active participle, meaning 'to make oneself similar to the Arabs'). On the complexities of this term and the nature of the debate that surrounds it, see Hitchcock (2008) and de Epalza (1992).
4. Arabized Christians of medieval Iberia would continue to flourish, but would ultimately not endure beyond the thirteenth-century. They were eventually absorbed by the wider population of Iberian Christians and greater, Latin Christendom. Muslims and their influence all but completely disappeared as they converted or were eventually expelled from the peninsula in the seventeenth-century (something similar could be said of Iberia's Jews from the late fifteenth-century).
5. For an Arabic edition of al-Qūṭī's letter, see Khazrajī (1975, 30–9, §§2–10). For the Arabic edition of the *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya*, see Qurṭubī (1980, 47, 57, 71, 77, 91, 97, 105–6, 115–17, 163–5, 177, 181–5, 215–17). Abridged English translations of both tracts appear in Constable (1997, 143–51). For a discussion of matters related to authorship, see in particular Burman (1994, 62–80).
6. Its full title is *Liber denudationis siue ostensionis, aut patefacientem* (The book of denuding or exposing, or The discloser), though it has been previously known by other titles (e.g. *Contrarietas alfolica* or *Telif*). The only extant manuscript is a Latin translation of what is most certainly an Arabic original. For a Latin edition with English translation, see Part 2 of Burman 1994. For Burman's discussion of the manuscript and authorship, see ibid. (37–62, 215–29).
7. See Eulogius, *Memoriale sanctorum*, 1.27 (in Gil 1973, 390–1) and Alvarus, *Indiculus luminosus*, 1 (in Gil 1973, 272–3; cf. Matthew 3.10).
8. For a discussion of these sources in the *Liber denudationis*, *Tathlīth al-waḥdāniyya*, and al-Qūṭī's letter, see Burman (1994, 95–189).
9. Of course, we must not neglect the role of both Jewish and Christian sources in the origins of some of the qur'anic language in these sources (see, for example, Baumstark 1958; Watt 1970, 82–5). Even so, as we hope to make clear, it is the Qur'an that our authors are interacting with, and in so doing, Muslims, Jews, and Eastern Christians become brokers of this transmission to our Arabized Christian authors.
10. This is shown not only in the use of Eastern Christian sources, but also in the collaboration with Eastern Christians dwelling in Iberia (on this, see Monferrer-Sala 2006; Zozaya 1998).
11. '*Bi-sm al-āb wa-al-ibn wa-al-rūḥ al-qudus, ilāh wāḥid*' (Khazrajī 1975, 3 §2). Cf. 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate' (*bismi llāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*) – common in the Qur'an and other Muslim texts.
12. Of course, some of these formulas find their origins outside Islam as with, for instance, '*subḥān*', which has non-Arabic/Islamic origins (see Buhl 1938).
13. *alladhī khalaqa al-samāwāt wa-al-arḍ wa-mā baynahumā* (Khazrajī 1975, 30 §2). Cf., for instance, Q 32.4 or Q 50.38.

14. Again, whilst this phrase is qur'anic in nature, it is found in Jewish literature and is even reminiscent of Genesis 1.1. Nevertheless, our authors' use of this phrase and applying it uniquely to Christ, in a context where Muslims (and Jews) would be familiar with it, is significant.
15. *ilāhanā wa-khāliqanā wa-razzāqanā wa-mumītanā wa-muḥyīnā* (Khazrajī 1975, 38 §10).
16. *fī khalīqatihi wa-tadbīrihi fī rubūbiyyatih* (Qurṭubī 1980, 47).
17. '[Muḥammad] taught … that Christ is the word of God and [his] spirit…' (*docuit* [*Christum*] *Dei uerbum esse et spiritum*…). Eulogius, *Liber apologeticus martyrum*, 19 (in Gil 1973, 487). '…profess a word of God and a spirit, as [Muslims] affirm…' (*proferunt, uerbum dei et spiritum ut illi asserunt*) (*Indiculus luminosus*, 9, in Gil 1973, 281).
18. Q 3.45: 'God is giving news to you [Mary] of a word' (*Allāha yubashshiruki bi-kalimatin*); and Q 4.171: 'Jesus … is a word of [God], and … a spirit from [God]' (*'Īsā ibn Maryam … kalimatuhu … wa-rūḥun minhu*). The Latin manuscript has '*Elmaran*' (*Āl-'Imrān*) and '*Elnessa*' (*al-Nisā'*) for the *sūra* titles (see *Liber denudationis*, 10.4. Burman 1994, 342–43).
19. Q 3.45: '[Christ] was "eminent in this world and the next one and one of those brought close to God"' (*wa-annahu kāna wajīhan fī al-dunyā wa-al-ākhira wa-min al-muqarrabīn*) (Khazrajī 1975, 3:31).
20. The author here paraphrases Q 3.59: 'The likeness of Jesus before God is as that of Adam (*inna mathal 'Īsa 'inda Allāh ka-mathal Ādam*) (*Liber denudationis* 10.11; Burman 1994, 350–1).
21. *kuntum khayr ummatin ukhrijat li-al-nās ta'murūna bi-al-ma'rūf wa-tanhawna 'an al-munkar wa-tu'minūna bi-llāh* (Q 3.110).
22. *alladhī hadānā li-dīnihi wa-ayyadanā bi-yamīnihi wa-khaṣṣanā … al-Masīḥ ilāhanā*.
23. This is not necessarily restricted to Islam; cf. Matthew 25.31–46, where it is those placed on Christ's right that will enter heaven.
24. The author attempts to strengthen his argument on this point in 10.16 with qur'anic references describing God as seated on a throne (e.g. Q 10.3; 13.2; 20.5), the width of which spans the heavens and the earth (Q 2.255). In 10.17, he also adds Hadith passages in which God is said to reach into hell in order to save some who were sent there (Burman 1994, 359). Curiously, the former argument follows one made by the ninth-century Theodore Abū Qurra (see Bacha 1904, 181.5–7; the entire tract appears in ibid. 180–6 and is translated into German in Graf 1910, 178–84. See also Thomas 2005, 135).
25. Though responding to a slightly different objection, similar evidence comes from Petrus Alfonsi's early-twelfth-century *Dialogus contra Iudaeos*, most likely written in the Aragonese capital of Huesca. For an English translation of the *Dialogus*, see Resnick, *Petrus Alfonsi, Dialogue against the Jews* (2006). For a Latin edition, see Mieth, *Der Dialog des Petrus Alfonsi: Seine Überlieferung im Druck und in den Handschriften Textedition* (1982), and for a Spanish translation by Esperanza Ducay, see Pedro Alfonso (1996). In his discussion of Christ's prophethood and divinity, Alfonsi refers to the prophet Isaiah and writes that Christ 'will not falter nor flee' before bringing judgement (heading 9; see Resnick 2006, 201, n. 16) where the translator observes that Alfonsi's 'He will not falter nor flee' [*non deficiet aut effugiet*] does not match the Vulgate's 'He will not be sad or troublesome' [*non erit tristis neque turbulentus*]). According to Alfonsi, it seemed clear that Isaiah 'wanted Christ's death to be understood by "falter," whereas by "flee" he wanted his Ascension into heaven to be understood', i.e. Christ will not die or return to heaven before giving his law (Resnick 2006, 201, n. 16). Alfonsi adds that Christ's death was 'according to the flesh', and so he, too, seems careful to distinguish between the functions of Christ's human nature and his divine nature.
26. These were given special attention at the Council of Chalcedon (451). Its creed was meant to curb Monophysite influence by emphasizing two natures in the one person of Christ. These two natures were not to be confused or divided – an effort to preserve the impassibility of divinity. As a result, the human attributes of Christ could only be predicated of his human nature; his divine attributes only of the divine nature. It was not until the Second Council of Constantinople (553) that the language used to describe the relationship of Christ's two natures was given more precision. Even so, some Christians retained an allegiance to Chalcedon (see Davis 1990). For a response to these very questions given to a cantor in Antioch by Jews and Muslims, which reflects the precise phrasing of the Second Council of Constantinople, see Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth-century theologian, and his *De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, Graecos et Armenos ad Cantorem Antiochenum*, 6–7, a critical edition of which can be found in Aquinas (1969). For an annotated English translation, see Kenny (1996); for a French translation, see Emery (1999); for a German translation, see Grabmann (1942). As G. Reynolds (2001) demonstrates, however, Aquinas' arguments also fail to take into account the Muslim perspective.
27. For example, the free-thinking Shi'i Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad ibn Hārūn al-Warrāq (d. c. 864) made this very argument (see Warrāq, 1987a, §§ 63–5; French translation in Warrāq 1987b, and an English translation in Thomas 2002).

28. The same criticism could be applied to Alfonsi's argument summarized in n. 25 above. Even more, his explanation for Christ's death could easily be used by any Muslims who happened upon his treatise to support various Islamic interpretations concerning Christ's crucifixion in the Qur'an, i.e. that he did not die, but was instead raised to heaven (see Q 4.156–9; Robinson 1991, 106–41, 171–2; see also Lawson 2009; Zahniser 2008).
29. Abū Qurra's work was also well-known in various Muslim circles (see Thomas 2005, 139).
30. Abū Qurra's answer presumably allows him to retain his allegiance to the creed of Chalcedon as well (see Thomas 2005, 137; Bacha 1904, 180.14–19). Cf. John of Damascus and a similar discussion concerning Christ's natures and impassibility in his *Disputatio Saraceni et Christiani* (in Sahas 1972, 150–3). Might it also be possible, then, given the presence of Iberian Christians in the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-centuries who exhibited a preference for Chalcedon, that the twelfth-century author of the *Liber denudationis* betrays here a similar Christological preference? On the Chalcedonian creed in sixth-eighth century Iberia, see Vives (1963, 171–85); McWilliam (1993, 77–8); and Thompson (1969, 164, 277).
31. For a similar line of argument, see the thirteenth-century Egyptian jurist Aḥmad ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfī (1986, 293, 346) and the comments in Reynolds (2001, 174, 176).
32. The author likens the incarnation to a pearl in its shell and a fire unable to injure an angelic being, reminiscent of Daniel 3.19–27 (Vulgate – 3.19–23, 91–4). Cf. a similar phenomenon in an eighth-century letter sent by Timothy I, the Nestorian patriarch of Baghdad, to a friend. It is Letter no. 40, translated from the original Syriac into French (Cheikho 1983). See discussion of the letter in Thomas (2005, 127–9).

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