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THE DIALOG ATTRIBUTED TO ABRAHAM OF TIBERIAS:  
NEW RESEARCH OF HIS HISTORICAL ENVIRONMENT

BY  
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#### A. THE “STATUS QUAESTIONIS”: THE DOUBTS ON THE HISTORICITY

In the critical edition of *Le dialogue de Abraham de Tibériade avec ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāšimī à Jérusalem vers 820*, published in 1986, with regard to the historicity of the work, Marcuzzo states:

Is the dialogue that we attribute to “Abraham of Tiberias with ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Hāšimī” historical? Did it take place indeed? Is it not a literary fiction to which had been applied, in order to render it credible, names of persons, of places and events? The problem is not without relevance. At a first reading the clear impression is of an historical dialogue: names of persons, dates, places, religious and social context, nature of the arguments, etc... But after a more careful reading, the doubts begin to rise<sup>1</sup>.

Marcuzzo lists other orientalist that, after having catalogued the manuscripts containing the dialogue, have not expressed judgments about the authenticity — Marcuzzo mentions Joseph Assemani, Etienne Assemani, Angelo Mai, M. Steinschneider, Sachau, Mingana, Sbath, and Cheikho — as well as the quick opinions of Vollers<sup>2</sup>, Graf<sup>3</sup> and Vajda<sup>4</sup>.

He concludes asserting:

No orientalist has expressed a formal judgment for or against the historicity of the dialogue attributed to Abraham of Tiberias. They gave impressions and they were rather critical about the historicity of the dialogue<sup>5</sup>.

Marcuzzo wanted to support the thesis of the authenticity with the more careful examination of three elements, namely the beginning of the dialogue, the characters and the role they play in the dialogue - Abraham from Tiberias, the Nestorian bishop Elia and the *amīr* ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Hāšimī - and the conclusion of the dialogue. They are elements - he states - that can favor a pessimistic judgment about the historicity.

These observations could lead us to think the dialogue as a beautiful history, pleasant as far as the reading goes, edifying for the Christian community, in which a noted editor constructs a literary scene, putting in some places some historical references in order to give the story greater credibility

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1) MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue* (1986), p. 97. The translation from the french is mine.

2) VOLLERS, *Das Religiongespräch* (1908), p. 32.

3) GRAF, *Geschichte* (1947), p. xxx.

4) VAJDA, *Un traité*, p. 138.

5) MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue* (1986), p. 99.

and he introduces in it, under the shape of a dialogue, theological information<sup>6</sup>.

#### B. THE ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF AUTHENTICITY ADDUCED FROM MARCUZZO

But Marcuzzo supports the historicity:

Personally, on the base of the “acquired sensibility” in the frequency of the text, the consideration of the historical and geographic content, shape and data of the dialogue, lead us to a conclusion that is opposite to the impressions expressed by the orientalists, and so we propose the following theory: “A Muslim-Christian dialogue must truly and fundamentally have taken place in Jerusalem at the beginning of the ix century between a monk, we call him Abraham of Tiberias, and a high Muslim personality, that it could have been ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Hāšimī. But the editor of the text of our dialogue has arranged with freedom the fundamental event and he has developed the beginning from a sure and the indispensable literary genre of apologetic style common in his age”<sup>7</sup>.

According to Marcuzzo therefore *it is not a chronicle, aiming at producing a faithful historical statement in all the details, nor is it a mere abstract invention*<sup>8</sup>, whose purpose could have been the “inner use” of the Christian community, of *an edifying history constructed in order to supply the Christians arguments in their daily comparisons with the Muslim interlocutor and in order to support their faith*<sup>9</sup>.

Marcuzzo therefore advances the thesis that, beyond the fictitious and edifying literary cover there are hidden references and details that must induce us to favorably consider the thesis of the historicity.

#### C. THE ARGUMENTS THE ORIENTALISTS USED WHEN DENYING THE AUTHENTICITY

Marcuzzo reasons more in detail on the opinions of the orientalists.

In the first place, the orientalists expressed their opinions after fast readings of the content; in the second place the manuscripts on the base of which Vollers and Graf based their opinions belonged to the recession much longer and far from the text that originated them: Vollers on the base of one manu-

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6) MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue* (1986), p. 100.

7) MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue* (1986), p. 101.

8) MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue* (1986), p. 101.

9) MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue* (1986), p. 101.

script, and Graf without knowing all the manuscripts and basing his own opinion on the opinion of Vollers.

Vajda, who knew the existence of an Islamic-Christian dialogue, does not seem to have studied the text because he was interested in a Judaic-Christian controversy attributed to Abraham from Tiberias that, for the admission of Vajda is very different from our text regarding the content and the form<sup>10</sup>.

The absence of historical references to Abraham of Tiberias cannot be invoked as an argument contrary to the historicity because the same argument can be invoked as argument in favor of authenticity.

The explicit reference to the Nestorian bishop Elia is explained on the basis of the handwritten tradition because it seems to be much later and the work of an editor.

The free and artificial full agreement of miracles on the end can be ascribed to the apologetic literary genre, well known in the literature of the Arab-Christian, that it demands a sure style but does not remove nor null the historicity.

These are therefore the critical points of view that Marcuzzo has expressed with regard to the opinions of other orientalist. Is their point of view correct? Yes, but only if they are taken with the positive arguments that Marcuzzo specify.

#### D. POSITIVE ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF AUTHENTICITY

##### *1. The characters*

What are the positive arguments? Marcuzzo adduces some arguments; they include the characters, the places as well as other indications.

In the first place, the characters are discussed. Marcuzzo moves from the problem of attribution. The case of attribution of a work to great personalities of the literature was not a rare phenomenon in ancient literature, and Christian literature did not differ. Marcuzzo quotes the case of Theodore Abū Qurrah to which Arabic Christians were used to attribute the apologies, having had a great reputation in controversy that authentic apologies brought him. But in the case of Abraham of Tiberias, what kind of work was possible

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10) Cf. MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue* (1986), pp. 101-102.

to attribute to him, having not such reputation?

The same argument can be used with regard to the *amīr*. We know that he covered official and military functions, that he possessed a good acquaintance with the language and was equipped of discreet intellectual and religious curiosity. He was the opposite of his father 'Abd al-Malik - the "most eloquent of banū Hāšim of his times"<sup>11</sup> - he not only had no such reputation, but he did not have any reputation at all to be ascribed as the main character in a literary work..

This argument that seems so strong, we consider weak because of the presence of the first and the second character can be ascribed to other reasons that we will explain.

## 2. *The places*

If they are taken in consideration, the places, according to Marcuzzo, we can deduce other indications that concur to establish the authenticity.

Jerusalem in fact can certainly be considered a celebrated city. However, if we consider the opinion in which the city was held from the Abbasid emperors and the credit it had during their dominion, we must reformulate our judgment. If it was intentional to adapt a cultural and religious dialogue in an important and culturally prestigious city, without doubt another city would have been preferred, Edessa or Damascus for instance, but above all Baġdād.

We could say however that the city of Jerusalem seems to have been chosen not for the cultural symbol she did not represent, but for the religious symbol she always was and is.

## 3. *Several Indications*

According to Marcuzzo, the historical period can be identified with the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn that more and better corresponds to the circumstances shown within the *Dialogue*:

The context of the times is in perfect harmony with the years in which, according to our calculation, the dialogue must have taken place, namely the years of the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn (813-833). At a time of tolerance, cul-

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11) Cf. L. CHEIKHO, *Le testament de 'Abd al-Malik ibn Šāliḥ à son fils avant de mourir*, in *al-Mašriq* 25 (1927), 738.

tural and religious initiatives, and also a time of relative peace that allowed movements and pilgrimages<sup>12</sup>.

According to Marcuzzo, the cities named in the dialogue are: Tiberias, Jerusalem, Damascus, Iraq, and al-Raqqah; the persons: monks, princes with their followers, patriarchs, bishops, the Christians, the Muslims and the Jews.

Marcuzzo is convinced that this is the true context at the beginning of the IX century in Jerusalem and in its outskirts. This context is still deeply marked from a character of simple, biblical and popular theology. A context in which the monks played a great role as it is well explained in our dialogue and that we can deduce from the history of the Church of Jerusalem of that time<sup>13</sup>.

According to Marcuzzo, not only the various kinds of contexts offer an argument in favor of authenticity, but also the realism of the text, save those elements that appear mainly literary: the general introduction, the introduction of several characters, collections of dogmatic formulas or biblical verses that circulated inside of the Christian communities and that give the impression to have been inserted in block, as in the end being filled with miracles as well as other passages<sup>14</sup>.

In conclusion therefore Marcuzzo collects this series of indications in order to conclude that the text of our dialogue is a witness of an actual historical dialogue:

All these historical, geographical, social and cultural data, without being absolutely and definitively a sure argument, offer however a true foundation to the historicity of our dialogue. Without bringing new and more consisting objections, they cannot be put on the account of one free composition or one literary imitation, simply filled with intentionally added historical details. Our text is far from giving the impression to be an imaginary dialogue of questions and answers, actions and separated reactions; it rather seems to be a dialogue that has happened between authentic personages, in a precise context and a determined time<sup>15</sup>.

#### E. NEW ELEMENTS WITH REGARD TO THE HISTORICITY?

Hence, from the analysis of the dialogue - as Marcuzzo showed and

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12) MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue* (1986), p. 104.

13) MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue* (1986), p. 105.

14) Cf. MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue* (1986), p. 105.

15) MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue* (1986), p. 107.

concluded - a dialogue *must (...) have taken place in Jerusalem (...) between a monk (...) and a high Muslim personality*, and in the same time, there is a literary «cover» where the editor of the text has arranged with freedom *the fundamental event and developed it beginning from a sure almost indispensable literary genre of apologetic style common to his age*;<sup>16</sup> going a step further, we ask: can there be other elements that would focus more intense light on this «historical environment» that - in Marcuzzo's opinion - the dialogue hides? Can the criteria of Marcuzzo be verified in order to approve the total picture, reject it or correct it?

In our opinion some tracks can be followed: philological, historical, as well as geographical indications. Let us collect some sociological and historical details leaving the philological, geographical and theological ones to the study preceding the forthcoming publication of the Italian translation.

### ***1. Christians, Jews and Muslims together***

It may appear that the dialogue is witness to a pacific cohabitation of the three communities as is said: *but here we are, we, the Christians and the Jews* (§7), and because of that the dialogue reflects the mutual interaction between the three communities made by a Christian report. But if we consider in a deeper way the aim of the dialogue, there is not only a mere cohabitation, but the dialogue is witness of a change in the society, specifically a conversion of Jews and Christians to Islam. Three persons called by the prince are converted to Islam (two from Christian faith and one from the Jewish one; cf. §14), and the dialogue itself in its structure is denouncing the methods used for obtaining the forced conversion to Islam. The promise of a reward made by the Caliph when the monk is invited to convert to Islam (§64), and the monk put in prison at the end of the dialog, are a very clear message. On the other hand, at the end of the dialogue, when the situation turns in advantage of Christianity inducing the two converted Jews and the two converted Christians to ask for baptism, the work manifests the dialogue's literary aim, namely to prove the superiority of Christianity over the Islamic faith that, at the time, was popularly becoming the faith of the majority of the population or was clear to all that in a few years it would have become.

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<sup>16</sup>) MARCUZZO, *Le dialogue* (1986), p. 101.



## 2. *The Jews*

The prince's doctor, a Jew, is called for solving the theological question thrown by the prince (§1-15), together with other two other Jews (§14), but the theological thinking that lead the structure of the dialogue stresses that they were unable to find the solution of the theological question that concerns the Christians.

At the beginning, with regard to the general condition of the Jews, is said not only something of theological value and in a Koranic style (*God has covered them with shame has cursed them and abolished their religion*) but is also given a reference to an historical condition because the prince's secretary states: *at this moment the situation is like you say and still worse (ašarr)* (§9-10).

If we consider the situation of the Jews in Jerusalem in the centuries preceding the Islamic conquest and in early Islamic era, we have to reconsider the situation of the Jews in Palestine, as stated by Lee Levin:

Heretofore it has been commonly assumed that the late Roman-Byzantine period witnessed a steady decline of Jewish life and the recession into a kind of Dark Age which was to last for centuries. Large-scale emigration, loss of political status, lapse of key communal institutions, economic hardships and religious discrimination bordering at times on persecution, were assumed to have had their cumulative effect, leaving the Jewish community in an impoverished state. This perception has been challenged on a number of fronts. The Cairo Geniza has revealed a series of literary works dating from this period, indicating the existence of a creative cultural life among Jews. This impression is the result of the now-accepted dating to late antiquity of a series of liturgical, apocalyptic, halakhic, and mystical works, previously thought to be medieval in origin. To these examples can now be added the ever increasing number of Byzantine synagogues being found throughout Israel. Moreover, other synagogues, products of a somewhat earlier age, continued to undergo extensive renovations, and were in use down to the Arab conquest of Palestine and beyond<sup>17</sup>.

With regard to the Jewish presence in Jerusalem, we are also informed that about 880 A.D. Daniel al-Qumusī came to Jerusalem. He was the found-

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17) Lee I. LEVIN, *Ancient Synagogues Revealed*, Detroit, 1982, pp. 9-10 quoted in Robert L. WILKEN, *The Land called holy. Palestine in Christian history & thought*, Yale University press, 1992, p. 195.

er of the Karayte sect, who refused the authority of the Talmud and accepted only the authority of the Holy Scripture. Daniel al-Qumusī planned with his faithful disciple Sahl Ibn Masliah, the repopulation of Jerusalem by the Jews, thinking about the envoy of five colons from each Jewish community of the Diaspora in order to increase the Jewish presence in the holy city. They wrote to the communities of the Diaspora who became sensitive to the argument of Jerusalem; the city become «nostalgic for her sons». The Karayte Jews, separated from the Rabbinic ones, settled themselves with the permission of Ibn Tulūn in a neighborhood outside of Jerusalem and began a great propaganda at the city-doors. Jewish presence began to increase<sup>18</sup>.

If we now consider what Karen Armstrong with regard to the Jewish presence in Jerusalem, we have to say that this cannot be the environment at the time of the redaction of the dialogue, where the situation of the Jewish community is depicted in a bad way and a «worse» is added; nonetheless there should have been a cultural and religious presence if in the dialogue are placed two Jewish men «who examine the Scriptures» (§15: *yubširu al-kutub*).

How about the Jews during the first middle of the IX century or even the second one before the repopulation of the city has to be taken as the environment that was in front of the redactor of our text.

### 3. *The Christians*

A theological problem is the green line along which the dialogue is literally built and is put at the beginning of the dialogue: the theological problem is the situation and the characteristics of the Christian community.

We want to collect these data and to examine them.

a) The high number (*katrah* §1). Perhaps this is not only a statistic number of the Christians in comparison to the Jews or to the Muslims or with both communities. The attention given to the high number of the Christians is a sign that the ruling Muslims were numerically growing but they were not yet the majority of the population. Also from the works of Theodore Abū Qurrah, especially his work in defense of the icons (probably written during the second iconoclasm at the beginning of the IX<sup>th</sup> century), we can draw historical elements that witness the slow but persistent migration of

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18) Cf. Karen ARMSTRONG, *Gerusalemme. Storia di una città tra ebraismo, cristianesimo e islam*, ed. Mondadori, Milano, 1996, p. 243.

Christians from the huge Christian community toward the ranks of the Muslims<sup>19</sup>. Referring to a study of Bulliet about the conversions to Islam especially in Iran, Huge Kennedy wrote:

The question of conversion to Islam is very problematic since, clearly, there were no census records or reliable statistics available. We know that there were no Muslims in the Near East before the time of the prophet and we can be reasonably certain that by the sixth/twelfth century the non-Muslims formed a fairly small minority of the population: between these two poles there is much room for speculation (...) according to his research, Iran was only about 8 per cent Muslim at the time of the 'Abbasid revolution in 132/750, but this changed rapidly in the years which followed; by the early third/ninth century the proportion of Muslims was probably about 40 per cent and this increased to between 70 and 80 per cent in the fourth/tenth century. It is more difficult to extrapolate from the Iranian data to other areas of the Muslim world, but we should probably be correct in assuming that the rate of conversion was faster in Iraq than in Iran but slower in Egypt where the Muslims remained a small ruling group among a largely Coptic population until Fatimid times. Bulliet admits that his hypotheses are speculative and unprovable but they do seem realistic and provide a useful basis for discussion<sup>20</sup>.

In addition, we can consider the beginning of the dialogue as an indirect historical source giving reference to the number of communities within the Christian population itself. The Patriarch is mentioned - that means the Melkite community -, the Nestorian bishop - and this means a Nestorian community -, but also the monastic rank was considered a potential church within the church: the passage in which the Muslims converting to the Christian faith ask the monk to baptize them and the monk refuses to proceed to baptism, indicating the Patriarch and the bishops as the more proper personalities

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19) TEODORO ABŪ QURRAH, *La difesa delle icone*, traduzione, introduzione e note a cura di Paola PIZZO, PCAC 1, Milano, 1995. From his work we can reconstruct the spiritual climate of the charges that Muslims were used to address to Christian people, such as the charges of foolishness and irrationality regarding the veneration of the icons but also with regard to the sacraments. Theodore Abu Qurrah is also witness of a change between the Christian Melkite community, like people over whom the psychological pressure of the new rulers was successful, inducing them not to venerate the images. Cf. 16,13; 8,4; 7,3; 18,2; 20,1; 21,1-2 and *passim*.

20) Huge KENNEDY, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, ed. Longman, London - New York 1994<sup>6</sup>, pp. 201-202.

to whom they have to refer (§566-571), is highly indicative about the consideration and the role that the author has of monastic life and of monastic communities. We can surely say that the author must have been a monk. He however, in his work, shows a clergy not theologically prepared and unable to answer the theological challenges that the mounting Muslim community is posing. On the other hand, he wants to show - remembering the dialogue that really happened and adding to it the arguments fitting to his time - the monastic movement as the only one who can stand and put a stop to the increasing conversions to Islam. We can also read between the lines and comprehend the competition between the clergy and the monks.

Besides these communities, mentioned in the dialogue, there were two other communities that remain hidden behind the term «their numerosity», perhaps because their presence in Jerusalem was restricted to a little community.

Now we know that the Latin Christian community in Jerusalem, during the period of Hārūn al-Rašīd, was permitted to have a larger space near the holy sepulcher: the king Carl the great was permitted to build in front of the Anastasis a house for hosting pilgrims, besides a church and a library. In Cedron valley also was permitted to build a twelve room building for hosting pilgrims, besides having land with vines and fruit-trees as well<sup>21</sup>. In addition, the Christian-Jacobite community built a new monastery dedicated to Mary the Magdalene north of the Haram at the beginning of the IX<sup>th</sup> century<sup>22</sup>.

b) Science, philosophy, and medicine (*'ilm, falsafah, ṭibb* §2). While science in our dialogue is used in a very general sense and in different contexts in the wide sense of the word,<sup>23</sup> philosophy and medicine are used in a more precise sense. The person who took care of the prince's health, his doctor, seems to be a Jew, because he is mentioned directly after two other Jews were called by the prince, but may have been also a Christian even if he does not divulge his religion. He is called as person bearing not only the knowledge for healing the prince, but also the knowledge for managing the poisons (§551) and capable of inflecting death through a poisoned drink (§551). Nonetheless the medicine as developed science is referred to Christians (§2).

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21) Cf. Karen ARMSTRONG, *Gerusalemme*, p. 240.

22) Cf. Karen ARMSTRONG, *Gerusalemme*, pp. 240-241.

23) At §10 with the term *ma'rifah* «knowledge»; at §20 is said, what about the city from which the monk come, Tiberias and al-Akwāḥ are mentioned, and these cities are put in link with the science.

Philosophy however, through Ibn al-Nadim's *Fihrist*, is well known in the environment of the Middle East of the time. We can assert that the IX<sup>th</sup> Century, the second half of the IX<sup>th</sup> century in particular, has to be considered the starting point of a Muslim philosophical thought. At this turning point the man that has to be considered is al-Kindī<sup>24</sup>.

If we consider the point of view of the author of the dialogue, philosophy seems to be borne - in the time during which he is writing - by Christians, and it would be more difficult to understand this kind of judgment in the later centuries, when also Muslims started studying this kind of science, especially in Bagdad.

c) The "education" (*adab* §2) and the endurance in their humiliation (*ṣabr 'alā al-ḍull* §2). It is quite difficult to understand what the author is referring to, or if there was a specific situation of humiliation. We see this reference more fitting to a general situation, and not to a specific episodic fact. We can report two historical data.

The first quotation is from the book of Abū Qurrah in which he reports the charges addressed to the Christians with regard to their faith and their rites<sup>25</sup>. Certainly Abū Qurrah lived in Harran which is quite far from Jerusalem, a city he visited at least once in his life. Although circumstances taken from the writings of Abū Qurrah cannot be applied or used for understanding the situation of Jerusalem, this source can explain or suggest what kind of humiliation is understood by the author of our work.

The second was the rite of the sacred fire, introduced at the beginning of the IX<sup>th</sup> century in the rites that took place at the holy sepulcher. We have information about this rite because of the report given in 947 by Muslim governors. They tried to stop this rite that had become a very noisy and a one-day revenge of the Christians towards the rulers<sup>26</sup>. This spiritual revenge

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24) Cf. Bayard DODGE, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim. Tenth century survey of Muslim culture*, Columbia University press, New York, 1970, pp. 615-626. For a presentation of the translation movement see Dimitri GUTAS, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture, The Graeco-Arabic Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsid Society (2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries)*, Routledge, London-New York, 1998. For a presentation of the beginning of Islamic philosophy cf. Cristina D'ANCONA, *Le traduzioni di opere greche e la formazione del corpus filosofico arabo*, in «Storia della filosofia nell'Islam medievale», a cura di Cristina d'Ancona, ed. Einaudi, Torino, 2005.

25) Cf. the footnote n. 19.

26) Cf. Karen ARMSTRONG, *Gerusalemme*, p. 242.

taken by the Christians hints to the situation of humiliation in which they were living.

These kind of information, far away from being a proof of the collocation of our literary work in Jerusalem or its outskirts, is well fitting to our context and even if they are not a proof, they are nonetheless a circumstantial evidence which we have to reckon with in addition to the other evidences for tracing a general picture of the environment in which the dialogue took place and was depicted by the author of the writing.

#### 4. *The Muslims*

In the first part of the dialogue (§34-35), the political and military predominance of the Muslims is depicted with clear images. From the evidences reported in some passages of the dialogue, Muslim power does not seem to be threatened by external military powers such as the Byzantines, and does not appear in the horizon as a climate of inner tension between princes, like the ascense of Tamīn Abū Ḥarb in 841 that spread terror in Jerusalem, burning churches and mosques<sup>27</sup>. Nor does it appear that the principality of the place is an independent power like the Turkish power of Aḥmad ibn Ṭūlūn, who kept Egypt in 869 and ruled on Egypt and Syria and Palestine until 904<sup>28</sup>.

It appears, on the contrary, that the presence of a Bedouin between the common criminality (arrested as thief) about whom the dialogue stresses, in his literary fiction, the Islamic faith pronounced before assuming the poison with the pronounciation of Sura 112 and of the *shahadah* as a magic formula (§545-556). Beyond the evident literary fiction, we are informed of the key role the Bedouin tribes played, with periods in which they were used to gaze at the Christian villages and churches, but it is hard to assign and identify a specified period of turbulence of this kind of tribes and establish an historical link between the literary reference and the actual history<sup>29</sup>.

#### CONCLUSIONS

What can be our conclusions after collecting these few elements with regard to the three communities that interacted in the dialogue?

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27) Cf. Karen ARMSTRONG, *Gerusalemme*, p. 242.

28) Cf. Karen ARMSTRONG, *Gerusalemme*, pp. 242-243.

29) Cf. Karen ARMSTRONG, *Gerusalemme*, p. 238.

The hypothesis from which we departed were the conclusions of Marcuzzo, a fundamental event happened during the period of al-Ma'mun's caliphate (813-831 A.D.) that has been revised and rearranged in the following years by the monk or another person, the author of the dialogue, in a literary popular genre. The literary elements, that can be fictitious, are however generally put in the literary fiction for appearing as reality, but in this way even the fictitious elements can become historical evidences of the period, the age and the culture of the author that generated them.

The theological controversy was too long and rich of literary references for being object of our study and also some other historical and geographical references will be treated in the introduction to the Italian translation that will appear in a future date.

Our analysis of the three communities and the interaction between them has lead us to confirm the hypothesis of Marcuzzo. It is difficult to consider that this literary work has been conceived and written in a later period (such as the tenth or eleventh century). The various literary elements would have been in contradiction with reality: the increased number of members of the Jewish community, the decreased number of members of the Christian community, a scientific and philosophical attitude become not specifically Christian, an increased key role of the monastic life in the consistence of the Christian faith and its role and link within the Christian community especially with the patriarch, the bishops and the clergy; the kind of link of Muslim authority towards the other two communities. If another hypothesis is proposed, an explanation regarding the place and the period of composition must be given. This new hypothesis should also explain all these elements together in a logical manner and in coherence with the environment that produced this literary work of Arabic-Christian literature.

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