

The Contribution of the Franciscan Center for Christian Oriental Studies (Mousky-Cairo) to Arab-Christian Literature

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1. Premise

The celebration of the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Franciscan Center for Christian Oriental Studies of Mousky (1954) offers us the occasion to peruse its numerous studies tied to the Arab-Christian Literature.

From the program of studies drawn out by the first director, Fr. Martiniano Roncaglia (1954-1957), who foresaw as a goal of the *Center for Oriental Studies*,¹ the study of Oriental Christianity in its various rites and in its relation with Islam and the West², we pass over, with Fr. Gabriele Giamberardini³ (1958-1968), to a more defined program of studies on the subject of Theology, Liturgy, History, and Archeology of the Oriental Churches through monographs, documents, translations, manuals, and *collettanea*.⁴

Skimming through the pages of the index of the periodical *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea*,⁵ one can notice immediately the extent of the contribution of studies pertaining to the theme of Arab-Christian Theology (ACT). Under the item *Chiesa Copta*, for example, there are about 38 titles,⁶ under *Chiesa Greca* 3 titles⁷, under *Chiesa Siriaca* 2 titles,⁸ and under *Terra Santa* 2 titles.⁹ Among the monographs, 9 volumes out of 14 relate to Arab-Christian Theology¹⁰ and so on. Among the historical, liturgical, Juridical, and theological works, 5 out of 18 regard Arab-Christian Theology.^{11, 12}

2. The field of ACT

We refer only to religious texts, composed in Arabic from the 8th century,¹³ that is, texts which, by their largeness and abundance, fall into 2nd place after the Greek and Latin texts¹⁴ with Patristic translations, lives of

¹ This is the initial name.

² Cfr M. RONCAGLIA, “Foreword”, *SOC Collectanea I* (1956) 3: “Oriental Christianity, in its ritual varieties and faiths, customs and habits, and its relation with Islam, Rome and the Western World in general, including historical, cultural and doctrinal problems of the pre-Christian Orient, will be represented.”

³ A Pioneer in the field of Coptic Theology and Mariology. His contribution to the Center and to the Franciscan history in Egypt and others has proven invaluable. To the Center (which assumes a more limited and defined titled with him), he has contributed about a hundred theological published books (Christology, Mariology, Worship, Ecclesiology, Liturgy, Eschatology, Franciscan History in Egypt etc.): cfr V. MISTRIH, “P. Gabriele Giamberardini O.F.M. (1917-1978): in memoriam”, *SOC Collectanea XVII* (1982) 1-16+3 ills.; Bernardina DI GIAMPIERO, “P. Gabriele Giamberardini O.F.M. (1917-1978) Un francescano aquilano in Egitto”, *SOC Collectanea XXXII* (1999) 61-112.

⁴ Cfr G. GIAMBERARDINI, “Presentazione”, *SOC Collectanea III* (1958) V-VII.

⁵ Cfr L. CRUCIANI, “Indici della rivista Studia Christiana Orientalia - Collectanea (1956-2004)”, *SOC Collectanea XXXVII* (2004) 413-478.

⁶ *Ibi* 447-451.

⁷ *Ibi* 451-452.

⁸ *Ibi* 452-453.

⁹ *Ibi* 458-459.

¹⁰ *Ibi* 475-476.

¹¹ *Ibi* 477-478.

¹² The Center has published other works pertaining to ACT cfr. for instance ASSFALG J., *Die Ordnung des Priestertums – Ein altes liturgisches Handbuch der koptischen Kirche*, Cairo 1955, XXVII-167 pp.:cfr G. GIAMBERARDINI, *Elenco delle pubblicazioni 1*, Centro francescano di Studi Orientali Cristiani, Cairo 1962, 24 pag., *ivi* 10; G. GIAMBERARDINI, *La consacrazione eucaristica nella chiesa copta*, Cairo 1957, 126 pp.+16 tav. f.t.: cfr *Ibid.*, 11).

¹³ Cfr KH. SAMIR, “The earliest Arab apology for Christianity (c.750)”, in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid period (750-1259)*, edited by Samir Khalil Samir & Jorgen S. Nielsen, Leiden 1994, 57-114. The text has been recently translated into Italian: PALESTINESE ANONIMO, *Omelia arabocristiana dell’VIII secolo*. Traduzione, introduzione e note di Maria Gallo, postfazione di Khalil Samir (Collana di testi patristici, 116), Roma 1994, 147 pag.

saints, biblical commentaries, works of ecclesiastical law, of history, as well as dogmatic, apologetic, moral, liturgical, and spiritual texts.¹⁵

There are texts composed in all Arab-speaking countries and from all the current Christian confessions. Arabic has quickly become the instrument of religious Christian expression. Some treatises or works composed by those belonging to a determined confession have been summed up or preserved by writers or scribes/copyists belonging to another Christian confession.¹⁶

Such a literature, born in the Holy Land and in Mesopotamia from the middle of the 8th century with apologetical and theological works, developed in Egypt¹⁷ from the 10th century with historical, juridical, and liturgical works; it eventually reached the 13th century leading up to the great cultural activity of the three sons of Al-‘Assāl (al-Šafī, al-As‘ad e al-Mu‘taman) with translations, homiletical, theological and liturgical writings of great value. The last one was the encyclopedic work *Mağmū‘ uṣūl al-dīn wa masmū‘ maḥṣūl al yaqīn* (= *Summa* of the Principles of the Religion).

Two other theological, encyclopedic work follow suit in the XIV, i.e. a work of Šams al-Ri‘ārah Ibn Kabar (+1324) *Miṣbāḥ al-ẓulmah wa ṭīl al-ḥidmah* (= Lamp of Darkness in the Exposition of Liturgical Service); and the second work is of Yūḥannā ibn abī Zakariyā ibn Sibā‘ from the title, *Pretiosa Margarita de Scientiis Ecclesiasticis* (*Al-ḡawhara al-naḥīsa fī ‘ulūm al-kanīsa*).¹⁸

3. The Contribution of Mouski

Evidently, the Franciscan Center for Christian Oriental Studies, finding itself in Cairo, has interested itself for the most part to works composed in Egypt.¹⁹

Beyond the catalogues of manuscripts,²⁰ we find studies on the lives of holy Monks from the Egyptian Sketia,²¹ as well as articles on Arab traditions from parts of the Bible and the Psalter,²² or juridical and liturgical

¹⁴ Cfr the work of Georg Graf who took many years to catalogue the manuscripts and printed texts in 5 volumes: *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (Studi e Testi, 118, 133, 146, 147, 172), Città del Vaticano 1944, 1947, 1949, 1951, 1953. Cfr also RENÉ-G. COQUIN, *Langues et littératures arabes chrétiennes*, in *Christianismes orientaux. Introduction à l'études des langues et des littératures*, Paris 1993, 35-106.

¹⁵ Cfr the analysis in the articles by Kh. Samir: KH. SAMIR, “Une théologie arabe pour l’Islam”, in *Spirituality and Ecumenism*, Yearbook 1979-1980. Ecumenical Institute for theological research, Tantur 1980, 57-84; ID., “Le patrimoine de langue arabe, in Pour une théologie contemporaine du Moyen Orient”, in *Actes du 1^{er} Symposium interdisciplinaire*. Institut Saint-Paul de Philosophie et théologie, Harissa 15-18 octobre 1987. Beyrouth-Jounieh 1988, 322, qui 231-254; ID., “Pour une théologie arabe contemporaine. Actualité du patrimoine arabe chrétien”, in *Proche Orient Chrétien* 38 (1988) 64-98; ID., “Letteratura araba cristiana”, in *Dizionario enciclopedico dell’oriente cristiano*, a cura di Edward G. Farrugia, Roma 2000, 430-434.

¹⁶ Cfr J.M. FIEY, “Coptes et Syriaques, contacts et échanges”, *SOC Collectanea* XV (1972-73) 295-365.

¹⁷ Cfr A. Wadi, “Introduction to the Coptic’s Arab-Christian Literature (in Arabic)”, *SOC Collectanea* XXIX-XXX (1996-1997) 441-492.

The article, which is amply rich, in spite of the divisions in paragraph, has no footnotes accompanying it. His bibliographical references are also incorporated within the text, making it easy to lose his train of thought. Some of the bibliographical references are not in the original language (cfr n. 12 for the title by Assfalg, n. 75 for the book of A. Abdallah, n. 103 for the article of J.M. Détré); others have yet to be completed cfr n. 66 for the reference to Constantin Bacha; n. 76 for the reference to the article of A. Wadi).

¹⁸ This concerns three famous works (the *Trilogy*) which Fr. Giamberardini dreamed publishing: cfr AL-MU‘TAMAN IBN AL-‘ASSAL, *Summa dei principi della religione* I, Introd., trad. e note B. Pirone (SOC Monographiae 8), Cairo-Jerusalem 1998, 5.

¹⁹ Two studies regard writings by Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Adī (+ 974 in Baghdad), of the Jacobite Iraqi Church: V. MISTRIH, “Traité sur la continence de Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Adī. Introduction, texte et traduction”, *SOC Collectanea* XVI (1981) 3-137+2 ills; K. SAMIR, “Le traité sur la nécessité de l’Incarnation de Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Adī résumé et glosé par el-Šafī Ibn al-‘Assāl”, *SOC Collectanea* XVIII (1985) 1-29.

²⁰ Other than the work by W. MACOMBER, *Catalogue of the Christian Arabic Manuscripts of the Franciscan Center of Christian Oriental Studies of Muski*, Cairo-Jerusalem 1984, 130 pp., appaiono quattro cataloghi di manoscritti: B. PIRONE, “I manoscritti di Dair al-Muḥarraḡ”, *SOC Collectanea* XXI (1988) 295-321; V. MISTRIH, “Notes sur une collection privée de manuscrits arabes-chrétiens en Syrie”, *SOC Collectanea* XXIII (1990) 91-137; A. WADI – V. MISTRIH, “Catalogue des manuscrits arabes du couvent des Franciscains à Bāb-Tūmā, Damas”, *SOC Collectanea* XXIX-XXX (1996-1997) 219-248; V. MISTRIH, “Catalogue des manuscrits du couvent St. Sauveur des Frères Mineurs à Jérusalem”, *SOC Collectanea* XXXIII (2000) 115-226.

²¹ B. PIRONE, “Vita di Mosè l’Etiop”, *SOC Collectanea* XXIV (1991) 5-115 From various manuscripts, of which one is of the Coptic Museum from 1363 and a second one from Muski from 1746); A. WADI, “Vita di Sant’Atanasio in una traduzione araba inedita”, *SOC Collectanea* XXVIII (1995) 145-160; B. PIRONE, “Vita dei santi Massimo e Domezio nelle fonti arabe”, *SOC Collectanea* XXIX-XXX (1996-1997) 249-388; ID., “La vita di S. Arsenio in una fonte araba”, *SOC Collectanea* XXXI (1998) 153-220... (From a manuscript from the National Library of Paris from 1673); ID., “Una recensione più lunga della vita di S. Arsenio”, *SOC Collectanea* XXXIII (2000) 9-96.

articles²³ or longer studies.²⁴ Lastly, we find two articles on the Holy Places²⁵ and two others on the conditions of Dhimmi.²⁶

But it is above all on the work of 3 brothers, sons of al-‘Assāl by Wadi Abullif that *SOC Collectanea* brings about original and interesting studies.²⁷

The literary production of al-As‘ad Ibn al-‘Assāl²⁸ wasn’t as rich as that of his two brothers. He left us behind some works still unpublished, among them are a treatise on the soul,²⁹ *Maqāla fi an-nafs*, an *Introduction*

We even find two studies by B. Pirone on St. Steven Sabaita, a monk of St. Saba (+794); B. PIRONE, “A Proposito di due toponimi nella vita di S. Stefano Sabaita”, *SOC Collectanea* XXIV (1991) 197-206; ID., “Un altro frammento della vita di S. Stefano Sabaita”, *SOC Collectanea* XXV (1992) 217-232; cfr also B. PIRONE, *Leonzio di Damasco, Vita di S. Stefano Sabaita* (SOC Monographiae 4), Cairo-Jerusalem 1991, 425 pp. (with a paralleled Arabic-Italian Text; from various Arabic manuscripts, of which two are from St. Catherine, Sinai 505 from the XIII cent. and Sinai 496 from 1293. The latter one is particularly interesting since at the end of the manuscript 160v, it states how the life of St. Steven was translated from Greek into Arabic in 902 by anbā John, son of Steven al-Fāhūrī and the second Sinai 505 of the XIII cent.).

²² O.H.E. KHS-BURMESTER, “Fragments from an Arabic Version of two Infancy Gospels”, *SOC Collectanea* VII (1962) 4+2 ills.; ID., “A folio from an XI-XII century Vellum manuscript of the Arabic Psalter”, *SOC Collectanea* VIII (1963) 349-359+2 ills.

²³ A. CAMPS, “Two spurious Arabic canons of the Council of Nicea found by the Franciscan Missionaries of Upper Egypt”, *SOC Collectanea* V (1960) 171-181; O.H.E. KHS-BURMESTER, “A folio of a XIVth century Ms. of the rite of consecration of the Chrism and the Kallieliaion from the monastery of Saint Macarius in Scetis”, *SOC Collectanea* IX (1964) 223-231+1 ill.; ID., “Three folios from the service for the consecration of the Chrism and the Kallieliaion”, *SOC Collectanea* X (1965) 239-247+3 ills.; G. VIAUD, “Prière de la fraction de notre Père Abraham. Texte copte-arabe”, *SOC Collectanea* IX (1964) 363-376; A. KHATER, “Nouveaux fragments du Synaxaire arabe”, *SOC Collectanea* X (1965) 249-406+9 ills.; YASSA ‘ABD AL-MASIH – A. KHATER, “An Arabic apocryphon of Saint Stephen the Archdeacon”, *SOC Collectanea* XIII (1968-1969) 161-198+2 ills.

²⁴ A. ABDALLAH, *L’ordinamento liturgico di Gabriele V, 88° patriarca copto (1409-1427)* (SCO Aegyptiaca), Cairo 1962, 472 pp. (from Ms. Par. Ar. 98; the manuscript is about baptism and chrism, nuptials and matrimony, the prayer of the lamp, the prayer of the holy Abū Tarbū; it is about the office of incense in the evening and morning, of the Mass of St. Basil, of clerical and monastic rites, of funeral rites, of the order/injunction about refilling the chalice, and of the consecration of the altar vessels); M. BROGI, *la santa salmodia annuale della Chiesa copta* (SCO Aegyptiaca), Cairo 1962, XXII+214 pp. (Italian translation of the edition of 1908 by C. Labīb: bilingual text Arabic-Coptic); K. BURMESTER, *The Horologion of the Egyptian Church. Coptic and arabic text from a mediaeval manuscript translated and annotated* (SOC Aegyptiaca), Cairo 1973, 237 in inglese + 78 pp. in Arabic (deals with 8 daily prayers: prayer of the morning, terce, sext, none, vespers, compline, vigils, and midnight).

Giamberardini, in some of his extensive studies, relies on sources from Medieval Coptic authors, cfr. G. GIAMBERARDINI, “Il primato di Pietro e del papa nella chiesa copta”, *SOC Collectanea* V (1960) 3-122+5 ills (pp. 39-43, 75-78 quotes Sawīrūs Ibn Muqaffa‘, al-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl, Al-Mu‘taman Ibn al-‘Assāl, Abū-l Barakāt Ibn Kabar, Ibn Sibā‘); ID., “La preghiera nella chiesa copta”, *SOC Collectanea* VIII (1963) 3-77+20 ills. (quotes several times al-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl, Ibn Kabar, Ibn Sibā‘); ID., “La sorte dei defunti nella tradizione copta I”, *SOC Collectanea* IX (1964) 3-210+8 ills (pg 40 mentions the liturgical arrangements of Gabriel V, published by A. Abdallah); ID., “La sorte dei defunti nella tradizione copta II”, *SOC Collectanea* X (1965) 3-207 (ch. VI, regarding theology, is mostly based on quotations by Sawīrūs Ibn Muqaffa‘, al-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl, Al-Asa‘d Ibn al-‘Assāl, Abū-l Barakāt Ibn Kabar, Ibn Sibā‘, Gabriele V); ID., “S. Giuseppe nella tradizione copta”, *SOC Collectanea* XI (1966) 3-291+16 ills (pp. 160-179): quotations from the Arabic texts by Joseph the Carpenter Sawīrūs Ibn Muqaffa‘, Sama‘an Ibn alīl Ibn Maqāra, Būlus al-Būšī, Abū Ṣāliḥ, Ibn Sibā‘); ID., “La primauté absolue du Christ et l’Immaculée conception de Marie dans Jean Duns Scot et dans la tradition copte”, *SOC Collectanea* XIII (1968-1969) 35-139 (pp. 51-64, 109-110 various quotations by Ibn al Muqaffa‘, Al-Mu‘taman Ibn al-‘Assāl, Al As‘ad Ibn al-‘Assāl, Abū-l Barakāt Ibn Kabar, Ibn Sibā‘, Yūhannā, Bishop of Samannūd).

M. BROGI, “Il Patriarca nelle fonti giuridiche arabe della chiesa copta (dal sec. X al sec. XIII)”, *SOC Collectanea* XIV (1970-1971) 1-161 (study done based on juridical compilations by Yūhannā Abū Ṣāliḥ, al-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl, and of the canons of the Patriarchs Cristodulo, Cyril II, Gabriel II, Cyril III).

²⁵ B. PIRONE, “Testimonianza di Eutichio sui Luoghi Santi”, *SOC Collectanea* XXIII (1990) 5-89 (this is about passages taken from the works of Eutyches, Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria (877-940), Kitāb al Burhān, cfr EUTICHIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, *The Book of demonstration*, ed. CACHIA P., trad. MONTGOMERY WATT, (CSCO 192,193,209-210), Louvain 1960-1961, and the *Annali*, cfr L. CHEIKHO, B. CARRA DE VAUX e H. ZAYYAT, *Eutychie Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales* (CSCO, Vol 50, Tomus 6, Vol 51, Tomus 7), Louvain 1906; Italian translation by B. Pirone, cfr EUTICHIUS, PATRIARCA DI ALESSANDRIA (877-940) *Gli Annali*, Introduzione, traduzione e note a cura di B. Pirone (SOC Monographiae 1), Cairo-Jerusalem 1987, 536 pp.); ID., “La presa di Gerusalemme nel sermone del monaco Strategio”, *SOC Collectanea* XXVIII (1995) 167-236 (It concerns the capturing of Jerusalem by the Persians in 614 from Arabic manuscripts sources).

²⁶ B. PIRONE, “Libro della riprovazione del ricorso ai servizi dei Dhimmi del dottissimo shaykh ed imam Abu Umama Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Ibn an-Naqqash”, *SOC Collectanea* XXIV (1991) 225-326; ID. “Libro delle obbligazioni dei cristiani”, *SOC Collectanea* XXV (1992) 5-68.

²⁷ A. WADI, “Bibliografia commentata sugli Aulād al-‘Assāl, tre fratelli scrittori del sec. XIII”, *SOC Collectanea* XVIII (1985) 31-79; ID., “Vita e opera del pensatore copto el-Ṣafī ibn al-‘Assāl (sec. XIII)”, *SOC Collectanea* XX (1987) 119-161; ID., “L’unione ipostatica di Cristo negli scritti del teologo copto el-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl (sec. XIII)”, *SOC Collectanea* XXI (1998) 5-71; ID., “La traduction des quatres Evangiles de al-‘As‘ad Ibn al-‘Assāl (XIII s.)”, *SOC Collectanea* XXIV (1991) 217-224; ID., “La soteriologia di el-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl (sec. XIII)”, *SOC Collectanea* XXV (1992) 197-216.

²⁸ Concerning al-As‘ad, cfr A. WADI, “Vita e opera...”, 135-138.

²⁹ Partially summarized in ch. 60 of the theological *Summa* of his brother al-Mu‘taman.

to the *Coptic Grammar*, an *Epitome on the Calculation of the Epact*, and a *Translation of the Four Gospels*, including a general introduction, ten synoptic tables, a preface to each Gospel, a critical apparatus with the variants of the translations on the margins, and a conclusion with methodological observations.³⁰

Even more prolific is the work by the brother, al-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl,³¹ which is the fruit of multiple books: philosophical, patristic, biblical commentaries, and canonical collections. In an easy, proper, and concise style, making use of synthesis³² and antithesis, he left behind canonical writings (famous is his Nomocanon *Totality of the Summary of the Canon* (*Ḡāmi‘ iḥtiṣār al-qawānīn*)³³), apologetical writings,³⁴ homilies in rhythmic prose,³⁵ compendiums of patristic work³⁶ and Christian Arab authors³⁷, glosses, and comments³⁸.

To illustrate the work of Al-Ṣafī, A. Wadi brings back three chapters of his thesis *Al-Ṣafī Ibn Al-‘Assāl (sec. XIII) and his Christological thought*, defended in 1985 at the Pontifical Oriental Institute of Rome.³⁹

It is important to follow A. Wadi especially in two articles: The Hypostatic Union of Christ⁴⁰ and Soteriology.⁴¹

In response to the objections of the Muslim polemicists against these two topics, Al-Safi presents motives of the Incarnation following Old Testament prophecies, that is, not taking into consideration neither sin nor the divinization of man, but starts from God, underscoring his generosity and bounty, after which he then considers man in his concrete state.⁴²

“The learned have mentioned many causes of the Union: these are grouped together in two categories: the first one from the part of the Creator and the second from our part.”⁴³

The motives on the part of the Creator “are his generosity and bounty” (*ḡūd*). It is a bounty that is manifested first in creation, then, increasingly in the mission of the prophets and which ultimately reaches its culmination with the Incarnation.⁴⁴

³⁰ A. Wadi refers to a provisory list of a good 28 manuscripts: A. WADI, “La traduction des quatres Evangiles...”, 221-223.

Kh. Samir gives a list of 31 manuscripts of which 17 were in existence during the author’s life or shortly after his death (cfr p. 547): KH. SAMIR, “La version arabe des Evangiles d’ al-As’ad ibn al-‘Assāl”, in *Parole de l’Orient* 19 (1994) 441-551, qui 455-490.

³¹ A. WADI, “Vita e opera...”, 145-161; KH. SAMIR, “Al-Ṣafī Ibn Al-‘Assāl, Brefs chapitres sur la Trinité et l’Incarnation”, in *Patrologia Orientalis* 192, Brepols 1985, 615-761, here 634-648.

³² Several chapters and extracts are included in the theological *Summa* of the brother al Mu’taman: cfr A. WADI, “Vita e opera...”, 154 nota 3-4.

³³ He has given us the most complete and the best structured codex of the canon law of the Coptic Church, which will serve as the basis for the legislation of the Ethiopic and Maronite Churches: cfr KH. SAMIR, “L’utilisation des sources dans le Nomocanon d’Ibn al-‘Assāl”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 55 (1989) 101-123, here 123.

³⁴ Kh. Samir defines him as the greatest apologist of the Coptic Church: cfr. KH. SAMIR, “Al-Ṣafī Ibn Al-‘Assal, Brefs chapitres...”, 617.

³⁵ Cfr Kegham Jamil BOLOYAN, “Il libro delle omelie”, un’opera letteraria e teologica di al-Ṣafī Ibn Al-‘Assal”, *Nicholaus* XXIV (1997) 7-30.

³⁶ Such as Gregory, St. Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Ephrem Syro, St. John Chrysostom: cfr A. WADI, “Vita e opera...”, 146 e 148, nota 104. In 1231, he summarizes the 88 homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Gospel of John and in 1236 the 90 homilies on the Gospel of Matthew: cfr KH. SAMIR, “Al-Ṣafī Ibn Al-‘Assāl, Brefs chapitres...”, 634, nota 59 e 63.

³⁷ The original 13 works of Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Adī is not known to us except in the compendium of al-Ṣafī: cfr A. WADI, “Vita e opera...”, 158, note 30. Kh Samir has counted up to 41 compendiums of treatises of Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī done by al-Ṣafī: cfr KH. SAMIR, “Le traité sur la nécessité de l’Incarnation de Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī”, in *SOC Collectanea* XVIII (1985) 1-29, here p. 6.

³⁸ Al Mu’taman refers to a good portion of this in his theological *Summa*: cfr A WADI, “Vita e opera...”, 160, note 39.

³⁹ The summary of the first chapter and the second chapter are reported in *SOC Collectanea* XX (1987) 19-161 with the title “Vita e opera del pensatore copto al-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl (sec. XIII)”; chapter six, in *SOC, Collectanea* XXI (1998) 5-71 with the title “L’unione ipostatica negli scritti del Teologo copto al-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl”; chapter seven in *SOC, Collectanea* XXV (1992) 197-216, with the title “La soteriologia di al-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl”.

Cfr the plan of the eight chapters in A. WADI, “L’unione ipostatica...”, 7-8.

⁴⁰ Cfr A. WADI, “L’unione ipostatica...”, 5-71.

⁴¹ Cfr A. WADI, “La soteriologia...”, 197-216.

⁴² Cfr A. WADI, “L’unione ipostatica...”, 46.

⁴³ Cfr A. WADI, “L’unione ipostatica...”, 43.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

“The Creator (may He be exalted!) is the best of givers. Now, the best of givers is he who gives the best essence. That came about with his union with us.”⁴⁵

On the part of the creature instead, the motive of the Incarnation is the longing, the need, and the tension toward perfection.

“Given that we were incapable of attaining our own human perfection, and given that the prophets were incapable of drawing the minimum number of people to the principles of such perfection, God became man; and in this way was able to draw a great number of men to the summit of human perfection.”⁴⁶

When speaking of Christ, he avoids using the formula “one nature from two natures”. Rather he asserts that Christ is the sole hypostasis constituted by two hypostases,⁴⁷ a reality constituted by two realities,⁴⁸ one substance constituted by two substances.⁴⁹ In him, the union between divinity and humanity is the original and only union (*ittihād ibdā’ī*);⁵⁰ in him, the perfect God and the perfect man, there are two distinct wills, which expresses itself in one sole willing, both acting in harmony one with the other.⁵¹

Al-Ṣafī concludes that Christians have the same faith in Christ: the difference resides only in the philosophical terms used.⁵²

Regarding the Islamic objections against Christian Soteriology, al-Safī affirms that Christ saves us with his birth (a motive for joy to all the world), his teaching (he has delivered us from punishment and from the fear of universal judgment, giving us a revealed law: whoever follows his dictates is saved from eternal damnation), with his example, his deeds, death, and resurrection. Christ saves from sin, giving us a law that annuls sin and saves us from spiritual death: whoever doesn’t accept the law nor puts it into practice, is not saved.⁵³

The most famous among the brothers is al-Mu’taman,⁵⁴ who left behind for us notable works of a philosophical, theological⁵⁵, biblical, liturgical⁵⁶, and linguistical nature⁵⁷.

His masterpiece is the *Summa of the Principles of the Religion and of the Transmission of Attained Certainties* (*Mağmū’ Uṣūl al-Dīn wa masmū’ maḥṣūl al-yaqīn*),⁵⁸ which is the fruit of an extensive literature⁵⁹,

⁴⁵ From a syllogism of Yaḥyā Ibn ‘Adī, referred by al-Ṣafī: *ibid.*, 44; cfr KH. SAMIR, “Al-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl, Brefs chapitres...”, 735.

The idea of the generosity of God, as remembered by A. WADI, “L’unione ipostatica...”, 44, footnote 73 is before Yaḥyā and may be found in St. Athanasius, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and Isaac of Nineveh.

⁴⁶ A. WADI, “L’unione ipostatica...”, 46.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 53, 56 note 136.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 56, note 135.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 56, note 137.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 56, note 131.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 59, nota 149.

⁵³ Cfr A. WADI, “La soteriologia...”, 207-210.

⁵⁴ A. WADI, “Vita e opera”, 139-141; AL-MU’TAMAN IBN AL-‘ASSĀL, *Summa dei principi della Religione*, Introduzione, traduzione e note di B. PIRONE, I (SOC Monographiae 8), Cairo-Jerusalem 1998, 26-28; A. WADI, *Studio su Al-Mu’taman Ibn Al-‘Assāl* (SOC Monographiae 5), Cairo-Jerusalem 1997, 125-176 (in arabo).

⁵⁵ Other than the *Summa*, he composed al-Tabṣira al-muṭṭaṣarah (The Compendium of the Illumination) in 16 chapters, in which he explains the principal Christian dogmas.

⁵⁶ In the biblical and liturgical fields, he composed a treatise on the Pauline Letters, a treatise on Holy Week (published by A. WADI, “Al-Mu’taman, Introduzione alla settimana santa”, *SOC Collectanea* XXXIII (2000) 227-249), a series of homilies and a booklet on ecclesiastical morality.

⁵⁷ Famous is his Arab-Coptic dictionary (*Al-Sullam*).

⁵⁸ Cfr A. WADI, *Studio introduttivo su Al-Mu’taman Ibn Al-‘Assāl e la sua Summa dei principi della Religione* (in Arabic) (SOC Monographiae 5), Cairo-Jerusalem 1997, 328 pp.; *Al-Mu’taman Ibn Al-‘Assāl Summa dei principi della Religione*, ed. A. Wadi, I-II (SOC Monographiae 6a, 7a) Cairo-Jerusalem 1998-1999, 454 pp.+468 pp.; 6b-7b, apparato critico, 1998-1999, 404 pp.+378 pp.; 8-9. trad. ital. di B. Pirone, 1998, 2002, 408 pp.+450 pp.

⁵⁹ The author remembers in the preface the fatigue behind researching the books, buying or copying them, the constancy of reading them uninterruptedly, forgoing any other occupation, “almost until drowning in sweat” (cfr number 15-19 of the critical edition).

He himself speaks to us of two trips to Damascus in 1237 and 1238 when he lost his entire library and all that he had composed: cfr A. WADI, “Vita e opera...”, 139, note 52.

His brother, Al-As’ad, had stayed some time there several times from 1230-1231 in search of manuscripts and to copy works by St. John Damascene (*ivi*, 136).

a kind of anthology of the texts of the Fathers of the Church⁶⁰, already translated into Arabic, and of texts composed by philosophers and Arab-Christians theologians⁶¹ or Muslim philosophers⁶².

The goal is that of offering⁶³ in a single book⁶⁴ the fruit of the readings done in different treatises by presenting his work in five parts⁶⁵ and seventy chapters⁶⁶.

This work was able to spread far and wide as it is evident from about fifty completed and non-completed manuscripts⁶⁷ and their numerous editions of passages and chapters. It is enough to quote what an anonymous author of 1396 said about it in his treatise on the Eucharist stating that “Having seen that the book the *Summa of the Principles of the Religion* is the most noble and the most sublime of the Science of the Christians, and that it is that which [even] the best among the faithful need to know concerning that which regards the integrity of faith as a whole, trinity and union, and the rest of the religious science, according to that which the Jacobite community retains, [and having found that this book] is without deficiency, devoid of defects, and that its author composed it of rare and precious pearls, [nonetheless], despite all that, I did not find that he (the author) remembered the Sacrament of the Eucharist, even if I confess from the heart and tongue that its author—may God have mercy on him—was the person best suited for his time and [belonging] to men of judgment, who knows how to express his own faith and who have already passed away from this world to the next....”⁶⁸

The edition of A. Wadi includes an introductory study volume on the author⁶⁹, plus two text volumes⁷⁰ and two other of footnotes⁷¹.

⁶⁰ John Chrysostom, Basil, Gregory the Nazianzen, Hyppolitus, St. Dionysius the Areopagite.

⁶¹ In the *Summa*, he refers to several passages by various Coptic authors, among whom are passages by brothers Al-As‘ad and al al-Ṣafī (about 50 pgs), by Syrian Jacobites (Abū Rā‘īṭa, Ibn Zur‘a, and above all Yahyā Ibn ‘Adī 110 pgs., proof of the Christian religion and argument of the Jacobite doctrine 1/16), by the Melkites (Naḏīf Ibn Yumn), and the Nestorians (Elias of Nisibi 13 pgs, Isrā‘īl, Bishop of Kaskar, Ibn al Ṭayyib 50 pgs, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī).

⁶² Especially in the first eight chapters, in which he refers to various passages by al-Farābī, Ibn Sīnā and al-Rāzī.

For the sources in general, cfr the list in A. WADI, “Studio introduttivo...”, 184-189.

⁶³ He offers it to the readers (cfr a kind of *captatio benevolentiae* in the proem (44-53) and first of all to himself (cfr proem, num. 43: I compiled it for myself and I made of it my study in my wanderings, my companion in my solitude, my shield in my disputes, my companion in my travels, my confidant in places where I stayed, my dream in my sleep, and my brake against outbursts of anger).

⁶⁴ He affirms in the proem, 52: If anyone is a beginner, let him skip over all the speculative arguments he will find difficult to comprehend and let him dedicate to easier distinguished revealed assertions [...] If, instead, he is already perfect, let him take this book as a memorandum, keep himself far from errors of thought, and help the ignorant and inexperienced understand its obscure parts.

⁶⁵ The parts and chapters do not result all the same: The first part (ch. 1-15) is the longest (329 pgs in the Arab edition), followed by the fourth (ch. 46-49 with 199 pgs), the third (ch 20-45 with 172 pgs), and the second (ch 16-19 with 99 pgs), and then the fifth (ch. 60-70 with 72 pgs).

Some chapters are considerably reduced: 1 page (ch. 26,45, 64, 66) or a page and a half (ch 25,28,32).

⁶⁶ The content is referred to the proem (numbers 54-130): in the first part (ch 1-15), after remembering the sources from where he drew information, he begins with an indispensable chapter on the logic (the knowledge of which it is indispensable in order to understand well this book: Proem 58); next are two chapters regarding the essence of the Creator and the contingency of the world followed by a chapter concerning the intellect, the soul, the body, and the human acts; other chapters tackle the proof of abrogation, the validity of uninterrupted transmission, the agreement among the three Christian confessions on the concept on the union of Christ (Man-God), the heresies, and the explanation of the Creed, the authenticity of Christianity and the elements of religion (faith and works), the baptism and the veracity of the Gospel. The second part (ch. 16-19) regards the unity and the Trinity and the explanation of relevant terms (one, substance, hypostasis, attributes of substance). The Third part (ch 20-45) presents the Union of the Divinity and humanity in Christ (prophecy, necessity of union, divinity of Christ, crucifixion). The fourth part (ch 46-59) speaks of Mary, the veneration of the cross, songs, melodies in prayer, prophets, apostles, angels, patriarchs, penance, confession, and free will. The last thing (ch 60-70) deals with the end of the world, of the future of the world, resurrection, reward, and punishment.

⁶⁷ Some go back to the XIII cent. (Vat Ar 103; Par. 201; Convento di S. Antonio, Ms teologico 157): cfr the list in A. WADI, “Studio introduttivo”, 189-192.

⁶⁸ Cfr A. ABDALLAH, “Un trattato inedito sulla SS. Eucaristia”, *SOC Collectanea* XII (1967) 345-463, here 401.

⁶⁹ Some comments on the book: two pages are completely made up of footnotes (39,112: typographically it would have been better at least to insert one line of the text, or reduce such footnotes, incorporating part of it in the text itself); the numbers 8-9 of pg. 79 would be best in the footnote, having no ties with the text. For quotations or passages quoted in detail, it was perhaps best to use a smaller print (for instance p. 69 num. 32, 33; 71, num. 35; 119, line 3-12; 121, num. 53,55; 127, num. 2, 3; 128, num. 4-6; 134, num. 14; 137, num. 16; 149, num. 20; 144, num. 26; 154, num. 26; 167, num. 55; 171, num. 60; 189, num. 29; p. 193-197). There are some repeated footnotes in French and Arabic (141/1-5; 223 note 7; 229 nota 14).

⁷⁰ In the foreword on pg 5, he promised to do a subsequent study regarding the sources and the necessary explanations.

⁷¹ The footnotes regard the difference between 10 consulted manuscripts and 21 published texts.

In the introductory study, right after the presentation and the bibliography, the first chapter gives a picture of the political and ecclesial situation of the 13 cent.; the second chapter concerns the literary interest of the family Al-‘Assāl; in the third and fourth chapters, we have the life and works of al-Mu‘taman; the fifth chapter the *Summa* (the date of its composition, sources, manuscripts, and printing); the sixth chapter the descriptions of consulted manuscripts and printed passages; and in the last chapter the method used in the edition.

The translation of B. Pirone, enriched with concise and essential notes⁷², is about two volumes.

In the 14 cent. in Egypt, we still find two important encyclopedic theological works. The first one is by Sams al-Ri‘asah Ibn Kabar (+ 1324), *Miṣbāḥ al-ḡulmah wa īdāḥ al-ḥidmah* (*Lamps of the darkness and exposition of the [liturgical] service*⁷³). The second work is by Yūḥannā ibn abī Zakariyā ibn Sibā‘ entitled *Al-ḡawhara al-naḡīsa fī ‘ulūm al-kanīsa* (*Pretiosa margarita de scientiis ecclesiasticis*).⁷⁴

Of the first work, A. Wadi⁷⁵ presents in *SOC Collectanea*, 3 chapters on the monastic life⁷⁶, on prayer⁷⁷, and fasting.⁷⁸ The second work includes two sections: one theological⁷⁹ and the other juridical-liturgical⁸⁰.

According to the judgment of the editor, the best part is the comments on the Our Father and the Creed (chaps.33-34) and chap. 84 on the Eucharist.

The editor⁸¹ bases his work on 18 codices (one of 1448), two popular editions, and on the partial edition of Jean Périer.⁸²

Conclusion

Leafing through FCCOS’ contribution to the patrimony of the Arab-Christian literature after fifty years of work, I have nothing else to say, but to encourage a continual commitment to such a field.

⁷² On pgs 411-412 of the second volume (*SOC Monographiae* 9), he adds an index of cited works, and on pgs 413-428 an index of people and places.

⁷³ It’s about an eclectic work with 24 chapters that deal with dogmatic, law, exegesis, and liturgy with extensive quotations and a list of read books (cfr ch. 7). The first 12 chapters have been published by KH. SAMIR, *Miṣbāḥ al-ḡulmah fī īdāḥ al-ḥidmah*, li-al-qass ŠAMS AL-RIYĀSAH ABI AL-BARAKĀT al ma‘rūf bi-IBN KABAR, Maktabat al-Kārūz, Cairo 1971, X-444 pp.

⁷⁴ Cfr V. MISTRIH, *Pretiosa Margarita de scientiis ecclesiasticis (Johannes Ibn Abi Zakariyā ibn Sibā), recognita in textu arabico, apparatus critico aucta ac in latinum idioma versa* (*SOC Aegyptiaca*), Cairo 1966, XLIV+660 pp.+6 ill.

⁷⁵ A. WADI had intentions of publishing the critical edition: cfr “Introduzione alla letteratura arabo-cristiana dei copti (in Arabic)”, *SOC Collectanea* XXIX-XXX (1996-1997) 460.

⁷⁶ A. WADI, “Abū al-Barakāt Ibn Kabar, Miṣbāḥ al-ḡulmah (cap. 14: La vita monastica, i monaci e l’amministrazione dei monasteri)”, *SOC Collectanea* XXXVII (2004) 315-348.

⁷⁷ A. WADI, “Abū al-Barakāt Ibn Kabar, Miṣbāḥ al-ḡulmah (cap. 16: La preghiera del giorno e della notte)”, *SOC Collectanea* XXXV-XXXVI (2002-2003) 365-456.

It is worth noting that the choice of inserting a comment at the end (pg 419-456) doesn’t seem good: the reader would like to see immediately in the footnote to the text either the variants of the manuscripts or the comments of the editor (quotations, sources, paralleled passages or eventual influences on other authors).

It was perhaps better in the introductory part to highlight the poor originality of the text, using the column to demonstrate paralleled passages, duplications, or influences.

⁷⁸ A. WADI, “Abū al-Barakāt Ibn Kabar, Miṣbāḥ al-ḡulmah (cap. 18: Il digiuno e la settimana santa)”, *SOC Collectanea* XXXIV (2001) 233-322.

⁷⁹ W. Mistrih (p. XI) distinguishes three parts: a biblical-theological one (chaps 1-2 Trinity; chaps 3-26: a compendium of the Old and New Testament from creation to the mission of the Apostles; chaps 33-34 comment on the Our Father and the Creed); a mystical-moral part (ch 32 fasting; chaps 35, 98 prayer; chaps 36-40 virtue); a third Sacramental part (chaps 28-29, 44 the orders in general; chaps 30-31 baptism and chrism; chaps 41-43 matrimony; 41-52 the Orders in kind; ch 96 penance; ch 84 Eucharist; ch 109 anointing of the sick).

⁸⁰ In two parts: ritual (chaps 60-64, 66-73 rites of the Mass; chaps 74-75 consecration of Clerics; chaps 100-105 Holy Week; chaps 99, 106-107 feasts of the year and the period of 50 days after Easter); and pastoral (chaps 44-52 offices of the clerics; chaps 87-98, 111-112 offices of the Patriarch, priests, and laity): *ibid.* XI.

⁸¹ V-VII preface; IX-XLIV introduction; 1-388 text; 389-598 Latin translation; 501-616 glossary; 617-655 indexes.

⁸² J. PÉRIER, “La Perle Précieuse traitant des sciences ecclésiastiques (chapitres I-LVI) par Jean, Fils d’Abou-Zakariyā surnommé Ibn Sabā’”, *Patrologia Orientalis* XVI, 1922, 591-760.

“The return to this Arab-Christian patrimony is a stimulus to reach out further to the needs of our local Churches in the cultural and intellectual fields.”⁸³

There is still a richness and value to discover, especially on the part of the believer who lives in this oriental world, even if it stands in need of being brought up to date⁸⁴.

Indeed, “the Science of the Principles of Religion results in being the most sublime thing that the best of believers can be occupied with; it is the ladder toward the dwelling of the angels and from where we can draw light in the darkness of the night of murky doubts [...] It is the object beyond all other worth to which a happy man can give of his own interest [...] Happy is he who knows it because by it he can [happily] consume his own life.”⁸⁵

(English translation by Edwin J. Paniagua)

Gianmaria Gianazza, Salesian, was born in Cerro Maggiore (Milan, Italy) in 1943. Since young he left for the Middle East in 1960 where he completed High School and philosophy in Lebanon, and Theology in the Holy Land. He was ordained a priest in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher Dec. 20, 1970.

Before theology, he worked in pastoral training among the youth in the Salesian Schools for three years, two of which were in Aleppo and one at El Houssoun in Lebanon. He worked two years as a catechist, and as a councilor from 1971-1972 and 1978-79; two years at the Provincial House in Bethlehem from 1982-1984; 20 years in Nazareth (being in charge of both an elementary and Junior High School from 1972-1974 and 1979-1982); he was director from 1984-1990 and 1999-2002, and Procurator from 1990-1996. He was at the same time Provincial Procurator for 9 years (1990-1996). Since 2002, he has been Provincial (Ispettore) of the Salesians of the Middle East.

Studies: Bachelor's degree in Theology (1967-1971) with a doctorate in language and Arabic literature (1974-1984), and a specialization in Arab-Christian manuscripts. In such a field, he has published a dozen of articles in Arabic and French, and other writings in Arabic geared towards pastoral youth.

Main Publications

- “Makkīhā I (1092-1109)”, *Parole de l'Orient* 11 (1983) 235-255.
- “Maria nell'Islam”, in *Maria nella sua terra*, a cura di Andrzej Strus, Cremisan-Betlemme 1989, 127-139.
- “La situazione missionaria nel contesto dell'Islam (contesto, sfide, suggerimenti per un itinerario di fede)”, in *Lettura missionaria di “Educare i giovani alla fede” C.G. XXIII, Incontro di Procuratori e Delegati Ispettoriali dell'Europa*: Groot-Bijgaarden, 11-15 Aprile 1991, Roma 1991, 129-143.
- “Kitāb Uṣūl al-dīn lil-baṭrak Iliyyā al-ṭānī”, *Al-Liqā'* 11 (1996/3) 66-81 (in arabo).
- “Al-risālah fi ṣarḥ ṣiyām al-naṣārā”, *Al-Liqā'* 11 (1996/3) 103-131 (in arabo).
- “Al-ṣalāt wa manāfi'uhā”, *Al-Liqā'* 11 (1996/4) 48-73 (in arabo).
- “Traité de la démonstration et de la direction Kitāb al burhān wa l-irṣād de Ṣalībā ibn Yūḥannā al-Mawṣilī”, *Parole de l'Orient* 11(1983) 235-255.
- “Ahamiyya al-turāt al masīhī al-'arabī li-ignā' al-lāhūt al-maḥallī”, *Al-Liqā'* 14 (1999/1) 89-94 (in arabo).
- “Allāhu l-Ab fī al-turāt al-'arabī al-masīhī”, *Al-Liqā'* 14 (1999/4) 89-109 (in arabo).
- “Lettre de Makkīhā (+1109) sur la vérité de la religion chrétienne”, *Parole de l'Orient* 24 (2000) 499-562 (in francese e arabo).
- *Nuṣūs muḥtāra min Kanīsat al-Maṣriq (11-14 centuries)*, Bagdad 2000, 159 pp. (in arabo).
- “Dieu le Père dans la Théologie arabe chrétienne”, *Proche Orient Chrétien* 51 (2001) 12-34.
- ÉLIE II (+1131), *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Dīn*, PAC 17-18, Éditions du CEDRAC, Beyrouth 2005, XXIX-571 pp. (in arabo).

⁸³ ASSEMBLEA DEI PATRIARCHI CATTOLICI ORIENTALI, *La presenza cristiana in Oriente testimonianza e missione*, 1992, 32.

⁸⁴ There are writings that deal with current arguments, such as the liberty of conscience (cfr Kh. SAMIR, “Liberté religieuse et propagation de la foi chez les théologiens arabes chrétiens du XI^e siècle et en Islam”, in *Tantur Yearbook*, 1980-1981, Jérusalem 1981, 93-164), the relationship between religion and authority (cfr Kh. SAMIR, *Religion et pouvoir chez les théologiens arabes du IX^e siècle*, in *L'utilisation de l'idée de Dieu dans la société du Moyen-Orient*, Jounieh 1993, (67-153); the problem of poverty-riches (cfr Kh. SAMIR, “Pour une théologie arabe contemporaine: Actualité du patrimoine arabe chrétien”, in *Proche Orient Chrétien* 38, 1988, 96); the problem of science (cfr KH. SAMIR, “Nécessité de la science. Texte de 'Abdallāh Ibn at- Ṭayyib (m. 1043)”, *Parole de l'Orient* 3 (1962) 241-259; ID., “Nécessité de l'exégèse scientifique. Texte de 'Abdallāh Ibn at- Ṭayyib”, *Parole de l'Orient* 5 (1974) 243-279).

⁸⁵ *Summa*, Proemio, 11,13,14.