

INCARNATION/TAGĀSSUD LEXICON IN NINTH-CENTURY ARABIC CHRISTIAN CONTROVERSY: A GENDER ISSUE¹

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Ninth-century Arabic Christian apologists, i.e. the first known Christian theologians who wrote in Arabic: the Chalcedonian (‘Melkite’) Theodore Abū Qurra (d. ca. 820–825),² the Syrian-Orthodox (‘Jacobite’) Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidma Abū Rā’īta (d. probably soon after 830),³ and the East Syrian (‘Nestorian’) ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī (d. ca. 840),⁴ composed their works to defend their teachings challenged by Muslims, particularly the doctrine of the Trinity and divine filiation, or to contrast other denominations, especially in the field of Christology. In this apologetic literature and in the intra-Christian dogmatic debates, they used a wide range of words, terms or appellatives, to refer to a variety of concepts and notions of ‘body’. While there is a hierarchy of forms based on the meanings, i. e. whether a physical body, a bestial, or a human one is intended, most bodily terms appear in discussions about the Messiah, His body, Incarnation, (in)dwelling, and humanisation. When the notions of Incarnation and humanisation are elaborated on, it is often done with the help of the analogy of human generation and reproduction, or that of a human being born from his mother, in the unified form of body and soul.

In this paper, I briefly present and classify the “body-Incarnation” lexicon of the Christian Arab authors, then I examine the depiction of the birth, Incarnation, and humanisation of the Son against the background of previous tradition. As S. Griffith puts it: “The Christian Arabic-speaking apologists of the first Abbasid century [...] especially in Iraq, [...] were the heirs of the Syriac-speaking tradition that for several centuries had been absorbing and putting into Syriac dress, the Greek ecclesiastical philosophy that was a distinctive blend of Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian elements,

¹ The first version of this article was prepared for and presented at the conference “Dis/embodiment and Im/materiality: Uncovering the Body, Gender and Sexuality in Philosophies of Late Antiquity – In Memoriam Marianne Saghy (1961–2018)”, Central-European University, Budapest, 6–8 June, 2019.

² See Lamoreaux 2009.

³ See Keating 2009.

⁴ See Beaumont 2009.

wedded to the exigencies of Christian doctrine” (Griffith 1980:171).⁵ I seek to identify some of the underlying philosophical theories on matter, reproduction, and gender, and I am also going to reflect on how the different Christologies determined what model was chosen by Chalcedonian, Syrian-Orthodox and East Syrian authors.

1 Overview

The connotations of terms that refer to the body can usually be linked to Greek Patristic and/or philosophical literature, and accordingly, their use is determined by that tradition. The chart below lists and classifies forms and terms (investigated and analysed in various contexts in detail elsewhere: Varsányi, 2013a, 2013b, 2015) as a basis for the present study, in the examples of which almost all of them occur. The Arabic form, where possible, is given together with a corresponding Greek term, which, in the majority of cases, is the Greek philosophical term⁶ that had come to be translated with the given Arabic form during the translation movement,⁷ but the meaning is usually enriched and diversified by those senses that it had in Patristic usage,⁸ which was also part of the Christian Arab authors’ patrimony. On some occasions: in the cases of the Incarnation, indwelling, and humanisation, there is only a corresponding Patristic term. First, the hierarchy of bodily terms is given, starting with *ǧirm* and arriving at *badan*, under which the “secondary” forms follow, i.e. those names or terms that appear less frequently, and instead of referring more strictly to the body, usually mean a bodily form or disposition. In the second column, next to the nouns meaning physical, or animate bodies, or human body, there are derived terms that come to mean ‘corporeal, physical, bodily’, especially when contrasted to ‘psychical and spiritual’ (*nafsānī*, *rūḥānī*) in the texts. Finally, the last column renders the investigated “actions” such as embodiment, incarnation, humanisation in a corresponding order to those out of which they are formed. That these forms were derived for the exigencies of expressing Christian theology in Arabic, is proven by the fact that they cannot be found in the books of definitions

⁵ The range of this article does not permit a fuller elaboration on this background, which is thoroughly studied and presented elsewhere: Goddard 2000:50, 54–55; Griffith 1980:161–162. See also the English study in: Maróth 2006; and Strohmaier 1987:380–389; Khalil 1983:41.

⁶ Such forms are given on the authority of Afnan 1968.

⁷ For its detailed description that indicates its beginning in the middle of the eighth century, see Gutas 1998; for references of its being contemporaneous with the appearance of the first systematic Arabic Christian treatises, see Griffith 2014:6.

⁸ Such forms are given on the authority of Lampe 1961.

(*kutub al-ḥudūd*) of Muslim authors.⁹ The necessity of the Arabization of Christian doctrine enriched the language by way of stimulating terminological developments.

“Body”	Derived terms	Actions: embodiment/related notions
<i>ḡirm</i> جرم (τό στερεόν, σῶμα) atom, substrate that can carry accidents		
<i>ḡism</i> جسم (τό στερεόν, σῶμα) a corporeal, inanimate and composite entity, created in time; (capable of mingling, but cannot affect or limit the divine principle); body of animals	<i>ḡusmānī</i> جسماني bodily, corporeal	<i>taḡassum</i> تجسم embodiment
<i>ḡasad</i> جسد (σῶμα, σὰρξ) human body, resurrection body, the Messiah’s flesh	<i>ḡusdānī</i> جسداني corporeal	<i>taḡassud</i> تجسد (ἢ σάρκωσις) incarnation (as taking a human body or nature; together with unification; taking flesh)
<i>badan</i> بدن (σῶμα) human body		<i>tabaddun</i> تبدين embodiment
<i>ḡutta</i> جثة (physical) body <i>hay’a</i> هيئة state, disposition <i>ḥilqa</i> حلقة (ἢ μορφή) bodily form <i>ṣabah</i> شبح form, person		
<i>haykal</i> هيكل “temple”		
<i>maḥall</i> محل dwelling place		<i>ḥulūl</i> حلول (in)dwelling (ἐνοίκησης)
		<i>ittiḥād</i> اتخاذ assuming (of the body) (πρόσληψις) (addition, acquisition, of human by Logos) <i>tadarru</i> تدرع dressing into (the body) <i>iḥtiḡāb</i> احتجاب veiling oneself (in a body)
		<i>ta’annus</i> تأنس humanisation (ἐνανθρώπησης) (‘incarnation – as an event; a source of redemption; Christ’s incarnate life, nature, or humanity) <i>ṣāra insānan</i> صار إنساناً become human
		<i>ittiḥād</i> اتحاد union (ἔνωσις) <i>iḡtimā</i> اجتماع combination, conjunction (συνουσία) <i>i’tilāf</i> composition

⁹ Abū Yūsuf b. Ishāq al-Kindī’s (d. c. 873) *Risāla fī Ḥudūd al-aṣyā’ wa-rusūmihā*, is the first Arabic book of philosophical definitions, by an author contemporary to ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī. The other works in a chronological order are: Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf al-Kātib al-Ḥwārizmī’s (d. 997) *Maḡāīl al-‘ulūm*; Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn Fūrak al-Anṣārī al-Iṣbahānī’s (d. 1015) *Kitāb al-Ḥudūd*; Ibn Sīnā’s (d. 1037) *Kitāb al-Ḥudūd*; Sayf ad-Dīn al-Āmidī’s (d. 1233) *al-Mubīn*; and finally, ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Ġurḡānī’s (d. 1414) *at-Ta’rīfāt*.

There are various terms for the body, flesh, and bodily form, but when it comes to *incarnation*, it is *ġasad* which forms a basis for a derived form to express it: i.e. *taġassud*. As far as it can be documented, the term first appears in this form with the meaning of incarnation in the Arabic translation of the debate by Timothy the Nestorian patriarch in the last decade of the eighth century. As M. Beaumont writes: “It is not known when the earliest Arabic translation was made, but it seems that the East-Syrian recension of the Disputation of the Monk Ibrāhīm aṭ-Ṭabarānī (9th c.) already quotes from it. The oldest surviving manuscript that contains an Arabic translation is to be found in the Cairo Geniza and probably dates from the 11th century” (Beaumont 2005:32). It is a part of the vocabulary of all three ninth-century authors, despite denominational disagreements. These authors all share a common vocabulary in Arabic, which attests to the existence of intensive interaction between Christian communities in the region.

On a thematic basis, the relevant examples are divided in three groups: (a) where the incarnation and birth of the Messiah is approached through notions of reproduction/generation; (b) through the dichotomy of body and soul; and (c) the combination of these two.

2 Reproduction/generation

As the Incarnation and divine filiation were among the most challenged Christian doctrines in debates with Muslim opponents, who confronted them as irrational, Christian apologetic works needed to demonstrate that these are not contrary to reason. One of the frameworks that is applied sets the Incarnation in the context of one of the theories concerning generation and reproduction, where the divine and human parts of the Messiah and their union in him are explained through one of the schemes of male and female contribution to the generation of the offspring – in accordance with respective Chalcedonian, Syrian-Orthodox and East Syrian Christologies.

2.1

In ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī’s first example, we see references to sexual intercourse, as the means of reproduction, related to shame and the dirtiness of seed – whence the necessity to wash it off, which is related to the issue whether sonship might properly be stated for God:

I would like to ask them why they find distasteful (*istašna ‘ū*)¹⁰ our naming of the Word as “Son,” according to what is in the Books of God concerning him.

¹⁰ The translation of *istašna ‘ū* with “finding distasteful” is justifiable because of the following reference to shame. However, another translation would also be possible, namely

Is it perhaps because we find that our sons only exist through sexual intercourse (*nikāḥ*), which we are ashamed (*nastaḥī*) to show? We consider the sperm (*al-manī*) by which they exist to be dirty (*nastaqdir*) to the extent that we wash ourselves of it. This is how their creation (*ḥalq*) comes from it. They remain in the darkness of the womb (*ẓalam al-baṭn*) for nine months, and they come out by strong labor pains through a narrow uterus, together with much blood (*dam kaṭīr*). We therefore inform them, [our accusers], that we are blameless before God from all of this, because the Son, according to us, does not have a body¹¹ (*laysa bi-ḡasad*) and he has no members, flesh or blood. His eternal birth (*wilādatuhu fī azaliyyatihi*) is not from the body of a woman (*min ḡasad imra'a*), but he is the Word of God, not confined or perceived. His origination is far beyond the description of the generation of light from the sun and speech from the soul (Mikhail's translation: 382).¹²

Fitting the main investigation of this article, first the issue of the theory of reproduction is examined here, then, some other considerations on gender and sexuality will be added. The issue debated is divine filiation – as “our naming of the Word as “Son”” indicates. The challenge is referred to by the use of the form *istašna'ū* (‘they find [it] distasteful’, or ‘they find it absurd, out of place, irrational’) a verb derived from the adjective *šani'*, (possibly including the connotations of the Greek: ἄτοπος), which means absurd, out of place (C.f. Afnan 1968:144–145). 'Ammār al-Baṣrī interprets this reaction in the context of biological sonship and human reproduction, so that his negation of such a context in relation to the divine Word should invalidate the judgement of absurdity. In describing human procreation, only the male seed is mentioned, – as indicated in the statement that human children “exist by the sperm” – i.e. only the male is mentioned explicitly as contributing seminal fluid (and through this: form) to the offspring generated, which, broadly, concords with the Aristotelian view of reproduction and gender (Allen 1987:92, 93), or, more generally, with the theory that holds that the male is the sole supplier of seed, which, apart from Aristotle, was advanced by other philosophers, including Anaxagoras, Diogenes of Apollonia, and the Stoics. (Wilberding 2015: 151) Male activity and passive femininity bear also the traits of the Platonic view (Allen 1987:91). On the other hand, on the woman's part, i.e. on that of the mother,

that of “finding it absurd,” as the root *Š-N-* usually refers to absurdity in apologetic and polemic texts.

¹¹ Instead of “does not have a body” the translation “is not a body” would be closer in meaning to the section of the Arabic texts that reads *laysa bi-ḡasad*.

¹² 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Burhān* 57:

واني لأحب أن أسألهم لم استنشعوا تسميتنا الكلمة ابناً على ما في كتب الله من ذلك؟ ألع ذلك لما وجدنا البنين عليه عندنا لا يكونون إلا بِنكاح نستحي من إظهاره ونستقدر المنى الذي يكون به حتى نغتسل منه وينشأ خلقهم منه ويمكنون في ظلم البطن تسعة أشهر ويخرجون بالطلق الشديد من أرحام ضيقة مع دم كثير؟ إنا نعلمهم أنا نبر إلى الله من ذلك كله، لأن الابن عندنا ليس بجسد ولا ذي أعضاء ولحم ودم، وليس ولادته في أزيلته من جسد امرأة، بل هو كلمة الله التي لا تحد ولا تدرك. وولاده فوق ولاد النور من الشمس والكلمة من النفس بما لا يوصف

only the great amount of blood is mentioned, which may be understood either as the female counterpart of the sperm in its “dirtiness”, in that it can be understood to be ritually unclean, or perhaps as the female contribution to generation, i.e. the catamenia (as matter) (C.f. also Bonnard 2013:11, Connell 2000:410; Parker 2012b:109; Smith 1983:477; and Sparshott 1983:6). To rebut this approach, the Word, i.e. the Son is indicated as an entity that is not a body and that has not got one, which means that his eternal birth is not bodily, consequently it is not from the body of a woman. It is significant that there is double stress on this fact, namely not only the bodily birth, but also that coming from a woman is emphasized. This emphasis will return in other contexts, as well, as a response, a rejection of an absurdity. To fit the apologetic framework even more, the Word’s not being confined (*lā tuḥadd*) is also articulated, which, on one hand could refer to the limitation in the uterus, but more generally, in this issue, the claims of contemporary Mu‘tazilites and other theologians are also echoed who argued that a God limited by a body could not be omnipresent (C.f. e. g. Martin 2001:106); consequently, God being or inhabiting a body is impossible.

After the examination of the underlying reproduction theory, we may turn to other considerations. E .g. particular is the reference to the “darkness of the womb”, which, apart from being a general notion, may also contain Quranic allusions.¹³ Among the other reflections on sexuality, those of its “shamefulness” (as *nastahī* implies it) and dirtiness (as *nastaqdir* implies it) deserve attention. Taking only the first word, *nastahī*, into consideration, the possible meanings, apart from the Aristotelian shamefulness (as αἰσχύνη),¹⁴ could also refer to the traditional senses of embarrassment, modesty, inhibition, bashfulness (as included in αἰδώς),¹⁵ so it could also be understood as if the implication of sexual intercourse by the idea of sonship, or filiation could be a source of embarrassment. Its joint appearance with *nastaqdir*, i. e. finding it dirty, however, definitely sets the issue into a negative framework. References to shame are rarely found in ‘Ammār’s works, which renders one of the possible interpretations, namely that of understanding “we are ashamed” as referring to the Christian community, unlikely. Given ‘Ammār’s lengthy elaboration elsewhere (*Masā’il* 114–115) on the idea that God’s design with human procreation/reproduction (*tanāsul*), i. e. intercourse between man and woman, and the birth of one generation from another, is to give a cause (*illa*) for reciprocal love and

¹³ E.g. Q 39:6 يَخْلُقُكُمْ فِي بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ خَلْقًا مِّنْ بَعْدِ خَلْقٍ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ ثَلَاثٍ (“He creates you in the wombs of your mothers, creation after creation, within three darknesses”). According to aṭ-Ṭabarī’s (*Tafsīr* VI, 368), these three darknesses are the belly, the uterus, and the placenta. في ظلمة البطن وظلمة الرحم وظلمة المشيمة. See also Qa’dān 2012:1292, and Ebrahim 2001:231.

¹⁴ In the Aristotelian sense: C.f. *Rhetoric* (2 1383b12–15) ‘Distress or disturbance at such evils, present, past or future, as seem to bring disrepute (*adoxia*)’.

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of the meanings of the two terms, the chronological changes in their senses, their differences, and convergences, see Konstan 2003, esp. 1034–1047.

affection (*maḥabba ba‘d li-ba‘d, wa-‘atf*), it is improbable that it should be considered shameful. Repeated references to the washing off of the semen corroborate the other possibility, i. e. that this shamefulness and the distaste is characteristic of the Muslim opponent’s approach, especially that it is indicated by other occurrences, too, which accords with the Islamic prescriptions for ablutions after the emission of semen. (C.f. Ebrahim 2001:231, Griffith 1983:178–179, and Wensinck 1927:85–86) One of these repeated references can also be found in the *Kitāb al-Burhān*:

As for that with which you mock us as you scorn baptism, [...], I return to them and thoroughly wonder about the apparent thing which they have neglected: their own problem which they did not examine themselves. When sperm (*al-manī*), – in which man’s visible [pure]¹⁶ form is formed (...), (heaven and earth are created to [preserve] that form),¹⁷ – is ejaculated from one of them, he does not simply wash the place from whence it came, as he does with his spoiled human waste,¹⁸ (from which nothing is really formed but worms and the like), but he washes from the top of the head to his feet. He calls this type of washing from that clean thing (*aš-šay’ al-z/ṭāhir*¹⁹) from which God created humans (*allaḏī minhu ḥalaqa Allāh al-bašar*), purification (*ṭuhūr*)! (Mikhail’s translation: 402).²⁰

Given that ‘Ammār considers the semen a clean thing, the washing of the whole body after ejaculation is more likely to be a reference to the ritual cleansing for purity: in accordance with the Quranic judgement of the semen as a despised, impure fluid.²¹ This additional extract also emphasizes the idea that humans come into being from the sperm, as “in which man’s pure form is formed”; and “that clean thing from which God created humans” indicate it. This is contrasted with “spoiled human

¹⁶ Hayek notes that in the manuscript, the form *ṭāhir* can be found, which he substituted by *zāhir*. Mikhail’s translation keeps the meaning of the edited version on the first occasion in “visible form”. [pure] is my insertion.

¹⁷ See also Griffith 1983:178, where he translates only this section: “in which there is imaged his own pure character for the sake of which heaven and earth were created.”

¹⁸ In the edited version, here we can read **al-‘drh*, but as Mikhail’s translation indicates, this form would make no sense here. Instead, we may think of *al-maḏira al-muntina* that can be translated as something rotten and putrid, coming out of the man.

¹⁹ Hayek substituted the form *ṭāhir* by *zāhir* once again (remarking in a footnote that in the manuscript, the former can be found). Mikhail’s translation is based on the manuscript version, as indicated in the second case in his translation “that clean thing”. I find the meaning “clean/pure” more convincing in both cases.

²⁰ Arabic text: ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Burhān* 81–82:

وهو أنه يخرج من أحدهم المنى الذي فيه صورت خلقته الطاهرة [الطاهرة] التي خلقت لها السماء والأرض، فلا يقع بأن يغسل الموضع الذي يخرج منه، كما يفعل في العذرة المنتنة التي تخرج منه ولا يتصور منها إلا الدود وما أشبهه، حتى يغسل ما بها بين قرنه إلى قدمه. ويسمى ذلك الغسل من ذلك الشيء الطاهر [الطاهر] الذي منه خلق الله البشر طهوراً

²¹ Q 32:8 (“Then He made his posterity out of the extract of a liquid disdained.”)

waste” from which only worms are formed, which, also attests to an Aristotelian influence, as far as putrefaction and spontaneous generation is concerned, such as the idea of living things being generated in decaying matter (Aristotle, *History of Animals*, Book V, Part 1,101–102).

2.2

The second example lets us peek into the underlying theory of reproduction and gender in the description of the coming into being of the Messiah:

“His grace and generosity to His creatures are more evident and more visible, and He has honoured them more and more. I mean: a man, His image [or: whom He formed] (*ṣawwarahu*),²² from the Virgin Mary (Maryam al-‘Adrā), without an element (*mādda*) of human seed (*zar*’).” (Mikhail’s translation: 393).²³

‘Ammār states that the human being is formed from the Virgin, which means that he is from the “matter” of the Virgin, yet, without any human seed. To express this “forming”, here, instead of a term referring to creation (*ḥalq*) or making (*ṣan*’), the giving of forms (*taṣwīr*) is articulated. This fits more than just one framework: apart from the philosophical sense derived from *ṣūra* as form, the Quranic usage is also followed, where the verb *ṣawwara* and its derivatives often express God’s act of fashioning and forming – following the act of creation.²⁴ It is implied then that form is given to already existing matter, namely to that taken from the mother, Mary. Consequently, if the presence of any seed is negated, it means that the matter taken from the mother is not seed, and that the seed excluded then would be male seed. We may thus say that ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī follows the one-seed theory of human reproduction, conforming to the Aristotelian approach that considers the female as the provider of material to the foetus and as a receptacle – while the male is provider of fertile seed. Another remarkable point is that the extracts attest to a richness of vocabulary used in this field. In the previous examples, sperm was designated by *al-manī*, here, seed is given as *zar*’ – later on we will witness a further variety of names to designate it, where some specific implications will be mentioned.

²² The original form *ṣawwarahu* in the Arabic text necessitates a slight modification in Mikhail’s translation, i. e. instead of “His image”, I inserted [whom He formed].

²³ Arabic text: ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Burhān* 70:

نعمته وجوده على خلقه أظهر وأبين، وشرفهم به أكثر وأكثر: أعني بشراً صورته من مريم العذرى بغير مادة من زرع

²⁴ Q 7:11 وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ (“And We have certainly created you, [O Mankind], and given you [human] form”)

Q 40:64 اللَّهُ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ قَرَارًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَصَوَّرَكُمْ فَأَحْسَنَ صُوَرَكُمْ وَرَزَقَكُم مِّنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ (“It is Allah who made for you the earth a place of settlement and the sky a ceiling and formed you and perfected your forms and provided you with good things”). See also Gimaret 2007:286–288.

2.3

As it is particularly stressed in the third and lengthy example, this time from ‘Ammār al-Baṣīr’s longer work, the *Kitāb al-masā’il wa-l-aḡwiba*, only the human hypostasis of the Messiah is taken from his mother, which is explicitly said to be *hylic matter* – likened to the matter that comes into being in time from a human mother and has a beginning: thus, human generation is offered as an analogy.

What we said (*qawlunā*) of that which is taken from the Virgin (*al-ma’ḥūd min al-Batūl*), is the same as what we said of the one which was taken in the union (*al-muttaḥad*), i.e. the created one that is taken from her (*al-maḥlūq al-ma’ḥūd minhā*); and what we said of the one which was taken in the union, i.e. the creature [taken] from her is the same as what we said of the conceived one (*al-maḥbūl bihi*), the one who was born from her (*al-mawlūd minhā*). And this is because that which is taken from her (*al-ma’ḥūd minhā*) is *hylic matter* (*mādda hayūlāniyya*) like the matter that comes into being (*al-mādda al-ḥādīṭa*) in [from]²⁵ the motherly nature (*aṭ-ṭibā’ al-ummahātiyya*) from [in]²⁶ the screen/shield of the bodies (*ḡunnat abdān*) of their children. [...]²⁷

First, if we render all the statements in the beginning of the extract together, we see that the *subiectum* is expressed in various ways: the human part of the Messiah – which is taken from the Virgin, – i.e. [the one] conceived by her and born from her, and the creature taken in union: all have the same *praedicatum* (*qawl* being also a logical term, so that “what we say of something” is also a general or an assertoric or declaratory statement): namely that this *subiectum* is *hylic matter* (*mādda hayūlāniyya*). This *hylic matter* is likened to the matter that comes into being (*al-mādda al-ḥādīṭa*) from the motherly nature in the bodies of children, which means that the matter of children’s bodies is also “taken” from the mothers and is *hylic material*. The emphasis laid on matter, ὕλη, which comes into being, is particularly informative, given that it accords well with the Aristotelian definition, that states that it “is to be identified with the substratum which is receptive of coming-to-be and passing away” (Aristotle, *Generation and Corruption*, 320a1–2; C.f. Saif 2016:182). The next part of the quotation goes on to specify the Messiah’s body and humanity:

As for the one taken in union (*al-muttaḥad*), the one created from the matter taken from her (*al-maḥlūq min al-mādda al-ma’ḥūda minhā*), it is a complete body (*badan tāmm*), animated by a knowing/rational soul (*mutanaffis bi-nafs ‘allāma*) from which he was set up as a complete human. [...]

In this part, first, the *subiectum* is given again, this time indicated by two forms: the one taken in union, which is the same as the one created from the matter taken, then the *praedicatum* expresses that this is the basis of the complete form: once

²⁵ In the text: *fī*, which I read as *min*.

²⁶ In the text: *min*, which I read as *fī*.

²⁷ In case of long citations, I divide the text into smaller units for comments and analysis. The references are given after the last unit of the citation.

animated by a knowing/rational soul (*mutanaffis bi-nafs 'allāma*), the complete body (*badan tāmm*) becomes a new, complete human being – the explicit articulation and emphasis on the “complete human being” is particularly important for the East Syrian Christology, as ‘Nestorians’ argued Christ’s divinity and humanity were independent of each other, which allowed them to insist upon the full humanity of Christ’s human nature. The rational soul cannot be a part of “the one created from the matter taken”, given that just a couple of lines above, we were informed that the latter is only *hylic* material. It fits well the Aristotelian idea that since the female provides the material of the new individual, it cannot also have the power to infuse soul into it (Horowitz 1976:195, Lange 1983:5). Particular is the reference to its being animated by a rational soul, because it raises the issue of ensoulment. No detail is given that would clarify when this ensoulment happens, however, the reference to the *rational* soul, as well as the lack of mention about the nutritive/vegetative or the sensitive, are significant. It may raise the question if there is any precedent graduality, or if the rational soul – i. e. the soul that is reserved only for humans – was acquired at the conception. We shall return to this question in extracts that give more specific references later on. So far, this is the example that most explicitly seeks to explain the Incarnation and the union of the human part and the divine Son in the Messiah with the help of the analogy of human generation. The female is seen to provide material, (and serve as a receptacle) – in accordance with the Aristotelian scheme (in which the male is the spirit, impregnating female matter, imparting life and motion (Parker 2012a:110; with reference to *Generation of Animals* 716a4–7, 727b 31–34, 729b15–21, 765b8–766a 36)). The next step is to specify the *subiectum* from another angle, by referring to it only from the approach of conception and birth:

The one who was conceived of (*al-maḥbūl bihi*) and born from her (*al-mawlūd minhā*), is a Messiah with two *hypostaseis* (*uqnūmayn*), a divine and a human one, who were a unique Messiah by their union. [...]

This modification of the diaphragm was necessary because that which was taken from Mary was *hylic* material; but that which was conceived and born, is already the “whole” of the Messiah, namely both of his *hypostaseis* in a union. The text then turns back to the matter, and reflects on a question frequently discussed in debates, namely if it was pre-existent to the existence of the unified Messiah:

If we come to the mention of the quiddity (*māhiyya*) of that which is taken (*al-ma'ḥūd*), taken in union (*al-muttaḥad*) and born (*al-mawlūd*), our answer should be understood from us concerning that which was taken from the Virgin (*al-ma'ḥūd min al-Batūl*) – whether it had existed in its nature before its actual existence or not. We say: the matter taken (*al-mādda al-ma'ḥūda*) had been existent, firm in the nature of the pure Virgin before its existence – certainly. [...]

Repeated references to the material part taken from the female, necessitate to discuss if the matter (*al-mādda*) of the offspring prior to conception is present in the mother. On the one hand, the human and material part, which is a constituent of the full humanity important for ‘Nestorians’, being taken from the mother, is necessarily present in her. The question of pre-existence is also a philosophical issue, connected to views on embryology, and spermatogenesis, which generally concerned the manner of the offspring’s physical presence in the seed and/or the parents’ contribution. Preformationists held that the body of the offspring exists pre-formed in the seed, whereas epigenesists (e.g., Aristotle and Galen) argued that the parts are formed successively after conception. (C.f. Wilberding 2015:5). In this case, too, the Aristotelian approach is followed, according to which the material is/can be there “from the beginning, but the formal cause only gradually plays out along with the efficient cause of the embryonic development” (Maienschein 2017:2). The author then turns to the issues of this forming and growth:

As for the growing body (*al-badan an-nāmī*), formed from the matter (*al-muṣawwar min al-mādda*): its fashioning and the union with it (*ḡibillatuhu wa-ittiḥāduhu*) happened together [simultaneously] – after that it had not existed in the disposition of its form (*hay’at šūratihi*). And the existence of the combined (*muḡtama*) Messiah, combined in his completion (*bi-kamālihi*) was just like this: [it happened/started] together [simultaneously] with the assumption and the union. And there the Pure Virgin conceived the Messiah, who exists in his two *hypostaseis*, then she gave birth to him Him – as soon as the months of her pregnancy terminated – as a complete Messiah.²⁸

It is visible here that ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī followed the epigenesists, since the extract states that the body is formed (*muṣawwar*) out of the matter that existed previously in the mother, upon union and conception. As the passive voice (i. e. the passive participle *muṣawwar*) indicates, the matter taken from the mother does not contribute to this forming, neither has it anything to do with the *growing* of the body (c.f. *al-badan an-nāmī*), which is a result of the forming. It might also run parallel with the Aristotelian idea according to which the male (semen) produces form and impetus from which an embryo grows, being the efficient cause rather than material cause

²⁸ Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. Arabic text: ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Masā’il* 184–185:

إن قولنا في المأخوذ من البتول، سوى قولنا في المتحد المخلوق المأخوذ منها، وقولنا في المتحد المخلوق منها، سوى قولنا في المحبول به المولود منها. وذلك أن المأخوذ منها مادة هيولانية كالمادة الحادثة في [!] الطباع الأماطية من جنة [!] أيدان أولادها. وأما المتحد المخلوق من المادة المأخوذة منها، فبدين تام متنفس بنفس فإذا أتينا على ذكر ماهية المأخوذ المحبول به المولود منها، فمسيح ذو أفتومين إلهي وأنسي كانا باتحادهما مسيحاً واحداً. فإذا أتينا على ذكر ماهية المأخوذ والمتحد والمولود، فليفهم عنا الجواب في المأخوذ من البتول هل كان موجوداً في طبيعتها قبل أن يوجد أم لا. فنقول: بل قد كانت المادة المأخوذة موجودة ثابتة في طباع البتول الطاهرة قبل أن توجد يقيناً. وأما البدن النامي المصور من المادة فكانت جبلته واتحاده جميعاً معاً، بعد أن لم يكن على هيئة صورته موجوداً. وكذلك كان وجود المسيح المجتمع بكماله مع الاتخاذ والاتحاد جميعاً معاً. وهناك أيضاً حبلت البتول الطاهرة بالمسيح الموجود بقنوميه، ثم ولدته، لما استكملت شهور حبلها، مسيحاً كاملاً.

(Horowitz 1976:185), not the female. The emphatic presence of matter and form accords well with the *hylomorphism*, too. The extract in its entirety represents clearly the ‘Nestorian’ teaching: only the human part, more specifically the *hylic* matter is taken from the mother, which is distinguished from the divine; but then the complete human and the divine that form a union are born together. For the generation of the human, ideas that fit the Aristotelian framework can be recognized.

2.4

The general statement in the fourth example which states that everyone is born from each of his parents in the way that is substantial in relation to that parent, implies an underlying general rule according to which it is fixed in what ways the mother or the father contribute to the generation of the offspring.

We also say of the Messiah that he is born from the Father in an eternal birth (*mawlūd min Abīhi mīlādan azaliyyan*), and we do not claim that his Father gave birth to him (*waladahu*) in both of his substances (*ḡawharayhi*). We say instead that everyone is born from his father and his mother; but he/[she] is his parent only in what is substantial and natural from him (*innamā huwa wāliduhu min ḡiha mā huwa minhu ḡawharī ṭabīʿī*). That is: his father gave birth to him in a divine, eternal birth in his divinity, and his mother gave birth to him in a human way in time (*bašariyyan zamaniiyyan*). Despite the difference in his states and the difference of his birth, He is a unique Messiah possessed of two substances, one son and two *hypostases*.²⁹

This underlying idea, i. e. the gendered division between the contributions of the father and the mother, helps the explanation of the material and time-related births of the Messiah, as well as the immaterial and timeless one of his divine part, on behalf of the Father. The unity between these two parts is that of a unique sonship.

2.5

The next example accords with the previous ones in some ways. If the woman’s contribution is fix, and, as seen above, is material, then the following rhetorical question has only one possible answer:

Is it not clear from what has been told in our book – that it is the greatest impossibility (*a ʿzam al-muḥāl*) that a woman should give birth to a divinity (*talid imraʿa ilāhan*) – instead of a combined Messiah (*Masīḡan muḡtamaʿan*) in which there is the possibility of conception, birth, education, and death? [...]³⁰

²⁹ Arabic text: ‘Ammār al-Bašrī, *Masāʿil* 191:

وقد نقول في المسيح أيضاً إنه مولود من أبيه ميلاداً أزلياً، ولا نزعم أن أباه ولده بجوهرية جميعاً. بل نقول إن كل واحد مولود من أبيه وأمه إنما هو والده من جهة ما هو منه جوهرية طبيعي، أي أبوه ولده ميلاداً إلهياً قديماً من جهة لاهوته وولده أمه بشرياً زمنياً. إذ هو مع اختلاف حالاته وغيرية ولادته مسيح واحد ذو جوهرين، ابن واحد وقنومان

³⁰ Arabic text: ‘Ammār al-Bašrī, *Masāʿil* 199:

The reference to impossibility might also be considered as one made to absurdity, since *muḥāl* also means the senseless and the absurd (like the Greek ἄτοπος). It might echo the general Greek philosophical understanding that matter is lower in importance than form and/or spirit, and the notion of the impotency of the female in producing the rational principle and/or the soul, let alone a divinity. It might also remind the reader of the idea of Aristotle and his followers according to which maleness is spiritual, while femaleness is material (Horowitz 1976:186–187) and that the form-bearer is more divine than the matter supplier (Sparshott 1983:8). As for ‘Ammār al-Baṣṭī’s previously seen examples, it can be paragoned to the first one, where the birth from the body of a woman was negated in case of the Son, due to his not having a body.

2.6

So far, we have seen examples that subscribed to the one-seed theory, where women do not contribute semen to generation. The view that both the male and the female emit seed, as stated by philosophers as Alcmaeon, Hippon, and other Pythagoreans, Parmenides, Empedocles, Democritus, Epicurus – and physicians: the Hippocratics, Diocles, Herophilus, Soranus, and Galen (Wilberding 2015:3; Bonnard 2013:4; Boylan 1986:52, 59)³¹ also found echoes in Arabic Christian writings. The example by Theodore Abū Qurra (from *On the Death of Christ*), attests to the contemporary circulation of these alternative theories.

You should know that the eternal Son was in the Virgin’s womb (*ḡawf*) in the same way that the power³² of a man’s seed (*quwwat zar‘ ar-raḡul*) is in a woman’s womb – with one difference: unlike the power of the seed, the Son did not have a body (*ḡasad*) by essence (*min ḡawharihi*). That said, the Son and the seed of the pure lady (*zar‘ al-Muṭahhara*) met one another in her womb, even as the seed of a man and a woman meet one another in the woman’s womb, and the Virgin Mary conceived (*ḥabalat*) the eternal Son and gave birth (*waladat*) to him, even as a woman conceives a man’s seed and gives birth to it. (It is thus that Mary is truly the Mother of God, even as the church proclaims her.) [...]

The first part of the extract compares the Son in the womb of the Virgin not to man’s seed in a woman’s womb in general, but only to its power, potency, or faculty, *quwwa*, since, as it is quickly added, the Son entering the Virgin’s womb is without

أو لم يتبين في أعلى كتابنا أنه من أعظم المحال أن تلد امرأة إلهاً لا مسيحاً مجتمعاً يوجد فيه إمكان الحمل والولاد والتربية والموت وما أشبه ذلك خاصةً باسم المسيح.

³¹ With Galen stating that both sexes contribute with semen; the woman “produces a seed useful for generation; but it is nonetheless inferior to the male sperm, notably in terms of agility and heat. For him too, the creative principle resides in the male sperm” (Bonnard 2013:7)

³² *Quwwa*: it may also be understood as a faculty.

a body. From the simile, however, it can be understood, that the power of the seed has one, which implies that the seed is considered to be a body, a physical entity (*ġasad*). In order to make the analogy more exact, the basis of the comparison cannot be the physical seed itself, but only its (creative) potency. In the next sentence, however, the simile is slightly modified, given that the Son's meeting Mary's seed is not likened to the meeting of the power/faculty of the male seed with that of the woman, but to the meeting of the two seeds, so in this case a Son-and-male-seed parallel is also applicable. It is then carried on, as it can be seen in the analogy between a woman's conceiving a male's seed and the Virgin's conceiving the Son; as well as to a woman's giving birth to it (i. e. to the seed) and the Virgin's giving birth to the Son. The following statement about Mary as Theotokos explains the subscription to this seed-model: if real conception of and giving birth to the Son take place, she can be called the Mother of God.

It belongs to the natural power of the man's seed (*li-quwwat zar' ar-raġul fī tabī'atihā*), when it meets in the womb (*rahm*) with the woman's seed, to differentiate (*tu'īt*) for itself members, to form (*tuṣawwir*) for itself this human form (*ṣūra*) from the matter (*hayūlā*) that comes forth with it from the seed of the man and the woman, and to distribute itself in each member, in the measure that it is proper for it to be in each member. In the same way, the Word differentiated (*'adat*) for itself members from the seed of the pure Mary, formed for itself from it this human form, and entered into each of those members and into the soul, even as it is right for the power of human nature to be in each of them. [...]

The simile is concentrating again on the powers/potencies of the seed, which, upon meeting the female seed, gives (*tu'īt*) members to itself, i.e. (as Lamoreaux translates and interpretes it in this passage, C.f. Lamoreaux 122.) "differentiates them". Already in this part of the description, there is the implication that the potency of the male seed is the form-giver, which is then explicitly stated in the following: "to form (*tuṣawwir*) for itself this human form (*ṣūra*) from the matter". This use of *taṣwīr* is similar to that of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, seen above, which refers to the seed as what forms a new human being. Matter is expressed by the term *hayūlā*, i.e. in a similar way that was seen above in the case of 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's *hylīc* matter; and the matter-form parallel, a kind of *hylomorphism* is also visible here. The description of the encounter of the two seeds and the male seed's forming the female one is already in accordance with Galenic spermatogenesis and embryology, as he asserts that the male seed is more powerful than the female, and functions as a craftsman in shaping the catamenia, i.e. acts as a fashioner – the female provides the material conditions for the embryo, while the spermata fashion it as best they can (Boylan 1986: 62).³³ Furthermore, in *On Semen*, Galen calls the male seed "not matter only

³³ C.f. "Like Aristotle, Galen allows for an independent assortment of traits as each *sperma* contends for the right to fashion individual parts from the *katamenia*. His account

but also power” that “makes the major contribution to the animal’s material principle”.³⁴ The forming potency of the human seed is then compared to the bodyless Word, which gives form and differentiates members from the woman’s seed. In case of humans, the basis of the formation is matter (*hyle*) coming from two seeds, while in case of the Messiah, is only taken from Mary.

The seed’s distributing itself in each member is in accordance with the seed’s forming each member but it can also be linked to the idea of the physical pneuma that is present in the whole of the body. The analogous entrance of the Word into each member and soul is important for Chalcedonian Christology, which acknowledges the two natures in a single hypostasis. The Word’s entering into the whole of the human being underlines this hypostatic unity.

When the eternal Son created (*ḥalaqa*) living entities (*al-ašbāḥ*) in the beginning, he gave them the ability (*qawwāhum*) to propagate via reproduction (*tawālud*), and he put the Holy Spirit in charge of that for them, that he might make it continue for them, through the Holy Spirit’s influence and strength (*tahī’a, taqwiya*). In the same way, through the Holy Spirit’s influence and strength (*taqwiya*), the Son made (*ṣana’a*) for himself that human body (*al-ḡasad al-insī*) from the seed that the pure lady gave him (*az-zar’ alladī nāwalathu*), through the Holy Spirit’s kindling (*išḡāl*)³⁵ of her, even as the power of the human seed made (*tašna’ quwwat az-zar’ al-insī*) for itself members, through the Holy Spirit’s granting of strength. The Son did not in any way transgress (*lam ya’du*) in this the limit of the power of the seed (*ḥadd quwwat az-zar’*). The Holy Spirit was responsible (*tawallā*) with regard to the Son for everything for which he is responsible (*yalīhi*) with regard to the power of the human seed (Lamoreaux’s translation 122).³⁶

contains elements of the Aristotelian and Hippocratic theories that preceded it. Like Hippocrates’ account, it is a dual-seed theory; as in Aristotle’s account, a creative element struggles to fashion intransigent material.” Boylan 1986:68. Reference on p. 67: “The form itself is accomplished by *sperma* fashioning the matter”

³⁴ Galen, *On Semen* 2.2.15–16. Cf. Anthony 2013:4.

³⁵ The text contains the form *išḡāl*, which would rather mean filling, occupation, occupancy, and taking up. Eventually, this may mean intrusion, too. I find this reading also grounded. Lamoreaux’s translation is based on a reading of *iš’āl* instead of *išḡāl*.

³⁶ Arabic text: *Maymar fī mawt al-Masīḥ* 63–64:

واعلم أن هذا الابن الأزلي كان في جوف العذراء كقوة زرع الرجل في جوف المرأة ما خلا أن الابن لم يكن له جسد من جوهره بثّة كما لقوة الزرع. فالتقى الابن وهو على هذه الحال بزرع المطهرة في جوفها كما يلتقي زرع الرجل والمرأة في جوف المرأة وحبلت مريم العذراء بالابن الأزلي وولدت كما تحبل المرأة بزرع الرجل وتلدّه. من أجل ذلك مريم هي والدة الإله حقاً كما تركز بها الكنيسة وكما أن لقوة زرع الرجل في طبيعتها إذا التقت في الرحم مع زرع المرأة أن تعطي لنفسها الأعضاء وتصور لها هذه الصورة الانسية من الهيولى التي تخرج معها من زرع الرجل والمرأة وتقسّم نفسها لكل عضو بقدر ما يستحق أن يكون فيه كذلك الكلمة عضت لنفسها الأعضاء من زرع مريم الطاهرة. وصورت لها منه الصورة الانسية وصارت في كل عضو من تلك الأعضاء. وفي النفس كما يستحق كل شيء من ذلك أن يكون فيه قوة الطبيعة الانسية. وكما أنه خلق الابن الأزلي الأشباح بدءاً ثم قواها أن تجري في التوالد. وكان روح القدس هو الذي ولي ذلك منها إذ أن يديمه لها بتهيئة روح القدس وتقويته صنع الابن لنفسه ذلك الجسد الانسي من الزرع الذي ناولته المطهرة

The difference of terms used for the different creative actions is telling. The Son's initial creation of humans is *ḥalq*, but the creative action that results in the coming into being of the human part of the Messiah is making, *ṣanʿ*, since it is not *ex nihilo*, but uses matter, namely seed taken from the "pure woman". This representation of the Son as τεχνίτης or δημιουργός fits more frameworks. The male as *tekhmites*, as craftsman, has just been mentioned above. Besides, on the one hand, in the works of Christian Arab authors, *ṣanʿ* is usually a kind of creative action (its being used synonymously with *ḥalq* by ʿAmmār al-Baṣṣī, while in a differentiated manner by Theodore Abū Qurra – who used *ḥalq* for creation *ex nihilo*, while *ṣanʿ* for making from pre-existing matter – as demonstrated in Varsányi 2015:222–245), so it fits the general framework of God's creation. In this respect, *ṣanʿ* also accords with (later) Islamic theological usage (on God as *Ṣāniʿ* see Gimaret 304–305).

Theodore Abū Qurra's presentation of reproduction (*tawālud*) as a divine design for the propagation of humankind is analogous to ʿAmmār al-Baṣṣī's *tanāsul* (as referred to above, in the first example), in that both cases, reproduction, sexual propagation comes from God/the Holy Spirit for humankind.

The reference to transgression (concerning the limit of the power of the seed) is of importance as it states that the one born from Mary is not entirely divine, but only formed the seed of the woman – this way the presence of the human nature is implicitly underlined. We can also notice that this idea is also expressed by the creative terminology: while in the beginning the Son created living entities – i.e. He created them *ex nihilo*, the term *ḥalaqa* is used. The Son's making of the body from the seed of Mary is referred to with *ṣanʿ*.

The texts seen so far attest to a great variety, Theodore Abū Qurra being an example of the approach that elaborated on the Incarnation and the generation of the Messiah using the two-semen theory. So far, we could see that the East Syrian author subscribed to the one-seed theory, while the Chalcedonian to the two-seed one.

3 Dichotomy of body and soul

In the forthcoming part those examples are presented that compare the divine and human parts of the Messiah which encounter each other and then become united in the Incarnation, to the union of body and spirit, or body and soul in a human being. These examples serve to demonstrate that such a union between entities of different natures is not contrary to rationality.

بأشغال روح القدس إياها كما تصنع قوة الزرع الانسي لنفسها الأعضاء بتقوية روح القدس لم يعد الابن في ذلك حد قوة الزرع بثة وإن روح القدس تولى من الابن في ذلك كلما بليه الزرع القوة لانسي

3.1

‘Ammār al-Baṣrī’s example from the *Kitāb al-Burhān* brings the spiritual and the bodily, corporeal natures and parts of the human being as a parallel to the divine and human in the Messiah.

So, the name Christ (*ism al-Masīh*) became indicative of the Creator and His creature (*al-Ḥāliq wa-ḥalquhu*). He is a Creator, who is invisible in His divinity, and seen in his humanity (*insiyya*) as created (*mahlūq*)³⁷; just as a human being indicates spirit and body (*rūḥ wa-ḡasad*), so he is spiritual in his spirit (*rūḥānī bi-rūḥihi*) and bodily in his body (*ḡusdānī bi-ḡasadihi*) (Mikhail’s translation 393).³⁸

The first part of this passage, namely the reference to name, *ism*, implies that whatever has a unique name, can be considered a single entity. However, the indication (*dalāla*) is to two parts that are unified in a single entity. In the simile presented, the human part of the Messiah corresponds to the body, while the divine to the spirit: the bodily–spiritual (*ḡusdānī–rūḥānī*) division is consistent with the divided contributions of parents to the generation of the offspring, as it was seen in the previous section. This correspondence, however, is modified in the *Masā’il wa-l-aḡwiba*, as it is seen in the following example:

You know with a certain knowledge (*ayqanta*) that even if your mother gave birth to you as a complete human who has spirit and body (*waladatka insānan kāmilan dā rūḥ wa-badan*), she has not given birth to your spirit and your body (*lam talid rūḥaka wa-badanaka*). Your mother has given birth to you only as a human who has spirit and body, by your body, (*insānan dā rūḥ wa-badan min qibal badanika*) that can receive birth [...] and not by your spirit which stands above these things and these states. [...] We do not say that the divinity of Our Lord – that stands above every analogy – is like the position of the spirit in the human – due to its transcendence and standing above the contingent things, bodies (*aḡsād*) and bodies (*abdān*). We say that the Pure Virgin, even if she gave birth to her son as a complete Messiah that had two substances: a divine and a human one, she did not give birth to him in both of his substances, but she gave birth to him by his humanity (*nāsūt*), which was extracted (*al-muntaza’a*) from her.³⁹

³⁷ I would modify the translation as “a creature, who is seen in his humanity” based on this part of the text: *mahlūq yurā bi-l-insiyyatihi*.

³⁸ Arabic text: ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Burhān* 71:

فصار اسم المسيح يدل على الخالق وخلقته، فهو خالق لا يرى بالاهيته ومخلوق يرى بآنسييته، كما أن الإنسان يدل على روح وجسد فهو روحاني بروحه وجسداني بجسده

³⁹ Arabic text: ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Masā’il* 190–191:

أيقنت بأن أمك، وإن كانت ولدتك إنساناً كاملاً ذا روح وبدن، فإنها لم تلد روحك وبدنك. إنما أمك ولدتك إنساناً ذات روح وبدن من قبل بدنك القابل للولاد [...]. لا من قبل روحك العالية عن هذه الأمور وعن هذه الحالات. فلا نقول الآن إن لاهوت ربنا جلت وتعاليت عن كل قياس، موضع الروح من الإنسان، في علوها وارتفاعها عن الأمور الحادثة على

Here, the parallel is on the one hand reinforced: the human being with a spirit and a body, born from his mother is presented as an analogy to the divine and human parts of the Messiah; while, on the other hand, the correspondence of the divine in the Messiah with the spirit(ual) in the human is negated on the basis of divine transcendence. Because of this transcendence, the birth from the Virgin Mary is only bodily, being related to the human part. Even if this division is between the body and the spirit, however, it may bear a far resemblance to the Aristotelian notion according to which the human being is the union of body and soul, where the soul is the form of the body (*De Anima* 412a/6–21) (Smith 1983:476) Another specification can be found in this passage: while it was seen above that what is taken (*ma'ḥūd*) from Mary is only *hylic* material, here, what is extracted (*al-muntaza*) from her is “humanity”, i.e. human nature, or the human part (*nāsūt*). The emphasis on Mary’s giving birth only to the human part stands in telling contrast with Theodore Abū Qurra’s example; it serves the aim to demonstrate that Mary is not Theotokos.

3.2

It is not only the union of body and soul in the human being which is given as an analogy to the Incarnation. Sometimes body and soul are described as mutually incarnating in each other to make the parallel even stronger, while this mutual incarnation, as it implies a combination, is also a way for the union:

The soul incarnated by the body and the body by the soul (*taḡassadat an-naḡs bi-l-badan wa-l-badan bi-n-naḡs*), and by their combination (*i'tilāf*), a single human being originated. Thus, the body was called the body of man and the soul the soul of man, and not the body of the soul or the soul of the body. If the soul had not combined with the body, the unity (*waḥdāniyya*) of man would never have come into being out of them. We can say it in other words and ways, too: The Word of God became human (*ta'annasa*), but not in the following ways, as one can say e. g. the water froze, i. e. congealed in itself/its essence and became ice. Or not as milk became cheese, i. e. it clotted in itself and thus turned into cheese. Or as one can say: the youngster turned into a man, i. e. he grew up in himself and became a [grown] man. It is rather in the meaning when one says that someone armed himself (*tadarra'a*), i. e. he wore armament, or someone equipped himself: i. e. he dressed in armour, or someone wore a turban, i. e. he put on a turban. It does not mean that this person became (*ṣāra*) a turban or weapons or armament. It is this way when we say that the Word of God incarnated and became human (*taḡassada wa-ta'annasa*), that is: he created a body and he put it on (*aḥḍaṭa ḡasadan wa-labisahu*). He created a human being and wore it as an armament (*ḥalaqa insānan fa-tadarra'ahu*), combined it with His *hypostasis* in order to appear

الأجساد والأبدان. ونقول: إن البتول الطاهرة، وإن كانت ولدت ابنها مسيحاً كاملاً ذا جوهرين كاملين لاهوتي وناسوتي، فإنها لم تلده بجوهرية كليهما، بل انما ولدته من قبل ناسوته المنتزعة منها

in it (*allafahu ilā qanūmihi li-yaḏhara bihi*), and in order to make His words and deeds appear through it. He also did it in order to unify this human being with Himself in His sonship (*li-yuwaḥḥidahu ma'ahu fī bunuwwatihi*). Beginning with the time of the assumption and unification, their position is that of a single Messiah (*fa-amruhumā fī waqt al-ittiḥād wa-l-ittiḥād Masīh wāḥid*).⁴⁰

The first sentence elucidates that from the approach of the coming into being of the single human being, the incarnation is a reciprocal action shared by both components: the body and soul. The second sentence serves dialectical purposes. As Muslim accusations concerning belief in the divine's corporeality need to be dismissed; it has to be demonstrated that the Messiah's body is not God's body. The simile of the reciprocal incarnation of the body and the soul, which results in the origination of a single human being, serves as the basis for establishing that the body is the human's body and not that of the soul. This analogy is necessary to demonstrate that Christians (especially Nestorians) do not claim that God has a body in the person of the Messiah. The example of the human being is of fundamental importance, since in the following, the Logos is introduced as having become human. Similes play an important role at this point in demonstrating that humanity and body did not become integral parts of the divine; but were assumed without affecting it. The examples of water turning into ice, milk into cheese, and youngsters into adults imply an interior change, but the Son's Incarnation and humanisation are not so: these have to be contrasted. The use of the analogy of milk becoming cheese is remarkable, given that a similar one, the coagulation/curdling of milk this is often used as an allegory both by Aristotle and Galen in the description of generation, of the function of male semen in conception. (Saif 2016:190) The analogy of a human being dressing up or putting on a piece of clothing is a frequently used one among Christian authors. For example, Abū Rā'īṭa expresses himself in a figurative way, when he says that the Logos (*al-Kalima*) put on the garment (*sirbāl*) of a human body.⁴¹

3.3

Turning to the Syrian-Orthodox theologian, he also uses predominant Monophysite analogies to serve as "a *mysterion* for the Incarnation". Among them, we find that of

⁴⁰ Arabic text: 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Masā'il* 196–197:

كما أنه إذا تجسدت النفس بالبدن والبدن بالنفس فقام منهما بانتلافهما إنسان واحد، سمي البدن بدن الإنسان والنفس نفس الإنسان ولا بدن النفس ولا نفس البدن، ولو لم تألف النفس بالبدن لم تقم وحدانية الإنسان منهما أبداً. وقد نقول أيضاً بلفظة أخرى ونحو آخر إن الله الكلمة تأنس لا على معنى قول القائل: الماء ملح أي جمدان بذاته فصار ملحاً. وكقوله إن اللبن تجبن أي اعتقد بذاته فصار جبناً. وكقوله الصبي ترجل أي شب بذاته فصار رجلاً، بل على معنى قول القائل: إن فلاناً تدرع أي ليس درعاً، وكقوله إن فلاناً تسلح أي ليس سلاحاً، وكقوله إن فلاناً تعمم أي ليس عمامة، لا إنه صار عمامة أو سلاحاً أو درعاً. كذلك بقولنا إن الله الكلمة تجسد وتأنس أي أحدث جسداً فلبسه وخلق إنساناً فتدرعه وألفه إلى قنومه ليظهر به قوله واعماله وليوحده معه في بنوته. فلنا فأمرهما جميعاً في وقت الاتخاذ والاتحاد مسيح واحد

⁴¹ Abū Rā'īṭa: *Fī iḥbāt dīn an-naṣrāniyya* 151.

the soul and human body forming the unity of the human being, which was especially favoured and used at least since the elaboration on it by Severus of Antioch (d. 538) (Griffith 1980:193). As it is presented below, it also evokes the (Platonic) notion of both men and women being (sexless) souls embodied (C.f. Smith 1983:472).

Is not every soul (*nafs*) of every one of us also incarnated (*mutağassida*) in a corporeal body (*ğasad*) [to make] a complete human being (*li-kamāl al-insān*)? Do you separate [the soul] from its spirituality (*rūḥāniyya*) and its immateriality (*lutf*) in its embodiment (*tağassud*) or in the transformation of the body (*intiqāl al-ğasad ‘an ḥālihi*) [back] into its first state [of death]?⁴² The soul (*an-nafs*) is always a soul and the body (*ğasad*) is always a body without the composite (*al-murakkab*) of these two being two different things (*iṭṭnayn*);⁴³ rather it is one in the union (*ittiḥād*) [of the two]. [...]

The human analogy serves to refute charges according to which the Incarnation and/or the embodiment would be contrary to reason. Though here the body-soul pair is mentioned, Abū Rā’iṭa, like ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, speaks about a spiritual nature. The unified entity is explicitly stated to be one, even though the presence of two components is acknowledged. The reference to the complete human being as one made of a body and a soul/spirit is articulated in the same fashion as we could see in ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī’s case. The analogy is then continued:

Just as the fire is embodied (*mutağassima*) in some corporeal bodies (*ğusūm*), and the sun in the disc, and the soul in the body (*an-nafs bi-l-ğasad*), without any of them being transformed from its ousia (*ğawhar*) [into something else], just so is the teaching about the Word [of God], and even more so than this, in that He has no space and no measure (*fusha, miqdār*). [The Word] is incarnated (*tağassadat*) in a corporeal body (*bi-ğism*), possessing a rational soul (*dū nafs manṭiqiyya*)⁴⁴ in a true, eternal, necessary⁴⁵ Incarnation (*tağassud ḥaqīqī, dā’im, lāzim*), without separation (*bilā tabāyun*), alteration (*tabaddul*) or change (*tağyīr*). It is the Word [of God] eternally, and the body a body eternally, without that in which they are joined together being two. Rather, the one incarnated (*mutağassid*) hypostasis is true God, and He is a true human being; He is one, not two, as we have mentioned (Keating’s translation, 231).⁴⁶

⁴² As there is no reference to “back” in the Arabic text, as inserted into Keating’s translation, in my view, probably the transformation of the body away from its initial “*badī*” – [i. e. *bad’ī*] state is intended.

⁴³ “*min ḡayr an yakūn al-murakkab min ḥādayn al-muḥtalifayn iṭṭnayn*”: my interpretation or corr.: without the composite of these two different things being two.

⁴⁴ This part of the passage: *bi-ğism dī nafs manṭiqiyya*, i.e. ‘a body that has a rational soul’ means a human being in its complete form.

⁴⁵ *lāzim* could mean inseparable or permanent in this context.

⁴⁶ Arabic text: Abū Rā’iṭa, *Risāla* 31:

Here, a variety of analogies is presented, and it is remarkable that while in case of the fire and the body in which it is burning, the sun and the disc, and the soul and the body, the author writes about embodiment; in case of the Word, he refers to Incarnation. The reference to the body, or more generally to the human, who is indicated by the body possessing a rational soul (*ġism dū nafs manṭiqiyya*), runs parallel to ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī’s “complete body (*badan tāmm*), animated by a knowing/rational soul (*mutanaffis bi-nafs ‘allāma*)”, as seen above. The body-soul duality, which forms a unique human being, without his being two is applied to the Word of God incarnating in the human being, forming a union with it, without “separation” (Keating’s translation for *tabāyun*, alternatively: difference, opposition). The analogy posits the soul and the *Kalima*, as well as the body and the human being side by side. While in ‘Ammār’s case there was a unity of meaning, a unique Messiah with two natures, substances, or hypostases; here, though two different substantialities are acknowledged, a unity is enforced in accordance with the Syrian-Orthodox Christology.

3.4

The similes are corroborated, and explicitly stated to be a *mysterion* for the Incarnation in the following extract:

The sun and its light, and the coal and its fire, and the soul and its body (*an-nafs wa-ġasaduhā*) are a *mysterion* for the Incarnation of the Word of God in the body (*sirr taġassud Kalimat Allāh bi-l-ġasad*). For just as each one of these three things mentioned is embodied in what embodies it (*mutaġassim fīmā taġassama bihi*), without change in its state or alteration in its *ousia* (*ġawhar*), and without the thing with which it is embodied being two, but rather that it is in truth (*bi-ḥaqq*) one, just so is it in the teaching on the Word of God: [it is an] Incarnation [of the Word in] a body (*taġassadat ġasadan*) possessing a soul (*dā nafs*), through Mary, the immaculate, without change in its state nor alteration in its *ousia*, without being limited by the body; rather, the body is limited by [the Word]. And [the Word] and the body are one in a real and eternal union, without difference [like that which] occurs in number, and they are not drawn to become two. Yet, a substantial distinction (*farq ġawharī*) is inherent in [the body]⁴⁷ and enduring in it, just like the substantial distinction

أو ليس كل نفس كل واحد منا أيضاً متجسدة بالجسد لكمال الإنسان. افتخر جوها عن روحانيتها ولطفها بتجسدها أو بانتقال الجسد عن حاله بدى. فالنفس نفس أبدأ والجسد جسد أبدأ من غير أن يكون المركب من هذين المختلفين اثنين بل واحد بالاتحاد

فكما أن النار متجسمة ببعض الجسوم والشمس بالعين والنفس بالجسد من غير أن ينتقل كل واحد منها عن جوهره هكذا والقول في الكلمة وأفضل من هذا بما لا فسحة له ولا مقدار. تجسدت بجسم ذي نفس منطقية بتجسد حقيقي دائم لازم بلا تباين من غير تبدل ولا تغيير. هي الكلمة أبدأ والجسد جسد أبدأ من غير أن يكون المجتمع منها اثنين بل أقنوم واحد متجسد الإله حق وهو إنسان حق فهو واحد لا اثنين كما ذكرنا

⁴⁷ though ... notwithstanding

between the sun and the fire and the soul, and those [things] which are embodied (*tağassamat*) in them (Keating's translation: 235, 237).⁴⁸

The division between embodiment and Incarnation is seen to be a conscious and consistent one, as well as the reference to the human part taken in this Incarnation: i. e. a body possessing a soul. The issue of limitation appears here as well, just as in 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's case, seen above.

In this section, we could see East Syrian and Syrian-Orthodox examples that presented-explained the coming into being of the Messiah with the use of the human body and soul parallel, and in the following section we will also witness some extracts from the Chalcedonian theologian, too. The question of the union and at the same time of the distinction between the two substantialities of the Messiah is the core issue of the Christologies of all the communities that the authors examined here represent, and some of the similarities are due to the shared confession of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed on behalf of all these communities. According to this, "the "one Lord Jesus Christ" is one single subject, but there is a divine/human duality of predication [...] a divinity/humanity, *lāhūt/nāsūt* distinction within the one Christ" (Swanson 1992:245), which came to be explained and defended against charges of absurdity most easily by the analogy of the union/distinction of two parts in the human.

4 Further combinations and considerations

In this section, those examples will be presented and studied that combine the gendered approach to reproduction with the dichotomy of body and soul/spirit in order to defend the doctrine of Incarnation.

4.1

In the first example which is from 'Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Burhān*, we can see that the body is formed by the contribution of the father, but the human is not a complete human without his soul/spirit – the two hypostases of the Messiah will be likened to this.

As the body (*badan*) of the human is formed/fashioned (*mağbūl*) [from] the seed (*zar*) of his father, and even if he would not deserve on his own to be

⁴⁸ Keating's translation: 235, 237; Arabic text: Abū Rā'īṭa, *Risāla* 31–32:

فالشمس ونورها والجمرة ونارها والنفس وجسدها سر لتجسد كلمة الله بالجسد. فكما أن كل واحد من هذا الثلاثة المذكورة متجسم فيما تجسم به بلا تغيير عن حاله ولا تبديل عن جوهره من غير أن يكون مع الشيء الذي تجسم به اثنين بل واحد بحق فهكذا والقول في كلمة الله تجسدت جسداً ذا نفس من مريم الطاهرة بلا تغيير من حالها ولا تبديل من جوهرها من غير أن تحد من الجسد بل الجسد المحدود منها وهي والجسد واحد باتحاد حقيقي دائم بلا تباين تبايناً يجري عليه العدد ويدعوا إلى اثنين وإن كان فرقاً جوهرياً لازماً له ثابتاً فيه كثبوت فرقي جوهرى الشمس والنار والنفس والذين تجسدت بهم

called human without the soul (*nafs*) that united with him (*al-muttaḥida ma 'ahu*), neither would he deserve to be called son of the father who generated him (*waladahu*), due to their indivisible sharing of a unique humanity and a unique sonship – together and equally, and he is not a son to anyone but the human, and he is nothing but the son of the human as long as he lives. [...] it is just according to the necessary verity that the body of the human be called one of the two parts of the form (*ḡutta*) of the human, and one of the two substances of the sonship of the human. [...] The hypostasis of the humanity of the Messiah, that is formed⁴⁹ from the nature of the pure Mary is like this – it is not possible to call him Messiah on his own, without the substance of the divinity, nor [to call him] the son of God without it [i. e. the divine substance].⁵⁰

Before turning to the actual examination of the combination of the reproduction/generation theory with the dichotomy of body and soul, let us mention that here 'Ammār al-Baṣrī talks about the unity of body and soul – while previously it was the body and the spirit: his usage is not consistent; it seems that for him, only the division between the material and the immaterial, the corporeal and the spiritual/psychical is of crucial importance. Here, the argumentation is set into the context of human sonship.

The bodily formation of a human being from the seed of the father, with the complete form of a human being consisting of the body and the soul is given as an analogy to the formation of the Messiah's humanity from the nature of Mary, while the complete form of the Messiah is made up from his humanity and divinity. It is emphasized that the human part, namely the body is formed from the matter provided by the mother. The remarkable feature is that sex differences are blurred, and the bodily contribution of the father in the case of the unity of human filiation is rendered analogous to that of the Mother in case of the unity of the Messiah. Besides, there is a slipping in the analogy: while the basis of the simile is a father, who generates a son, who comes to be called the son of the father together with the soul; the parallel brings the human hypostasis of the Messiah that is born from Mary, but together with the divinity, to be called the son of God – not Mary. If the analogy is introduced through the human parents: i. e. the father in the first, while Mary in the second case,

⁴⁹ The text reads as *maḡbūla*. Due to its frequent appearance in such contexts, I find a reading of *maḡbūla* also justifiable in the meaning of 'conceived'.

⁵⁰ Arabic text: 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Masā'il* 186–187:

كما أن بدن الإنسان المجبول زرع أبيه، وإن كان لا يستحق أن يسمى على انفراده دون النفس المتحدة معه إنساناً، ولا الأب الذي ولده ابناً لا شتراكهما شركة لا تقسم في إنسية واحدة وبنوة واحدة جميعاً سواء، فليس بنو غير إنسان ولا غير ابن الإنسان ما دام حياً [...] بل قد يحق على الحقيقة الواجبة أن يسمى بدن الإنسان أحد جزئي جثة الإنسان وأحد جوهر بنوة الإنسان كذلك فنوم بشرية المسيح المجبولة من طباع مريم الطاهرة، وإن كان [لا] يجوز أن يدعى على انفراده دون فنوم اللاهوت مسيحاً، ولا لله دونه ابناً

then the son should be called the son of that parent, furthermore, the soul of the human would correspond to the divinity in the Messiah. If it is not so, then some parts of the correspondence might be covert: as the human father generates his son (by his body), so is the divine hypostasis generated by God in the Messiah (in his divinity) – but the soul of the human should then be paralleled to the human hypostases in the Messiah.

4.2

The second example also emphasizes the fatherly origin of the formation of the body, while the unity of the human being is complete by a creation of a living soul into it – this unity serves as the analogy for the unity of the Messiah and his Incarnation.

Due to His grace and might, He sculpted (*anḥata*) a pure and clean form (*šabaḥan zakīyyan tāhīran*)⁵¹ of their substance, and He incarnated in it, and assumed it as a garment for His divinity (*tağassadahu wa-ttaḥaḍahu libāsan li-lāhūtihi*), in order to necessitate the reality of pre-eternal sonship for him (*li-yūğiba lahu bi-dālika ḥaqq al-bunuwwa*), and to make him equal to Himself in this sonship. We know that the matter (*mādda*) out of which your body was formed/generated (*kuwwina*) as a body, is of the essence (*ṣulb*) of your father, then, out of the sperm (*nutfa*) a body and limbs and members were formed (*ṣuwwira*). After the creation (*ḥalq*) of the body and its parts had been completed, (subsequently) a living soul (*nafs ḥayya*) was created (*ḥuliqa*) in it, but not from the essence of your father. Then, from the essence of your father and your soul, which was not begotten by your father, and which is not from the nature (*tibāʿ*) of the sperm (*nutfa*), you became [were made to become] a unique son of your father, from the seed (*zarʿ*) of your father, verily.⁵²

This extract introduces new ideas, since the Incarnation happens in a sensible image or form (*šabaḥ*), not a body this time. However, this form must be of a corporeal nature, given that it is sculpted, and is the means by which the Incarnation occurs. *Tağassud*, the Incarnation in a clear form is synonymous with *ittiḥād*, assuming this form as a garment. As a parallel of the Son's Incarnation in the pure form, the composition of the human body and soul is presented. The human body is expressed by *badan* and is combined with *nafs*, while the Incarnation is still derived from *ğasad*. A point which is worthy of examination here is the sequence of man's

⁵¹ I interpreted *šabaḥ* as form but see also Lamoreaux's translation of *ašbāḥ* as living entities, in Theodore Abū Qurrah's text, cited under 2.6. above.

⁵² Arabic text: 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Masā'il* 193:

انحت من جوهرهم بفضله وجبروته شبحاً زكياً طاهراً فتجسده واتخذة لباساً للاهوته ليوجب له بذلك حق البنوة التي لم تظل فتصيره معه فيها مثله كما قد نعلم من المادة التي كون بدنك منها بدنأ، وانما كانت من صلب ابيك، ثم صور من النطفة بدن وجوارح وأوصال. حتى اذا كملت خلقة البدن وجوارحه خلقت فيه من بعد ذلك نفس حية لا من صلب ابيك، ثم صور من صلب ابيك، ونفسك لم يلدتها أبوك ولا من طباع نطفته، فصيرت من زرع ابيك ابناً واحداً بحق لا ابيك

creation and growth, since it may fit more than one framework. On the one hand, it may parallel the *ḥadīṭ* on man's creation, where the sequence is similar – first creation (*ḥalq*) from the sperm (*nufḥa*), and then ensoulment: “The creation of each of you is completed (*yuḡma* ‘*ḥalquhu*) in his mother's womb for forty days in the form of a drop, then he becomes a clot of blood for the same interval, then a morsel of flesh for the same period. Then an angel is sent to him, who breathes the spirit (*rūḥ*) into him ...” (. an-Nawawī 1977:37). Of course, the establishment of a direct relationship between the two texts would be far-fetched. However, this tradition can be found both in al-Buḥārī's and Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥs*, and in at-Tirmidī's *Sunan*, etc. which implies that this tradition had been widely known and accepted in the ninth century, when ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī wrote the *Kitāb al-masā'il wa-l-aḡwiba*. Details that suggest some relationship are in the choice of the terms *nufḥa* for sperm (previously we could see *manī* for semen and *zar'* for seed), which is also its Qur'ānic name (e. g. 22:5 and 55:14),⁵³ and *ḥalq* for creation. When explaining Christian teachings, ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī might have deliberately used an imagery known to and accepted by Muslims.

On the other hand, turning back to the underlying theories in general, we can see that the limbs and members are formed (*ṣuwwira*) out of the sperm. Though the mention of the only one male seed would indicate an Aristotelian approach according to which the male semen produces form and impetus from which the embryo grows (Horowitz 1976:185–186) – the use of the passive voice implies another forming agent. The reference to ensoulment is also remarkable: the soul is created into the body only after the completion of its creation, i. e. after its formation – this idea could fit both frameworks mentioned above, so ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, providing this parallel, could doubly avoid accusations of absurdity.

4.3

In Abū Rā' ita's case, we can note the presence of the division of the spiritual and the corporeal (while previously he talked about the soul and the body – once again, the usage is not fixed), where the human part of the Messiah is mentioned as coming from the Virgin Mary through a corporeal birth, yet, in the unified form of the spiritual and the corporeal.

They may say: “How is it possible that one who is without flesh (*laysa bi-ḡism*)⁵⁴ be born of a corporeal (*ḡusmāniyya*) woman? Flesh (*ḡism*) can only be born from flesh.⁵⁵ You should know that it is impossible that what is

⁵³ See also Ebrahim 2001:230–231.

⁵⁴ This part of the quote could also be translated as: who is not a (physical) body.

⁵⁵ Given the sentence structure and also the change of the emphasis in meaning, the translation of the phrase would be more punctual as “from flesh/body only flesh/body can be born”

without flesh⁵⁶ be born.” It should be said to them: If we had described the Word [of God] as having been born from a corporeal woman free of a body (*imra’ a ġusmāniyya muġarrada min ġayr ġasad*), then you would [be correct] in this statement. However, when our description is: “the birth of the Word from a corporeal (*ġusmāniyya*) woman is a corporeal (*ġusmānī*) birth”, there is no fault necessary for us in this (*lam yalzamnā fī dālīka ‘ayb*).⁵⁷ The “being born” only belongs to the state of the body (*ġasad*), which is taken (*ma’ hūd*) from the woman and unified with [the Word], because it is born from her as spiritual (*rūhāniyya*) and corporeal (*ġusdānī*). [...]

In this part of the passage, the opponent starts with a *reductio ad absurdum* argument concerning the corporeal birth of the divine part of the Messiah. The answer reflects on this move, acknowledging that such a claim would be false, but modifying the proposition to a corporeal birth, in which the body of the Messiah is included, so that the proposition does not conclude with an error. The body is described then as being “taken” (*ma’ hūd* – as in the text of ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī) and corporeally born, however, in the unified form of body and Word, that includes both the bodily and the spiritual. The division was necessary to respond to the *reductio ad absurdum*, however, it needs to be elaborated on in order to explain the unity of these two counterparts. – Before turning to that elaboration, let us notice a similarity to ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī’s example where the impossibility of a woman giving birth to God was emphasized. The human analogy is introduced for this, where embodied spirits are born from the mothers by a bodily birth.

Is not something similar in a certain way said about the births of humans from their mothers as the birth of the Word from Mary? Are they born from their mothers as spirits without bodies, or embodied spirits (*arwāḥ mutabaddina*)? And since they are not born simply as spirits, can it be denied that they have a bodily birth (*walūd mutabaddin*)? Just as it is impossible that spirits be born from mothers if they are not united with bodies and are born of [mothers] because of their being united with bodies from the beginning of their creation (*ma’ a awwal ḥilqatihinna*), so is the teaching about the incarnated Word: [the Word] was born because of the state of the body, which was taken from Mary, and incarnated with [the Word], [the Word was] not free from a body, as you think.

The embodiment of souls/spirits in bodies of humans was seen above, as well as its serving as an analogy for the Incarnation. Here, the gendered aspects also gain significance, where the impossibility of the birth of the immaterial divinity from a corporeal woman is emphasized. A new feature in this example lies in the reference to the unity of body and soul right from the beginning of creation, which implies that

⁵⁶ Or, as above: “who/what is not flesh”.

⁵⁷ Or: “does not necessarily follow a fault from this”, as *lazima* in argumentation usually means that a conclusion necessarily follows from a proposition.

Abū Rā'īṭa does not subscribe to a gradual ensoulment but implies the presence of spirit in the embryo right from the conception. The third step is the *bi-lā kayfa* argumentation:

Now if they say: “How does something without a body (*mā laysa bi-ḡasad*)⁵⁸ become incarnated (*yataḡassad*)?” it should be said to them: As for the “how”, we are in agreement that we have no knowledge. But our ignorance of the “how” does not invalidate our teaching concerning it, [...] And the dwelling (*sukūn*) of the spirit [in] the body no one disputes, but with regard to the “how” of its dwelling, this is concealed and hidden from us. But this does not hinder us from acknowledging the creation of creatures and the dwelling of the spirit in the body. This is the same with the teaching of the union of the Word and the body (*ittihād al-Kalima al-ḡasad*): we believe it and do not deny it, even if this is so subtle that we do not understand it (Keating’s translation 261, 263).⁵⁹

This part of the quote is of interest due to the Islamic phraseology, which is deliberately used, the parallel it offers with Islamic thought, as Josef van Ess assumes:

[Muslim] Theologians, [...] used *bi-lā kayfa* [...] in the sense of “without qualifying God in a way only to be applied to His creation”; they presented it as a middle course between a literal acceptance of the anthropological statements in the Scripture (= *takyīf, tašbīh*) on one side and their metaphorical interpretation in the Mu’tazilite sense (*ta’wīl = ta’īl*) on the other (van Ess 2000:344).

Abū Rā'īṭa’s example does not refer to God’s essence when emphasising this approach; instead, he refers to God’s or more specifically to the Son’s Incarnation. The passage does not refer to anthropomorphic issues, yet it uses the known *bi-lā kayfa* approach in order to say that the given issue is beyond the reach of human perception. He probably deliberately used this terminology; and we may see that

⁵⁸ Or: “what is not a body”, as above.

⁵⁹ Arabic text: Abū Rā'īṭa, *Risāla* 47–48:

فإن قالوا كيف يجوز في من ليس بجسم أن يولد من امرأة جسمانية وإنما يولد من الجسم جسم لتعلموا أنه لا سبيل إلى أن يولد ما ليس بجسم. يقال لهم إنه لو كان وصفنا في الكلمة ولدت من امرأة جسمانية مجردة من غير جسد لكان لكم في ذلك مقال فأما إذ صار وصفنا ولود الكلمة من امرأة جسمانية ولوداً جسمانياً لم يلزمنا في ذلك عيب. فأما ولد لحال الجسد المأخوذ من المرأة المتحد بها لأنها ولدت منها روحانية جسدانية أو ليس القول في ولود الأدميين من أمهاتهم شبيه بها في بعد أنحائه [!] في ولود الكلمة من مريم. والمولودون من أمهاتهم أهم أرواح من غير أبدان أم أرواح متبدنة. وإذ لم يلدن أرواحاً مجردة تتغى عنها ولودها متبدنة. فكما أن الأرواح لو لم تكن متحدة بالأبدان لم يكن سبيل إلى أن يولدن من الأمهات وقد يولدن منهن لاتحادهن بالأبدان مع أول خلقتهن. هكذا القول في الكلمة المتجسدة ولدت لحال الجسد المأخوذ من مريم المتجسد بها لا مجردة من الجسد كما ظننتم فإن قالوا فكيف يتجسد ما ليس بجسد فقال لهم أما كيف فنحن مقرون أنه لا علم لنا. وليس جهلنا بالكيف بالذي يبطل قولنا فيه ... وسكون الروح البدن مما لا يمتري فيه أحد. فأما كيفية سكونها فمخفي عنا مستتر. وليس ذلك بالذي يمنعنا من أن نفر بخلق الخلائق وسكون الروح البدن. هكذا والقول في اتحاد الكلمة الجسد نحن مصدقون به غير جاحدين له وإن لطف ذلك فلم نعلمه

Christian-Muslim parallels are offered in methodology besides terminology. Abū Rā'īṭa is not the only Christian theologian to benefit from this argument, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī is also seen to make use of it.⁶⁰

4.4

As in the case of the previous two authors, we may say also based on Theodore Abū Qurra's example (taken from *On Our Salvation*), that he adhered to the tradition of interpreting the unity of body and soul, and as in the case of Abū Rā'īṭa, we can see this adherence by their simultaneous creation.

The eternal Son who was begotten of the Father before the ages (*al-mawlūd min Allāh*), who shares the Father's essence (*min ḡawhar Allāh*) and is his equal, in his mercy came down from heaven to Adam's seed and took up residence in the womb of the Virgin Mary (*ḡalla fī raḡm Maryam al-'Aḡrā'*), who had been purified (*al-muṭaḡhara*) through the Holy Spirit. He took from her a body (*ittaḡaḡa minḡa ḡasadan*) that he fashioned (*ḡabala*) for himself, along with a mind and soul (*bi-'aql wa-naḡs*) and became a human being (*ta'annasa*) from the Holy Spirit and from the Pure Virgin (Lamoreaux's translation 131).⁶¹

The notion of the simultaneous creation of body and soul, as well as the tripartite constitution (*soma, psyche, pneuma*) of man is also in line with the Patristic tradition.⁶²

⁶⁰ "There is also no answer to the question of the mode (*kayfiyya*) of God's Incarnation (*taḡassud*) and the union (*ittihād*) of the body (*al-ḡasad*) with the incarnating [one] from the aspect of this sonship. What we are obliged to answer is the question whether He incarnated and whether He unified [with the body]. As for the meaning of His Incarnation and union, we have already given an answer to it by the one that you have heard. As for how He incarnated and how He unified [with the body]: there's no way to perceive (dark) and answer it." Arabic text: 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Masā'il* 214:

أما أن يكون قد خلق، وقد علموا، وأما ماذا خلق من العالم وأهله، فلم يجهلوا. وأما كيف خلق وكيف صنع من لا حركة ولا علاج، فلا سبيل إلى معرفته والإخبار عنه، لأن المخلوق لا يفعل فعلاً من دون الحركات والعلاج. كذلك لا جواب لمسألة عن كيفية تجسد الله واتحاد الجسد مع المتجسد في جهة تلك النبوة، الذي يلزمنا الجواب فيه من السؤال أن هل تجسد وهل اتحد. فأما معنى تجسده واتحاده فقد أجبنا فيه بالذي سمعت. فأما كيف تجسد وكيف اتحد فلا سبيل إلى دركه والجواب عنه

⁶¹ Arabic text: *Maymar fī annahu lā yuḡfar* 85:

الابن الأزلي المولود من الله قبل كل دهور الذي هو من جوهر الله وعدله هبط من السماء برحمته إلى ذرية آدم وحل في رحم مريم العذراء المطهرة بروح القدس فاتخذ منها جسداً جبله لنفسه بعقل ونفس. وتأنس من روح القدس ومن مريم المطهرة

⁶² For examples including those of Gregory of Nyssa and John of Damascus, see G. W. Lampe 1961:1362.

Conclusion

Working with a philological–terminological approach, I explored the terms and forms applied either for the body or for the incarnation along with related notions. Through extracts taken from the works of the Chalcedonian (‘Melkite’) Theodore Abū Qurra, the Syrian-Orthodox (‘Jacobite’) Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidma Abū Rā’iṭa, and the East Syrian (‘Nestorian’) ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, I demonstrated that due to their different Christologies, they applied different theories on gender, reproduction, body and soul, when they elaborated on the Incarnation and birth of the Messiah. While the ‘Nestorian’ author applied a one-seed theory that is mostly in line with the Aristotelian teaching, the ‘Melkite’ one, in order to secure the teaching concerning Mary as Theotokos, subscribed to a two-seed theory, which is probably Galenian; while the ‘Jacobite’ theologian was seen to adapt his teaching to a Platonic notion of men and women being souls embodied. All authors were seen to turn to these theories in an attempt to rationalize their teaching and defend it against charges of absurdity. Parallels from the Quran, *ḥadīth*, or Islamic philosophy could be frequently noted either on the level of terminology, or on that of imagery. All three authors exploited the notion of the soul/spirit-body duality of human beings, in order to provide an analogy for the humanity and divinity of the Messiah, but the (lexical) use was not fixed: alternating appearances of soul or spirit, or different forms for body (*ḡasad*, *badan*) were seen. Other questions that were linked to the main issue include that of ensoulment, or embryology and spermatogenesis. All three authors were seen to apply *hylomorphism*, too. As a conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the gendered approach as far as the spectrum of this essay is concerned. I need to emphasize its relevance for the texts written by ninth-century Christian Arab authors, the application of which made it possible to disclose so far hidden layers.

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