

# Theodore Abū Qurrah and John the Deacon

*John C. Lamoreaux*

**T**HEODORE ABŪ QURRAH (d. *ca* 820) is a figure well known to specialists in the study of early Christian Arabic literature, and for good reasons.<sup>1</sup> Not only was he one of the first Christians to write in Arabic, he was also one of the first to offer a sustained theological defense of Christianity against the claims of Islam. While few details are known about the events of Theodore's life, the situation is otherwise with his theological labors. Over a dozen of his Arabic works have survived and been published.<sup>2</sup> Others are still unedited.<sup>3</sup> Another forty or so Greek treatises are extant and published, while others remain to be edited.<sup>4</sup> Most of Theodore's Greek works and yet other texts attributed to him have also been preserved

<sup>1</sup>For details see Sidney H. Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah: The Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian Writer of the First Abbasid Century* (Tel Aviv 1992); and John C. Lamoreaux, "The Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah Revisited," *DOP* 56 (2002) 25–40.

<sup>2</sup>The standard editions: Qustantīn al-Bāshā, *Mayāmir Thāwudūrus Abī Qurrah Usquf Harrān* (Beirut 1904), hereafter cited as *B* followed by page and line number; Ignace Dick, "Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra," *Le Muséon* 72 (1959) 53–67; Sidney H. Griffith, "Some Unpublished Arabic Sayings Attributed to Theodore Abu Qurrah," *Le Muséon* 92 (1979) 27–35; Ignace Dick, *Traité de l'existence du Créateur et de la vraie religion* (Patrimoine arabe chrétien 3 [Jounieh/Rome 1982]), and *Traité du culte des icônes* (Patr. ar. chrét. 10 [1986]); John C. Lamoreaux, "An Unedited Tract against the Armenians by Theodore Abū Qurrah," *Le Muséon* 105 (1992) 327–341.

<sup>3</sup>For an overview of these unpublished works see Khalil Samir, "al-Jadīd fī sīrat Thāwudūrus Abī Qurrah wa-āthārihi," *al-Mashriq* 73 (1999) 433–436.

<sup>4</sup>*PG* 97.1461–1610, 94.594–596, 1595–1598. To my knowledge, Theodore's unedited Greek works have never been surveyed.

in mediaeval Georgian.<sup>5</sup> Recently Reinhold Glei and Adel Theodor Khoury prepared the first critical edition of Theodore's seventeen Greek works on Islam.<sup>6</sup> Their edition has provided numerous pleasant surprises: not least the clarification of many of the textual difficulties presented by the early printed versions of these works. By far the most intriguing aspect of their work, however, has been their conclusion that these seventeen treatises were not in fact written by Theodore, but are instead the labors of an otherwise unknown John the Deacon, who claimed to be transmitting in written form accounts of debates between Theodore and a variety of Muslim interlocutors. This paper seeks to clarify the relation between these seventeen works newly attributed to John and the corpus of Theodore's writings, arguing, first, that only a portion of these seventeen works should be attributed to John, and, second, that in his own compositions John is likely to have made direct use of Theodore's written works.

*John the Deacon and the recovery of his work*

Glei and Khoury's reattribution of Theodore's seventeen works on Islam is a result, largely, of their discovery of the lost preface to John's work. From this preface it is now clear that John entitled his work: *From the Refutations of the Saracens by Theodore Abū Qurrah, the Bishop of Haran, as Reported by John the Deacon*. This preface John opened with a meditation on the cosmic struggle between God and the Devil. Heresies, he says, are befalling the Church. This is because the Devil always seeks

<sup>5</sup>A small portion of the Georgian versions of Theodore's works is available in Leila Datiashvili, *Teodore Abuk'ura: T'rakt'at'ebi da dialogebi targmnili berjnułidan Arsen Iq'altoelis mier* (Tbilisi 1980). For an overview (incomplete) of unpublished works, see K. Kekelidze, *Ucxo avt'orebi jvel kartul lit'erat'uraši*, in his *Et'iudebi jveli kartuli lit'erat'uris ist'oriidan V* (Tbilisi 1957) 55–57. It may be noted that of the twenty-two items there cited, only one (no. 19) is present in Datiashvili's edition.

<sup>6</sup>Reinhold Glei and Adel Theodor Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra: Schriften zum Islam* (Corpus Islamo-Christianum, Series Graeca 3 [Würzburg 1995]: hereafter cited as G followed by page numbers and, where necessary, line numbers).

to undermine what God establishes. It is as with Job. When God declared Job righteous, the Devil sought to show that he was not. Even so, John suggests, when God said that the Church would remain inviolate, the Devil set himself to show that God is a liar, and it is through heresies that he does this. God does not leave the Church undefended, however. For each heresy the Devil incites, God provides her with a defender. One of these defenders is of special note, John writes: this is “Theodore, the most blessed and most philosophical bishop of Haran,” who “held up to public scorn the impious religion” of the Muslims and “in his divinely inspired writings showed to all that it was worthy of derision” (G88.43–47). John then claims often to have been present when Theodore debated with Muslims and suggests that his readers will benefit if he records some of what transpired at those debates.<sup>7</sup> As for the seventeen dialogues that follow in the edition of Gleason and Khoury, these, according to their editors, are John’s record of those debates.

The discovery of John’s preface is important. For one thing, it has resolved a long-standing controversy as to whether Theodore was a disciple of John of Damascus. A corrupt version of the title to John’s work had long been known (PG 94.1596B). It read, however, not “as reported by John the Deacon,” but “as reported by John of Damascus.” Through a variety of means, this has been taken to suggest that Theodore was the Damascene’s disciple, perhaps physical, more likely spiritual. There is no need to rehearse the details of the controversy,<sup>8</sup> which is now effectively moot. At the same time, if there is no longer reason to think that Theodore was a disciple of the Damascene, there is also no longer any reason to continue advocating what might be

<sup>7</sup>What follows (G88.53–56) seems likely not to be part of John’s preface, but rather the introduction to the first of his dialogues (*Opusculum* 18). This is also how Datiashvili (*supra* n.5: 96.3–6) interpreted the passage.

<sup>8</sup>For an overview see Griffith (*supra* n.1) 19.

called the long chronology for his life,<sup>9</sup> the primary evidence for which has been this corrupt version of the title to John's work.

The discovery of John's preface is important for yet other reasons, not least for the further questions it raises. If it is correct that none of these works can any longer be attributed to Theodore, we suddenly find that a good portion of our evidence for the earliest stage of the Orthodox response to Islam has begun to look rather evanescent. These works can no longer be attributed to someone about whom we know something as to the social context in which he wrote. Rather, they have now to be ascribed to an otherwise unknown John the Deacon, about whom we know nothing, apart from what little he chose to tell us in his preface. And as for that preface, how are we to evaluate its claims? Is there any reason to believe John when he says that he knew Theodore and attended his debates? And what of his claim to have been familiar with Theodore's writings? If this is true, might it not have been from those writings that he drew his knowledge of Theodore's teachings? If so, where did John live? under Islam? or in Byzantium? More importantly, when did he live? Many important questions, thus, remain to be resolved. In this regard, two subjects form the focus of the present article.

It is necessary, first, to reexamine the textual tradition of John's work. Is it the case that it originally comprised a preface and seventeen dialogues? In reconstructing John's work, Glei and Khoury utilized only a part of the relevant manuscript evidence. In particular, they did not take into consideration a number of important witnesses in Greek and Georgian. These witnesses would suggest, instead, that only a portion of these seventeen dialogues should be attributed to John. Furthermore, the evidence of these witnesses can provide some fairly specific

<sup>9</sup>Its primary exponent has been Joseph Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'Église melchite du V<sup>e</sup> au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* II.2 (Louvain 1988) 109–110.

data as to when John flourished. Second, John's dialogues are in many ways quite unlike any of the Arabic works of Theodore. They are far more openly hostile to Islam. Although Theodore often engages Islam in his Arabic works, he does so in a delicate manner, usually without specifying the identity of his opponents. John's dialogues, on the other hand, are acerbic, even to the point of arguing that Mohammed was both a demoniac and the disciple of an Arian. Nothing even remotely similar to this is found in Theodore's Arabic works. More troubling: many of the polemical themes in John's text are, quite simply, without parallel in Theodore's Arabic works. Is there, then, any reason to think that John's dialogues reflect the teachings of Theodore?

*The textual tradition of John the Deacon's work*

In preparing their edition of John's work, Glei and Khoury utilized a total of twelve manuscripts, all from well-known European collections: two from Munich, three from Paris, six from the Vatican, and one from Vienna.<sup>10</sup> Of these, the two most important for them were **Y** (*Paris gr.* 1111, copied in the 11th century) and **A** (*Munich gr.* 66, copied in the 16th century). As they explain, their edition follows most closely the testimony of **A** and treats **Y** with some suspicion, in part because they think that it presents "einen stark verwilderten Text," in part because they suspect that it bears traces that betray "eine frühe willkürliche Bearbeitertätigkeit" (G68). Regardless, both manuscripts are important in their edition, though for different reasons. Glei and Khoury suggest that **A**, notwithstanding its late date, is valuable because it offers a good text and seems to reflect an early hyparchetype. As for **Y**, they consider it of special significance both because it is the oldest textual witness, and because, of their twelve manuscripts, it alone contains John's preface and the first of his dialogues (*Opus.* 18).

<sup>10</sup>The principles of their edition are described at G67–70.

In investigating John's work, Glei and Khoury offer a number of conclusions as to its original form. They suggest that it was initially divided into three parts and that these three parts comprised a preface and a total of seventeen dialogues.<sup>11</sup> Its first part contained John's preface and nine dialogues (*Opus.* 18–25, 32); its second part included a total of four dialogues (*Opus.* 3, 8, 16, 9); the third and last part consisted of four dialogues (*Opus.* 35–38). Glei and Khoury maintain that John penned all three parts: "Redigiert wurden aber diese Dialoge, wie die Einleitung zu der gesamten Sammlung der *Opuscula* deutlich macht, von Johannes Diakonos, eines Schülers und Bewunderers des Abū Qurra" (G52). They also recognize, however, that these parts differ from one another in significant ways. While part one is strongly polemical, parts two and three are more apologetic. Moreover, part two seems to form a "Neuansatz" (G70). As for the dialogues that make up the third part, Glei and Khoury note that their position in the textual tradition is somewhat anomalous. They are found in but one of their twelve manuscripts (A) and they—alone of John's dialogues—seem to be related in some way to the *Disputatio saraceni et christiani*, a work transmitted under the name of John of Damascus.<sup>12</sup>

There are extant not twelve, but roughly one hundred witnesses to the corpus of Theodore's Greek works.<sup>13</sup> While the majority of these witnesses contain just one, two, or a handful of Theodore's texts, about a third transmit substantial collections of his works. A fuller analysis of these witnesses would have been beneficial to Glei and Khoury in the preparation of

<sup>11</sup>G9, 50–52, and 68–70.

<sup>12</sup>B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos: IV. Liber de Haeresibus, Opera Polemica* (Patristische Texte u. Studien 22 [Berlin 1981]) 427–438, reprinted in Glei and Khoury at 168–183.

<sup>13</sup>These witnesses, which have never before been surveyed, are described in some detail in a book on which I am currently working, on the textual tradition of Theodore's works in Arabic, Greek, and Georgian.

their edition. It may be noted, for example, that **Y** is not the only Greek manuscript to have preserved the first of John's dialogues. Other copies can be found, for instance, in *Lavra* G43 (283), *Lavra* L135, *Moscow gr.* 231 (Vladimir), and *Vatopedi gr.* 236. (Copies of the latter three manuscripts are easily accessed in Paris, in the Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes.) So too, **Y** is not the only witness to John's preface: at least one other copy has been preserved in Greek and there is also an early Georgian version (see *infra*). Yet again, **Y** is by no means the oldest witness: the so-called first part of John's work has also been preserved in a manuscript dating from the early tenth century; so too, other of the works that Gleason and Khoury ascribed to John are extant in another manuscript from the early tenth century (see *infra*). Above and beyond this, however, a fuller analysis of these witnesses sheds much light on the different forms that the corpus of Theodore and John's writings took during the course of their transmission.

An analysis of the full manuscript evidence shows that the corpus of Theodore's works was initially transmitted in a relatively small number of forms, each apparently independent of the other, each of which seems to have originated at a fairly early date. In the textual tradition, two forms of the corpus are relatively infrequent. Neither of these is large; and apart from a single dialogue (*Opus.* 16), neither presents much overlap with the works edited by Gleason and Khoury. One form consists of ten *opuscula* (28, 27, 26, 29, 30, *De differentia proprissime*, 34, 42, 31, 16). Exemplars include: *Heidelberg Palatin. gr.* 281 (A.D. 1040); *Vienna phil. gr.* 174 (14th cent.), *Vat. gr.* 790 (14th or 15th cent.), *Escorial Upsilon I.13* (252) (16th cent.); *Munich gr.* 104 (16th cent.), *Vatican Reg. suec. gr.* 108 (16th cent.). The other consists of a mere five *opuscula* (26, 27, 28, 29, 30). Exemplars include: *Genova gr.* 27 (11th cent.), *Vatopedi gr.* 236 (at ff.2-4: 12 or 13th cent.), and *Berlin gr.* 152 (17th cent.).

In addition to these two forms of Theodore's corpus, there is a third—one that is much larger and much more widely encountered in manuscript form. Among the many witnesses to this third form of the corpus, two are of especial importance given their early date. One is *Moscow Historical Museum gr.* 231 (Vladimir), a theological miscellany, primarily on Christological themes.<sup>14</sup> It was copied for Arethas the archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia in the year 932—in other words, roughly one hundred years after Theodore's death. Moreover, as L. G. Westerink has argued (197), the main body of this miscellany, including its works ascribed to Theodore, had probably already been collected in their present form much earlier, perhaps even during the lifetime of Theodore.<sup>15</sup> The other witness is *Vienna phil. gr.* 314.<sup>16</sup> This manuscript is a philosophical miscellany. It was copied *ca* 925, perhaps in South Italy.<sup>17</sup> Coincidentally, as suggested by its scholia, the copy from which this manuscript was produced seems also at one time to have passed through Arethas' hands.<sup>18</sup> These manuscripts offer two early witnesses

<sup>14</sup>For a thorough description of this manuscript, see L. G. Westerink, "Marginalia by Arethas in Moscow Greek MS 231," *Byzantion* 42 (1972) 196–244 (hereafter WESTERINK).

<sup>15</sup>Although Westerink suggests that it may have been in existence since the eighth century, it is unlikely that it could have existed that early. At least one of its works, Theodore's letter to the Armenians (ff.1<sup>r</sup>–8<sup>v</sup>), dates from the patriarchate of Thomas of Jerusalem. See *PG* 97.1504D. While the chronology of Thomas' reign as patriarch is poorly documented, he must have ascended the throne between 800 and 807. On him see Robert P. Blake, "Deux lacunes comblées dans la *Passio XX Monachorum Sabaitarum*," *AnalBoll* 68 (1950) 42–43.

<sup>16</sup>For a brief description of this manuscript see Herbert Hunger, *Katalog der griechischen Handschriften der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek: I Codices Historici, Codices Philosophici et Philologici* (Vienna 1961) 405–406.

<sup>17</sup>Only the part of the manuscript written in the first hand, ff.1<sup>r</sup>–110<sup>r</sup>, is dated to 925. The works of Theodore are found in the second part of the MS. (ff. 110<sup>v</sup>–151<sup>v</sup>, with Theodore's works at ff.113<sup>r</sup>–151<sup>v</sup>), which is written in a second hand and undated. Its hand is contemporary with the first hand, however. See Josef Bick, *Die Schreiber der Wiener griechischen Handschriften* (Vienna 1920) 17, who also suggests that both scribes were from the same school.

<sup>18</sup>See Westerink 201.



Moscow gr. 231	Vienna phil. gr. 314	Tbilisi S-1436
4		
Ps.-Justin		29
<i>Quaest. et respons.</i>		30
<i>De duabus nat.</i>		<i>On Laughter</i>
<i>De unione et incarn.</i>		28
2		<i>Another Dialogue</i>
3	3	3
5–8	5–8	5–8
16	16	16
9–14	9–14	9–14
33	33	33
15	15	15
42	42	42
31	31	31
1	1	1
17	17	17
John part I w/o pref.	2	2
	4	John part I w. pref.

Table 1: The Shared Core of Abū Qurrah's Corpus

—to my knowledge, the earliest—for understanding what this most common form of the corpus of Theodore's Greek works looked like less than a century after his death.

Table 1 presents a synopsis of the works by Theodore found in the Moscow and Vienna manuscripts. As can be seen, the Moscow manuscript opens with Theodore's fourth *opusculum*, his letter to the Armenians (PG 97.1503–22), followed by Ps.-Justin's *Quaestiones graecae* and then an acephalous *Quaestiones et responsiones*, perhaps by Theodore.<sup>19</sup> Next in the manuscript is a short work entitled "Of the same to the same ones," which

<sup>19</sup>This acephalous work now contains seven questions and responses, the sixth of which is Theodore's *Opus. 39* (PG 97.1595–1598).

Westerink (212) has dubbed *De duabus naturis*. While it is not yet clear whether this is a work by Theodore, the treatise that follows, the *De unione et incarnatione*, certainly is (PG 97.1601–1610). The selections from Theodore’s works continue with twenty-seven *opuscula*, the last nine of which (18–19, 21–24, 32, 20, 25) are what Gleis and Khoury have identified as part one of John’s work. It should be noted, however: John’s preface is lacking (perhaps because the manuscript’s exemplar was damaged at this point)<sup>20</sup> and the first of these nine dialogues bears the above-mentioned, corrupt version of the title (that mentioning John of Damascus). As for the Vienna manuscript, it contains a total of twenty of Theodore’s *opuscula*. Unlike the Moscow manuscript, it presents *Opus*. 2 and 4 not at the beginning but at the end of its collection of Theodore’s works and is lacking the so-called first part of John’s work (that is, the Moscow manuscript’s final nine *opuscula*).

As can readily be seen, the core of the Moscow and Vienna manuscripts’ collection of Theodore’s works is shared. This shared core consists of eighteen *opuscula*: 3, 5–8, 16, 9–14, 33, 15, 42, 31, 1, 17. These *opuscula* are not only present in both manuscripts, they are also found in precisely the same order. Nor are these two manuscripts the only ones to bear witness to the existence of this shared core. Indeed, what is here termed the shared core of Theodore’s works would appear to be the most commonly encountered form for their *in corpore* transmission. Similar collections can be found in numerous other manuscripts, including, to cite some of the more prominent examples:

*Milan Ambrosiana gr.* 681 (10th cent.), with the shared core at ff. 222–227 (other of Theodore’s works are interspersed elsewhere in this miscellany)

*Sinai gr.* 383 (10th or 11th cent.), with the shared core at ff.149–154, preceded and followed by other works of Theodore

<sup>20</sup>Following the title one finds the words ζήτηι τὸ προοίμιον, a phrase which indicates a lacuna that the scribe was seeking to fill.

- Vatopedi* 236 (12th or 13th cent.), containing the shared core at ff. 95<sup>v</sup>–101<sup>v</sup>, followed by *Opus*. 2, and then by the so-called first part of John the Deacon's work
- Vat. gr.* 2220 (A.D. 1304), containing only the shared core
- Vat. gr.* 1838 (13th cent.), containing the whole of the shared core, preceded by *Opus*. 28–30 and five unedited works (seemingly by Theodore)
- Ochrid Naroden gr.* 86 (inv. 84) (13th cent.), containing the shared core, preceded by *Opus*. 2, and followed by two short works against the Jacobites, unpublished, and then by Theodore's letter to the Armenians and his *De unione et incarnatione*
- Rome B. Vallicelliana gr.* 12 (13th cent.), containing the shared core, followed by a number of other works by Theodore
- Vat. gr.* 402 (A.D. 1383), containing the shared core at ff.129<sup>v</sup>–148<sup>v</sup>, followed by patristic citations, and then by further works by Theodore (ff.161<sup>v</sup>–178<sup>r</sup>)
- Vat. gr.* 492 (13th or 14th cent.), contents identical to *Vat. gr.* 1838
- Athos Lavra G43* (283) (14th cent.), containing the shared core, followed by the putative first part of John the Deacon's work
- Paris suppl. gr.* 1090 (15th cent.), containing the shared core (with the exception of *Opus*. 33)

In addition to these many Greek witnesses, there is also an early Georgian version of the shared core. This is to be found among the works of Arsen Iq'altoeli.

Born in Georgia in or around 1050, Arsen proceeded to Constantinople and later to the Black Mountain, only then to return to Georgia. It is estimated that he died sometime after 1125. Among Arsen's works is the *Dogmaticon*, a large florilegium that was likely begun while he was still at Constantinople. In the *Dogmaticon* Arsen included a number of works ascribed to Theodore. In the oldest form of its textual tradition (that represented by *Tbilisi S-1463*, copied in the 12th century), we find two sets of Theodore's works.<sup>21</sup> The first, found at ff.252<sup>r</sup>–256<sup>r</sup>, contains just two tracts, Theodore's letter to the Armenians (*Opus*. 4)

<sup>21</sup>Ivane Lolashvili, *Arsen Iq'altoeli: Cxovreba da moqvac'eoba* (Tbilisi 1978) 112–123.

and his *De unione et incarnatione*.<sup>22</sup> The second, at ff.288<sup>r</sup>–301<sup>r</sup>, contains twenty-four treatises by Theodore, immediately followed by part one of the work of John the Deacon. As can be seen from Table 1, this second set contains the seventeen works making up the shared core of Theodore's corpus, preceded by five other tracts.<sup>23</sup> As for John's work, Arsen places it at the end of the shared core and offers the following items in the following order: John's preface, 18–22, 24, 32, 25.

As just noted, Arsen's translation includes John's preface. This makes it an important witness to the text of that preface: indeed, one roughly contemporary with Y. While Y was the only Greek copy of the preface known to Glei and Khoury, it is not the only one to have been preserved. There is another copy in *Vatopedi gr.* 236 (ff.108<sup>r</sup>–109<sup>r</sup>). This copy stands in very close relation to the text of the Georgian translation. One may note, in particular, that the Georgian version's title, although similar to Y's, is simplified and includes no mention of John: *Sark'inozta mimartisa sit'q'wis-gebisagan net'arisa Teodore Avuk'uraysi* (*From the Refutation of the Saracens by the Blessed Theodore Abū Qurrah*). The *Vatopedi* version is: ἐκ τῶν πρὸς τοὺς σαρακηνοὺς ἀντιρρήσεων τοῦ μακαρίου Θεοδώρου τοῦ Ἀβουκαρᾶ (*From the Refutation of the Saracens by the Blessed Theodore Abū Qurrah*).

Let us return to John's work and to Glei and Khoury's reconstruction of its contours. Is there any reason to think that as penned by its author John's work comprised three parts and that it consisted of his preface and seventeen dialogues? In

<sup>22</sup>Respectively, *PG* 97.1503–1522 and 1601–1610. Lolashvili (*supra* n.21: 115, 118) also ascribes to Theodore the two prior works (ff.226<sup>r</sup>–251<sup>v</sup>), both of which are substantial, but anonymous, refutations of the Jews, as well as the Christological treatise at 190<sup>v</sup>–202<sup>v</sup>. The latter is not by Theodore. It is, instead, Leontius of Byzantium's *De sectis*, now edited under the name of Theodore (Datiashvili [*supra* n.5] 24–93). While the two anti-Jewish works merit further investigation, neither seems likely to be by Theodore.

<sup>23</sup>Two of these works are unedited. The first is entitled *On Laughter*. Copies of it are also known in Greek (in, e.g., *Vat. gr.* 492 and 1838). The second is entitled, simply, *Another Dialogue*. Copies of it can also be found in the same two Vatican MSS., where, too, it immediately follows *Opus*. 28.

Arsen's translation and in the Greek witnesses known to me, the nine dialogues (*Opus.* 18–25, 32) making up what Gleii and Khoury have termed the first part of John's work are almost invariably transmitted as a unity, sometimes with, more often without John's preface. To judge from the evidence of the Vienna and Moscow manuscripts, it is likely that this so-called first part of John's work was originally independent of the shared core of Theodore's dialogues. At some point, however—very early on—it came to be attached to the shared core of Theodore's dialogues. Later manuscripts, too, sometimes transmit only the shared core, while at other times they append to it the first part of John's work.

In the witnesses known to me, the dialogues comprising what Gleii and Khoury have termed the second part of John's work (*Opus.* 3, 8, 16, 9) seem never to have been transmitted as part of John's work, nor even as a unity. Rather, in the earliest manuscripts and throughout nearly the whole of the manuscript tradition, they are found interspersed among the *opuscula* making up what has here been termed the shared core of the corpus—which is, it must be emphasized, the earliest attested and most widely encountered form for the *in corpore* transmission of Theodore's works.

As for the third part of John's work, its four dialogues (*Opus.* 35–38) appear to have entered the textual tradition of Theodore's writings only at a much later date. They are not found in the Vienna or the Moscow manuscript, nor in Arsen's translation, nor in any other of the earliest forms of the corpus of Theodore's works. In fact, I know of only four copies of these dialogues. Of these, the earliest is *Venice gr.* 521 (13th cent.), in which they are anonymous—and transmitted independently of the works of either John or Theodore. The other three manuscripts, which are all very closely related to one another, append these dialogues to the end of their copy of part one of John the Deacon's work: *Wolfenbittel gud. gr.* 102 (14th cent.),

*Munich gr. 66* (16th cent.), *Vatican otto. gr. 382* (17th cent.). Be that as it may, in each of these three manuscripts, these four *opuscula* are transmitted anonymously. In a word, there seems to be not a single manuscript that ascribes these dialogues either to Theodore or to John.

From the evidence presented above, what can be inferred about the original contours of John's work? It must be emphasized, first, that no manuscript known to me attests to what Gleis and Khoury have identified as the tripartite form of John's work. In fact, there would seem to be only two manuscripts that even contain all seventeen of these dialogues, both quite late: the above-mentioned *Munich gr. 66* (16th cent.) and *Vatican otto. gr. 382* (17th cent.). In no case, however, do these manuscripts transmit the seventeen dialogues as a unity. Some are found interspersed among the dialogues comprising what has here been termed the shared core of Theodore's works. Others, the so-called first part of John's work, are found later in the manuscripts. Yet other of the dialogues are transmitted anonymously.

Is it the case, then, that John's work originally consisted of a preface and three parts? To judge from the history of its transmission, we must conclude that there is very little reason to think that this was the case. It seems, rather, that John's work originally comprised just a preface and nine dialogues; and it would seem that this work circulated independently. Shortly after its composition, however, John's work must have come to be attached to the shared core of Theodore's writings. This much seems clear. As for what has been identified as the second part of John's work, in the most commonly encountered form of the corpus its four dialogues are part of the shared core of Theodore's Greek *opuscula*, which was independent of John's work, though sometimes transmitted with it. As for the four *opuscula* of the so-called third part of John's work, these anonymous dialogues must originally have circulated independently of the

works of Theodore and John the Deacon, only later coming to be attached to the combined corpus of their works. In the end, there is not even any reason to think that they were written by either Theodore or John: every manuscript known to me transmits them anonymously.

When did John the Deacon compose or compile his work? It will be recalled that John, in his preface, claimed to have been an eyewitness to Theodore's debates. There is nothing in the manuscripts to contravene this claim. Indeed, the evidence of *Moscow gr.* 231 would lend weight to its veracity. It will be recalled that this manuscript was copied in 932, roughly one hundred years after Theodore's death. Moreover, it is descended from an earlier exemplar, one that, according to Westerink, had been collected in its present form much earlier, perhaps even during the lifetime of Theodore. The evidence of the Moscow manuscript suggests that John's work must have been compiled relatively close to the time when Theodore himself flourished: surely no more than one hundred years later, probably much less. It is, thus, entirely likely that John was either a contemporary or a near contemporary of Theodore.

*John the Deacon's dependence on Theodore's written works*

Let us assume for now that John's work originally contained just his preface and nine dialogues (18–25, 32). As noted above, these nine dialogues purport to record interchanges between Theodore and a variety of Muslim interlocutors. They concern a variety of subjects: the nature of a true prophet; the Muslim claim that Christians corrupted their scriptures; whether the coming of Muhammad was prophesied by Christ; whether Muhammad performed miracles; whether Muhammad was possessed by a devil; how and why Christianity spread; the defense of Christian ritual; the doctrine of Christ; and the issue of polygamy. Do John's dialogues reflect the teachings of Theodore? While it must be admitted that parallels are largely

lacking in Theodore's Greek works, the situation is otherwise vis-à-vis his Arabic works. There are a number of close parallels, enough, in fact, to suggest that at least part of John's work preserves an authentic record of the teachings of Theodore. Indeed, as will be seen, from the nature of the parallels it seems likely that John drew directly on Theodore's Arabic works.

Of John's dialogues, the themes of four (20, 22–24) seem to be wholly lacking in parallels with the works of Theodore. The first of these (20) is not actually a dialogue, but an extended analogy that argues from Muslim accounts of his prophetic experiences that Muhammad was possessed by a demon. *Opusculum* 22 presents a dialogue between Theodore and an anonymous Saracen, in which he defends the Christian understanding of how the Eucharistic bread becomes the body of Christ. *Opusculum* 23 is the shortest of John's dialogues: Theodore is asked by a Muslim to defend the proposition that Christ is God's son, when Christ himself said, "The Son can do nothing of himself, except what he sees the Father doing" (Jn 5:19). *Opusculum* 24 is concerned with polygamy: Theodore is asked by a Muslim to defend the superiority of monogamy over polygamy. Again, it must be emphasized, no parallels for the themes of these four dialogues are found among Theodore's works.

As for *Opuscula* 18 and 19, while lacking specific parallels, they do bear some general thematic similarities to Theodore's works. *Opusculum* 18 takes as its setting the Palestinian city of Azotus (Ashdod). We are told that the Christians there were in dire straits because of the Muslims and invited Theodore to come to their aid. There ensued a dialogue between Theodore and a Muslim, on the nature of a true prophet. The Muslim suggests that even as Christians believe Christianity to have succeeded Judaism, so also they should believe Islam to have succeeded Christianity. Theodore responds by outlining the two characteristics of true prophets, namely, that their prophetic mission be attested at a minimum by signs and ideally also by



prophecy. Such signs and prophecy are lacking in the case of Muhammad, however. Accordingly, Theodore concludes: "Well, where then does this leave your prophet?" (G92.116). A similar topic is dealt with in *Opusculum* 19. The narrator tells us, first, that it is customary for the Saracens when they meet Christians not to greet them but immediately to say: "Testify that God has no partners and that Muhammad is his servant and messenger" (G94.2–4). Once, when Theodore was coming down from Jerusalem, he was met by a Muslim who invited him to make such a testimony.<sup>24</sup> The dialogue that follows again turns on the nature of a true prophet. Theodore argues that one should receive a prophet only if he is attested by prophecies or by signs and, further, that Muhammad is attested by neither. The Muslim responds that Christ did, in fact, predict the coming of Muhammad, but that Christians excised this prediction from the Gospel. Theodore answers: if someone goes to a judge, claiming to be owed a loan and bringing a document that bears no mention of such a loan, the judge will rule that he should receive nothing. So also, Theodore argues, the Muslims have nothing from the Gospel. The Muslim then suggests that even if there are no prophecies, there are at least Muhammad's signs. The narrator concludes: "At this the barbarian turned to the recounting of false stories, but was unable to say anything true and thus fell silent" (G96.39–40).

Theodore's works also appeal to signs and prophecy as a means of identifying a true prophet. Of special note is his *On the Confirmation of the Law of Moses*, which seeks to establish the truth of Christianity over against Judaism and the various non-orthodox forms of Christianity. The introduction to this work, in particular, bears a number of thematic parallels to John's *Opuscula* 18 and 19. The work opens with a recapitulation of

<sup>24</sup>G94.4–6 follows the testimony of A, which omits mention of the dialogue's setting. I am reading with Y and the Georgian (Datiashvili [*supra* n.5] 98.10–14).

the story of Moses' encounter with God on Mt Sinai and follows with an account of the three signs that testified that Moses was sent by God (B140.8–141.12). The purpose of these signs, according to Theodore, was to show that the Jews were justified in accepting Moses' claims (B141.13–142.14). What then of the Christians? Jesus, too, did signs (B142.15–143.4). Indeed, Theodore argues, he never asked anyone to accept his teaching unless he had already done a sign to establish his authority. Unlike Moses, however, Jesus had a second form of testimony (B144.6–145.4). And this was that Moses and the prophets had predicted his coming. It is for this reason that the Gentiles were justified in their belief that Christ was sent by God. Here, too, accordingly, we find an acknowledgement of signs and prophecy as the only means to identify a true prophet. It must be emphasized, however: such thematic parallels are too general to warrant the conclusion that John is here making use of a work by Theodore.

Theodore's works also contain thematic parallels to John's final dialogue (32). This text is concerned with Christology, especially the manner of Christ's death. We are told by the narrator that Theodore once met with one of the illustrious Muslims, in the presence of a group of Muslims and Christians. This Muslim suggested that if Christ was able to die (that is, experience the separation of his divinity from his humanity) he was able no longer to exist, and that thus the "God of the Christians came to be non-existent" (G124.9). Theodore responds by explaining that it is not proper to compare the union of a person's body and soul with the union of divinity and humanity in Christ. When Christ died, his body and soul were separated (his body being in the grave; his soul, in Hell), but he himself remained inseparably conjoined with both. When the Muslim goes on to suggest that this is impossible, Theodore argues that to deny this is also to deny that God could be present in both Mecca and Baghdad at the same time. The

dialogue concludes: “The Muslim, then, as if tangled in a net, became speechless and mute in wonder” (G126.52–53).

A recurrent theme in a number of Theodore’s works is the manner of the union of natures in Christ and how this union differs from the union of a person’s body and soul. There is extant in Greek an unedited treatise on this subject.<sup>25</sup> Another unedited tract on the same is extant in Georgian.<sup>26</sup> This is a subject that Theodore treats in his letter to the Armenians (PG 97.1515–1520). This same subject is also discussed in his Arabic works against the Monophysites. It is prominent in his *On the Death of Christ* (B56–58, 65–66). It is also the main subject of his letter to David the Monophysite (B104–139), which seeks to show the proper sense in which one can transfer the analogy for union in the case of a human being to that of the union of natures in Christ. Clearly, this was a subject with which Theodore was concerned. Once again, however, the parallels between *Opusculum* 32 and Theodore’s works do not seem specific enough to warrant the conclusion that John drew on them.

While specific parallels are lacking in seven of John’s dialogues, the situation is otherwise with the remaining two. John’s fourth dialogue (*Opus.* 21) takes as its setting a debate between Theodore and a certain learned Muslim. The dialogue opens with a mention of the three types of human beings (the wise, the middling, and the stupid) and asks what could have attracted any of them to believe in a crucified God. In order to get at “the hidden cause of their consenting” (G104.42–43), Theodore argues via an extended analogy. Imagine, he asks his interlocutor, that you are a king and that a lowly-looking messenger comes to you. He bids you to abandon idolatry and adhere to the wor-

<sup>25</sup>It seeks to show τὸ ἀπεικὸς τοῦ τινος ἀνθρώπου τῆ κατὰ Χριστὸν ἐνώσει. It can be found, e.g., in *Munich gr.* 66, *Paris gr.* 1111, *Venice gr.* 521 (Zanetti), and *Genova gr.* 27.

<sup>26</sup>See Kekelidze (*supra* n.5) 55, no. 3.

ship of a crucified God. As if that were not bad enough, the messenger also says that you must live a life of privation and self-restraint and that the only reward you can expect is in the next world. You would surely think such a religion not a little unattractive and would rightly answer the messenger: “Who would take it on himself to submit to such a religion?” (G106.92–93). The only thing that would persuade you to accept this religion would be if the messenger were able to do miracles in the name of this crucified God, which is exactly what happened in the case of Christianity. Theodore concludes: “Behold, it has been shown to you, according to our promise, that the doctrine of the Christians is established by those things in it that seem to be least” (G106.108–110).

The distinctive argument of *Opusculum* 21 is readily familiar from a number of Theodore’s Arabic works. A very nearly identical argument is found in the final chapter of his *On the Existence of God and the True Religion* (Dick 259–270), in his *On the Confirmation of the Gospel* (B71–75), and at the beginning of his *On the Confirmation of the Law of Moses* (B140–179, especially 146–153). The basic argument of all three texts is as follows:

1. The Gospel is hideous, both in its theological claims (a crucified God) and in its ethics (live a life of privation).
2. No one would willingly believe in such a religion.
3. Many people do, however, believe in this religion.
4. The only thing that could have induced them to believe is miracles.
5. These miracles, thus, confirm the truth of the Gospel.

In none of these three works are Theodore’s arguments explicitly addressed to the Muslims. In *On the Confirmation of the Law of Moses*, he is opposed to Judaism. In the other two works, he is opposed to all religions other than Christianity, though there are a number of hints that he might also have his eye on Islam.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Note, in particular: (i) the mention of those who acknowledge “a prophet (*nabī*) or messenger (*rasūl*) sent by God” (72.11); (ii) his reference to Christian-

Regardless, the structural parallels between these Arabic works and John's dialogue are evident.

The parallels between John's *Opusculum* 21 and Theodore's Arabic works are to be seen in two other respects as well. First, in *Opusculum* 21, the discussion both opens and closes with a rather peculiar division of humans into three classes (G102.24, 35; 106.105): the wise, the middling, and the stupid (σοφοί, μέσοι, μωροί). Why one would need to divide humans into these three classes is never explained, however, nor is the significance of the classes ever fully developed. In all three Arabic versions of Theodore's argument, we find an identical classificatory scheme (*ḥakīm, jāhil, wasat*).<sup>28</sup> From the parallels in the Arabic versions, it is further clear why Theodore needed to divide humanity into three classes for the purposes of his argument: each of these classes, he argues, received or rejected Christ for different reasons.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, the hypothetical messenger is presented at the end of *Opusculum* 21 as doing miracles to convince unbelievers of the truth of his hideous message. A blind man is brought, and the messenger makes the following imprecation: "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene ... who was overcome by the Jews and hung on a cross ... see!" (G106.98–102). In two of the Arabic versions of this argument, Theodore closes with the example of the apostle Thomas and the miracles he performed among the Indians: how he went to the Indians, was rejected for the absurdity of his message, and only convinced them of the truth of Christianity through the performance of a miracle. We are also told the precise words employed by Thomas to perform his miracle. In one instance, he said: "In the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified in Jerusalem, arise!" (Dick 269.19). In the other instance: "In the name of Jesus the

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ity as *lā rayba fīhi* (74.2), cf. Qur'ān 2.2; and (iii) his references to polygamy at Dick 263.4 and 266.6–7.

<sup>28</sup>B74.6–9, 150.8, 151.1; Dick 263.18–19, 268.13.

<sup>29</sup>For the fullest presentation of this theme, see B150.8, 151.5.

Nazarene, whom the Jews crucified in Jerusalem, arise!" (B74.18–19). In the latter case, great weight is given to the fact that the oath is made, not in the name of God, but in the name of Jesus (B74.19–75.2). In both instances, however, Thomas' imprecation is specified, and its wording is important in that it establishes the truth of his claim about the crucified God.

It seems clear that *Opusculum* 21 offers a version of one of Theodore's most distinctive apologetic arguments. It should be noted, however: in John's work this argument has been transformed from being against Judaism or all other religions in general, to being against Islam. Further, John's version of the argument is but a dim reflection of Theodore's fuller version. While it maintains a number of its specific turns of phrase, it has divorced them from their broader context. This is particularly clear in the case of the threefold division of humanity into the wise, middling, and stupid, and in the case of the nature of the messenger's oath. While both points are very significant in Theodore's arguments and are developed in some detail, in John's work they are put forward in an offhanded manner. Their significance seems to depend on a broader context that is presupposed but not supplied. All these features are suggestive of compilation, more specifically that John made rather careless use of one of Theodore's Arabic works.

Lastly, strong parallels with Theodore's Arabic works are also found in John's *Opusculum* 25, which seeks to show that God has a Son and that this Son is coeternal. John's dialogue opens with the narrator's attempt to specify its context. We are told that the Muslims are eager to deny the divinity of the Word of God and that they do this because their prophet was the disciple of an Arian. We are then informed that the present dialogue took place "in a public assembly" (G118.8–9). Theodore's argument turns on the need for God always to be ruling over something, in that his rule is not an accidental attribute. Moreover, that over which God rules must be of the same

nature, otherwise his rule would be dishonorable. Theodore concludes: "See then, you who deny the divinity of the Word of God, it has been established that God has a Son who is of the same substance and that like God this Son is without beginning and eternal" (G122.75–77).

The precise arguments ascribed to Theodore in *Opusculum 25* are also found in his *Discourse Confirming That God Has a Son* (B91–104). Both treatises begin by eliciting the concession that God is possessed of the attribute of being a ruler (G118.15–17; B91.12–16). Both then turn to the issue of whether this rule is over God's creation, arguing that this would be impossible in that it would mean that God's rule is both accidental and dishonorable (G118.17–120.44; B91.16–93.7). To prove the latter point, both treatises imagine someone who comes to a king and addresses him as a king of asses:

Greek (G120.37–39): *Theodore*: If someone came to the king and addressed him, "Greetings, king of the asses," what do you say that such a person should suffer? *Saracen*: The ultimate punishment!  
 Arabic (B93.2–3): [Theodore says to his hypothetical opponent]: If you were a king and a man came to you and said, "Peace be upon you, head of the asses," I suppose that you would inflict a mortal punishment on him.

Having established that God's rule cannot be over the creation, both treatises then suggest that it must be over one who is equal, lesser, or better (G120.45–46; B93.8–15). As it cannot be over one who is better or lesser, it must be over one who is equal. Moreover, both treatises go on to suggest, God's rule over this equal must be by will, by force, or by nature (G120.61–62; B93.16–94.7). The arguments of the Greek treatise are somewhat more complex here, but it, like the Arabic, ends by suggesting that this rule must be by nature. Accordingly, both conclude, this equal over whom God rules by nature is none other than the Son of God (G122.69–83; B94.7–12).

As can be seen, the arguments of *Opusculum* 25 and the beginning of Theodore's *Discourse Confirming That God Has a Son* are nearly identical, in their structure and order as well as in their details. So closely does John's dialogue resemble Theodore's discourse that it must be concluded that John almost certainly made use of this particular treatise. Again, however, John has adapted his source. He has taken a work by Theodore that was originally addressed to the Jews and turned its arguments against the Muslims.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, John's source was not originally in dialogue form. It was, however, relatively easy to turn it into a dialogue, in part through Theodore's frequent use of hypothetical objectors—as in the example cited above.

In sum, three of John's dialogues bear some general, thematic parallels to the works of Theodore, four have no parallels, while another two contain parallels so extensive as to warrant the conclusion that they were drawn directly from Theodore's Arabic treatises. Nonetheless, it seems clear that John adapted his source. None of the works of Theodore that were used by John was explicitly directed against the Muslims. Further, none of them was in dialogue form. In the latter case, however, Theodore's tendency to interweave with his exposition potential objections and his answers to those objections may have greatly facilitated John's task. While it remains possible that John attended debates between Theodore and the Muslims (as he would have us believe in his preface), the nature of the parallels between his and Theodore's works suggests rather that John made direct use of Theodore's Arabic works. Nor should this be surprising, given John's own explicit mention of Theodore's written works in his preface. As for John's works that lack parallels with the writings of Theodore, it must be remembered that we do not have access to all of Theodore's Arabic works.

<sup>30</sup>That it was against the Jews seems likely from the sixth of Theodore's Arabic works (B83–91). The sixth, seventh, and tenth of his Arabic works seem originally to have been parts of a single, larger work.



Some remain to be published, while others seem now to be lost.<sup>31</sup> It is always possible that the themes of John's other dialogues were taken from Arabic works that are at present inaccessible.<sup>32</sup>

### *Conclusions*

This paper has sought to clarify a number of questions as to the original contours of John the Deacon's work and its relation to the oeuvre of Theodore. Two early tenth-century Greek manuscripts and Arsen's *Dogmaticon*, as well as a variety of later witnesses, offer good reasons to think that John's work consisted originally of a preface and a total of nine dialogues. As for the dialogues that Gleis and Khoury identified as part two of John's work, in nearly all manuscripts these were not transmitted as part of John's work, but in what has here been called the shared core of Theodore's corpus. Similarly, there is little evidence to suggest that *Opuscula* 35–38 originally made up what Gleis and Khoury have identified as the third part of John's work. These four dialogues seem, rather, to have circulated independently of both the work of John and the shared core. It is further clear from the textual tradition of his work that John was writing fairly close to the *floruit* of Theodore: certainly less than one hundred years after his death, and perhaps much less. And finally, there is evidence to suggest that John made direct use of Theodore's Arabic works.

<sup>31</sup>For the most current account of these unedited works, see Samir (*supra* n.3) 433–436.

<sup>32</sup>In particular, it is necessary to note one of Theodore's works said to have been preserved in *Sbath* 1324 (copied in 1773), a manuscript that is now lost. From *Sbath's* short description of this manuscript (*Bibliothèque de manuscrits Paul Sbath* III [Cairo 1934] 116), it seems that this work was entitled *Questions and Answers from the Voice of the Virtuous Father Theodore the Bishop of Haran, against the Outsiders*, that it was directed against the Muslims, and that it was in dialogue form. This manuscript and many of *Sbath's* other manuscripts are not to be found with the rest of his collection in the *Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana*. See Anton Heinen's comments in his article (dated 1990) on the Arabic manuscripts of Vatican City, in Geoffrey Roper, ed., *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts* III (London 1994) 635.

Roughly a quarter of Theodore's Greek works can no longer be attributed to him, but to this John the Deacon. What of Theodore's other Greek works? As is clear from its title, one of the longest and most important of these, his letter to the Armenians, is a translation from Arabic—and we even know the name of its translator. Parts of other works are now known to have been written not by Theodore but by other, named individuals.<sup>33</sup> Others are sometimes encountered in the manuscript tradition under different names (*e.g.*, Theodore of Raithu).<sup>34</sup> Others speak of Theodore in the third person (*PG* 97.1536D5). More troubling, many do not resemble, in either form or content, those of Theodore's works that are certain to be authentic. Slowly, but inexorably, the corpus of Theodore's Greek works is starting to vanish. Perhaps Sidney H. Griffith is right in his suspicions, first voiced over a decade ago, that to judge from what can be discovered about the decline of Greek and its displacement by Arabic in early Islamic Syro-Palestine, most of these Greek works were probably not originally written by Theodore.<sup>35</sup>

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Department of Religious Studies  
Southern Methodist University  
Dallas, TX 75205-0133  
jclam@mail.smu.edu

<sup>33</sup>The third part of *Opus. 39* (*PG* 97.1596D2–1597A14), for instance, was not written by Theodore. It is, instead, a scholion of Arethas: see Westerink 212. *Cf.* also the title to *Opus. 40* (1597B), which seems to suggest that the work was written by Photius.

<sup>34</sup>Hints of this are preserved even in Migne's edition. See, *e.g.*, *PG* 97.1562D and 1566B.

<sup>35</sup>"The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic," *The Muslim World* 78 (1988) 22–23.