

MAGIC, THE MANDYLION AND THE LETTER OF ABGAR

On a Greco-Arabic Amulet Roll in Chicago and New York*

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Anyone who had the good fortune to visit the exhibition *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City in 2004, and saw the installation of the art of Christian communities in the East will have seen a true oddity: an amulet roll, now divided between the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York (M 499) and the Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago (cod. 125) (fig. 1)¹. Its striking features were plain from that New York installation, as the Chicago piece was framed and hanging on a wall, and the Morgan piece was in a neighboring vitrine with new wooden handles. Beyond that striking presentation, the roll's own qualities are remarkable, too: when the two sections are added together, the roll reaches a length of 5.1 m (which is not complete, as loss is evident at both ends) and a width of around 9 cm. The texts are oriented on the vertical axis of the roll, and they point to purposes for which the roll was intended: on the obverse, texts in Greek include, in order from top to bottom and starting with the Chicago piece, the initial passages from the *Gospels* of Mark (1,1-8), Luke (1,1-7) and John (1,1-17), with Matthew (4,9-13) following, then the *Nicene Creed*, *Psalms* 68, and on the Morgan fragment, *Psalms* 35 and 91, the *Epistle of Abgar Legend*, and short, poetic invocations to nine saints. Beginning with a cross at the head of the roll as it survives, the reverse of the roll contains a series of prayers, supplications and spells in Arabic, which were written for a Christian, Suleyman ibn **S_r_h**, by what appear to be several hands, in the year of Alexander 1694, or 1383 of the Common Era (fig. 2). The roll also possesses 28 illustrations, if one counts the cross on the reverse. And excluding that final example, the illustrations are of a high quality in terms of style, and they survive in remarkably good condition, given the format.

This constellation of features indicates the extraordinary quality of the object: a bilingual scroll of striking dimensions, very fine illustrations, and a date for ownership that places it outside of the Byzantine empire but within its cultural orbit. Indeed, it is a unique survival, as I do not know of another roll with Greek from the Middle Ages that is not liturgical, diplomatic or legal in character².

Anticipating a full-length monograph that I am preparing with my colleague Barbara Roggema, this article will deal with three, related issues that the roll raises. The first is the material support itself, the roll; this format was not uncommon, but also not so common that its potency was obscured. Second, the combination of the roll with the *Abgar Legend* brings to the fore questions of magic and devotion, and the purposes of the roll will

be examined: protective, devotional and confessional. Because of what I believe are sound reasons for assigning the roll to Egypt or Palestine, specifically the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai, the roll must also be placed in a context where Islam was dominant, and I will argue, finally, that the roll should be seen within a long-term debate between Christians and Muslims over the value of figural art in devotion.

The Abgar cycle is at the heart of the roll, for how it defines the purposes and meanings of the roll, and also for how it defines Christian ideas concerning representation. The legend of king Abgar of Edessa and of his amazing correspondence with Christ was famous throughout medieval Christendom and beyond; versions exist in many languages, and the legend is a core element of Christian *apokrypha*³. Here, the text describing the writing of the letters, the promises made by Christ in his letter, and the miraculous creation of Christ's image are by far the longest on the roll, and they fall in the middle of the length of the roll; for that reason, the images, which comprise a cycle of fourteen units, are the best preserved, as the inside of the roll suffered least in the process of rolling and unrolling.

The text here is based on the early eleventh-century *Epistula Abgari*, which begins with an exchange of letters. Abgar, the king of Edessa, learned of the activities and persecutions of Christ in Jerusalem, and he sent a letter asking Christ to join him in his kingdom of Edessa (fig. 3). Abgar was not simply altruistic, as he was suffering from an illness, and Abgar wrote in praise of the power of Christ to heal. Abgar sent his messenger, unnamed in this text, to deliver the message. Christ sent back a letter expressing his regrets to Abgar and also his eternal protection of the city; his blessing extended to anyone and over his or her home, for one is thrice blessed, he said, if one believes but does not see. Furthermore, he promised that he would send an apostle, Thaddaeus, and he included the seven characters comprising his seal, with an explanation of its meaning to guarantee the efficacy of those signs (fig. 4). Anyone carrying these signs, who puts them on his house or possessions, would be protected from all danger and suffering, Christ promised. The signs are in the middle of the cycle, and they are a separate illustrative unit. They form a kind of acronym: Christ stated that he is not man merely or apparently but truly, the *psi* standing for *psilos*; the *chi* states that Christ stands over the cherubim; the *epsilon* that Christ, the *ego*, is God, that is above all and except for him no other God exists; the *upsilon* represents his status as highest king, the *upsilos basileus* and God of Gods; the *rho* stands for him as de-



1. Ms. M 499, 14th century, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library

liverer, *o rystes*, of humanity; and the *delta* revealing that he lives entirely, *diolou*, and continuously, *dienekos*, and rules forever. The image of the seal is divergent from the verbal description, in that the cross is supplanted by the *nomina sacra* for Christ's name «IC XC», which occupy the top two squares of the grid, and in the lowest two squares, the word «NIKA», or victory, referring back to salvific and protective qualities of the cross. According to the text, Christ also recognizes Abgar's messenger and gives him his miraculously produced likeness on a cloth, called here a «sindon»; the messenger had been unable to take the likeness of Christ, and Christ washed himself and left an imprint on the towel used for drying his face (fig. 5). In the end, the letter and image arrived in Edessa, Abgar was healed, and true to Christ's promise, the apostle Thaddeus eventually arrived in the city to convert and to heal its inhabitants.

In the center of the cycle of the *Letter* of Abgar is a conjunction of the verbal and the visual, which is at the heart of Christ's promise and its effectiveness, the seven signs of Christ's nature, status and history. The representation of the signs is unusual to this roll. The representation here, the characters laid out in a grid pattern, should not lead one to look for direct models, as the solution arrived at by the painter is not particularly complex or necessarily original. Rather, it needs to be noted how the grid functions in the object as guarantor of protection and statement of faith.

The grid has clear magical or divine properties, because the text promises that those who have these signs are protected from all evils and harm. And this use of Greek characters in isolation like this example is a common element of medieval magic. The name of God is sometimes written out in enigmatic characters as a protective device, and yet the meaning of roll's signs is perfectly transparent when one reads the accompanying



2. Cross and Text at Head of Verso, Chicago, University of Chicago, cod. 125c.



3. Abgar and Messenger, Ms. M 499, 14th century, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, illustrative unit 2



4. Seal of Christ, Ms. M 499, 14th century, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, illustrative unit 7

text. Outside Byzantium, too, Greek characters were a diagnostic tool for magical healing, which could be ascribed to the letter sent to Abgar too. For instance, this *Sphere of Petosiris* found in a twelfth-century English manuscript of computational tables (St. John's College, Oxford, 17, 8r), places Greek, improperly understood, in a diagram intended to be interpreted by a healer for a prognosis of the life and death of a patient (fig. 6)⁴. Yet the power of the *Sphere* resides in its strange and obscure format, and the Seal of Christ given to Abgar is potent, certainly, but legible, at least to Greek speakers.

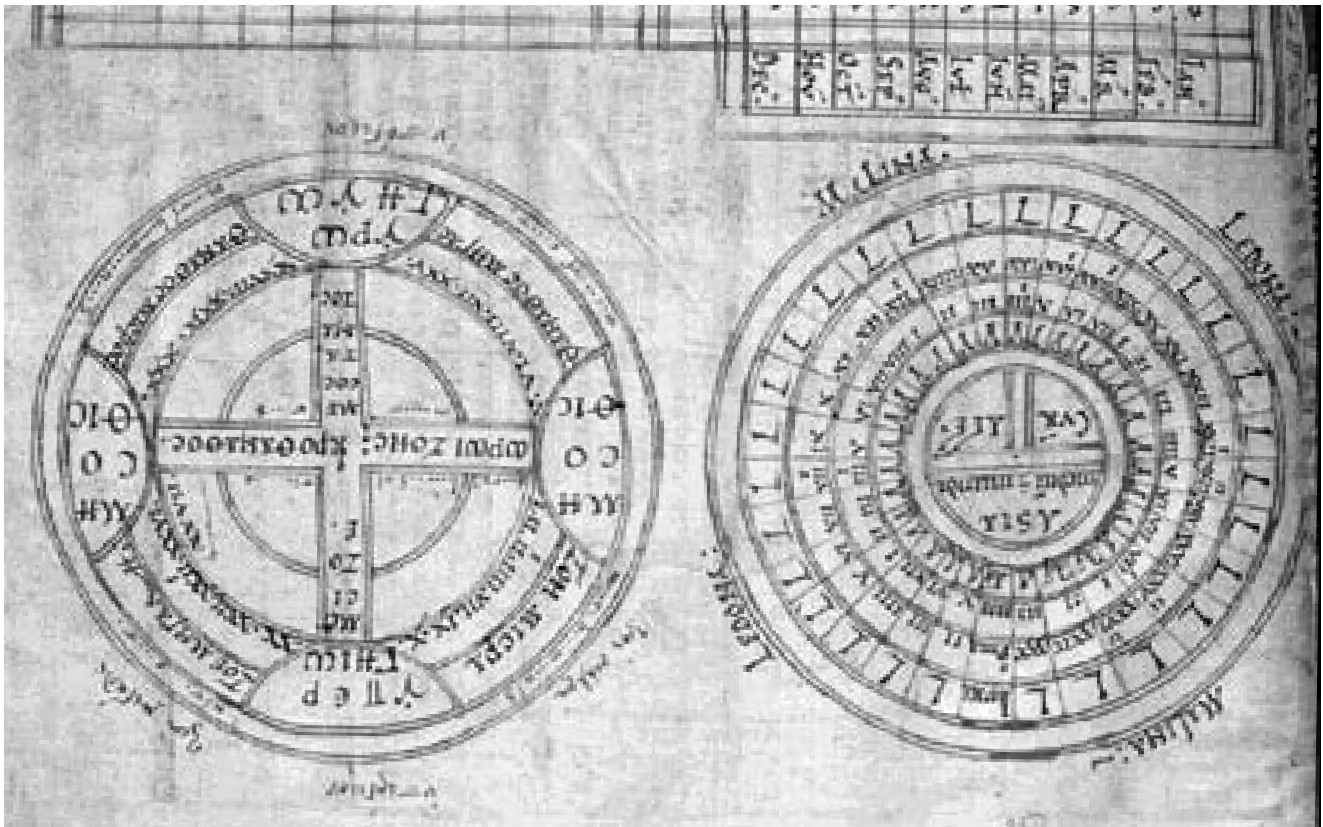
The legibility and orthodoxy of the Seal of Christ here give it a distinct character, at least compared to Christian examples. But this kind of grid with characters or numbers was not uncommon in the Muslim world and is found in a variety of media, including ceramics, manuscripts and clothing⁵. A variety of formats are to be found in these objects, but normally the magic squares were filled with numbers, characters or words, often of a protective and orthodox nature. This example of a magic square is from an Iranian talismanic chart from the early twentieth century, but it shows a typical example of medieval magical design, a grid of four by four cells, each filled with invocations to God (fig. 7)⁶. These designs reveal the best parallel for the seal of Christ in the Letter to Abgar, and yet the format shows that these Islamic magic squares were carefully presented, and their making carefully prescribed. For example, this il-



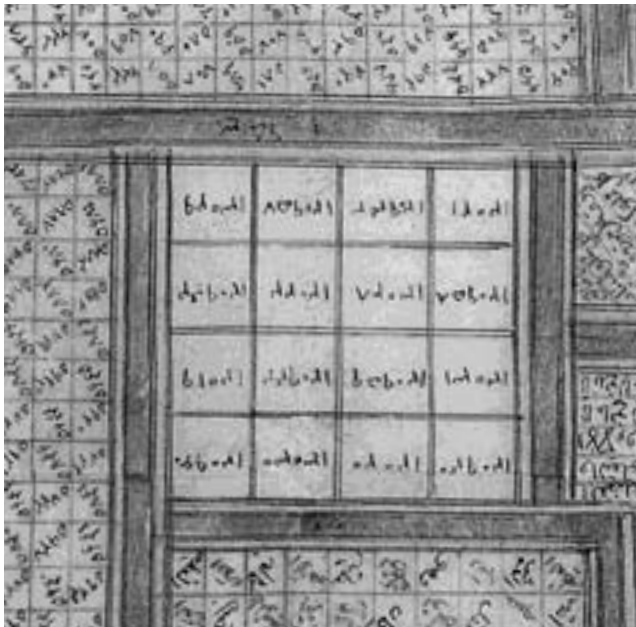
5. Christ Dispatching Mandylion, Ms. M 499, 14th century, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, illustrative unit 10

lustration shows a talismanic image of a warrior, and the accompanying text describes how to make such an image work as a talisman (fig. 8)⁷. It comes from a manuscript of the *Book of Wonders*, dated to 1388 but written by Muhammad b. Mahmud b. Ahmad-i Tusi, in the late twelfth century. I will return to Tusi's manuscript later, but I want to point out in passing its date contemporary to our roll. The manuscript image has no power whatsoever, and making it potent, according to the manuscript, «depends on a symbiotic relationship among visual image, specified temporal conditions and material of particular stones»⁸. The Seal of Christ, contained and explained in the *Letter of Christ to Abgar*, is unproblematic in comparison. It simply does its work, no matter the format, the medium or conditions of its creation. The format of the *Seal*, as it is found on the Chicago-Morgan roll, is best paralleled by Muslim magic squares, but the specifics of its activation are not developed – I cannot help but think that this simplicity is part of the reason more examples are not extant, in fact.

The powerful protection afforded these signs of Christ on our roll cannot be denied, but likewise important are their unassailable orthodoxy, like one finds in most of the Muslim magic squares. The *Letter* essentially shows the rewards of correct faith in the natures of Christ, faith especially like Abgar's that is not based on personal witness. Moreover, the *Letter*, and in its condensed form, the characters of Christ's seal, reveal his



6. Sphere of Petosiris, 12th century, Oxford, St. John's College, cod. 17, c 8r



7. Iranian Talismanic Cart, early 12th century, London, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art

dyophysite nature, true man and true God, distinct but in seamless unity⁹.

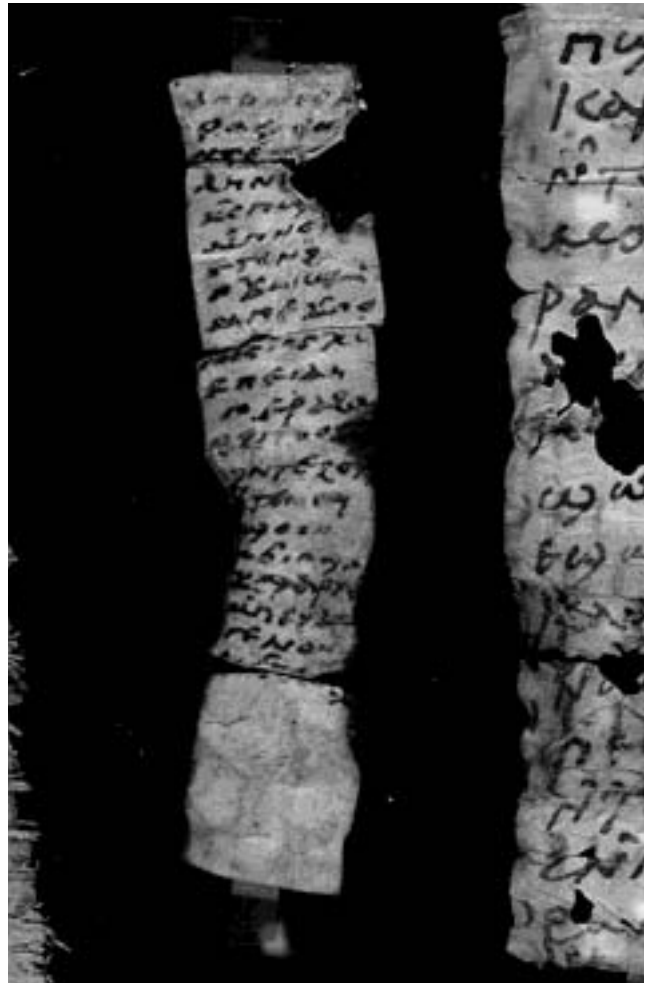
While the range of uses of a given text, like the *Letter of Abgar*, is great, from wooden tablets to scraps of papyrus to parchment rolls, the essential quality of the

text as a traditional history with good doctrinal credentials was generally not doubted¹⁰. Indeed, the prayers and invocations found on even the most self-interested amulets drew on the common *formulae* found in liturgy and scripture¹¹. Some of the other texts included on the Chicago-Morgan roll reveal a lack of distinction between magic and orthodoxy, as the texts chosen have an impeccable Christian history of invoking divine aid and safekeeping. For instance, the *Psalms* have an ancient history as protective texts, as their language and message have always given them that power. The Chicago-Morgan roll also includes passages from Christian scripture, Mark, Luke, John and Matthew, written in that order at the head of the roll now in Chicago. The selected texts reveal, even in their abridged form, general safeguarding long ascribed to the *Gospels*.

The copying out of the incipits of the *Gospels*, correctly and legibly, for amuletic purposes had a long and even unexceptionable tradition, and evidence survives from before the fourteenth century of the power ascribed not only to those incipits but also to their conjunction with the beginning of the text of the *Letter of Abgar*. Evocative is a strip of Coptic parchment in the British Library, Or. 4919(2), which shows the protective quality of such texts together in a format clearly designed to be worn on the person of the owner (fig. 9). The strip, measuring 7 x 1.6 cm, contains the beginning of the *Letter of Abgar*, followed by the first words of the four *Gospels*, all written in twenty-one lines of a minute



8. Talismanic Image of a Warrior, 1388, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Suppl. Pers. 332, c. 68a



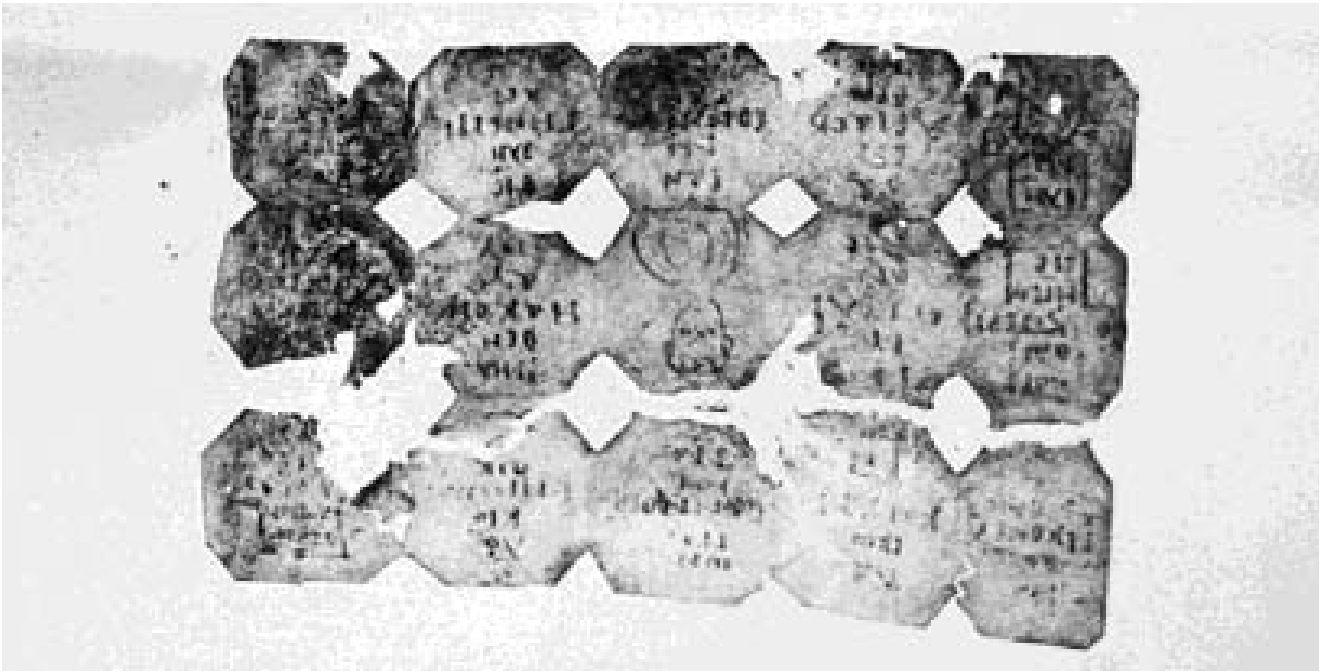
9. Amulet Roll, London, British Library, Or. 4912(2), recto

script in a sloping hand. This small strip of parchment was originally folded and used as an amulet¹².

The combination of these texts, *Psalms* and Christian *Gospels*, along with apocrypha like the *Letter of Abgar*, therefore, has a history outside the Chicago-Morgan roll, and this history accommodates different scales, uses and costs. The small piece in the British Library and the Chicago-Morgan roll together show this range. But while these objects can be understood as orthodox and not unusual uses of texts for devotional and protective power, the use of representation in this process is not clarified by the comparison. In fact, the extensive use of images marks the Chicago-Morgan roll as highly exceptional in this context. Certainly, imagery and Christian scripture were frequently introduced into magical papyri for their special power. For example, this Early Medieval piece of parchment now in Allentown, Pennsylvania (Muhlenberg College, Theol. Pap. 2), presents some of the same elements as the Chicago-Morgan roll (fig. 10)¹³. It has an excerpt from scripture, Matthew 4:23-4, which described Christ's healing ministry, as well as a sketch of the evangelist (presumably) and a cross-shaped grid with characters. It is small, measuring 6 x 11.5 cm, and its form reveals a different

order of aesthetics than the Chicago-Morgan roll does. The illustrations collected on the Chicago-Morgan roll, all twenty-eight, are in contrast high quality and expensive, with their gold grounds, and are also unmistakably conventional. For instance, the passages of Mark and Luke are prefaced by their author portraits, very conventional signs of authorship and authority, and *Psalms* 68 is preceded by a portrait of David, in a form both traditional and obvious (fig. 11). Nowhere on the obverse of the object is any trace of crypto-magical designs. A question, therefore, is the function of the images on the Greek obverse. Some element of magical protection is part of their presence, as for instance with the pairs of standing military saints at the base of the roll, including George and Demetrius, Eugenius, Theodore and Artilectus, who stand on guard in answer to the poetic invocations below them. The portrait of the orans Daniel, placed in this sequence of military saints, functions as an intermediary figure between supplicant and God, an ancient form found in Early Christian art and before.

The images perform several functions, illustrative, punctuating, devotional and protective, and their accumulation, in a way that is absolutely unprecedented for



10. Amulet Roll, *Allentown, Mublenberg College, Theol. Pap. 2, recto*

this format of an illustrated manuscript, reveals a complex set of purposes behind the object. For the roll is not only prophylactic; it also points the user in other directions. The problem with trying to come to terms with the functions of this object rests, in part, in the lack of *comparanda* in the Byzantine or East Christian world. Before the sixteenth century, the only comparable objects, to my knowledge, are either liturgical or diplomatic. Other possibilities, however, allow analysis of the possible uses of the roll to range beyond the discussion of prophylactic art and texts offered above. In fact, they open up a host of possibilities beyond the interesting, but limiting, designation as amulet roll.

Medieval and modern practice involves rolls as private devotional devices, working as an *aide-mémoire* for prayers and as focus for personal piety. For example, the Pierpont Morgan Library possesses a Late Medieval roll, Glazier 39, that suggests personal piety and engagement with the object¹⁴. The Glazier manuscript is an impressive object, 585 cm long and 18.2 cm wide, and it is like the Chicago-Morgan roll in that it also possesses eighteen drawings along its length, mostly of individual saints, with prayers also suggestively directed to Iskins, Otheos and Atthanatos, among others.

Rolls were also used in more public work as teaching tools and as admonitions to proper behavior, as well as private devotional objects. In modern Ethiopia, rolls are hung near the bed of the sick person, and the priest can read from it there or in church, but in Ethiopian custom the length of the roll is always carefully tailored to the dimensions of the user's body, so it is usually around 2 m long¹⁵.

The roll's texts themselves have strong affinities with protective operations, as attested in other objects of the

medieval eastern Mediterranean. But the length, and the elaborateness and high quality of decoration of the roll are altogether different in character from the strip in the British Library with its parallel collection of texts. The roll in its material qualities belongs to a different world. The long piece of supple and expensive parchment is one indication of the costs involved. These elements indicate an elite context for the commissioning of the roll, and while this context does not eliminate in any way the use of the roll as protection, the roll is so full of text and illustration that reading and viewing, contemplation and prayer, are also part of its work for Christians who owned it. The holding of the roll, and the actual performance of the unrolling, proceeding through its length, and rerolling, are each devotional acts, very like fingering rosary beads for example. The tactile and performative aspects of the roll need to be appreciated in order to see the employment of the roll as invocation to protection as well as an act of piety, which is fully tactile and engaging. The object itself is incentive to reading and from that to devotion and prayer, as well as to contemplation of sacred images.

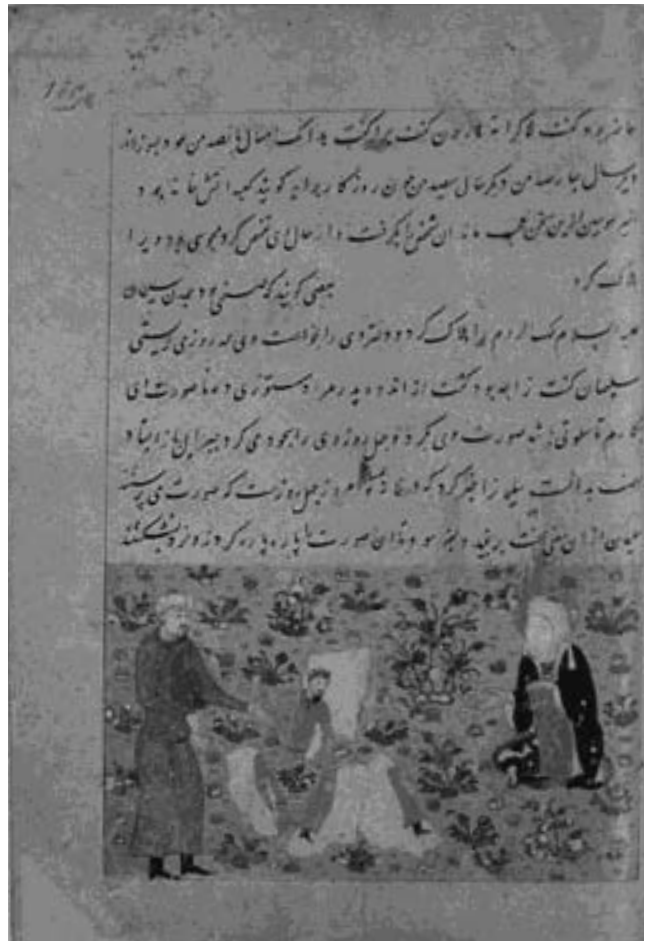
Unfortunately, the obverse of the roll provides no information about the ways in which it was used, beyond the suggestive texts and images still extant, nor about the person who commissioned it, where or when. The roll has lost portions at the top and bottom, and these areas may once have given personal details and desires. The Arabic text on the reverse does indeed state that the roll was by the year of Alexander 1694, or 1383 of the Common Era, in the possession of an Arab Christian. He added a cross at the head of the roll, which is intact, perhaps implying that the roll was already missing some of its head, and he added a *colophon*.



11. David, Ms. M 499, 14th century, University of Chicago, illustrative unit 7

The Arabic *colophon*, of course, raises questions about the provenance of the roll, its date and original uses. An East Christian candidate for such an object would be some Melkite community in Egypt or Palestine, a place where Greek was used and understood, and where high-quality manuscript production and design were feasible. The Melkite context fits, given Sidney Griffith's conditions of a strong adherence to a Greek patristic heritage, of the adoption of Arabic as a common language, and of a distinctive Christological position, namely a Chalcedonian dyophysitism, that would set them apart from other East Christian congregations¹⁶. The theology expressed on the roll does not help us pinpoint the provenance at all: scripture, *Psalms* and the *Nicene Creed* are common elements. The Arabic reverse does not help necessarily in this regard, but the dating for instance on that side, based on the Alexandrian calendar, rather than dating from creation or from the Muslim reckoning, is common to Syriac and Melkite churches both.

The best evidence for an East Christian provenance for the Chicago-Morgan roll is the only *comparandum* that I have been able to find for this roll, Palat. Suppl. gr. 116, in the Nationalbibliothek, Vienna¹⁷. The very fragile parchment roll in Vienna measures 285 x 15 cm, and



12. Suleyman's Queen's Idol, 1388, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Suppl. Pers. 332, c. 165a

unlike the Chicago-Morgan roll, the Vienna roll gives information about the original scribe, patron and place of production. The roll was written by Thomas the Patrologus, whose inscription is partially preserved, so the roll likely dates approximately to the second quarter of the sixteenth century. Moreover, Thomas wrote a prayer on the roll for the servant of God, Antonius, and his parents and children. The roll contains a number of legends and prayers, some accompanied by illustrations: an anonymous narration of the battle of the Archangel Michael with Baskania; a prayer for warding off spells for Antonius and his family; the *Letters* of Abgar and Christ; and an exorcism prayer from the liturgy of Basil in favor of Antonius and his house. Illustrations head three of the texts: the Archangel Michael before the first text; an image of George and the dragon before the final text; and at the beginning of the *Letters*, the *Mandylion*, the miraculous image of Edessa.

This roll in Vienna is the only object extant fully comparable to the Chicago-Morgan roll, and together they evoke a whole class of objects, which because of their personal, intimate nature and fragility have been lost to historians. The provenance at Sinai is highly probable, given Thomas's connection as a Greek-speaking monk,



13. Seljuk Bowl with Shaikh and Christian Woman, ca. 1200, Washington, Freer Gallery

and perhaps priest, at the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai. The Chicago-Morgan roll belonged to a similar context where protective and devotional texts are put into a roll format in a semi-official fashion by monks or priests.

The images are integral to these rolls. In many ways, the production and use of figural art in a religious context provided unity across Christian groups, especially in relation to dominant Muslim mores. The Muslim presence at Sinai was always pronounced in the Middle Ages, and it reveals itself in the presence of a mosque, a transformed hostelry for pilgrims, within the precincts of the monastery itself. The Melkite Christian presence is likewise revealed in commissions at the Monastery, commissions that show the centrality of figuration for Christian self-definition.¹⁸

Two monumental icons from ca. 1200 are remarkable survivals of Greek and Arabic dualism¹⁹. These icons represent the prophets Elijah and Moses, in scenes connected to the holy sites at Sinai where the prophets received, respectively, nourishment and law from God. The dimensions of the icons are striking, as they measure about 130 x 70 cm, a massive scale in this period. The inscriptions reveal the Arabic-Greek context, in

that both have Arabic inscriptions running along the lower horizontal frame. The Arabic contains the same messages as the Greek inscriptions. The dimensions also seem to imply that the painter Stephen made these icons at Sinai, as one would assume that the wood would be transported into the monastery and then assembled as panels and then painted. This scenario is the likeliest, I believe, and it shows that extraordinarily fine work could be done at that remote site and that care was taken to preserve the messages in the significant languages of the Melkite church.

Now equally telling is the presence of figuration, beyond the bilingual nature of the icons, and it is worth addressing the use of figural images as another aspect of Christian identity, especially as perceived in the Muslim east. For the tradition of painting portraits of the prophets was an ancient one, according to Christian and Muslim traditions both. The *Chest of Witnessing* is a tremendously rich Muslim tradition, for instance, in which medieval writers described the foundation of portraiture at God's hand²⁰. In this tradition, Adam asked God for renderings of all the prophets among his progeny, and God produced a set of painted panels, which were placed in a special case; the originals disappeared at some unknown time, but copies were made at the hand of the prophet Daniel. Much later, followers of Muhammad visited the court of Heraclius to convince the Byzantine emperor of the error of the Christian Romans, and they were amazed when they were shown the *Chest of Witnessing* as the final portrait was of Muhammad himself²¹. I know of no depictions of the *Chest*, but the tradition does show a special prestige for portraiture among Muslims, as well as a competitive art-historical sense, for the *Chest of Witnessing* shows God as painter and delineator of sacred history.

Muslim views of images and their revelatory power are, therefore, complex and not so divergent from Christian views in their essential concerns. The truth in painting, as it were, was a point of contention, and the scene from Tusi's *Book of Wonders* from 1388 shows the *stigma* attached in his view to unseemly attention to pictures (fig. 12)²². Here the painter showed Suleyman and his wife before the shattered portrait of her father, to which she had been too attached. Idolatry is a distinct danger when one is tricked by painting's illusionism.

In another, related tradition, the false prophet Mani (216-74/77) was held as an example of art used in the service of misleading revelation²³. He was a formidable figure, who not only wrote but also painted, and according to Tusi again, he depicted the meaning of the *cosmos*, the sons of lightness and darkness, in order to convert new followers. In a tradition dating back to Ephraim the Syrian in the fourth century, Mani had painted his revelations on a roll, which appears to have survived till the late eleventh century. Both Christian and Muslim convention upheld Mani as the paradigm of the misuse of painting, exemplified by his own painted roll.

Let me try briefly then to place the Chicago-Morgan



14. Mandylion Healing, Ms. M 499, 14th century, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, illustrative unit 13

roll into this context of medieval art histories – that is, of establishing confessional identities through figural art –, for it seems to me that the roll under discussion was also a kind of response, though indirect, to assertions Muslim theologians and historians were making. The *Chest of Witnessing* vividly asserted Muhammad as the final prophet through the proof of God making Muhammad's likeness at the beginning of creation. In this tradition, God is maker and prefigurer of his own history of revelation, but just the same he does not figure himself, the unknowable maker with the brush and paints. The Christian roll, obviously, asserts its own history of God's revelation and of his role as artist, as well as special men who comprised the Christian community. The Chicago-Morgan roll most fully argues its position for a divine history of art that not only places Christ at the end of the line of prophets, but also as the divine maker of his own self-portrait. This Christian paradigm of making likeness establishes the inscription of divine features in our own human faces, whereas the Chest of Witnessing tradition presents God as first artist, not as self-portraitist of humanity.

Wrong-headed image making was intimately connected in Muslim minds with Christian identity, witness this bowl from the Freer in Washington D.C. and dated ca. 1200, where the Christian woman on the right seduces the Muslim shaikh (fig. 13)²⁴. The scene derives from the story of the Christian woman and Muslim shaikh found in the work *The Conference on Birds*, by Farid Ud-din Attar (second half of the twelfth century)²⁵. The beautiful Christian woman reveals her divergence from Islam in her garment freckled with figures. Those figures covering the desired body represent real danger to the shaikh. Idolatry nearly costs him his soul. According to Mohammad Muhsin, writing in the sixteenth century, such images are «Christian breaths»²⁶.

The Christian rolls implicitly argue their position against such accusations, and the *Mandylion* is a key point in the relationship between God and humanity (fig. 14). That image asserts paradigms of Christianity: God is like us, he lived amongst us, his protection and presence survives his passing in testimonies and traces left behind, and he made an image that proved all of these beliefs. Moreover, he unambiguously wrote down proof of all these facts, and the roll shows that truth, in the letter and seal of Christ – and I will only mention in passing Muhammad's Seal of Prophethood, the birthmark between his shoulder blades that was inscribed on many Islamic talismans²⁷. It seems to me that the bilingual Melkite identity in art is expressed in the Chicago-Morgan roll in ways that can only be understood as belonging to that confessional context where Islam is a major foil. Figuration, especially divine figuration, is the central concern in such a context, where God's own face and seal, not his prophet Muhammad's, endow Christians with unique signs of presence and protection.

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¹ *Byzantium. Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, exhibition catalogue, ed. by H.C. Evans, New York 2004, pp. 438-439, for bibliography.

² On the general development of the roll in the Middle Ages, see, for example, A. Dzurova, *La miniatura bizantina: I manoscritti miniati e la loro diffusione*, Milan 2001, pp. 18-20, 184; M.T. Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, New York/London 1996, pp. 12-29; U. Horak, «Christliches und Christlich-Magisches auf illuminierten Papyri, Pergamenten, Papieren und Ostraka. Das pergament P. Vindob. G. 40.204 mit Christus und den vier Evangelisten», in: *Mitteilungen zur christlichen Archäologie*, 1, 1995, pp. 27-48, as well as W. Brashear, «Magical Papyri: Magic in Bookform», in: *Das Buch als magisches und als Repräsentationssubjekt*, ed. by P. Ganz, Wiesbaden 1992, pp. 25-57.

³ *Acta apostolorum apocrypha*, ed. by R.A. Lipsius and M. Bonnet, Leipzig 1891, pp. 279-283. See also M. Cavana, «Lapide con presunta lettera di Gesù Cristo», in: *Mandylion. Intorno al Sacro Volto, da Bisanzio a Genova*, exhibition catalogue (Genoa, Museo Diocesano, 2004), ed. by G. Wolf, C. Dufour Bozzo & A.R. Calderoni Masetti, Milan 2004, pp. 68-71; J.B. Segal, *Edessa, The Blessed City*, Oxford 1970, pp. 62-76; P. Lemerle, *Philippe et la Macédoine orientale à l'époque chrétienne et byzantine. Recherches d'histoire et d'archéologie*, Paris 1945, vol. 1, pp. 86-90; C. Picard, «Un texte nouveau de la correspondance entre Abgar d'Osroène et Jésus-Christ gravé sur une porte de ville, à Philippos (Macédoine)», in: *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, XLIV, 1920, pp. 41-69; F. Nau, «Une inscription grecque d'Édesse. La lettre de N.-S. J.-C. à Abgar», in: *Revue de l'orient chrétien*, XXI, 1918-1919, pp. 217-218; and E. von Dobschütz, «Der Briefwechsel zwischen Abgar und Jesus», in: *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie*, XLIII, 1900, pp. 422-486.

⁴ See R. Hanna & J. Griffiths, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Western Medieval Manuscripts of St. John's College, Oxford*, Oxford 2002, pp. 26-34; F. Wallis, «Medicine in Medieval Calendar Manuscripts», in: *Manuscript Sources of Medieval Medicine: A Book of Essays*, ed. by M.R. Schleissner, New York-London 1995, pp. 126-127, and *Eadem, MS Oxford St. John's College 17: A Mediaeval Manuscript in Its Context* (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1985), pp. 248-250.

⁵ See A. Ittig, «A Talismanic Bowl», in: *Annales islamologiques*, XVIII, 1982, pp. 88-90; S. Cammann, «Islamic and Indian Magic Squares», in: *History of Religions*, VIII, 1968-60, pp. 181-209, 271-299; T. Canaan, «Arabic Magic Bowls», in: *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, XVI, 1936, pp. 79-127; H.H. Spoer, «Arab Magic Medicinal Bowls», in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, LV, 1935, pp. 237-56; J. Robson, «Magic Cures in Popular Islam», in: *Moslem World*, XXV, 1934, pp. 33-36; and T. Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* [London 1927], Reprint, Jerusalem 1979, pp. 116-118. Similar patterns are found on surviving fifteenth/sixteenth-century silks in the Topkapi Collection, but those shirts also have the Seal of Solomon, names of caliphs, angels and prophets, in elaborate magical programs intended to protect the wearer. See H. Tezcan, «The Imperial Robe Collection at the Topkapi Palace Museum», in: *Silks for the Sultans: Ottoman Imperial Garments from Topkapi Palace*, trans. by R. Bragner, Istanbul 1996, pp. 27-28, and also pp. 228-248 for plates.

⁶ F. Maddison & E. Savage-Smith, *Science, Tools and Magic*. Part One. *Body and Spirit, Mapping the Universe*, The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, vol. XII/1, London 1997, pp. 59-71.

⁷ P.D. Berlekamp, *Wonders and Their Images in Late Medieval Culture: "The Wonders of Creation" in Fars and Iraq, 1280-1388* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2003), pp. 186-194.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁹ See É. Drioton, «Un apocryphe anti-arien: Le version copte de

la correspondance d'Abgar, roi d'Édesse, avec Notre-Seigneur», in: *Revue de l'Orient chrétien*, xx, 1915-1917, pp. 306-326, 337-373. Geza Vermes in his *The Changing Faces of Jesus*, London 2000, p. 222, states that the letter is «devoid of doctrinal content». While this assertion holds true for the first century, naturally the letter contains doctrinal references important for the later Middle Ages.

¹⁰ Of course, early skeptics spoke against Christ having written anything at all during his lifetime, which left the door open, naturally, for the “letters from heaven”. See H. Leclercq, «Abgar (la légende d’)», in: *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et liturgie*, ed. by F. Cabrol & H. Leclercq, Paris 1913-1953, t. 1, p. 97. On these letters, see L. Gougaud, «La prière dite de Charlemagne et les pièces apocryphes apparentées», in: *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, xx, 1924, pp. 213-216; E. Renoir, «Christ (Lettre du), tombée du ciel», in: *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et liturgie*, III, 1, pp. 1534-1546; H. Delehaye, «Note sur le légende de la lettre du Christ tombée du ciel», in: *Bulletin de la Classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques, Académie royale des sciences, des lettres et des beaux-arts de Belgique*, 1899, pp. 171-213; and the texts in A. Vasiliev, *Anecdota graeco-byzantina*, Moscow 1893, pp. 23-32.

¹¹ On the use of Gospel openings and other prayers from scripture, see, for instance, D. Frankfurter, «Amuletic Invocations of Christ for Health and Fortune», in: *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, ed. by R. Valantasis, Princeton 2000, pp. 340-343; E.D. Hunter, «A Scroll Amulet from Kurdistan», in: *Aram*, v, 1993, pp. 243-254; and E.A. Judge, «The Magical Use of Scripture in the Papyri», in: *Perspectives on Language and Text. Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen's Sixtieth Birthday, July 28, 1985*, ed. by E.W. Conrad and E.G. Newing, Winona Lake, Indiana 1987, pp. 339-349. See also S. Gabelic, «Prophylactic and Other Inscriptions in Late Byzantine Fresco Paintings», in: *Byzantinische Malerei. Bildprogramme-Ikonographie-Stil*, ed. by G. Koch, Wiesbaden 2000, pp. 57-72.

¹² W.E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London 1905, pp. 140-141; and E.A.W. Budge, *Amulets and Talismans*, New Hyde Park, New York 1961, p. 132 [= *Amulets and Superstitions*, New York-London 1931].

¹³ J. van Haelst, *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens*, Paris 1976, p. 127, and also M.J. Kruger, «P. Oxy. 840: Amulet or Miniature Codex?», in: *Journal of Theological Studies*, LIII, 2002, pp. 81-94.

¹⁴ J. Plummer, *Manuscripts from the William S. Glazier Collection*, New York 1959, pp. 24-25; and R.H. Robbins, «The “Arma Christi” Rolls», in: *Modern Language Review*, xxxiv, 1939, pp. 415-421. On the *Arma Christi* iconography and devotion, see R. Berliner, «Arma Christi», in: *The Freedom of Medieval Art” und anderer Studien zum christlichen Bild*, ed. by R. Suckale, Berlin 2003, pp. 97-191; D.S. Areford, «The Passion Measured: A Late-Medieval Diagram of the Body of Christ», in: *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. by A.A. MacDonald, Groningen 1998, p. 215; J.F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*, New York 1998, pp. 82-83, 141-143, 304-308; Id., *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*, Berkeley 1997, pp. 2, 68, and R. Suckale, «Arma Christi: Überlegungen zur Zeichenhaftigkeit mittelalterlicher Andachtsbilder», in: *Städels-Jahrbuch*, vi, 1977, pp. 177-208.

¹⁵ See J. Mercier, *Art That Heals: The Image as Medicine in Ethiopia*, New York 1997, and Id., *Ethiopian Magic Scrolls*, trans. by R. Pevear, New York 1979, and now the very fine *Ethiopian Art: The Walters Art Museum*, Lingfield, Surrey 2001.

¹⁶ See S.H. Griffith, «The Life of Theodore of Edessa: History, Hagiography, and Religious Apologetics in Mar Saba Monastery in Early Abbasid Times», in: *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, ed. by J. Patrich, Leuven 2001, pp. 147-169; S.H. Griffith, «“Melkites”, “Jacobites” and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria», in: *Syrian Christians under Islam. The First Thousand Years*, ed. by D. Thomas, Leiden 2001, pp.

9-55; D. Thomas «Byzantium and the Christians in the World of Islam: Constantinople and the Church in the Holy Land in the Ninth Century», in: *Medieval Encounters*, III, 1997, pp. 231-265, as well as M. Rubin, «Arabization versus Islamization in the Palestinian Melkite Community during the Early Muslim Period», in: *Sharing the Sacred. Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land, First-Fifteenth Centuries CE*, ed. by A. Kofsky and G.G. Stroumsa, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 149-162.

¹⁷ H. Hunger and C. Hannick, *Katalog der griechischen Handschriften der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Teil 4. Supplementum graecum*, Vienna 1994, pp. 200-201. On the illustrated manuscripts of this period at Sinai, see G. Galavaris, «The Ornamentation of 15th/16th Century “Sinaitic” Manuscripts», in: *The Greek Script in the 15th/16th Centuries*, Athens 2000, pp. 443-463, who does not, however, mention Thomas or this roll in Vienna.

¹⁸ See J. Lafontain-Dosogne, «Le monastère du Sinai: Creuset de culture chrétienne (x^e-xiii^e siècle)», in: *East and West in the Crusader States. Contexts-Contacts-Confrontations. Acta of the Congress held at Hernen Castle in May 1993*, ed. by K. Ciggaar, A. Davids & H. Teule, Leuven 1996, pp. 103-129.

¹⁹ Bibliography and description in *Sinai-Byzantium-Russia. Orthodox Art from the Sixth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Y. Piatnitsky et al., London 2000, pp. 242-244.

²⁰ D.J. Roxburgh, *Prefacing the Image: The Writing of Art History in Sixteenth-Century Iran*, Leiden 2001, pp. 170-175. See also *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades: The Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abi Talib al-Dimashqi's Reply*, The History of Christian-Muslim Relations, vol. II, ed. by R. Ebied & D. Thomas, Leiden, 2005, pp. 174-175.

²¹ See also U. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims. A Textual Analysis*, Princeton 1995, p. 49.

²² Berlekamp, *Wonders and Their Images in Late Medieval Culture*, p. 194.

²³ See Y. Porter, «La forme et le sens: À propos du portrait dans la littérature persane classique», in: *Pand-o Sokhan: Mélanges offerts à Charles-Henri de Fouchécour*, ed. by C. Balay, C. Kappler and Z. Vesel, Tehran 1995, pp. 222-225; P.P. Soucek, «Nizami on Painters and Painting», in: *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. by R. Ettinghausen, New York 1972, pp. 9-10; L.J.R. Ort, *Mani: A Religio-Historical Description of his Personality*, Leiden 1967, pp. 32, 180, and C. W. Mitchell, *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan. Volume I: The Discourses Addressed to Hypatius*, London 1912, p. xciii.

²⁴ See E. Atil, «Islamic Women as Rulers and Patrons», in: *Asian Art*, Spring, 1993, p. 4, and Ead., *Ceramics from the World of Islam*, Washington D.C. 1974, pp. 94-95. My thanks to Catherine B. Asher for bringing this interpretation to my attention.

²⁵ Farid Ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. by S.C. Nott, London/New York 2000, pp. 47-57, and *Persian Mysticism*, trans. by R.P. Masani, New Dehli 1981, pp. 55-62.

²⁶ Roxburgh, 2001 (as n. 20), pp. 194-195. But such expressions occurred earlier. See the fascinating study by R. Shukurov, «Christian Elements in the Identity of the Anatolian Turkmens (12th-13th Centuries)», in: *Cristianità d'occidente e cristianità d'oriente (secoli VI-XI)*, Settimane di studio del centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, vol. LI, Spoleto 2004, p. 738.

²⁷ A. Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety*, Chapel Hill 1985, p. 34.