The empire that Oman’s ruler, Sayyid Sa’id b. Sultan al-Bu’ Sa’idi (r. 1806-1856), created in East Africa was one of the most cosmopolitan the world has ever seen. The ruling Omani Arabs were Muslims of the Ibadi sect; the “Swahilis” were Shafi’i Sunni Muslims;¹ the Indians were of various religious persuasions—Hindus, Sunnis, Twelver Shi’a, Isma’ilis, Bohora, and Parsees; the army consisted mainly of Baluchis, who were Hanafi Sunnis; and non-Muslim Africans came from many different regions. When Sayyid Sa’id made Zanzibar the capital of the Omani empire in 1832, scholars migrated to Zanzibar from various parts of the Swahili coast, and he appointed qadis for both Sunnis and Ibadis in every large town. Sayyid Sa’id and his successors were admired for their broad tolerance of all religions; according to one source, Sayyid Sa’id would not allow the slaughter of any cattle in predominantly Hindu sections of town, for fear of offending the residents.² When European travelers, diplomats and Christian missionaries arrived on the scene in the 1840’s, they were also impressed by the good-humored politeness of the Muslims. A British missionary in East Africa in the 1880s wrote:

Although the Arabs, like other Mohammedans, fiercely resent one of their number becoming a Christian, they are not on that account hostile to Christians who have not been Mohammedans ..., nor do they take much, if any trouble, to convert either Christian or heathen to Mohammedanism. The heathen coast man, the converted native from the interior, ... the Buddhist from India and the Parsee fire-worshipper, all alike live in peace, and pursue unhindered and unpersecuted their religious observances in the Arab-ruled towns of Zanzibar and the coast. ... So far as I have been able to gather from my intercourse with them, they do not even object to a missionary speaking to them of the claims of Christ; only they consider any personal questions as to their own individual belief an exhibition of bad manners and a want of courtesy on the part of their questioner.³

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The first Christian missionaries to East Africa were German Lutherans, who began a missionary settlement near Mombasa in the 1840s, and French Catholics of the Holy Ghost Fathers, who followed up their work among ex-slaves in Réunion with the establishment of a permanent mission in Zanzibar in 1860. But the missionaries with the deepest impact on Zanzibar, with the closest ties with the sultan and with Muslim scholars, were those who came from the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa (hereafter UMCA). Founded as a direct result of David Livingstone’s appeal to bring Christian civilization to Africa and end the horrors of the slave trade, the UMCA initially attempted to establish a center near Lake Nyasa. However, the missionaries found that by providing asylum to those trying to escape enslavement, they became targets of the aggression of those engaged in the slave trade. Furthermore, many missionaries rapidly succumbed to diseases. This led to Bishop Tozer’s crucial decision to remove the center of the UMCA mission to Zanzibar in 1864.

British political interest in East Africa in the nineteenth century focused mainly on the control and eventual elimination of the slave trade. There was, therefore, a convergence of interests between the British political agents in Zanzibar and the missionaries, which undoubtedly stood to the missionaries’ advantage, as Great Britain, whose consulate in Zanzibar opened in 1841, exercised a great deal of influence on Zanzibari politics, finally making Zanzibar a protectorate in 1890. In 1845 Sayyid Sa’id entered into a treaty with Great Britain, prohibiting the export of slaves from his East African dominions and the import of slaves from any part of Africa into his possessions in Asia, and allowing British warships to seize any vessels carrying the slave trade under his flag, except those transporting slaves from one East African port to another in his domains. Later treaties with Sayyids Barghash (1870-88) and Khalifa (1888-90) abolished the slave trade altogether, and ultimately abolished the legal status of slavery. Shortly after Bishop Tozer arrived in Zanzibar in 1864, a group of five slaves, seized from an Arab dhow, were released by Sayyid Majid (1856-70) into his care. The nucleus of Christian converts emerged out of the growing numbers of freed slaves for the next twenty-five years.

This article focuses not on the slave trade, which is thoroughly covered in all histories of the Zanzibar sultanate and of Christian missions in East Africa, but on more subtle interpersonal dynamics between missionaries and Muslims in Zanzibar. Missionary opposition to the slave trade did not necessarily imply disaffection from the Arabs, even on the mainland, where the impact of the slave trade was most devastating. Although Livingstone “saw the slavers at their work and realized that this was a country invaded by Asiatics whose exploitation of it carried no single mitigating feature,” writes Oliver, “socially, there was always something of a fellow-feeling between the European and the Arab in the centre of Africa.” As Tozer remarked, “Every Arab is a 'perfect gentleman.'” Nonetheless, Tozer described Islam as a “horrible parody of religion, pandering to every passion and lust, and utterly misrepresenting God and goodness,” and decided that Muhammad “must have been a coarse, vulgar, treacherous man to invent a system which could lull his followers into security, and yet leave them as far from God as ever.” He seemed to believe that Sayyid Majid’s “perfect” manner was partially attributable to his contact with Christians, which “improves and softens the Mahometan character and disposition.” In view of Muslim antagonism to Christianity, Tozer concluded that the best policy was to refrain from all hostile attacks.
When, in 1872, the British government sent Sir Bartle Frere to Zanzibar to negotiate a treaty for the total abolition of the slave trade by sea, he inspected all the different missionary groups in East Africa, and was particularly impressed with the settlement of 324 freed slaves at Bagamoyo, on the mainland opposite Zanzibar, founded by the Holy Ghost Fathers in 1868. Such settlements tended to become independent political and economic units. The UMCA, on the other hand, would take in only as many freed slaves as they could provide with a solid Christian education. Whereas the UMCA stressed spiritual rebirth and conversion, and felt that economic incentives were disastrous for both Africans and missionaries, Catholics, for whom salvation is obtained through membership in the Church with consequent access to the “means of grace” in its Sacraments, saw little harm in material incentives. They focused primarily on extending practical help to Africans, in the hope of surreptitiously baptizing infants and the elderly without their relatives’ awareness.

EDWARD STEERE IN ZANZIBAR, 1864-1882

The most influential and capable leader of the UMCA was Edward Steere, who accompanied Bishop Tozer when he first came to Africa in 1864, and took his place as bishop in 1874 when Tozer was forced by illness to return to England. A man of talent in multiple areas, Steere made a permanent mark on Zanzibar by composing a handbook of the Swahili language, establishing a printing press in Zanzibar, translating large portions of the Bible into Swahili, and building, on the site of the recently-closed slave market of Zanzibar, Christ Church, an imposing structure of which he was the chief architect and builder. Steere’s gentleness, humor, respect, and compassion won him many accolades and friendships with people of all ethnic groups in Zanzibar, and his mastery of many languages was indispensable to the mission.

In a letter shortly after his arrival in Zanzibar, Steere writes about his fascination with the Arabs, “a race that has done more, and is less known than any other in the world.” Thirteen years later he groped for an appropriate Christian theological evaluation of Muhammad. In contrast to typical Christian demonization of Muhammad, Steere said that at the very least, Muhammad was “a man possessed with a great zeal for God, and a great hatred for idolatry and injustice.” He even speculated that Muhammad might really have had a divine commission to call the Arabs back to the faith of Abraham, so that they might be prepared for faith in Christ. Nonetheless, he was critical of Muslims’ idealization of the past, so that, “instead of encouraging growth, it petrifies.” And of the much-vaunted Muslim tolerance for non-Muslims, Steere comments, “He tolerates other men much as we do the lower animals; they are at liberty to live and do as they please, so long as they make themselves useful in their places, or at least do not excite the anger, or the cupidty, of the superior race. Beyond this toleration or contempt, no thorough-going Mohammedan can ever get.”

Many Christian missionaries felt that it was virtually impossible to convert Muslims to Christianity, and hoped to influence Muslims in a less direct fashion, through living an austere lifestyle devoted entirely to the service of others. Dr. Steere felt this was not enough. In a letter written in December 1873, he wrote that the people of Zanzibar were suspicious of European motives in working to end the slave trade, and he felt it only honest to proclaim publicly the religious inspiration for their actions.
In reality, however, while Steere enjoyed many theological discussions with Muslims, he felt that he lacked the gift of evangelism; he saw his focus on understanding Muslims and other Africans rather than evangelizing them was a flaw: “I do not possess some of the essential elements of a Missionary character. I can be very friendly with Negroes and Arabs, and can learn to use their language, and enter into their modes of thought, mainly because I am content to accept them as my teachers rather than to put myself forward to teach them.”

It was for this reason that he declined, at first, the request to become bishop of Zanzibar, a post he accepted under pressure.

A major impediment to evangelism among Muslims, Steere wrote, is the threat hanging over any convert from Islam. Sultan Majid warned the first missionaries that if they made any converts, “there were many people in the town who would consider it a duty to cut their throats, and he could not protect them.” Missionaries were under European protection and had nothing to fear, but Steere was disturbed by the idea that “one is bidding another to danger his life, while one’s own is in perfect safety.” Nonetheless, there was at least one Muslim convert to Christianity in Zanzibar, an Arab named ‘Abdallah b. Muhammad, who had learned English from Bishop Steere.

As long as he was only an enquirer he might stand at the end of the Slave Market Church, and no notice was taken. But one day he uncovered his head, and knelt down among the Christians. The next day, the enlightened Seyid Barghash sent him to prison; and there for three and a half weary years he remained, scorning all offers of freedom at the cost of his religion. All his Christian friends could do for him was to supply him with food, and to receive letters from him declaring his full trust in Christ. Then he fell ill; and there, in the utter loneliness of a prison, with none to applaud or console him, he who had never tasted the joys of Christianity among the faithful, and whose only privilege was to suffer for his Master, was content to die a captive.

A letter dated November 2, 1881, addressed to Bishop Steere from Archdeacon Farler, a UMCA missionary at Magila, on the mainland north of Zanzibar, speaks of “another notable conversion” of a Muslim elder who had previously threatened his son for converting to Christianity, but was convinced by the Christians’ high moral standards, that their faith must be true. Tristram Pruen, a missionary in German East Africa in the late 1880s, argues against those who say there are no converts from Islam. “This is obviously erroneous, as there are men, now in orders as clergymen of the Church of England, who once were Mohammedans.”

Christ Church was formally opened on Christmas Day 1879, to a large and diverse audience, including some leading Muslim men. Sayyid Barghash had signaled his good wishes not only by allowing the church to be built on the site of the closed slave market, but also by donating a clock for the church tower. In contrast to the self-righteousness often associated with European efforts to abolish slavery in Africa, Heanley describes Steere’s work with the freed slaves as “a poor installment of the debt that England owes to Africa, and a very inadequate occupation of the opportunities still open to her of repaying it,” citing the crimes of former English pirates and slave-dealers, giving England “an evil name that has been most justly earned.” He writes, “If we could but realize the debt that we owe.
them, and give but one tithe of English lives for the lives that Africa has given us, we should send out missionaries, not by twos or threes, but by hundreds and thousands."

The mission’s printing press regularly printed the sultan’s invitations and public announcements. On October 15, 1879, Sayyid Barghash came to inspect the printing press. Steere writes:

I went over to Kiungani and set up a little couplet in the Arabic, that he might print it himself if he chose. . . . He came at about half-past four in a steam launch with a party of about a dozen, all of them men of learning and devotees. I suspect they thought printing an uncanny art, and he wanted to show them what it was. Christease was printing off some of the book of Genesis, and went on like clockwork, and then they came and looked at the type and read the couplet, which comes out of the Arabian Nights, and approved of it highly, and saw another of our printers setting up type.

It is notable that shortly thereafter Barghash acquired a printing press for the sultanate, which in 1880 issued the first of many publications of Ibadi works.

Steere’s work on the Swahili language was also greatly appreciated by leading Zanzibaris. When he returned to England for a furlough in July 1878, he brought with him in manuscript form, or roughly printed at the mission press, a grammar and dictionary of the language, several parts of the Bible translated into Swahili, portions of the Book of Common Prayer, and schoolbooks, all to revise and publish in England. Barghash’s chief minister came to bid him farewell, and “said he could only bear the parting in the hope that, in getting our grammar and dictionary printed in England, I might be building a bridge over which the thoughts of Zanzibar might pass to England, and English learning and wisdom find their way to Zanzibar. And perhaps our own wishes could hardly have been expressed more neatly.”

Steere studied Arabic with local Arabs, and discussed Christian doctrine with Muslim scholars. Zanzibari Muslims of Zanzibar eagerly received Arabic Bibles from the mission, which was constantly running out and needing to order more. The British consul, Sir John Kirk, was surprised while passing through town in July 1879, to overhear a group of Zanzibaris discussing the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

One of the Muslim scholars with whom Steere was in frequent contact was Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Amawi (1838-96), whom Abdallah Saleh Farsy, author of the only published account in Swahili of the Shafi’i scholars of the coast, described as “one of East Africa’s cleverest shaykhs.” From Farsy we learn that he arrived in Zanzibar from Somalia as a teenager, and became a judge in the coastal town of Kilwa at the prodigiously early age of sixteen. After only a few years he was brought to Zanzibar to serve as qadi, and remained so until the early 1890s, when he resigned and his eldest son, Burhan, filled the post. Throughout an illustrious career in which he served six of Zanzibar’s sultans, Amawi wrote on theology, law, Sufism, grammar, rhetoric, and history, and composed an unfinished Swahili-Arabic dictionary. He also served as a political advisor, ambassador and diplomat. Although Farsy lamented the loss of nearly all of Amawi’s writings, some may be found in Oman, and fragments of others have been discovered in Dar es Salaam.
Farsy wrote that of all the Muslim scholars of the coast, Amawi was the most skilled at, and involved in, debating Christian missionaries, and he specifically mentions Tozer, Steere, and Canon Dale. Steere also wrote that he held weekly meetings with local Muslim shaykhs in his home, and it is likely that Amawi was a participant. In one letter he wrote, “Abdul Aziz called and asked for an explanation of the statement that man was made ‘in the image of God,’ which shocked them. I wrote and sent him an explanation in Swahili.” Despite Amawi’s reputation as a debater with missionaries, he assisted Steere in the translation of some of the Psalms and the Gospel of Luke into Swahili. In one of the Dar es Salaam fragments, Amawi mentions a debate that he had with Bishop Chauncy Maples in Christ Church, moderated by Sir Arthur Henry Hardinge. Amawi says that he had known Maples since the days of Bishop Steere, and proceeds to cite the precise hour of Steere’s death—a sign, perhaps, of a close relationship between them.

**“THE APOLOGY OF AL-KINDI,” AND ‘ALI AL-MUNDHIRI’S RESPONSE**

In 1877 Steere suggested that the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in London might devote a special branch to the publication of “any and every book and tract on the Muhammadan controversy.” Only three years later, the Turkish Mission Aid Society published an apologetic treatise written ca. 830 C.E. by an Arab Christian identified as ‘Abd al-Masih b. Ishaq al-Kindi, a courtier of the ‘Abbasid Caliph al-Ma’mun, in answer to a letter written to him by his friend, ‘Abdallah b. Isma’il al-Hashimi, inviting him to embrace Islam. The text, edited by Anton Tien, was based on two manuscripts, one from Egypt and one from Constantinople. The book was reissued by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge in London in 1885, and at some point Tien undertook a translation entitled “The Apology of al-Kindi,” at the end of which he comments, with apparent frustration, “Both manuscripts are largely corrupt and differ in a number of passages. [The editor] has labored to put them together as best he could; he who has done his best is not to be blamed, even if he fails.”

The book includes an introduction describing the circumstances under which Hashimi wrote his letter (pp. 2-3 of the Arabic), followed by Hashimi’s letter (pp. 3-37), then Kindi’s heated response (pp. 38-270), and finally a brief account from the Egyptian manuscript of al-Ma’mun’s response to their debate (pp. 270-272).

Sir William Muir published a commentary, summary and partial translation of the text in 1882, with “the primary object” of placing it “in the hands of those who will use it in the interests of the Christian faith.” Although Muir finds that Kindi’s arguments contain “a good deal that is weak in reasoning, some things that are even questionable in fact, and an abundance of censorious epithets against the Moslem, Jewish, and Magian faiths that might well have been materially softened, yet, taken as a whole, the argument is, from the Apologist’s standpoint, conducted with wisdom and agility.”

Muir’s hope that missionaries might use the text to debate with Muslims was apparently realized when an unnamed missionary brought it to the Ibadi shaykh, ‘Ali b. Muhammad al-Mundhiri, and used it to debate with him. Mundhiri describes the treatise as “important” (‘azimat al-sha’n) and “well-argued” (qawiyyat al-burhan), and of better quality than the polemical works the missionary had brought to him earlier, which he had easily “refuted and destroyed.” Mundhiri felt obligated
to respond to Kindi’s *risāla*, although it was more than a thousand years old, because of its recent publication, its strong arguments, because he did not know of any other Muslim response to it, and because it is a religious obligation to refute all *bida’*, especially in this case, as the text could do great harm to Islam. He regrets that his father, “the matchless scholar,” was not alive to write this response, for then “we would have been spared the burden of its evil, for he blocked similar efforts by Christians.” However, he resigns himself to the fact that the treatise had “become the responsibility of the humble, ignorant and stupid one, after the passing of this great, perceptive man from our company,” and asks God to give him insight into what in the treatise was true and what was not. He explains that as Kindi’s treatise employed proof texts from “the ancient scriptures,” he felt compelled to do the same, “because an argument that takes its proof from a text the opponent does not accept [the Qur’an] is ineffective.”

‘Abdallah b. Isma’il al-Hashimi, whose letter prompted ‘Abd al-Masih al-Kindi’s heated response, informs his friend that he had for many years been immersed in reading the books of other religions, especially those of the Christians. He had read the entire Bible as well as books of the various Christian sects, of which he found the Nestorians (“your own party”) to be the most like the Muslims. He speaks very highly of the monks and their piety and said that he had always avoided religious disputation, endeavoring to be respectful and hear what others have to say. But finally, he felt compelled by conviction and by his friendship with al-Kindi to summon him to the true *hanifi* faith of Abraham and of “my master, the lord of mankind, friend of the Lord of the universe, seal of the prophetic order, Muhammad, son of ‘Abdullah the Hashimite, of Quraysh descent, an Arab of the country and town of Mecca, master of the rod and the pool and the camel, who intercedes for us, friend of the Lord of power, companion of Gabriel the faithful spirit.” He proceeds to summon al-Kindi to do the five daily prayers, fast in Ramadan, make the pilgrimage to Mecca, and to “struggle in the path of God” by raiding the hypocrites and fighting the unbelievers (*al-kafara*) and the idolaters (*al-mushrikin*) with the edge of the sword. He quotes many Qur’anic passages describing the rewards of Paradise and the tortures of Hellfire in hope that Kindi might heed the warning. He finally appeals to him to cease wearying himself with useless asceticism, and “embrace the faith that brings assurance.”

Kindi’s reply can be broken into three parts: (1) an attempt to prove the Christian doctrine of the Trinity; (2) a derogatory examination of the life of the Prophet Muhammad and a discussion of the signs of true prophethood; (3) a discussion of the “true” origin of the Qur’an as the work of a Christian monk named Sergius and of its compilation, with an argument that the first four caliphs hated each other and corrupted the text of the Qur’an, and a denigration of the language of the Qur’an; (4) a denigration of Muslim ritual practices and customs, including ablutions, circumcision, the pilgrimage, and Muslim marriage and divorce; (5) a denial that Muslim holy places offer any benefit, in contrast to the healing miracles of the Apostles; (6) a condemnation of Muslim practices of jihad and the sufferings of Christians under Muslim conquest; (7) a condemnation of Muslim preoccupation with the pleasures of this world; and finally, (8) a long summary of the teachings of the life of Christ and the teachings of Christianity.

‘Ali al-Mundhiri responds to al-Kindi’s arguments point by point. In the course of his discussion he demonstrates an extraordinarily detailed knowledge of the Bible, which he says he had read in four editions, three of them in English,

Mundhiri’s arguments are often refreshingly original. He usually appears to accept the Bible as authentic, although he occasionally accuses Kindi of *tahrif*, as when Kindi uses the word *rabb* for “lord” in Psalm 110:1; without an Arabic Bible in hand, he believes Kindi’s use of *rabb* instead of *sayyid* in this context must be mistaken. Likewise, when Kindi tells a strange and insulting story about Muhammad (to be discussed below), Mundhiri finds this as evidence of the untrustworthiness of Christians and the need to be wary of the authenticity of their texts. But when Kindi attributes words from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke to Jesus, Mundhiri replies that these words belong not to Jesus but to the Gospel, which is from God; Jesus is merely the recipient of his Lord’s message, as indeed Jesus affirms in John 14:24 (“The word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me”--although Mundhiri translates “the Father” as “Allah”). He does indeed follow the standard Muslim interpretation that the promised “spirit of truth” who would come after Jesus (John 16:12-14) was none other than Muhammad, and implies that Muhammad brought the whole truth, in contrast to Jesus, because Jesus himself told his disciples in this passage, “I have many other things that I do not tell you because you cannot bear them now, but when the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you to the whole truth. . . .”

Some of Kindi’s arguments are strange, and Mundhiri has no trouble refuting them. For example, Kindi believed that when Genesis 15:6 said of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son at God’s command that “he believed the Lord and it was accounted to him for righteousness,” this meant that until that time Abraham had not believed in the one God, and had worshipped an idol while he lived with his father in Harran. So when al-Hashimi summons him to be a *hanif* like Abraham, Kindi allegedly takes this to mean a summons to be an idolater! Mundhiri finds it unthinkable that a prophet could ever worship an idol, and sees Kindi’s statement as insulting and unmanly. Mundhiri comments that not only does Gen. 15:6 not indicate that Abraham had been unbelieving beforehand, but that Hebrews 11:8 affirms that “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance,” indicating that he had faith when he was still living in Harran. Mundhiri’s ability to jump from the story of Abraham in Genesis to this verse in Hebrews, which might easily be overlooked by many Christians, is truly remarkable.

Likewise, when Kindi tries to limit the legitimate heirs of Abraham to the descendants of Isaac, Mundhiri quotes Galatians 3:28-29: “There is no Jew or Greek, no slave or free, no male or female, for they are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, you are a descendant of Abraham, heirs according to the promise given to his descendants.” Mundhiri persists, “Do you think Abraham left his son Ishmael without knowledge of the oneness of God? . . . Was it not Ishmael with whom God was [in the wilderness] and whose voice He heard and whom He rescued from death and to whom He promised His blessing, as recorded in Genesis? . . . The one who is calling you to monotheism inherited it from his prophet and father, our master Muhammad!”

Kindi finds cryptic references to the secret of the Trinity in the Old Testament, as when God identified himself to Moses as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:15). Mundhiri retorts that by such logic, if God had mentioned His name four or five times, that would mean that He is four or five persons. Kindi’s Arabic translation of “God” in Gen. 1:1 (“In the
beginning God created the heavens and the earth") is *al-ala*ba, “the gods,” and he saw this plural form as a reference to the Trinity as well. Mundhiri, confined to English and Swahili translations, did not realize that in the original Hebrew what we translate as “God” is *Elohim*, a plural form. He accuses al-Kindi of distorting the text, substituting words and changing them, adding and taking away from the text. “Because of such examples, we suspend judgment concerning the acceptance of all that is in the books in your hands, except what is in agreement with the truth we have.”

Kindi points out that the Qur’an also uses the plural “We” in reference to God, but Mundhiri retorts that this is merely for magnification and emphasis on God’s greatness. Kindi also sees an allusion to the Trinity in the three men who appear to Abraham in Gen. 18:2-3. Mundhiri retorts:

If you make this a proof for the Trinity because he saw three men and you make them gods, then you must affirm the Marcionite doctrine, for indeed you follow their doctrine that these three whom Abraham saw were separate gods. . . . If you make these gods, you also attribute to your gods the need to occupy space and to take shade under a tree from the heat of the sun and to rest under the tree [referring to Abraham’s offer of hospitality in Gen. 18:4]. The true God cannot be contained in a place, because He existed from all eternity before there ever was a place, and He does not move from one place to another, because there is no place that for a single second is devoid of God’s knowledge, power, and administration. Nothing is hidden from Him so that He would have to move to see what it is about, because He knows what is hidden in our breasts. . . . And He cannot be seen by eyes, because eyes can only see what takes up space in a place, and God is not in a place. As the Book says: “The Lord says, ‘What is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?’” (Acts 7:49-50). . . . The three are angels whom God sent to him and his wife Sarah to give them the good news of Isaac’s birth, just as God sent an angel to Zechariah to give him the good news of John’s birth, . . . and just as he sent an angel to Mary to give her the good news of Jesus’ birth.

Mundhiri points out that according to Gen 18:22, “The men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord,” indicating that the three men were in no way a symbol of the Trinity, but were merely three angels.

Kindi says that the Qur’anic verse, “Those who say that God is the third of three are unbelievers” (5:73), refers not to Christians, but to the Marcionites, for they believe in three separate gods, but are not Christians, whereas Christians affirm that God is one and three. Mundhiri replies:

I concede to you your statement that this verse means the Marcionites, not you and those like you, because it does not mention a religious community by name. But I make this concession with the stipulation that you have no belief or doctrine that includes what is in this verse; otherwise, you and the Marcionites are jointly indicated by this verse. And I say: Do you not believe in three persons, all of whom you profess to be divine, existing in His essence, as indicated by what you say concerning

http://web.mit.edu/cis/www/mitejmes/
His word, “I will praise the Word of God” (Psalms 56:10) that this indicates that the Word of God is a god in truth, and that this indicates that each of the Persons is a god in truth.49

Rather than finding it problematic that Jesus be called “son” (۪۱۳۸۲) of God, Mundhiri heartily agrees with Kindi that ۪۱۳۸۲ does not mean ۳۱۱۳, because the Qur’an itself assures us of that; rather, ۪۱۳۸۲ is used as a metaphor. But others have also been called sons of God, e.g. Adam in Luke 2:38. Does this mean that Adam also existed from eternity and is uncreated?50 challenges Mundhiri. “Calling Jesus the son of God does not remove him from the attributes of creatures; it simply means that like Adam he was created without a father--and Adam also had no mother, which is even more amazing! Likewise in Luke 4:35, Jesus tells his disciples that if they love their enemies they will be sons of the most High. . . .”

Naturally, Mundhiri is highly affronted by Kindi’s derogatory interpretation of Muhammad’s life:

He even claims that he was a brigand who stole people’s possessions! Isn’t that one of the repugnant things that he prohibited, fighting those who did such acts and cutting off their hands and feet because they did these things? . . . . You even allege that he went out to Yathrib to become a highwayman, and that this is why the people of Mecca expelled him from their city! By God, you have told a staggering lie and committed a grave sin . . . , and the book of Jesus does not permit that. But this is no worse than the allegations you make against God’s book, the Torah, and against Moses, on whom be peace, and against Abraham.51

As evidence that the Muslims did not enjoy God’s support, Kindi cites a Muslim raid on a Meccan caravan that was aborted because the Meccans outnumbered the Muslims more than three to one, “whereas you know that Gabriel in human shape rode on an ashen gray camel wearing a green mantle while Pharaoh and his host of 4,000 horses pursued the Israelites. . . . But your master has no such witness to bring”; likewise, the angels fought for Joshua at Jericho. Kindi suggested that if Muhammad were a man of God, an angel would have protected him from getting wounded at Uhud, as Elijah was protected from King Ahab, Daniel from the lions of Darius, and the three men from the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar.52

Mundhiri responds with reference to Numbers 13: Although God had said that he would cast fear of the Israelites into the hearts of the people so they could take their land, Moses sent men to spy out the land. “Did Moses not know God’s promise to him that he would have the land? So why did he send spies? Is this a sign of fear or because of a lack of angelic support? Beware of criticizing the prophets and what they do, for if you criticize one of them, you criticize all of them!” Referring to the spies’ fearful report of the strong people of the land and the people’s fear and doubts on hearing this report, Mundhiri asks, “Does this mean that Moses was not a prophet? Why didn’t angels come at that point to support and encourage them and to fight on their behalf--and Joshua was among them, for whom the angels fought [at Jericho]!”53

Mundhiri defends Muhammad’s sternness with the Jews by comparing his actions with Peter’s harshness with a couple who had hidden some of the money gained from the sale of their land, at a time when all the Christians were sharing all
things in common. Peter announced that they would die on the spot, and so they instantly fell down dead at Peter’s feet (Acts 5:8). Mundhiri finds this inconsistent with Christian mores: “Surely this is something of which Jesus would not approve!”

Kindi argues that if Muhammad were really a prophet, he would have performed miracles, and all the people would have believed in him. Mundhiri retorts by saying that Muhammad did indeed work more miracles than he had time to mention, and that if miracles were sufficient to convince all the people, then everyone would have believed in Moses and Jesus, although John 12:37 says, “Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him,” and Mark 6:4 says that Jesus could not perform any miracles in his hometown and with his relatives because of their lack of faith.

Kindi wrote that Muhammad had ordered the Muslims not to bury him when he died, because God would raise him to heaven, as Christ was raised, and that he was too dear to God to be left on earth more than three days; and that when the promised event did not happen, his body could not be washed, because it was already decaying, so he was buried without being washed.

Not surprisingly, Mundhiri finds this to be “the worst calumny that you utter about his life,” and comments:

It is by such statements that the rational man knows that the Christians cannot be trusted in what they say on religious matters, and because of such statements nothing they have or claim can be trusted to be from the Gospel, the authenticity of which we do not know, not anything they claim to have from Jesus or from any other prophet, because these people have substituted true speech with lies.

Nonetheless, Mundhiri does not accuse the Christians as a whole of propagating such falsehood—“just this Kindi who allegedly belonged to their religion and who by his lies defiled their religion and its people.” Concerning the strange story, Mundhiri denies that there is any report that Muhammad ever said he should not be buried.

Kindi felt that as a true Arab he was able to assess the Qur’an’s literary qualities. He found fault with the Qur’an’s use of foreign words, although there is no language with as rich a lexicon as Arabic. He claimed to have read the language of the mushaf of Musaylima, who made his claim to prophethood after Muhammad’s death, and found it superior to the language of the Qur’an. He argued that although his friend was of the Quraysh, he had no advantage over him.

If you say that the Quraish are the most eloquent of the Arabs, the knights errant of eloquence, we oppose to you a fact, the truth of which you can scarcely deny or dispute, viz. that Mulaika daughter of Nu’man al-Kindi, when Muhammad asked for her hand, and she married him, said, “Shall Mulaika marry a trader?” We both know that the Quraish are the merchants and traders of the Arabs, while the Kinda were a royal race, who ruled the rest of the Arabs. I do not mention this fact to boast of the nobility of my own birth, or to establish my descent from a pure Arab stock, but to remind you that the Kinda were the most powerful and literary tribe in the kingdom, distinguished for their eloquence and poetry, leaders of armies, owners of cattle, distinguished for their
virtue. The barbarians of Rome and Persia always sought relationship with them, and boasted that their daughters were at our service—a boast such as only the brutish could make. No doubt the Qurash also excelled in point of influence and natural gifts, particularly the Hashimites, as no one can deny who is not blinded by envy. And so, in my judgment, are all the Arabs and the rest of the nomads—high spirited, excelling in point of virtue and natural gifts, as God has endowed them beyond other barbarians.\textsuperscript{60}

Mundhiri’s response to this is first of all to accuse Kindi of ignorance of his own lineage and of the origin of the Arabs. Kindi said that the Arabic language goes back to “our father Isma’īl,” but Mundhiri replies that Arabic existed before the time of Isma’īl; it existed from the time of the Tower of Babel. Isma’īl merely married into the Arabs, and Kindi’s claim to be a descendant of Isma’īl is incorrect. Rather, Mundhiri says, Kindi descended from the prophet Hud. Kindi’s claim that the Kinda ruled over all the other Arabs is nonsense, he says. It is true that the Kinda were kings, but they were conquered by Mundhiri’s own ancestor, the Lakhmid king al-Mundhir ibn Ma’ al-Sama’,\textsuperscript{61} who won people over with prudence and generosity rather than brute force, and whose greatness was such that he was said to be the third Dhu al-Qarnayn (the second Dhu al-Qarnayn was Alexander the Macedonian). When the Banu Asad killed their own king, Hujr, and proclaimed their loyalty to al-Mundhir al-Lakhmi, Hujr’s son Imru’ al-Qays, the famous poet, massacred the Banu Asad but failed to win the support of any Arabs in his quest to march against al-Mundhir. He finally turned to the Roman emperor, who gave him his daughter in marriage. “This is the one of whom you boasted, saying that the Romans and Persians gave your ancestors their daughters.” But an interpreter from the Banu Asad at the emperor’s court told him that Imru’ al-Qays’s ultimate plan was to turn against the emperor after conquering al-Hira, so the emperor gave Imru’ al-Qays a poisoned garment, that killed him. Mundhiri asks:

So how could they have ruled over all the Arabs? Where is their strength and their eloquence? How can their sayings be compared with the style of the Qur’ān and the knowledge and wisdom it contains? But God guides whom He wishes.\textsuperscript{62}

Mundhiri’s wealth of knowledge of Arab genealogy and lore is interesting, as is his confidence that, a millennium more remote from the events of which he speaks than his opponent, he knows the facts better than Kindi. Anyone familiar with Arabic literature cannot fail to notice the familiar theme of boasting of one’s lineage, and the notion that the deeds of one’s ancestors continue to reflect on the esteem of their descendants many centuries later.

Kindi claims that he found the Qur’an to be nothing but disorganized, self-contradictory phrases with no literary merit or meaning. Regarding these alleged contradictions in the Qur’an, Mundhiri advises him to remove the log from his own eye before trying to extract the speck of dust from someone else’s (an obvious reference to Jesus’ advice in Matthew 7:3-5 and Luke 6:41-42), and points out contradictions between stories in the gospels. He goes on at some length to speak on Arab eloquence and the reactions of Muhammad’s contemporaries to hearing the Qur’an.\textsuperscript{63}

Kindi’s discussion of circumcision is interesting for two reasons: first, he tells a very bizarre story concerning its origins,\textsuperscript{64} which Mundhiri correctly refutes
with reference to the book of Genesis; second, Kindi provides an apparently inaccurate quotation from St. Paul, which may indicate that the Bible he used was different from the version accepted as canonical by the Catholic church, and Mundhiri is only too ready to respond with an accurate quotation of Romans 2:25. When Kindi argues that it is unnecessary to wash after sexual emission, because it has no color or unpleasant odor, but rather is the source of “a human being of perfect knowledge,” Mundhiri responds with a quote from Leviticus 15:17 that indicates that seminal emission is indeed unclean, and everything that comes into contact with it must be washed with water. When Kindi criticizes Islamic food prohibitions by saying that “God saw that all that He made was good, and He made pigs,” Mundhiri says this deception is from Satan, for Satan deceived Adam into eating the fruit of the forbidden tree that God had made. He interprets the story of Jesus casting the demons out of two men and sending them into a herd of pigs as an indication of the uncleanliness of pigs (Matthew 8:30-33). If they were not unclean and were it not prohibited to own them, Jesus would never have allowed himself to destroy the herd, for he would not destroy lawful property.

These are just some of the many indications that Mundhiri had a very full command of the Bible, and was able to use it to good and original effect in debating with Christians. It is clear that Mundhiri was in no way daunted by Kindi’s attacks, despite his humble disclaimers at the outset. He also had full confidence that the power of God that continued to work among Muslims. After finding fault with the powerlessness of Muslim holy places, Kindi admits that Christian holy men no longer perform miracles, explaining that they were only needed when the faith was new. Mundhiri finds this unconvincing, and affirms that God continues to perform great miracles among the Muslims: God answers the prayers of Muslims, and those who are especially pure of soul experience special graces.

They are guided by the lights of their hearts to knowledge of secrets and wisdom, without any strenuous effort or bitter life. Some even fly in the air and walk on water, or travel long distances in less than an hour, and the wild animals and beasts of prey do not harm them; rather, the wild animals love them, and the lion casts amorous glances at them, and if they desire anything it is given to them before they ask for it. There are even some who, if they told a mountain to cease existing, it would cease to exist, and if they wanted something, it would come to them. This happened to our shaykh, the worshipper and ascetic, Nasir b. Abi Nabhan, who died in the time of our master Sa’id b. Sultan—he moved a very large mountain from its place, and did other things from the blessings that appeared at his hands. Likewise other pious Muslims who were known by the people of this time—they saw their blessings with which God favored them. I only mention these to you so you will know that these things continue to happen to pious Muslims to this day. . . . The Imams of Nizwa, who manifested justice when all the world was unjust, worked many miracles. A light continues to appear over their graves to this day. Whoever does not believe this should come to Oman and see their tombs.

‘Ali al-Mundhiri was born in East Africa, and his family had lived there for generations, but he was able to testify, perhaps from personal experience, of the
miraculous light that appears over the tombs of the Imams of Nizwa, a reference that places him squarely in the heart of Ibadi tradition. His reference to Nasir ibn Abi Nabhan is interesting but not surprising, given the account of his fearsome talisman against Sayyid Sa'id and his uncle, Talib b. Ahmad, that led Sa'id to keep Nasir by his side for the rest of his life, and hold Nasir's head in his lap as he expired. Even Abdallah Saleh Farsy, whose interest is mainly in Shafi'i scholars, mentions that Nasir was said to deal with the jinn. Nasir had died only forty-four years before; he had been an associate of Mundhiri's father, and his reputation remained vivid. Such stories strongly affirm that the Muslims--and for Mundhiri, the true Muslims are only the Ibadis--are the true heirs of the baraka of Jesus as well as Muhammad, for they are able to perform miracles, whereas the Christians are not.

In 1891, at the time that Mundhiri wrote his refutation of Kindi's treatise, Zanzibar had become a British protectorate, ruled from the Colonial Office in London. Interactions with the British and with Christians had become inevitable for leading scholars of Zanzibar, though perhaps they were not yet particularly alarmed at potential European cultural and religious influence. This situation changed dramatically as the judicial system came under British control in the late 1890s, more Muslim children attended Christian schools, and some Muslims in Zanzibar were adopting European dress. In January 1910, the leading scholar in Oman, Nur al-Din ‘Abdallah ibn Humayyid al-Salimi, wrote a response to some Ibadis living in Zanzibar concerning the permissibility of attending Christian schools, wearing European clothes, learning European languages, and shaving the beard. To all of these questions Salimi gives a strongly worded and tightly argued prohibition. In the section on schools, he draws on Irshad al-hayara fi tabdhir al-muslimin min madaris al-nasara, written in 1901 in Beirut by the Palestinian scholar, Yusuf b. Isma‘il al-Nabhani (1850-1932). Nabhani in turn cites Tarbiyat al-mar’a, by the Egyptian, Muhammad Tal‘at Harb, who quotes a European magazine indicating that Christian schools in Muslim lands, and especially schools for girls, were intended to promote disaffection from Islam and love for European imperial rule. Only on the subject of learning foreign languages does Salimi grant a small concession: foreign languages may be learned only to the extent that is necessary by those who are forced to interact with foreigners. But he feared that if children learned foreign languages, their familiarity with Arabic would decrease, and they would become less influenced by the Qur’an and Sunna of the Prophet.

CONCLUSION

Christian missionaries enjoyed, for the most part, very cordial relationships with Muslim scholars in Zanzibar, who were interested in reading the Bible and discussing theological issues, who helped them in their study of Swahili and Arabic, and were even willing to assist them in translating Christian texts into Swahili. Until the cessation of the slave trade at the end of the 1880s, Muslims showed little concern about missionary activity among Africans, and many Christians believed Muslims to be unconvertible; those who did believe them to be potential, if unlikely, candidates for conversion worried about the consequences of such conversions. The activities of Christian missionaries were only mildly worrisome in 1891 to al-Mundhiri, who confidently tore away at the only Christian tract he had yet found to pose any significant challenge to Islam. His citation of the miracles of the great Ibadi Imams of Oman indicates his close connection to that country and
that tradition, despite the fact that his family had lived in East Africa for generations. Salimi’s response to the Muslims of Zanzibar in 1910, however, indicates a drift of many Muslims in Zanzibar away from Ibadi ideals, and that by then Christian influence had become a serious concern to Muslim religious scholars.

ENDNOTES

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1 Many Swahilis consider themselves to be “Shirazis,” descended from princes of the city of Shiraz who escaped political persecution by escaping to East Africa in the tenth century; hence some Swahilis insist that they are of Persian descent, although their alleged ancestors could have been Arab or Persian. There is a vast academic discussion on Swahili identity, and whether it is primarily Bantu or Arab, or to be seen as a mixture of both. I have no intention of entering this controversy, as both race and ethnicity are largely subjective terms that are subject to change. The spiritual linkages of much of the Swahili learned class with the Hadramawt are evident. Many Somalis claim Qurashi descent.

2 Ali Muhsin Al Barwani, *Conflicts and Harmony in Zanzibar (Memoirs)* (Dubai: n.p., 1997), 33 The author, who was prominent in Zanzibari politics before the anti-Arab revolution of 1964 and was imprisoned for ten years after the revolution, also describes the complete harmony among people of various religions in Zanzibar before the revolution.


4 Although the slave trade in East Africa was primarily initiated by Arab traders, many African chieftains became involved by raiding their weaker neighbors and handing them over to the Arabs.


6 Oliver insists that this was a “happy accident,” and that missionaries were not consciously working as an arm of European imperialism. *Missionary Factor*, 178-9.

7 See, for example, Pruen’s comments on the mutual assistance slave traders and missionaries offered each other. *The Arab and the African*, 254-6.

8 Oliver, *Missionary Factor*, 11, 101. This “fellow-feeling” changed abruptly between 1884 and 1888, largely because of the aggressive German takeover of Tanganyika.


10 Letter to Miss Tozer (his sister), September 14, 1864


14 Ibid., 307.

15 Ibid., 309.

16 Ibid., 310.

17 Ibid., 121.

18 Ibid., 126.

19 Ibid., 310-311.


The first work published there was Qunnus al-Shari'a, a 90-volume work by the nineteenth-century Omani Ibadi scholar, Junayyib b. Khamis al-Sa'di, of which the press in Zanzibar published volumes 1-16; vols. 1-21 have been published in Oman. Complete manuscripts of all ninety volumes may be found in Oman’s Ministry of National Heritage and Culture and in the private library of Sayyid Muhammad al-Bu Sa'di in Sib, Oman. Barghash’s printing press also published works by Ibadi scholars of the Mzab valley, Algeria.

25 Heanley, A Memoir of Edward Steere, 86.

26 Heanley, A Memoir of Edward Steere, 86.

27 Heanley, A Memoir of Edward Steere, 86.


29 Abdullah Saleh Farsy, Baadhi ya wanavyoongo wa kishafi wa mashariki ya Afrika (Mombasa: n.p., 1972), originally published in 1944 by Zanzibar’s Education Department as part 2 of Tambo ya Imam Shafi’i wa wanavyoongo wa kabwa wa mashariki ya Afrika. Randall L. Pouwels translated this as The Shafi’i Ulama of East Africa, ca. 1830-1970 (Madison: University of Wisconsin African Studies Program, 1989), where this appears on p. 44.

30 I found Amawi’s book on theology, over 400 pages in length, portions of a poem in praise of the Prophet, portions of his history of the Bu Sa‘idi dynasty, and, most interestingly, portions of his diaries of two of his journeys in the Rovuma river region on behalf of Sayyid Barghash, in the private library of Sayyid Muhammad al-Bu Sa‘idi in Sib, Oman. The Dar es Salaam fragments include portions from some of these same works, as well as a work on Sufism and a portion of his Swahili-Arabic dictionary. I received a photocopy of these fragments from Mwalimu Muhammad Idris Saleh of Zanzibar, some of them sent to me by Dr. Mohammed Kassem of Brock University in Ontario. I am extremely grateful for the assistance rendered by all these individuals. A fuller account of Amawi’s life and work can be found in Valerie J. Hoffman, “In His (Arab) Majesty’s Service: The Career of a Somali Scholar and Diplomat in Nineteenth-Century Zanzibar,” The East African Coast in Times of Globalization, ed. Roman Loimeier and Rüdiger Seesemann (Münster, Hamburg, Berlin, Vienna, London: LIT Verlag, 2006).

31 Farsy, Shafi’i ulama of East Africa, 44.

32 Heanley, A Memoir of Edward Steere, 86. In 1877 he also wrote, “I was once asked by some Mohammedan doctors to give my sense of the saying that man was made in the image of God, and they were quite astonished to find that I did not attribute to God body, parts, and passions.” Ibid., 309. As there is a well-known hadith saying that God created Adam according to His own form, it is odd that the passage in Genesis should have aroused such surprise and consternation.

33 In A Handbook of the Swahili Language as Spoken at Zanzibar (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1924), vi-vii, Steere states that Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Aziz (al-Amawi) volunteered to translate the Psalms from Arabic into the best and purest Swahili, but Steere “found, before long, that not only did his numerous avocations prevent any rapid progress, but that his language was too learned to suit exactly our purpose in making the version; it did not therefore proceed further than the Sixteenth Psalm. I printed these as at once a memorial of his kindness and a specimen of what one of the most learned men in Zanzibar considers the most classical form of his language.” Aloo Osotsi Mojola credits Amawi with translating the Gospel of Luke, “The Swahili Bible in East Africa from 1844 to 1996: A Brief Survey with Special Reference to Tanzania,” The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends, ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Boston, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001) 514, although he did it in cooperation with Rev. R. Lewin Pennell, who is credited with the translation in A. E. M. Anderson-Morhead, History of the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa, 1859-1896 (London: Office of the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa, 1897), 66.

34 Chauncey Maples joined the mission on March 18, 1876, during the bishopric of Dr. Edward Steere. He became Archdeacon of Nyasa, then priest on September 9, 1876. He was consecrated Bishop of Likoma on June 29, 1895, and the Rev. William Moore Richardson was consecrated for Zanzibar. As Hardinge became head of the British administration in Africa only in July 1895, it must be assumed that the debate between Maples and Amawi took place during Maples’s brief stay in Zanzibar before he proceeded to take up his bishopric in Likoma. Bishop Maples drowned in a storm on Lake Nyasa September 2, 1895, on his way to take up his post.

35 Heanley, A Memoir of Edward Steere, 313.

The Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do . . . ?” In Gen. 18:22, “So the men from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way.

When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He looked up and saw three men standing near him.

Society and printed by an R. Watts in London.

transactions of the various institutions for propagating the gospel,” issued by the Church Missionary

unsuccessful, but there is a reference to a “Missionary Register for 1830 containing the principal

http://web.mit.edu/cis/www/mitejmes/
you say we have done so.”

God’s own word, nor have we added to or taken from it, nor have we altered or falsified it, though just as we have said, there are three persons yet one God and one Lord. We have not gone beyond actually Is. 48:16; in the Arabic, it is clear that “His Spirit” is a subject along with “the Lord.” This is secret, and from the former time I was there; and now the Lord has sent me and His Spirit” [it is praised God most High in chapter 61 of his prophecy, saying: ’From the beginning I spake not in symbol in his book of the mention of the three Persons, that they are one God”]. Isaiah the prophet Does he not rather in his Psalms hint at the three persons who yet are one God? [literally, “But it is a (Ps. 68:19, paraphrase). Did David desire that the one God should be praised by him, or three gods? God? . . . . In another Psalm he says: ’Blessed be God, even our God, who daily beareth our burdens” (Ps. 68:19, paraphrase). Did David desire that the one God should be praised by him, or three gods? Does he not rather in his Psalms hint at the three persons who yet are one God? [literally, “But it is a symbol in his book of the mention of the three Persons, that they are one God”]. Isaiah the prophet praised God most High in chapter 61 of his prophecy, saying: ’From the beginning I spake not in secret, and from the former time I was there; and now the Lord has sent me and His Spirit” [it is actually Is. 48:16; in the Arabic, it is clear that “His Spirit” is a subject along with “the Lord.”]. This is just as we have said, there are three persons yet one God and one Lord. We have not gone beyond God’s own word, nor have we added to or taken from it, nor have we altered or falsified it, though you say we have done so.”

49 Mundhiri, Kitab fi l-radd `ala l-nasara, 37. What Kindi says in Tien’s translation is (p. 423): “David the prophet says of God in Psalm 33 (v. 6): ’By the Word of God the heavens were made, and all the hosts of them by the breath (i.e., Spirit) of His mouth.’ Here, clearly and explicitly David speaks of the three persons when he mentions God, the Word and the Spirit [literally in the Arabic, “God, His Word, and His Spirit”]. Have we said anything in advance of this [more properly, “Have we added anything to what David said in our description?”] In another Psalm he solemnly affirms that the Word of God is God Himself [more literally: “that the Word of God is a true god (ilah haqq): ’I will praise the Word of God” (Ps. 56:10, Peshitta, paraphrase). Do you suppose that David praised what was not God? . . . . In another Psalm he says: ’Blessed be God, even our God, who daily beareth our burdens’ (Ps. 68:19, paraphrase). Did David desire that the one God should be praised by him, or three gods? Does he not rather in his Psalms hint at the three persons who yet are one God? [literally, “But it is a symbol in his book of the mention of the three Persons, that they are one God”]. Isaiah the prophet praised God most High in chapter 61 of his prophecy, saying: ’From the beginning I spake not in secret, and from the former time I was there; and now the Lord has sent me and His Spirit” [it is actually Is. 48:16; in the Arabic, it is clear that “His Spirit” is a subject along with “the Lord.”]. This is just as we have said, there are three persons yet one God and one Lord. We have not gone beyond God’s own word, nor have we added to or taken from it, nor have we altered or falsified it, though you say we have done so.”

50 Mundhiri, Kitab fi l-radd `ala l-nasara, 19-23.

51 Ibid., 42-43.


53 Mundhiri, Kitab fi l-radd `ala l-nasara, 60-64.

54 Ibid., 87-88.

55 Ibid., 104-116.

56 Tien, “Apology of al-Kindi,” 528 n. 48: “Though there appear to be no Muslim sources for Muhammad ever saying that he would be resurrected as Jesus was on the third day, al-Kindi’s accusation is not entirely without merit. Muhammad died on a Monday, June 7, 632, but according to most major Islamic histories he was buried in the middle of the night Wednesday without even Aisha’s knowledge. It appears that the normal procedure, however, was to bury the dead on the day of their death (to precede the rapid decay of the corpse which was increased by the heat of the season), as in the case of Abu Bakr who died in August and was buried within a few hours of his death. Quite often knowledge. It appears that the normal procedure, however, was to bury the dead on the day of their death (to precede the rapid decay of the corpse which was increased by the heat of the season), as in the case of Abu Bakr who died in August and was buried within a few hours of his death. Quite often the Muslim community at the time as to who was to be their new leader. The vast majority of Islamic sources show that ’Umar didn’t believe that Muhammad was dead at all and he threatened anyone who should maintain such a thing. ’Umar is reported to have said that Muhammad had just gone to be with Allah as Moses had for 40 days and that he would return. Nöldeke and Schwally (Geschichte des Qorans, vol. 2, p. 83) show Shahristani (ed. Cureton I, 11) as maintaining that ’Umar alluded to Jesus the son of Mary instead of Moses in this statement, and Sahab Bukhari, The Virtues and Merits of the Companions of the Prophet, ch. 6, hadith 18, vol. 5, p. 13 shows ’Umar as saying that Muhammad was to be resurrected. One result of these somewhat apparent contradictions is that some Western scholars of Islam attribute the delay in Muhammad’s burial to disagreements in the Muslim community at the time as to who was to be their new leader. 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Qur’an, Abu Bakr still waited a few days to bury Muhammad’s corpse. In view of the many inconsistencies concerning the death of Muhammad, it is quite possible that there were Muslim hadith in al-Kindi’s day which reported that he was to be resurrected in a manner similar to Jesus. Moreover, it appears that none of the later Muslim apologists even tried to respond to al-Kindi’s charge, though they must certainly have known of it at least through al-Biruni. Be that as it may, the matter of Muhammad’s resurrection has long been a subject of dispute in Muslim circles, see Fritz Meier, ‘Eine auferstehung Mohammeds bei Suyuti,’ Der Islam, vol. 62 (1985): 20-58.

59 Imru’ al-Qays, considered the most distinguished Arab poet of the pre-Islamic period, was a Kindī.
62 Mundhiri, 185-192, includes Imru’ al-Qays’s poems on these events, Cf. S. Boustany, “Imru’ al-Kays b. Hudjr,” Encyclopaedia of Islam, CD-ROM version. Boustany tells the story in a manner close to Mundhiri’s version, identifying the emperor as Justinian in Constantinople, and saying that the poisoned shirt was allegedly a punishment for Imru’ al-Qays’ seduction of Justinian’s daughter, although “in fact history does not mention that Justinian had a daughter.”
63 Mundhiri, 173-188.
65 Mundhiri, 202.
66 Arabic version, 163.
67 Mundhiri, 206.
68 Ibid., 207.
69 Ibid., 208-9.
70 Kindi, Arabic version, 162-3.
71 Mundhiri, 219-230. Anne K. Bang points out that his obituary (Supplement to the Zanzibar Gazette, 2 January 1926) states that ‘Ali b. Muhammad never left Zanzibar. She comments, “If this is correct, it was highly unusual for a member of a scholarly family, Ibadi as well as Shafi’i. Most of them would at one point of their life perform the hajj, often combined with a period of study in the Hijaz. For the Ibadi Omanis, a sojourn in Oman was also common.” Safis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa, 1860-1925 (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 154. Mundhiri’s comment here about the light appearing over the graves of the Imams in Nizwa would lead us to believe that he did travel to Oman.
72 Nasir b. Abi Nabhan was the greatest Ibadi scholar of his generation in Oman, and the son of the greatest scholar of the previous generation, he lived from 1778 to 1847. Abu Nabhan and his son Nasir were very critical of the ruling dynasty. After his father’s death in 1822, Sayyid Sa’id launched an attack on the family estate, but Nasir was able to counterattack through the use of powerful talismans. This supposedly frightened Sayyid Sa’d so much that he took Nasir into his inner circle and never let him out of his sight, even taking him into battle, and taking him to Zanzibar, where Nasir died with his head on the Sayyid’s lap. Nur al-Din ‘Abdallah b. Humayyid al-Salimi, Tuhfat al-a’yan bi sirat ahl ‘Uman [The Gem of the Eminent in the History of the People of Oman], 2 vols. in one (Sib, Oman: Maktatab al-Imam Nur al-Din al-Salimi, 2000), 2: 179, 216-229.
77 Muhammad Ta’āt Harb, Tahrīr al-mur’ā wa ‘l-hijāb [Women’s Education and the Veil] (Cairo: n.p., 1899). This book was written in response to Qasim al-Amin’s famous Tahrīr al-mur’ā [The Emancipation of Women] (Cairo: Maktatab al-Tarqi, 1899). Both books have been reprinted numerous times. Ironically, Harb’s book was reissued in 1905 by Matha’at al-Manar, the publishing company established by Muhammad ‘Abduh’s disciple, Muhammad Rashid Rida. It is ironic because some believe Amin’s book actually to have been the work of ‘Abduh, and was certainly written under ‘Abduh’s influence. Rida, however, became more conservative than his master, and admired the Wahhabi movement of Arabia. Significantly, a recent edition of Harb’s book was published in Riyad.

http://web.mit.edu/cis/www/mitejmes/
Saudi Arabia, under the title *Taqrîb k̲ita̲b Tarbiy̲at al-m̲a̲r'ah wa l-hijab: wa l-nuwa radd 'ala du'at muharriri al-m̲a̲r'ah* [Approaching the Book ‘The Education of Women and the Veil, a rebuttal of those who claim to liberate women] (Riyad: Adwa’ al-Salaf, 1999).