ʿAbd al-Aḥad Dāwūd

David Benjamin Keldani

DATE OF BIRTH 1867
PLACE OF BIRTH Urmia, Iran
DATE OF DEATH 6 July 1950
PLACE OF DEATH New York

BIOGRAPHY

Originally named David Benjamin Keldani, this convert to Islam was a former Roman Catholic priest of the Uniate-Chaldean Church. When he converted he adopted the name ʿAbd al-Aḥad (Servant of the One). According to a short biography that appeared in the *Islamic Review* in 1929, David Benjamin was born in 1867 in Urmia, Iran. He received his early education in his home town. Between 1886 and 1889, he served among the teaching staff of the Archbishop of Canterbury's mission to the Assyrian (Nestorian) Christians in Urmia. In 1892, he was sent to Rome by Cardinal Vaughan for further training in philosophy and theology at the *Pontificio Collegio Urbano* and was ordained priest in 1895. The same year, he joined the French Lazarist Mission at Urmia (Anonymous, 'Short biographical sketch', p. 76). In a letter dated 14 February 1900, signed as David Benjamin, Archpriest of Urmia, he asks for money for a chapel to be built in Digala, followed by a thank-you letter dated 2 July 1900 for the money raised. The letters were published in *The Tablet* in March and July 1900. However, as reported in his biography, he left the priesthood in 1900 and served in the Persian Service of Posts and Customs, and later as teacher and translator for Crown Prince Muhammad Ali Mirza.

He joined the Unitarian community in England in 1903, and in 1904 he was sent by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association to serve as a teacher in his home country. On his way to Urmia, he visited Istanbul, where he met Şeyhülislam Mehmed Cemaleddin Efendi and some other scholars, and embraced Islam (Anonymous, 'Short biographical sketch', p. 78).

On his conversion to Islam in 1904, David acquired Ottoman citizenship. Between 1905 and 1906, he served as a teacher and administrator at Darüşşafaka School in Istanbul, which provided primary and secondary

education for Muslim orphans. He also worked for the Encümen-i Teftiş ve Muayene (Committee of Inspection and Examination), a branch of the Ministry of Education. In 1914, he began working at Mektûbî-i Fetvahâne (Fatwa Department) and later for the journal *Cerîde-i İlmiyye*. However, he had to resign from both posts after less than a year.

He knew English, French, Italian, Latin and Persian (Anonymous, 'Abdülehad Davud Efendi'). He reportedly migrated to the USA, and died in a care home in New York on 6 July 1950. His death certificate identifies him as widowed, a professor by occupation and a US citizen (Bakır, 'Yeni belgeler ışığında Abdulahad Davud'un hayatı ve fikirleri', pp. 9, 89-90).

A. Zapsu, who was personally acquainted with 'Abd al-Aḥad, reports that, in addition to the languages mentioned above, he knew Turkish, Kurdish, Greek and Hebrew, and that he took the name 'Abd al-Aḥad as a 'protest against the Trinity' (Zapsu, *Büyük İslâm târihi*, p. 114). Şerefeddîn, *dersiam* (religious teacher) at the Bayazid Mosque, reports that 'Abd al-Aḥad knew Ahmed Midhat Efendi in person (Şerafeddîn, Review of 'İncîl ve Salîb', p. 296).

As a Muslim, he authored numerous works. In addition to his two books, *İncîl ve Salîb* and *Esrâr-ı Îseviyye,* he published articles in journals such as *Beyânü'l-Hakk Gazetesi, Sebîlürreşâd* [*Sırât-ı Müstakîm*] and *The Islamic Review*, in which he often discusses matters related to Islam, Christianity and Christian-Muslim relations. His last article is reported to have appeared in *The Islamic Review* in August 1931.

A series of articles by him entitled 'Assyria, Rome, and Canterbury' in ten parts was published in *The Tablet* in 1892-3. In these he describes the past and present state of the Chaldaeo-Assyrian Christians.

While still a Catholic, he published two articles in *The Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 'The authenticity of the Pentateuch, Part I' (August 1894) 682-93, and 'The authenticity of the Pentateuch, Part II' (September 1894) 769-87.

After his conversion, he authored 20 essays in Ottoman Turkish which were published in *Beyânü'l-Hak*: 'Hindistân İğtişâşları', 1/11 (1 December 1324) 240-2; 'Pânislâmizm. Cemiyyet-i Umûme-i İslâmiyye', 1/13 (15 December 1324) 284-6; 'Âlem-i İslâmiyyet. Câvâ yâhut Yirmi Sekiz Milyon Müslümanı Hâvî Bir Cezîre', 1/22 (16 February 1324) 514-19; 'Âlem-i İslâmiyyet. Câvâ', 1/23 (23 February 1324) 540-1; 'Âlem-i İslâmiyyet. Sumatra Müslümanları', 1/26 (16 March 1325) 615-17; 'Âlem-i İslâmiyyet. Çin Müslümanları-1', 2/58 (26 April 1326) 1206-7; 'Âlem-i İslâmiyyet. Çin Müslümanları-2', 3/60 (6 May 1326) 1218-19; 'İran'ın Vaziyet-i Hâzırası', 3/60 (6 May 1326) 1219-21; 'Âlem-i İslâmiyyet. Çin Müslümanları-3', 3/61 (10 May

1326) 1236-8; 'İran'ın Vaziyet-i Hâzırası-2', 3/61 (10 May 1326) 1238-40; 'Çin Müslümanları-4', 3/63 (24 May 1326) 1271-2; 'İran'ın Vaziyet-i Hâzırası-3', 3/64 (31 May 1326) 1281-3; 'İran'ın Vaziyet-i Hâzırası-4', 3/65 (7 June 1326) 1296-9; 'Girit Meselesi ve İngiliz Siyaseti', 3/66 (14 June 1326) 1314-17; 'Çin Müslümanları-5. Konfuçizm Din ve Felsefesi', 3/66 (14 June 1326) 1317-20; 'İran'ın Vaziyet-i Hâzırası-5', 3/68 (28 June 1326) 1348-51; 'İran'ın Vaziyet-i Hâzırası-6', 3/69 (5 July 1326) 1365; 'Âlem-i İslamiyyet. Çin Müslümanları, Din ve Felsefe-6', 3/70 (12 July 1326) 1375-8; 'Türkiye İttifak Etmeli mi?', 3/74 (9 August 1326) 1445-7; 'Türkiye İttifak Etmeli mi?-2', 3/75 (16 August 1326) 1463-4.

He also wrote nine essays which were published in *Sebîlürreşâd* [*Sırât-ı Müstakîm*]: 'Kırk İki Bin Katolik Misyoner Cemiyeti', 12/292 (3 April 1330) 103-5; 'İngiliz Müslümanları. İngiltere'de Dîn-i İslâm'ın İntişârı', 12/305 (3 July 1330) 334-5; 'İngiltere'de İntişâr-ı Dîn-i İslâm-2', 12/306 (10 July 1330) 355-6; 'Kiliseler İttihâdı Mümkün müdür?', 16/398-9 (20 March 1335) 88-90; 'Hıristiyanlık, Filistin'de Bir Yahudi Hükümetinin Teşekkülüne Müsait midir?', 16/400-1 (27 March 1335) 103-5; 'Katolik ile Ortodoks Kiliseleri'nin İttihâdı Mümkün müdür?', 16/404-5 (10 April 1335) 133-5; 'Mühim Bir Eser-i Dînî Hakkında', 16/406-7 (17 April 1335) 155-8; 'Anglikan ile Ortodoks Kiliseler'inin İttihâdı Mümkün müdür?', 16/408-9 (17 April 1335) 171-3; 'Kiliseleri'nin Tevhîdine Neden Lüzûm Görülüyor?', 16/411-12 [412-13] (8 May 1335) 208-11.

He further published 22 essays in *The Islamic Review*: 'Why the Devil is called "Iblis" in the Qur'ān', 14/10 (October 1926) 391-5; 'Aḥmed in the Old Testament', 15/10 (October 1927) 354-8; 'Muhammad in the Old Testament. II. The question of the birthright and the covenant', 16/7 (July 1928) 235-42; 'Muhammad in the Old Testament. III. The mystery of the "mispa"', 16/8 (August 1928) 275-84; 'Muhammad in the Old Testament. IV. Muhammad is the "Shiloh"', 16/9 (September 1928) 313-21; 'Muhammad in the Old Testament. V. Muhammad and Constantine the Great', 16/11 (November 1928) 394-403; 'Muhammad in the Old Testament. VI. Muhammad is the Son of Man', 16/12 (December 1928) 439-48; 'Muhammad in the Old Testament. VII. King David calls him: "My Lord"', 17/1 (January 1929) 14-23; 'Muhammad in the Old Testament. VIII. "The Lord and the Apostle of the Covenant"', 17/2 (February 1929) 56-64; 'Muhammad in the Old Testament. IX. Genuine prophets preach only Islam', 17/3 (March 1929) 92-101; 'Muhammad in the Old Testament. X. Islam is the Kingdom of God on earth', 17/7 (July 1929) 225-37; 'Muhammad in the New Testament. I. Islam and Ahmadiyāt announced by angels', 17/11 (November 1929) 385-95; 'Muhammad in the New Testament. II. "Eudokia" means "Ahmadiyeh"',

18/1 (January 1930) 4-14; 'Muhammad in the New Testament. III. John the Baptist announces a powerful prophet', 18/3-4 (March-April 1930) 114-24; 'Muhammad in the New Testament. IV. The prophet foretold by the Baptist was certainly Muhammad', 18/5 (May 1930) 156-64; 'Muhammad in the New Testament. V. The baptism of John and Jesus only a type of the "Sibghatu'l-Lāh"', 18/9 (September 1930) 313-22; 'Muhammad in the New Testament. VI. The "Sibghatu'l-Lāh", or the baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire', 18/10 (October 1930) 353-63; 'Muhammad in the New Testament. VII. The "Paraclete" is not the Holy Spirit', 18/11 (November 1930) 400-11; 'Muhammad in the New Testament. VIII. "Periqlytos" means "Ahmad", 19/1 (January 1931) 10-20; 'Muhammad in the New Testament. IX. "The Son of Man", who is he?', 19/2 (February 1931) 60-70; 'Muhammad in the New Testament. X. By the apocalyptical "Son of Man", Muhammad is intended', 19/3-4 (March-April 1931) 112-24; 'Muhammad in the New Testament. XI. The Son of Man according to the Jewish apocalypses', 19/8 (August 1931) 282-92. These essays were collected in a book entitled *Mohammad in the Bible* published in Doha in 1980.

The Islamic Review (February 1929, p. 76) reports that, during his stay in Istanbul in 1895, 'Abd al-Aḥad wrote a series of articles in English and French on the 'Eastern Churches', which were then published in *The Levant Herald*. In addition, he published translations of the *Ave Maria* in the *Illustrated Catholic Missions*. It also states that he published a Syriac periodical *Qala d-šrara* ('The voice of truth') in the same year in Urmia.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

M.S. Sefiloğlu, 'Son dönem Osmanlısında bir mühtedi. Abdülehad Davud', Istanbul, 2020 (MA Diss. İbn Haldun Üniversitesi)

S. Bakır, 'Yeni belgeler ışığında Abdulahad Davud'un hayatı ve fikirleri', Istanbul, 2019 (MA Diss. Marmara Üniversitesi)

H. Darcan, 'Bir Osmanlı mühtedisi olarak Abdülahad Davud', Sakarya, 2008 (MA Diss. Sakarya Üniversitesi)

Anonymous, art. 'Abdülehad Davud Efendi', in *İstanbul Müftülüğü Arşivi, Sicil Defterleri*, vol. 4, Istanbul, [n.d.], 233

Ömer Faruk Harman, art. 'Abdülahad Dâvûd', in *DİA*

A. Zapsu, *Büyük İslâm târihi*, Istanbul, 1976, p. 114

'Abd al-Aḥad Dāwūd, *Muhammad in the Bible*, Kuala Lumpur, 1969[3] (includes 'A short biographical sketch of Professor 'Abdu 'l-Ahad Dáwúd', B.D., pp. 7-10, and articles originally published in *The Islamic Review*; also available in Arabic, Persian and German trans.)

Anonymous, 'A short biographical sketch of Professor 'Abdu 'l-Ahad Dáwúd, B.D.', *The Islamic Review* 17 (February 1929) 76-8

Şerefeddîn, 'İncîl ve Salîb' [book review], *Sebîlürreşâd* [*Sırât-ı Müstakîm*] 11/279 (15 January 1914) 296-7

All 'Abd al-Aḥad Dāwūd's Ottoman Turkish essays published in *Beyânü'l-Hak* can be downloaded in pdf format at http://ktp.isam.org.tr/

All his essays published in *Sebîlürreşâd* [*Sırât-ı Müstakîm*] are in downloadable pdf format at http://ktp.isam.org.tr/

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

İncîl ve Salîb
'The Gospel and the Cross'

DATE 1913
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Ottoman Turkish

DESCRIPTION

İncîl ve Salîb is a refutation of Christianity in 239 pages, consisting of ten chapters (*bâb*) divided into 41 sections. It was published in Istanbul in 1913 by Mahmud Bey Matbaası. Towards the end, the author writes that this is the first volume of *İncîl ve Salîb* specifically entitled 'What is the Gospel?', and that it would serve as an introduction to the nine volumes that were to follow (pp. 152, 195, 238). He further notes that in the second volume his intention will be to prove that the 'books of the Gospels' are not the product of *vahiy* (revelation; p. 238). However, there is no trace of the other nine volumes. The book is dedicated to Seyyid Abdülkadir, son of a Naqshbandi shaykh and a member of the Ottoman Senate.

In the introduction, 'Abd al-Aḥad criticises the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and argues that Jesus was not crucified. In his opinion, the account of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ is just a 'tale' (p. 12). He also states that the four Gospels were authored many years after Jesus and that they were altered before reaching us. He thus considers that it is a duty to declare the prophethood of Muḥammad.

The book begins with introductory information about the 27 books of the New Testament, and their canonisation and reception in the Catholic Church. 'Abd al-Aḥad argues that the real objective of the Gospel was to announce the good news of 'Ahmed' and 'Islam', and further states that there is no book called 'Gospel' authored and confirmed by Jesus Christ. Likewise, the Apostles and early Church did not have a book called

'Gospel'. The gospel existed in oral form and was all about giving the good tidings of the *melekûtullâh* (kingdom of God; or *melekût*, which he uses interchangeably), which in his view is 'Islam' and the Prophet of Islam, 'Ahmed'. Jesus received 'revelations' (*vahiyler*) 'inspirations' (*ilhamlar*) and 'verses' (*âyetler*) from God, though these were never 'written down' but only transmitted to the Apostles 'orally' (pp. 102-3, 195). Twenty-seven books of the New Testament are not the same as the *Glorious Gospel* (*İncîl-i Şerîf*) (p. 197) and are not the product of divine revelation (p. 227).

'Abd al-Aḥad goes on to say that the four canonical Gospels were authored many years after the time of Jesus. Focusing on the song of the angels in Luke 2:14 ('Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom He favours, *eirene en anthrōpois eudokias*'), he argues that this verse was wrongly translated and has been misunderstood ever since: the term *eirene* means 'Islam' and *eudokia* denotes 'Ahmed'. Throughout the book, 'Abd al-Aḥad argues that 'Jesus Christ was appointed by God especially to reform the Sons of Israel, clarifying "the Law of Moses" anew' (p. 70). Jesus did not try to establish a new faith or church, but sought to prepare the Jews for the advent of *melekûtullâh*, namely Islam (p. 112). Although 'Abd al-Aḥad shows respect for 'the Apostle' Paul (p. 178), he criticises both Paul and the Church's understanding of the term *melekût*. He concludes that the Gospel is not a written book but an 'oral statement' that gives good tidings of the Qur'an and a 'divine command' for the Jews in preparation for the advent of *melekûtullâh*, i.e. Islam (p. 195).

'Abd al-Aḥad expresses opposition to the translation of works that are hostile to the Bible from English or French into Turkish. Although he regards them as distorted, such sacred texts contain divine and authentic parts and so deserve respect. In his opinion, a Muslim should approach the Bible with the intention of uncovering any hidden truths therein (pp. 69-70). He holds a progressivist view of the various nations with regard to beliefs. For him, each religion and nation has to go through three stages of development. He considers Christianity to be in the second stage, Judaism in the first and Islam in the third and final. Islam is the unique universal faith that gathers up all of humanity (pp. 70-3).

Looking at the disagreements between the Christian churches, 'Abd al-Aḥad concludes that there is neither 'spiritual fraternity' nor 'physical unity' among Christians, particularly in Europe (pp. 147-8), which he finds to be in contrast to 'a globally united Muslim nation' (pp. 149-52). He further comments that the Jews can easily establish an agreement with and live peacefully among Muslims because of the closeness of their faith to

Islam (p. 158), and they can 'establish a local government' of their own (p. 161, also see p. 168).

SIGNIFICANCE

'Abd al-Aḥad wrote *İncîl ve Salîb* in order to repudiate the Christian belief in the crucifixion of Christ. It is significant that, contrary to the mainstream Muslim view, he insists throughout the book that the Gospel is only 'oral preaching' and that Jesus never had a written book (e.g. p. 239).

Although this is a work of refutation focused mainly on Christian theology and the Bible, it is interspersed with the author's views on current world politics. He praises the ethical and cultural state of Muslim society and in contrast he considers the socio-cultural and religious state of Christian Europe as mediocre. He also discusses Jews and Zionists, and suggests that Jews are in agreement with Muslims and the Ottoman State (pp. 167-8).

Ohannes Kirkoryan penned a refutation of *İncîl ve Salîb* entitled *Îzâh-ı hakîkat. İncîl ve Salîb nâm esere cevâb* as soon as it appeared. In the introduction to this book he accuses 'Abd al-Aḥad of employing derogatory language against Christians. Şerefeddîn, a *dersiam* (religious teacher) at the Bayazid Mosque, in his review of *İncîl ve Salîb* expresses the view that it contains more information than Raḥmat Allāh al-Kayrānawī's *Iẓhār al-ḥaqq* (1864), which was highly regarded in the Islamic world (Şerefeddîn, Review of 'İncîl ve Salîb', p. 297).

PUBLICATIONS

'Abd al-Aḥad Dāwūd, *İncîl ve Salîb*, Istanbul, 1913

Abdulehad Dâvûd, *İncîl ve Salîb*, ed. Kudret Büyükcoşkun, İstanbul, 1999, repr. 2007 (annotated edition in modern Turkish)

STUDIES

K. Büyükcoşkun, Review of *İncîl ve Salîb*, *Kitap Dergisi* 63-5 (1992) 40-6

Zapsu, *Büyük İslâm târihi*, pp. 114-24

Ö.F. Harman, art. 'Abdülahad Dâvûd', in *DİA*

O. Kirkoryan, *Îzâh-ı hakîkat. İncîl ve Salîb nâm esere cevâb*, Istanbul, 1914

Şerefeddîn, Review of 'İncîl ve Salîb'

Anonymous, Review of *İncîl ve Salîb*, *Sebîlürreşâd* [*Sırât-ı Müstakîm*] 11/271 (20 November 1913) 167-8

Esrâr-ı Îseviyye. Allah Bir midir Üç müdür? 'The secrets of Christianity. Is God one or three?'

DATE 1916
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Ottoman Turkish

DESCRIPTION

This is a polemical work against Christianity and Christian missionary activity, written in the form of a fictional biography of a former Christian missionary. A good portion of the work consists of dialogue. Covering 159 pages in the 2003 edition, the book aims to critique and refute Christianity and British Christian missionary activity, and to warn Muslims against them. The plot revolves around Fano, a young Nigerian who becomes a Protestant missionary through the Church Missionary Society of Great Britain. While on mission, Fano meets Hajj Abdullah, a Berber Muslim, with whom he discusses various issues related to Christianity and Islam.

The author criticises not only Christian missionary activity, but more specifically British missionaries for their Eurocentrism and nationalist and racist tendencies. His criticism of priests and missionaries also extends to social welfare, arguing that there is a huge gap between them and the local inhabitants. Either through the voice of Hajj Abdullah, or in his own words, 'Abd al-Aḥad criticises certain elements of the Christian faith, such as original sin, the crucifixion of Christ, the Trinity, the authenticity of the Gospels, priests and priesthood.

Hajj Abdullah challenges Fano on various aspects of his Christian faith and invites him to embrace Islam. After clarifying certain issues such as the question of intercession and the multiple marriages of the Prophet Muḥammad, Fano becomes a Muslim.

Esrâr-ı Îseviyye does not appear to have been referred to by later authors. Its continuing value is that through the main *persona* of Fano, 'Abd al-Aḥad Dāwūd seems to be sharing his own experience and feelings as a former missionary and the reasons why he converted to Islam.

PUBLICATIONS

'Abd al-Aḥad Dāwūd, *Esrâr-ı Îseviyye. Allah Bir midir Üç müdür?* İstanbul, 1916

Abdülehad Davud, *Müslüman Olan Papaz. Esrar-ı İseviyye – Allah Bir midir, Üç müdür?* İstanbul, 2003 (in modern Turkish)

Betül Avcı