THE TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF IBN AṬ-ṬAYYIB:
AN INTERPRETATION OF BABAI THE GREAT’S
METAPHYSICAL SYSTEM IN THE WORLD OF ISLAM

BY

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ABSTRACT

The Trinitarian doctrine of Abū al-Farağ ‘Abd Allah Ibn at-Ṭayyib (10th-11th c.) may be considered a good example of an interpretation of the Trinitarian theology and metaphysical system of Babai the Great (7th c.). Babai made an effort to discern between metaphysical terms, such as: substance (kyānā), hypostasis (qnōmā), and person (parṣōpā), making a peculiar mixture of Cappadocian, Nestorian, i.e., East Syrian, and Antiochene theology. Ibn at-Ṭayyib, however, did not make use of Babai’s terminology. Particularly, although he explained the Trinitarian dogma in a similar way to Babai, he did not apply the term person (parṣōpā) to the Trinitarian theology. This paper aims to show the importance of the Trinitarian thought of Ibn at-Ṭayyib. It also answers the following questions: 1) how was he able to make an excellent interpretation of Babai’s thought in the language and ambient of Islam, and 2) why did he consider it the best way to explain the Trinitarian dogma to the Muslims?
INTRODUCTION

The Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocians was the foundation stone for the Trinitarian dogma of the Church. In the first synods of the Church of the East, there are archaic expressions and a particular Trinitarian terminology: God is one nature (kyānā) and three hypostases (qnōmē). Babai the Great (7th century) introduces an important development in the Trinitarian and Christological doctrine and terminology within the Church of the East. His effort was to discern between such terms as: nature (kyānā), hypostasis (qnōmā) and person (parsōpā), a peculiar mixture of both Cappadocian and Antiochene theology. His philosophical terminology and theological doctrine was officially recognized by his church at the assembly of bishops in 612, but only with respect to its Christological part. As for his philosophical approach to the Trinitarian dogma, it was not totally approved, or we can say that it was neither accepted nor rejected.

In the 10th and 11th centuries, the Trinitarian theology of Abū al-Farağ ʻAbd Allah Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, an important theologian of the Church of the East, can be considered a good example of an interpretation of Babai’s Trinitarian theology. It is worth noting that Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib respected the desire of his church not to apply the term “person” (parsōpā) to its Trinitarian theology as Babai did. Rather, he explained the Trinitarian dogma by elaborating on Babai’s metaphysical system from an Aristotelian philosophical context.

This paper aims to present and analyze the metaphysical systems of Babai and Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib in order to determine the common nucleus between the two, and then to analyze the further development of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib. Additionally, it will demonstrate the importance of the Trinitarian thought of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, and his ability to explain the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas in the language and milieu of Islam, using traditional terminology and making an excellent interpretation and modification of Babai’s metaphysical system. It will be also shown that with his elaboration of Babai’s metaphysical system, Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib created his own system. This new and particular metaphysical system was a good way to answer questions posed by the Muslims of his time regarding the Trinitarian dogma.

Before beginning our analysis, we would like to make some terminological remarks. First of all regarding the term qnōmā: it is the Syriac translation of the Greek ὑπόστασις, usually translated by scholars as “hypostasis” (at least in a Trinitarian context)¹, although it should be noted that not all

scholars accept this translation. In fact, in the history of the Christian doctrine, the term hypostasis did not have one meaning and a unique metaphysical function. When hypostasis was translated into Syriac with the term qnōmā, it did not always have one specific meaning attributed to it by the Syriac theologians, and did not always correspond to the meaning attributed to it by the Greeks. Nevertheless, we will use terms, hypostasis and qnōmā, as synonyms.

The same applies to the term parsōpā, which is the Syriac term for the Greek πρόσωπον. It was used in different ways to explain either Trinitarian theology or Christological doctrine. In the Syriac tradition, it was also used with different meanings and significances. For this reason, we will use the term parsōpā with the English translation of the Greek term πρόσωπον, i.e., person. Following is a list of English translations that will be used for Arabic philosophical terms: “essence” will be used for ḏāt; “substance” for ḡawhar; “hypostasis” for uqnūm; “person” for šahṣ and farṣūf; “attribute” for sīfah, and “property” for ḥāssah.

In addition, we chose to refer to the Church of the East also as Nestorian. This is not meant to be polemical or offensive in any way. We prefer to use this term because the same Church in 612 considered its doctrine to be Nestorian, a term that became synonymous with orthodoxy. We also prefer to use the term Miaphysites for the Jacobites, i.e., the Syrians who did not accept the Council of Chalcedon, the non-Chalcedonians of Syriac language. Finally, for those who accepted Chalcedon, we use the term Chalcedonians.

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4) We think that translating the term qnōmā with hypostasis, and parsōpā with person/πρόσωπον, is not wrong. The important thing is to underline the various comprehensions of the terms and the different meanings and metaphysical functions they hold, cf. André DE HALLEUX, “‘Hypostase’ et ‘personne’ dans la formation du dogme trinitaire (ca. 375-381)”, in André DE HALLEUX, Patrologie et œcuménisme. Recueil d’études, Peeters, Leuven, 1990, pp. 113-214; Andrea MILANO, Persona in teologia. Alle origini del significato di persona nel cristianesimo antico, Éditions Dehoniane, Naples, 1984; TURCESCU, “Prosopon”, pp. 374-395; while for the meaning of these terms in the Eastern Syriac tradition see PATROS, “La cristologia”, pp. 28-33.
5) Cf. CHABOT, Synodicon, pp. 573-574:
A. BABAI THE GREAT AND HIS DOCTRINE

Until the year 612, the doctrine of the Church of the East used a certain metaphysical terminology to express Trinitarian and Christological dogmas: 1) God is one nature (kyānā) and three hypostases (qnōmē), the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; 2) Christ is one person (paršōpā) and two natures (kyānē), united without division or mixture.6

During the Christological discussions within the Church of the East, for ecclesiastical, political and doctrinal reasons, some theologians began to develop metaphysically its Christology. The role of the schools and some monasteries was important in this development.7 The so-called “controversy of Ḥennānā of Adiabene” was the most significant event which shows the theological discussion within the same church and the direct and indirect contacts between it and the other churches-confessions, i.e., the Chalcedonians and the non-Chalcedonians (Miaphysites).8 The most important figure, whose activity as a monk, spiritual leader and theologian had the major influence on the Church of the East and its official doctrine, was Babai the Great.9

Babai the Great10 was born ca. 551 in the area of Beth ‘Aynatha. He became a monk in the “Great Monastery” founded by Abraham of Kaškar (†588),11 to whom he became superior and spiritual leader. After the death of the Catholicos of the Church of the East, mar Grigor (†610),12 Chosroes II (d. 628), the Sasanian emperor, did not allow the bishops of this church to elect a new Catholicos. Until Chosroes’ death, the church was led by the archdeacon Aba of Seleucia and Babai, who had the appointment of “visitor of the monasteries”. In the year 612, according to the will of Babai, an as-

7) In this regard see BECKER, Fear.
9) Cf. BAUM & WINKLER, The Church, p. 38.
11) On Abraham of Kashkar see Lucas VAN ROMPAY, “Abraham of Kashkar”, in GEDSH, pp. 8-9; Sabino CHILÀ, Abramo di Kashkar e la sua comunità. La rinascita del monachesimo siro-orientale, Qiqajon, Magnano, 2005.
12) On this catholicos see Lucas VAN ROMPAY, “Grigor I”, in GEDSH, p. 183.
semblly of bishops was held, which adopted a new Christological formula: Christ is one person (\(\text{pars}\,\text{ōpā}\)) in which were united, without mixture or separation, two natures (\(\text{kyānē}\)) and two hypostases (\(\text{qnōmē}\)).

Certainly, this was the contribution of the metaphysical development that Babai made and expressed in his “Book of the Union”, which we will briefly present in this paper. It is to be noted that Babai’s theological system was adopted partly by the assembly of 612. This does not mean that his metaphysical system, especially regarding his Trinitarian thought, was totally rejected or was not used by others. The main part of our paper here, in fact, will focus on how Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib used and interpreted Babai’s metaphysical system to explain the Trinitarian doctrine to Muslims.

1. Babai the Great’s metaphysical system

Going back to Babai’s metaphysical system, we should always keep in mind that in the internal Christological discussion among the theologians and thinkers of the Church of the East there were questions regarding the two natures of Christ and their real union. If Christ is one person with two united natures, and these natures maintain their properties, should we consider the union real or not? In addition, the presence of the Miaphysites (Jacobites) into the Sasanian land, and their propaganda against the traditional doctrine of the Church of the East considering it a dualistic Christology and accusing it to be real Nestorianism, i.e., the doctrine of two separated subjects in Christ, had made a group of theologians of this church refute any non-dualistic Christological formula or proposal. They considered such doctrines a betrayal of the faith of the Church, that is, in Christ the united natures are perfect and each one conserves its natural properties.

For that reason, the Christological proposal of Ḥenanā that Christ is one person (\(\text{pars}\,\text{ōpā}\)), one hypostasis (\(\text{qnōmā}\)) and two natures (\(\text{kyānē}\)) was

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14) This work was edited and translated into Latin by VASCHALDE, Babai Magni.
seen as dangerous to some of the theologians and thinkers of the Church of the East. In fact, they tried to conserve their different Christological identity from the Chalcedonians and the non-Chalcedonians (Jacobites)\(^\text{17}\).

Babai, against such voices as the one of Ḥenana, wrote his “Book of the Union”, and was one of the important theologians of the Church of the East to develop systematically the Trinitarian and Christological doctrine of his church, according to his point of view. He actually defined the technical and metaphysical terms used in these doctrines, giving them a clear explanation and a precise metaphysical role and use\(^\text{18}\).

There is no doubt that the concept of nature (\(\mathrm{ky\ddot{a}n\ddot{a}}\)) was not a topic of discussion since there was already an agreement on its definition that it was the general and common substance (\(\mathrm{i\ddot{u}\ddot{u}\ddot{\tau}\ddot{a}/\mathrm{usi\ddot{a}}\))\(^\text{19}\). The problem, however, was regarding the definition of the terms hypostasis (\(\mathrm{qn\ddot{o}m\ddot{a}}\)) and person (\(\mathrm{par\ddot{s}\ddot{\nu}p\ddot{a}}\)), their relation to the common nature (\(\mathrm{ky\ddot{a}n\ddot{a}}\)), and the one between each other.

According to Babai, a singular substance (\(\mathrm{usi\ddot{a}/\mathrm{o\ddot{u}\ddot{s}\ddot{i\ddot{a}}}}\)) is called:

hypostasis (\(\mathrm{qn\ddot{o}m\ddot{a}}\)), consisting in its single essence [expressed] by the number ‘one’. And it is distinct from the ‘many’ [hypostases], not because of the fact that it became singular, but since it receives, in the created, rational and free beings, various accidents of virtue of abundance or of poverty, of knowledge or of ignorance; and in the irrational beings receives also various accidents, either by opposed temperaments or in any other way. And these [the accidents], as I said, are not creators, they are only created [things]. Hypostasis is fixed according to its nature and it is subject to the species and the nature of which it is hypostasis, together with the similar hypostases to it [i.e. of the same nature]. It is distinguished from these similar and equal hypostases.

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postases through the singular property which possesses by its person (parsōpā). For example, Gabriel is not Michael and Paul is not Peter. But in each hypostasis (qnōmā) [of them] the entire common nature is known, and [with regard to] the one nature that comprises the hypostases (qnōmē) in a common way, it is known through the mind what [sort of nature] it is, whether it is the nature of men or of other things. The hypostasis (qnōmā), however, does not comprise [all] the common [being].

Babai’s definition of hypostasis (qnōmā) seems to be close to the one that Aristotle gave for the primary substance, but we should not arrive at such a conclusion without first analyzing carefully Babai’s full definition. Qnōmā is a singular substance (ܐܘܩܝܐܐ ܝܛܝܕܝܐܮܐ). Being singular means that it subsists by itself. Numerically it is one. It belongs to a distinct species, which is the common nature (ܟܝܧܐ ܓܘܦܝܐܐ). It is one among many hypostases (qnōmē) that belong to the same common substance. All these qnōmē are equal and identical in everything related to the common nature they manifest perfectly. The qnōmā, however, is not identified with the common nature, since the latter comprises all of the singular substances subject to it. Qnōmā is also a perfect singular nature, manifesting this nature perfectly, i.e., the natural properties of one specific species, but is not the entire common being (ܠܓܒܠܐ ܚܒ ܠܩܘܣܐ ܕܝܨ ܠܬܐ ܘܕܒܝܧܐܢ ܕܫܪܟܐ ܕܬܐ ܘܚܬܐ). Qnōmā, being a singular nature, is fixed naturally, i.e., it cannot change to another species or another common nature; it cannot form a new reality with another qnōmā, or a new hypostasis (qnōmā) of new species. Qnōmā can receive various accidents, and these distinguish one hypostasis (qnōmā) from another one of the same common nature. It is the group of singular properties possessed by one qnōmā that constitutes, according to Babai, a person (parsōpā). To be clearer, Babai gives an example: Gabriel and Michael, Paul and Peter are all human qnōmē, i.e., singular human natures. They are similar according to their natural properties, but Gabriel is not Michael because of the different personal properties of each qnōmā. This, in fact, is the metaphysical function of person (parsōpā) according to Babai’s

20) The translation is ours.
21) VASCHALDE, Babai Magni, pp. 159-160.
thought. Gabriel and Michael, Paul and Peter are \textit{qnōmē}, but also are \textit{paršōpē}. In the following citation, Babai further explains his system:

The person (\textit{paršōpā}) is the property of any [possible] hypostasis, which distinguishes it from other [hypostases], because the hypostasis of Paul is not the hypostasis of Peter. Although they [i.e. Paul and Peter or any other humans] are equal in nature and hypostasis—for each of them possesses a body and a soul, they is living, and rational and corporeal—nevertheless in person they are distinct from each other, either in age, appearance, health, wisdom, power, paternity, filiation, being male or female, or any other way that distinguishes and manifests the singular and individual property. [As a consequence], this one is not that one, nor is those these. Although in nature they are identical, [nevertheless] in the [domain] of the singular property that this hypostasis possesses, which is not that one, it is the person that makes the distinction\textsuperscript{22}.

In this definition we should notice that for Babai, the \textit{qnōmā} has two kinds of properties and characteristics, the natural and the proper. By the natural, it is recognized to which common being it belongs. By the individual, it is distinguished from the other hypostases (\textit{qnōmē}) of the same species and general substance. In our opinion, for Babai, the \textit{qnōmā} by itself, being a singular and concrete substance of a general nature, is a perfect manifestation of the natural properties of this species, however, to be recognized as individuality, i.e., a particular reality, it receives a person (\textit{paršōpā}), that is, a group of individual properties. One can notice that for our thinker, the general nature, in fact, does not exist. It is an abstract reality, while the concrete one is the subsistent reality, the singular and concrete substance, the \textit{qnōmā}. However, this subsistent reality cannot be complete without the individual properties, which is the person that each \textit{qnōmā} possesses. The person of one hypostasis, i.e., reality composed by \textit{qnōmā} and \textit{paršōpā}, in conclusion, is a concrete, perfect and complete singular nature recognized so by its natural (\textit{qnōmā}), and personal (\textit{paršōpā}) properties\textsuperscript{24}.

\textsuperscript{22} The translation is ours.
\textsuperscript{23} \textsc{vaschalde}, Babai Magni, p. 160.
\textsuperscript{24} For more details regarding Babai’s thought and doctrine of these terms see \textsc{scipioni}, Ricerche, pp. 110-112; \textsc{abramowski}, “Babai”, pp. 297-314.
Making this analysis we can, in fact, notice that Babai is developing his metaphysical system, having as its basis, not only the philosophy of stoicism regarding the categories of “κοινός ποιός” and “ιδίως ποιόν”, as Scipioni sustained, but also the Aristotelian concept of substance “οὐσία”, the primary and the secondary. In our opinion, it is an elaboration and development of what we already find in Gregory of Nyssa’s metaphysical system, i.e., the concept of the “partial substance” (μερικὴ οὐσία) or “particular substance” (ἰδικὴ οὐσία). It is not our purpose to enter into detail regarding the doctrine of Gregory of Nyssa or the other Cappadocians, but we think that Babai had as a basis an existing elaboration of that metaphysical system, already in use by other Antiochene thinkers and theologians. However, Babai gave it a new dimension, which we may call “Nestorian”.

According to the elaborated system that Babai had as a basis, we can say that the secondary substance is the common and general, the universal. It is an abstract nature, while the primary substance is the singular nature with the individual properties. It is the common nature which takes an existence in individuals. There is, however, another status or category of substance, the partial one, which is an intermediate status between the abstract reality (common and general) and the concrete one (individual and singular).

Babai applied the terminology he had to this metaphysical system. For the general and common, i.e., the secondary substance and the “κοινός ποιός”, he used “substance” (ܐܘܩܝܐ), “nature” (ܟܝܧܐ) and “essence” (ܐܝܮܘܬܐ). This category is the group of the natural properties of one species, it is an abstract reality. When this abstract reality comes into existence and is distinct numerically, it is called hypostasis (ܩܝܣܐ). The singular substance is one of many that are subject to one specific species and common

27) In addition to the reference in the previous footnote, see also KARIATLIS, “St Basil’s”, pp. 57-83; TURCESCU, “Prospopon”, pp. 374-395; HILDEBRAND, The Trinitarian.
28) We think, as Scipioni demonstrated, that Nestorius’ Liber Heraclides, including Pseudo-Nestorius, used such a system, cf. SCIPIONI, Ricerche, pp. 98-158, 153-158. Regarding the Antiochene background of Babai, see ABRAMOWSKI, “Babai”, pp. 328-341. In addition, in our view, Leontius of Byzantium, who had an Antiochene education and formation, used a similar system and applied it to the Chalcedonian Christology. Regarding his system, see KRAUSMÜLLER, Dirk, “Making Sense of the Formula of Chaldon. The Cappadocians and Aristotle in Leontius of Byzantium’s Contra Nestorians et Eutychianos”, in Vigiliae Christianae 65 (2011), pp. 484-513. We are, in fact, planning to further investigate this topic in order to demonstrate the common Antiochene metaphysical system of both Babai and Leontius. The former gave it a “Nestorian” dimension while the latter gave it a Chalcedonian dimension.
nature. In our opinion, the *qnōmā* in Babai’s thought is the singular nature without individual properties, yet it is not a complete and perfect individual, even if it is singular and perfectly manifests the natural properties, that is, the partial nature in an intermediate status. When, however, this partial nature receives personal and individual properties through various accidents, it becomes a person (*ḥakamā*), i.e., an individual. So when a *qnōmā* receives its *parsōpā*, this means that it receives its individualization, its personalization. For this reason, in our opinion, Babai calls it “the *parsōpā* of the *qnōmā*”, as the first quotation of the next section demonstrates.

2. Babai the Great’s Trinitarian doctrine

In his metaphysical system which we just presented, it is clear that Babai is making a very significant development, differentiating it from the traditional Cappadocian metaphysical system. In fact, this will become clear as we see how our thinker applies this system to his Trinitarian doctrine:

Three are the adorable hypostases (*qnōmē*) of the eternal Trinity identical in everything: in one glorious essence (*īṭūtā*), cause of all creatures. However, if you want to distinguish through reason the one [hypostasis] from the other, you cannot [do it], except through the property of their persons (*parsōpē*). The name ‘Father’ is, in fact, the person (*parsōpā*) of his hypostasis [*qnōmā*]: He is unbegotten; from whom the Son, already since eternity, was begotten. And [the Son] is distinct through the person (*parsōpā*) of his hypostasis, so He is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit, but the begotten from the Father before the ages. And so we distinguish the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit through its singular person (*parsōpā*) that He possesses, for He is from the Father since eternity, that is, from the nature of Him through the way of the procession, so He is neither the Father nor the Son. This means that these [hypostases] are distinct through the distinct persons (*parsōpē*) they own through their properties. These adorable persons (*parsōpē*) can be given...
and received; the hypostases (qnōmē), on the contrary, can neither be given nor received. Because of the fact that this hypostasis (qnōmā) cannot be received, to become one hypostasis with another [different] hypostasis is impossible. But what inheres permanently in one hypostasis (qnōmā) is the thing by which it is distinguished, so that is not another hypostasis, i.e., the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit. These names, as they are persons, not in the [domain of hypostases, can be given and received. The hypostasis (qnōmā), however, shows only that this is this and not that. [For example], when two men come forward us, iy is known that they are two hypostases, but it is not yet known who is the one and who is the other, i.e., yet the property of the hypostasis (qnōmā) is not manifested as person (parṣōpā)\textsuperscript{29}.

In his Trinitarian doctrine, it is notable that Babai, on the one hand, tries to be faithful to the Cappadocian tradition and his church’s doctrine, and on the other hand, he succeeds in applying the Cappadocian doctrine to his own system. Without going into much detail, for the Cappadocians, ὑπόστασις, which is somehow synonymous to πρόσωπον, is the result of the common nature with an idiom (ἰδίωμα), that is, a property. For example, the Son is the divine common nature with the idiom of the generation, so he is the begotten Son. For the Cappadocians, the general nature and the idiom make the hypostasis, and at the same time, the idioms also reveal the relation (σχέσις) between the hypostases of the divine nature. Being the Son generated from the Father and the Spirit proceeding from the Father makes the latter to be the cause of the Trinity\textsuperscript{31}.

Also, for Babai, the Father is the cause of the Son and the Spirit. The Father as qnōmā, i.e., divine concrete and singular substance with his own property of his person (parṣōpā), is the cause of the Son and the Holy Spirit,

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\textsuperscript{29} The translation is ours.
\textsuperscript{30} VASCHALDE, Babai Magni, pp. 160-161.
\textsuperscript{31} Cf. HILDEBRAND, The Trinitarian, pp. 82-92, especially pp. 91-92, and pp. 92-98, see also KARIATLIS, “St Basil’s”, pp. 67-68.
two *qnōmē* with their *parsōpē*. It is not the general nature with the property or the idiom that make the hypostasis, as it is for the Cappadocians, but it is the hypostasis (*qnōmā*), as concrete singular substance of a general nature, with the property that make the person (*parsōpā*). It is clear that *qnōmā* and *parsōpā* are two different metaphysical concepts with different functions. In these last affirmations we notice not only the differentiation between Babai and the Cappadocians, but also that for Babai there is a difference between idiom, and property (*ܕܝܡܝܐ*), and person (*ܦܪܨܘܦܐ*).

It may be argued that the *parsōpā* manifests the personal properties of one *qnōmā*. One can also observe, however, that sometimes the difference between these two concepts is blurred. The clearest example of this is the explanation that Babai gives regarding the names. For him, the names “Father”, “Son”, and “Holy Spirit” are the persons, and at the same time they are the individual properties of the *qnōmē*. For this reason, he affirms that “the name ‘Father’ is the person (*parsōpā*) of his hypostasis” (*ܫܐܥ ܐܒܐܐ ܓܝܐܪ܇ ܦܪܨܘܦܐܐ ܗܘ ܕܩܧܐܘܣܗ*). We can explain it also by the following: the person (*parsōpā*) is called “Son” since his *qnōmā* received the property of sonship, i.e., being generated from the Father. This means that the *parsōpā* is an idiom of the *qnōmā*. We can also say that the name of one *parsōpā* indicates the property of its *qnōmā*, and is consequently its personal property.

To make all of this more comprehensible, we will use the following schemes:
An abstract substance of specific species includes a mass of qunomē (hypostases), i.e., singular subsistent substances; each one perfectly manifests the common substance, that is, its natural properties.

Personalization or individualization of a singular substance: a qunomā with a group of individual properties and idioms becomes a parşopā, i.e., singular subsistent substance that manifests perfectly its natural and personal properties.

A divine qunomā with the individual properties of unbegottenness is the parşopā of the Father. The parşopā of the Son is a divine qunomā with the property of generation, while the one of the Holy Spirit is a divine qunomā with the property of procession.

The Father is the cause of the Trinity. The Son and the Holy Spirit are perfect divine qunomē from the perfect divine qunomā of the Father. They are recognized by their parşopē because of their relation with the Father, i.e., their personal property that comes from their relation with their cause.

3. Babai the Great’s Christological approach

Babai was not interested in developing his metaphysical system for the purpose of explaining the Trinitarian doctrine. For him, the Christological dogma was the most important issue. His system helped him to support the doctrine regarding the two natures and two hypostases in Christ united in one person. He said, in fact, as we have seen above, that the qunomā is fixed and cannot be received or given, while the parşopā can be received or given. By this, he is trying to prepare the way for his Christological doctrine: the parşopā of the Son was given to the human qunomā of Christ, and so this human qunomā received or acquired its personalization; and in this parşopā
the union was realized. We have, as a consequence, one person of Christ, which is a common \textit{parșōpā} of two \textit{qnōmē}.

This system was adopted partially by the synod of 612. That assembly of bishops considered the doctrine regarding the two \textit{qnōmē} in Christ to be orthodox. Regarding the Trinitarian dogma, however, and the use of Babai’s system in the Trinitarian field, especially applying the concept of \textit{parșōpā}, it was not officially accepted. This is probably because there was either a danger of it being understood as tritheism, or simply that at the time, the problem was not Trinitarian but Christological.

With the arrival of Islam in the Near East, the Trinitarian dogma took its place once again within theological discussions, but this time between Christians and Muslims. For the latter, actually, this dogma meant polytheism. The Christians felt the necessity to re-produce apologetic works in order to cope with this new situation. Babai’s system was not utilized in the Trinitarian field during his time because there was no need for it. However, Ibn at-Ṭayyib, in the new Islamic milieu, tried to explain the Trinitarian dogma to Muslims by further developing Babai’s system, while keeping in mind that it was not officially accepted by his church.

B. IBN AT-ṬAYYIB AND HIS DOCTRINE

We do not have much biographical information regarding Ibn at-Ṭayyib’s date of birth. Scholars, however, claim that it was in the last quarter of the 10th century. Regarding the date of his death, the Jacobite Barhebraeus (†1286) states that Ibn at-Ṭayyib died on October of the year 1043.


33) Cf. CHABOT, Synodicon, pp. 564-567 (for the Trinitarian and Christological doctrine), pp. 583-584 (regarding the orthodoxy of this doctrine), see also BAUM & WINKLER, The Church, p. 39.


He is one of the most important “Nestorian” thinkers of his time, and maybe the most important and greatest polymath of the Church of the East. He was a physician, philosopher and theologian; he wrote many works on medicine, commentaries on most of the works of Aristotle, Galen and Hippocrates, exegetical works on most of the books of Holy Scripture and dogmatic treatises, especially regarding Trinitarian dogma. Being a polymath and a great theologian afforded him the position of secretary to two Catholicoi of the Church of the East: Yūḥannā VII (1012-1020 or 1013-1022) and Elias I (1028-1049). Having taken the responsibility of approving the dogmatic works of “Nestorian” authors and theologians of his time, such as Elias of Nisibis, means that he was considered a theologian and teacher of the Church of the East in that period.

Samir Khalil Samir also demonstrated in his article, “La place d’Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib dans la pensée arabe”, the importance of our author among the Arab thinkers and philosophers, both Muslim and Christian. The different citations that Samir uses confirm all that we have mentioned previously regarding the position of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib as an Aristotelian philosopher and commentator, and as a theologian and approver of theological works. The fact that some of his works are cited by the encyclopedia “Maǧmū‘ uṣūl al-dīn – Summa of the principles of religion” of the Coptic theologian al-Mu'taman Ibn al-‘Assāl († after 1265), proves that his doctrine was admired by authors of other Christian confessions and was greatly useful to them, even if he belonged to a “heretical” church according to their beliefs.

He is also considered to be the last Christian Aristotelian teacher working in Baghdad. In his exegesis, he follows the Antiochene School, especially, the thought of Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Ephraim the Syrian and others. Scholars note that he explains the Trinitarian dogma

37) There is a critical edition of this work with Italian translation see al-Mu'taman Ibn al-‘Assāl, Summa.
39) Some of his works, such as his commentary on the prologue to John, when copied by non-Nestorians received some changes in their content because of the Christological disagreements between them. For more on this, FAULTLESS, “The two Recensions”, pp. 177-198. See also HADDAD, La Trinité, p. 73.
to Muslims without mentioning their names, using Aristotelian philosophy and the discussion on the attributes of God\(^\text{42}\). Our objective here is to present his Trinitarian doctrine and to demonstrate that he was a disciple, maybe indirectly, of Babai’s philosophical system. In our opinion, he elaborated such system and used it in his doctrine, taking into consideration the new conditions of the Christians of that period and region: the Arabic language and the Islamic general context.

To accomplish this, we will use the following edited works\(^\text{43}\) of Ibn al-Ṭayyib\(^\text{44}\):

a. Treatise on the Trinity (\textit{Maqālah fī at-taḥlīlī})\(^\text{45}\).

b. Treatise on the Trinity and Unity (\textit{Maqālah fī at-taḥlīl wa-t-tawhīd})\(^\text{46}\).

c. Discourse on the Union (\textit{al-Kalām fī al-ittihād})\(^\text{47}\).

d. Work in fourteen chapters (Arabic title is unknown)\(^\text{48}\).

e. Treatise on the Union (\textit{Kitāb al-ittihād})\(^\text{49}\).

\textit{1. Terminology and metaphysical definitions}

Before we look at or examine the Trinitarian doctrine of our author, we should present two of his quotations that illustrate his metaphysical system, which is based on Babai’s system as will be made clear by our analysis:

\textsuperscript{42} Cf. FAULTLESS, “Ibn al-Ṭayyib”, p. 670.

\textsuperscript{43} We follow the English titles suggested by FAULTLESS, “Ibn al-Ṭayyib”, pp. 674-697. In the same pages, there is a list of the works of Ibn al-Ṭayyib related to the Muslim-Christian dialogue. Another list of his works is offered in GRAF, GCAL, vol. II, pp. 162-177.

\textsuperscript{44} Unfortunately we do not have complete critical editions of all the works of Ibn al-Ṭayyib. Although we have editions of some works, they are not always critical, but based on just one manuscript. For this reason and in order to have a clearer image of his thought, we need a complete critical edition of all the works attributed to him. These critical editions would ensure the authenticity of his works and might also resolve other important issues regarding his doctrine.

\textsuperscript{45} There is an edition with a French translation: Ibn al-Ṭayyib, \textit{Maqālah fī at-taḥlīlī}, pp. 74-89.

\textsuperscript{46} There is an edition with a French translation: Ibn al-Ṭayyib, \textit{Maqālah fī at-taḥlīl wa-t-tawhīd}, pp. 108-123.

\textsuperscript{47} There is an edition with a French translation: Ibn al-Ṭayyib, \textit{al-Kalām fī al-ittihād}, pp. 144-150.

\textsuperscript{48} This work came to us by way of the citation provided by al-Mu'taman ibn al-ʻAssāl: Ibn al-Ṭayyib, \textit{Work in fourteen chapters}, pp. 275 - 277 (ch. 11, par. 92-101); pp. 409-416 (ch. 19, par. 28-51).

\textsuperscript{49} This work came to us only partially, since it is quoted by al-Mu'taman Ibn al-ʻAssāl: Ibn al-Ṭayyib, \textit{Kitāb al-ittihād}, pp. 77-78 (ch. 8, par. 126-255).
The terms used by Christians regarding the essence (ḏāt) of the Creator (Glorified and Exalted Be He!), are: substance (ḡawhar), hypostasis (uqmūm), person (farsūf), unity (tawḥīd), trinity (taḏlīt), attributes (ṣifāt), and union (ittiḥād).

The term substance (ḡawhar) in every essence (ḏāt) indicates the absolute nature (muṭlaq aṭṭabā‘ī) in the thing, such as the nature of the human being (al-ḥumām) in his persons (ašḥāṣihi) and the fire in its persons (ašḥāṣihā). If [the essence] becomes particular (taḥṣāṣat), through the specification, you name it hypostasis (uqmūm), and if the attribute of the hypostasis becomes specific (ta‘ayyanat), you name it [the essence] person (farsūf wa šaḥṣ). When [the essence] obtains a multitude of descriptions [i.e., attributes], according to one side, it may be considered one, and according to another, many: it is one, from the side of the substance (ḡawhar), it is, however, many, from the side of its descriptions [i.e., attributes].

It is notable that for Ibn aṭ-Ṭāyyib, the substance (ḡawhar) is an abstract essence (ḏāt) and reality. This is the meaning, in fact, behind the expression, “the absolute nature in the thing”. It is the common nature of the persons (ašḥāṣ) of the same essence, and it indicates its species. This abstract reality obtains its existence when it becomes particular (taḥṣāṣaṣa). Becoming particular means for our author that the essence obtains an attribute. We think that he means that it manifests its natural properties, and in this case it could be called hypostasis (uqmūm). In our opinion, we have a kind of identification between the natural properties and the hypostasis. It means that the hypostasis is the perfect manifestation of the natural properties of one species in a singular substance. When this singular substance, i.e., natural properties, obtains specific attributes and descriptions, it becomes a person (farsūf šaḥṣ). This is the only text that we read among the works of Ibn aṭ-Ṭāyyib in which the term farsūf (parṣōpā) was found. He identified it with the term šaḥṣ, which is used more often to refer to the same metaphysical category.

50) It is an Arabic transliteration of the Syriac term parṣōpā (赉``), which also may be read as farsōfā.

51) The translation is ours.

52) Ibn aṭ-Ṭāyyib, Work in fourteen chapters, p. 275 (ch. 11, par. 93-94).

53) Cf. HADDAD, La Trinité, p. 176. See also Bo HOLMBERG, “‘Person’ in the Trinitari-
Our author, then, uses the three different categories that Babai developed in his system. Considering these three categories as three statuses of substances confirms our opinion that behind this system there are the three types of natures: the abstract, the concrete and the intermediate. In addition, we can note that he tries to apply the Cappadocian\textsuperscript{54} doctrine regarding the meaning of hypostasis: a general and common nature with a specific idiom\textsuperscript{55}.

Ibn at-Ṭayyib gives an example to his readers in order to make it clearer. This example is taken from a quotation in the 13/14\textsuperscript{th} century ms. Vatican Arab. 36, which is attributed to our author with the title “The difference between the substance and the hypostasis”:

“The difference between the substance (gawhar) and hypostasis (qnūm) and person (ṣaḥṣ)”, attributed to him [to Ibn at-Ṭayyib] (May God be pleased with him!).

**The substance** (gawhar) is the indication of the essence, absolutely, as we say “human being”.

And the hypostasis (uqnūm) is the indication of it [the essence] when it becomes, with vagueness, particular (taḥṣṣaṣaṣat) as we say “a man” or “a woman”.

And the person (ṣaḥṣ) is the indication of it [the essence] when it becomes, with purity, particular (taḥṣṣaṣaṣat), as we say Moses and Mary\textsuperscript{56}.

First of all, we notice that our author is following the three metaphysical categories that Babai developed. Even if these three categories are different amongst each other, they are related to each other in some way, they are three statuses of the essence. The hypostasis (uqnūm) is a singular nature

\textsuperscript{54} That our author knew very well the doctrine of the Cappadocians, especially the one of Basil the Great, is confirmed by the numerous citations and references to his thought that he makes in his commentary on Genesis, see for example Ibn At-Ṭayyib, *Commentaire*, p. 7; this reference to Basil, in addition, is related to Basil’s doctrine on the Trinity.

\textsuperscript{55} We find an affirmation of this in his work, “in fourteen chapters”, see Ibn at-Ṭayyib, *Work in fourteen chapters*, p. 217 (ch. 8, par. 239): “...الأقنوم ليس مع الرجل مع الشخص بل مع الجوهر ...” He also gives the same definition in Ibn at-Ṭayyib, *Magālah fi at-taṣlīr*, p. 109: “... لأن الأقنوم ليس هو أكثر من جمع الذات مع الصفة ...» We will return to this topic later in this paper.

\textsuperscript{56} The translation is ours.

\textsuperscript{57} Vat. ar. 36, f. 138\textsuperscript{v}.
without clear specification, i.e., without personal properties, or let us use the expression “without personalization”. If the general and common substance is the human being, its singular natures are men and women. Simply, men and women are the perfect manifestation of the natural characteristics and attributes of the common essence. They indicate that this singular hypostasis belongs to the species of “human being”.

When, however, each singular nature, i.e., hypostasis, obtains specific attributes and properties, it becomes a person (šahṣ). Therefore, we can say that we have different singular natures, the difference being indicated in the particularity of each singular nature, so that one may be called Moses and the other Mary. We think that the key for understanding the thought of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib is his use of the word “taḥāṣṣāsat”, which is a verbal form of the term “ḥāṣṣah”, property.

This supports our claim that for our author hypostasis (uqnūm) and person (šahṣ) are two different kinds of properties and attributes, being natural and particular. Here, in fact, is the explanation of the expressions “vagueness” and “pureness”. Another thing we should note in this citation is the non-use of the term farṣūf. This, in our opinion, is because, in contrast with its synonym šahṣ, the term farṣūf did not enter the Arabic philosophical lexicon. Finally, this citation illustrates that these three categories are the three kinds of natures developed by the elaboration of Aristotle’s doctrine on the substance with the one of stoicism.

2. Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib’s metaphysical system and Trinitarian dogma

How could Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib apply this system to his Trinitarian doctrine? We must take into consideration that when he writes about the Trinity, he

58) In his work “in fourteen chapters” our author affirms this opinion by clearly stating that the hypostasis is one substance with a property, while the person is substances with many properties. It is clear that he is developing his doctrine dealing with the Christological issue, so he is talking about substances in one person. What interests us is the fact that hypostasis and person are identified with two different kinds of properties and attributes, see Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, Work in fourteen chapters, p. 218 (ch. 8, par. 244): «هذا القول قول من لا يفهم الفرق بين الأقنوم والشخص، والأقنوم جوىر بصفة واحدة، والشخص جواىر كثنًة بصفات...» In the same work we notice, as we did with Babai, that this identification means simply a manifestation of the attributes and properties, so the person manifests the personal attributes, and through its hypostasis manifests the natural properties, see Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, Work in fourteen chapters, p. 219 (ch. 8, par. 246): «على هذا المذهب يبطل فعل أقنوم الإنسان، وهو الأكل والسمع واللعب، وقد وصف المسيح مما، ويطلق صفة جواهر كثيرة صفات...»
has his opponents specifically in mind, i.e., the Muslims\(^5\). This means that in applying his metaphysical system, he must be careful not to be understood as a tritheist. In addition, we will notice that he uses Muslim language and doctrine, especially in the discussion on the divine attributes.

He said: “The Church believes that the Creator is one substance (ḡawhar) and He is described by three attributes (ṣifāt), and it believes that He is described by three hypostases (aqānīm)…”.

And the substance indicates the essence (ḏāt) of the sublime Creator, which, as it is demonstrated, is one; and the attributes indicate existing meanings of this essence, and [they] are not subsistent essences (ḏawāt qā‘imah bi-nufūṣihā); they are the “paternity”, the “filiation” and the “procession”. And the hypostasis (uqnūm) indicates the result of the essence with each one of the attributes. So when the essence is taken with the meaning of paternity, the result is called “Father”, when the same [essence] is taken with the meaning of the filiation [it] is called “Son”, and when it is taken with the meaning of the procession [it] is called “Holy Spirit”\(^6\).

From the first affirmation we notice that for Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib the uniqueness of God is to be found in the fact that the divine nature is one: God is one according to his substance (ḡawhar), which is his essence (ḏāt). The second thing we should note is that this one essence is described by three attributes (ṣifāt) and by three hypostases (aqānīm). Does our author limit the metaphysical function of hypostasis to describing the general essence? If the answer is yes, does he identify hypostasis with the attribute?

In the same citation above, it is clear that the attributes, which are also called “meanings” (ma‘ānī), are not subsistent essences (ḏawāt). This means that the attributes are not identified with hypostases (aqānīm), which are essences as he claimed in his metaphysical system above. As a consequence, when Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib mentions that the divine essence is described by three

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59) As we said, our author never mentions Muslims in his works, although it is clear that he writes apologetically to them as we will demonstrate in our analysis, see also FAULTLESS, “Ibn al-Ṭayyib”, p. 670.
60) The translation is ours.
attributes and three *aqānim*, he is intending two different metaphysical categories. The attributes, in fact, according to our text, are the “paternity”, the “filiation” and the “procession”. This causes or leads us to argue that for him the attributes in Trinitarian doctrine are the idioms of the persons (*ašhāṣ*) of his metaphysical system.\(^{62}\)

As for Babai, “person” for Ibn at-Ṭayyib is the idiom of the Cappadocians, and in our case is called attribute (*ṣifah*). It is the group of the personal and individual properties of each singular substance. Attention, however, should be placed on Ibn at-Ṭayyib’s approach to the Cappadocian system, and how he modifies Babai’s system and applies it. He does not use the metaphysical term person (*farṣūflāṣ*), even though it is used in his general metaphysical doctrine, as we have seen above. For him, the Father is already a specific hypostasis, i.e., hypostasis with an attribute, which is the meaning of the paternity. For Ibn at-Ṭayyib the Cappadocian affirmation that the essence with an idiom forms the hypostasis is accepted under one condition: this general essence with the attribute makes not just any hypostasis, but a specific one. According to his metaphysical system, this hypostasis is a person, i.e., a singular subsistent substance individualized and personalized. In other words, it makes a particular substance.\(^{63}\)

If the three divine *aqānim* are known and recognized as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this means that they are already specific *aqānim*, that is, hypostases with their persons (individual attributes of paternity, filiation and procession). The divine essence is one, but it is an abstract concept; it obtains its existence through the hypostases. These hypostases, however, are with their attributes, because they exist with the relation between them, i.e., they are cause and caused.\(^{64}\) The following scheme further clarifies this point:

\(^{62}\) Regarding the difference between hypostasis and person according to our author, see HADDAD, *La Trinité*, pp. 150, 157.

\(^{63}\) See also a comment on this in HADDAD, *La Trinité*, p. 154.

\(^{64}\) See also his *Maqālah muḥtasarah fī al-aqānim wa-l-ḡawhar wa anna al-fī‘l li-l-ḡawhar*, “Brief treatise on the hypostases and substance, and the fact that action pertains to the substance”, edited twice, once by Gérard Troupeau and the second time by Samir Khalil Samir, cf. FAULTLESS, «Ibn al-Ṭayyib», 694. We were not able to read and check either of these editions, but since this work exists in one manuscript only, Vat. ar. 145, ff. 70’-73’, we were able to read the manuscript and check the text of Ibn at-Ṭayyib.
The Father is the divine essence subsisting and recognized by a specific attribute, it is a hypostasis with a person. The Son is recognized as Son because of his relation to the Father; He is caused by the hypostasis of the Father, who is a divine particular essence, so He is also divine particular essence, (divine hypostasis). However, being caused by the Father, i.e., the inter-trinitarian relation, He has his attribute eternally, that is, the person of filiation. As a consequence, He is recognized to be Son, hypostasis and person. We can say the same about the Holy Spirit.

In his “Treatise on the Trinity and Unity”, Ibn at-Ṭayyib declares that the result of the essence and the attribute is a specific hypostasis, i.e., hypostasis with person. Before we cite the text in which he mentions this doctrine, we need to underline the fact that in his apologetic works regarding Trinitarian dogma, he develops Trinitarian analogy, as all Arab-Christian theologians do. He chose the one of “knowledge” (‘ilm), “knower” (‘ālim), and “known” (ma‘lūm)\(^{65}\). For him, these are three attributes that characterize the divine essence. This essence has the “knowledge”, i.e., the Father, this essence knows itself, so it is “knower”, i.e., the Son, and it is also “known” to itself, i.e., the Holy Spirit\(^{66}\). It is clear that to develop such an analogy, he

\(^{65}\) Cf. HADDAD, La Trinité, p. 228.

\(^{66}\) Cf. Ibn at-Ṭayyib, Maqālah fi at-taḥlīl, p. 81.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Hypostasis of</th>
<th>Divine essence with the attribute of</th>
<th>Hypostasis</th>
<th>Person</th>
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<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>hypostasis of the Father</td>
<td>paternity (person of the Father)</td>
<td></td>
<td>person (attribute of paternity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>hypostasis of the Son</td>
<td>filiation (person of the Son)</td>
<td></td>
<td>person (attribute of filiation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy Spirit</td>
<td>hypostasis of the Holy Spirit</td>
<td>procession (person of the Holy Spirit)</td>
<td></td>
<td>person (attribute of procession)</td>
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uses as a basis the discussion on the attributes that describe the divine essence. We will return to this topic further on in this paper. For now, let us read how he uses this analogy and integrates it into his metaphysical system:

And the Christians define the essence (al-ḏāt) as substance, not similar to the [created] substances, and they nominate the attributes (ṣifāt) properties (ḥawāss).

They name the attribute of knowledge “paternity”, and the attribute of knower “filiation”, and the attribute of known “procession”.

They name the sum [i.e., the results] that are [composed] by the essence with the attributes hypostases (aqānīm).

And when the essence is taken with the meaning of knowledge, this sum is called the hypostasis of the Father (uqnūm al-Āb).

And when it is taken with the meaning of the knower, this sum is called the hypostasis of the Son (uqnūm al-Ibn).

And when it is taken with the meaning of the known, this sum is called the hypostasis of the Spirit (uqnūm al-Rūḥ).

According to such a system, the three hypostases can describe the divine essence, as Ibn at-Ṭayyib affirms in the above citation. Since the aqānīm include the attributes within themselves, i.e., the persons, they also describe the divine essence. It is clear again that there is no identification between hypostasis and attribute, but there is a relation. Let us read the following quotation, which further illustrates our analysis:

And since the hypostasis (uqnūm) is the result

لأن الأقنوم ليس هو أكثر من مجتمع الذات مع

Regarding this analogy see HADDAD, La Trinité, p. 228.

67) The translation is ours.

68) Ibn at-Ṭayyib, Maqālah fi at-taqālī, pp. 81,83. We find the same affirmation in his “Treatise on the Trinity and Unity”, but without the application of the term uqnūm to the Father and the Son and the Spirit, although he says that these three are aqānīm: «وإذا أخذت كل واحدة من هذه الصفات مع الذات كان من الجملة أقنوم، فصفة القوة على العلم وهي المدلول عليها بالآية إذا أخذت مع آيداً قبل في الذات آيداً ذات من شأنها أن تعلم وهذا يعبر عنه بأنه أب، وصفة علمها ذاذاً وهي المدلول عليها بالآية إذا أخذت مع الذات تقوم من الجملة معني العالم وهو الحبر عنه باقنوم الإبن، وصفة كومها معلومة إذا أخذت مع الذات تقوم من الجميع جملة وهي للعبر عنها بالروح». Ibn at-Ṭayyib, Maqālah fi at-taqālī wa-t-tawḥīd, p. 113.
of the essence (ḏāt) with the attribute (ṣifah); and since the attributes (ṣifāt) are three, if the essence is taken with each one of them, the result is one hypostasis (uqūmūm). As a consequence, the Creator is one and many; one, from the side of the essence (ḏāt) and many from the side of the hypostases (aqānīm).

The last sentence, in fact, is similar to the one of his metaphysical rules presented above. Here we present a comparison:

When [the essence] obtains a multitude of descriptions [i.e. attributes], according to one side, it could be considered one, and according to another, many. It is one, from the side of the substance (ḡawhar), it is, [however], many, from the side of its descriptions [i.e. attributes].

As a consequence, the Creator is one and many; one, from the side of the essence (ḏāt) and many from the side of the hypostases (aqānīm).

It is clear, then, that within the Trinitarian field, when our author affirms that the hypostases (aqānīm) describe the divine nature and that they are, in some way, identified by attributes, i.e., the individual idioms of each hypostasis (property, ḥāṣṣāh), he means that these hypostases are eternally with persons, because they came to exist through a relation between them.

In our opinion, there are two reasons behind this interpretation and modification of Babai’s system: 1) on the one hand, Ibn at-Ṭayyib wants to maintain one cause in the Trinity, i.e., the Father as hypostasis and person; 2) on the other hand, he also desires to underline the unity of the three hypostases in the one common essence.

69) The translation is ours.

70) Ibn at-Ṭayyib, Maqālah fī at-taḥlīl wa-tawhīd, p. 109.

71) For some scholars the Nestorian Church identified hypostasis with attribute, see in the introduction of Robert Caspar, “Les versions arables du dialogue entre le Catholico-Timothée I et le Calife al-Mahdī (IIe/VIIe Siècle) ‘Mohammed a suivi la voie des prophètes’ ”, in Islamocristiana 3 (1977), 107-175, here 121. But, in fact, this identification must be read under the conditions that our author gives. For example, if here in Ibn at-Ṭayyib we do not find a clear identification between hypostasis and attribute, in Elias of Nisibis, a contemporary Nestorian author of Ibn at-Ṭayyib, the hypostases are attributes. Since both authors are of the same church, we think the key for understanding this identification in Elias is the doctrine of Ibn at-Ṭayyib here. For the Trinitarian doctrine in Elias see Ebeid, La Tunica, pp. 451-482. Years before Elias, the Coptic bishop Sāwīrūs Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ identified hypostasis with attribute, but he had a different basis for this identification and, as a result, a different doctrinal outcome, see Ebeid, La Tunica, pp. 293-307, see also Mark Swanson, “Are Hypostases Attributes? An investigation into the Modern Egyptian Christian Appropriation of the Medieval Arabic Apologetic Heritage”, in ParOr 16 (1990-1991), pp. 239-250.
The cause cannot be an abstract reality, but the common nature is abstract. To resolve this problem, he considers the hypostasis a perfect manifestation of the common essence in a singular way that is the common essence with the attribute. The Father in this case is not identified with the abstract common nature, but being the cause, he manifests this common nature perfectly, and the hypostases caused by him also manifest perfectly the common nature. To explain this problem and to resolve it, he again uses the analogy of “knowledge” (ʻilm), “knower” (ʻālim) and “known” (maʻlūm). Through this analogy he tries to show that the three hypostases as essence are one, co-existing together eternally. Having one cause (Father) and two caused (Son and Spirit) does not mean that this one cause is of the divine essence and its existence. Rather, it is simply cause of itself, i.e., it manifests the inter-trinitarian relations:

And if we say that the Father is cause and the Son and the Spirit are caused, this should not be understood that we mean cause of existence [i.e., creation], because the essence is one numerically.

The Father, however, who is the same essence with the power of knowledge, is the cause of the Son and the Spirit, I mean, the same essence with the [ability] to be knower and known.

It is one essence, a cause of itself, not [as a cause] of [its] existence. If we, [however], comprise the essence of the Creator with the rest of the created beings, it [the divine essence] is cause of their existence [of the created beings] and of their formation and their creation.

In this way, he maintains a differentiation between the three metaphysical categories: essence, hypostasis and person; and at the same time, he tries to be closer to the Cappadocian doctrine and consistent with the official doctrine of his church. He does not have as a basis, as Rachid Haddad claimed, the neoplatonic doctrine. According to us, he is taking an Aristotelian approach to Babai’s system.

72) The translation is ours.
73) Ibn at-Ṭayyib, Maqālah fi at-taqlīṭ wa-t-tawhīd, pp. 119, 121.
74) Cf. HADDAD, La Trinité, pp. 243-245.
The question that arises from such analysis is why did our author avoid using the term of person (farsūflšahš), even though he applied it as a concept, since he identified it with the attributes and the properties? A quick answer could be that he wanted to be consistent with the official doctrine of his church. The key, however, comes from his historical context and the discussion regarding the divine attributes.

3. Divine attributes and Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib’s metaphysical system

One important element of the Christian-Muslim dialogue at the time of our author, and even earlier, was the divine attributes. It was also a dialogical topic among the different Islamic theological and philosophical schools. The question was the following: if the divine attributes are eternal as God is, it means that they co-exist with him and, as a consequence, there is polytheism in God, or as Muslims call it, širk76.

Having this element in mind, Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, who accepted the metaphysical system of Babai and modified it to explain the Trinitarian doctrine, also developed it through the doctrine on the divine attributes77. First of all, his doctrine on the attributes of God consists of the distinction between two kinds of attributes: essential (ṣifāt dāt) and verbal (ṣifāt fi ‘lta‘addī)78. The essential attributes describe the divine essence and the inter-trinitarian relation of the


77) For a short comment on Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib’s doctrine on the divine attributes see FAULTLESS, “Ibn al-Ṭayyib”, p. 670; See also HADDAD, La Trinité, p. 156.

78) We would like to mention here that in this division of attributes we note the nucleus of the discussion regarding the distinction between essence and energy in God, which was developed during the 11th century in Byzantium. This discussion, however, was based on the doctrine of Basil the Great, cf. Γεώργιος ΜΑΡΤΖΕΛΟΣ, Ουσία και Ενέργεια του Θεού κατά τον Μέγαν Βασίλειον. Συμβολή εἰς τὴν ἱστορικοδομικὴν διερεύνησιν τῆς περὶ ουσίας καὶ ενεργειῶν τοῦ θεοῦ διδασκαλίας τῆς Ὑποδοχῆς Εκκλησίας, Πορναράς, Thessaloniki, 1984, pp. 13-26. Again, we then see a Cappadocian influence in our author. However, we think that this topic requires another and more detailed research. See also HADDAD, La Trinité, pp. 189-190.
three hypostases. The verbal attributes, however, describe the extra-trinitarian relation, i.e., the relation of God with the other created beings.

This is not the place to analyze this aspect of Ibn at-Ṭayyib’s doctrine; we would simply like to mention that the analogy of “knowledge” (ʿilm), “knower” (ʿālim) and “known” (maʿlūm) is also used here to explain his opinion regarding the two kinds of attributes. These three attributes are of the essence and describe it. They are only three because Scripture talks about the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, i.e., it is divine inspiration to believe in three divine hypostases; In addition, our author tries to demonstrate the necessity of the number three through philosophical and logical instruments.

The rest of the attributes are not essential and they describe the relation between God and His creatures. When we say God is “knowledge” (ʿilm), “knower” (ʿālim) and “known” (maʿlūm), we are describing His essence that has the power of knowledge, knows itself, and is known to itself. When we say, however, God is powerful, or Creator, this manifests that in comparison with his creatures, He is powerful and He is their Creator.

From an Aristotelian approach he also shows that the verbal attributes


80) Cf. Ibn at-Ṭayyib, Maqālah fī at-taḥlīl, p. 85: «فصفات الذات هي الثلاث صفات التي قالنا، لا:»


82) See for example, Ibn at-Ṭayyib, Work in fourteen chapters, p. 411 (ch. 19, par. 36).
exist in God eternally, so they are in him as «δυνάμει εἶναι» (bi-l-quwwah), i.e. He has the power to manifest them. At one specific time, these attributes are manifested as «ἐνέργεια εἶναι» (bi-l-fiʿl)\(^{83}\). It is also notable that in this explanation, he is modifying the Cappadocian use of Aristotle’s system. They talked about «δυνάμει εἶναι», «ἐνέργεια εἶναι», «δὶ εἶναι», to show that the energy of God is one, and each hypostasis has its own role in manifesting this one energy\(^{84}\). For our author, however, the interest is to prove that the verbal attributes exist eternally in God. In conclusion, we can say that for Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib all the attributes are of the divine essence, however, one group describes the essence as it exists, while the other group describes the actions of this essence, either as “power to act” or as “manifestation of the action”.

According to Babai’s system there are two kinds of properties: the natural and the personal. The hypostasis (qnōmā) manifests the natural, that is, the common substance. The person (parsōpā) is the group of the individual idioms of one hypostasis, its personalization. Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, on the one hand, wants to maintain Babai’s system as a basis of his doctrine, and, on the other hand, has in mind the discussion on God’s attributes and their two kinds, which are the essential and the verbal. In our opinion, his desire not to complicate his system so that it could be comprehended by his Muslim readers, and his will to demonstrate that the hypostases are eternal attributes of the divine essence and are not identified with the essence but coexist and describe it, led him to modify Babai’s system and to interpret it in a very interesting way.

First of all, he avoids using the term person (farṣūflṣahṣ) in his Trinitarian doctrine, and we think that he gives the attribute (ṣifah) and property (ḥāṣṣah) the metaphysical function of Babai’s parsōpā, but with some difference. Attribute, in this case, is essential, i.e., it describes the common essence. The result of this description is one specific hypostasis (uqnūm). We see, in addition, an approach to the Cappadocians’ system, but even in this approach our author departs from it by explaining it in a way we would call an Aristotelian interpretation of Babai’s system. The attribute, then, is not exactly as Babai’s parsōpā, that is, the individual properties of one qnōmā.

\(^{83}\) Cf. Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, Maqālah fī at-taṭlīṯ wa-t-tawḥīd, p. 115: «فالبارئ تعالى يوصف بهذه الصفات في القدم على أنها فيو وملكاته شأنها أن تفعل، وما فعله فهو موجود لها في القدم بالقوة أيضًا فإن القدرة ما دامت بالقوة فمقدورها بالقوة وإذا فعلت صار مقدورها بالفعل وبعد إجاد العالم يوصف بأنه حكيم وجواد بالفعل لأن المقدر وجد بالفعل والمنتفق أيضًا».

\(^{84}\) Cf. ΜΑΡΤΖΕΛΟΣ, “Η ἐννοια”, pp. 72-73.
The attribute for Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib describes the common essence (ḏāt) and forms with it a particular substance, an uqnūm. The result in both systems is the same: a specific hypostasis, i.e., a singular substance with personal and individual property.

Although Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib makes this modification, he maintains three different metaphysical categories in his system. He refuses, however, to use the term “person” for the reason of its meaning in the Arabic philosophical lexicon. First of all, the term farṣūf is not used in such lexicon; the term šaḥṣ, in fact, is its synonym and replaces it metaphysically. Šaḥṣ in Arabic means individual, and this concept contains the meaning of division within itself. If Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib would apply it in Trinitarian dogma, as he does in the anthropological field of Christology, the Trinity would be understood as a tritheistic doctrine.

The reasons which led Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib to interpret Babai’s system in this way are now clear. We should pay attention, however, to the fact that when we say that he considers the attributes as essential, he does not understand them as the category of natural properties. They describe the divine essence, but at the same time each attribute gives the essence a different description, giving it a different personalization. His whole purpose is to convey the idea that, since the hypostases include the common essence and different attributes, they describe the common essence through its perfect manifestation in each hypostasis, without, however, underlining that the hypostases are three particular substances of the common species. In this way, the hypostases are not understood to be three divided realities and individuals, which would be tritheism or polytheism. As a result, Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib at the same time tries to follow Babai’s system, to modify it to be in concordance with the official faith of his church, and to elaborate it in order to answer the questions regarding the issues of his time, i.e., the divine attributes. He is a real inter-

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86) For our author the term šaḥṣ when it is applied to human beings means a single human nature, i.e., an individual. This is clear in his Christological doctrine as he calls the humanity of Christ the assumed human person (šaḥṣ), with whom God was united. cf. Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, al-Kalām fī al-ittiḥād, p. 149, «ولأنه ليس من الأشياء الخمسة وليس يسمع أحد شخصًا وأخذ به»: see also Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, Al-Kalām fī al-ittiḥād, p. 194 (ch. 8, par 138): «وظهر في توسط للعالم وهو النبي الذي لما تم الشخص المأخوذ من السيدة ...».

87) Cf. Haddad, La Trinité, p. 176; See also Faultless, “Ibn al-Ṭayyib”, p. 670. We came to the same conclusion regarding another author of the same church, i.e., Elias of Nsibis. See, Ebeid, La Tunica, p. 479.
preter, philosopher and theologian of his church.

4. Ibn at-Ṭayyib’s Christological approach

As we said, according to the Christological doctrine of Babai and the official Christology of the Church of the East after the year 612, Christ is the union of two natures and two hypostases. He is the one person of filiation, one Christ and Son. This means that the person of the Son was given to the qnōmā of the human being in Christ so that it could be personalized.

We would now like to present very briefly the Christology of Ibn at-Ṭayyib in order to see how he explains it after having modified Babai’s system:

And the belief of this group [Nestorians, Orientals] regarding the union is that the two substances (al-ġawharayn) remain as they are, and the two hypostases (al-uqmūmān) as they are, and the union took place in the property (ḥāṣṣah) of the filiation, which is the meaning of knowing the Creator’s essence of itself. This person (šaḥs) [Jesus] chosen from the Lady, [Mary] shared this property (ḥāṣṣah) with God, and became from it one Christ, one Son, not one substance (ġawhar) or one hypostasis (uqmūm) 88.

And through these arguments it is demonstrated that Christ, after the union, is two substances (ġawharān) and two hypostases (uqmūmān), one Son. The union, then, is in the filiation, [not] in the substance (ġawhar) nor in the hypostases (uqmūm) 90.

The interesting thing in this Christological approach is that Ibn at-Ṭayyib differs, in some way, from the traditional and official doctrine of his church; he does not mention the term “person” to express the uniqueness in Christ92. Even though Christ is one, the subject after the union is one Christ and one Son. There are, however, two united substances and two united hypostases in this one subject. So terminologically, he differs from his tradition, but the content is the same.

88) The translation is ours.
89) Ibn at-Ṭayyib, Al-Kalām fī al-ittiḥād, p. 193 (ch. 8, par. 130).
90) The translation is ours.
91) Ibn at-Ṭayyib, Al-Kalām fī al-ittiḥād, p. 197 (ch. 8, par. 152).
92) We arrived at the same conclusion regarding Elias of Nisibis. See, EBEID, La Tunica, pp. 569-570.
Instead of talking about the person of the union, the person of filiation, as it is called in his tradition, i.e., the person of Christ and Son, he mentions that the union took place in the property of filiation. According to our analysis, however, the essential property and attribute has the function of Babai’s \( \text{parşöpā} \). In this case, he follows the doctrine of his church applying to it his development of the metaphysical system.

The divine essence with the one property of filiation forms the hypostasis of the eternal Son. With the same property the human substance forms the hypostasis of the man taken from the Virgin Mary.

What is interesting in all of this is that at one side, Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib does not use the term person (\( \text{sahş} \)) as a term for the metaphysical concept of \( \text{parşöpā} \), even though in his metaphysical system this term is mentioned clearly. At the other side, however, he uses this term, as we said above, for the human being in Christ in order to underline that the humanity in Christ is one individual, one single human hypostasis and person. He made this modification for one reason, which is to emphasize that the humanity in Christ is not an abstract nature, or the common substance of humanity, but one single substance.

He could not apply the term \( \text{sahş} \) to the divine hypostasis because, as we said, he wished to avoid being understood as tritheistic. What is important in this case is to underline the fact that the union was made between one \( \text{uqnūm} \) of the three divine hypostases, the Son, with one single man, the \( \text{sahş} \) taken from Mary. It is clear that in this case the term \( \text{sahş} \) is only used in anthropological doctrine, and means a singular, personalized substance and one individual\(^\text{93}\). In the Trinitarian field, however, it is not used.

In conclusion, Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib’s, in his theological thought modified his metaphysical system, and as a result, he created two different metaphysical categories: person (\( \text{sahş} \)) and property (\( \text{sifah/hāṣṣah} \)). Hypostasis in Trinitarian doctrine is specific, so it includes its particular attribute and property. It is not person, since the three hypostases are not separated realities. However, in anthropological doctrine, the specific hypostasis, that is the essence and

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\(^{93}\) In fact one can notice that in anthropological context \( \text{sahş} \) is to be considered as a synonym of hypostasis (\( \text{uqnūm} \)), which is a single subsistent substance personalized and individualized, see for example this identification in his commentary on Genesis Ibn Aṭ-ṭayyib, *Commentaire*, p. 28: وَتَسمَى أَبَوْجُدُ الْإِسْمَ أَمْامُ الْأَسْمَاعِ الْأَرْضِيَةَ اَمْامُ الْأَوْلَى الْفَجْسَمَةُ وَأَمْامُ الْأَوْلَى الْفَجْسَمَةُ اَمْامُ الْأَوْلَى الْفَجْسَمَةُ. In addition, the same use we find in Elias of Nisibis, cf. EBEID, *La Tunica*, p. 570.
one attribute, is one person, i.e., an individual, since it is a separated reality.

**CONCLUSION**

The metaphysical system is the basis for expressing the Christian faith in philosophical terms and concepts, that is, in dogmas. Different metaphysical systems, different definitions and comprehensions of the concepts and terms produce different ways for expressing the dogmas. Among the Antiochene thinkers and theologians, there was the use of an elaborated version of the Aristotelian metaphysical system regarding the substance and its kinds. This elaborated version began with the Cappadocians, namely Gregory of Nyssa who mixed Aristotle’s and Stoicism’s doctrines on the substances.

This Antiochene system consists of three kinds of nature: abstract nature (the species), concrete nature (singular and particular), and partial nature, i.e., nature in intermediate status (not abstract and not particular). We also find such division in some commentators of Aristotle, under a Stoic influence, which means that it was a current philosophical system. Babai the Great, in a decisive moment of his church, developed a metaphysical system that had as its basis the system circulating among the Antiochenes, with the purpose of defending the Christological doctrine of the two natures, two hypostases, and one person. His starting point, then, was Christological, and consequently he had to apply his system to the Trinitarian field.

Nature (kyānā) is an abstract reality, hypostasis (qnōmā) is a nature in intermediate status, i.e., it has the natural properties of the species to whom it belongs, however still not personalized. It is concrete reality and singular nature, but without specific properties which make it distinct from the other hypostases subject to the same common nature. This distinction is made by the person (paršōpā) that each hypostasis possesses, which is the group of the individual properties. According to this system, the divine nature is abstract reality; the three divine hypostases (qnōmē) are subject to this reality and manifest perfectly its natural properties. These three hypostases are distinct through the particular person (paršōpā) of each one, the group of the particular properties of each qnōmā. In the Christological field, Christ is two natures, i.e., two different substances. These natures are distinct through their natural properties that are manifested by the qnōmā of each one, and

because of this, the two realities are also two qnōmē, i.e., two distinct and different concrete natures. These two qnōmē, however, are personalized by the same parṣōpā, i.e., the common parṣōpā of filiation.

If for Babai the starting point was the Christological doctrine for which he developed his metaphysical system and then applied it to the Trinitarian field, for Ibn at-Ṭayyib, the starting point was the Trinitarian doctrine. He elaborated and modified Babai’s system, applied it to his Trinitarian doctrine, and then came to use his new approach in the Christological field. We can say that Ibn at-Ṭayyib adopted Babai’s system when he talks metaphysically, i.e., when he gives definitions for the metaphysical concepts. When he had to apply it, however, in Trinitarian and Christological doctrine, he had to make a modification, an elaboration and interpretation. While the theological and doctrinal content of both theologians was identical, that is, the faith of the Church of the East, the context of Ibn at-Ṭayyib was different: 1) we have the return of the discussion on the Trinity and also on the person of Christ; 2) we have a new language and a different philosophical lexicon. This element, in fact, was the reason behind the interpretation that Ibn at-Ṭayyib made of Babai’s system.

Ibn at-Ṭayyib used the same basis as Babai, i.e., the doctrine regarding the three kinds of nature. He was able to accept such a division, since he was an Aristotelian philosopher and commentator, and since such a system was also adopted by other commentators of Aristotle. In addition, he was familiar with the use of this system by Babai. Ibn at-Ṭayyib, then, on the one hand, wanted to maintain the basis of the Cappadocians’ doctrine, and on the other, he knew that Babai’s system, with some modification, could be helpful in explaining the Trinitarian faith to Muslims. We understand this modification as an Aristotelian interpretation of Babai’s system, and not simply an application of the Cappadocians’ thought into Babai’s system, since Ibn at-Ṭayyib approached the Cappadocians’ doctrine through an Aristotelian reading.

The three divine aqānīm, then, are the composition of the divine essence with essential attributes that describe the common divinity. These three hypostases are not partial natures, since their attributes are specific; they manifest the inter-trinitarian relation. For this reason, Ibn at-Ṭayyib was able to affirm that the aqānīm describe the essence, and they are not three separated realities, that is, they are not three divinities. As a consequence, trying to avoid the accusation of being tritheistic, he did not apply the term person (farṣūflṣāḥṣ) in his Trinitarian doctrine. The metaphysical function of this concept was given to the concept of property/attribute (ḥāṣṣahlṣifah),
which is related to the hypostasis. In this way, he was able to say that the
three Christian hypostases are three distinct essential attributes of God’s one
essence, and not three individuals or three singular separated divine sub-
stances.

From this starting point, he also modified the Christological doctrine by
not calling the one Christ and Son “person” (šaḥṣ). Consequently, the union
took place in the property of the filiation and not in the parsōpā of the Son
that was given to the human nature in Christ, as Babai teaches. That being
so, the natures in Christ are two, and these two natures have one attribute,
and are two hypostases (aqānīm). Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib was able to affirm that the
union was between one uqnūm, the Son, and not the whole Trinity, with one
single human being, i.e., one human uqnūm, which is person (šaḥṣ), that is,
separated concrete nature.

In this way he could:

1) reply to Muslims and prove to them that the three aqānīm are essen-
tial attributes of God, and not three gods;

2) explain that there are differences between essential attributes and
verbal ones;

3) maintain his ecclesiastical tradition of not using the term person in
Trinitarian doctrine;

4) give the metaphysical function of person to the property;

5) apply, after this modification, Babai’s system to the Cappadocians’
doctrine with an Aristotelian approach;

6) avoid the accusation of tritheism by using the term “person” only in
an anthropological doctrine; and

7) express the Christological faith of his church using this system.

Finally, we conclude by saying that the work of Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib was more
than a mere transmission of the doctrine of Babai or the Cappadocians, and
was more than an elaboration of it or a simple modification. Rather, it should
be considered a doctrinal and philosophical development within the Church
of the East and Christian thought.
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