


## [P. 31] Christians and Christianity in Islamic exegesis

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### Introduction\*

Great efforts have been made to shed light on the conundrums of the Arabic Qurʾān, both linguistically, lexically and philologically<sup>1</sup>, and thematically and historically<sup>2</sup>. In recent decades the tendency has been to consider that it belongs, at least in part, within the textual or discursive framework of the early Christian

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<sup>1</sup>. A. A. Mingana, « Syriac influence on the style of the Kuran », *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 11 (1927) 77-98 (repr. in Ibn Warraq [ed.], *What the Koran really says. Language, text and commentary*, Amherst NY, 2002, 171-92); C. Luxenberg, *Die Syro-Aramäische Lesart des Koran. Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, Berlin, 2000, Hans Schiler, 2007<sup>3</sup> (trans. *The Syro-Aramaic reading of the Koran. A contribution to the decoding of the language of the Koran*, Köthen Hans Schiler, 2007); G. Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qurʾān. Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Qurʾān*, Erlangen 1974 (trans. with modifications *A challenge to Islam for reformation. The rediscovery and reliable reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian hymnal hidden in the Koran under earliest Islamic reinterpretations*, Delhi, 2003); see the accompanying essay on Christians and Christianity in the Qurʾān for further references.

<sup>2</sup>. A. . Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen ?*, Bonn, 1833, Leipzig, 1902<sup>2</sup> (trans. F.M. Young, *Judaism and Islam*, Madras, 1898, New York, 1970). For other studies, see M. Schöller, « Post-enlightment academic study of the Qurʾān », in *EQ*: C. Gilliot and P. Larcher, « Language and style of the Qurʾān », in *EQ*.

or patristic eras, or the world of late antiquity<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, pre-Islamic Arabia « was not isolated [P. 32] from the main currents of world culture and religion »<sup>4</sup>, as appears in the striking continuity between the sources of the **Qūān** on Jesus, Mary, Christianity and related topics, and the sources employed by the earliest Muslim commentators.

### The sources of the Qurʾān on Jesus and Christianity

It is important to emphasise, as some scholars have pointed out, that the Christianity known among the Arabs in pre-Islamic times<sup>5</sup> « was largely of the

<sup>3</sup>. S. Griffith, « Christian lore and the Arabic Qurʾān. The “Companions of the Cave” in Sūrat al-kahf and in Syriac Christian tradition », in G.S. Reynolds, (ed.), *The Qurʾān in its historical context*, London, 2007, 109-37, p. 109. A. Neuwirth, « Psalmen – im Koran neu gelesen (Ps 103 und 104) », in D. Hartwig et al. (eds.), « *Im vollen Licht der Geschichte* ». Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der Koranforschung, Würzburg, 2008, pp. 157-189. A. Neuwirth has also call attention several times upon the process of codification and canonization of the Qurʾān within the liturgy : « Vom Rezitationstext über die Liturgie zum Kanon. Zu Entstehung und Wiederauflösung der Surenkomposition im Verlauf der Entwicklung eines islamischen Kultus », in S. Wild (ed.), *The Qurʾān as Text*, Leiden, 1996, pp. 69-105/translated by Th. Herzog « Du texte de récitation au canon en passant par la liturgie. A propos de la genèse de la composition des sourates et de sa redissolution au cours du développement du culte islamique », *Arabica* XLVII (2000), pp. 194-229.

<sup>4</sup>. J.W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian theology*, 4 vols in 2 parts, London, 1945-67, I, 1, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>. On Christianity among the pre-Islamic Arabs, see R. Bell, *The origin of Islam in its Christian environment*, London, 1926, pp. 2-63 ; H. Charles, *Le Christianisme des Arabes nomades sur le limes...*, Paris, 1936 ; R. Dussaud, *La pénétration des Arabes en Syrie avant l’Islam*, Paris, 1955 ; T. Andrae, *Les origines de l’Islam et le christianisme*, trans. J. Roche, Paris, 1955, pp. 15-38 ; J.S. Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in pre-Islamic times*, London, 1979 ; E. Rabbath, *L’Orient chrétien à la veille de l’Islam*, Beirut, 1980 ; A. Havenith, *Les Arabes chrétiens nomades au temps de Mohammed*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1988 ; S.B. al-Āyib, *Al-Masīhiyya al-ʿarabiyya wa tṭawwuruhā*, Beirut, 1997, 1998<sup>2</sup> ; M. Piccirillo, *L’Arabie chrétienne* (trans. E. Schelstraete and M.-P. Duverne, Paris, 2002). For religion in

Syrian type, whether Jacobite or Nestorian »<sup>6</sup>. The question has been raised whether the religious community on which Muḥammad was reliant might not be near the Elkesaite movement<sup>7</sup> or Manicheism<sup>8</sup>. Manicheism was introduced to [P. 33] to al-Ḥīra, a town with which Mecca had close relations<sup>9</sup>, in about 272<sup>10</sup>, and a very plausible hypothesis is that « Islam's first appearance was [as] a non-

al-Ḥīra, see ʿA, ʿAbd al-Ghanī, *Tārīkh al-Ḥīra fī l-jāhiliyya wa-l-Islām*, Damascus, 1993, pp. 471-95. For the importance of relations between Mecca and al-Ḥīra, see M.J. Kister, « Al-Ḥīra. Some notes on its relations with Arabia », *Arabica*, 15 (1968), 143-69 ; C. Gilliot, « Une reconstruction critique du Coran ou comment en finir avec les merveilles de la lampe d'Aladin ? », in M. Kropp (ed.), *Results of contemporary research on the Qurʾān*, Beirut/Würzburg, 2007, 33-137, pp. 66-67

<sup>6</sup>. A. Jeffery, *The foreign vocabulary of the Qurʾān*, Baroda, 1938, pp. 20-21

<sup>7</sup>. A. Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad*, 3 vols, Berlin, 1869<sup>2</sup>, i, pp. 30, n. 1, 32-42, 91-102; ii, pp. 208, 232 ; A. von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 3 vols, Tübingen, 1909-102, ii, pp. 535-37 ; G. Luttikhuisen, *The revelation of Elchasai*, Tübingen, 1985, pp. 9-10 ; J. van Reeth, « La zandaqa et le prophète de l'Islam », in *Incroyance et dissidences religieuses dans les civilisations orientales*, 2007, 67-79, p. 67.

<sup>8</sup>. R. Simon, « Mānī and Muḥammad », *JSAI*, 21 (1997), 118-41, p. 134 : « Both Manicheism and Islam assert the seriality of prophets » ; Andrae, *Les origines de l'Islam*, p. 209 ; K. Ahrens, *Muhammed als Religionsstifter*, Leipzig, 1935, pp. 130-32 ; M. Sfar, *Le Coran, la Bible et l'Orient ancien*, Paris, 1998, pp. 408-25 (ch. 11, « Aḥmad, le prophète manichéen »). On the presence of Manicheism in Arabia at the time of Muḥammad, see G. Monnot, « L'histoire des religions en Islam, Ibn al-Kalbī et Rāzī », *RHR*, 188 (1975) 23-34 (repr. in *Islam et religions*, Paris, 1986, 27-38, p. 33, quoting Ibn al-Kalbī [q.v.]) ; M. Gil, « The creed of Abū ʿĀmir », *IOS*, 12 (1992), pp. 9-57 ; van Reeth, « La zandaqa », pp. 67-70.

<sup>9</sup>. According to Ibn ʿAbbās, quoted by Ibn al-Kalbī, Manicheism (*zandaqa*) was brought to Mecca by Qurayshites who used to go to al-Ḥīra for business and met Christians there ; Monnot, *Islam et religions*, p. 33 ; cf. Kister, « al-Ḥīra ».

<sup>10</sup>. M. Tardieu, « L'arrivée des manichéens à al-Ḥīra », in P. Canivet and J. Rey-Coquais (eds), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam VIIe-VIIIe siècles*, Damascus, 1992, 15-24, p. 18.

conformist off-shoot of Manicheism »<sup>11</sup>. Mani's prophetic understanding of himself as an equal partner of the Paraclete, as promised by Jesus, even perhaps as the Paraclete himself, was eschatological (in this respect Muḥammad resembled him)<sup>12</sup>, and Islamic authors recorded that he claimed to be the Seal of the Prophets<sup>13</sup>, just as Muḥammad is called in the Qurʾān (Q 33: 40).

For Tor Andrae, who has made the most systematic investigation of Muḥammad's indebtedness to Syrian Christianity, « the eschatological piety » of Muḥammad or of the Qurʾān<sup>14</sup> are deeply influenced<sup>15</sup> by this form of Christianity, and especially by Syrian monasticism. He has shown the 'evident relations between the language of the Koran and that of the Christian churches in Syria'. In the same way, A. Mingana has demonstrated that the proper names of biblical personages found in the Qurʾān are given in their Syriac form<sup>16</sup>, coming from the Peshitta, the text of the Bible used in Syriac-speaking areas.

<sup>11</sup>. Gil, « The creed of Abū ʿĀmir », p. 22; Sfar, *Le Coran, la Bible et l'Orient*, pp. 408-25; Van Reeth, « La zandaqa' » p. 68

<sup>12</sup>. G. Stroumsa, « Aspects de l'eschatologie manichéenne », *RHR* 198 (1981), 163-81.

<sup>13</sup>. Al-Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes*, trans. D. Gimaret and G. Monnot, Paris, 1986, i, p. 662 : Mani said, « Then the Seal of Prophets shall come to the land of the Arabs » (probably an interpolation in favor of Muḥammad) ; H. Puech, *Le Manichéisme*, Paris, 1949, p. 146, n. 248; M. Tardieu, *Le Manichéisme*, Paris, 1981, pp. 19-27 ; J. Ries, « Les Kephalaia. La catéchèse de l'église de Mani », in D. de Smet, G. de Callatay and J.M.F. van Reeth (eds), *Al-Kitāb: la sacralité du texte dans le monde de l'Islam. Actes du symposium international tenu à Leuven et Louvain-la-Neuve du 29 mai au 1 juin 2002*, Brussels, 2004, 143-53, pp. 143-8

<sup>14</sup>. Andrae, *Les origines de l'Islam*, pp. 67-199, 107, 145, 190, 204; T. Andrae, « Zuhd und Mönchtum », *Le Monde Oriental*, 25 (1931), 296-327, p. 298.

<sup>15</sup>. The terms « borrowing », « allusion », « interpretation » and « influence » are preferable to « intertextuality », which is rarely defined..

<sup>16</sup>. Mingana, « Syriac influence », pp. 81-82.

**John Bowman (1916-2006)** has gone further and, pointing to the presence of Monophysites in Najrān and among confederate [P. 34] Arab tribes, for instance the Ghassanids, has explained the prophetology and biblical awareness exhibited in the Qurʾān by the hypothesis that Muḥammad was in contact with Jacobites (« Monophysites »), who used the Syriac Diatessaron<sup>17</sup> together with other texts in addition to the canonical Gospels<sup>18</sup>, and that he freely edited these texts for his own purposes<sup>19</sup>.

**Jan Van Reeth** has shown in detail that a number of features of Jesus and Christianity in the Qurʾān can be explained by a connection between the Qurʾān and the Diatessaron. For example, Q 48: 29 combines the two Gospel pericopes of Mark 4:26–27 and Matthew 12:23: « Such is their likeness in the Torah and their likeness in the Gospel – like as sown corn that sendeth forth its shoot and strengtheneth it and riseth firm upon its stalk, delighting the sowers – that He may enrage the disbelievers with (the sight of) them. God hath promised, unto such of them as believe and do good works, forgiveness and immense reward ». This is the same combination that appears in the *Diatessaron*, seen in the

<sup>17</sup>. On the Diatessaron, see T. Baarda, *Essays on the Diatessaron*, Kampen, 1994; W. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*, Leiden, 1994.

<sup>18</sup>. J. Bowman, « Holy scriptures, lectionaries and the Qurʾān », in A. Johns (ed.), *International congress for the study of the Qurʾān*, Canberra (May 1980), Canberra, 1983<sup>2</sup>, 29-37; J. Bowman, « The debt of Islam to Monophysite Syrian Christianity », *Nederlands Teologisch Tijdschrift*, 19 (1964-65), 177-201 (repr. in *Essays in honour of Griffiths Wheeler Thatcher*, ed. E. MacLaurin, Sydney, 1967, 191-216), summarized by Griffith, 'Christian lore', p. 112.

<sup>19</sup>. **Lee Martin McDonald**, « The integrity of the biblical canon in light of its historical development », *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 6 (1996) 95-132, p. 121 ; R. Casey, « The Armenian Marcionites and the Diatessaron », *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 57 (1938) 185-94.

Middle Dutch translation that was made of it from a lost Latin translation in the thirteenth century, and in the Arabic translation of it<sup>20</sup>.

Van Reeth does the same with the quṛānic stories of the infancy of Mary (Q 3:35–48), John the Baptist (Q 19:3), and Jesus (Q 3:37, 19:22–26), showing again that « the Koran witnesses to the tradition of the *Diatessaron* »<sup>21</sup>. Even if the *Diatessaron* does not explain all the quṛānic details about the life of Jesus, « In referring to the *Diatessaron* [P. 35] as Mani had done before him, the Prophet Muhammad could emphasize the unity of the Gospel. Moreover he came within the scope of the posterity of Marcion, of Tatian and Mani, all of whom wanted to establish or re-establish the true Gospel, in order to take hold of its original meaning. They thought themselves authorized to do this work of textual harmonization because they considered themselves the Paraclete that Jesus had announced »<sup>22</sup>.

While comparisons between references to Mary, Jesus and so on in the Qurʾān, and in the New Testament Apocrypha<sup>23</sup> the New Testament, the

<sup>20</sup>. Cebus Cornelis de Bruin, *Diatessaron Leodiense*, Leiden, 1970, p. 92, §§ 93-94 ; A. Marmardji, *Diatessaron de Tatien*, texte arabe, Beirut, 1935, pp. 159-60.

<sup>21</sup>. J. Van Reeth, « L'évangile du prophète », in D. de Smet, G. de Callatay and J.M.F. van Reeth (eds), *Al-Kitab: la sacralité du texte dans le monde de l'Islam*. Actes du symposium international tenu à Leuven et Louvain-la-Neuve du 29 mai au 1 juin 2002, Brussels, 2004, 155-74, p. 163. On the possible influence of the *Diatessaron* and the apocryphal Gospels on the Qurʾān, see J. Gniska, *Qui sont les chrétiens du Coran ?* (French trans. Charles Ehlinger, Paris, 2008), pp. 101-9.

<sup>22</sup>. J. Van Reeth, « L'évangile du prophète », p. 174 ; cf. R. Simon, 'Mānī and Muḥammad', *JSAI* 21 (1997) 118-41, p. 134: « Both Manicheism and Islam assert the seriality of prophets »: Andrae, *Les origines de l'Islam*, p. 209; Ahrens, *Muhammed als Religionsstifter*, pp. 130-32.

<sup>23</sup>. E.g. James Keith Elliott, *The apocryphal New Testament*. A collection of apocryphal Christian literature in an English translation, Oxford, 1993 ; J.K. Elliott, *The apocryphal Jesus*. Legends of the Early Church, Oxford, 1996 ; A. Terian, *The Armenian Gospel of the*

*Diatessaron* and the Peshitta have been noted<sup>24</sup>, there is also continuity between these possible sources, and above all the Apocrypha, and the earliest Muslim Qurʾān commentaries.

#### The early exegetes

The works of most of the earliest commentators, from the seventh and eighth centuries, have not survived, but many of their interpretations are transmitted in later commentaries with chains of authorities. Chief among them are: ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAbbās (known as Ibn ʿAbbās, d. c. 687)<sup>25</sup>; Saʿid ibn Jubayr (d. 713); Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 722); ʿIkrima (d. 723), a freeman of Ibn ʿAbbās; al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim (d. 723), who was active in Transoxiana; ʿAṭāʾ ibn Abī Rabāḥ (d. 732) (all so far are considered pupils of Ibn ʿAbbās); Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728); Muḥammad [P. 36] ibn Kaʿb al-Quraḏī (d. 736)<sup>26</sup>; Qatāda ibn Diʿāma (d. 736); al-Suddī al-Kabīr (d. 746), the Kufan popular storyteller; al-Rabīʿ ibn Anas (d. c. 756) of Baṣra, who was active in Transoxiana<sup>27</sup>; Muḥammad b. al-

*Infancy*. With three early versions of the Protoevangelium of James, Oxford, 2008; F. Bovon and P. Geoltrain (eds), *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, I, Paris, 1997.

<sup>24</sup>. W. Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum*, Stuttgart, 1922; H. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, Hildesheim, 1931, 1988<sup>2</sup>, pp. 449-58; K. Ahrens, « Christliches im Koran. Eine Nachlese », *ZDMG*, 84 (1930) pp. 15-68; D. Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran et dans les vies des prophètes*, Paris, 1933, pp. 135-54; B. Pirone, « La tradizione dei testi evangelici nell'ambiente formativo di Muhammad », in R. Tottoli, (ed.), *Corano e Bibbia*, Brescia, 2000, 133-75. See also van Reeth's article noted above.

<sup>25</sup>. C. Gilliot, « Ibn ʿAbbās », *EB*; C. Gilliot, « Portrait "mythique" d'Ibn ʿAbbās », *Arabica*, 32 (1985) 127-83; M. Lidzbarski, *De prophetis, quae dicuntur, legendis arabicis prolegomena*, Leipzig, 1893, pp. 41-4.

<sup>26</sup>. As **As** a young boy he was rescued when 600 or 900 men of the Banū Qurayza were executed by **Muḥammed** in Medina.

<sup>27</sup>. On these commentators, see C. Gilliot, « Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval », in *EQ*.

Sā'ib al-Kalbī (d. 763, the father of Hishām ibn al-Kalbī, [q.v.]), whose exegesis is often dependent on Ibn 'Abbās.

From the mid 8th century onwards there are several commentators whose works are extant: Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767)<sup>28</sup>, who was active in Transoxiana; the Yemenite Ma'mar ibn Rashīd (d. 770), in the version of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 827)<sup>29</sup>, with a tendency to legal exegesis; the Baṣran Yaḥyā ibn Sallām (d. 815)<sup>30</sup>; the Baṣran of Jewish origin Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar ibn al-Muthannā (d. 821)<sup>31</sup>; and the Kūfan grammarian Farrā' Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād (d. 822)<sup>32</sup>.

To these may be added some others who were not exegetes *stricto sensu*, but whose reports are transmitted in later commentaries:

Ka'b al-Aḥbār (Hebrew ḥāber, d. c. 652)<sup>33</sup>, a Yemenite Jew who converted<sup>34</sup> to Islam in about 638<sup>35</sup>. He probably came to Medina during the caliphate of 'Umar, and transmitted Judaeo-Christian material, among others to

<sup>28</sup>. M. Plessner and A. Rippin, « Muqātil b. Sulaymān » in *ED*; C. Gilliot, « Muqātil, grand exégète, traditionniste et théologien maudit », *Journal Asiatique*, 279 (1991) 39-92; Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 5 vols, ed. 'A.M. Shiḥāta, Cairo, 1980-89.

<sup>29</sup>. 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, 3 vols, ed. M. 'Abduh, Beirut, 1999.

<sup>30</sup>. Yaḥyā ibn Sallām, *Tafsīr*, 2 vols, ed. H. Shalabī, Beirut, 2004 (sūras 16-37 only).

<sup>31</sup>. Abū 'Ubayda, *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, 2 vols, ed. F. Sezgin, Cairo, 1954-62.

<sup>32</sup>. Farrā', *Ma'ānī l-Qur'ān*, 3 vols, ed. A.Y. Najātī and M. al-Najjār, Beirut, 1955-63.

<sup>33</sup>. M. Schmitz, « Ka'b al-Aḥbār », in *ED*; I. Wolfensohn, *Ka'b al-Aḥbār und seine Stellung im Ḥadīth und in der islamischen Legendenliteratur*, Gelnhausen, 1933; Lidzbarski, *De prophetis*, pp. 31-40.

<sup>34</sup>. On storytellers and converts, see R. Tottoli, *Biblical prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim literature*, Richmond, 2002, pp. 86-96.

<sup>35</sup>. But see M. Perlmann, « A legendary story of Ka'b al-Aḥbār's conversion to Islam », in Joshua Starr memorial volume, New York, 1953, 85-99; M. Perlmann, « Another Ka'b al-Aḥbār story », *JQR*, 5 (1954) 48-58.



Ibn ʿAbbās<sup>36</sup>. His narratives (or those attributed to him) comprise Judaeo-Christian and Judaeo-Islamic traditions.

Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 732)<sup>37</sup>, « the Manetho of the South Arabians », a Yemenite of Persian origin, probably born Muslim, who draws as [P. 37] often as not on Ibn ʿAbbās. Wahb was the first of a long line of Islamic scholars or authors who transmitted ‘biblical’ narratives. One of the works attributed to him is *Kitāb al-mubtadaʾ wa-qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (« The beginning and stories of the prophets »)<sup>38</sup>, whose contents are scattered through later works. He was credited by later sources with a commentary on the Qurʾān, though he probably did not compose one; rather, later exegetes, such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī, incorporated into their own commentaries elements from him of the kind that were later called *isrāʾīliyyāt* (*judaica*, *i.e.* so-called « Jewish material »)<sup>39</sup>, though these included not only Jewish or supposedly Jewish material, but also Christian or supposedly Christian material, accounts regarded as history, edifying narratives, and fables or legends from folklore, allegedly (but sometimes actually) borrowed from Jewish or other sources. Many Islamic scholars rejected them, though others drew on them albeit with reluctance. It is worth noting that almost all the commentators named above transmitted material of this kind, and that almost all later commentators made copious use of it.

<sup>36</sup>. Wollfensohn, *Kaʿb al-Aḥbār und seine Stellung*, pp. 42-47..

<sup>37</sup>. R.G. Khoury, « Wahb ibn Munabbih », in *ED* ; van Ess, *TG*, ii, pp. 702-5 ; Lidzbarski, *De prophetis*, pp. 44-54;;R.G. Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, Wiesbaden, 1972

<sup>38</sup>. Khoury, *Wahb . Munabbih*, pp. 232-46.

<sup>39</sup>. On this term, see G. Vajda, « Isrāʾīliyyāt », in *ED* ; J. Dammen McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians. An analysis of classical and modern exegesis*, Cambridge, 1991, p. 29, n. 41.

Muḥammad ibn Ishāq, known as Ibn Ishāq (d. 767)<sup>40</sup>, the author of the best known Life of Muḥammad, is not considered an exegete, but he gives many accounts which are related to exegesis. His grand-father was possibly a Christian, which might explain his interest in Jewish and Christian material.

Of these, Ibn ʿAbbās, Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, Wahb ibn Munabbih and Ibn Ishāq in particular transmitted Judaeo-Christian elements<sup>41</sup>, and « introduced them into the faith and literature of Islam »<sup>42</sup>. In their turn, Abū ʿUbayda Maʿmar ibn al-Muthannā and Farrāʾ Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād, who both died at the very beginning of the 9th century, introduced the study of grammar and linguistics and elements of rhetoric and stylistics, contributing to the doctrine of the inimitability (*iʿjāz*) of the Qurʾān, and, in the case of al-Farrāʿ, the examination of the *variae lectiones* (*qirāʾāt*)<sup>43</sup>.

#### [P. 37] « Nazarenes » and others

For the Islamic representation of « Christians » and « Christianity », the exegesis of Q 28:52-55 is decisive: « Those to whom We gave the Scripture before it, they believe in it... », and especially « Even before it we were of those who surrender [unto Him?] (*muslimīn*) »<sup>44</sup>. In themselves, these verses are allusive with no specific reference to « Christians ». But according to Mujāhid, they refer to « the Muslims (*maslama*) among the People of the Book », or according to al-Ḍaḥḥāk, « people among the People of the Book who believed

<sup>40</sup>. Lizbarski, *De prophetis*, pp. 54-57 ; Guillaume (Alfred ; 1888-1962), *The Life of Muhammad. A translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1978<sup>5</sup> (1955<sup>1</sup>, Londres, Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press), XLVII+815 p.

<sup>41</sup>. Lidzbarski, *De prophetis*, p. 30.

<sup>42</sup>. Nabia Abbott, « An Arabic papyrus in the Oriental Institute. Stories of the Prophets », *JNES*, 5 (1946) 169-80, pp. 170-71 (with no reference to Ibn Ishāq).

<sup>43</sup>. Gilliot « Exegesis of the Qurʾān », pp. 108-10

<sup>44</sup>. Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad*, ii, pp. 379-82 ; Dammen McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, pp. 240-57

to the Torah and in the Gospel (*injīl*). Then they encountered Muḥammad and believed in him ». Sometimes names of individuals are given, for instance the Jews °Aṭīyya al-Qurazī<sup>45</sup>, Abū Rifā°a, °Abdallāh ibn Salām, and Salmān al-Fārisī, the Zoroastrian turned Christian<sup>46</sup>. For others, such as Muqātil, the occasion of the revelation of Q 28:52 was the coming of forty men of « the People of the Gospel » to Medina with Ja°far ibn Abī Ṭālib when he returned from Ethiopia<sup>47</sup>, and eight from Syria<sup>48</sup>. Yaḥyā ibn Sallām gives two interpretations: the verse was revealed concerning those of the People of the two Books who believed, or concerning the Jew Rifā°a (ibn Samaw°al) al-Qurazī, of the Banū Qurayza who was spared when his tribe was executed in Medina<sup>49</sup> – « This verse was revealed concerning ten Jews, of which I am one »<sup>50</sup>. It is clear that in the religious imagination of the commentators the true Christians are Muslims, and that Muslims are the true followers of Jesus : « People of the religion of Jesus [P. 39]

<sup>45</sup>. On him, see Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba fī ma°rifat al-ṣaḥāba*, 7 vols, ed. M. Fāyid *et al.*, Cairo, 1963, 19702, iv, p. 46, no. 3689 : « the young lads who were beardless were not killed » ; Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen, 1858-60, pp. 688-92/trans. A. Guillaume, *The life of Muhammad*, Karachi, 1955, pp. 463-65.

<sup>46</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur°ān*, ed. M. al-Saqqā and A.S. °Alī, 30 vols, Cairo, 1954-57, xx, pp. 88-89. (Hereafter, al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* = *al-Ṭabarī*, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* : Jāmi° al-bayān °an ta°wīl al-Qur°ān, ed. M.M. Shākir and A.M. Shākir, 16 vols, Cairo, 1954-68, which goes as far as Q 14:27. For the remainder of the Qur°ān, references are to the complete edition of al-Saqqā and °Alī = al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. al-Saqqā).

<sup>47</sup>. According to Sa°id ibn Jubayr they were Ethiopians ; Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad*, ii, pp. 380-81.

<sup>48</sup>. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, on Q 28:52.

<sup>49</sup>. On Muḥammad's execution of 600 to 900 men of the Banū Qurayza, see Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, pp. 688-92/Guillaume, *Life*, pp. 463-65.

<sup>50</sup>. Yaḥyā ibn Sallām, *Tafsīr*, ii, p. 599. On Rifā°a ibn Samaw°al al-Qurazī, see Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, p. 692/Guillaume, *Life*, p. 466.

are the Muslims (*al-muslimūn*, those who submit to God) above all the religions »<sup>51</sup>.

With regards to Q 2:62<sup>52</sup>, « And those who are Jews, and Christians (*Naṣārā*, « Nazarenes »), and Sabeans, whoever believeth in God and the Last Day and doeth right, surely their reward is with their Lord... », three etymologies of *Naṣārā* are given. According to the first, which is based on the Arabic root n.ṣ.r, Christians are called this because of their support (*nuṣra*) and mutual assistance for each other<sup>53</sup> : the second, represented by Qatāda, Ibn ʿAbbās, and Ibn Jurayj<sup>54</sup>, associates them with Nazareth (*al-Nāṣira*); and the third is based on Q 61:14, in which Jesus asks, « Who will be my helpers (*anṣār*) for God ? »<sup>55</sup>. Some exegetes explain this verse by means of a story related by al-Suddī, which preserves memories of the religious syncretism of late antiquity. As Salmān, a young nobleman from Gundishapur, was hunting with the local prince one day, they came upon a man who was reading a book and weeping<sup>56</sup>. When he

<sup>51</sup>. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, on Q 3:55.

<sup>52</sup>. See S. Khalil, « Le commentaire de Tabari sur Coran 2/62 et la question du salut des non-musulmans », *AION*, 11 (1980), 555-617.

<sup>53</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, pp. 143-45; Dammen McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, p. 95 ; ʿA. Charfi, « Christianity in the Qurʾān commentary of al-Ṭabarī », *Islamochristiana*, 6 (1980) 105-48, p. 133.

<sup>54</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, p. 145, according to the Meccan Ibn Jurayj (d. 767), whose grandfather Gregorius (Jurayj) was a mawlā of the Umayyads ; ʿA. ʿAlī *et al.*, *al-Naṣārā fī l-Qurʾān wa-l-tafsīr*, Amman, 1998, p. 34 ; Dammen McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, p. 95 ; M Ayoub, *The Qurʾān and its interpreters*, 2 vols, Albany NY, 1984 and 1992, i, p. 109. See the discussion on Nazarenes, Nazôrenes, Christians by Gnilka, *Qui sont les chrétiens du Coran ?*, pp. 31-39.

<sup>55</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, p. 145; Dammen McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, p. 95

<sup>56</sup>. In Syrian monasticism, the « mourners » (*abilē*) were an ascetic elite associated with the Beatitude : « Blessed are those who mourn... » (Matthew 5:4); see D. Caner, *Wandering, begging monks*. Spiritual authority and the promotion of monasticism in late antiquity,

explained that this was the Gospel revealed to Jesus, the two « submitted themselves to God » (*aslamā*, « became Muslims » or submitted), and Salmān joined a community of monks (*ruhbān*), distinguishing himself by the severity of his ascetic practices. He accompanied the head of the community to Jerusalem, and studied there. When he came to see that prophetic marvels were events of the past [P. 40], he grew sad, but the head told him that a prophet was soon to arise among the Arabs. While he was returning from Jerusalem, Salmān was captured by Arabs and sold into slavery. Then he heard that a prophet had arrived in Medina. He hurried to the city, and there described to Moḥammad the prayerful community in which he had lived. The Prophet replied: ‘They are among the people destined for Hell’, upon which Salmān professed belief in Muḥammad and his teachings<sup>57</sup>.

The early commentators also preserve elements of the »cultural memory « concerning the beginnings of Christianity and some of its characteristics in late antiquity, together with theological and mythical representations of a clearly Islamic character. One of the crucial passages is Q 57:27, « Then We caused our

Berkeley CA, 2002, p. 51, n 2. Muḥammad had evidently been in contact with such men, as seen in Q 5:82-83: « ... There are among them priests and monks. When they listen to that which hath been revealed to the Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears ». Muḥammad knew anchorite practices, and had probably engaged in them himself before his revelations; E. Beck, « Das christliche Mönchtum im Koran », *Studia Orientalia* (Helsinki) 13 (1946) 1-29, p. 7

<sup>57</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, pp. 150-55 ; Ayoub, *The Qur’an and its interpreters*, i, pp. 110-12; ‘Alī, *Al-Naṣārā*, pp. 36-37; Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, pp. 105-6; cf. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, pp. 137-43/Guillaume, *Life*, pp. 95-98 (a very different account from Ibn ‘Abbās) ; Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, i, p. 112. See further G. Levi Della Vida, « Salmān al-Fārisī », in *ED, Suppl.* : K. Tröger, « Muhammad, Salman al-Farisi und die Islamische Gnosis », in H. Bethge *et al.*, *For the children, perfect instruction. Studies in honor of H.-M. Schenke*, Leiden, 2002, pp. 247-54.

messengers to follow in their footsteps; and We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow, and gave him the Gospel, and placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him. But monasticism (*rahbāniyya*) they invented – We ordained it not for them – only seeking God’s pleasure, and they observed it not with right observance. So We give those of them who believe their reward, but many of them are evil-livers »<sup>58</sup>. In his commentary, Muqātil suggests a clear syntactical distinction in the qur’ānic text between « compassion and mercy », the two direct objects of the predicative sentence, and « monasticism », commenting : « Then He [God] introduces a new sentence »<sup>59</sup>. For him, the ‘monasticism’ (ascetism) of his time does not correspond to that of the followers of Jesus at the beginning of Christianity, or at least to the conception he has of this way to life<sup>60</sup>, because « After Jesus son of Mary the number of polytheists [P. 41] increased ; they defeated the believers and humiliated them. The believers isolated themselves, they dwelt in hermitages, and this lasted long. Some of them returned to the religion of Jesus and invented Christianity (*Naṣrāniyya*), so God says : ‘They invented monasticism’, they devoted themselves to God’s service (or, they practised celibacy, *tabattalū*) [...]. They did not observe what I have commanded [...], when they became Jews and Christians (or, called themselves so). Some of them however remained faithful to the religion of Jesus until they reached the times of Muḥammad »<sup>61</sup>. Here ascetism

<sup>58</sup>. See H. Çinar, *Maria und Jesus im Islam*. Darstellung anhand des Korans und der islamischen kanonischen Tradition unter Berücksichtigung der islamischen Exegeten, Wiesbaden, 2007, pp. 160-63.

<sup>59</sup>. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, iv, p. 246.

<sup>60</sup>. P. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, Beirut, 1970, pp. 52-56. On the different interpretations of this verse by western scholars, see S. Sviri, « Wa-rahbāniyyatan ibtada’ūhā. An analysis of traditions concerning the origin and evaluation of Christian monasticism », *JSAI*, 13 (1990) 195-208, pp. 195-201

<sup>61</sup>. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, iv, p. 246

in itself is not condemned; what is condemned is the way of practising it, celibacy for instance, and the theological doctrines «invented» by the Nazarenes (*Naṣrāniyya*). Ascetism (*raḥbāniyya*) could not be condemned because Muḥammed is said to have practised a form of spiritual retreat before the time of Islam, probably under the influence of Manichaeism and Judaeo-Christianity, which itself was influenced by Manichaeism and gnosticism.

The attitude demonstrated in this account is partly based on the the qurʾānic and Islamic dogma of the distortion or falsification (*taḥrīf*) of the scriptures by Jews and Christians, as given by Ibn ʿAbbās<sup>62</sup>: «After Jesus, kings<sup>63</sup> distorted the Torah and the Gospel. The king summoned people to choose between death and relinquishing their reading of their books, except what had been distorted. A group of them chose to live on pillars<sup>64</sup>, others to roam about wandering, eating what beasts eat, others built monasteries in the deserts, digging wells and growing herbs. Each group was imitated by others, but they became polytheists. When Muḥammed came, only a few of them remained. Then the hermits descended from their cells, the cenobites came out of their convents, and the roaming monks came back from their wandering, and all of them believed in him and gave credence to him. [P. 42] These have a

<sup>62</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. *al-Saqqā*, on Q 57:27; C. Gilliot, «Exégèse et sémantique institutionnelle dans le Commentaire de Tabari», *SI*, 77 (1993) 41-94, pp. 73-74 (al-Thaʿlabī, *Tafsīr*, ix, pp. 248-49, borrows this tradition from al-Ṭabarī); Sviri, «Wa-rahbāniyyatan ibtadaʿūhā», pp. 205-6 (here from al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī [fl. 930], *Nawādir al-uṣūl*, 2 vols, ed. A.ʿA. al-Sāyih and S. al-Jumaylī, Cairo, 1988, i, pp. 224-25): Dammen McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, p. 264 (summarized); Charfi, «Christianity in the Qurʾān commentary of al-Ṭabarī», p. 139.

<sup>63</sup>. The reference is often made to Constatine.

<sup>64</sup>. On the stylites in pre-Islamic poetry, see I. Goldziher, «'Säulenmänner' im Arabischen», *ZDMG*, 55 (1901) 503-8, pp. 504-5 (repr. in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Hildesheim, 1967, iv, 309-14, pp. 310-11).

twofold recompense » (Q 57:28). A slightly different report is attributed to Ibn Mas'ūd, another Companion of Muḥammad<sup>65</sup>.

To the « monasticism » (ascetism) of the Christians is opposed the « monasticism » of Islam, according to a tradition transmitted from Muḥammad by the Companion Anas ibn Mālik : « Every prophet has his monasticism, the monasticism (ascetism) of this community (Islam) is holy war (*al-jihād fī sabīl Allāh*) »<sup>66</sup>. However, there is a tension between rejecting forms of ascetism such as Christian monasticism, on the one hand, and an attraction towards ascetism, on the other. Muḥammad and other members of the Quraysh are said to have practised times of spiritual retreat (*taḥannuth*) before the coming of Islam<sup>67</sup>, and ten of his Companions are said to have been tempted by what were considered within Islam to be « extreme » forms of ascetism. Among them<sup>68</sup>, the following names are given (on Q 5:87): 'Uthmān ibn Maz'ūn, 'Alī, Ibn Mas'ūd, and al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad. According to Mujāhid, they practised celibacy (*tabattalū*), they wore 'monk's habits' (*musūḥ*), they wanted to roam around (*al-siyāḥa*) like wandering monks, they abstained from certain foods, and they wanted to castrate themselves<sup>69</sup>. It should be noted that the qur'anic *ḥanīfiyya*

<sup>65</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, xxvii, pp. 239-40 (trans. in Gilliot, « Exégèse et sémantique », pp. 72-74; Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, p. 265 (summarized) ; Charfi, « Christianity in the Qur'ān commentary of al-Ṭabarī », pp. 139-40.

<sup>66</sup>. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 6 vols, Cairo, 1895, iii, p. 266, cf. iii, p. 82/ed. A.M. Shākir, 22 vols, Cairo, 1945, 19902, xi, p. 278, no. 13742, cf. x, p. 257, no. 11713.

<sup>67</sup>. Meir Jacob Kister, « Al-taḥannuth. An inquiry on the meaning of a term », *BSOAS*, 31 (1968) pp. 223-36

<sup>68</sup>. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, i, pp. 498-99, gives the ten names.

<sup>69</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, x, p. 519, no. 12388. Other accounts are given from 'Ikrima, Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn Zayd, etc. ; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, x, pp. 514-21; cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 67, *Nikāḥ* 9.



has been associated with Manichaeism, Sabeanism<sup>70</sup>, etc. According to al-Kalbī (d. 763), « The Sabians are people between the Jews and the Nazarenes ; they confess God, shave the middle of their heads and they castrate themselves (*yajubbūna madhākīrahum*) »<sup>71</sup>. Significantly, the first Muslims themselves were called Sabians by the pagans of Mecca and Medina<sup>72</sup>.

#### [P. 43] The origins and early divisions of Christianity

The most common historical, or pseudo-historical, and theological explanation given by the early commentators concerning the divisions between the followers of Jesus after « he was raised up to heaven by God » is the following : they were split into two, three, or four groups (the « infidels »), while another group (the true « Muslims »), remained « faithful » to Jesus. But they were oppressed by the other groups, or by two of them, until Muḥammad was sent by God with Islam again

According to Ibn ʿAbbās, after Jesus was raised up to heaven, « his followers divided into three groups » [a fourth is sometimes mentioned, those who say that Jesus is « one of three Gods »<sup>73</sup> together with God and Mary<sup>74</sup> : in

<sup>70</sup>. Gil, « The creed of Abū ʿĀmir », pp. 13-15 ; G. Monnot, « Sabéens et idolâtres selon ʿAbd al-Jabbār », *MIDEO*, 12 (1974) 13-48 (repr. in Monnot, *Islam et religions*, 207-27).

<sup>71</sup>. Al-Ṭaʿlabī, *Tafsīr*, i, p. 209, on Q 2:61. Cf. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, i, p. 112 ; al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*, i, p. 434, according to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī ; al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 3 vols, Istanbul, 1916-19, iii, p. 91; Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad*, § I, pp. 579, 388-89.

<sup>72</sup>. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, Berlin, 1897, pp. 237-38.

<sup>73</sup>. They were « the Israelites who were the kings of the Nazarenes », evidently a confusion; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 80 vols, ed. M. Amrawī and ʿA. Shīrī, Beirut, 1995-2001, xlvii, pp. 478-79 ; S. Mourad, 'Jesus according to Ibn ʿAsākir », in J. Lindsay (ed.), *Ibn ʿAsākir, and early Islamic history*, Princeton NJ, 2001, 22-43, pp. 30-31.

<sup>74</sup>. Cf. Q 5:116: « O Jesus, son of Mary, didst thou say unto mankind : Take me and my mother for two gods beside God ? » ; Charfi, « Christianity in the Qurʾān commentary of al-Ṭabarī », p. 132. On this assertion, see C.E. Sell, *The historical development of the Qurʾān*,

some versions they are called the « Israelite Christians », and their religion « the religion of the emperor », *dīn al-malik*<sup>75</sup>. One group, the Jacobites, said, « God was among us as long as we willed, then he ascended to Heaven ». Another, the Nestorians, said, « The son of God was among us as long as we wished, then [God] caused him to ascend to Him ». Another, the Muslims, said, « [Jesus] was the servant of God, and His messenger for as long as He willed, then God caused him to ascend to Him ». « The two unbelieving groups gained ascendancy [P. 44] over the Muslim group and destroyed it. Islam remained in eclipse until God sent Muḥammad »<sup>76</sup>.

According to Muqātil, « The Nazarenes divided into three groups over Jesus : the Nestorians said that he is God's son, the Jacobites (*al-Ya<sup>c</sup>qūbiyya*) that he is God, and the Melkites (*al-Malkāniyyūn*) 'God the third of three' (Q 5:73) »<sup>77</sup>.

London, 1909, p. 172. On the Collyridians (« cake-eaters »), whose worship of Mary is sometimes thought to be related to this verse, see H. Wace, and W.C. Piercy (eds), *A dictionary of Christian biography and literature to the end of the sixth century AD*, art. « Collyridians ».

<sup>75</sup>. Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī ta<sup>r</sup>īkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk*, 17 vols, ed. M. <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Qādir <sup>c</sup>Aṭā<sup>3</sup>, Beirut, 1992, ii, p. 41 ; P. van Koningsveld, « The Islamic image of Paul and the origin of the Gospel of Barnabas », *JSAI*, 20 (1996), 200-28, pp. 204-5. Four groups of learned Jews discussing Jesus after his ascension are also presented in an account by Muḥammad al-Quraḏī, but without mention of denominations. One says that he was born after his mother had committed « an ungodly act » (ghayr ṣāliḥ); Ibn al -Jawzī, *Muntaẓam*, ii, p. 40 ; van Koningsveld, p. 204.

<sup>76</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. al-Saqqā, xxviii, p. 92, on Q 61:14 ; Ibn <sup>c</sup>Asākir, xlvi, p. 475; Mourad, « Jesus according to Ibn <sup>c</sup>Asākir », p. 30 and n. 21.

<sup>77</sup>. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, ii, p. 628, on Q 19:37. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, x, p. 482, on Q 5:73, also mentions the three groups, but has *al-Ya<sup>c</sup>qūbiyya* and *al-Malikiyya*, and on p. 484, on Q 5:74, *al-Ya<sup>c</sup>qūbiyya* only. Cf. Charfi, « Christianity in the Qur<sup>3</sup>ān commentary of al-Ṭabarī », pp. 140-41. It is worth noting that the mutakallim al-Māturīdī (d. 944) does not name Christian

Ibn Jurayj (d. 767) reports in more detail that the leaders of the three groups who split were Decius (*Daqyūs*)<sup>78</sup>, Nestorius and Mār Ya<sup>c</sup>qūb. The followers of the last (Jacobites) said that Jesus is God, who came down to earth, caused to live or caused to die as he willed, and then rose to heaven. The followers of the second (Nestorians) said that Jesus is the son of God. The followers of the first, ‘the Israelites, kings of the Christians’ (Melkites), said that Jesus is « the third of three », that is « Allāh is God, he is God, his mother is God ». The fourth group were the « Muslims » (of the time), who said that Jesus was « the servant, the messenger, the spirit (*rūḥ*), and the word (*kalima*) of God ». These groups fought each other, and they overcame the « Muslims »<sup>79</sup>.

A particular group of « Christians », or better « Children of Israel », hearers or disciples of Jesus, or Jews<sup>80</sup>, is presented by some exegetes [P. 45] to

groups in his commentary, *Taʿwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 5 vols, ed. F.Y. al-Khaymī, Beirut, 2004 [Very bad edition. Since we have a good ed., 18 vols., by Ahmet Vanlioğlu et al., under the direction of Bekir Topaloğlu, Istanbul, Mizan Yayınevi, 2002-2008]

<sup>78</sup>. For Decius (r. 249 to 251), see al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. C. Pellat, 7 vols, Beirut, 1966-79, ii, p. 39, § 729/Les prairies d’or, trans. C. Pellat, 5 vols, Paris, 1962-97, ii, p. 273, where he is known as the persecutor of the Christians. In Ibn Jurayj’s account, there is probably some confusion with Constantine or one of his successors.

<sup>79</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. al-Saqqā, xvi, pp. 83-84, on Q 19:34 ; Charfī, « Christianity in the Qurʾān commentary of al-Ṭabarī », pp. 140-41. Qatāda gives a similar account, but without mentioning Decius ; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, xvi, p. 86, on Q 19:37. He adds an argument of the « Muslims » : Jesus ate and slept, God did not – at this time the Jacobites appeared and the « Muslims » were killed. For him this is an explanation of Q 3:21.

<sup>80</sup>. On « a people who sinned by violating the Sabbath » (Jews), and their punishment of being transformed into apes or pigs, see I. Lichtenstadter, « ‘And became ye accursed apes’ », *JSAI*, 14 (1991) 153-75. On Q 5:65 and 7:163-66, and particularly 7:166, « Be ye apes despised and loathed », see al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, xiii, pp. 179-202; on Q 2:65, see al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, pp. 167-73 ; Ayoub, *The Qurʾan and its interpreters*, i, pp. 113-16;; W.M. Brinner, *Lives of the Prophets*, Leiden, 2002, p. 482-84 (trans. of al-Tha<sup>c</sup>labī ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī q̣iṣṣat al -

explain other passages of the Qurʾān, with polemical arguments against Jews and Christians or Judaeo-Christians. So, on Q 5:78: « Those of the Children of Israel who went astray were cursed by the tongue of David, and of Jesus, son of Mary; that was because they rebelled and used to transgress », Muqātil<sup>81</sup> says that these people ate from the [descended] table and did not believe, so Jesus cursed them, like those who had violated the Sabbath (*ashāb al-sabt*), or the Sabbath-breakers. They were 5,000<sup>82</sup> (other versions have 330), and God transformed them into pigs (other versions have apes, or apes and pigs)<sup>83</sup>. It is worth noting that alone among the early commentators Mujāhid interprets this transformation figuratively: « They were not transformed, but it is a parable which God made for them (the Jews of Medina) », or « Their hearts were transformed; they were not transformed into apes, but it is a parable which God made for them, like ‘the ass carrying books’ (Q 62:5) »<sup>84</sup>.

anbiyāʾ, hereafter referred to as Thaʿlabī-Brinner: a more accurate trans. is H. Busse, *Islamische Erzählungen von Propheten und Gottesmännern*, Wiesbaden 2006, hereafter referred to as Thaʿlabī-Busse – although al-Thaʿlabī died in 1035, he transmits early material).

<sup>81</sup>. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, i, p. 496, on Q 2:77-78; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, pp. 229-30, on Q 5:114. Cf. Thaʿlabī-Brinner, pp. 664-72; Thaʿlabī-Busse, pp. 501-4; B. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*. An introduction to the Quran and Muslim exegesis, London, 2002, pp. 309-10; Charfi, « Christianity in the Qurʾān commentary of al-Ṭabarī », pp. 120-21.

<sup>82</sup>. Matthew, 14:21. The longer accounts have reminiscences of the institution of the eucharist (Matthew 26:26-29 and parallels), of the multiplication of loaves (Matthew 14:15-21; Matthew 15:32-37 and parallels), of Acts 10:11-16, or 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Çinar, *Maria und Jesus im Islam*, pp. 163-70

<sup>83</sup>. Cf. Matthew, 8:28-34 and parallels, the story of Jesus casting out demons and turning them to pigs.

<sup>84</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ii, pp. 172-73, nos 1143-44, on Q 2:65; Ayoub, *The Qurʾan and its interpreters*, i, p. 114.

Some early reports anticipate later Muslim polemics against Paul as the most important founder of the so-called Christian « evident unbelief » (*kufri mubīn*). The ʿAbbasid historiographer Sayf ibn ʿUmar (q.v.) discusses Paul’s « adverse influence » on early Christianity in the context of the conspiracy that led to the assassination of the Caliph ʿUthmān. He adduces an account about Paul<sup>85</sup> as a parallel to that of a Jew of Ṣanʿāʾ, ʿAbdallāh ibn Saba<sup>86</sup>, who is said to have converted to Islam in the time of ʿUthmān and then led people astray with doctrines which [P. 46] became the basis of the dissensions between Shīʿī and Sunnī Islam<sup>87</sup>. Sayf transmits this narrative from ʿAṭīyya (who could be either the commentator Abū Rawq ʿAṭīyya ibn al-Ḥārith al-Hamdānī [*al-Kūfī [on him v. Anthony (Sean W.), The Caliph and the heretic. Ibn Sabaʿ and the origins of Shīʿism, Leiden, Brill, 2012, p. 33-34, et passim]*), ~~or ʿAṭīyya ibn Yaʿlā al-Ḍabbī~~), who transmitted it from Yazīd al-Faqʿasī, who can be estimated to have died around 708 (this is interesting information for the antiquity of this tradition among the northern Arabian tribe of Asad).

[Since we have written this pages, we have to refer to Anthnony (Sean W.), Sayf b. ʿUmar account of ‘King’ Paul and the corruption of ancient Christianity», *Der Islam*, 85 (2008), p. 164-202]

After Jesus had been raised up by God, his followers were 700 (or 700 families). Paul, the king at this time, urged that they should be killed, but they managed to escape. So Paul devised a trick: he put on the clothes worn by Jesus’ followers and went to find them. He was captured by them, but he told them he

<sup>85</sup>. Sayf ibn ʿUmar, *Kitāb al-ridḍa wa-l-futūḥ*, ed. Q. al-Sāmarrāʾī, Leiden, 1995, pp. 132-35.

<sup>86</sup>. Sayf ibn ʿUmar, *Kitāb al-ridḍa wa-l-futūḥ*, , pp. 135-38 ; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. M. de Goeje *et al.*, *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari*, 15 vols, Leiden, 1879-1901, ii, 2941-44/*The History of al-Ṭabarī*, xv, trans. R.S. Humphreys, Albany, 1990, pp. 145-48; M. Hodgson, « ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʿ », in *ED*.

<sup>87</sup>. Van Koningsveld, « The Islamic image of Paul », p. 202.

had met Jesus, who had taken away his hearing, sight and reason<sup>88</sup>. He promised to serve the cause of the followers and to teach them the Torah and its regulations. He had four visions, by means of which he convinced the followers that the direction of prayer was east, all food was permissible, and all forms of violence (*jihād*) and revenge were abolished<sup>89</sup>. He reserved the third vision for a group of four, Jacob, Nestor, Malkūn<sup>90</sup>, and the « believer »<sup>91</sup>. After asking this group several questions, Paul said, « I declare that God has manifested (*tajallā*) Himself to us, but has then withdrawn from sight (*iḥtajaba*) ». One of them said that Paul was right, the second that it was God and Jesus was His Son, and the third, « No ! But he is the third of three : Jesus as son, his father, and his mother ». But the « believer » cursed them and insisted that Paul had come to mislead them, and, urging his own followers to remain faithful to the true teaching of Jesus, he departed with them. Paul urged the other three to fight the « believer » and his followers, but they fled to Palestine (*al-Shām*), where they were taken captive by the Jews. They asked the Jews to let them live in caves, on mountain tops and in hermitages, and to wander (*nasiḥū*: « we shall wander ») through the countryside, and their offspring introduced innovations (*biḍā*<sup>6</sup>) in religion (with a quotation of [P. 47] Q 57:27: « [...] But monasticism they invented... »). A small remnant of the followers of the « believer », who « became the uppermos<sup>7</sup> » (Q 61:14), escaped to the Arabian peninsula, where

<sup>88</sup>. Cf. Acts, 9:1-9.

<sup>89</sup>. Cf. Matthew 5:38-42 ; Romans 12:17 ; 1 Peter 3:9, with quotations taken from these texts or others : « Do not repay evil for evil » ; « If anyone slaps you on a cheek, turn to him the other also » ; « If anyone takes some of your clothes, give him the rest ».

<sup>90</sup>. In *The Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, ed. Terian, pp. 48 and 55, one of the Magi, « kings of the Persians », is called Melkon.

<sup>91</sup>. Van Koningsveld, « The Islamic image of Paul », p. 204, rightly notes that he is « gnostically referred as the 'Believer' ».

thirty of them lived as monks (or hermits), saw Muḥammad, and believed in him.

This tradition, as far as is known, does not appear in any of the classical Qurʾān commentaries, although the whole passage is taken up by the Andalusī Muḥammad al-Qaysī (fl. 1309) in one of his anti-Christian treatises<sup>92</sup>.

According to Ibn Ishāq<sup>93</sup>, « The Christians assert that [...] among the apostles of Jesus (ḥawāriyyūn) and followers who were sent after them were the apostle Peter and Paul, who was a follower and not an apostle; they went to Rome. Andrew and Matthew were sent to the country whose people are man-eaters, a land of blacks<sup>94</sup>. Thomas was sent to Babylonia in the east, and Philip to Qayrawān and Carthage in North Africa. John went to Ephesus, the city of the youths of the cave, and James to Jerusalem, that is Aelia, Bayt al-Maqdis. Bartholomew (Ibn Tūlmā/Talmā) was sent to Arabia, namely the Ḥijāz, and Simeon to the lands of the Berbers in Africa. Judas was not sent as an apostle,

<sup>92</sup>. See P. van Koningsveld and G.A. Wieggers, « The polemical works of Muḥammad al-Qaysī and their circulation in Arabic and Aljamiado among the Mudejars in the fourteenth century », *Al-Qantara*, 15 (1994) 163-99, pp. 168-69.

<sup>93</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, i, pp. 737-38/*The History of al-Ṭabarī*, iv, trans. M. Perlmann, Albany NY, 1987, p. 123 ; cf. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, p. 972/Guillaume, *Life*, p. 653 ; Thaʿlabī-Brinner, p. 673.

<sup>94</sup>. Cf. *The Acts of Philip*, in *The apocryphal New Testament*, trans. M.R. James, Oxford, 1924, p. 32 : « And John was there also, and said to Philip : Andrew is gone to Achaia and Thrace, and Thomas to India and the wicked flesh-eaters, and Matthew to the savage troglodytes. And do thou not be slack, for Jesus is with thee. And they let him depart » ; Bovon and Geoltrain, *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, I, p. 1217 ; *Acts of Thomas*, in Elliott, *The apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 447-48. *Acta Andreae et Matthiae in urbe anthropophagorum* (*Acts of Andrew and Matthias*, a text very near to the coming of Islam, IVth or Vth century), 1-3, in the city of Myrmidonia, in Elliott, *op. cit.*, pp. 283-284.

but his place was taken by Ariobus<sup>95</sup> « after the latter had perpetrated his deed »<sup>96</sup>.

According to Qatāda, Jesus sent two disciples to Antioch, but people there did not believe in them, so he sent a third to support them<sup>97</sup> [P. 48] According to the Yemenite Shu'ayb (ibn al-Aswad) al-Jabā'ī al-Janadī (d. after 723), the names of these two disciples were Simon and John, and the third was Paul<sup>98</sup>.

### Mary

Since the exegetical traditions on Mary and Jesus are well known<sup>99</sup>, only a few representative early traditions need be mentioned

<sup>95</sup>. In Acts 1:26 this is Matthias. Compare with the list given in *The Acts of Philip*, VIII, in Bovon and Geoltrain, *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, I, pp. 1262-63.

<sup>96</sup>. Wheeler, *Prophets*, p. 308, wrongly translates » « Judas, who was not a disciple, went to Ariobus ».

<sup>97</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. al-Saqqā, xxii, p. 155, on Q 36:12. According to Wahb : God sent three messengers to Antioch whose Pharaoh was the idolatrous Abṭīḥās ; their names were Ṣādiq, Maṣḍūq and Salūm (figurative names for « faith ») ; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, xxii, p. 156.

<sup>98</sup>. Ibn Abī Hātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 10 vols, ed. A.M. al-Ṭayyib, Mecca and Riyadh, 1997, x, p. 3192, no. 18050. It is said of this Shu'ayb (who is one of Ibn Ishāq's authorities) that « he had read the books », meaning in this context books of the Jews and Christians, and that he was an expert on « apocalyptic and battle literature (*malāḥim*) ».

<sup>99</sup>. See D. Wismer, *The Islamic Jesus. An annotated bibliography of sources in English and French*, New York, 1977 ; Tha'labī-Brinner, pp. 622-80 ; al-Kisā'ī, *The tales of the prophets of al-Kisā'ī*, trans. W.M. Thackston, Boston, 1978 pp. 326-36 (al-Kisā'ī [active before 1200] is probably a pseudonym) ; Wheeler, *Prophets*, pp. 297-320;;R. Tottoli, *The stories of the prophets by Ibn Muṭarrif al -Ṭarafī*, Berlin, 2003, pp. 161-74 ; A. Ferré, « La vie de Jésus dans Tabari », *Islamochristiana*, 5 (1979), 7-29 ; Charfi, « Christianity in the Qur'ān commentary of al-Ṭabarī » ; N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity. The representation of Jesus in the Qur'ān and the classical Muslim commentaries*, Basingstoke, 1991 ; N. Robinson, « Jesus », in *EQ* : N. Akin, *Untersuchungen zur Rezeption des Bildes von Maria und Jesus in den frühislamischen Geschichtsüberlieferungen*, Edingen-Neckarhausen, 2002 (Diss. University of Heidelberg) ; Çinar, *Maria und Jesus im Islam* : B. Stovasser,



It has often noted that the presentation in the Qurʾān of Mary's birth and childhood is a 'borrowing' from and an adaptation of the Protoevangelium of James (or other similar direct or indirect sources)<sup>100</sup> We find further features from the same 'source(s)' or others in early commentaries on Q 3:35. According to Ibn Ishāq, « Zachariah and ʿImrān<sup>101</sup> married two sisters, Zachariah marrying the mother [P. 49] of John [the Baptist], and ʿImrān the mother of Mary, though ʿImrān died while his wife was pregnant with Mary. It has come to us that that the wife of ʿImrān was barren until she reached old age. ʿImrān and his family were people of high esteem with God. While she was sitting one day in the shade of a tree, Anna (Ḥannah) saw a bird feeding its young<sup>102</sup>. She yearned for offspring in the same way, and prayed to God to grant her a child. God

« Mary », in *EQ*; A. Rippin, « John the Baptist », in *EQ*; S. Karoui, *Die Rezeption der Bibel in der frühislamischen Literatur am Beispiel der Hauptwerke von Ibn Qutayba* (gest. 276/889), Heidelberg, 1997

<sup>100</sup>. Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans*, p. 77 ; *The Protoevangelium of James*, 7:2; 8:1, in Elliott, *The apocryphal New Testament*, p. 60

<sup>101</sup>. At first glance, one might assume that in identifying Mary as the daughter of Amram and sister of Aaron the Qurʾān confuses Mary with Miriam, the sister of Aaron and Moses (Exodus 6:18, 20; Numbers 26:59); R. Tottoli, « ʿImrān », in *EQ*; J.S. Jaspis, *Koran und Bibel. Ein komparativer Versuch*, Leipzig, 1905, p. 55 ; G. Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qurʾān*, London, 1965, p. 64 ; H. Räisänen, *Das koranische Jesusbild*, Helsinki, 1971, p. 18 G. Lauche, *Die koranische Umdeutung und Verkürzung des biblischen Jesusbildes in seiner soteriologischen Bedeutung*, Giessen, 1983, pp. 36-38. But it has been shown by S. Mourad, « Mary in the Qurʾān : a reexamination of her presentation », in Reynolds, *The Qurʾān in its historical context*, 163-74, pp. 163-66, 172, that her identification as Amram's daughter and Aaron's sister « are meant to highlight her biblical heritage »; for instance, « it is on the basis of her Aaronic lineage that Mary could serve in the Temple ».

<sup>102</sup>. *The The Protoevangelium of James*, 3:1, in Elliott, *The apocryphal New Testament*, p. 58 ; *The Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, 1:9, ed. Terian, p. 5; Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes*, p 137.

answered her prayers, and she conceived Mary. Shortly afterwards, °Imrān died. When his wife became aware of her pregnancy, she vowed to dedicate the child in her womb to the service of God. The custom was that such a child would worship God and serve the Temple in total isolation from all worldly affairs »<sup>103</sup>.

In the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān Mary is called « sister of Aaron (Hārūn) » (Q 19:28). Of course, many people in Mecca and Medina would have known that this was false, and a pia fraus had to be found. When one of Muḥammad’s Companions, who had been asked about this by the Christians of Najrān, raised it, Muḥammad is supposed to have explained, « People used to be called by the names of those who were before them ! »<sup>104</sup>.

According to a prophetic tradition, « Every child is touched by Satan’s attack at his birth, whereupon the child cries out ». The only exception was Mary, « for when [her mother] bore her, she said : ‘I crave Thy protection for her offspring from Satan the outcast’ » (Q 3:36)<sup>105</sup>. According to Qatāda and others, neither Mary nor Jesus was touched by Satan’s attack at their birth<sup>106</sup>.

[P. 50] Many details are given about Mary’s guardian (Q 3:37: ‘And [God] made Zachariah her guardian’). According to al-Suddī, « Those who write the Torah » were disputing about the custody of Mary, and they decided to cast lots<sup>107</sup> for her. They went to the Jordan and threw in their pens (aqlām).

<sup>103</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vi, p. 330, no. 6858 ; Ayoub, *The Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān and its interpreters*, ii, 93; cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, i, pp. ??? 710-2/*History*, iv, pp. 102-3. See also Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, pp. 406-7/Guillaume, *Life*, pp. 274-76 ; Wheeler, *Prophets*, pp. 297-98 ; Tottoli, *The stories of the prophets by Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī*, pp. 161

<sup>104</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. al-Saqqā, xvi, p. 78 ; Charfi, « Christianity in the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān commentary of al-Ṭabarī », pp. 111-12.

<sup>105</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vi, p. 336, no. 6884 ; Charfi, « Christianity in the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān commentary of al-Ṭabarī », p. 112 » Ayoub, *The Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān and its interpreters*, ii, p. 94.

<sup>106</sup>. Tha<sup>ʿ</sup>labī-Brinner, p. 624 ; Tha<sup>ʿ</sup>labī-Busse, pp. 471-72.

<sup>107</sup>. Cf. *The Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, 3:3, ed. Terian, p. 14

Zachariah's pen stood firm above the water, while the pens of the others were swept away<sup>108</sup>. The choice of pens for casting lots in this account denotes a theological intention, because in the Qur'ān Zachariah is preordained by God for the custody of Mary: « When they threw their pens [to know] which of them should be the guardian of Mary » (Q 3:44). In Islamic mythology the *qalam* (Greek *kalamos*, Latin *calamus*) was one of the first of God's creations, and has to do with predestination and the writing of human acts<sup>109</sup>.

In relation to the verse, « Whenever Zachariah went into the sanctuary where she was, he found that she had food » (Q 3:37), the commentators give many explanations of what this was<sup>110</sup>: « He found grapes out of season in a great basket » (Ibn Jubayr, Mujāhid), « summer fruits in winter and winter fruits in summer » (al-Ḍaḥḥāk, Qatāda), « Zachariah shut seven doors upon her, but when he entered, he found summer fruits in winter and winter fruits in summer » (al-Rabīʿ ibn Anas)<sup>111</sup>. Zachariah said: « The one who brings these fruits to Mary is able to make my wife fertile and to give me a boy from her »<sup>112</sup>.

<sup>108</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vi, pp. 349-50, no. 6904 ; Ayoub, *The Qurʾān and its interpreters*, ii, p. 99 ; Thaʿlabī-Brinner, p. 625 ; Charfi, « Christianity in the Qurʾān commentary of al-Ṭabarī », pp. 112-13.

<sup>109</sup>. According to Ibn ʿAbbās, the first thing God created was the Preserved Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz*), then he created the Pen (*qalam*) ; Kisāʿī-Thackston, p. 5 ; C. Gilliot, « Mythe et théologie : calame et intellect, prédestination et libre arbitre », *Arabica*, 45 (1998), pp. 151-92

<sup>110</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vi, pp. 254-57 ; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, i, pp. 390-91 ; Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, ii, p.640

<sup>111</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vi, pp. 354-55 ; Ayoub, *The Qurʾān and its interpreters*, ii, p. 100 ; Charfi, « Christianity in the Qurʾān commentary of al-Ṭabarī », p. 133 ; Thaʿlabī-Brinner, pp. 625-26 ; Thaʿlabī-Busse, pp. 472-73 ; Kisāʿī-Thackston, p. 327. Cf. *The Protoevangelium of James*, 8:1, in Elliott, *The apocryphal New Testament*, p. 60, where she is fed by the hand of an angel; Coptic history of the Virgin, quoted by W. St. Clair-Tisdall, *The Original sources of the Qurʾān*, London, 1905, pp. 159-60 (from F. Robinson, *Coptic apocryphal Gospels*,

Ibn Ishāq continues the story of Mary : « Later her guardian was Jurayj, the ascetic (*al-rāhib*), a carpenter of the sons of Israel. The arrow came out to him so he took her, Zachariah having been her guardian beforehand. A greivous famine befell the sons of Israel and Zachariah was unable to support her, so they cast lots to see who should be her guardian. ‘And thou wast not with them when they disputed’ i.e. about her (Q 3:44) »<sup>113</sup>. The same account is found in al-Tha<sup>c</sup>labī’s Stories of the prophets (though the attribution is dubious), still attributed to Ibn Ishāq, except that this time it is Joseph the Carpenter who casts lots and gains responsibility for Mary<sup>114</sup>.

#### Jesus’ birth and childhood

The Qur’ānic narratives on Jesus’ birth under a palm-tree and the words of the baby Jesus (Q 19: 23-26) are very similar to the Pseudo-Gospel of Matthew : « And the pangs of the childbirth drove her (i.e. Mary) unto the trunk of a palm-tree... (Q 19: 23) (Jesus said to her) : And shake the trunk of the palm-tree toward thee, thou wilt cause ripe dates to fall upon thee » (Q 19: 25). However this latin text, *Liber de infantia* (chapters 20-21, in Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 95-96) is from the VIIIth or IXth century, and it cannot be the direct source of the Qur’ān, so both have a common source. According the *Liber de infantia* this took place in Egypt, but in the Qur’ān it occurred during the delivery of Mary. The origin of the « mistake » (Egypt/Bethleem) could have its origin in one of the « wild readings » of the tradition of the *Diatessaron*, an instance of

Cambridge, 1896, p. 15); *The Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, 3:1, ed. Terian, p. 13 ; Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans*, p. 76, refers only to *The Protoevangelium of James*, not the Qur’ān itself.

<sup>112</sup>. Muqātil, i, p. 273, the only interpretation he gives.

<sup>113</sup>. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, p. 407/Guillaume, *Life*, p. 275 (al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vi, p. 356-57, gives this in a more amplified form from Ibn Ishāq).

<sup>114</sup>. Tha<sup>c</sup>labī-Brinner, p. 626.

such being in the Middle Dutch translation : « They found a shed made of twigs in a street » (De Bruin, *Diatessaron*, 16-17 ; Van Reeth, « L'évangile du Prophète, pp. 165-166. Elsewhere Van Reeth has called attention upon the influence of Manicheism on the Qur'ānic presentation of the Eucharist : « Eucharistie im Koran », in M. Gross (Markus)/Karl-Heinz Ohlig (eds.), *Schlaglichter. Die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte*, Berlin, 2008, pp. 457-460). The ancient exegetes have taken over material from the same common source and from other sources (Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, II, 625 ; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, XVI, pp. 63-73).

[P. 52] According to Wahb ibn Munabbih, at Jesus' birth, « wherever idols were worshipped, the idols were toppled and turned upside down »<sup>115</sup>. Many other miracles which Jesus performed (or as the Muslim commentators describe them, miracles performed by God through Jesus or upon him with the permission of God) during his childhood, whether or not mentioned by the Qur'ān, are described at length, such as speaking in his cradle (Q 19:29-30: « I am the servant of God »)<sup>116</sup>, creating birds from clay (Q 3:49)<sup>117</sup>, etc. According

<sup>115</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, i, p. 727/*History*, iv, p. 115 ; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vi, p. 341, no. 6894, on Q 3:36 ; Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its interpreters*, ii, p. 94 ; °Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, i, pp. 390-92 ; Tha°labī-Brinner, p. 643 ; cf. *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, 23, in Elliott, *The apocryphal New Testament*, p. 96 ; Bovon and Geoltrain, *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, I, p. 140 ; The Armenian Gospel of the Infancy, 15:16, 16:4, ed. Terian, pp. 72, 76 ; *The Arabic infancy Gospel*, 11-12, in Elliott, *The apocryphal New Testament*, p. 103.

<sup>116</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. al-Saqqā, xvi, pp. 79-80 ; al-Tha°labī, vi, pp. 213-14. Cf. *The Arabic infancy Gospel*, 1, in Elliott, *The apocryphal New Testament*, p. 102 ; Bovon and Geoltrain, *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, I, p. 227.

<sup>117</sup>. N. Robinson, « Creating birds from clay. A miracle of Jesus in the Qur'ān and in classical Muslim exegesis », *MW*, 79 (1989) 1-13. Cf. Ibn Ishāq in al-Ṭabarī, vi, pp. 425-26, no. 7086 ; Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its interpreters*, ii, p. 141 ; Charfi, « Christianity in the Qur'ān

to Ibn Ishāq, « When Jesus was about nine or ten years old, his mother sent him to school. But whenever the teacher taught him anything as he used to do with youths, he found that Jesus already knew it. The teacher exclaimed, ‘Do you not marvel at the son of this widow? Every time I teach him anything, I find that he knows it far better than I do’ »<sup>118</sup>.

The Kūfan al-Suddī al-Kabīr, interpreting « And I announce unto you what ye eat and what ye store up in your houses » (Q 3:149), asserts, « When Jesus grew into a young boy, his mother committed him [to teachers] to study the Torah. When he was playing with the youths of the village, he used to tell them what their parents were doing »<sup>119</sup>, or he told them what they would be eating at home<sup>120</sup>. It should be noted that the Khurasānī exegete Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767), who obviously also knew such narratives, is content with a [P. 53] summary of them without chains of authority<sup>121</sup>, as is the case throughout his commentary.

According to Wahb, « When Jesus was twelve years old, God revealed to his mother in Egypt, where she had fled from her people after giving birth to him, ‘Take him back to Syria’. She did as she was commanded. She was with him in Syria until he became thirty years of age. The period of his prophethood was only three years, after which God took him up to him ». Al-Ṭabarī continues,

commentary of al-Ṭabarī », p. 119; also Bovon and Geoltrain, *Ecrits apocryphes chrétiens*, I, 197.

<sup>118</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vi, p. 433, no. 7099, on Q 3: 49 ; cf. *The infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Greek A, then B, 6, 1-4; Latin, 6, 1-12, with the Master Zaccheus), in Elliot, *The apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 76-77 (Greek A 6) ; also Bovon and Geoltrain, *Ecrits apocryphes chrétiens*, I, pp. 198-201.

<sup>119</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vi, p. 433, no. 7100 ; Ayoub, *The Qurʾan and its interpreters*, ii, p. 142.

<sup>120</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vi, pp. 434-35, no. 7107.

<sup>121</sup>. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, i, p. 277, on Q 3:49.

« Wahb further claimed that more than 3,000 diseased people often came together to Jesus to be healed. Those who were able to come to him did so, and he himself went to those who were unable to walk. Jesus used to cure them by means of prayers to God »<sup>122</sup>.

The Christians, and especially Paul, as we have seen, are accused of distorting the scripture brought by Jesus (*tahrīf*)<sup>123</sup>, and abolishing the laws he had enjoined from God. However, exegetes differ regarding the things that Jesus made lawful for the Children of Israel. For some of them the laws of Jesus were « more lenient » than those of Moses, even though he came to confirm the Mosaic Law. For Wahb, « Jesus was a follower of the law of Moses. He observed the Sabbath and faced Jerusalem in prayer. He said to the Children of Israel, ‘I have not come to call you to disobey even one word of the Torah<sup>124</sup>. I have come only to make lawful for you some of the things which were before unlawful and to relieve you of some of the hardships’ »<sup>125</sup>. According to al-Rabīʿ ibn Anas (on Q 3:50), « The Law with which Jesus came was much more lenient than that which Moses brought. In the Torah revealed by Moses the flesh of the camel and the fats (*thurūb*) were forbidden. But they were permitted by the law revealed by Jesus; the spur of the rooster, fats, kinds of fish or of birds that have no claws »<sup>126</sup>.

<sup>122</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vi, pp. 431-32, on Q 3:49; Ayoub, *The Qurʾan and its interpreters*, ii, pp. 141-42.

<sup>123</sup>. H. Lazarus-Yafeh, « Tahrīf », in *EI2* ; R. Caspar, and J.M. Gaudeul, « Textes de la tradition musulmane concernant le *tahrīf* (falsification) des écritures », *Islamochristiana*, 6 (1980) 105-48.

<sup>124</sup>. Cf. Matthew 5:17-19.

<sup>125</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vi, p. 438, no. 7111 ; Ayoub, *The Qurʾan and its interpreters*, ii, p. 149.

<sup>126</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, vi, p. 439, no. 7113, or according to Qatāda, no. 7112 ; Ayoub, *The Qurʾan and its interpreters*, ii, p. 146 ; Thaʿlabī-Brinner, p. 656.

[P. 54] The development of exegesis

The development of exegesis on Christians and Christianity follows the general development of qurʿānic exegesis. The traditions mentioned above on Jesus, Christians, and Christianity belong to the ‘formative period’ of exegesis<sup>127</sup>. Then came an intermediary and decisive stage, with the introduction of grammar and linguistics (from the second half of the 8th century), and elements of rhetoric and stylistics (9th to 10th centuries)<sup>128</sup>, and also the rules of the transmission of ḥadīth, the beginnings of « sectarian » exegesis (Khārijīs, Shīʿīs, etc.)<sup>129</sup>, the introduction by some theologians (Khārijīs, Zaydīs, Muʿtazilīs, Ḥanafīs, Ḥanafī-Māturīdīs, Ashʿarīs, etc.) of dialectical theology (*kalām*)<sup>130</sup>, and the rejection of this theology by others (proto-Ḥanbalīs, Ḥanbalīs, Mālikīs, etc.). In addition, there was the influence of anti-Christian polemic in the newly conquered territories. At the beginning, Muslims had traditions about Christianity but no explicitly constituted theological system<sup>131</sup>. In the 8th and 9th centuries in Kūfa and elsewhere their theology was partly constructed in contact with, and in reaction against, « dualist » Christians, Marcionites and Daysanites (Bardesanites), and Manicheans<sup>132</sup>.

Most of the great exegetical works, such as al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 923) commentary, took over many of the exegetical accounts referred to above, although an author such as al-Ṭabarī often gives his own position after quoting them. The Muʿtazila did not pay so much attention to the traditions transmitted, and preferred to

<sup>127</sup>. Gilliot, « Exegesis of the Qurʿān: Classical and Medieval », pp. 104-8.

<sup>128</sup>. Gilliot, « Exegesis of the Qurʿān: Classical and Medieval », pp. 108-10.

<sup>129</sup>. Gilliot, « Exegesis of the Qurʿān: Classical and Medieval », pp. 116-18.

<sup>130</sup>. Gilliot, « Exegesis of the Qurʿān: Classical and Medieval », pp. 114-16.

<sup>131</sup>. D. Thomas, *Anti-Christian polemic in early Islam*. Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq’s ‘Against the Trinity’, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 3-8.

<sup>132</sup>. Van Ess, *TG*, I, pp. 416-36.



argue rationally<sup>133</sup>, according to the principle of the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*). Somewhat like the Mu<sup>c</sup>tazila, the Sunnī theologian and exegete al-Māturīdī (d. 944) is reluctant to base his choices on exegetical traditions, preferring to [P. 55] employ his own theological ideas<sup>134</sup>: on Q 19 (Mary), for instance, he refers to very few traditions<sup>135</sup>.

However, the majority of Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān commentaries continue to the present to transmit the exegetical traditions of early Islam on « Christians » and « Christianity » with the same polemical (sometimes with more polemical) bias against them. And these traditions are usually accepted as true by the majority of Muslims, including scholars.

### Conclusion

The treatment of the Nazarenes and Nazarism in the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān and in Islamic exegesis is ambiguous. On the one hand, it includes laudatory tones and narratives<sup>136</sup>, but on the other, « direct or indirect criticism constitutes the largest category »<sup>137</sup>. The « good » Nazarenes are two types, those who remained

<sup>133</sup>. Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, Leiden, 1920, 1970<sup>3</sup>, pp. 107-8, rightly remarks that the « rationalistic » stance of the early exegete Mujāhid was appreciated by the Mu<sup>c</sup>tazilites (cf. his comment cited above, that the transformation of Jews and Christians into apes or pigs was meant figuratively not literally).

<sup>134</sup>. M. Mustafizur Rahman, *An introduction to al-Maturidi's Ta'wilat ahl al-sunna*, Dacca, 1981, pp. 91-93. A good example of that is given in C. Gilliot, « L'embarras d'un exégète musulman face à un palimpseste. Māturīdī et la sourate de l'Abondance (al-Kawthar, sourate 108) », in R. Arnzen and J. Thielmann (eds), *Words, texts and concepts cruising the Mediterranean sea. Dedicated to Gerhard Endress*, Leuven, 2004, pp. 33-69.

<sup>135</sup>. Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wilat ahl al-sunna*, iii, pp. 257-82.

<sup>136</sup>. Emphasised by Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ānic Christians*, p. 4: in her study her choice consists of « positive allusions to the Christians » in the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān and exegesis.

<sup>137</sup>. Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ānic Christians*, p. 4; For a list of criticisms, see Charfi, « Christianity in the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>ān commentary of al-Ṭabarī », pp. 134-38.

« Muslims » and those who became Muslims. Those who are supposed to have remained « Muslims » constituted a very interesting category in the Muslim imagination, even if they were few in number according to most accounts. They remained faithful to the *islām* (submission to God and His « books ») of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and other prophets, waiting for the « praised one » (Muḥammad), or the « most laudable one » (Aḥmad) (Q 61:6)<sup>138</sup>, the Paraclete<sup>139</sup> who is announced by Jesus in the Gospel of John ; to Ibn Ishāq, « the *Munaḥḥemana* in Syriac is Muḥammad, in Greek he is the Paraclete ». The second type of « good » Nazarenes is represented by those who, being Christians, « submit » (*aslamū*) themselves to God and His messenger. Both types are witnesses to the « truth » of Islam, because [P. 56] they recognized the « proofs of prophethood » (*dalā'il al-nubuwwa*) in Muḥammad and in the message delivered to him<sup>140</sup>. But the « bad » Nazarenes, who are « going astray » (*ḍallūn*)<sup>141</sup> and leading others astray (*muḍillūn*), « who are

<sup>138</sup>. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. al-Saqqā, xxviii, p. 87, a declaration attributed to Muḥammad himself.

<sup>139</sup>. Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, pp. 149-50/Guillaume, *Life*, pp. 103-4. For the claim that the original name of the Prophet of Islam was not Muḥammad, see Gilliot, « Reconstruction », p. 77, n. 304.

<sup>140</sup>. A. Schlatter, « Die Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums zum Islam », *Evangelisches Missions-Magazin*, N.F. 62 (1918), 251-64, p. 254. In the hagiographical traditions of his life, Muḥammad appears as a parallel to the Jesus of the church, with a miraculous birth, sinlessness, ascension, etc.

<sup>141</sup>. Right from the beginning of the Qur'ān (Q 1:6-7), « those who go astray » designate the Christians, and « those who earn Thine anger » the Jews, according to several traditions attributed to Muḥammad, and for the majority of the exegetes, e.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, i, pp. 193-95, 185-88 ; cf. Muqātil, i, p. 36: « The religion of the polytheists, that is the Christians », « The Jews of whom God is angry, so he transformed them into apes and pigs ».

polytheists/associationists (*mushrikūn*) », are also adduced as proofs a contrario of Muḥammad's « prophethood ».