





JEWISH CHRISTIANITY AND  
THE ORIGINS OF ISLAM

# Judaïsme ancien et origines du christianisme

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# JEWISH CHRISTIANITY AND THE ORIGINS OF ISLAM

Papers presented at the Colloquium  
held in Washington DC,  
October 29-31, 2015  
(8<sup>th</sup> ASMEA Conference)

edited by

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BREPOLS

2018

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D/2018/0095/22

ISBN 978-2-503-57779-1

e-ISBN 978-2-503-57780-7

10.1484/M.JAOC-EB.5.114140

## FOREWORD

The modern research focused on the origins of Islam has been traditionally marked by an optimism which contrasts with the methodological criticism used to face the proto-history of Judaism or Christianity; the supporting pillars of this optimism are the confidence in the validity and trustworthiness of the old sources, together with a subtle resistance to apply the historical-critical methodology to the Qur'ān. But since the 70s of the last century, a heterogeneous group of researchers began to cast into doubt the traditional assumptions about the origins of Islam, which had been peacefully shared with some minor nuances by the academic community. In different ways and with their own theories, Günter Lüling, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, John Wansbrough, Yehuda Nevo, Christoph Luxenberg and many others, in a nutshell affirmed that the master narrative about the origins of Islam and the Qur'ān was historically unreliable, and did not clarify what exactly happened to prompt the emergence of that new religion.

The arrival of these revisionist theories, proposed by those and other authors who by no means may be considered members of a unified school, caused great commotion among the Western Islamicists (a phenomenon known as the “70s shock”), challenging those two aforementioned attitudes inherited from the European Orientalism of the 19th and 20th centuries, and also creating either an enormous fascination or a vehement rejection in the academic environment. In any case, a good number of researchers and scholars have embraced the new perspective with interest or even enthusiastically, and this is reflected in the current overwhelming quantity of scientific production on this subject with complementary or opposing theories, and the uninterrupted appearance of new philological, archeological or historical information.

Of course, the Western origins of this Revisionism have not facilitated its acceptance by the Muslim apologists, who have identified it as another new crusade or a manifestation of cultural imperialism. In our environment, some scholars regret the current panorama of studies on the origins of Islam, which has even been described as *ein hoffnungsloses Chaos*, where the revisionist production has become a true marginal “sub-culture”<sup>1</sup>,

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1. A. NEUWIRTH, “Zur Archäologie einer heiligen Schrift: Überlegungen zum Koran vor seiner Kompilation,” in C. BURGMEYER (ed.), *Streit um den Koran*, Berlin, 2004, p. 82.; G.S. REYNOLDS, “Introduction. Qur'ānic studies and its controversies,” in *id.* (ed.) *The Qur'ān in its historical context*, Oxon-New York, 2008, p. 8; Other-

without unity between the theories, lacking a common methodology or a school that can be a real and organized challenge for the traditional paradigms. In fact, the critics argue that these ambitious projects lack decisive evidence and they move in the realm of plausibility, arguing that revisionist authors reconstruct the origins of Islam on the basis of imaginative and not sufficiently proved assertions, even forcing the sources to prove their own theories. In any case, the current research on the origins of Islam should take these perspectives into account, accepting the fact that an approach exclusively centered on the traditional sources or a simple view of Early Islam is insufficient to break new ground concerning the origin of this religion. To this day, there is no doubt that this field of research requires an interdisciplinary effort, taking into account information from both Muslim and non-Muslim sources, archaeological evidence, linguistic analysis and studies on contact and evolution of theological ideas.

Without losing sight of this revisionist environment, among all the different theories that currently explore the religious milieu of Late Antiquity to elucidate the origins of the Islamic religion, there are a large group of scholars that come away from the Qur'an with the impression that Jewish Christianity must have played a role in its formation, reviving the question of a potential link between Early Islam and the beliefs and practices of those followers of Jesus that maintained or adopted certain Jewish beliefs and practices, either Jews that believed in the messianism and/or the prophecy of Jesus (groups whose existence and nature is still a matter of debate). A majority of Qur'an scholars argue against the Jewish-Christian thesis with strong arguments or simply ignore it. In any case, the question is still subject of passionate debate among specialists.

In historical and philological research, the value of the information provided by the sources frequently depends on how researchers select, analyze and interpret it;<sup>2</sup> this principle acquires even more relevance in the current studies on early Islam and its origins, in which it is in vogue "to take absence of evidence as evidence of absence."<sup>3</sup> Such ambiguity and even arbitrariness in the choice and interpretation of the data is probably due to the impossibility of separating humanistic study from the passions, interests, expectations and even political circumstances underlying the same defended theories. With respect to the support of a Jewish-Christian connection for the early Islam, John Toland, one of the first advocates of

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wise, some scholars propose even "to reset the terms of discussion". A. AL-AZMEH, "Implausibility and Probability in Studies of Qur'anic Origins," paper published by the International Qur'anic Studies Association.

2. J. WANSBROUGH, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, New York, 1978, p. 32.

3. R.G. HOYLAND, "The Jews of the Hijaz in the Qur'an and in their inscriptions," in G.S. REYNOLDS (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qur'an. The Qur'an in its historical context II*, Oxon-New York, 2011, p. 114.



such a theory, appeared to be motivated by an aesthetic feeling when he understood as a 'poetic justice' that the ancient Jewish Christianity had survived in Islam. Indeed, besides the pure scientific interest, this kind of fascination has been present in several authors, just as a desire to remove any sense of originality from Islam. Likewise, the refusal to accept a Jewish-Christian substrate in Early Islam at times has been motivated by and avoidance of reshaping the traditional framework from a revisionist point of view. This position might be caused by a spreading group consciousness in the Western Islamology or even by a certain short-shrift attitude to proposals coming from academic and extra-academic environments not always linked to Islamology or Arabism. As already has been noted, the situation has been made worse by political events in the USA, Europe and the Near East after the Twin Towers attack, pushing scholars into being involuntarily anti-Muslim propagandists (in the case of revisionists) or apologists for it (in the case of traditionalists)<sup>4</sup>. In this context, the proposal for a Jewish-Christian influence on nascent Islam has even been qualified as a Zionist theory.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, and knowing that this matter attracts a great deal of attention among the specialists, my initial goal was to organize a meeting to foster a discussion about the question of Jewish Christianity and Early Islam to discuss about the *status quaestionis*, the proposals of future works on this precise field and, of course, to present the current objections against this theory. The idea was enthusiastically welcomed by the officers and the academic council of the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa: they offered the infrastructure of the annual ASMEA Conference for the meeting and provided funds for financing the assistance of the scholars, giving me the entire liberty of selecting the members and organizing the schedule.

This volume collects the papers of this two-day colloquium held in Washington DC in October 2015 and highlights the vitality of this field of studies. The contributions included here cover a broad range of topics, and they offer new ideas, interpretations and understandings of the question. As editor I encouraged presenters to bring their papers to press and to take into account the lively discussion that took place in Washington, giving authors a great deal of latitude in terms of the length of their published contributions. I sought to establish consistency in the text while respecting author preferences in transliterations and onomastics.

As organizer of the colloquium and editor of this book I wish to express my gratefulness to the Association for the Study of the Middle East and

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4. R.G. HOYLAND, "Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion," in S.F. JOHNSON (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Oxford-New York, 2012, p. 1056.

5. P.S. VAN KONINGSVELD, "Revisionism and Modern Islamic Theology," *Hikma* 1 (2010), p. 19.

Africa for their financial support. I thank deeply Dave Silverstein and the organizers of the Conference in Washington for their enthusiastic help, their warm welcome, invaluable assistance and kind cooperation during those days. I am grateful to all the participants and attendees for making it such a lively meeting. I thank also the contributors to this volume for their insights, their research and their patience. Finally, I wish to express a special gratitude for Simon Claude Mimouni who offered his collection to publish these pages, and for Brepols Publishers for producing such a handsome volume.

Francisco del Río  
Barcelona, November 2016

# JEWISH CHRISTIANITY, THE QUR'ĀN, AND EARLY ISLAM: SOME METHODOLOGICAL CAVEATS

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The question raised by this meeting seems straightforward: *Is there a Jewish-Christian influence at the core of the most primitive Islam*, as several former and recent scholars have argued (sometimes in very different ways)?<sup>1</sup> However, straightforward questions do not necessarily admit straightforward answers –for example because they can be quite ambiguous. Therefore, the path to a putative answer might be full of pitfalls and meanders– and I want to explore here some of them. They pertain to words and formulas included in the question itself, namely “Jewish-Christian,” “influence,” and “most primitive Islam.” I am afraid I will have

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1. See especially H.J. SCHOEPS, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, Tübingen, 1949, p. 334-343; M. RONCAGLIA, “Éléments ébionites et elkésaites dans le Coran: notes et hypothèses,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 21 (1971), p. 101-126; Y. DURRA AL-ḤADDĀD, *Al-Qur’ān da’wā naṣrāniyya*, Jounieh, 1969; *id.*, “Coran, prédication nazaréenne,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 23 (1973), p. 148-155, *id.*, *Al-Inḡīl fī-l-Qur’ān*, Jounieh, 1982; P. CRONE, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), p. 59-95; *id.*, “Jewish Christianity and the Qur’ān (Part One),” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74-2 (2015), p. 225-253; *id.*, “Jewish Christianity and the Qur’ān (Part Two),” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 75-1 (2016), p. 1-21; Sh. PINES, “Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), p. 135-152, reprinted in G.G. STROUMSA (ed.) *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines, Vol. IV: Studies in the History of Religion*, Jerusalem, 1996; Abū Mūsā AL-ḤARĪRĪ (J. AZZI), *Qass wa-nabīy*, Beirut, 1990; French translation by S. GARNIER: J. AZZI, *Le prêtre et le prophète*, Paris, 2001; F. DE BLOIS, “*Naṣrānī* (Ναζωραῖος) and *ḥanīf* (ἕθνηκόες): studies in the religious vocabulary of Christianity and Islam,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65-1 (2002), p. 1-30; É.-M. GALLETZ, *Le Messie et son prophète*, 2 vol., Versailles, 2005; J. GNILKA, *Die Nazarener und der Koran*, Freiburg, 2007; H.M. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*, Tübingen, 2013; F. DEL RÍO, “The Rejection of Muhammad’s Message by Jews and Christians and its Effect in Islamic Theological Argumentation,” *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 6 (2015), p. 59-75. The most recent *status quaestionis* is G.G. STROUMSA, “Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins,” in B. SADEGHI, A.Q. AHMED, A. SILVERSTEIN and R.G. HOYLAND (eds.), *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honour of Patricia Crone*, Leiden, 2015, p. 72-96.

more doubts or questions than answers, and for reasons of space, I will have to leave aside several relevant issues.

### Jewish Christianity

The first problem when we talk about the possible Jewish-Christian background of early Islam is to know what we mean exactly by “Jewish Christianity.”<sup>2</sup> Is there an accurate and useful definition? It seems – at first view – that there are basically three kinds of definition: the ethnic, the praxis-based, and the doctrinal.

*Ethnic definition:* Jewish Christians are ethnic Jews who became Christians. *Praxis-based definition:* Jewish Christians are those (whatever their ethnic background) who accept Jesus as the messiah and continue practices associated with Judaism. *Doctrinal definition:* Jewish Christians are Christians who retain Jewish thought and literary forms.

These definitions raise various problems: to sum up, they look anachronistic and highly dependent on ecclesiological and heresiological catego-

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2. Jewish Christianity (or, perhaps more accurately, Judaeo-Christianity) has been the topic of many recent books and papers. See, for the last quarter of century, in chronological order: J.E. TAYLOR, “The Phenomenon of Early Jewish Christianity: Reality or Scholarly Invention?,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 44-4 (1990), p. 313-334; *id.*, *Christians and the Holy Places. The Myth of Jewish-Christians Origins*, Oxford, 1993; S.C. Mimouni, *Le judéo-christianisme ancien. Essais historiques*, Paris, 1998, English translation (to be used with caution): *Early Judaeo-Christianity. Historical Essays*, Leuven, 2012; F. MANNS, *Le judéo-christianisme: mémoire ou prophétie?*, Paris, 2000; S.C. MIMOUNI & F. Stanley JONES (eds.), *Le judéo-christianisme ancien dans tous ses états*, Paris, 2001; G. FILORAMO & C. GIANOTTO (eds.), *Verus Israel. Nuove prospettive sul giudeocristianesimo*, Brescia, 2001; D. BOYARIN (ed.), *Judaeo-Christianity Redivivus*, special issue of *The Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9-4 (2001), p. 417-509, A.H. BECKER & A.Y. REED (eds.), *The Ways That Never Parted. Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*; Minneapolis, 2003; P.J. TOMSON & D. LAMBERS-PETRY (eds.), *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, Tübingen, 2003; D. BOYARIN, *Border Lines. The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia, 2004; O. SKAUSANE & R. HVALVIK (eds.), *Jewish Believers in Jesus*; Peabody, 2007; M. JACKSON-McCABE (ed.), *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered*, Minneapolis, 2007; D. BOYARIN, “Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99 (2009), p. 7-36; J.C. PAGET, *Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians in Antiquity*, Tübingen, 2010; E.K. BROADHEAD, *Jewish Ways of Following Jesus. Redrawing the Religious Map of Antiquity*, Tübingen, 2010; A. BEDENBENDER (ed.), *Judäo-Christentum. Die gemeinsame Wurzel von rabbinischem Judentum und früher Kirche*, Paderborn, 2012; P. LUOMANEN, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels*, Leiden, 2012; F.S. JONES, *Pseudoclementina Elchaisaiticaque inter judaeochristiana: collected studies*, Leuven, 2012; *id.* (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity. From Toland to Baur*, Leiden, 2012; S.C. MIMOUNI, “Le judaïsme chrétien ancien: quelques remarques et réflexions sur un problème débattu et rebattu,” *Judaïsme ancien – Ancient Judaism* 1 (2013), p. 263-279.

ries.<sup>3</sup> A detailed discussion is out of place here, but it is certainly appropriate to add a few remarks about the ethnic and the praxis-based definitions (the doctrinal definition is not fashionable anymore, and rightly so).

The ethnic definition does not seem adequate enough: should an “ethnic Jew” who becomes Christian but wholly gives up Torah practices be called a Jewish Christian? Most people would certainly answer no. Hence it seems necessary to add praxis-based elements, as do several scholars, like Mimouni or Broadhead. According to Mimouni’s most recent definition,

Ancient Jewish Christianity is a modern term designating those Jews and their pagan sympathizers who recognized Jesus as messiah, who recognized or did not recognize the divinity of Christ, but who, all of them, continued to observe, in totality or in part, the Torah.<sup>4</sup>

According to Broadhead’s definition, Jewish Christians are “Followers of Jesus who maintain a significant degree of Jewishness – they present themselves as faithful Jews standing in continuity, in both thought and deed, with God’s covenant with Israel.”<sup>5</sup> This presupposes, of course, that

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3. For a more thorough discussion of this issue, see e.g. M. JACKSON-McCABE, “What’s in a Name? The Problem of ‘Jewish Christianity,’” in *id.* (ed.), *Rediscovering Jewish Christianity*, p. 7-38; D. BOYARIN, “Rethinking Jewish Christianity,” and E.K. BROADHEAD, *Jewish Ways of Following Jesus*, p. 28-58. The disagreement among scholars over the texts which should be counted as “Jewish-Christian” is sometimes striking – and this is a good sign that there might be something fishy with this category. For example, according to F. Stanley Jones, none of the New Testament writings should be counted as Jewish Christian as such (*Pseudoclementina*, p. 454), whereas S.C. Mimouni claims that almost all New Testament writings are of Judaeo-Christian origin, except Mark, Luke and Acts (*Early Judaeo-Christianity*, p. 160). Yet it seems also judicious to read Luke and Acts as *Jewish texts* (see for example I. OLIVER, *Torah Praxis after 70 CE: Reading Matthew and Luke-Acts as Jewish Texts*, Tübingen, 2013), and I see no reason not to do the same with Mark. Therefore, why not saying that *all* texts of the New Testament are simply Jewish (and written, of course, by Christ-believing Jews)?

4. S.C. MIMOUNI, “Le judaïsme chrétien ancien,” p. 273.

5. E.K. BROADHEAD, *Jewish Ways of Following Jesus*, p. 57. Broadhead adds the following caveat seemingly designed, at least in part, to exclude Judaizers from Jewish Christianity: “excluded from this definition of Jewish Christianity would be [1] all conceptions of an Israel replaced by or superseded by Christianity, [2] all systems that abrogate or replace the Law, [3] all allegorizing or spiritualizing interpretations of the Law, and [4] all christological paradigms that call into question the basic integrity of monotheism. *These represent a disruption rather than a continuation of Israel’s heritage.* Also excluded would be [5] individuals and movements who embrace aspects of Jewish belief and practice, but whose basic identity is Gentile and Christian” (numbers and emphasis are mine). This caveat is interesting, in part welcome, and in part questionable. [1] is certainly a very significant criterion; [2] is simply redundant with the usual criterion of a partial or complete continuation of Torah practice; [3] is too restrictive; [4] is *ad hoc*, and is aimed at excluding “high Christologies” – but should it exclude “orthodox” Jewish Christians, like the so-called Nazarenes, whose existence Broadhead does not doubt? Moreover, where is

we already know precisely who the Jews are and what is Jewishness – and maybe this is less easy than it seems. Incidentally, it might probably be better to speak of *Judaeans*.<sup>6</sup>

The praxis-based elements also raise difficulties (note that the praxis-based definition *alone* is unable to pick out Jewish Christians from Judaizers – that such a distinction should be preserved is another topic). For example: which proportion of Jewish practices should be kept for allowing us to speak of *Jewish* Christianity? What is the level of the “significant degree of Jewishness,” or the observance of the Torah, required? And *who* is legitimate in deciding where the limit has to be drawn, and which practices are essential and which are not?<sup>7</sup> Should we focus on circumcision and shabbat? Yet these criteria are not so clear. For example, circumcision was sometimes not practiced inside Judaism,<sup>8</sup> and sometimes practiced outside. When we learn from Sozomen (Ecc. Hist. VI.38.11) that there were Arabs who practiced circumcision, should we suppose, as Sozomen apparently claims, a Jewish influence? Or is it simply the way Sozomen makes sense of such Arab customs? Circumcision was not confined to “Jews,” and to what extent was it really a way for the Arabs to commemorate the Abrahamic covenant? Please note, moreover, that according to these criteria (circumcision, shabbat), and regardless of ethnicity, Ethiopian Christianity looks definitely Jewish Christian.

Some scholars, like Daniel Boyarin, have therefore argued that the category of “Jewish Christianity” is too confused to be of any use. Others, while aware of these problems, are not ready to jettison it and award it, at least, some heuristic virtues.<sup>9</sup> I have nothing against giving up the label, but if people still want to use it, why not – provided it is reminded that this is a modern and elusive category, which does not refer to clearly identifiable groups<sup>10</sup> (contrary to what it is supposed to do), and which brackets together multifarious subcultures and religious sensitivities.

Much depends, of course, on our own reasons for using this term. If it is “to disturb (...) any unquestioned assumptions that we might harbor

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Broadhead speaking from when he refers to “the disruption and continuation of Israel’s heritage”? This looks like a theologian’s value judgment, not an historian’s analysis. About [5], see next paragraph in the main text.

6. S. MASON, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007), p. 457-512.

7. About such “checklists,” see D. BOYARIN, *The Jewish Gospels. The Story of the Jewish Christ*, New York, 2012, p. 7-22.

8. J. COSTA, “Le marqueur identitaire de la circoncision chez les rabbins de l’Antiquité,” in S.C. MIMOUNI & B. POUDERON (eds.), *La croisée des chemins revisitée*, Paris, 2012, p.161-194.

9. A.Y. REED, “‘Jewish Christianity’ after the ‘Parting of the Ways,’” in A.H. Becker & A.Y. REED (ed.), *The Ways That Never Parted*, p. 190-191; G.G. STROUMSA, “Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins,” p. 74.

10. G.G. STROUMSA, “Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins,” p. 74.

about the essential incompatibility and inevitable “parting” of Judaism and Christianity,”<sup>11</sup> or if it is to remind of the importance of Jewish believers in the making of Christianity, there should be no quibble – except that I am unsure this is the best way to achieve such a goal. For example, when we are dealing with the period before the 4<sup>th</sup> century, it would be far more accurate to rely on Carlos Segovia’s typology, and therefore speak of:

(a) the Christ-believing Jews who accepted Paul’s original message of integrating the gentiles *qua* gentiles into the people of God alongside Israel;<sup>12</sup>

(b) the Christ-believing Jews, be they originally born Jews or proselytes, who opposed Paul’s message by claiming that the gentiles had to adopt all or almost all Jewish practices (I prefer avoiding the term “conversion” here);

(c) the non-Jewish Christ-believers who sided with (a) or (b);

(d) the non-Jewish Christ-believers who refused to join Israel.<sup>13</sup>

Note that it is only group (d) which gives rise to supersessionism; and it is only a part of group (d) which will become mainstream Christianity – Marcionism, for example, which also belongs to (d), will not.

On the other hand, after the so-called “parting of the ways,” we face a very different problem. Indeed, our evidence on the so-called “Jewish Christians” is very shaky: most of our extant data (first-hand<sup>14</sup> and second-hand) come from the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE – in fact mainly from the 4<sup>th</sup> (that we have such data at this time is also related to the eye of the beholders, namely, the heresiologists).<sup>15</sup> Beyond the 5<sup>th</sup> century, we have almost no evidence (“almost no evidence” does not mean “nothing at all,” but it means that there is certainly no evidence strong and unambiguous enough to support the existence and influence of a specific sectarian Jewish Christian community behind the rise of Islam).

And here a remark is in order – about the *connotation* of the term “Jewish Christian.” Almost every work on this topic will focus on apparently marginal groups (most often the Nazarenes/Nazoreans, whose existence is

11. A.Y. REED, “‘Jewish Christianity’ after the ‘Parting of the Ways,’” p. 191, note 5.

12. Paul is often considered as the main target of Jewish Christians – but, strictly speaking, he was no less “Jewish Christian” than his Ebionite critics!

13. C.A. SEGOVIA, “The Jews and Christians of Pre-Islamic Yemen (Ḥimyar) and the Elusive Matrix of the Qur’ān’s Christology,” in this volume, p. 87-99.

14. See especially the Pseudo-Clementines and the testimonies gathered in A.F.J. KLIJN and G.J. REININK, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects*, Leiden, 1973, and A.F.J. KLIJN, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition*, Leiden, 1992.

15. “It is not epiphenomenal that so often heresy is designated as “Judaism” and “Judaizing” in Christian discourse of this time, nor that a certain obsession with varieties of “Jewish Christianity” (Nazoreans, Ebionites) became so prominent in some quarters precisely at the moment when Nicene orthodoxy was consolidating” (Boyarin, *Border Lines*, p. 14).

in fact highly doubtful,<sup>16</sup> the Ebionites, the Elkesaites, and sometimes also the Cerinthians and the Symmachians), even when the goal is to show that these groups were not so marginal, at least at a certain time. On the other hand, Ethiopian Christianity will *not* be examined, nor other kinds of Eastern Christianity, for example the Armenians, who were accused by Jacob of Edessa to follow Jewish ideas and observances about impurity, because they had been taught by a Jew,<sup>17</sup> nor Manichaeism, even if it is the surgeon of a Jewish Christian group. Sometimes (though it is less fashionable now), the question will be about the relations between the Jewish Christian groups and the earliest “Christian” communities (like the Jerusalem community). Behind this state of affairs looms the genetic search for their origin in previous (more or less sectarian) movements. This is a quest which is highly dependent on a heresiological worldview – a worldview the historian should not share.

In other words, speaking of Jewish Christianity leads (not necessarily consciously) to highlight the limited regional scope of Jewish Christian movements, who became more and more marginal with the development and consolidation of Imperial Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: “To be sure, late antique Jewish Christian communities must have been small, marginal groups, often living in a protecting isolation.”<sup>18</sup> But if these groups were small and marginal, how did they play a role in the emergence of Islam? It seems that there are only two strategies to overcome this problem: either posit the existence of otherwise unknown Jewish Christian groups in the vicinity of Muḥammad’s movement, or claim that Jewish Christian ideas were more widespread than Jewish Christian communities: monks, dissidents, missionaries, merchants, soldiers, refugees, would have facilitated the circulation of religious ideas in Arabia – and particularly, on its margins, some of them could have facilitated the circulation of “Jewish Christian” ideas, unattractive for bishops and rabbis, but welcome for the group(s) behind the rise of Islam.<sup>19</sup>

In other words: either we use “Jewish Christian” in a strict sense, and following its usual definitions, we look for *specific communities or groups* (since these definitions are normally tailored to pick out real groups or people), or we use it in a looser sense.

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16. P. LUOMANEN, “Nazarenes,” in A. MARJANEN and P. LUOMANEN (ed.), *A Companion to Second-Century Christian ‘Heretics’*, Leiden, 2005, p. 279-314.

17. See K. KAYSER, *Die Canones Jacob’s von Edessa*, Leipzig, 1886, p. 3-4 (Syriac text). Of course, Ethiopians and Armenians are not supposed to be ethnically Jewish, and they are not “sympathizers” of Jewish people – therefore, there seems to be good reasons not to mention them. But, on the other hand, their practices and beliefs are perfectly consonant with what Jewish Christianity is supposed to look like.

18. G.G. STROUMSA, “Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins,” p. 75.

19. G.G. STROUMSA, “Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins,” p. 79, 90.



*First strategy:* if we use the label “Jewish Christian” in a strict sense, evidence is simply lacking. We have no evidence of Jewish Christian groups in Arabia in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, and no evidence either that other putative Jewish Christian groups elsewhere in the Near East played a role in the emergence of early Islam. Of course, scholars often refer to *indirect* evidence, which is of two kinds. The first concerns striking parallels and similarities between, on the one hand, the Qur’ān and early Islam, and on the other hand, what we can find in what is, rightly or wrongly, called Jewish Christian texts and movements. I do not deny all these parallels (however, some are more apparent than real), but I would explain them in a different way, as I will try to show below.

The second kind of indirect evidence pertains to elements which would attest the Jewish Christianity of people among the informants (or the opponents) of Muḥammad. In particular, relying on some narratives in the Muslim tradition, it has been argued that Warāqa b. Nawfal was a Jewish Christian.<sup>20</sup> Maybe one could design similar hypotheses about Zayd b. Tābit, or about the Jews of Medina, who could then be imagined to be Jewish Christians, and not Jews. The trouble is that there is simply no way to substantiate or disprove such suppositions, which are speculative and/or circular – the putative evidence is too shaky and meagre indeed to allow any conclusion.<sup>21</sup> And if we are not ready to imagine Arabia as a kind of Jurassic Park for ancient “heresies,”<sup>22</sup> then we should find another explanation of the affinities between Jewish Christianity and early Islam.

Hence the *second strategy*: using the label “Jewish Christian” in a looser sense. But which sense? Does it refer to groups *inside* the “great Church”? In this case, what is the difference between Jewish Christians and Judaizers? Or does it refer to *texts*, or *ideas*? But then, what makes a text Jewish Christian or not? More precisely, what does it mean, or entail, to describe a text or an idea as Jewish Christian when it is used, or widespread, in a non-Jewish Christian community? Let’s agree, for example,

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20. See for example Abū Mūsā AL-ḤARĪRĪ, *Qass wa-nabīy*.

21. The traditions on Warāqa look rather as retrojections and “crystallizations” – on figures related to Muḥammad – of a much more complex phenomenon, namely, the later scribal role of Jewish and Christian *literati* in the making of the Qur’ān (either by “converting” to the new faith or, more realistically perhaps, by putting their pen at the service of the new power). On this last issue, see K.-F. POHLMANN, *Die Entstehung des Korans. Neue Erkenntnisse aus Sicht der historisch-kritischen Bibelwissenschaft*, Darmstadt, 2015; G. DYE, “Réflexions méthodologiques sur la ‘rhétorique coranique,’” in D. DE SMET & M.A. AMIR-MOEZZI (eds.), *Controverses sur les écritures canoniques de l’islam*, Paris, 2014, p. 147-176; *id.*, “The Qur’ānic Mary and the Chronology of the Qur’ān,” in G. DYE (ed.), *Early Islam: The Sectarian Milieu of Late Antiquity? Proceedings of the First Nangeroni Meeting of the Early Islamic Studies Seminar, Milan 2015*, Chicago (forthcoming).

22. I borrow this nice formula from J. TANNOUS, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam: Making Incommensurables Speak*, PhD Princeton University 2010, p. 396.

that it makes sense to say that the *Didascalia Apostolorum* was written by a Jewish Christian, and therefore that it could be called, originally, a Jewish Christian text. But is it still warranted to speak of a Jewish Christian, or Judaeo-Christian text, when it is used, and has become, the “textual good” (*Textgut*) of (non-Jewish) Christian communities – as seems to be the case indeed with the *Didascalia*? A positive answer would entail radical consequences, since the same could arguably be said of any book of the New Testament.

Another example: it has been argued that the similarities between *sūra Maryam* and the *Protoevangelium of James* pointed to Jewish Christianity, supposedly the elected ground of traditions about Jesus’ childhood.<sup>23</sup> Even if we grant that the *Protoevangelium of James* comes from a Jewish Christian milieu (the matter is disputed), or that traditions on Jesus’ childhood originate in Jewish Christian circles (I would urge caution here), such similarities do not prove anything, since the *Protoevangelium* was very popular in Late Antiquity, as were many traditions on Jesus’ childhood. If we want to explain the origins of the traditions involved in *sūra Maryam*, and the way they are mixed there, we have to adopt a geographical approach, since these traditions are all deeply related to Palestine, and especially the popular, liturgical and homiletic traditions of Kathisma church, and more generally the Jerusalem Marian liturgy.<sup>24</sup>

These questions on method and lexicon are not purely formal, because the way we use and understand the tools we rely on when we interpret a phenomenon is deeply related to the way we frame the questions, and to the kind of answers we are looking for.

## Influence

The second problem when we talk about the possible Jewish-Christian background of early Islam is to find real parallels. Sometimes an apparent similarity is noticed, and conclusions are drawn. We need to be careful on such cases (and the issue of real or apparent similarities is only half of the job, since we should also account for the differences between the Qur’ān

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23. J. GNILKA, *Die Nazarener und der Koran*, p. 103.

24. In other words, the sources of Q 19 are to be found in popular and local traditions, related to a Chalcedonian church. See S. SHOEMAKER, “Christmas in the Qur’ān: The Qur’ānic Account of Jesus’ Nativity and Palestinian Local Tradition,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28 (2003), p. 11-39; G. DYE, “Lieux saints communs, partagés ou confisqués: aux sources de quelques péripécies coraniques (Q 19:16-33),” in I. DEPRET & G. DYE (ed.), *Partage du sacré: transferts, dévotions mixtes, rivalités interconfessionnelles*, Bruxelles-Fernelmont, 2012, p. 55-121; *id.*, “The Qur’ānic Mary and the Chronology of the Qur’ān.”

and its supposed direct or indirect source). Here are a few examples. The first one pertains to onomastics:<sup>25</sup>

[A] The Qur'anic names of the Old Testament patriarchs and of the protagonists of the gospels (Jesus, Mary, John, Zachariah, etc.) all derive from Semitic (Hebrew or Aramaic, though occasionally restructured) forms. By contrast, [B] the Qur'anic names of the post-Mosaic prophets (e.g. Yūnus/Jonah) derive from the Greek forms found in the Septuagint. This suggests that [C] Muhammad's awareness of these figures derives not from the Nazoreans but from Melchite Christians<sup>26</sup>.

It is supposed here that Muḥammad got his information on Old Testament patriarchs and of the protagonists of the gospels from Nazoreans. This appears to be a *non sequitur*, since Aramaic-speaking Christians could do the job as well. I guess de Blois favors the Nazorean explanation because he believes, for other reasons, that the Qur'anic *naṣāra* are Jewish Christians, and also because this list matches the (pseudo-Clementine) Jewish Christian conception of prophecy, which does not recognize any prophet between Moses and Jesus. However, I am afraid that the premises of the argument are dubious. Indeed, if there is nothing to object concerning [A], [B] and [C] are much more questionable.

I will focus only on [B]. Do the names of post-Mosaic prophets in the Qur'ān come from Greek? De Blois refers to Jonas, whose name in the Qur'ān is Yūnus (with some variants: Yūnas and Yūnis) and considers it comes from Greek Ἰωνᾶς. Yet from a strictly linguistic viewpoint, it could derive also from Geez Yonas or Christian-Palestinian Aramaic Yūnas (a Christian source, in any case). Same thing with Elijah (ʿĪlyās): Greek Ἠλίας or Ἠλείας provides the final *-s*, but Geez ʿElyas and Syriac ʿElyās (less common, however, than ʿElyā), provide it too. Another example: it seems straightforward to derive the Qur'anic name of Job (ʿAyyūb) from Syriac ʿAyūb (ʿAyyūb seems indeed to be a calque from Syriac) – no need to refer to Greek Ἰώβ (strictly speaking, a borrowing of Arabic ʿAyyūb from Greek Ἰώβ is not excluded, but there is not the slightest reason to think that it should come from Greek rather than Syriac).

There are even more decisive examples. The final *ʿayn* in the Qur'anic name of Elisha, Alyasaʿ, cannot come from Greek Ἐλίσσα, Ἐλισάιε ou Ἐλισάιος, whereas it is present in the Semitic forms, like Syriac Elyšaʿ, Geez ʿEləsaʿ or Hebrew ʿElišāʿ; moreover, Solomon's name (Sulaymān) can be easily explained from Syriac Šlīmūn, whereas it is harder to derive it

25. See G. DYE & M. KROPP, "Le nom de Jésus (ʿĪsā) dans le Coran, et quelques autres noms bibliques: remarques sur l'onomastique coranique," in G. DYE & F. NOBILIO (edS.), *Figures bibliques en islam*, Bruxelles-Fernelmont, 2011, p. 174-176.

26. F. de BLOIS, "Islam in its Arabian Context," in A. NEUWIRTH, M. MARX and N. SINAI (eds.), *The Qur'ān in Context. Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, Leiden, 2010, p. 622, note 16 (letters are mine).

from Greek Σαλώμων. In other words, there is no Biblical proper name in the Qur'ān where a borrowing from Greek is the only or the best explanation. Therefore, I do not see how we could draw any conclusion about confessional influences relying only from the Qur'anic names of the prophets.

The second example concerns a famous religious formula – the first part of the *šahāda*. According to Stroumsa: “One of the most striking parallels between the pseudo-Clementine writings and the Qur'ān is probably Peter's claim, in the Homilies, that ‘God is one, and there is no God beside Him.’”<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, Greek *heis estin ho theos, kai plēn autou ouk estin theos* (Hom. 16.7.9) is the equivalent of Arabic *lā ilāha illā huwa* and *lā ilāha illā Allāh*. The second formula appears only twice in the Qur'ān (35:37; 47:19), even if it will become later the first part of the “official” *šahāda*, whereas the first one is extremely widespread ((3:18; 4:87; 6:102, 106; 7:158; 9:31, 129; 11:14; 13:30; 20:8; 23:116; 27:26; 28:70, 88; 35:3; 39:6; 40:3, 62, 65; 44:8; 64:13; 73:9). There are some variants with personal pronouns: *lā 'ilāha 'illā 'ana* (16:2; 21:25), *lā 'ilāha 'illā 'anta* (21:87), and sometimes divine epithets are added: *lā 'ilāha 'illā huwa r-raḥmānu r-raḥīm* (2:163), *lā 'ilāha 'illā huwa l-ḥayyu l-qayyūmu* (2:255; 3:2), *lā 'ilāha 'illā huwa l-'azīzu l-ḥakīmu* (3:6, 18).

In his examination of the parallels between the *šahāda* and the pseudo-Clementine formula,<sup>28</sup> Pines notices that the sentence *lā ilāha illā huwa* sometimes occurs in relation to the rebuttal of the belief that Allah has a son or a companion (6:102). For sure, the Pseudo-Clementine writings and the Qur'ān both display a anti-Trinitarian theology – but they are certainly not the only ones to do this.<sup>29</sup> Are we allowed to suppose a kind of literary dependence between both texts, which would support the idea of a Jewish Christian background of the Qur'ān?

The problem in claiming such a dependency is that the parallel is less significant than Pines and Stroumsa believe. The idea of God's uniqueness is quite widespread and the ways to formulate it are not infinite, especially when the aim is to *contrast* the belief in one God and any kind of “polytheism.” Moreover, we find this formula elsewhere, especially in the Syriac *Acts of the Martyrs* (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c.), as noticed by Philippe Gignoux:<sup>30</sup>

*w'lh 'hryn lbr mnh lyt ln*: “and there is for us no other God beside Him.”<sup>31</sup>

27. G.G. STROUMSA, “Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins,” p. 86.

28. Sh. PINES, “Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity,” p. 141-142.

29. See below, p. 28.

30. P. GIGNOUX, “Les antécédents nestoriens de la Chahada,” *Acta Iranica* 28 (1988), p. 403-406. English translation: “The Nestorians Antecedents of the Šahāda,” in IBN WARRAQ (ed.), *Christmas in the Koran*, Amherst, 2014, p. 683-687.

31. P. BEDJAN (ed.), *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, 7 vol., Paris-Leipzig, 1890-97, vol. II, p. 346-347.

*dhđ hw 'lh' wlyt 'hryn lbr mnħ*: “that God is one and there is no other beside Him.”<sup>32</sup>

*wtd' dhwyw wlyt 'hryn lbr mnħ*: “and you know that He exists and that there is no other beside Him.”<sup>33</sup>

*wlyt 'lh lbr mnħ*: “and there is no God beside Him.”<sup>34</sup>

*wlyt 'lh 'hryn lbr mnk*: “and there is no God beside You.”<sup>35</sup>

*'nt 'nt 'lh šryr wlyt 'hryn lbr mnk*: “You are the true God and there is no other beside You.”<sup>36</sup>

*wlyt 'lh 'hryn lbr mnħ*: “and there is no other God beside Him.”<sup>37</sup>

Gignoux claims that “one cannot evade the conclusion which imposes itself, that is to say that the *šahāda* has its origin in the Judaeo-Christian circles, but it was also very well-known among the Nestorian community on the middle and at the end of the Sassanian period.”<sup>38</sup> Anyway, if one is really looking for origins, a Nestorian source appears much more plausible than a Jewish Christian one, which seems at best indirect. Furthermore,<sup>39</sup> a similar formula can already be found in Isaiah 44:6 (see also Isaiah 44:8, 45:21): “I am the first and I am the last, apart from me there is no God” (in Syriac: *wlyt 'lh lbr mnħ*).

We should also add the Syriac (Peshitta) translation of Psalm 18:31-32 (=2 Samuel 22:32, same translation in the Targum), where there is: *lyt 'lh lbr mn māryā*: “there is no God beside the Lord.” Translated into Arabic, it becomes *lā 'ilāha 'illā r-rabb*, and not much aesthetic taste is needed to substitute, for phonetic reasons, *Allāh* to *al-rabb*, and get *lā 'ilāha 'illā Allāh*. Such formulas travel easily and can be interpreted or re-interpreted without difficulty. Therefore, giving a too big weight to the parallelism with the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies does not seem warranted.

There is certainly here a very significant methodological issue. This formula, as it is understood in its “Nestorian” context, does not display the kind of Unitarian christology we found in the Qur’ān. Should we conclude, therefore, that it could not be the origin of the Qur’anic formula? This is, to my mind, unwarranted, since it ignores the phenomena of *active* appropriation from the community who faces such formula – and the discourse which goes along it. Such a community can interpret, re-interpret, and even misinterpret or (deliberately) subvert this discourse, and it can also choose to keep one part of it and reject another part. The transmis-

32. Id., II, p. 375.

33. Id., II, p. 384.

34. Id., II, p. 406, 410.

35. Id., II, p. 425.

36. Id. II, p. 447.

37. Id., II, p. 458.

38. P. GIGNOUX, “The Nestorians Antecedents of the Šahāda,” p. 685.

39. P. GIGNOUX, “The Nestorians Antecedents of the Šahāda,” p. 684.

sion and spreading of religious ideas and formulas does not require only one active participant (a transmitter like, for example, a missionary): the receiver plays an active role in this process too.<sup>40</sup>

Here is a third example, related to the interpretation of a famous Qur'anic verse (Q 5:116): "(Remember) when God said, 'Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say to the people, 'Take me and my mother as two gods instead of God (alone)'?" The context seems to imply that, according to the Qur'ān, the Christians took Mary as the third person of the Trinity. This looks strange, and various explanations have been proposed.<sup>41</sup> It has been supposed that this verse refers to a specific Christian sect, the Collyridians. This does not look very convincing, for many reasons – for example, because there is no evidence that the Collyridians (if they really existed) ever considered Mary as a part of the Trinity. Others have argued that Muḥammad could have mistaken Mary for the Holy Spirit, by ignorance, or because the word for "spirit" (*rūḥ*) is feminine in Arabic. It does not seem very plausible either. Some scholars, like de Blois and Gallez, have argued that the Nazoreans are targeted here.<sup>42</sup> Both refer to Origen and Jerome:

But in the gospel written according to the Hebrews which the Nazoreans read, the Lord [Jesus] says: "Just now, my mother, the holy spirit, lifted me up" (Jerome, *in Esaiam* 40:9). Just now my mother, the holy spirit, lifted me up by one of my hairs and brought me to the great mountain Thabor (Origen, *in Johannem* 2:12).

In a nutshell: since we have evidence that a Jewish Christian (Nazorean) text calls the holy spirit "Jesus' mother," then Q 5:116 is a polemic against a Nazorean doctrine. This is certainly ingenious, but hardly convincing, and not only because of the problem of the ambiguous evidence about Nazoreans (in general, and in relation to Muḥammad's movement in particular). In fact, the content of the verse itself goes against such a reading. First of all, the text says "Jesus, son of Mary!"; and *immediately after*, it refers to Jesus' mother. Of course, "Jesus son of Mary" might be considered as a stereotyped formula, but the obvious reading is to identify "my mother" (Jesus' mother) and Mary. Moreover, it is clear that the text

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40. See for example the studies in S. STEWART and R. SHAW (ed.), *Syncretism / Anti-Syncretism. The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, London, 1994, and maybe especially B. MEYER, "Beyond Syncretism. Translation and diabolization in the appropriation of Protestantism in Africa," p. 43-64.

41. See G.S REYNOLDS, "On the Presentation of Christianity in the Qur'ān and the Many Aspects of Qur'anic Rhetoric," *Al-Bayān – Journal of Qur'ān and Ḥadīth Studies* 12 (2014), p. 52-53.

42. F. DE BLOIS, "Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖοι) and ḥanīf (ἕθνη): studies in the religious vocabulary of Christianity and Islam," p. 14-15; É.-M. GALLEZ, *Le messie et son prophète*, vol. 2, p. 74-83.

does not aim at simply describing Christian beliefs and practices; it is, on the contrary, a polemical text, which draws to absurd consequences the Theotokos formula and the idea of Jesus' divine sonship (in a way which might be reminiscent of "Nestorian" polemics): if you make Jesus God and the son of God, and if you say that Mary is not only the mother of Jesus, but also the mother of God (Theotokos), then the only logical conclusion (to be rejected, of course) is that Mary should be divine too.<sup>43</sup>

### Early Islam

A third problem when we talk about the possible Jewish-Christian background of early Islam is that "early Islam" might not be very homogeneous – in fact, we need to be clear about what we mean by "most primitive Islam." First of all, the Qur'ān cannot simply be considered to be only Muḥammad's words, since there are good reasons to acknowledge a significant compositional and editorial activity on the Qur'ān *after* Muḥammad's death, or *independently* of Muḥammad.<sup>44</sup> It entails that the sources or the informants of Muḥammad are not necessarily the sources of the (authors of) various Qur'anic pericopes or suras: looking for the sources of the Qur'ān, therefore, does not unescapably mean looking for Muḥammad's putative informants. Second – and it is the problem I have in mind here –, the content of the Qur'ān itself is sometimes quite heterogeneous. Therefore, when we speak about the "most primitive Islam," are we talking about Muḥammad's community, or are we talking about the Qur'ān, and if we are referring to the Qur'ān, about which layers of the text are we talking? Most of the time, all is done as if these were the same things, whereas we should arguably be more cautious.

But let us go back to the Qur'ān and consider the figures of the prophets, and especially the place of Jesus. There is no need to insist again on the importance of Jesus in the Qur'ān, but *sometimes* he seems to be only one character among others (4:163 – whereas 4:164 highlights Moses; 6:85).

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43. See M. CUYPERS, *Le festin. Une lecture de la sourate al-Mâ'ida*, Paris, 2007, p. 351-352, and F. VAN DER VELDEN, "Kotexte im Konvergenzstrang – die Bedeutung textkritischer Varianten und christlicher Bezugstexte für die Redaktion von Sure 61 und Sure 5, 110-119," *Oriens Christianus* 92 (2008), p. 164-171.

44. In other words, the idea that the Qur'ān is the gathering of Muḥammad's *ipsissima verba* should certainly be given up. See e.g. K.-F. POHLMANN, *Die Entstehung des Korans*; G. DYE, "Pourquoi et comment se fait un texte canonique? Quelques réflexions sur l'histoire du Coran," in C. BROUWER, G. DYE and A. VAN ROMPAEY (eds.), *Hérésies: une construction d'identités religieuses*, Bruxelles, 2015, p. 55-104; *id.*, "The Qur'anic Mary and the Chronology of the Qur'ān." It should be noted also that the Qur'ān, in all probability, and whatever its shape then, did not play a central role in the life of the first generations of "Believers." See G. DYE, "Pourquoi et comment se fait un texte canonique?," p. 77-104.

In Q 37, there is a long list of prophetic figures, but no mention of him. Such lists do not agree with mainstream Christianity, but they do not agree with “Jewish Christianity” either: Jesus’ role is not central enough.

On the other hand, as noticed by Francisco del Río Sánchez,<sup>45</sup> there are lists of Qur’anic prophets which seem to exclude all prophets between Moses and Jesus. For example: “(Remember) when We made a covenant with the prophets – and from you, and from Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus, son of Mary – We made a firm covenant with them.” (Q 33:7)

This list is very significant – but is it specifically Jewish Christian, and does it reveal specific Jewish Christian tenets? Some cautiousness, once again, is allowed. Take, for example, the following text by Jacob of Edessa (c. 633-708):<sup>46</sup>

For what is Christianity except the covenant of God with humans? Now the covenant of God with humans, is from the time when God created the first man in His image and placed him in Paradise, whatever this is, and set down for him a law and a commandment which was from Him and gave him freedom of the will and admonished him to keep it. (...) We see that the covenant of God therefore was set down and entrusted to humans once, then it was set down and given to humans [*i. e.* several times afterwards]. And at a second time [it was given] to Adam and to his children, which is now this law which is natural and unwritten. And a third time with Noah and with his children. And a fourth time, with Abraham and Isaac. And a fifth time, with the people of the children of Israel by means of Moses and in written form.

Jacob then explains that the sixth time there has been a covenant, it was with the person of Christ – a very special covenant, for sure. The last (seventh) covenant will be at the end of the world. Of course, Jacob of Edessa lived after Muḥammad, but there is no reason to think that he is dependent here on the Qur’ān or on Muḥammad’s preaching. It seems more plausible to see this text as the expression of a possible conception of sacred history in the Christian Near East.

Jacob’s text has much in common with the Qur’ān. For Jacob, Christianity is more ancient than all the other “religions.” It is as old as creation or humankind. In fact, Christianity is the covenant of God with humans – no idea here of a developmental history of revelation, but the tenet of

45. F. DEL RÍO, “The Rejection of Muhammad’s Message,” p. 66-68.

46. This text comes from a book on canon law which is now lost, but some excerpts of Book XII are preserved in two different manuscripts of the British Library (BL 12, 154, fol. 164-165; BL 17, 193, fol. 58). I quote from J. TANNOUS, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam*, p. 216-217.



the same covenant renewed several times between God and humanity, and a continuous insistence on the importance of *law*. This is – on the formal level at least – very close to the Qur’anic model of prophecy (except that it seems that, in the Qur’ān, the prophets seem to be sent to a particular people, and not to the whole humankind). Moreover, the first covenant reminds of the Qur’anic “pre-eternal pact” (Q 7:172). It is also particularly significant that Jacob of Edessa refers to “Adam and his children,” “Noah and his children,” “Abraham and Isaac.” The question of prophets’ offspring and descendance is highlighted here – and this is a very prominent topic in the Qur’ān too.

The Qur’ān provides also another remarkable list of prophets (Q 3:33-34): “Surely God has chosen Adam and Noah, and the house of Abraham and the house of ‘Imrān over the worlds, some of them descendants of others.” The *crux interpretatum* concerns the expression “house of ‘Imrān” (*āl ‘imrān*). In light of its Qur’anic context, it refers to Jesus’ family (Mary is called “sister of Aaron” (Q 19:28), “daughter of ‘Imrān” (*bint ‘Imrān*) (66:12), and she is the biological daughter of “the wife of ‘Imrān” (*imrā’at ‘imrān*) (3:35-36)), but in a way which links Jesus and Mary to Moses’ family, with his father ‘Amran, his brother Aaron and his sister Miryam. I have argued elsewhere that there is neither a confusion between Mary and Miryam, nor a simple metaphor about Mary’s Aaronid ancestry, but something closer to a typological identification: when the Qur’ān states that Mary is Aaron’s sister and ‘Imrān’s daughter, it does not state that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is Aaron’s biological sister and ‘Imrān’s biological daughter, but it claims that she is prefigured, one way or another, by the “family of ‘Imrān,” especially Aaron and Miryam. Yet this typology is perfectly Christian – but it is not widespread, since it can be found, in this precise sense, *only* in the Jerusalem Marian traditions of the early 7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>47</sup>

In other words: sometimes we have a list of prophets which is not enough Christian to be counted as “Christian” or “Jewish Christian,” and sometimes we have perfectly Christian lists where, however, the ontological status of Jesus has been downplayed, in comparison to mainstream Christianity – as if we had several *strata* in the Qur’ān. Should we explain this by a Jewish Christian background influenced by Christianity, or as a kind of reaction to, or (re)interpretation of, Christian discourse, or in another way? Let us leave the question open, even if I would favour the second alternative.

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47. G. DYE, “Lieux saints communs,” p. 92-109; id., “The Qur’anic Mary and the Chronology of the Qur’ān.” This typology is made possible, in the Christian context, by the use of Jewish traditions about Aaron’s and Miryam’s dormitions – but that does not imply there is a Jewish Christian movement of any kind at work here.

## Conclusion

Even if I warned that fancying Jewish Christian *groups* behind the rise of Islam was too speculative (and unnecessary), one can concede that there is something that might be called a “Jewish Christian sensitivity” in the Qur’ān. It includes, among other things: a low Christology, where Jesus is a servant and a prophet but neither a divine being nor the son of God (even if the virginal birth is asserted), an insistence on law, and a certain conception of prophecy, which is, however, not specifically Jewish Christian.<sup>48</sup> Yet there are also elements which undeniably point towards Eastern Christianity as the most plausible context of the Qur’ān (I do not imply it is also the context of Muḥammad’s preaching – let us leave also this question open here): a Qur’anic Mariology deeply related to Christian Palestinian traditions, a typology between Adam and Jesus, a similar anti-Jewish rhetoric, many common points with Syriac cosmology, piety and eschatology,<sup>49</sup> and the fact that the closer parallels to the Qur’anic Biblical and para-biblical stories are to be found, most of the time, in Eastern Christianity...

How should we explain the presence of this “Jewish Christian sensitivity”? Not by the influence of an unknown Jewish Christian group, nor by Jewish Christian tenets transmitted in a very obscure way. Maybe a brief glance at the concrete religious situation of the Late Antique Middle East will bring some insights.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, confessional loyalties in the Late Antique Middle East were much more in flux than we generally believe. People could move back and forth from different church groups, not only in rural areas, but also close to the centres of theological power,<sup>51</sup> or inside the same family, from one generation to another.<sup>52</sup> There could be various reasons for this behaviour, even lucrative ones – in other words, “religious identity was being

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48. A topic I sadly cannot discuss here. See J.M.F. VAN REETH, “Melchisédech le Prophète éternel selon Jean d’Apamée et le monarchianisme musulman,” *Oriens Christianus* 96 (2012), p. 8-46; *id.*, “*Qui es-tu? Es-tu Élie? Est-tu le Prophète?* (Jean 1: 19-21) Transposition intertextuelle d’une prophétologie, de la Bible au Coran,” in P. CASSUTO & P. LARCHER (eds.), *Oralité et écriture dans la Bible et le Coran*, Aix-en-Provence, 2014, p. 145-162.

49. The classical study of the Syrian background of Qur’anic eschatology and piety is T. L., *Les origines de l’islam et le christianisme*, tr. J. ROCHES, Paris, 1955. See, however, J. COSTA, “*Olam ha-ze/’olam ha-ba, al-dunyā/al-aḥīra*: étude compare de deux couples de termes dans la littérature talmudique et le Coran,” *Arabica* 62 (2015), p. 234-259, on the Jewish background of some Qur’anic eschatology.

50. I owe much here to Tannous’ insightful discussion of this issue in his dissertation *Syria between Byzantium and Islam*, which provides many examples and contains some excellent formulas.

51. J. Tannous, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam*, p. 230.

52. J. Tannous, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam*, p. 227.

used instrumentally.”<sup>53</sup> This is true, not only between different Christian movements, but also between Christian and non-Christian religious groups.<sup>54</sup> Of course, it does not entail that relations between these groups were necessarily peaceful.

On the other hand, the theological elites were involved in building barriers and frontiers, and also in trying to get the adherence of ordinary Christians, as well as extirpating what they considered to be idolatrous beliefs or practices (beliefs and practices which were very widespread, and probably even more widespread than the so-called “orthodox” beliefs and practices). Most of the ordinary Christians had certainly other interests than border policy (which was as much boundary maintenance as boundary drawing),<sup>55</sup> even if frictions between Christians of opposed ideas were not uncommon either. Many disagreements of this kind are lost to us now, but we should be aware that the content of the tenets involved in such disagreements was very multifarious – without implying a group or community which necessarily followed such and such tenet.

This idea could be made clearer with the following experiment: suppose you make today a street survey and ask Christians about their Christological and more generally religious ideas. You might get many answers, sometimes in line with the official doctrine (but very often not) – but press these people a bit with a few malicious questions and you will realize that even most of those who answer in accordance to the official doctrine are certainly “heretics,” even if, probably, they do not realize it. And, more generally, you might find “Arians,” “Jewish Christians,” “Docetists,” and so on, among all the Christians interviewed. However, it does not mean that Arian, Jewish Christian, or Docetist communities are alive today and managed to survive, almost hidden, for centuries.

In fact, the 7<sup>th</sup> century is a time of “confessional kaleidoscope,”<sup>56</sup> not only on the level of popular religion (and of course with people Christianized only recently or lightly), but *also* on the level of many monks and clerics – not all, for sure, and clearly not on the level of the religious entrepreneurs of the theological elite who were involved in border policy. The range of beliefs available to Christians was large: we know, for example, that there were Christians in the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century who believed that polygamy was compatible with Christianity,<sup>57</sup> and they had some good reasons to think so, since the Bible allows polygamy – and highly blessed figures like Abraham, Jacob, or David are said to have been polygamous.

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53. J. Tannous, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam*, p. 233.

54. J. Tannous, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam*, p. 272.

55. J. Tannous, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam*, p. 272.

56. J. Tannous, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam*, p. 255.

57. J. Tannous, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam*, p. 258.

So, might they think with some reason – if they were polygamous, why not us?

Therefore, most probably, what I have called a “Jewish Christian sensitivity” was floating around – and we have no need to suppose a relation with earlier Jewish Christian communities, or even with Jewish Christian texts. In fact, the “Jewish Christian sensitivity” is a widespread sensitivity for people belonging to a Biblical or para-biblical culture, since it is based, for its Christology and its prophetology as well, on a Monarchianist theology, *i.e.* a kind of piety which highlights God’s uniqueness. Such theologies can be found outside Jewish Christianity (Paul of Samosata, Theodote of Byzantium...). And the idea of Jesus as a prophet or servant of God is scripturally warranted.

And this brings us to the next topic: how to generate “heresy.”<sup>58</sup> Of course, I use the (value-laden, and inappropriate) term “heresy” here only for the sake of convenience (perhaps it would be better to say only “how to generate different scriptural beliefs”). To generate “heresy,” what is needed is not a relation with a “heretic” movement, or with a “heretic” teacher – we should not posit unnecessary entities. What is simply needed is to read Scripture (which admits many possible readings, and which contains anyway multifarious, not to say contradictory, elements) in a way which is not consonant with the “orthodox” reading. Any reading of Scripture supposes taking some passages as fundamental and others as secondary, ignoring others, taking some passages literally, and others metaphorically, and so on. The various so-called “heretics” and the “orthodox” believers all do this; they only differ in their choices about the passages they rely on (and those they neglect), and the ways they read them. If, moreover, there is no agreement on what should count as Scripture (the hierarchy between canonical and non-canonical books was not well implemented at this time, and the sources of religious authority were quite diverse), the range of available interpretations expand even more.

In other words, Scripture (taken in a large sense, and not only as the Jewish or Christian canon), is a literary, thematic, symbolic and formulaic repertoire which is the tank where so-called “heretics” and orthodox take their stuff, in different and even sometimes opposed ways, through phenomena of reinterpretation, appropriation and subversion of competing readings and tenets.<sup>59</sup> I suggest that this is the kind of phenomenon we should refer to when we want to explain the presence of supposed “Jewish Christian” ideas of the Qur’ān.

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58. J. Tannous, *Syria between Byzantium and Islam*, p. 397-98.

59. Note that this is something usual with “nativist” movements. On Early Islam as a nativist movement (an open question, to my mind, which deserves further study), see the reflections of P. CRONE, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Princeton, 1987, p. 247-252.

This approach seems to me less speculative, and more economical and more realistic. My point is not that we should take into account only “mainstream” religious ideas or movements – far from that. Islam was born indeed in a highly sectarian milieu, but not the kind of sectarian milieu sometimes referred to, *i.e.* I do not see early Islam as the surgeon of a marginal and almost hidden Jewish Christian movement. The sectarian milieu I have in mind is rather the one described in the previous pages – a very diverse religious landscape with many rival but porous confessional groups, escaping, most of the time, the control of the “orthodox” boundary makers.



# THE JEWISH AND/OR CHRISTIAN AUDIENCE OF THE QUR'ĀN AND THE ARABIC BIBLE

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Many stories in the Qu'rān are only understandable to those with a good working knowledge of a wide range of Jewish and Christian narratives. What does this tell us about the nature and identity of the Qu'rān's intended audience? Is it reasonable to assume that this knowledge was imparted/acquired orally or should we conclude that some familiarity with textual sources is necessary to account for the knowledge evidently possessed by Muḥammad's adherents? And does it not make sense to infer that an Arabic translation of the Bible was one of these written sources (*pace* Griffith)?

Ever since Geiger in the early nineteenth century, with renewed efforts by Torrey and Bell in the early twentieth, scholars have sought to demonstrate Jewish and Christian influence upon the content of the Qu'rān.<sup>1</sup> This influence is evident not only in its stories about Old and New Testament figures, but also in many of its legal and ritual prescriptions. Moreover, the Qu'rān recounts some stories in a very allusive and elliptical manner and one cannot really discern their import if one does not know the Jewish or Christian counterpart to which they refer. Much less attention has been paid to what this tells us about Muḥammad's audience. Since the Qu'rān contains both Jewish and Christian narratives, does this mean that Muḥammad's followers were acquainted with both traditions? And if so, would this imply that they were Judaeo-Christians of some sort, or was West Arabia exposed to Jewish *and* Christian teachings to a much greater extent than has usually been supposed? Or else should we infer that we only have the Qu'rān in an abbreviated form and that Muḥammad imparted these accounts (at least on some occasions) in a fuller form?

Let me first give an illustration of what I mean before I continue this line of thinking. A simple example is provided by the story of how Mary, mother of Jesus, was given sustenance by a palm tree (Q 19:24): "He (the new-born Jesus) called to her (Mary) from below her (*min taḥtihā*): 'Do not be sad, your Lord has put below you a rivulet (*sarīyan*).'" Although the

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1. A. GEIGER, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen*, Bonn, 1833. Ch. TORREY, *The Jewish Foundation Of Islam*, New York, 1933; R. BELL, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*, London, 1926.

mention of a “rivulet” is not immediately comprehensible here, the Qu’rān is clearly alluding to the tale in the Christian tradition that recounts how Mary, tired on the journey to Egypt, sought rest under a palm tree, whereupon Jesus, “looking up from his mother’s bosom”, calls upon the palm tree to lower its fruit-bearing branches and to let a stream come out from under it so that Mary is able to eat and drink.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the verses in the Qu’rān that relate episodes connected with the Bible concern Old Testament characters rather than New Testament ones, and for that reason it has been assumed, at least since Torrey, that Muḥammad was much more indebted to Judaism than to Christianity. However, many of the narratives in the Qu’rān about Old Testament personalities are closer to versions found in late antique Christian commentaries and homilies than to those occurring in the Old Testament itself or in late antique rabbinic works. This has recently been demonstrated by Josef Witztum in connection with the Qur’anic tales about Satan refusing to bow before Adam, Cain and Abel, Abraham’s building of the Ka’ba and Joseph’s relationship with Potiphar’s wife.<sup>3</sup> Here I would like to present the intriguing case of the anonymous sleeper of Q 2:259:<sup>4</sup>

Or it is like the one who passed by a township which had fallen into ruin. He said, “How will God bring this to life after its death?” So God made him die for a hundred years; then He revived him. He said, “How long have you remained (thus)?” The man said, “I have remained (thus) a day or part of a day.” He said, “Rather, you have remained (thus) one hundred years. Look at your food and your drink; it has not gone bad. And look at your donkey; and so that, We make you a sign for the people, look at the

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2. The Qu’rān itself recounts elements of this story in 19:23-26. For the Christian traditions (especially the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*) see G. PARRINDER, *Jesus in the Qur’an*. Oxford, 1995, p. 75-78, and S. MOURAD, “Mary in the Qu’rān: a re-examination of her presentation,” in G.S. REYNOLDS (ed.), *The Qur’an in its Historical Context*, London-New York, 2008, p. 167-69, who notes that the story draws on the Greek myth of Leto’s labour and the birth of Apollo. J. VAN REETH, “L’Evangile du Prophète,” in D. DE SMET *et al.* ed., *Al-Kitāb: La sacralité du texte dans le monde de l’Islam*, Brussels, 2004, p. 165-66, explains the Qu’rān’s placement of the palm-tree story amid the birth of Jesus (not in the course of Mary’s flight from Egypt) by reference to the influence of the Diatesseron tradition. S. SHOEMAKER, “Christmas in the Qu’rān: the Qur’anic account of Jesus’ nativity and Palestinian local tradition,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28 (2003), p. 11-39, links these traditions with the Kathisma church near Jerusalem to argue for a Palestinian origin.

3. J. WITZTUM, *The Syriac Milieu of the Qur’an: the recasting of Biblical narratives*, Princeton University (PhD. Thesis), 2011; see also *id.*, “The Foundations of the House (Q 2:127),” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72 (2009), p. 25-40.

4. I used this example in an unpublished lecture entitled “The Language of the Qu’rān and a Near Eastern Rip van Winkle,” which was given at an event in Marburg, in May 2012, on the occasion of the retirement of Professor Wim Raven.



bones (of this donkey) how We put them in their place and then We clothe them with flesh." And when it became clear to him, he said, "I know that God has power over all things."

No further information is given here or elsewhere in the Qur'an as to the identity of "the township that had fallen into ruin" or of the person who questioned God's ability to revive it. The majority of Muslim commentators were in agreement that the former was Jerusalem, but were divided over whether the latter was Jeremiah (sometimes identified with al-Khidr) or Ezra ('Uzayr in Arabic).<sup>5</sup> Both of these prophets were connected by the writings attributed to them with the sack of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. Yet in the works of Jewish and Christian exegetes neither was known to have undergone a lengthy period of sleep. This honor went to the Ethiopian Abimelech, the faithful servant of Jeremiah, who was rewarded by God for his loyal service (he twice freed his master from imprisonment) by being spared from witnessing the destruction of Jerusalem. Though this character is known in the Jewish tradition, it is the story told by a Greek Christian apocryphal text known as *4 Baruch* or "the things omitted from Jeremiah" (*Paraleipomena Jeremiou*) that seems closest to the Qur'anic narrative.<sup>6</sup>

Just before the siege of the holy city commenced, Abimelech was sent by Jeremiah to collect some figs to give to the sick; having picked a few and put them in his basket he lay down under a tree to rest, whereupon God, in observance of the promise he had made to Jeremiah, put him to sleep for sixty-six years. When Abimelech awakes, he assumes that, like the man of Q 2:259, he has only slept for a little while (*oligon*), "a day or part of a day" (*yawman aw ba'da yawmin*). Interestingly, we encounter the same reaction – and the same wording (18:19) – in another account of extended sleep, namely "the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus", or in the Qur'anic

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5. Jeremiah tends to be regarded as the more likely contender and al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, M.J. DE GOEJE *et al.* (ed.), Leiden, 1866-1901, 1, p. 647-8, has him perform exactly the same actions as Abimelech does in *4 Baruch* (on which see below), except that he sleeps for 70 years, which, interestingly, is the figure given in the Coptic version of this text (again see below). The Muslim tradition would seem to have omitted the minor characters of Abimelech and Baruch and assigned their roles to Jeremiah. For full discussion see H. SCHÜTZINGER, "Die arabische Jeremia-Erzählungen und ihre Beziehungen zur jüdischen religiösen Überlieferung," *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 25 (1973), p. 2-8.

6. In the Bible (Jer. 39:16-18) Jeremiah's servant (called Ebedmelech rather than Abimelech) is told by God that he will escape the destruction of Jerusalem, but it is not revealed how this comes about and it is this gap that *4 Baruch* fills. Since it draws upon the first-century Syriac text *2 Baruch* (which does not mention Abimelech), *4 Baruch* is usually dated to the late first/early second century AD (see J. HERZER, *4 Baruch (Paraleipomena Jeremiou)*, Atlanta, 2005, p. xxx-xxxvi). For earlier scholarship on the link between Q 2:259 and Abimelech/Ebedmelech see H. SCHÜTZINGER, "Die arabische Jeremia-Erzählungen," p. 9-13.

recasting “the companions of the cave” (*ahl al-kahf*), which relates how a group of youths hide in a cave from the persecution of the pagan emperor Decius and are put to sleep by God only to wake up some three centuries later in a now Christian realm (18:9-26).

Abimelech sets off towards Jerusalem, but he is confused by the changed appearance of the city. He asks an old man on the road about the whereabouts of Jeremiah and receives the answer that the prophet is now in captivity in Babylon with much of Jerusalem’s Jewish population. Abimelech argues that not enough time has elapsed for all of this to have happened and he remarks upon the freshness of his figs in order to confirm how little time can have gone by. But the old man points to the fields, observing that the crops have not yet matured and figs are not yet in season. This immediately signals to Abimelech, and to us, that his perception of time is out of synch with the reality of the world around him. A similar moment of recognition features in the Qur’anic tale of the sleepers of the cave, when one of them tries to purchase goods in the market with coins of the pagan emperor Decius, only to be told by the vendor that they are no longer in circulation.<sup>7</sup> In the case of both the figs and the coins, they are out of their proper time, an anachronism, and so make clear to their owners that they too are an anachronism.

Abimelech was next taken by an angel of the Lord to see Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe, who, on seeing the figs, proclaims (6:5):

Look at this basket of figs, for behold, they are sixty-six years old and have not become shriveled or gone bad (*ouk emaranthēsan oudhe ōzesan*), but they are dripping milky juice (*alla stazousi tou galaktos*).

The figs dripping with milky juice echo the “food and drink” of Q 2:259, as indeed was realized by Muslim commentators, who explain the words in the Qu’rān as a reference to “fruits and their juice,”<sup>8</sup> even though they attribute them to Jeremiah rather than to Abimelech. The same observation, “they have not gone bad” (*oudhe ōzesan / lam yatasan-nah*), is found in both texts, and the point of this statement in the Qu’rān,

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7. We only learn this from the Christian account; the Qur’anic narrative is characteristically elliptical, but clearly alludes to it: “So send one of you with this silver coin of yours to the city and let him look to which is the best food and bring you provision from it, but let him not make you known to anyone, for if they become aware of you they will stone you or return you to their religion, and then you will never prosper. And thus did We bring about their discovery” (18:19).

8. For example, al-Ṭabarī in his commentary on this verse (*Jāmi’ al-bayān fī ta’wīl al-qur’ān*, ed. ‘A.‘A. AL-TURKI, Rabat, 2001, 4.596) quotes the paraphrase of Isma’īl al-Suddī (d. 774): “Look at your food [of dates and grapes/*min al-tīn wa-l-‘inab*] and your drink [of juice/*min al-‘aṣīr*].”

which some scholars have branded illogical or obscure,<sup>9</sup> now becomes clear. Indeed, the phrase is doubly meaningful. On the one hand, the fact that the figs have “not gone bad,” though out of season, serves to occasion a moment of *anagnōrīsis* in their owner, a sudden realization of the truth about his situation and how long he has slept. And on the other hand, the fact that the figs have “not gone bad” after such a long passage of time is a clear indication of the intervention of God and of his power over all Creation, plants just as much as humans and animals.

Though *4 Baruch* is set in the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, it is an early Christian text, and one that emphasizes the idea of the resurrection. The verbs used for Abimelech’s sleep and awakening, *anapausis* and *exypnizein*, allude to the sleep of death and the entry into eternal life. The ripe flesh and juice of the figs symbolizes the fleshly home (*sarkikos oikos*), the dwelling place of the soul, which shall not rot, but will be reserved for the bodily resurrection promised to the righteous, as is indicated by what Baruch goes on to say to Abimelech after his exclamation about his ripe figs:

Thus will it be for you, my flesh, if you do the things commanded you by the angel of righteousness. He who preserved the basket of figs, the same one will again preserve you by his power (6.6-7).

Bodily resurrection is a key aspect of Christian doctrine and features already in the New Testament, but it is also a major theme in the Qu’rān, and indeed it links the stories of the companions of the cave and the subject of verse 2:259. In both cases, the sleepers are put to sleep and roused from it directly by God, the verb for the latter action being *ba’atha*, which is also employed in the context of the resurrection of the God-fearing on Judgement Day. In both cases, too, the sleepers are asked how long they remained (*kam labithtum*) in their respective sleeping spots, and this same question is, according to Qu’rān 23:113, put to the souls of the departed lined up on Judgement Day, with the sense of how long had they remained on the earth. In all three cases, the answer is the same: “a day or a part of a day,” though it is of course a common perception of multi-year sleepers that they have only dozed a brief while, as for example in the tale of Abimelech above and also in the Greek myth of Epimenides, who awakes after a fifty-seven-year sleep in a cave in Crete firmly of the opinion that his slumber was of short duration (*nomizōn ep’ oligon kekoimēsthai*).<sup>10</sup>

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9. E.g. Ch. LUXENBERG, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Qu’rān*, New York, 2007: “One cannot see why God first of all points out to the man who has been restored to life that his food and drink have not gone bad.”

10. Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum*, ed. M. MARCOVICH, Stuttgart, 1999-2002, p. 109.

The other element of the story of verse 2:259 that has been considered obscure is the man's donkey. One could assume that it is a mistake and try to retool it, as Christoph Luxenberg does in his analysis of this verse, replacing the Arabic word for "donkey" (*himār*) with the Syriac word for "perfection" (*gemārā*).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, one does not need to turn to Syriac for this reinterpretation; the Arabic root underlying the word "donkey" conveys the sense of redness, ruddiness, and one could stretch this to healthiness. Both the Syriac "perfection" and the Arabic "ruddiness/healthiness" would seem to fit well with the remaining portion of the Qur'anic verse, which speaks of Abimelech's rejuvenation: the re-knitting of his bones and re-clothing with flesh, itself an allusion to Ezekiel's vision of how God spoke to dry bones, saying:

Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live: I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord (37:5-6).

Otherwise, one could cast around for parallels in other traditions from which the Qu'rān might have borrowed, such as the Talmudic tale of the enigmatic Ḥoni the Circle-Drawer, a holy man and miracle-worker of the first century BC, who fell asleep for 70 years and upon waking saw that his donkey was still alive and had sired many offspring.<sup>12</sup> One could also, though, simply accept that the Qu'rān is not merely imitating Jewish and Christian narratives, but innovating to some extent and producing its own distinctive new take on old stories. In this view, one could regard the donkey as a narrative elaboration that took place in the Arabic-speaking monotheist circles of Syria-West Arabia. The same goes, perhaps, for the dog that acts as a guardian in the tale of the companions of the cave. And this is an interesting point: not only does the Qu'rān assume that its audience knows these Biblical tales, but what is more it is alluding to different versions of these tales from those that are known to us from mainstream Jewish and Christian texts.

From what we have said, it would seem certain that the story of Abimelech and the figs, as expounded in the Christian apocryphal text known as *4 Baruch*, underlies Q 2:259. The same story appears in a Coptic Jeremiah apocryphon that was copied in the seventh century, so we know that it was still in circulation among Christian communities of the

11. C. LUXENBERG, *Syro-Aramaic Reading*, p. 194-95.

12. For references and previous scholarship see H. SCHÜTZINGER, "Die arabische Jeremia-Erzählungen," p. 12-13. Note that again food plays a role in indicating the passage of time, for the first thing Ḥoni sees when he awakes is a man picking carobs, and when he asks him "are you the man who planted the tree?", he is told that he is his grandson whereupon "he exclaimed: It is clear that I slept for seventy years!".

Near East at the time of Muḥammad.<sup>13</sup> This example, therefore, backs up the contention of Luxenberg, Witztum and many others, though arrived at and expressed in different ways, that late antique Christian texts are more often the inspiration for the Qu'rān than the Jewish tradition. Even direct allusions to the Old Testament, such as that in Q 2:255 ("God is neither affected by slumber or sleep" / *lā ta'kudhuhu sina wa-lā nawm*) in respect of Psalms 121:4 ("He who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps" / *lā yanūm wa-lā yīṣān*), need not exclude a Christian origin, since large portions of the Old Testament had become part and parcel of Christian lore by the seventh century. So could we go as far as to say, that all of the references to the Old Testament in the Qu'rān had come via Christianity? This would require further investigation, but certainly we could reasonably make the case that late antique Christianity, particularly its Syriac form, could have provided all the raw material for the Qu'ranic Biblical narratives without there being any necessary recourse to Jews or, for that matter, to Judaeo-Christians.

But how was this material transmitted to Muḥammad's Arabia? Sidney Griffith has provided some interesting discussion of this question and his conclusion is, in a nutshell, that Syriac Christianity was *only* disseminated orally to Arabophone Christians in Arabic:

Given the lack of an earlier written translation of any portion of the Bible done under Jewish or Christian auspices prior to the rise of Islam, and the consequent fact that for liturgical and other purposes, especially among Christians, translations must have been done on the spot by Arabic-speaking Christians according to an oral tradition of translation from mostly Syriac originals, the somewhat counterintuitive conclusion emerges that the Arabic Qu'rān, in the form in which it was collected and published in writing in the seventh century, is after all the first scripture written in Arabic.<sup>14</sup>

And much the same position has recently been advocated by Emran el-Badawy: "It is they [Arabic-speaking Christians] who were the cultural agents, this study argues, absorbing various elements of the Aramaic Gospel Traditions into the oral tradition of pre-Islamic Arabia, elements that eventually entered into the Qu'rān's milieu".<sup>15</sup>

No concrete proof has so far been unearthed to counter the assumption that Syriac Christian ideas and stories were communicated only by oral means to the West Arabians of Muḥammad's day; as Griffith notes:

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13. See K.H. KUHN, "A Coptic Jeremiah Apocryphon", *Le Muséon* 83 (1970), p. 97. The story of Abimelech/Ebedmelech is recounted in paragraphs 22 and 38-40 (*ibid.*, p. 293-94 and p. 320-24).

14. S. GRIFFITH, *The Bible in Arabic*, Princeton, 2013, p. 53.

15. E. EL-BADAWI, *The Qur'an and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, London, 2013, p. 8.

“there is as yet no sure basis to support the thesis that prior to the rise of Islam Arabic-speaking Christians were in possession of a written Arabic Bible, or portions of it, such as the Gospel or the Psalms.”<sup>16</sup> The evidence for a pre-Islamic Arabic Bible is indeed mostly circumstantial and relies on two key points. Firstly, there is the fact that in the course of the fourth-sixth centuries Christians of other language traditions (Georgian, Armenian, Coptic, Christian Palestinian Aramaic-speakers and others) worked in tandem with Greco-Syriac missionaries to have key Christian texts translated into their own tongues, devising a new script for that purpose. Secondly, there is the fact that a distinctively Arabic script began to be used by Arabophone Christian communities in Yemen and Syria<sup>17</sup> from the late fifth century onwards, as is attested by a number of surviving inscriptions.<sup>18</sup>

The focus of Griffith, el-Badawy and others in their discussion of the existence of a pre-Islamic Arabic Bible is very much on Muḥammad’s Hijaz, but two of the pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions are found on the lintels of churches in Syria, one near Aleppo and the other, dated to 567 AD, near Damascus; the latter is placed there next to a Greek text on the orders of the person who commissioned the building, one Sharahil ibn Zalim. It makes more sense, then, to concentrate on late antique Syro-Mesopotamia and Palestine when considering a home for the incubation of an Arabic Bible rather than Muḥammad’s locale. In Syro-Mesopotamia we encounter the likes of the holy man Ahudemmeḥ, who would “visit all the camps of the Arabs, instructing and teaching them in many sermons... establishing in every tribe a priest and a deacon...and founding churches and naming them after tribal chiefs.”<sup>19</sup> To the southwest, in Palestine, we observe the celebrated monk Euthymius (d. 473) attracting the devotion of the local Arabophone pastoralist tribes, whom he catechised and baptised, successfully encouraged to build churches and settle nearby, and

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16. S. GRIFFITH, *The Bible in Arabic*, 49. He is here discussing the theories of Irfan Shahid and Hikmat Kachouh that the Bible existed in written Arabic translation in pre-Islamic times.

17. And very likely also southwest Iraq, most obviously around al-Hira, but we have no contemporary evidence for this, only the say so of later Arabic sources; see E. HUNTER, “The Christian Matrix of al-Hira,” in C. JULLIEN (ed.), *Les Controverses des Chrétiens dans l’Iran Sassanide*, Paris, 2008, p. 41-56, and I. TORAL-NIEHOFF, *Al-Hira: Eine arabische Kulturmetropole im spätantiken Kontext*, Leiden, 2014.

18. This material is now handily collected and discussed (by Z.T. Fiema, A. al-Jallad, M.C.A. Macdonald and L. Nehme) in G. FISHER, *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, Oxford, 2015, p. 395-433. The inscriptions from Yemen are not mentioned there; see Ch.J. ROBIN, 2014: “Inscriptions antiques de la région de Najrān”, *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres: Comptes Rendus de l’année 2014*, p. 1033-1128.

19. “Histoires d’Ahudemmeḥ et de Marouta”, ed./tr. F. NAU, *Patrologia Orientalis* 3, 1905, p. 26-27.

assigned them priests and deacons.<sup>20</sup> In the political arena of this region we find the Christian Arabophone brothers, al-Ḥārith and Abū Kārib, sons of Jabala, acknowledged as kings and powerbrokers on a variety of different media: local inscriptions, the colophon of a sixth-century Syriac manuscript from a monastery near Palmyra, a south Arabian monumental building, a papyrus from Petra, as well as in Byzantine historical and religious texts, which document their role as soldiers and supporters of the church in the eastern provinces of the Empire.<sup>21</sup> As regards more direct links between Arabic and the Bible in this region, we have Jerome talking about “the Arabic language” in the context of his translations of the books of Daniel and Job, and an Arabic glossary on the Psalms surviving on a papyrus in the mosque of Damascus has been shown to have its roots in “pre-Islamic Graeco-Arabic texts”.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, though Syria-Palestine may well have been the home of Arabophone Christianity, the fact that Christianity had also become entrenched in Yemen by the sixth century meant that Muḥammad’s audience in central west Arabia would have been exposed to Christian traffic passing between southwest Arabia and the Levant in the form of various Christian officials and emissaries, priests and holy men. For instance, the first two bishops of Najran in north Yemen were consecrated by the renowned Philoxenus, bishop of Mabbug, in the early sixth century; and the south Arabian martyr Elias had been a monk at the convent of Mar Abraham of Tella (east of Edessa) and had been ordained a priest by John, bishop of Tella. The connection was strong enough between the two regions that the news of Christians killed by the Jewish king of Yemen in the 520s very quickly spread and prompted such senior figures as Jacob, bishop of Serug, and John the Psalter, from the monastery of Aphtonia at Qenneshre (east of Aleppo), to pen works in honor of these Christians martyrs.<sup>23</sup>

In any case it would seem to be agreed by all that Biblical and quasi-Biblical narratives were circulating in Arabic among Christian Arabo-

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20. “Life of Euthymius” in Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the monks of Palestine*, ed. E. SCHWARTZ, Leipzig, 1939 (tr. R.M. PRICE, Kalamazoo, 1991), 18.24-25.

21. F. MILLAR, “Rome’s Arab Allies in Antiquity,” in H. BÖRM and J. WIESEHÖFER, (eds.), *Commutatio et Contentio: Studies in memory of Zeev Rubin*, Dusseldorf, 2010, p. 210-13; F. MILLAR, “A Syriac Codex from near Palmyra and the ‘Ghassanid’ Abokarib,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 16 (2013), p. 15-35.

22. F. MILLAR, “Jerome and Palestine,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 29 (2010), p. 76; A. AL-JALLAD, *The Damascus Psalm Fragment: Middle Arabic and the Legacy of Old Higazi* (Oriental Institute; Chicago, forthcoming), Appendix 2 and chapter 3.

23. I. SHAHID, *The Martyrs of Najran: new documents*, Brussels, 1971, p. vi-vii/p. 45-46 (ed./tr.); R. SCHRÖTER, “Trostschriften Jacobs von Sarug an die himjaritischen Christen,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 31 (1877), p. 361-405.

phone populations inside and on the Arabian borderlands of the Byzantine and Persian empires before Islam, whether only in oral form or in both oral and written form. Perhaps, then, rather than continuing to hunt down the elusive specter of Judeo-Christian communities in west Arabia, it would be worthwhile to devote more attention to the different ways in which a monotheist vocabulary and a monotheist corpus of (oral and/or written) literature had been developed and disseminated in Arabic across the Syro-Mesopotamian and Arabian regions in the century or so before Muḥammad. It inevitably entailed interaction with other Christian traditions and Christian literatures, in particular with the Peshitta Bible, which was the most authoritative version of the Christian Scripture in the Aramaic-speaking lands of the Near East in the sixth century.<sup>24</sup> To some extent at least the Qu'rān assumes such a Christian Arabic *Vorlage*. The advanced form of the Qu'rān's polemic, both in terms of language and arguments, and the familiarity of Muḥammad's audience with so much Biblical material make it certain that monotheist vocabulary and concepts had circulated in the Hijaz long before Muhamamd's lifetime.<sup>25</sup> Although much of this material may have been spread orally, some of the allusions to the Bible in the Qu'rān are suggestive of a written context.<sup>26</sup> Further investigation of this point, which is effectively a refinement of Luxenberg's position, might open up a whole new avenue of research, namely the reconstruction of pre-Islamic theological discourse in Arabic.

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24. S. Griffith and E. el-Badawi assume Aramaic-Arabic bilingualism explains the interaction, though some posit direct knowledge of Syriac; e.g. S. Seppälä, "Reminiscences of Icons in the Qur'an?," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22 (2011), p. 3-21, see p. 7: "My own estimation is that, if the author of the Qu'rān had direct contact with Christian texts, the most likely possibility is that he heard recitation of Syriac hymns related to liturgical feasts, in addition to Gospel readings from Syriac Qeryana."

25. This point is argued in a different vein by G. HAWTING, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*, Cambridge, 2006, and P. CRONE, "The Religion of the Qur'anic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities," *Arabica* 57 (2010), p. 151-200, in their studies on the monotheist coloring of the *mushrikūn*.

26. Consider the example in Ch. LUXENBERG, *Syro-Aramaic Reading*, p. 210-11: the parallel between Q 24:31 ("let them [believing women] not stamp their feet [*lā yaḍribna bi-arjulihinna*] to give knowledge of the finery they conceal") and Isaiah 3:16 ("[the women of Zion] walk and trip along with their feet tinkling [from their ankle-rings]") – in the version of the Peshitta Bible, which has *mṭarrpān b-reglaybēn*, rather than that of the Hebrew Bible, which has *ṭāfōf b-raglehem* – is more suggestive of written rather than purely oral transmission.



# DU *VERUS PROPHETA* CHRÉTIEN (ÉBIONITE ?) AU « SCEAU DES PROPHÈTES » MUSULMAN

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« Ils disent que les prophètes sont des prophètes  
de l'intelligence et non pas de la vérité ».  
Épiphane de Salamine, *Panarion* XXX, 18, 5

*Dans cette étude, on examine le thème du Verus propheta chrétien au « Sceau des Prophètes » musulman en passant par le Sceau des Prophètes manichéen dont les significations sont tout aussi semblables que différentes. On tente ensuite d'établir un lien théorique entre ces trois doctrines, la chrétienne, la manichéenne et la musulmane avec la pratique de la dissimulation (en arabe la taqiyya) qui les a caractérisées, du moins dans certains de leurs cercles minoritaires plus que majoritaires. On traite aussi de l'expression « Sceau de la Prophétie », présente dans la tradition manichéenne comme dans la tradition musulmane, qui signifie « confirmation, attestation, signe », sans être revendiquée par Mahomet.*

*This study examines the category of Christian Verus propheta to the Muslim "Seal of Prophets" through the Manichean Seal of Prophets whose meanings are also similar that different. It then attempts to establish a theorist link between these three doctrines, the Christian, the Manichean and the Muslim with the practice of camouflage (taqiyya in Arabic) that has characterized them, at least in some of their more majority than minority circles. This study also deals with the expression "Seal of the Prophecy", present in the Manichean tradition as in the Muslim tradition, which means "confirmation, certificate, sign", without be claimed by Muḥammad.*

Venant d'un spécialiste du judaïsme et du christianisme, un peu moins du manichéisme et pas du tout de l'islam, le propos de cette contribution va proposer une recherche sur le « Sceau des Prophètes »<sup>1</sup>. Un concept dont les origines et les influences sont particulièrement difficiles à établir, mais

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1. Je tiens à remercier Mohammad-Ali Amir-Moezzi et Guillaume Dye pour leur lecture efficace et perspicace d'une première version de ce texte. Je reste bien sûr seul responsable de ses faiblesses et de ses erreurs.

dont les conséquences sont importantes, car conduisant à l'adhésion de telle ou telle religion et à la reconnaissance de son prophète comme le dernier d'une chaîne plus ou moins longue, sans compter l'impact politique qui en ressort dans son acceptation.

Dans cette contribution, la problématique centrale n'est pas tellement celle des origines « judéo-chrétiennes » de l'islam à propos desquelles les hypothèses sont foisonnantes, mais celle des influences qui se sont exercées sur le mouvement de Mahomet à travers le concept du « Sceau des Prophètes ».

Observons d'emblée que, s'il est bien connu que les religions s'empruntent les unes les autres par de multiples contacts de tout ordre, il est moins connu en revanche que ces emprunts sont difficiles à situer dans le temps et dans l'espace, surtout qu'ils sont toujours dissimulés : notamment en se disant originaux, alors qu'ils ne le sont pas nécessairement. Le christianisme, le manichéisme et l'islam ont en commun d'être des formes religieuses d'essence prophétique qui présentent toutes trois la spécificité d'avoir été développées autour d'une figure charismatique – Jésus, Mani et Mahomet –, qu'elles considèrent chacune à sa manière comme le dernier d'une chaîne, comme le « Vrai Prophète » ou comme le « Sceau des Prophètes ».

Observons aussi que l'idée de « fin » que véhicule la thématique symbolique du « sceau » a toujours été liée dans le développement de l'histoire des idées religieuses ou politiques à celle des origines. Ce qui clôture doit être en même temps ce qui a été premier, autrement dit : à l'origine des origines. C'est pourquoi la plupart des perspectives liées à cette thématique ont fait appel à une revendication d'antériorité ou de préexistence, qui concerne essentiellement le message apporté par Moïse (notamment pour la Torah), Jésus, Mani et Mahomet. Ainsi, les Écritures, considérées comme saintes, mises sous leurs noms, sont tenues pour la parole de Dieu qui les a dictées aux prophètes.

Par ailleurs, cette idée semble en opposition avec l'enseignement ésotérique par communication directe avec la divinité qui se transmet par oral ou par écrit de manière initiatique. Un enseignement que l'on rencontre dans certains cercles du judaïsme (les mystiques), du christianisme (les gnostiques) ou de l'islam (le chiisme imamite et ismaélien)<sup>2</sup>. On le retrouve aussi dans des cercles mystiques et spirituels tardo-antiques du néoplatonisme et du néopythagorisme. Vu la place et le temps impartis, toutes les remarques et réflexions présentes dans cette contribution seront nécessairement condensées et parfois schématisées.

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2. Parmi une bibliographie relativement abondante, voir par exemple H. CORBIN, « De la gnose antique à la gnose ismaélienne », dans *Oriente e Occidente nel Medioevo. Convegno di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, Rome 1957, p. 105-146 (= *Temps cyclique et gnose ismaélienne*, Paris 1982, 3e partie).

### I. Le *Verus Propheta* dans le christianisme<sup>3</sup>

La doctrine du *Verus Propheta* est fondamentale pour comprendre l'éclatement du mouvement chrétien parmi les diverses revendications prophétiques à caractère eschatologique du judaïsme, notamment dans certaines de ses branches plutôt minoritaires<sup>4</sup>.

La doctrine – ou le mythe – du « Vrai Prophète » ou « Prophète de Vérité », se rencontre, non sans quelques nuances qui ne sont pas seulement de l'ordre de la terminologie, dans les écrits chrétiens que l'on considère comme appartenant soit à la tendance judaïsante, soit à la tendance gnosticisante.

Dans les écrits qui relèvent de ces formes de pensée, il s'agit de deux représentations thématiques : celle de l'*Adam redivivus*, chez les judaïsants et celle du *Seth redivivus*, chez les gnosticisants. On peut par conséquent affirmer que deux représentations du *Verus Propheta* sont connues : la première chez les chrétiens judaïsants ; la seconde chez les chrétiens gnosticisants. Chacune de ces deux représentations a été inventoriée et analysée par Luigi Cirillo dans une contribution remarquable<sup>5</sup> : ce qui lui a permis de montrer que dans les écrits, on trouve développée, non sans des variantes, une seule et même structure. Observons cependant que selon Giovanni

3. Ces éléments sont repris non sans compléments et rectifications de S.C. Mimiouni, « La doctrine du *Verus Propheta* de la littérature pseudo-clémentine chez Henry Corbin et ses élèves », dans M.-A. AMIR-MOEZZI, C. JAMBET et P. LORY (éd.), *Henry Corbin. Philosophies et sagesse des Religions du Livre. Actes du Colloque « Henry Corbin »*. Sorbonne, les 6-8 novembre 2003, Turnhout, 2005, p. 165-175. Voir aussi A. LE BOULLUEC, « La doctrine du Vrai Prophète dans les écrits pseudo-clémentins », dans M.A. AMIR-MOEZZI (ÉD.), *L'ésotérisme shi'ite : ses racines et ses prolongements – Shi'ite Esotericism: Its Roots and Developments*, Turnhout, 2016, p. 139-162 : ce travail, paru après la rédaction de la présente contribution, semble vouloir se situer au niveau de la comparaison toujours délicate pour ne pas dire difficile ou impossible avec l'islam chi'ite.

4. La littérature sur cette question n'est pas très abondante, outre les quelques références qui vont être mentionnées ici, voir C. COLPE, *Das Siegel der Propheten. Historische Beziehungen zwischen Judentum, Judenchristentum, Heidentum und frühen Islam*, Berlin, 1990, spécialement p. 38-58. Voir aussi G. FILORAMO, « Le prophétisme du roman pseudo-clémentin dans le contexte historico-religieux de l'Antiquité tardive », dans F. AMSLER, A. FREY, C. TOUATI et R. GIRARDET (éd.), *Nouvelles intrigues pseudo-clémentines – Plots in the Pseudo-Clementine Romance*. Lausanne 2008, p. 351-359. Voir encore H.M. TEEPLE, *The Prophet in the Clementines*, Evanston/Illinois, 1993. Voir surtout D.H. CARLSTON, « The True Prophet's Teaching as an Exegetical Criterion », dans *Jewish-Christian Interpretation of the Pentateuch in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*, Minneapolis, 2013, p. 77-109.

5. L. CIRILLO, « *Verus Propheta* », dans C. JAMBET (éd.), *Henry Corbin*, Paris, 1981, p. 240-255. Voir aussi *id.*, « *Verus Propheta* et l'histoire du salut », dans K. FRÖHLICH (éd.), *Testimonia Cœcumenica in honorem Oscar Cullmann octogenarii die XXV februari A.D. MCMLXXXII*, Tübingen: 1982, p. 51-53.

Filoramo, la figure du *Seth redivivus* dans les écrits gnostiques ne tient aucun rôle prophétique, sa fonction principale consistant d'une part, dans la fondation du monde céleste de la généalogie séthienne, d'autre part, dans la communication de la connaissance séthienne<sup>6</sup>.

Il n'est évidemment pas possible ici de reprendre ces deux figures du *Verus Propheta* : l'on s'en tient par conséquent à la première, celle de l'*Adam redivivus*, sans doute la plus archaïque et la plus importante du fait qu'elle semble avoir été réutilisée plus tard dans le mouvement de Mahomet<sup>7</sup>, en passant ou non par le manichéisme. La figure du *Seth redivivus* n'en est pas moins importante, mais de par son rôle dans les cercles mystiques chrétiens, gnosticisants ou pas<sup>8</sup>. Sans entrer en matière outre mesure, relevons que Luigi Cirillo pense pouvoir reconnaître la représentation du « Vrai prophète » dans deux groupes de chrétiens considérés comme développant des orientations gnostiques :

(1) chez les naasènes (attestés dans Hippolyte, *Elenchos* V, 6-11), qui vénèrent l'Anthropos primordial, « Adamas », regardé comme la source de la vie et la vie elle-même ;

(2) chez les séthiens (attestés dans Irénée, *Contre les hérésies* I, 30 ; Hippolyte, *Elenchos* V, 19-22 et Épiphane, *Panarion* XXXIX), qui vénèrent un personnage mythique, Seth, considéré à la fois comme Jésus et Christ, lequel est à l'origine de la race élue que constitue le groupe<sup>9</sup>.

Il convient de souligner que l'expression « Vrai prophète » ne figure pas dans tous ces passages, et qu'il y a une divinisation de ces figures mythiques, Seth notamment, alors que ce n'est pas le cas chez les ébionites.

La doctrine du « Vrai Prophète » fonctionne avec celle du « Faux Prophète » et de la mise à l'écart de ce dernier par les partisans du premier – élément fondamental pour comprendre l'intérêt de la première de ces deux doctrines<sup>10</sup>. Soulignons seulement que s'il est question des faux prophètes

6. G. FILORAMO, « Le prophétisme du roman pseudo-clémentin », p. 354.

7. Pour l'*Adam redivivus*, voir H.J.W. DRIJVERS, « Adam and the True Prophet in the Pseudo-Clementines », dans C. ELSAS & H.G. KIPPENBERG (éd.), *Loyalitätskonflikte in der Religionsgeschichte. Festschrift für Carsten Colpe*, Würzburg, 1990, p. 314-323. Voir aussi D. CÔTÉ, « The Adam Figure in the *Pseudo-Clementines* and the Notion of True Prophet », (à paraître).

8. Pour le *Seth redivivus*, voir D.M. BURNS, « Jesus' reincarnations revisited in Jewish Christianity, Sethian Gnosticism, and Mani », dans S.E. MYERS (éd.), *Portraits of Jesus: Studies in Christology*, Tübingen, 2012, p. 371-392. Voir aussi J.D. TURNER, « Le séthianisme et les textes séthiens », dans J.-P. MAHÉ & P.-H. POIRIER (éd.), *Écrits gnostiques. La bibliothèque de Nag Hammadi*, Paris 2007, p. XXXVI-XLIII.

9. L. CIRILLO, « Verus Propheta », p. 246-247.

10. À ce sujet, voir S.C. MIMOUNI, « Les imposteurs dans les communautés chrétiennes des Ier-IIe siècles », dans *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 27 (2010), p. 253-263. Voir aussi G.G. STROUMSA, « False Prophets of Early Christianity », dans B. DIGNAS, R. PARKER et G.G. STROUMSA (éd.), *Priests and Prophets among Pagans*,

dans la Bible, ce n'est pas le cas pour le « Vrai Prophète » où l'expression n'apparaît jamais. Observons déjà que l'éventualité d'une influence manichéenne sur le mouvement religieux initié par Mahomet n'est pas impossible, même si certaines recherches semblent plutôt indiquer qu'elle pourrait être plus tardive et donc secondaire, se limitant notamment à des cercles restreints.

Il est important de souligner que certains critiques, notamment Luigi Cirillo, veulent retrouver dans la représentation du Christ figurant dans l'*Elenchos*, un texte chrétien de la première moitié du III<sup>e</sup> siècle, une attestation de la thématique du *Verus Propheta* chez les elksaïtes<sup>11</sup>. Plus spécialement dans l'hypostase céleste du Christ, qui a transmigré (ou transvasé) d'un corps à un autre jusqu'à sa dernière manifestation en Jésus pour assurer la révélation de la vérité à chaque génération de l'humanité.

Ainsi, en *Elenchos* X, 29, 2 (« Ils [les elksaïtes] ne croient pas que le Christ est un, mais qu'il y en a un en haut, et qu'il s'est souvent transvasé dans plusieurs corps et notamment en Jésus, de même (ils croient), d'une part, qu'il a été engendré par Dieu et, d'autre part, qu'il est un esprit, parfois qu'il est né d'une vierge, parfois qu'il n'est pas né d'une vierge, et que depuis toujours il s'est transvasé (μεταγγιζόμενον) dans les corps et qu'il se révèle à plusieurs selon les temps »), où l'on trouve un résumé des plus succincts des doctrines elksaïtes, il est question de la distinction entre le Christ d'en haut – qui est un esprit (= un Ange) – et celui d'en bas – qui est Jésus : ainsi, le Christ a souvent transmigré dans plusieurs corps et en dernier il s'est manifesté en Jésus. Ici, on rencontre l'expression μεταγγιζόμενον (= il a transvasé) alors qu'en *Elenchos* IX, 14, 1 (« Il [Alcibiade d'Apamée] dit que le Christ fut un homme comme tous les autres et que ce n'est pas la première fois maintenant qu'il est né d'une vierge, mais qu'il est né aussi dans le passé, c'est bien des fois qu'il est né et qu'il naît, qu'il s'est manifesté et qu'il a grandi, allant d'une naissance à l'autre et passant d'un corps à l'autre (μετενσωματούμενον) »), l'auteur de la notice ou sa source utilise l'expression μετενσωματούμενον (= il est passé d'un corps à un autre), attribuant la doctrine évoquée à Pythagore.

Du point de vue des représentations, il y a un rapprochement certain avec ce que l'on rencontre dans la littérature pseudo-clémentine à propos du *Verus Propheta*. Mais est-on habilité pour autant à dire que cette doctrine est attestée chez les elksaïtes, notamment en l'absence explicite de l'expression dans toute la documentation transmise sur ce mouvement ?

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*Jews and Christians*, Leuven-Paris-Walpole/Massachusetts, 2013, p. 208-229. Voir encore *id.*, « False Prophet, False Messiah and the Religious Scene in Seventh Century Jerusalem », dans J. CARLETON-PAGET & M. BOCKMUEHL éd., *Redemption and Resistance. The Messianic Hope of Jews and Christians in Antiquity*, London, 2007, p. 278-89.

11. L. CIRILLO, « Verus Propheta », p. 248-251.

Une évidence qui ne s'impose pas, même si elle est reprise parfois par les critiques qui se sont intéressés à la question.

La doctrine du « Vrai Prophète » (ὁ ἀληθῆς προφήτης) ou du « Prophète de Vérité » (ὁ τῆς ἀληθείας προφήτης) chez les chrétiens judaïsants est attestée par un ensemble de passages de la littérature pseudo-clémentine, dans lesquels ce personnage est identifié avec « Adam-Jésus » dont la venue a été annoncée par Moïse.

Dans cette immense littérature, il s'agit de la doctrine la plus importante et la plus originale, après celle de l'unicité divine.

La littérature pseudo-clémentine, on le sait, renferme un fond originaire d'un milieu chrétien d'origine judéenne remontant vraisemblablement au II<sup>e</sup> siècle que les critiques identifient, de manière presque unanime, comme étant ébionite. Rappelons que la littérature pseudo-clémentine est composée de deux grands ensembles que l'on désigne sous les noms d'*Homélies* et de *Reconnaisances*. En toute hypothèse, ces ensembles littéraires reposeraient sur un « Écrit de Base » qui aurait englobé deux documents conservés et transmis dans cette littérature pseudo-clémentine : les *Prédications de Pierre* et les *Ascensions de Jacques* – des documents que l'on considère souvent comme relevant, l'un et l'autre, du mouvement ébionite.

Ce serait de cet « Écrit de Base » que relèverait une catéchèse de Pierre à Clément sur le « Vrai Prophète », désignée en *Reconnaissance* I, 25 sous le nom de la *Somme de toute la religion et de la piété*, laquelle aurait constitué la pièce maîtresse de l'édifice doctrinal du mouvement ébionite puisque, d'après Épiphane de Salamine (un hérésiologue chrétien de la seconde moitié du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle), en *Panarion* XXX, 15, 1-4, c'est ce mouvement qui aurait conservé et transmis l'ouvrage des *Voyages de Pierre*, dont les livres ont été « écrits par Clément »<sup>12</sup> – or c'est précisément ce Clément qui a reçu de Pierre la « connaissance » du « Vrai Prophète ».

Il ne faudrait pas négliger pour autant la perspective des auteurs-compilateurs-rédacteurs des *Homélies* et des *Reconnaisances*, des œuvres qui sont vraisemblablement de la région d'Antioche et datent du milieu du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle, dont le message est de communiquer sur un certain prophétisme à des communautés chrétiennes d'origine judéenne qui souhaitent maintenir encore, en cette période de transformation, un lien profond et sans rupture aucune avec le judaïsme<sup>13</sup>. Dans les *Homélies* et les *Reconnaisances*,

12. Voir L. CIRILLO, « L'Écrit pseudo-clémentin primitif (« Grundschrift ») : une apologie judéo-chrétienne et ses sources », dans S.C. MIMOUNI & I. ULLERN-WEITÉ (ed.), *Pierre Geoltrain ou Comment « faire l'histoire » des religions ? Le chantier des « origines », les méthodes du doute, et la conversation contemporaine entre les disciplines*, Turnhout 2006, p. 221-235.

13. À ce sujet, voir D. CÔTÉ, *Le thème de l'opposition entre Pierre et Simon dans les Pseudo-Clémentines*, Paris, 2001. Voir aussi *id.*, « Le problème de l'identité religieuse dans la Syrie du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le cas des Pseudo-Clémentines et de l'*Adversus Judaeos* de saint Jean Chrysostome », dans S.C. MIMOUNI & B. POUDERON (éd.),

on rencontre l'idée que deux voies conduisent au salut, celle de Moïse et celle de Jésus.

Toutefois, ce qui caractérise les deux époques de la littérature pseudo-clémentine (le II<sup>e</sup> comme le IV<sup>e</sup> siècle), c'est une attente eschatologique extrêmement soutenue qui se développe avec pour contexte la persécution interne aux communautés chrétiennes qui sont en conflit pour des raisons doctrinales.

Quoi qu'il en soit de cette question des sources, dans la structure actuelle du roman pseudo-clémentin, d'après *Homélie* I, 20, 2 (« Quand j'eus mis par écrit [Clément], sur son ordre [Pierre], le discours concernant le Prophète, il te fit envoyer [Jacques] le volume de Césarée de Straton »<sup>14</sup>), Clément est censé écrire à Jacques, l'évêque de la communauté de Jérusalem, pour lui envoyer, sur l'ordre de Pierre, le « Discours sur le Prophète » : ce dernier correspond, selon le résumé de *Reconnaissance* III, 75, 1-12, au traité *De Vero Propheta*, qui est cité, en *Reconnaissance* III, 75, 1 (« Des livres que je t'ai envoyés antérieurement, le premier traite donc du Vrai Prophète et de la compréhension spécifique de la Loi, conformément à ce qu'enseigne la tradition de Moïse »<sup>15</sup>), dans le premier des dix livres des *Prédications de Pierre* – l'origine ébionite de ce dernier ouvrage est assurée puisque, dans la *Lettre de Pierre à Jacques*, il est mentionné comme un texte que Pierre a composé et envoyé à Jacques.

L'origine ébionite de la doctrine du « Vrai Prophète » dans la littérature pseudo-clémentine étant plus ou moins assurée, il est maintenant nécessaire de présenter et d'analyser deux textes qui renferment la substance de la doctrine : il s'agit de l'*Homélie* III, 17-28 et de la *Reconnaissance* I, 27-71 – on s'étend plus sur le second que sur le premier. On examine aussi le passage essentiel de *Reconnaissance* I, 18, 4.

Observons auparavant qu'il est probable, comme l'a avancé Oscar Cullmann, que cette doctrine trouve sa source dans le mysticisme judéen, qu'on appelle aussi le gnosticisme judéen, dont le mouvement chrétien, à commencer par Paul de Tarse, a été tout imprégné<sup>16</sup>.

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*La croisée des chemins revisitée. Quand la « Synagogue » et l'« Église » se sont-elles distinguées ? Actes du colloque de Tours, 18-19 juin 2010*, Paris 2012, p. 339-370.

14. Traduction de A. LE BOULLUEC (éd.), « Homélies », dans P. GEOLTRAIN & J.-D. KAESTLI (éd.), *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, II, Paris, 2005, p. 1249.

15. Traduction de L. CIRILLO & A. SCHNEIDER, « Reconnaissances », dans P. Geoltrain & J.-D. Kaestli (éd.), *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, II, Paris 2005, p. 1789.

16. O. CULLMANN, *Le problème littéraire et historique du roman pseudo-clémentin. Étude sur le rapport entre le gnosticisme et le judéo-christianisme*, Paris 1930, p. 207-212. Voir aussi F. PARENTE, « Profetismo e profezia nella tradizione giudea e cristiana e nella moderna critica storica », dans H. GUNKEL, *I profeti*, Florence, 1967, p. 15-110 (il s'agit d'une introduction à la traduction italienne d'un ouvrage paru en allemand : *Die Propheten*, Göttingen, 1917).

*Homélie III, 17-28*<sup>17</sup>

Dans ce texte et d'autres passages parallèles des *Homélie*s pseudo-clémentines, qui proviendraient des *Prédications de Pierre* dont il est question en *Reconnaissance III, 75*, le « Vrai Prophète » est identifié avec la personne d'Adam-Jésus et est considéré à la manière d'un révélateur de la connaissance.

Adam est « le seul vrai prophète » (*Homélie III, 21*), il a été créé directement par Dieu à la différence des autres hommes qui sont nés d'« une goutte de souillure » (*Homélie III, 17, 1 ; 20, 1*). Adam possède l'« Esprit de pré-connaissance » (*Homélie III, 17, 1*) et « c'est lui qui a eu l'honneur d'être le chef et le seigneur de tous les êtres qui sont dans l'air, sur terre et dans les eaux » (*Homélie III, 20, 3*). Comme il a l'« Esprit de Dieu », Adam n'a pas péché: de ce fait, son péché n'est admis que par les hommes qui manquent de discernement et se laissent tromper par l'Écriture qui à ce sujet a été falsifiée (*Homélie III, 17 ; 21 ; voir Homélie II, 52 et Homélie III, 39*). De plus, toujours de par l'« Esprit de Dieu », Adam est immortel (*Homélie III, 20, 3*).

Adam, qui au commencement possède l'« Esprit Saint du Christ » (*Homélie III, 20*), est oint au terme de ses pérégrinations dans ce monde: il est donc le Messie et il trouve en Jésus son « repos » pour toujours. Cette représentation d'Adam chez l'auteur ébionite de ces passages montre l'utilisation d'une configuration de pensée selon laquelle les temps premiers (Adam) et les temps derniers (Jésus) s'identifient. Adam et Jésus sont la même personne: les deux en effet disposent des mêmes prérogatives – outre qu'ils partagent le titre de « Père », ils bénéficient de l'onction avec l'huile de l'arbre de vie qui est dans le paradis, de la pré-connaissance et du don prophétique (*Homélie III, 19 ; voir Homélie VIII, 10*).

Les *Homélie*s insistent beaucoup sur la fonction du « Vrai Prophète » qui est celle d'assurer la tradition de la vérité et de mettre au même niveau Moïse et Jésus, égalité qui repose sur la doctrine du « Vrai Prophète » et de ses manifestations successives à partir d'Adam (*Homélie III, 20*).

Dans ce contexte, le grec γυνῶσις, qui renvoie essentiellement à la Torah de Moïse, joue un rôle capital: en *Homélie II, 11, 3*, il est dit que seulement celui qui connaît tout à l'avance, le « Vrai Prophète », peut apporter la « connaissance » – « c'est la pré-connaissance – en grec πρόγνωσις – qui apporte la connaissance aux ignorants ».

La révélation du « Vrai Prophète » est indispensable pour la connaissance de la Vérité, car, selon *Homélie I, 18-19*, le monde est comme une maison obscurcie par une épaisse fumée qui ne permet pas aux hommes qui l'habitent d'élever leurs regards vers Dieu: c'est pourquoi ceux qui

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17. Voir A. LE BOULLUEC, « Homélie », dans P. GEOLTRAIN & J.-D. KAESTLI (éd.), *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, II, Paris, 2005, p. 1285-1292.



aiment la Vérité doivent appeler au secours, à grands cris, de l'intérieur de la maison, afin que quelqu'un se trouvant au-dehors vienne ouvrir la porte pour faire entrer dans la maison la lumière extérieure au soleil – cet homme qui vient au secours, c'est le « Vrai Prophète », le seul qui puisse illuminer les âmes des hommes.

Parallèlement à la tradition de Vérité, assurées par les manifestations successives du « Vrai Prophète », se déroule la tradition de l'Erreur dont le principe est « une nature féminine de très loin inférieure à Adam » : Ève (*Homélie III*, 22-27).

Observons encore que, d'après Épiphane de Salamine, les elkasaites croient que le Christ ou Messie est d'abord venu en Adam, puis qu'il est apparu aux patriarches en revêtant le corps d'Adam et qu'enfin il est venu en Jésus (*Panarion XXX*, 3, 2-6).

*Reconnaissance I*, 27-71<sup>18</sup>

Il s'agit d'un long passage distribuable en deux parties : la première comporte un discours de Pierre qui résume les grandes étapes de l'histoire d'Israël depuis les origines du monde (*Reconnaissance I*, 27-42) ; la seconde présente la façon dont la question messianique a été posée aux origines du christianisme (*Reconnaissance I*, 43-71). Tout le passage a une allure très ancienne et rappelle le discours d'Étienne dans les *Actes des Apôtres*, en 7, 1-50, où l'on rencontre la même opposition au Temple de Jérusalem et la citation de Dt 18, 1-18 annonçant la venue du Prophète. La seconde partie, *Reconnaissance I*, 43-71, pourrait représenter ce qui reste d'une autre source ébionite, les *Ascensions de Jacques*, citée elle aussi par Épiphane de Salamine en *Panarion XXX*, 16, 7-9.

Dans la première partie (*Reconnaissance I*, 27-42), Pierre explique que Dieu a créé le monde à la façon d'une unique maison, pour ainsi dire à deux étages, et qu'il a réservé aux anges la partie qui est au-dessus du firmament et aux hommes celle qui est au-dessous (*Reconnaissance I*, 27, 4) : Dieu a entendu donner au monde une Loi éternelle qui ne serait pas falsifiée et destinée à être connue par tous les hommes. C'est dans ce contexte narratif qu'est mentionné par trois fois le « Vrai Prophète » dans diverses manifestations :

(1) Une première fois, il apparaît à Abraham pour lui apprendre la connaissance de la divinité, l'origine et la finalité du monde, l'immortalité de l'âme et les dispositions nécessaires pour plaire à la divinité, la résurrection des morts, le jugement futur, la rémunération des bons et le châtement des méchants (*Reconnaissance I*, 33, 1-34, 2) ;

(2) Une deuxième fois, il apparaît à Moïse pour l'aider dans son œuvre et il est précisé que le culte sacrificiel est autorisé à condition qu'il soit

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18. Voir L. CIRILLO & A. SCHNEIDER, « Reconnaissances », dans P. GEOLTRAIN & J.-D. KAESTLI (éd.), *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, II, Paris, 2005, p. 1649-1681.

offert au dieu unique pour un temps limité et dans un lieu déterminé – il est prédit que le culte sacrificiel serait totalement aboli par le « Vrai Prophète » (*Reconnaissance I*, 37, 3) ;

(3) Une troisième fois, il se manifeste en Jésus : il remplace le culte sacrificiel par le rite du baptême administré en son propre nom et il proclame que seul par un tel rite les hommes trouveront la rémission des péchés et l'immortalité (*Reconnaissance I*, 39, 3).

Dans la seconde partie (*Reconnaissance I*, 43-71), est présentée la situation des deux communautés – l'une est judéenne chrétienne et l'autre est judéenne non chrétienne – à Jérusalem, sept ans après la mort de Jésus. Ce qui est en question, c'est l'interprétation messianique de la personne de Jésus : les Judéens veulent savoir « si c'est bien lui le Prophète que Moïse a annoncé et qui est le *Christ éternel* » (*Reconnaissance I*, 43, 1), car, est-il précisé, ce n'est qu'en cela que l'on distingue les chrétiens des Judéens incroyants (*Reconnaissance I*, 43, 2).

C'est dans ce contexte que Clément dit à Pierre : « Par ton enseignement, j'ai déjà appris que le *Vrai Prophète* est le Christ, mais je voudrais savoir ce que ce mot *le Christ* signifie » (*Reconnaissance I*, 44, 6). La réponse de Pierre rejoint le contenu de l'*Homélie III*, 19 : le « Vrai Prophète » se réalise dans la personne unique d'Adam-Jésus. Elle précise aussi que l'onction du premier homme a été une onction ayant une valeur éternelle et mentionne aussi le baptême de Jésus afin de faire comprendre que c'est à ce moment que Jésus a été reconnu comme étant le « Vrai Prophète » que Moïse a annoncé (*Reconnaissance I*, 48).

Il convient d'observer que cette idée de la manifestation définitive du « Prophète » est aussi exprimée par un autre texte judéo-chrétien, l'*Évangile selon les Hébreux*, en particulier dans un fragment conservé par Jérôme (*Commentaire d'Isaïe XI*, 2). On ignore si l'auteur de ce texte entend identifier l'Esprit et le Prophète, mais l'un et l'autre ont en tout cas le même but : « Conduire dans toute la vérité », selon une expression qu'on trouve en Jn 16, 13. Il est sûr que le fragment en question a su condenser la doctrine christologique dont il est question en R I, 48 et en H III, 20 : en Jésus, dernière manifestation du « Prophète qui est le Christ éternel », la vérité énoncée par tous les prophètes est parvenue à son achèvement.

En *Reconnaissance I*, 52, 3, il est question de la présence du « Vrai Prophète » aux générations des justes qui ont précédé la venue de Jésus : « Le Christ qui était dès le commencement et depuis toujours, était, bien que secrètement, toujours présent aux côtés des justes à travers toutes les générations, de ceux surtout qui attendaient sa venue et à qui il est apparu fréquemment »<sup>19</sup>.

19. Traduction de L. CIRILLO & A. SCHNEIDER, « Reconnaissances », dans P. GEOLTRAIN & J.-D. KAESTLI (Éd.), *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, II, Paris, 2005, p. 1668.

Il apparaît ainsi que dans le texte de *Reconnaissance* I, 27-71, on trouve réunies deux représentations fondamentales : celle du « Christ éternel » et celle du « Christ qui a existé au commencement et pour toujours ». Or, en désignant le « Vrai Prophète » comme le « Christ éternel », les *Reconnaissances* apportent un élément à peu près nouveau par rapport aux *Homélie*s : celui de la préexistence d'une hypostase (= une réalité) éternelle – un élément qui, en effet, se trouve à peine indiqué dans les *Homélie*s : en *Homélie* I, 18, 4, où il est seulement mentionné que le « Vrai Prophète » vient du dehors.

On peut en déduire que la doctrine du « Vrai Prophète » repose sur une structure qui comporte essentiellement deux moments : la préexistence et la manifestation d'une hypostase céleste – celle-ci en tant qu'elle est préexistante s'appelle le « Christ éternel », et en tant qu'elle se manifeste et revêt la personne d'Adam-Jésus prend le nom de « Vrai Prophète ».

Dans les *Reconnaissances*, il n'est pas autrement question d'incarnation dans le passage de la préexistence du Prophète à sa manifestation : il « apparut » (texte latin de *Reconnaissance* I, 33, 1) ou il « se montra » (texte syriaque de *Reconnaissance* I, 33, 1) à Abraham, ou encore il « vint » à Moïse (texte syriaque de R I, 34, 4), et d'autre part qu'il s'est manifesté en revêtant la personne d'Adam-Jésus.

Partout, il n'y est pas non plus question de réincarnation du « Vrai Prophète » : Jésus est le « Vrai Prophète » et il est le Christ venu pour accomplir la Loi de Moïse (R V, 10, 1).

#### *Reconnaissance* I, 18, 3-4

J'ai en moi la certitude que quiconque aura pris connaissance de cette démonstration concernant le Vrai Prophète ne pourra plus, à l'avenir, douter de la vérité. Par conséquent, sois plein de confiance à l'égard de cette croyance élaborée dans les cieux, grâce à laquelle tout artifice du mal est vaincu<sup>20</sup>.

Dans ce passage des *Reconnaissances*, Clément affirme à Pierre que sa croyance au Vrai Prophète est inébranlable. Pour le rédacteur des *Reconnaissances* la doctrine du *Verus Propheta* est une doctrine d'origine divine, « élaborée dans les cieux », qui a pour objectif final la victoire sur le principe du mal. Comme le fait remarquer avec raison Giovanni Filoramo, cette affirmation synthétise (1) « la fonction essentielle de la doctrine dans l'économie du roman » et (2) « le changement qui a eu lieu dans l'histoire du prophétisme chrétien »<sup>21</sup>.

20. Traduction de L. CIRILLO & A. SCHNEIDER, « Reconnaissances », dans P. GEOLTRAIN & J.-D. KAESTLI (éd.), *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, II, Paris, 2005, p. 1642.

21. G. FILORAMO, « Le prophétisme du roman pseudo-clémentin », p. 353.

Ce dernier point de vue est important pour comprendre la doctrine du *Verus Propheta* dans la littérature pseudo-clémentine qui ne repose pas sur une figure concrète d'un prophète, mais sur une manifestation prophétologique de la divinité. Autrement exprimé, cette doctrine n'est pas une élaboration d'origine humaine, mais une élaboration d'origine divine, que l'on peut recevoir à travers une révélation et qui est à protéger ou à dissimuler par le secret ésotérique.

*Récapitulatif: éléments de synthèse*

Dans la littérature pseudo-clémentine, le « Vrai Prophète » ne possède à aucun degré la nature divine: c'est un homme comme les autres, mais c'est un homme qui est particulier et exceptionnel, en ce sens qu'il est perpétuellement assisté par l'« Esprit de Dieu » qui lui est indissolublement uni – c'est de là qu'il tire son infaillibilité et l'étendue illimitée de sa « connaissance ». Comme il est dit en *Homélie II*, 6, 1: « Le *Prophète de Vérité* est celui qui connaît toutes les choses de tous les temps, les choses passées comme elles ont été, les choses présentes comme elles sont, les choses futures comme elles seront. Il est infaillible, miséricordieux et seul il a reçu mission de montrer le chemin de la vérité »<sup>22</sup>. La raison d'être du « Vrai Prophète », c'est l'incapacité absolue dont est frappé l'esprit humain de découvrir par lui-même la vérité religieuse.

Pour le ou les auteurs ébionites, le « Vrai Prophète » est Jésus, mais les premiers à qui cette mission a été dévolue ont été Adam et Moïse. Ainsi donc, Adam, Moïse et Jésus sont les trois manifestations successives du « Vrai Prophète », qui, comme il est dit en *Homélie III*, 20, 2: « depuis le commencement du monde, traverse tous les âges en changeant à la fois de forme et de nom, jusqu'à ce que, arrivé enfin au temps qui est le sien et oint par la miséricorde de Dieu en récompense de ses travaux et de ses peines, il jouisse pour toujours du repos »<sup>23</sup>.

Il convient de faire remarquer que dans cette représentation, la personne de Jésus n'est pas considérée comme identique à celle d'Adam et à celle de Moïse: ce sont trois hommes différents, qui ont été chargés de la même mission, à savoir, prêcher aux hommes la même doctrine – de ce fait, tous trois ont été unis de la même manière, intime et permanente, avec l'« Esprit de Dieu ». Autrement dit, Adam, Moïse et Jésus ne sont qu'un seul et même « Prophète de Vérité », puisque ce qui compte, ce n'est pas l'homme mortel, mais l'« Esprit de Dieu » qui a fait d'eux ses organes infaillibles.

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22. Traduction à partir de A LE BOULLUEC, « Homélies », dans P. GEOLTRAIN & J.-D. KAESTLI (éd.), *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, II, Paris, 2005, p. 1253.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 1288.

Deux questions se posent maintenant : celle de l'identification de l'hypostase du « Christ éternel » et celle de l'interprétation des deux moments dans la structure fondamentale de la doctrine du « Vrai Prophète » – l'une et l'autre étant extrêmement liées. Les traditions mystiques judéennes ou juives les plus anciennes, remarquablement mises en évidence par Hans-Joachim Schoeps, ont sûrement joué un rôle important dans la formation de la doctrine du « Vrai Prophète »<sup>24</sup>. Déjà dans cette ligne de recherche, Oscar Cullmann a donné une certaine importance aux personnages du Fils d'Homme et d'Hénoch pour rendre compte du « Vrai Prophète » et il a montré que dans le *Livre d'Hénoch*, en LXXI, 14, une hypostase céleste, celle du Fils d'Homme, est identifiée avec Hénoch, et que dans d'autres passages de ce même document le Fils d'Homme (XLVI, 3; XLVIII, 7; LVII, 6-7) est préexistant et qu'il vient dans ce monde pour révéler les secrets divins<sup>25</sup>. Revenant d'une certaine manière sur une hypothèse avancée jadis par Lucien Cerfaux<sup>26</sup>, Luigi Cirillo<sup>27</sup>, pour sa part, a proposé de prendre en considération les doctrines angéologiques du judaïsme hétérodoxe de tendance chrétienne, telles par exemple les spéculations au sujet de l'« ange glorieux du Seigneur », une expression que l'on rencontre dans le *Pasteur d'Herma*s, en Vision V, 1; Similitude V, 4, 4; VII, 1-3; VIII, 3, 3; 4, 1; IX, 1, 3, qui lui aussi est préexistant et révélateur des mystères divins comme c'est le cas, par exemple, dans l'*Apocalypse d'Elkasai* ou cet Ange est identifié avec le « Fils de Dieu »<sup>28</sup>. Le même Luigi Cirillo a estimé alors que c'est « la gnose juive samaritaine » qui pourrait offrir le modèle le plus proche de l'hypostase du « Christ éternel », notamment à partir des traditions véhiculées au nom de Simon le Magicien et de ses disciples, lesquels ont cru que le « Prophète » annoncé par Moïse s'est manifesté dans leur maître (*Reconnaissance* VII, 33), ce qui leur a permis de le considérer comme étant à la fois la manifestation d'une hypostase transcendante, le « Christ », et celle du « Prophète »<sup>29</sup>.

Quoi qu'il en soit de cette dernière proposition sur laquelle il est difficile de se prononcer, c'est vers les traditions mystiques judéennes, forcément hétérodoxes, qu'il convient de se tourner pour comprendre la formation de

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24. H.-J. SCHOEPS, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums*, Tübingen, 1949, p. 87-116.

25. Voir O. CULLMANN, *Le problème littéraire et historique du roman pseudo-clémentin*, p. 207.

26. L. CERFAUX, « Le vrai prophète des Clémentines », dans *Recherches de science religieuse* 18 (1928), p. 143-163 (= L. CERFAUX, *Recueil Lucien Cerfaux*, I, Gembloux, 1954, p. 301-319).

27. L. CIRILLO, « Verus Propheta », p. 245-246.

28. Voir L. CIRILLO, « Erma e l'apocalittica a Roma », dans *Cristianesimo nella storia* 4 (1983), p. 1-32.

29. Voir J. FOSSUM, « Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism », dans *Vigiliae christianae* 37 (1983), p. 260-287.

la doctrine du « Vrai Prophète », laquelle paraît être l'émanation de certains milieux judéens mystiques de la tendance chrétienne, sans doute plus ébionite qu'elkasaïte, même si cette dernière éventualité est envisageable, car une influence de l'ébionisme sur l'elkasaïsme n'est nullement à exclure en totalité – ainsi que l'indiquent les travaux anciens, mais toujours d'une grande utilité, d'Einar Molland<sup>30</sup>.

Ces discussions, dont la trace la plus ancienne semble être 2 P 1, 21, montrent que durant tous les II<sup>e</sup>-III<sup>e</sup> siècles il y a eu des controverses dans certains milieux chrétiens interstitiels sur les vrais et les faux prophètes comme il y en a aussi dans certains milieux gréco-romains sur les vrais et les faux philosophes (*Reconnaissance* VIII, 53, 1) – de telles discussions vont se retrouver dans les milieux manichéens et dans les milieux musulmans, ils sont inhérents à tout mouvement prophétique en émergence et correspondent à des luttes pour la détention de l'autorité et du pouvoir.

Observons déjà que récemment, Hartmut Bobzin a soutenu l'hypothèse que l'expression « Sceau des Prophètes » désigne, dans un certain nombre de textes chrétiens et en particulier judéo-chrétiens, la personne de Jésus qui vient pour confirmer et accomplir la prophétie de Moïse et se prolonger dans la personne de Mahomet<sup>31</sup>.

Bref, comme le souligne fort bien Giovanni Filoramo, la littérature pseudo-clémentine dans son ensemble est un « témoin significatif de la naissance d'une véritable prophétologie, centrée sur la figure du Vrai Prophète, prophétologie qui devient l'élément d'identification des communautés » le mettant en œuvre<sup>32</sup>.

#### *Annexe: éléments de terminologie*

La représentation du « Vrai Prophète » est parfois mise en relation avec celle du « Sceau des Prophètes », tant dans des milieux chrétiens que dans

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30. E. MOLLAND, « La thèse *La prophétie n'est jamais venue de la volonté de l'homme* (2 Pierre I, 21) et les Pseudo-Clémentines », dans *Studia theologica* 9 (1955), p. 67-85; *id.*, « La circoncision, le baptême et l'autorité du décret apostolique (Actes XV, 28 sq) dans les milieux judéo-chrétiens des Pseudo-Clémentins », dans *Studia theologica* 9 (1955), p. 1-39.

31. H. BOBZIN, « 'Das Siegel der Propheten'. Maimonides und das Verständnis von Mohammeds Prophetentum », dans Georges TAMER (éd.), *The Trias of Maimonides. Jewish, Arabic and Ancient Culture of Knowledge*, Berlin, 2005, p. 289-306; *id.*, « The 'Seal of the Prophets': Toward and Understanding of Muhammad's Prophethood », dans A. NEUWIRTH, N. SINAI et M. MARX (éd.), *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, Leyde-Boston, 2010, p. 565-583.

32. G. FILORAMO, « Le prophétisme du roman pseudo-clémentin », p. 353.

d'autres milieux religieux. Il n'est pas inutile alors de se pencher sur le terme « sceau » qui est lourdement chargé de symbolisme<sup>33</sup>.

Dans la littérature biblique, le substantif « sceau » et le verbe « sceller », qui proviennent de la racine חָטַם (*ḥatam*), prennent deux sens, le propre et le figuré : pour le sens propre, voir Est 8, 8-10 pour le substantif et Jr 32, 10 pour le verbe ; pour le sens figuré, voir Ct 8, 6, Ag 2, 23 ou Dn 9, 24 – dans ce dernier verset, חָטַם (*ḥatam*) est utilisé dans ses deux sens.

Les mêmes sens du substantif « sceau » et du verbe « sceller » apparaissent dans le Nouveau Testament : pour le sens propre, voir Ap 5, 1 ; pour le sens figuré, voir 2 Co 1, 22. Le thème du sceau apparaît aussi en Jn 6, 27. Le terme utilisé ici est le verbe grec σφραγίζω que l'on peut traduire par le verbe latin *signavit*, qui signifie « marquer d'un sceau » pour confirmer l'authenticité de quelqu'un et prouver par un témoignage qu'une personne est bien ce qu'elle affirme être. Comme le Christ, les chrétiens sont eux aussi « marqués du sceau de Dieu ».

La métaphore du sceau est aussi présente dans la prophétie des « semaines d'années » du *Livre de Daniel*, en 9, 20. Dans la version grecque de Théodotion de ce verset, elle est énoncée de la manière suivante : « Soixante-dix semaines ont été divisées sur ton peuple et ta cité sainte pour mettre un terme aux fautes, sceller les fautes, effacer les iniquités, amener la justice éternelle, sceller la vision et la prophétie, oindre le saint des saints ».

Observons encore que dans la littérature judéenne, il est question du « sceau » pour désigner la circoncision (*Testament de Lévi*, Rm 4, 11, *Exode Rabba* 5 [sous la forme araméenne חָטַם]), alors que dans la littérature patristique, il désigne le baptême (*Épître de Barnabé* 9, 6 ; *Pasteur d'Hermas* IX, I, 3 ; *Seconde Épître de Clément* 7, 6 ; 8, 6).

L'usage métaphorique de la thématique du « sceau » se rencontre aussi dans d'autres textes chrétiens d'orientation gnostique, sans qu'on puisse dire qu'il s'agit dans tous les cas d'une réelle initiation baptismale. En tout cas, il en est question dans le *Livre des secrets de Jean* [*Apocryphon de Jean*] (NH II, 1 et NH IV, 1)<sup>34</sup>, dans la *Pensée première à la triple forme* [*Prótennoia trimorphe*] (NH XIII, 1)<sup>35</sup> et dans le *Livre sacré du Grand Esprit invisible* [*Évangile des Égyptiens*] (NH III, 2 ; NH IV, 2)<sup>36</sup>, au cours d'un rituel baptismal considéré comme « séthien », comportant « cinq sceaux » qui correspondent soit à une quintuple signation, soit à une quintuple immersion – il en va de même dans *Zostrien* (NH VIII, 1) où il s'agit un

33. Voir F.J. DÖLGER, *Sphragis : eine altchristliche Taufzeichnung in ihren Beziehungen zur religiösen Kultur des Altertums*, Paderborn, 1911.

34. Voir J.-M. SEVRIN, *Le dossier baptismal séthien. Études sur la sacramentaire gnostique*, Québec, 1986, p. 31-37.

35. Voir *ibid.*, p. 71-75.

36. Voir *ibid.*, p. 114-115.

sceau unique imposé lors du baptême en cinq étapes<sup>37</sup> et dans *Marsanès* (NH X) où il s'agit de treize sceaux renvoyant à une initiation plus spirituelle que baptismale<sup>38</sup>. En revanche, dans *l'Allogène* (NH XI, 3), une apocalypse séthienne, il est fait mention du « sceau », mais avec une sens tout autre puisqu'il renvoie à la clôture de la révélation (69, 16-19).

En christianisme, ce « saint des saints », qui a pour rôle d'abolir et d'accomplir, c'est-à-dire « sceller », désigne évidemment Jésus, lequel est identifié la plupart du temps au Messie. Dans le traité *Contre les Judéens* de Tertullien de Carthage, un auteur chrétien de la fin du II<sup>e</sup> siècle et du début du III<sup>e</sup> siècle, il est aussi question du « Sceau des Prophètes » et non pas du « Vrai Prophète » comme on le pense parfois<sup>39</sup>. En VIII, 12, on peut lire : « Le Christ, qui scellait la vision et toutes les prophéties (*Christus est signaculum omnium prophetiarum*), qu'il accomplit par son avènement. Voilà pourquoi Daniel dit avec une grande exactitude que son avènement 'était le sceau de la vision et de la prophétie' ». En XI, 10, on peut lire : « Le Christ est le sceau de tous les prophètes (*Christus est signaculum omnium prophetarum*) qui l'ont précédé et qui étaient venus pour l'annoncer ». Cependant, pour Tertullien, ce n'est pas Jésus, mais Jean le Baptiste qui est le dernier prophète (*clausula prophetarum*).

Cette thématique du sceau pourrait provenir de Jn 6, 27 : « Il faut vous mettre à l'œuvre pour obtenir non pas cette nourriture périssable, mais la nourriture qui demeure en vie éternelle, celle que le Fils de l'Homme vous donne, car c'est lui que le Père, qui est Dieu, a marqué de son sceau (ἔσφραγισεν) ».

Pour Carsten Colpe<sup>40</sup>, suivi par Michel Tardieu<sup>41</sup>, dans le *Contre les Judéens* de Tertullien de Carthage, les Judéens en question pourraient être des chrétiens d'origine judéenne se réclamant d'un fondateur postérieur à Jésus, dont le nom n'est pas mentionné, mais qui pourrait être soit Ébion soit Elkasai, auquel ils donneraient le titre de « Sceau de toutes les prophéties » et de « Sceau de tous les prophètes ». À la lecture du texte, il faut bien avouer que cette hypothèse paraît difficile à retenir, même si

37. Voir *ibid.*, p. 186-190.

38. Voir J.D. TURNER, « Marsanès », dans J.-P. MAHÉ & P.-H. POIRIER (Éd.), *Écrits gnostiques. La bibliothèque de Nag Hammadi*, Paris, 2007, p. 1431-1433.

39. Voir G.D. DUNN, *Tertullian's Adversus Iudaeos. A Rhetorical Analysis*, Washington D.C., 2008. Voir aussi *id.*, « Tertullian and Daniel 9, 24-27. A Patristic Interpretation of a Prophetic Time-Frame », dans *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 6 (2002), p. 352-367.

40. C. COLPE, *Das Siegel der Propheten*, p. 28-34.

41. M. TARDIEU, « La chaîne des prophètes », dans *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* 1-2 (1996), p. 357-366; *id.*, « Mani et le manichéisme. Le dernier prophète », dans *Encyclopédie des religions*, I, Paris, 1997, p. 225-230. Voir aussi *id.* « Les manichéens dans le monde musulman », dans T. BIANQUIS, P. GUICHARD et M. TILLIER (éd.), *Les débuts du monde musulman, VIIe-Xe siècle, de Muhammad aux dynasties autonomes*, Paris, 2010, p. 491-498, spécialement p. 496.



l'application par Tertullien de ce titre à Jésus n'est nullement à négliger. En revanche, Il serait possible de voir, en ce groupe mentionné dans ce traité, des Judéens du judaïsme synagogal manifestant des tendances prophétiques, mais sans aucune précision quant au prophète attendu qu'ils espèrent être le dernier d'une longue chaîne – en tout cas pas des Judéens du mouvement rabbinique, non attesté à cette époque à Carthage.

## II. Le « Sceau des Prophètes » dans le manichéisme

Pour traiter de cette question, on se fonde principalement sur un article remarquable de Guy G. Stroumsa dont les conclusions ne semblent guère avoir été suivies, ce qui est quelque peu regrettable<sup>42</sup>.

Ce que l'on appelle généralement « la prophétologie manichéenne » peut être considéré comme une suite de plusieurs étapes dans la réflexion théologique de Mani ou de ses disciples. La première est celle que l'on repère dans la *Vita Mani* du Codex manichéen de Cologne où Mani est situé parmi une série d'envoyés – Adam, Seth, Énosh, Shem, Hénoch –, dont le prédécesseur immédiat est non pas Jésus, mais Paul. Observons que ces grands ancêtres sont désignés une fois, en CMC 62, 9-14, comme « les apôtres très bénis, sauveurs, évangélistes et prophètes de vérité ». La deuxième étape est celle qui est attestée dans le *Shâbuhragan* dont seuls des fragments ont été conservés. Mani, dans un fragment rapporté par al-Biruni, est situé après Adam, Seth, Énosh, Shem, Hénoch, Bouddha, Zoroastre, Jésus et Paul. La troisième est celle qui est mentionnée dans le *Livre des Géants* où Mani est présenté après une série d'envoyés réduite à Seth, Zoroastre, Bouddha et Jésus. Précisons que Mani semble ici opérer la combinaison des deux chaînes « scellées » par le dernier prophète, autrement dit : débouchant sur lui-même. Dans les homélies manichéennes conservées en copte, Mani est aussi mentionné avant Zarathoustra et Jésus comme « le troisième apôtre » (11, 23-24 ; 25-27) ou comme « l'apôtre de lumière » (16, 28, voir 28, 21.28). Dans tous ces écrits proprement manichéens, Mani n'est jamais qualifié comme le « Sceau des Prophètes ».

Pourtant, d'après al-Biruni (mort vers 1050), il est rapporté que dans l'*Évangile Vivant*, Mani se proclame le « Paraclét » annoncé par le Messie (c'est-à-dire Jésus) et le doxographe musulman ajoute qu'il est le « Sceau des Prophètes » – une formulation qui est reprise postérieurement par

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42. G.G. STROUMSA, « Seal of the Prophets: The nature of a Manichaean Metaphor », dans *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), p. 61-74 (= « 'Le sceau des prophètes': nature d'une métaphore manichéenne », dans *Savoir et salut. Traditions juives et tentations dualistes dans le christianisme ancien*, Paris, 1992, p. 275-288).

d'autres auteurs musulmans, comme par exemple al-Shahrastani (mort en 1153)<sup>43</sup>.

Le fait que cette donnée ne se retrouve que sous la plume de doxographes et hérésiologues musulmans devrait peut-être plus éveiller la suspicion que ce n'est habituellement le cas, car il ne serait pas impossible qu'ils aient paraphrasé l'affirmation manichéenne à partir de la formule coranique plutôt que de rapporter une formule manichéenne précise mentionnée dans un écrit de ce groupe.

Dans le manichéisme, le rôle du dernier prophète est de récapituler les prophéties antérieures pour permettre la fondation de la communauté, puisque toutes les prophéties sont censées avoir été réalisées par la venue de la dernière révélation.

Cette conception prophétologique d'une histoire balisée par des témoins (écrits ou oraux) des manifestations divines relève, par ses origines lointaines, de l'apocalyptique judéenne. L'image du « sceau », appliquée à cette conception, signifie que la révélation dernière est authentiquée et fermée.

Dans la littérature manichéenne, il est souvent question de la thématique du « sceau » et l'on dit parfois qu'elle est originaire de l'elkasaïsme, alors qu'elle n'y est, sauf erreur, aucunement attestée de manière claire<sup>44</sup>.

On sait par ailleurs qu'avant sa mort, Mani a écrit à son Église une « Lettre du Sceau », mais, d'après le passage extrêmement corrompu (M 454B) qui en fait mention, il n'y a aucune indication sur le sens du terme « sceau ».

On laisse de côté, les « trois sceaux », très bien décrits par Augustin (*Confessions* V, 10), qui relèvent de l'éthique manichéenne, mais nullement de la doctrine prophétologique de cette même religion.

En revanche, on se penche sur un manuel manichéen pour la confession des péchés (le *X<sup>u</sup> astvanift*), réservé aux auditeurs et conservé que dans une version en ouïgour, où il est question des « quatre sceaux de lumière » dans le passage suivant :

En Äzrua tängri, dans le Dieu du Soleil et de la Lune, dans le Dieu puissant et dans les prophètes, nous mettons notre confiance, nous nous sommes reposés sur eux [et] sommes devenus Auditeurs. Quatre sceaux de lumière, nous avons scellés en nos cœurs. Tout d'abord, l'Amour, le sceau d'Äzrua tängri, en second lieu, la Foi, le Sceau du Dieu du Soleil et de la Lune, troisièmement la Crainte [de Dieu], le sceau du Dieu Quinaire [et] quatrièmement la Sagesse, le sceau des prophètes (VIII, 13)<sup>45</sup>.

43. On les trouve toutes réunies dans K. KESSLER, *Mani: Forschungen über die manichäische Religion*, I, Berlin, 1889.

44. Voir A.V.W. JACKSON, « The Manichaean 'Seals' », dans *Researches in Manichaeism*, New York, 1932, p. 331-337.

45. Traduction française d'après G.G. STROUMSA, « 'Le sceau des prophètes': nature d'une métaphore manichéenne », dans *Savoir et salut. Traditions juives et*

Le « sceau des prophètes », mentionné dans ce passage, est à mettre en relation avec la « Sainte Religion », c'est-à-dire l'Église manichéenne, comme cela est précisé dans une autre version de ce passage rapporté dans le *Fihrist* d'Ibn an-Nadim<sup>46</sup>. Il ne concerne nullement Mani. C'est en tout cas le seul texte manichéen où il est question de l'expression « sceau des prophètes », mais les prophètes auxquels il est fait référence dans cette phrase ne sont pas les prédécesseurs de Mani, mais plutôt ses successeurs constituant l'Église manichéenne – il revient à Guy G. Stroumsa d'avoir pour la première fois attiré l'attention sur cette expression dans ce passage.

Cette expression pourrait être tout aussi bien préislamique que postislamique. Dans ce second cas, en effet, il se pourrait très bien que des manichéens d'Asie Centrale, une région alors sous domination musulmane, l'aient emprunté au Coran, afin d'être considérés comme des membres d'une des religions du Livre, et donc de bénéficier de l'habituel régime de protection. Quoi qu'il en soit, la mention du « sceau » n'implique donc pas une référence au « dernier », mais renvoie à l'idée de confirmation ou d'attestation. Il est peu probable que cette mention ait influencé celle que l'on retrouve dans la littérature islamique.

Selon toute apparence, Mani ne se présente jamais comme un prophète, mais comme un apôtre, un messager. En effet, Mani s'est considéré comme le dernier d'une succession de messagers envoyés pour léguer à l'humanité les visions qui leur ont été octroyées dans un ravissement extatique. C'est ce qui ressort de certains passages de la *Vita Mani* du CMC, comme CMC 72, 4-7, où Mani se désigne comme un « apôtre de Jésus-Christ » et lorsqu'il appelle ses disciples le « sceau de son apostolat », reprenant en cela 1 Co 9, 2, où Paul dit à ses disciples : « car le sceau de mon apostolat, c'est vous qui l'êtes ». D'ailleurs, dans le *Shâbubragan*, Mani se désigne comme l'« Apôtre du Dieu de Vérité en Babylonie ».

Il n'est pas nécessaire de continuer à reprendre ici la démonstration performative de Guy G. Stroumsa, aussi va-t-on se contenter seulement de ses conclusions qui peuvent être résumées, selon les propos mêmes de ce critique, dans les cinq points suivants<sup>47</sup> :

1. Mani ne semble pas s'être considéré seulement ou principalement comme un prophète, mais plutôt comme un apôtre – un messager divin.

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*tentations dualistes dans le christianisme ancien*, Paris, 1992, p. 275-288, spécialement p. 282, réalisée d'après la traduction anglaise de J.P. ASMUSSEN, *X<sup>u</sup> âtvânîft: Studies in Manichaeism*, Copenhague, 1965, p. 196.

46. Voir G. FLÜGEL, *Mani: seine Lehre und seine Schriften*, Leipzig, 1862, p. 95, et aussi p. 292-293, n. 220 et 223.

47. G.G. STROUMSA, « 'Le sceau des prophètes': nature d'une métaphore manichéenne », dans *Savoir et salut. Traditions juives et tentations dualistes dans le christianisme ancien*, Paris, 1992, p. 275-288, spécialement p. 287.

2. Le terme prophète, bien que polyvalent, semble avoir été utilisé dans l'Église manichéenne primitive pour désigner les élus.

3. La métaphore du sceau, bien que polyvalente dans la littérature manichéenne, n'implique nulle part l'idée de dernier ou de fin, mais plutôt celle de confirmation, d'attestation, ou encore de signe.

4. Dans le seul texte manichéen (*X<sup>u</sup>astvanift*) où elle apparaît, la métaphore du « Sceau des Prophètes » ne peut renvoyer qu'à l'une des quatre vertus théologiques cardinales, celle concernant l'Église de Mani.

5. Il paraît difficile d'accepter les données doxographiques et hérésiologiques, toutes recueillies chez les auteurs musulmans, selon lesquelles Mani se serait désigné lui-même comme le « Sceau des Prophètes ».

Autrement exprimé, on ne peut exclure que la présentation d'al Biruni ait utilisé non pas une expression manichéenne, mais plutôt l'expression musulmane que l'on trouve dans le Coran et dans le Ḥadith – lui accorder un crédit absolu, comme le font par exemple Albert Henrichs et Ludwig Koenen<sup>48</sup> avec bien d'autres critiques, devient donc difficile. Il reste cependant possible qu'en Irak, en Iran et en Asie Centrale, déjà sous domination musulmane, les manichéens aient utilisé l'expression « Sceau des Prophètes » pour caractériser Mani à l'instar de Mahomet, déjà défini ainsi.

Guy G. Stroumsa n'est ni le premier ni le seul à considérer que le rattachement du « Sceau des Prophètes » que l'on trouve dans l'islam ne provient pas d'un substrat judéo-chrétien, et encore moins du manichéisme. Pour Carsten Colpe, un tel rattachement est des plus hâtifs. Il ne s'agit en fait que d'une hypothèse reposant sur des fondements assez fragiles<sup>49</sup>. Il est bien évident qu'à partir du « Sceau des Prophètes », qu'on veut reconnaître autant dans l'elkasaïsme que dans le manichéisme, on tente de jeter un pont entre les religions dites du « Livre ». Un tel rapprochement est sans doute louable en soi, mais il faut bien reconnaître qu'il ne repose malheureusement que sur des bases plus « intellectuelles » que « scientifiques »<sup>50</sup>.

Il est donc peu probable que l'expression musulmane « Sceau des Prophètes » que l'on trouve dans le Coran provienne du manichéisme. S'il fallait lui chercher une origine à tout prix, plutôt indirecte que directe, il faudrait alors la renvoyer à la littérature biblique, patristique et rabbinique,

48. A. HENRICHS & L. KOENEN, « Der Kölner Mani-Kodex (P. Colon. inv. nr. 4780). ΠΕΡΙ ΤΗΣ ΓΕΝΝΗΣ ΤΟΥ ΣΩΜΑΤΟΣ ΑΥΤΟΥ. Edition der Seiten 1-72 », dans *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 19 (1975), p. 72, n. 138. Voir aussi *id.*, « Ein griechischer Mani-Kodex (P. Colon. inv. nr. 4780) », dans *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 5 (1970), p. 109, n. 25.

49. C. COLPE, *Das Siegel der Propheten*, p. 15-37 et p. 227-243.

50. Voir aussi W.C. SMITH, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, New York, 1962, p. 281, n. 49.

mais seulement à partir de l'expression du « Vrai Prophète », car il n'y est jamais question de l'expression « Sceau des Prophètes ».

La prudence s'impose, car en matière d'influences s'il est certain que le manichéisme a inspiré l'islam, il est possible aussi qu'il ait emprunté à l'islam, si ce n'est pour se faire passer comme une religion du Livre, surtout en Asie centrale après sa disparition de Babylonie<sup>51</sup>.

Il ne s'agit pas pour autant de nier toute influence manichéenne sur l'islam, mais plutôt de mieux la cerner, car il est certain qu'elle s'est exercée sur certains cercles chiites vers la fin du VII<sup>e</sup> et la première moitié du VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle<sup>52</sup>.

### III. Le « Sceau des Prophètes » dans l'islam

D'emblée, avant de pénétrer dans ce dossier, il faut bien avouer que, pour un non spécialiste, face à la tradition musulmane (sunnite plus que chiite) qui est immense, les renouvellements documentaires, les oppositions historiographiques, les questionnements méthodologiques font aujourd'hui de l'histoire des origines de l'islam un vaste chantier, qui est d'autant plus brouillé que la bibliographie est énorme – les ouvrages et les articles parus au cours de ces cinq dernières décennies se comptant en effet par milliers. C'est pourquoi, le non spécialiste éprouve un certain sentiment d'accablement, tellement les sources internes et externes, littéraires et non littéraires (archéologiques et épigraphiques) sur les débuts de l'islam sont abondantes, difficiles à pénétrer et à critiquer, même si les plus importantes sont éditées ou publiées.

Pour le concept « Sceau des Prophètes » dans l'islam, on se cantonne exclusivement au Coran, non sans savoir que le Ḥadith, tant sunnite que chiite, apporte au cours des siècles des compléments importants dans son interprétation exégétique, mais pas nécessairement dans sa compréhension<sup>53</sup>.

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51. Voir T. PETTIPIECE, « Manichaeism at the Crossroad of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Traditions », in Brouria BITTON-ASHKELONY, T. de BRUYN et C. HARRISON (éd.), *Patristic Studies in the Twenty-First Century. Proceedings of an International Conference to Mark The 50th Anniversary International Association of Patristic Studies*, Turnhout, 2015, p. 299-313.

52. Voir H. HALM, *Die islamische Gnosis. Die Extreme Shia und die 'Alawiten*, zürich-Munich, 1982.

53. Pour une première approche, voir G. GOBILLOT, « Sceau des prophètes », dans M.-A. AMIR-MOEZZI (éd.), *Dictionnaire du Coran*, Paris, 2007, p. 795-797. Voir aussi les contributions fondamentales de Y. FRIEDMANN, « Finality of Prophethood in Sunni Islam », dans *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), p. 177-215 (voir aussi *id.*, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background*, Berkeley/Californie, 1989, p. 49-93) et de U. RUBIN, « The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy. On the Interpretation of the Qur'anic Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (33) », dans *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 164 (2014), p. 65-96.

Dans tout le Coran, Mahomet n'est désigné qu'une seule fois comme le « Sceau des Prophètes ». Cette expression apparaît au verset 40 de la sourate 33 (al-Aḥzāb ou « Les Coalisés »):

Mahomet n'a jamais été le père de l'un des hommes parmi vous, mais l'envoyé d'Allah et le Sceau des Prophètes (*khātām al-nabiyyīn*) – Allah connaît parfaitement toute chose.

Le terme *khātām*, utilisé dans ce verset, est selon toute vraisemblance originaire des langues sémitiques. Il est attesté en hébreu sous la forme *ḥotām* et en syriaque sous la forme *ḥātmā*. Il peut être traduit par le terme « sceau » et prendre le sens de « confirmation », d'« authenticité » ou de « finalité ». L'expression « Sceau des Prophètes » sera enregistrée, répétée, développée, orchestrée par la tradition musulmane, tant sunnite que chiite, qui en fera un point fondamental de sa théologie, et le pivot de sa théologie des religions<sup>54</sup>.

Le verset met en avant le fait que Mahomet n'a pas eu de descendant mâle (il n'a laissé que des filles, ses fils étant tous morts en bas âge) puisqu'il est le dernier des prophètes – sens qu'il faut donner ici au terme « sceau », ce qui n'exclut pas qu'il puisse recouvrir en même temps celui de « confirmation » ou d'« authenticité » comme il est possible de le supposer grâce à un rapprochement avec Jn 6, 27 (« C'est lui [le Fils de l'Homme] que le Père, Dieu, a marqué de son sceau »). C'est d'ailleurs sur un rapprochement avec Jn 6, 27 que Samir Khalil Samir a interprété cette expression coranique comme « une marque d'appartenance », c'est-à-dire un signe d'authenticité de la mission prophétique de Mahomet<sup>55</sup>.

En islam, ce concept est d'une grande importance théologique, mais aussi source d'un certain nombre de difficultés dont certaines ont été notamment provoquées par l'opposition entre les traditions sunnites et les traditions chiites.

Selon les traditions sunnites, Mahomet s'est désigné lui-même par les titres *khātām al-nabiyyīn* et *khātām al-nūbuwwa*. Quelques commentateurs ont considéré que le sens réel de l'expression ne vise que la perfection absolue du message transmis par Mahomet, qui a été investi de la totalité de la vertu prophétique, mais que la capacité à prophétiser ne s'est pas arrê- tée avec lui.

54. Voir M. AZAIEZ – G.S. REYNOLDS – T. TESEI – H.M. ZAFER (éd.), « QS 30 – Q 33: 40 », dans *The Qur'an Seminar Commentary – Le Qur'an Séminaire: A Collaborative Analysis of 50 Qur'anic Passages – Commentaire collaboratif de 50 passages coraniques*, Berlin, 2016, p. 293-295.

55. S.K. SAMIR, « Une réflexion chrétienne sur la mission prophétique de Muhammad », dans A.-M. DELCAMBRE & J. BOSSHARD (éd.), *Enquêtes sur l'islam. En hommage à Antoine Moussali*, Paris, 2004, p. 263-292, spécialement p. 267-268.

Selon les traditions chiïtes, la sainteté des imans comporte une part importante de prophétie, qui les situe sur ce plan juste après Mahomet, mais parfois dans une position supérieure à la sienne. La capacité à interpréter les textes (*ta'wīl*) est présentée dans tous les cas comme indispensable au décryptage du message dont il a été le porte-parole : ainsi, dans le chiïsme, sans le *ta'wīl*, le Coran est lettre morte.

Ces deux traditions, par leurs théologiens soumis d'une manière ou d'une autre à des pouvoirs politiques souvent identiques, ont imposé à tous les musulmans la doctrine de la fin de la prophétie, non sans aménagements.

Ainsi, par exemple, dans certains cercles chiïtes, la doctrine de l'homme divin, établissant une continuité perpétuelle de la prophétie à travers les imams et leurs initiés, qui bénéficient de l'inspiration ou de la révélation divines par l'intermédiaire de l'esprit saint, est en contradiction avec la doctrine selon laquelle Mahomet est le « Sceau de la Prophétie », considéré comme le dernier des prophètes<sup>56</sup>. En clair, comme le dit avec beaucoup de pertinence Mohammad-Ali Amir-Moezzi : « l'imam est capable, grâce à l'esprit saint, entité céleste mais aussi composante d'origine céleste de son âme, d'entrer directement en relation avec la source de toutes révélations » et de préciser « il n'a besoin, le cas échéant, ni du Prophète ni du Coran »<sup>57</sup>. C'est précisément, ce à quoi pourrait s'opposer le concept coranique du « Sceau des Prophètes ».

Dans la tradition musulmane, il est affirmé unanimement que Mahomet a adopté un homme du nom de Zayd, lui conférant alors les droits d'héritages découlant de cette adoption. Pourtant, il convient cependant de remarquer que si la prophétie est héréditaire et si Mahomet a un fils, il ne peut pas être le dernier des prophètes ou, à l'inverse, s'il est le dernier des prophètes, il ne peut avoir de fils.

Selon David S. Powers, auteur de deux ouvrages importants sur la tradition relative à Zayd et aux conséquences de son adoption provisoire<sup>58</sup>, des changements radicaux ont sans doute été apportés dans le courant du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle pour conférer à Mahomet le statut de « dernier prophète ». Pour ce faire, il a considéré l'interprétation musulmane des récits sur la répudiation de Zayd par Mahomet, son mariage avec la femme de ce dernier et le martyre de Zayd au cours d'une bataille contre les Byzantins. Ainsi, pour ce critique, ce sont des raisons théologiques qui ont conduit à des

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56. À ce sujet, voir M.-A. Amir-Moezzi, « Les cinq esprits de l'homme divin (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine, XIII) », dans *Der Islam* 92 (2015), p. 297-320, spécialement p. 316 et p. 319-320.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

58. D.S. POWERS, *Muhammad is not the Father of Any of you Men. The Making of the Last Prophet*, Philadelphie/Pennsylvanie, 2009 ; *Zayd: the Little Known Story of Muhammad's Adopted Son*, Philadelphie/Pennsylvanie, 2014, p. 117-123.

changements dans ces récits et à l'abolition ou à la réforme de certaines institutions juridiques fondamentales.

Toujours selon David S. Powers, comme « Sceau des Prophètes », Mahomet est censé confirmer les révélations reçues par les prophètes antérieurs, mais comme le « dernier des prophètes », interprétation probablement plus tardive, il est celui qui a mis fin à la prophétie.

On estime généralement que le « Sceau des Prophètes » est un concept qui se trouve non seulement dans l'islam, mais aussi dans le manichéisme. Les auteurs musulmans (comme al-Biruni, al-Shahrastani ou Ibn al-Mur-tada) savent, en effet, que Mani s'est déclaré être le « Sceau des Prophètes » : une représentation ayant été reprise par Mahomet, qui se l'est appliqué ou auquel on l'a appliqué.

Certains savants modernes comme Adolph von Harnack (1851-1930)<sup>59</sup> ou Moshé Gil (1921-2014)<sup>60</sup> ont considéré, l'un et l'autre à leur manière, que l'islam a dû être influencé par le manichéisme, si ce n'est avoir été « un rejeton non conformiste du manichéisme » – c'est le cas aussi de Róbert Simon<sup>61</sup>. De fait, ce rapprochement paraît erroné, car jamais dans la littérature manichéenne Mani n'est désigné comme le « Sceau des Prophètes », ainsi que l'ont montré, on l'a déjà vu, d'autres éminents savants modernes comme Carsten Colpe et Guy G. Stroumsa.

La plus ancienne attestation de l'expression « Sceau des Prophètes » figure dans le traité *Contre les Judéens* de Tertullien : il en a déjà été question. Toutefois, pour cet auteur chrétien, l'expression ne renvoie pas au dernier des prophètes, mais à l'accomplissement de toutes les prophéties. Ainsi, dans ce texte, le dernier des prophètes à avoir annoncé Jésus est Jean le Baptiste. Dans le Coran, le « Sceau des Prophètes » désigne le dernier des prophètes au sens où il apporte la dernière version du message divin aux hommes, seule version vraie et seule voie de salut.

Il est possible que Mahomet se soit considéré dans un premier temps comme le « prophète de la fin du monde » (le *nābī l-malḥama*), celui qui annonce la parousie imminente devant survenir de son vivant, ainsi que l'a fort bien démontré Paul Casanova (1861-1926) dans un ouvrage qui a fait date<sup>62</sup>, avant d'être considéré, dans un second temps comme le « Sceau des Prophètes ». Autrement dit, Mahomet aurait été un prophète eschatologique et non pas un prophète fondateur de religion : une perspective qui est maintenant reprise par nombre de chercheurs, comme par exemple

59. A. VON HARNACK, *Christliche Parallelen zum Islam*, Leipzig, 1877-1878.

60. M. GIL, « The Creed of Abu 'Amir », dans *Israel Oriental Studies* 12 (1992), p. 9-47.

61. R. SIMON, « Mani and Muhammad », dans *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1997), p. 118-141.

62. P. CASANOVA, *Mohammed et la fin du monde. Étude critique sur l'islam primitif*, Paris, 1911-1913.



Jan M.F. van Reeth<sup>63</sup> et Stephen J. Shoemaker<sup>64</sup> qui s'inscrivent dans les grandes lignes du courant historiographique dit « révisionniste » dont le chef de file a été John Wansbrough<sup>65</sup>, suivi par Patricia Crone et Michael Cook<sup>66</sup>, ainsi que par Fred M. Donner<sup>67</sup>.

Faire l'histoire de l'expression coranique « Sceau des Prophètes » n'est pas évident, comme le montrent les nombreux spécialistes qui s'y sont confrontée, que ce soit dans le domaine sunnite ou dans le domaine chiite.

En se fondant sur son caractère unique dans le Coran et sur l'origine non arabe du terme *khātām*, l'authenticité de cette expression a souvent été plus ou moins mise en doute, et ce depuis Hartwig Hirschfeld en 1886<sup>68</sup>. Pour Yohanan Friedman (1986), sans contester son authenticité, le sens de l'expression dans son contexte coranique est difficile à évaluer de manière claire, d'autant qu'elle a été contestée durant tout le premier siècle islamique<sup>69</sup>. Pour David S. Power (2009) qui estime que le texte coranique a subi une série d'omissions secondaires et des ajouts afin de l'adapter à certaines circonstances politiques, la communauté musulmane est divisée sur la signification de l'expression : pour certains critiques, il y a confirmation des révélations issues du judaïsme et du christianisme ; pour d'autres critiques, Mahomet clôture la mission prophétique – cette idée ne s'étant imposée que sous le califat omeyyade<sup>70</sup>. Selon Uri Rubin (2014), qui est le dernier à être intervenu sur cette question, la finalité de la mission prophétique est une idée coranique et non une idée post-coranique, l'expression « Sceau des Prophètes » impliquant son caractère définitif ainsi que sa confirmation – pour ce critique, en se fondant sur la structure consonantique, le texte coranique, tout au moins la sourate 33, n'a pas été falsifié : ce qui lui permet de conclure « qu'il n'y a aucune raison impérieuse de

63. J.M.F. VAN REETH, « Muḥammad: le premier qui relèvera la tête », dans A. FODOR (éd.), *Proceedings of the 20th Congress of the Union européenne des arabisants et des islamisants*, Budapest, 2003, p. 83-96 et *id.*, « Le Coran et ses scribes », dans C. CANNUYER, A. SCHHORS et R. LEBRUN (éd.), *Les scribes et la transmission du savoir*, Bruxelles, 2006, p. 67-82.

64. S.J. SHOEMAKER, *The Death of a Prophet. The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*, Philadelphie/Pennsylvanie, 2012. Voir aussi *id.*, « The Reign of God Has Come? Eschatology and Empire in Late Antiquity and Early Islam », dans *Arabica* 71 (2014), p. 514-558.

65. J. WANSBROUGH, *Quranic Studies. Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford, 1977, New York, 2006 et *id.*, *The Sectarian Milieu. Content and Composition of Islam Salvation History*, Oxford, 1978, Amherst, 2004.

66. P. CRONE & M. COOK, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge, 1977.

67. F.M. DONNER, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge/Massachusetts, 2010.

68. H. HIRSCHFELD, *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Koran*, Leipzig, 1886, p. 71-72.

69. Y. FRIEDMANN, « Finality of Prophethood in Sunni Islam », p. 177-215.

70. D.S. POWERS, *Muḥammad is not the Father of Any of you Men. The Making of the Last Prophet*, 2009.

supposer que pour les musulmans du premier siècle islamique qu'originellement l'expression coranique *khātām al-nabiyyīn* est comprise dans le sens de confirmation seule, sans celui de finalité »<sup>71</sup>.

Quoi qu'il en soit de ces diverses positions critiques, si l'on acceptait de considérer que l'expression « Sceau des Prophètes » soit une insertion postérieure, la grande question qui se poserait alors est la suivante : à quand remonte cet ajout dans le verset 40 de la sourate 33 ? Ce qui sous-entend de se demander également quel a été le contexte politique et religieux de cette insertion ?

Précisons qu'on peut dater de manière différente l'insertion du concept « Sceau des Prophètes », notamment en fonction du modèle historiographique que l'on adopte pour les débuts de l'islam – ce qui est source de difficultés face à une instabilité variant considérablement selon tel ou tel modèle.

Si l'on admettait le modèle de Fred M. Donner, qui considère que les croyants adhérant au message de Mahomet ne se sont définis que tardivement comme musulmans, c'est-à-dire comme membres d'une communauté religieuse totalement distincte du judaïsme et du christianisme, le concept « Sceau des Prophètes » aurait pu être alors inséré dans le verset 40 de la sourate 33, à l'époque du calife 'Abd al-Malik (685-705)<sup>72</sup> et des inscriptions du Dôme du Rocher réalisées sur ses ordres en 691-692 (son nom ayant été remplacé par celui de al-'Ma'mūn)<sup>73</sup>, lors de la mise en œuvre du Coran désigné comme celui « d'"Uthmān » – du moins d'après l'hypothèse d'Alphonse Mingana (1878-1937) fondée sur les travaux de Paul Casanova dont il a déjà été question<sup>74</sup>.

Concernant l'ajout possible de ce verset coranique, dans son compte-rendu du livre de David S. Powers, sur *Zayd*, Mohammad-Ali Amir-Moezzi propose l'hypothèse considérant la volonté de neutraliser les effets de la naissance du premier descendant mâle de Mahomet en la personne de Hasan, fils de Ali et de Fatima et donc petit-fils du Prophète : celui-ci appelle d'ailleurs toujours Hasan et son frère Husayn, ses deux fils<sup>75</sup>.

71. U. RUBIN, « The Seal of the Prophets and the Finality of Prophecy », p. 65-96, spécialement p. 96.

72. Voir G. HAWTING, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750*, Carbondale/Illinois, 1987, s.n. 'Abd al-Malik.

73. Voir C. KESSLER, « 'Abd al-Malik's Inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock: A Reconsideration », dans *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 102 (1970), p. 2-14. Voir aussi O. GRABAR, « Kubbat al-Ṣakhra », dans *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, V (1986), p. 297-299 et *id.*, *La formation de l'art islamique*, Paris, 1987, p. 61-67.

74. A. MINGANA, « The Transmission of the Koran », dans *Journal of the Manchester Egyptian and Oriental Society* 5 (1915-1916), p. 25-47 (= *Moslem Word* 7 (1917), p. 223-232 et p. 402-414).

75. M.-A. AMIR-MOEZZI, « David S. POWERS, *Zayd: The Little Known Story of Muḥammad's Adopted Son*, Philadelphie (Pennsylvanie), University of Pennsylvania

Dans ce cas, l'emprunt direct au manichéisme, s'il s'avérait – ce qui est toutefois peu probable –, apparaîtrait comme plus évident, car les musulmans sont alors depuis plusieurs décennies en contact avec les manichéens de Babylonie et du Golfe Persique – d'autant que les manichéens, s'ils sont attestés dans le Chatt al-Arab et le long du Golfe Persique (notamment à al-Hira en Babylonie au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle<sup>76</sup>), ne le sont pas ailleurs dans la Péninsule Arabique.

Comme l'affirme avec justesse Mohammad-Ali Amir-Moezzi, « l'histoire de l'islam naissant est marquée par une violence séculaire se manifestant surtout par d'incessantes guerres civiles qui, nécessairement, ont eu une influence décisive sur la genèse et le développement des textes scripturaires et des doctrines »<sup>77</sup>. C'est peut-être dans ce contexte qu'il faudrait situer l'apparition du concept « Sceau des Prophètes » et son élaboration, dans le cadre des guerres menées par le pouvoir central contre les « faux-prophètes » émergeant un peu partout dans l'ensemble du monde musulman et non seulement dans la Péninsule Arabique<sup>78</sup>.

Il n'est pas possible ici d'entrer dans le détail des nombreuses rébellions et répressions qui ont traversé l'histoire des califats omeyyade et abbasside – les chefs rebelles, revendiquant plus ou moins un statut prophétique, ayant presque tous tendance à se déclarer prophètes et envoyés de Dieu à l'instar de Mahomet<sup>79</sup>.

Que ce soit dans le sunnisme ou dans le chiisme, le concept « Sceau des Prophètes », signifiant la finalité de la prophétie, semble avoir mis un certain temps pour être accepté par tous. Mais, comme le souligne avec propos Mohammad-Ali Amir-Moezzi, « l'idée d'une rupture définitive

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Press, 2014, 175 pages », dans *Judaïsme ancien / Ancient Judaism* 5 (2017), p. 333-342.

76. Voir M. TARDIEU, « L'arrivée des manichéens à al-Hira », dans P. CANIVET & J.-P. REY-COQUET (éd.), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam. VIIe-VIIIe siècles. Actes du Colloque international Lyon – Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen / Paris – Institut du Monde Arabe. 11-15 septembre 1990*, Damas, 1992, p. 15-24; *id.*, « L'Arabie du Nord-Est d'après les documents manichéens », dans *Studia iranica* 23 (1994), p. 59-75.

77. M.-A. AMIR-MOEZZI, « Dissimulation tactique (*taqiyya*) et scellement de la prophétie (*khatm al-nubuwwa*) (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine, XII) », dans *Journal asiatique* 302 (2014), p. 411-438, spécialement p. 432.

78. À ce sujet, voir Y. FRIEDMANN, « Finality of Prophethood in Sunni Islam », p. 177-215, spécialement p. 193-194. Voir aussi C.J. ROBIN, « Les signes de la prophétie en Arabie à l'époque de Muhammad (fin VI<sup>e</sup> siècle et début VII<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'ère chrétienne) », dans S. GEORGOUDI, R. KOCH-PIETTRE et F. SCHMIDT (éd.), *La raison des signes : présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne*, Leyde-Boston, 2012, p. 433-476.

79. À ce sujet, voir M.-A. AMIR-MOEZZI, « Dissimulation tactique (*taqiyya*) et scellement de la prophétie (*khatm al-nubuwwa*) », p. 433-436. Voir aussi *id.*, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant. Sources scripturaires de l'islam entre histoire et ferveur*, Paris, 2011, où l'hypothèse est déjà avancée.

entre le Ciel et le Sage », qui est liée avec ce concept, semble avoir été mal supportée par les imams chiites et leurs adeptes, au point qu'« ils auraient introduit des nuances dans les données prophétologiques pour sauvegarder la possibilité d'une telle communication en y appliquant en même temps les règles de la *taqiyya*, de la garde du secret »<sup>80</sup>.

Il est même envisageable de considérer tout le verset 40 de la sourate 33 comme un ajout tardif de l'époque omeyyade : c'est l'hypothèse que propose David S. Powers, avec pour objectif d'établir le concept et donc le dogme de l'ultime prophète<sup>81</sup> ; hypothèse qui est également reprise par Guillaume Dye dans ses publications<sup>82</sup>.

Cette idée de la clôture de la prophétie ne peut pas effectivement être antérieure à l'établissement du pouvoir omeyyade, car c'est aussi de cette époque que daterait, du moins d'après Alfred-Louis de Prémare dans un premier temps<sup>83</sup> et Fred M. Donner dans un second temps<sup>84</sup>, la mise en place de l'islam avec ses propres caractéristiques marquant de manière définitive, son éloignement du judaïsme comme du christianisme, suivi par bien d'autres critiques comme par exemple Guillaume Dye<sup>85</sup>.

Ajoutons qu'il est possible que ce passage du « Sceau des Prophètes » ait été interpolé à des fins de politique intérieure et non à des fins de politique extérieure : c'est-à-dire pour rallier des opposants musulmans au pouvoir omeyyade, et non de nouveaux convertis à l'islam. En effet, les mouvements politico-religieux dissidents ont été nombreux avant l'accession au pouvoir d'Abd al-Malik, ils ont été présents autant en terre chiite qu'en terre sunnite – suscitant partout dans le monde islamique un climat de violences et un cycle de répressions.

D'un point de vue philologique, il est évidemment difficile de contrôler la validité de ce qui ne peut être qu'une hypothèse, étant donné qu'on ne connaît à ce jour, de l'avis même des paléographes coraniques, aucun fragment de cette sourate sans ce verset.

Si l'on en croit la tradition chiite, le contenu du Coran a varié et que celui réuni par 'Ali n'est pas tout à fait le même que celui réuni par 'Uth-

80. *Id.*, « Dissimulation tactique (*taqiyya*) et scellement de la prophétie (*khatm al-nubuwwa*) », p. 435.

81. D.S. POWERS, *Zayd: the Little Known Story of Muhammad's Adopted Son*, p. 117-123.

82. G. DYE, « Pourquoi et comment se fait un texte canonique ? Quelques réflexions sur l'histoire du Coran », dans C. BROUWER, G. DYE et A. VAN ROMPAEY (éd.), *Hérésies: une construction d'identités religieuses*, Bruxelles, 2015, p. 55-104, spécialement p. 70.

83. A.-L. DE PRÉMARE, *Les fondations de l'islam. Entre écriture et histoire*, Paris, 2000.

84. F.M. DONNER, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge/Massachusetts, 2010.

85. G. DYE, « Pourquoi et comment se fait un texte canonique ? », p. 55-104.

man. Ainsi, en ce qui concerne la sourate 33, dans laquelle se trouve le verset 40 sur le « Sceau des Prophètes », elle aurait comporté 286 versets et non pas 73 versets comme cela est le cas actuellement<sup>86</sup>. Au-delà de ces généralités, il est évidemment difficile d'en savoir plus, puisque le Coran connu est supposé être celui de 'Uthman.

Quoi qu'il en soit, l'histoire des origines de l'islam semble marquée par deux phénomènes politiques et religieux spécifiques qui s'entremêlent étroitement : (1) une violence permanente sous forme de guerres civiles ; (2) une élaboration scripturaire, à savoir le Coran et le Ḥadīth, à des fins de régulation et d'unification. Ces deux phénomènes, – bien mis en évidence par Mohammad-Ali Amir-Moezzi dans un livre rompant avec certains consensus parfois troublants qui estiment que les événements relatifs à la succession de Mahomet ne sont que de simples « tensions » ou « péri-péties » et les sources où est rapportée la résistance de 'Ali et de ses partisans comme « suspectes »<sup>87</sup> –, fondent le pouvoir des successeurs légitimes ou illégitimes de Mahomet<sup>88</sup>.

Un pouvoir qui, pour s'établir avec une certaine légitimité, doit maîtriser la codification scripturaire, laquelle conditionne les croyances et les pratiques des fidèles : ces derniers sont ainsi dominés et unifiés, et donc plus soumis.

La question de la fin de la prophétie que l'expression coranique *khātam al-nabiyyīn* suggère a été acceptée par tous les musulmans, sunnites et chiites, mais à des moments sans doute différents et avec des significations pouvant s'opposer de manière radicale. Son impact a été plus politique que religieux, car elle a permis l'établissement d'un pouvoir centralisé à partir d'une mise en ordre d'une prophétologie dorénavant contrôlée par des juristes-théologiens au service des califes, mais sans empêcher pour autant l'émergence d'une résistance idéologique entraînant une répression violente tant parmi les sunnites que les chiites<sup>89</sup>.

Observons enfin qu'en considérant que Mahomet est le « Sceau des Prophètes », on affirme que l'islam remplace ou abroge le judaïsme et le christianisme, voire le manichéisme et le mazdéisme. Cette idée est incluse

86. À ce sujet, voir M.-A. AMIR-MOEZZI, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant*, p. 51.

87. Voir par exemple le livre de H. DJAÏT, *La grande discorde : religion et politique dans l'islam des origines*, Paris, 1989, p. 57-59.

88. M.-A. AMIR-MOEZZI, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant*. Voir le compte rendu critique M. TERRIER, « Violences politiques, écritures canoniques et évolutions doctrinales en islam : des approches traditionnelles à la nouvelle approche critique de M.A. Amir-Moezzi », dans *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 40 (2013), p. 401-427.

89. Voir S.M. WASSERSTROM, « The Moving Finger Writes: Mughira b. Sa'id's Islamic Gnosis and the Myths of its Rejection », dans *History of Religions* 25 (1985), p. 62-90.

dans l'assertion selon laquelle la fonction prophétique est héréditaire et qu'elle s'achève avec Mahomet qui marque un scellement. C'est ainsi qu'a été comprise, tout au moins à partir d'un certain moment difficile à déterminer avec précision, l'expression *khātām al-nabiyyīn*. Autrement exprimé, pour les musulmans, Mahomet est le point culminant d'une « lignée prophétique » : il est le dernier des prophètes et des messagers envoyés par *Allah* à l'humanité, il est le « Sceau des Prophètes ». Il devient ainsi celui que tous doivent rallier pour bénéficier de la rédemption ultime, la prophétie *via* Moïse ou Jésus devenant caduque

#### IV. Conclusion

Les trois concepts dans le christianisme, dans le manichéisme et dans l'islam, dont il vient d'être question, malgré une vague ressemblance, semblent indépendants les uns des autres. Le dernier ne provient pas du deuxième. Le premier n'a donné naissance ni au deuxième, ni au troisième – c'est ce qui ressort de l'analyse des textes (chrétiens et manichéens). Pourtant, ils entretiennent entre eux un certain rapport, laissant penser qu'ils se sont influencés les uns les autres.

Existe-il un lien entre ces trois concepts, le chrétien, le manichéen et le musulman ? Un lien qui permettrait de mieux les comprendre et donc de mieux les expliquer. On suggère que ce lien pourrait avoir été la pratique de la dissimulation que le christianisme, le manichéisme et l'islam ont utilisée à telle ou telle époque pour exister et survivre dans un environnement relativement hostile. D'autant que dans l'Antiquité tardive, la continuité de la prophétie, qui est une notion capitale dans plusieurs traditions religieuses, apparaît au centre de ce que l'on appelle la dissimulation qui est fondamentale pour tout mouvement eschatologique face aux pouvoirs politiques et institutionnels<sup>90</sup>. Il s'agit d'une hypothèse que l'on ne peut pas totalement développer dans le cadre de cette contribution : aussi ne va-t-on que donner quelques éléments dispersés<sup>91</sup>.

Pour ce faire, on va partir de la *taqiyya* dans l'islam à propos du concept du « Sceau des Prophètes »<sup>92</sup>. La *taqiyya*, qui, selon Mohammad-Ali Amir-Moezzi, signifie « dissimulation tactique », consiste « à cacher une vérité relevant de la croyance de ceux qui n'en sont pas dignes », autre-

90. Voir le dossier réuni et introduit par M.V. CERUTTI, « *Dissimulatio*. Between Anthropology and Theology: an Introduction to the Subject », dans *Annali di scienze religiose* 4 (2011), p. 9-14.

91. Pour une première approche, voir M.-T. URVOY, « Dissimulation », dans M.-A. AMIR-MOEZZI (éd.), *Dictionnaire du Coran*, Paris, 2007, p. 222-223. Voir aussi M.-A. AMIR-MOEZZI, « Dissimulation », dans *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* I (2001), p. 540-542.

92. À ce sujet, voir M.-A. AMIR-MOEZZI, « Dissimulation tactique (*taqiyya*) et scellement de la prophétie (*khātām al-nubuwwa*) », p. 411-438.

ment dit : cacher son appartenance religieuse, éventuellement la renier, en cas de menace sur son intégrité physique ou sa vie.

Dans l'Antiquité, la pratique de la dissimulation se rencontre dans certains milieux mystiques et philosophiques, ainsi que dans les cultes à mystères. Elle est réclamée de la part de ses disciples ou adeptes qui ne doivent pas en divulguer les pensées ou rituels, comme cela est le cas, par exemple, dans *Les Métamorphoses* d'Apulée (de la fin du II<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère), mettant en scène l'initiation de son héros, Lucius, aux mystères isiaques à Cenchrées près de Corinthe.

Dans le christianisme, sous le nom de « discipline de l'arcane », on connaît la dissimulation chez les penseurs chrétiens de l'Antiquité (Clément d'Alexandrie, Origène d'Alexandrie, Basile de Césarée, Cyrille de Jérusalem et le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite)<sup>93</sup>. La discipline de l'arcane est fondée sur Mt 7, 6 : « Ne donnez pas aux chiens ce qui est sacré, ne jetez pas vos perles aux porcs, de peur qu'ils ne les piétinent et que, se retournant, ils ne vous déchirent ». Il en est question tant dans les groupes judaïsants que dans les groupes gnosticisants : pour les premiers, voir la littérature pseudo-clémentine, notamment les lettres préliminaires qui s'en réclament à des fins de transmission aux initiés et non à tous, ainsi que dans les *Homélies* ou les *Reconnaisances* ; pour les seconds, voir certains écrits retrouvés dans la bibliothèque de Nag Hammadi<sup>94</sup>.

Certains critiques, notamment Hans Kippenberg<sup>95</sup> et Josef van Ess<sup>96</sup>, ont tendance à voir dans le caractère sacré de la *taqiyya* une influence de la *disciplina arcana* chrétienne. Quoi qu'il en soit, il est certain que la pratique de la dissimulation se rencontre aussi bien chez les chrétiens, les manichéens et les musulmans. Chez les chrétiens et les musulmans, elle permet la transmission des idées au travers de certains concepts : il pourrait en avoir été ainsi pour celui du Vrai Prophète et celui du Sceau des Prophètes, identifiés à Jésus pour le premier et à Mahomet pour le second – plus tard, les manichéens auraient pu l'utiliser pour imposer Mani.

On va faire nôtre la remarque de Karim Douglas Crow à la fin de son article : « Nous nous défendons de poursuivre la question au-delà de ce point, en espérant que le lecteur intéressé prendra les matériaux présen-

93. À ce sujet, voir P. BATIFFOL, « Arcane », dans *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* I/2 (1937), col. 1738-1758.

94. Voir C. GIANOTTO, « La dissimulazione nello gnosticismo », dans *Annali di scienze religiose* 4 (2011), p. 71-82.

95. H.G. KIPPENBERG, « Ketman. Zur Maxime der Verstellung in der antiken und frühislamischen Religions-geschichte », dans J.W. VAN HERTEN (éd.), *Tradition and Re-Interpretation in Jewish and Early Christian Literature' Essays in Honour of Jürgen C.H. Lebram*, Leyde, 1986, p. 172-183, spécialement p. 173.

96. J. VAN ESS, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. Und 2. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, I, Berlin-New York, 1991, p. 313.

tés ici pour continuer la réflexion sur les questions soulevées»<sup>97</sup> – une remarque que nous devons à notre éminent collègue Mohammad-Ali Amir-Moezzi<sup>98</sup>.

Ces trois concepts entretiennent entre eux un rapport certain, a-t-on déjà observé. Reste à savoir comment est-il envisageable de définir ce rapport ? Faut-il le voir en termes d'appropriation ou en termes d'adaptation ? Étant donné les origines du manichéisme, qui sont assurément elkasaites, il n'y a pas grande difficulté à concevoir une appropriation de la conception du *Verus Propheta* et son adaptation. Il n'en demeure pas moins que l'expression *Verus Propheta* est totalement absente de la documentation manichéenne connue, seule l'expression de « sceau des prophètes » étant attestée et avec un sens qui est tout autre. Pour l'islam, c'est moins simple : il y a appropriation du concept qui vient peut-être du christianisme, mais probablement pas du manichéisme. Dans tous les cas, celui auquel l'emprunt est supposé avoir été fait ne consent aucune donation : il ne lui est d'ailleurs rien demandé. L'emprunteur prend ce qui lui convient et il ne se sent tenu d'en référer à quiconque, sinon à lui-même, en construisant ses propres légitimations.

Il faut envisager aussi une certaine fluidité de ces trois concepts que l'on retrouve directement ou indirectement dans de nombreuses traditions religieuses englobées sous les étiquettes de judaïsme et de christianisme, d'islam aussi. Cette fluidité atteste des contacts entre Judéens, chrétiens et musulmans sous forme de dialogues entre savants ou sous forme de sources écrites qui les véhiculent dans des narrations n'ayant pas obligatoirement un aspect théologique<sup>99</sup>. Donner un contexte historique à une telle fluidité n'est pas évident et ne s'impose pas, d'autant que l'exercice ne débouche bien souvent que sur des hypothèses incontrôlables.

Il n'en demeure pas moins que le concept du « Vrai Prophète » comme celui du « Sceau des Prophètes », chez les chrétiens comme chez les musulmans, sont bien plus importants qu'on ne le pense généralement. Derrière ces concepts, il y a l'idée fondamentale et primordiale d'ordre apologétique que, parmi les religions révélées, seule la dernière est l'accomplissement ou l'aboutissement des précédentes. Une idée qui a été bien exploitée, essen-

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97. K.D. CROW, « The 'Five Limbs' of the Soul: A Manichean Motif in Muslim Garb? », dans T. LAWSON (éd.), *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought. Essays in Honour of Hermann Landolt*, London-New York, 2005, p. 30.

98. M.-A. AMIR-MOEZZI, « Les cinq esprits de l'homme divin (Aspects de l'imamologie duodécimaine, XIII) », dans *Der Islam* 92 (2015), p. 297-320, spécialement p. 298.

99. Voir P.S. ALEXANDER, « Transformations of Jewish Traditions in Early Islam: The Case of Enoch/Idris », dans G.R. HAWTING, J.A. MOJADDEDI et A. SAMELY (éd.), *Studies in Islamic and Eastern Texts and Traditions in Memory of Norman Calder*, Oxford, 2001, p. 11-29, spécialement p. 29.



tiellement dans des conflits internes, par les chrétiens, mais qui l'a été aussi par les musulmans. Elle est évidemment très dépréciative pour les religions « non célestes » (selon la terminologie musulmane) – c'est-à-dire les religions païennes –, et elle rejette totalement celui qui n'a pas de religion et celui qui refuse toute religion. Il paraît donc impossible pour les non chrétiens ou les non musulmans de reconnaître Jésus ou Mahomet comme le « Sceau des Prophètes », car le faire équivaut à se faire chrétien ou musulman – une question qui doit être toujours d'actualité dans le « dialogue » islamo-chrétien.

Pour les chrétiens « orthodoxes », contrairement aux chrétiens « hétérodoxes », la question est posée autrement. Pour les premiers, le prophétisme a presque totalement disparu au profit du messianisme qui est devenu exclusif<sup>100</sup> – en dehors toutefois des groupes dont il est question par exemple dans la *Didachè*, dans *l'Apocalypse de Jean* ou dans *l'Apocalypse de Pierre*. Pour les seconds, en revanche, le prophétisme s'est maintenu ainsi qu'on peut le constater dans certains mouvements comme ceux, par exemple, des ébionites et des elksaïtes, également aussi dans le mouvement initié par Montan et ses prophétesses en Phrygie<sup>101</sup>.

Pour répondre à la problématique de ce colloque sur le judéo-christianisme et les origines de l'islam, une question difficile et discutée qui semble avoir été posée pour la première fois par Adolf Harnack en 1877-1878<sup>102</sup>, souvent reprise depuis, il est difficile de se prononcer uniquement sur la base de ces expressions prophétiques qui entretiennent inévitablement entre elles des rapports, mais de là à dire qu'elles s'originent et s'influencent il y a un pas que l'historien doit avoir du mal à franchir<sup>103</sup>. Sans se prononcer plus avant sur la validité de cette problématique, observons seulement que devant l'ambiguïté du concept « judéo-christianisme », il

100. Voir D.E. AUNE, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, Grand Rapids/Michigan, 1983.

101. À ce sujet, voir J.M.F. VAN REETH, « La typologie du prophète selon le Coran : le cas de Jésus », dans G. DYE & F. NOBILIO (éd.), *Figures bibliques en islam*, Bruxelles, 2011, p. 81-105.

102. A. VON HARNACK, *Christliche Parallelen zum Islam*. Voir aussi *id.*, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, II, Tübingen, 1909, p. 529-538.

103. Pour un état des questions et des recherches, voir celui très récent de G. STROUMSA, « Judéo-christianisme et islam des origines », dans *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 156 (2013), p. 489-512 (= « Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins », dans B. SADEGHI, A.Q. AHMED, A. SILVERSTEIN – R. G. HOYLAND (éd.), *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts. Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone*, Leyde-Boston, 2015, p. 72-96). Voir aussi la contribution plus développée de P. CRONE, « Jewish Christianity and the Qur'an (Part One) », dans *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74 (2015), p. 225-253 et « Jewish Christianity and the Qur'an (Part Two) », dans *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 75 (2016), p. 1-21.

semble préférable d'utiliser le concept « judaïsme chrétien » qui présente l'avantage d'être plus clair<sup>104</sup>.

S'il est certain que les Judéens de l'Arabie ou du Shâm en général ont exercé une certaine influence sur le mouvement de Mahomet et de ses premiers disciples, notamment sur son caractère prophétique et eschatologique que certains d'entre eux ont rejoint durant un temps sans abandonner pour autant leurs croyances et pratiques, une question toutefois se pose : est-ce que ces Judéens sont des chrétiens ? Tout le problème est là, car s'il est à peu près sûr que ce ne sont pas des Judéens rabbiniques, il se pourrait en revanche que ce soient des Judéens synagogaux<sup>105</sup> et non pas des Judéens chrétiens, lesquels ne sont pas attestés dans le centre et le nord de la Péninsule Arabique. C'est une hypothèse qu'il ne faut nullement négliger, d'autant que les recherches les plus récentes sur le judaïsme en Arabie, conduites avec pertinence par Christian J. Robin, vont dans ce sens<sup>106</sup>.

Dans le « melting-pot » religieux de l'Arabie du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle, les seuls qui ne soient pas attestés sont les chrétiens d'origine judéenne – à moins, évidemment, qu'on ne sache pas encore les identifier dans la documentation disponible.

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104. À ce sujet, voir S.C. MIMOUNI, « Le judaïsme chrétien ancien : quelques remarques et réflexions sur un problème débattu et rebattu », dans *Judaïsme ancien / Ancient Judaism* 1 (2013), p. 263-279.

105. À ce sujet, voir S.C. MIMOUNI, *Le judaïsme ancien du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle avant notre ère au III<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère : des prêtres aux rabbins*, Paris, 2012, p. 475-505 et p. 529-567. Voir aussi J. COSTA, « Qu'est-ce que le judaïsme synagogal ? », dans *Judaïsme ancien / Ancient Judaism* 3 (2015), p. 63-218. Voir encore id. S.C. MIMOUNI, « Le 'judaïsme sacerdotal et synagogal' en Palestine et en Diaspora entre le II<sup>e</sup> et le VI<sup>e</sup> siècle : propositions pour un nouveau concept », dans *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 159 (2015), p. 113-147.

106. C.J. ROBIN, « Le judaïsme de Himyar », dans *Arabia* 1 (2003), p. 97-172 ; id., « Himyar et Israël », dans *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 148 (2004), p. 831-908 ; id., « Joseph, dernier roi de Himyar (de 522 à 525, ou une des années suivantes) », dans *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 32 (2008), p. 1-124 ; id., « Les religions pratiquées par les membres de la tribu de Kinda (Arabie) à la veille de l'Islam », dans *Judaïsme ancien / Ancient Judaism* 1 (2013), p. 203-261 ; id., « Le roi himyrite Tha'ran Yuhān'im (v. 342-v. 375). Stabilisation politique et réforme religieuse », dans *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 41 (2014), p. 1-96 ; id., « Quel judaïsme en Arabie ? », dans C.J. ROBIN (éd.), *Le judaïsme de l'Arabie antique. Colloque de Jérusalem (février 2006)*, Turnhout, 2015, p. 15-296.

# JEWISH CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAMIC ORIGINS. THE TRANSFORMATION OF A PERIPHERAL RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT?

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Among all the different theories that currently explore the religious milieu of Late Antiquity to elucidate the origins of the Islamic religion, there are some works that strongly attract our attention: I am referring to those that revive the question of a potential link between Early Islam and Jewish Christianity; that is to say, Christians that maintained or adopted certain Jewish beliefs and practices, either Jews that believed in the messianism and/or the prophecy of Jesus (groups whose existence and nature is still a matter of debate).

This theory was proposed for the first time by the Irish freethinker John Toland (d. 1722), considered the creator of the modern concept of “Jewish Christianity” together with Ferdinand Christian Baur.<sup>1</sup> Toland considered that the testimony of the *Gospel of Barnabas* (an apocryphal document probably of *Morisco* origin) provided evidence that the roots of Islamic religion should be sought in the “most ancient monuments of Christian religion” and not in the Christian heresies.<sup>2</sup> Almost two centuries later, Adolf von Harnack (1909) reformulated the same idea with more contemporary terms, thus becoming the true precursor of the current theories on the Jewish-Christian origins of Islam,<sup>3</sup> a thesis that would

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\* The writing of this paper was made possible with the generous support from the Spanish Ministry of Economy MINECO/FEDER, EU (I+D n. FFI2016-80590-P).

1. F.S. JONES (ed.), *The Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity: From Toland to Baur*, Atlanta,. The first author to use such terminology seems to have been Daniel ZWICKER in his work *Irenicum Irenicorum, Seu Recontiliatoris Christianorum hodiernorum Norma Triplex, Sana omnium hominum Ratio, Scriptura Sacra, & Traditiones*, Amsterdam?, 1658.

2. J. TOLAND, *Nazarenus: or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity containing the history of the ancient Gospel of Barnabas and the modern Gospel of the Mahometans, attributed to the same Apostle*, London, 1718, p. 5.

3. G.A. VON HARNACK, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Tübingen, 1909, vol. 2, p. 529-538. Julius WELLHAUSEN made passing reference to the *nasara* in his work *Reste arabischen Heidentums. Gesammelt und Erläutert*, Berlin, 1897, p. 232, without taking up the idea.

taken up by Adolf Schlatter (1918) and specially by Hans-Joachim Schoeps (1949). The same data would be re-examined in the works of Tor Andrae (1932) or more recently Martiniano Roncaglia (1971), among many others.<sup>4</sup>

Little more could be said in this regard using the method of establishing parallels between the Qur'ān and what could be known of the early Jewish Christianity, and therefore the issue was more or less settled. Nevertheless, some works based on the linguistic analysis and the re-interpretation of the sources began to appear during the last third of the 20th century, paving the way for a 'second generation' of studies. Without losing sight of John Wansbrough's revolutionary suggestions,<sup>5</sup> the first substantial turning point of this theory would be the proposal of Günter Lüling (1974), for whom the Qur'ān is a palimpsest in which it is possible to discover different redactional levels.<sup>6</sup> Islam in its origins would be related to a kind of marginal Christianity, which had its last refuge in Arabia: in fact, Lüling suggests that Muhammad, a member of one anti-Trinitarian Christian community (Ebionite?), inaugurated a strong monotheistic movement aiming to bring together Jewish and Jewish-Christians against the 'idolatrour' Trinitarians (that would be the original *mušrikūn*, and subsequently they were related to the pagans).<sup>7</sup> Lüling's theories had been noted in the scholarly world, but they failed to gain general acceptance, mainly due to his reconstructions of the Qur'ānic text that, at times,

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4. A. SCHLATTER, "Die Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums zum Islam," *Evangelisches Missionsmagazin* 62 (1918), p. 251-264; H.-J. SCHOEPS, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, Tübingen, 1949, p. 334-342. And also *id.*, *Das Judenchristentum: Untersuchungen über Gruppenbildungen und Parteikämpfe in der frühen Christenheit*, Bern, 1964; T. ANDRAE, *Mohammed, sein Leben und sein Glauben*, Göttingen, 1932; M.P. RONCAGLIA, "Éléments Ébionites et Elkésaites dans le Coran," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 21 (1971), p. 101-126. Roncaglia developed Harnack's theories and, basing on the legend of Waraqa ibn Nawfal, postulated an Elchasaite origin for Islam identifying Ebionism with Elchasaism.

5. One of the pioneers of revisionism in Islamology with his works *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, London Oriental Series vol. XXXIV, Oxford, 1978, and *Qur'anic Studies. Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, Oxford, 1977. C.A. SEGOVIA, "John Wansbrough and the Problem of Islamic Origins in Recent Scholarship: A Farewell to the Traditional Account," in B. LOURIE & C.A. SEGOVIA (eds.), *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, Piscataway NJ, 2012, p. xix-xxviii.

6. The oldest one being a Christian hymnary. G. LÜLING, *Über den Ur-Qur'an. Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophelieder im Qur'an*, Erlangen, 1974.

7. G. LÜLING, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad. Eine Kritik am "christlichen" Abendland*, Erlangen, p. 73-89 and 423. A summary of his theories has been published in English: *Id.*, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation: the Rediscovery and Reliable Reconstruction of a Comprehensive Pre-Islamic Christian Hymn Hidden in the Koran under Earliest Islamic Reinterpretations*, Delhi, 2003.

seemed to be at the service of his claims. However, Lüling's revisionist proposal would inspire many subsequent studies; in fact, his theory of a kind of Jewish Christianity underlying Early Islam has been received with interest by many Islamicists.

Other authors pertaining to this second generation of researchers would raise again a 'Jewish Christian connection' for the Islamic origins.<sup>8</sup> Yehuda Nevo (d. 1992), looking into the Syro-Palestinian society of the 7th and 8th centuries, argued that the religious *formulae* of the first 'Islamic' inscriptions found in the Negev suggested a undetermined monotheism that gradually progressed towards what later came to be known as "Islam". Nevo, taking inspiration from the Wansbrough's hypothesis about an Islam with a sectarian Jewish-Christian origin that progressively developed until its self-awareness, postulated that Islam was born in an environment where the vast majority of people were pagan while the elite professed a certain kind of Jewish Christianity.<sup>9</sup> Despite Nevo's theories having been strongly criticized from different perspectives,<sup>10</sup> his contributions are valuable for the study of a potential Abrahamic monotheism among the Negev Arabs of the 5th and 6th centuries.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, back in the mid-60s Shlomo Pines (d. 1990) defended the survival of Jewish Christianity into Islamic times on the basis of the information conserved in the *taṭbīṭ dala'il nubuwwat sayyidinā Muḥammad* by Abū l-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Ḡabbār (d. 415/1025) and in the *Ḥall aš-šukūk wa-l-radd 'alā l-yahūdī l-muḥālif*

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8. The idea of a Jewish-Christian origin for Islam has also inspired several Christian Arabs authors. In the 60s, Yūsuf Durra al-Ḥaddād suggested the identification of the Qur'ānic *naṣārā* with the Nazarenes: *Al- Qur'ān da'wā naṣrāniyya*, Jounieh, and *Al-Inḡīl fī l-Qur'ān*, Jounieh, 1982. More recently, the Lebanese monk Youssif AL-AZZI (Abū Mūsā al-Ḥarīrī) has imaginatively recreated the relationship of Muhammad with the "Jewish-Christian" Waraqa ibn Nawfal without providing proof. This work, subject of controversy within the Arab world, was translated into French in 2001: *Qass wa-nabī*, Jounieh-Kaslik, 1979; id., *Nabī r-raḥma*, Beirut, 1990 (French translation, *Le prêtre et le prophète*, Paris, 2001).

9. Y. NEVO, "Towards a pre-history of Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994), p. 108-141, especially p. 125-126. Y. Nevo & J. Koren, *Crossroads to Islam. The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State*, Amherst NY, 2003.

10. R.G. HOYLAND, "The Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1997), p. 96; F.M. DONNER, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, Princeton NJ, 1998, p. 62-63.

11. Y. NEVO & J. KOREN, *Crossroads to Islam*, p. 189-190. Quoted by G. STROUMSA, "Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins," in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts. Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone*, Leiden-Boston, 2014, p. 88. This contribution has been recently republished with minor modifications as a book chapter. *Id.*, *The Making of Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity*, Oxford, 2015, p. 139-158.

by Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAwn (c. 1273).<sup>12</sup> Pines was convinced that these texts contained Judeo-Christian traditions originating in a fairly late Judeo-Christian community, suggesting that Islam should be understood as a development of Jewish Christianity.<sup>13</sup> Pines theories unleashed many virulent responses by several scholars<sup>14</sup> but also arouse the interest of others<sup>15</sup>. Indeed, even some of his critics admit that it is necessary to investigate how these concepts arrived to the Qurʾān, recognizing implicitly their presence in this text.<sup>16</sup>

The theories of François de Blois (2004) can be placed within this second generation of studies. According to this scholar, the Islamic religion—which was born in an environment where Paganism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism coexisted—exhibits important similarities with this last one (especially in its conception of Prophecy) due to the common Jewish-Christian background of both religions. According to de Blois, Islam in its origins was a peripheral product in the religious life of the Near East. This early Islam had been in contact with ‘religious fossils’ of marginal character, just like Nazoraean Judaeo-Christianity (the Qurʾānic *naṣārā*–Ναζωραῖοι), different from the *ṣābiʿa*<sup>17</sup> and from the Elkhasaïtes:<sup>18</sup> in fact, this author proposes “re-opening and re-evaluating the specifically ‘Jewish Christian’ influences on the original formulation of Islam”.<sup>19</sup> Joachim Gnilka (2007) has shared De Blois interpretation of

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12. S. PINES, *The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source*, Jerusalem, 1966; *id.* “Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judeo-Christianity,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), p. 135-152, *id.* “Studies in Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity based on Arabic Sources,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 6 (1985), p. 107-161; *id.* “Judeo-Christian Materials in an Arabic Jewish Treatise,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 35 (1967), p. 187-217.

13. Such as *muʾmin/ūn* (Q 2. 62, 5.29 etc.), that he interpreted as a calque of οἱ πιστεύοντες/*credentes* (Acts 2.44 and specially 22.19), a term that, according to Pines, could be commonly used to refer to Jewish-Christians, who were different from the Christians (*naṣārā*), Jews or Zoroastrians.

14. On the debate provoked by these proposals, see G.S. REYNOLDS, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: ʿAbd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins*, Leiden, 2004, p. 1-17.

15. P. CRONE, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), p. 59-95, especially p. 74-85.

16. G.S. REYNOLDS, *A Muslim Theologian*, p. 15.

17. See Q 2:62, 5: 69 and 22: 17.

18. F. DE BLOIS, “The ‘Sabians’ (ṣābiʿūn) in Pre-Islamic Arabia,” *Acta Orientalia* 56 (1995), p. 39-61; “Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanīf (ἕθνηχός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65/1 (2002), p. 1-30 and “Elchasaï – Manes – Muhammad: Manichäismus und Islam in religionshistorischen Vergleich,” *Der Islam* 81 (2004), p. 31-48.

19. DE BLOIS, *Naṣrānī*, p. 17.

the Qur'anic term *naṣārā*, and he also defends the presence of Nazoraean communities in the early-Islamic environment. According to Gnilka, this fact might explain the close parallels between Islamic and Jewish-Christian theologies.<sup>20</sup> In any case, the different interpretations of Qur'anic terminology in this point and the historical relevance of this theory have given rise to a lengthy debate, which has lasted until today.<sup>21</sup>

The current generation of studies, represented by authors such as Holger Zellentin,<sup>22</sup> stands for an interdisciplinary approach effort that continues to suggest a rapport between Jewish Christianity and early Islam, but now taking a more cautious approach. Firstly, they propose a reformulation of the term "Jewish Christianity" and its interpretation, in line with Claude Mimouni and Annette Joshiko-Reed. On the other hand (and from the current historical perspective that considers the birth of Islam as a phenomenon that should be placed within the late antique contexts)<sup>23</sup> this new line of research is not overly centered on linguistic analysis or lexical comparatives, but it gives more attention to the study of affinities between the Qur'an and the Christian literature possibly originating in a Jewish-Christian milieu (I am referring in particular to the Pseudo-Clementine literature that took form in 4<sup>th</sup> century Syria, the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, a late antique church order that circulated widely in Syriac communities on the Arabian periphery, and the Enochic eschatological traditions preserved in the Ethiopian Christianity.) Indeed, these parallels can be detected in many formulae, topics and structures, which are present in legal narratives, ritual norms, theological doctrines and hermeneutical practices.

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20. J. GNILKA, *Die Nazarener und der Koran: Eine Spurensuche*, Freiburg, 2007.

21. At the limit of the enthusiasm for a historical reconstruction of the Islamic religion origins, taking as a reference the Qur'anic *naṣārā*, is the doctoral work of E.-M. GALLEZ, *Le Messie et son Prophète: aux origines de l'Islam: vol. I: De Qumran à Muhammad*, Versailles, 2005; *Vol. II: Du Muhammad des Califés au Muhammad de l'histoire*, Versailles, 2010, and *Vol. III: Histoire et légendologie*, Versailles, 2010. Furthermore, Sidney Griffith has presented his arguments against De Blois' interpretation, an "ingenious but tortuous line of reasoning," S.H. GRIFFITH, "Al-Naṣārā in the Qur'an," in G.S. REYNOLDS (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qur'an. The Qur'an in its historical context II*, Oxon-New York, 2011, p. 314, note 35.

22. H.M. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur'an's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*, Tübingen, 2013; C.A. SEGOVIA, "Thematic and Structural Affinities between 1 Enoch and the Qur'an: A contribution to the Study of the Judaeo-Christian Apocalyptic Setting of the Early Islamic Faith," in B. LOURIE & C.A. SEGOVIA (eds.), *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where and th Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, Piscataway NJ, 2012, p. 231-267. Anyway, some of the more recent Segovia's works tend to identify a pro-Nestorian Christianity in the Islamic origins.

23. R.G. HOYLAND, "Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion," in S.F. JOHNSON (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Oxford-New York, 2012, esp. p. 1053-1056 and 1069-1072.

The future of this line of research involves finding a satisfactory answer to three major questions related to the existence of a Jewish-Christian influence on early Islam: firstly, the problem of historicity, i.e. how to demonstrate the continue existence of Jewish-Christian communities within the early 7th century Hejaz, in order to explain in a convincing manner the ways through which these concepts may have reached nascent Islam. Intrinsically linked to this first issue is the terminological problem as indicated above, namely, the rethinking of the use and meaning of the term "Jewish-Christian". Finally it is necessary to determine if the influence of Jewish Christianity reaches the same ideological structuring of Islam as it is presented in the Qur'ān or if it is only possible to identify some common isolated theological ideas.

### **Objection to a feasible Jewish-Christian influence on early Islam.**

The arguments defending the existence of a Jewish-Christian foundation in Early Islam are of unequal value; on the other hand, the advocates of this theory adopt different positions on the same subject: the most maximalist (purely revisionist but offering a captivating view of the facts) claims that 'embryonic' Islam was only but a certain kind of local Jewish Christianity, possibly a peripheral religious movement, which developed into a differentiated religion for various reasons (Lüling, Nevo, Gallez, among others). Other moderate proposals recognize the existence of Jewish-Christian influences on the Qur'ān but they value differently the importance of those within the text. In fact, many striking data have been taken in consideration by different researchers, as is the case of the late Patricia Crone, who concluded that Jewish Christians were 'the most obvious candidates' for the role of transmitters of a number of Qur'ānic themes;<sup>24</sup> other scholars accept a possible presence in Arabia of Jewish-Christian groups, or accept the basic claim of Jewish-Christian influence on Early Islam as a reasonable possibility.<sup>25</sup>

However, there is a strong objection to the existence of real influences of Jewish Christianity on Islam, namely, the allusion to the lack of geographic or chronological proximity between both religious phenomena. This observation is based upon the assumption that Jewish Christianity

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24. P. CRONE, "Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part One)," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74/2 (2015), p. 225-253, and *id.*, "Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part Two)," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 75/1 (2016), p. 1-21.

25. For example, Aziz AL-AZMEH, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allah and his People*, Cambridge, 2014, p. 273; G. BÖWERING, "Recent Research on the Construction of Qur'ān," in G.S. REYNOLDS (ed.), *The Qur'ān in its historical context*, Oxon-New York, 2008, p. 76-77; F.M. DONNER, "The Qur'ān in recent scholarship," *ibid.*, p. 33.



disappeared probably after the 2nd century and certainly during the 4th century, and therefore it is not viable to explain neither the precise origin nor the channels through which those ideas reached the 7th century Hejaz. From this perspective it is possible to recognize in the Qurʾān some common *theologoumena*, but they would be little more than interesting (and useless) phenomenological coincidences.<sup>26</sup>

The scholars engaged in the study of early Islam usually accept at this point the most common historiographical opinion regarding Jewish Christianity, which, at the same time, depends on the version of the facts provided by Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339). According to Eusebius, “Jewish Christianity” (a denomination never used by this author or by any other Christian writer from the Patristic period) was a religious movement that ended during the 2nd century with the “parting of the ways,” with a diminishing trajectory after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. As I have just pointed out, it is common to accept the existence of Jewish Christianity during the 2nd century and even until the 3rd and 4th centuries, denying to this phenomenon any subsequent continuity.<sup>27</sup> From this perspective it is impossible to establish any link between this first Jewish Christianity and those supposed ‘Qurʾānic Jewish-Christians’, appearing from nowhere at least three centuries later.<sup>28</sup> The authors holding this conclusion argue, with no small amount of reason, that the Rabbinical works barely mention this issue.<sup>29</sup> And the Christian sources, in

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26. In any case, it seems difficult for the critics to give an alternative explanation for the more striking and unquestionable parallels: “The pertinent texts, such as the *Didascalia* and others, like the Pseudo-Clementine corpus, simply continued to be of interest and importance to the wider Christian communities of late antiquity,” S.H. GRIFFITH, “Review to Holger Zellentin’s *The Qurʾān’s Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*,” *Theological Studies* 76/1 (2015), p. 172-173.

27. *Historia Ecclesiastica* III, 5.3; IV, 5.2 and 6.3. A.Y. REED, “Jewish Christianity as a Counter-history? The Apostolic Past in Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History and the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies,” in G. GARDNER & K.L. OSTERLOH (eds.), *Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World*, Tübingen, 2008, p. 208-216.

28. R. Brague, “Le Coran: sortir du cercle?,” *Critique* 671 (2003), p. 251.

29. Apart from the allusions to an early movement represented by figures such as Yaʿqob of Kfar Sakhnayya/Kfar Sama who, according to *Tosefta* (Hul. 2, 22-23) offered to heal Eliezer b. Dama in the name of Jesus b. Pantira (see also TB *Avodah Zarab* 17a and 27b; TJ, Shab. 14:4, 14d; TJ, Av. Zar. 2:2, 40d, etc.), or the references to certain *minim* who followed these same beliefs (TB *Avoda Zara* 27b). The mention in *Berešit Rabba* 25, 1 of a controversy between the Palestinian *amora* Rabbi Abbahu (c. 300) and the *minim* about some Enochic texts is very suggestive but it does not clarify the exact nature of these heretics. An interesting analysis of those passages in Ph.J. MAYO, “The Role of the *Birkath Haminim* in Early Jewish-Christian Relations: A Reexamination of the Evidence,” *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 16.2 (2006), p. 325-344.

reference to the heresiologists and historians of the Patristic period (Eusebius, yet again),<sup>30</sup> offer unreliable information regarding Jewish-Christians because of their ambiguity, their intentionality (to deny the ‘heterodox’ traditions’ vitality, and show that the ‘orthodox’ church represents the only true apostolic religion) and their dependence on other sources<sup>31</sup>. At this point, it is necessary to overcome this perspective, working on the question from two different aspects: 1) A reformulation of the meaning of the concept “Jewish Christianity” and, from this starting point, 2) a new approach to the information provided by the sources.

### Re-thinking concepts. The ancient sources.

As noted above, it is well known that “Jewish Christianity” and its related terms is a modern category that continues to be used with the same contradictory meanings attributed to it by Eusebius, because 1) it serves to name the ‘Orthodox’ movement of the Jews who followed Jesus in the earliest Church of Jerusalem, but 2) also it is used to group certain ‘heresies’ listed in Patristic works (i. e. Ebionites, Elcasaites, Nazoraeans, etc.) into a single category. This is precisely what has caused Jewish Christianity to continue to be studied along these two lines, in spite of the fact that the concept thus expressed (as Daniel Boyarin said) has nothing to do with the reality of the facts and, therefore, is unsuitable for its correct description.<sup>32</sup> In any case, and lacking a better one, the composite word “Jewish Christianity” continues to be useful to refer to the common denominators of an extremely complex religious phenomenon that might

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30. Among them, Ignatius of Antioch (c. 107), Justin (c. 162/168), Hegesippus (d. 180) Iraeneus (c. 202), Hyppolitus of Rome (c. 236), Origen (d. 254), the aforementioned Eusebius of Caesarea, Marius Victorinus (c. 355), Epiphanius of Salamis (d.403) and Jerome (d. 420), although the list of authors belonging to the first five centuries is still longer. A.F.J. KLIJN & G.J. REININK, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects*, Leiden, 1973.

31. S.J. SHOEMAKER, *The Death of a Prophet. The End of Muhammad’s Life and the beginning of Islam*, Philadelphia, 2012, p. 209 note 62. Other authors defend the cautious use of these sources to know some details of this heterogeneous phenomenon: C.S. MIMOUNI, “Le Judaïsme Chrétien Ancien: Quelques remarques et réflexions sur in problème débattu et rebattu,” *Judaïsme ancien / Ancient Judaism* 1 (2013), p. 275. Mimouni also offers a geographical reconstruction of the 4th century Jewish-Christian settlements using the information provided by Epiphanius of Salamis, Jerome and, to a lesser extent, Eusebius, Origen and Hyppolitus. *Id.*, “Les établissements naziréens, ébionites et elkasaites d’après les hérésiologues de la Grande Église,” *Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi* 31/2 (2014), p. 25-39.

32. D. BOYARIN, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia, 2004, and *id.* “Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to which is Appended a Correction of my *Border Lines*,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99 (2009), p. 7-36.

well have continued to exist in many places of the Near East, including 7th century Arabia.<sup>33</sup>

The proposal for a redefinition of Jewish Christianity has been ongoing since at least 1998.<sup>34</sup> As a result, there is a greater agreement to accept that under this denomination we should include the multiple 'Jewish' ways of belief and worship that continued to persist or were created thanks not only to the evolution of the original Christianity of Jewish origin but also to the continuous contact between Jews and Christians: a circumstance which caused new and different Judaizer Christianities.<sup>35</sup> Jewish Christianity, far from diminishing after the catastrophe of the year 70, was emerging in different ways and forms as a vital strand, specially within Syriac, Ethiopic and Arabic Christianity, adopting the appearance of a complicated patchwork formed by different phenomena of unequal origins and nature, from which we do find cues and even proof that still needs to be further examined. Bearing in mind the inherent limitations of a presentation of this kind, paying attention to some information provided by the sources could be of interest to readdress the question of the continued existence of Jewish Christianity in the age and environment that saw the birth of Islam.

Even from a traditional perspective, influence of the synagogal Judaism in the origins of biblical, theological and liturgical traditions of Syriac Christianity (specially the Eastern branch) is a fact commonly accepted.<sup>36</sup> It would be imprecise, inaccurate and even deceptive to qualify this branch of Christianity as Jewish-Christian; however, it is true that Jewish Christianity would have been a vital element of Syriac Christianity

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33. G. STROUMSA, *Jewish Christianity*, p. 74. *Id.*, "From Qumran to Qur'an: The Religious Words of Antient Christianity," in Ch. METHUEN, A. SPICER & J. WOLFFE (eds.), *Christianity and Religious Plurality*, Woodbridge-Rochester NY, 2015, p. 5-6.

34. C.S. MIMOUNI, "Le Judaïsme Chrétien Ancien: Quelques remarques et réflexions sur un problème débattu et rebattu," *Judaïsme ancien / Ancient Judaism* 1 (2013), p. 266-274.

35. A.Y. REED, "'Jewish Christianity' after the 'Parting of the Ways,'" in A.H. BECKER & A.Y. REED (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Tübingen, 2003, p. 230-231. On Byzantine and Middle-Eastern judaizer Christians during the late Antiquity, V.K. VYHMEISTER, "The Sabbath in Asia," in K.A. STRAND (ed.), *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, Washington DC, 1982, p. 153-158.

36. R. MURRAY, "The Characteristics of Earliest Syriac Christianity," in N.G. GARSOÏAN, T.F. MATTHEWS and R.W. THOMSON (eds.), *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, Washington DC, 1982, p. 3-16; G.A.M. ROUWHORST, "Jewish Liturgical Traditions in Early Syriac Christianity," *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997), p. 74-82; L.W. BARNARD, "The origins and emergence of the Church in Edessa during the First Two Centuries A. D.," *Vigiliae Christianae* 22 (1968), p. 161-175; S. Brock, "The Peshitta Old Testament: Between Judaism and Christianity," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 19 (1998), p. 483-502.

during the 3rd and 4th centuries, as witnessed by the works of Bardaisan (d. 222), Aphrahat (d. 345) or Mani. Even the *Book of Elchaasai*, as F. Stanley Jones suggests, should not be considered as a “Christian aberration,” but a founding document of early Syrian Christianity in Mesopotamia and Syria.<sup>37</sup> The same could be said of that literature close to the Jewish-Christian views, such as the Pseudo-Clementine writings or the *Didaskalia Apostolorum*. Sidney Griffith himself says that the texts of Jewish-Christian inspiration coming from the Syriac tradition continued to be of interest and importance for the Christians of late antiquity:<sup>38</sup> in my view, the profile of those Christians could be detected thanks to some testimonies belonging to the 4<sup>th</sup> though 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, telling about the presence of Jewish-Christian communities in Syria and Mesopotamia. I will limit myself to presenting some data for the purpose of drawing attention to the possible value of a sufficient number of indications.

As Patricia Crone noted, the presence of Judaizer Christians in Syria, Mesopotamia and Phrygia during the 4<sup>th</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup> centuries is a well-known fact, but it has significant implications in understanding the oldest Islamic argumentation, because Muslims and Jewish-Christians could argue that they were the true followers of Jesus’ teachings, creating an alliance against the corruption provoked by the “introduction of Roman customs” (Trinitarian beliefs). According to Crone, the Muslim writers knew of the existence of these heterogeneous groups (among them would also be ‘old-fashioned’ Jewish-Christians) and they used their argumentation in many works such as the aforementioned *Tatbīt* of ‘Abd al-Gabbār.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, John Chrysostome’s homilies against the Jews and Judaizer Christians of Antioch (386-387), Christians keeping the Shabbat and practicing circumcision, have been recently interpreted as a reflection of an atmosphere in which orthodox Christians, Jews and Jewish-Christians of different types (converted Jews, Judaizers and ‘apostolic’ Christians) live together: a significant heterogeneity within a metropolis located on the western edge of the Syriac area.<sup>40</sup> This situation might be even more

37. F.S. Jones, *Pseudoclementina Elchasaiticaque inter Judaeochristiana: Collected Studies, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 203, Leuven, 2012, p. 473.

38. S.H. GRIFFITH, “Review to Holger Zellentin’s *The Qur’an’s Legal Culture*,” p. 172.

39. Crone suggests a middle ground between the arguments of Pines y Stern. P. CRONE, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,” p. 74-76.

40. P.W. HARKINS (tr.), *John Chrysostom, Discourses Against Judaizing Christians*. Fathers of the Church vol. 68, Washington DC, 1979. R. STARK, *The Rise of Christianity. How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*, Princeton, 1997, p. 66-67; Ch.E. FONROBERT, “Jewish Christians, Judaizers and Christian Anti-Judaism,” in V. BURRUS (ed.), *Late Ancient Christianity, A People’s History of Christianity*, vol. 2, Minneapolis, 2005, p. 234-254; P. CRONE, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,” p. 83-95.

evident inland, and was still common during the 5th century, as Isaac of Antioch testifies (d. c. 459).<sup>41</sup> In Mesopotamia there is no doubt that (in contrast with the official religion), different types of Jewish and Christian syncretism (understanding syncretism as the way in which a religious feature of one or more traditions becomes incorporated into another tradition) were very widespread among the Christian popular classes, as is evidenced by the magic bowls dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>42</sup> This finding illustrates the complaint of some ecclesiastical authors mentioning Christians who celebrated Pesah, kept Shabbat and circumcision, and use Jewish amulets.<sup>43</sup> The question appears again in the Synods of the early 8th century, referring to an oft-repeated but never respected regulation against these practices.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the reference to the *Šabtāyē* by Mārūcā of Mayfarqaṭ (d. a. 420) and Barhadb<sup>c</sup>šabbā ʿArbāyā, d. a. 650<sup>45</sup> (namely, circumcised Christians who considered that the New Testament has not abrogated the Torah and celebrated the Eucharist on Shabbat) fits well with the description of a Jewish-Christian group. Centuries later, Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) explicitly mentioned them in more detail, suggesting that *Šabtāyē* still existed at his time in the form of different homonymous groups of Novatian schismatics<sup>46</sup> and Jewish-Christians of apostolic origins. In another passage, this same autor mentions the literal exegesis (“bodily,” Syr. *gušmānā*) used by the *Šabtāyē*, placing it next to the Jewish interpretation of the Bible.<sup>47</sup>

41. S. KAZAN, “Isaac of Antioch’s Homily against the Jews,” *Oriens Christianus* 45 (1961), p. 30-53; 46 (1962), p. 87-98; 47 (1963), p. 89-97; 49 (1965), p. 57-78.

42. T. HARVIAINEN, “Syncretistic and Confessional Features in Mesopotamian Incantation Bowls,” *Studia Orientalia published by the Finnish Oriental Society* 70 (1993), p. 36-37.

43. J. NEUSNER, *Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism in Talmudic Babylonia*, Lanham MD, 1986, p. 142.

44. S. ROSENKRANZ, *Die jüdisch-christliche Auseinandersetzung unter islamischer Herrschaft. 7.-10. Jahrhundert*, Bern-Berlin, 2004.

45. G.A. VON HARNACK (tr.), “Der Ketzerkatalog des Bischofs Maruta von Maiperkat,” in O. VON GEBHART & G.A. VON HARNACK (eds.), *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, vol. IV, Leipzig, 1899, p. 7 and 14; F.-N. NAU (ed. and tr.), “Histoire de Barhadbesabba ʿArbaia,” *Patrologia Orientalis* 23 (1932), p. 187-188.

46. There was a relationship between some *shabtāyē* and certain Sabbatios, a converted Jew who created a schism within Novatianism during the reign of Theodosius I (379-395), V.K. VYHMEISTER, *The Sabbath in Asia*, p. 157.

47. *Gušmānāʿīl u-yūdāʿīl u-sabtānāʿīl*. R. SCHRÖTER, “Erster Brief Jakob’s von Edessa an Johannes den Stiliten,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 24 (1870), p. 271 (Syriac) and 275 (German). W. WRIGHT (ed.), “The Epistles of Mar Jacob, Bishop of Edessa,” *Journal of Sacred Literature 4th Series* 10 (1867), p. 26; F.-N. NAU, “Traduction des Lettres XII et XIII de Jacques d’Édesse,” *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 10 (1905), p. 278. P. CRONE, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,” p. 84-85.

On the other hand, the testimonies about a likely presence of Jewish-Christians in Palestine, Transjordan and even in Arabia deserve a careful consideration. We have, for example, the information provided by John of Damascus (d. 749) regarding the Elchasaite communities that “up to the present time inhabit that part of Arabia which lies on the further side of the Dead Sea”.<sup>48</sup> Although his testimony in this point usually is considered dependent on Epiphanius of Salamis, it should be noted that (as Stroumsa points out) this author lived in the monastery of Mar Saba, located 11 km. from the shore; this circumstance makes plausible that John could give first-hand information concerning this point.<sup>49</sup> There are also references to the survival of Jewish-Christian communities in the *Anonymous of Piacenza*, who described the Holy Land in the 570s, and in *De Locis Sanctis*, by the Irish abbot Adonman of Iona (a. 670). The author of the *Anonymous of Piacenza* claimed to have found Hebrew women in Nazareth that, unlike their co-religionists, were “full of charity” for Christians. Those women assured that their physical beauty “was granted them by the Blessed Mary, who they say was their mother”. The *Anonymous* (which uses the word *Hebrews* (*Hebraei*) only in this paragraph) is not speaking in this case of rabbinic Jews (*Iudaei*). On the other hand, the “Christian” synagogue to which this same passage refers probably corresponds to the building described by Bellarmino Bagatti after the excavations carried out between the 1950s and 60s.<sup>50</sup> Adomnan of Iona used for his work different sources whose identification and content is still a matter of controversy.<sup>51</sup> In a paragraph of his work, he makes explicit reference to a dispute that took place in Jerusalem between believing Jews, namely Jewish-Christians (*Iudei vero credentes*) and unbelieving Jews (*cum infidelibus Iudeis*) because of a Christian relic. Mu‘āwiya I himself, d. 680 (*Saracenorum rex nomine Mavias*) had to intervene in this conflict.<sup>52</sup> In reference to the Hejaz, aš-Šahrastānī (d. 1153) mentions some Jews that accepted Jesus as a Prophet, although they continued to observe the norms of their religion.<sup>53</sup>

48. F.H. CHASE (tr.), *St. John of Damascus: Writings*, The Fathers of the Church. A new Translation vol. 37, Washington DC, 1958, p. 124 (§53).

49. T.G. STROUMSA, “Jewish Christianity,” p. 75.

50. A. STEWART (tr.), *Of the Holy Places visited by Antoninus Martyr*, London, 1887, p. 4-5. B. BAGATTI, *Excavations in Nazareth. Vol. 1: From the Beginning till the XII Century*, Jerusalem, 1969.

51. R.G. HOYLAND & S. WAIDLER, “Adomnán’s *De Locis Sanctis* and the Seventh Century Near East,” *The English Historical Review* 129/ 539 (2014), p. 787-807.

52. Note the similarity with Q 61, 14. I. POMIALOVSKY (ed.), *Arculf’s Relatio de Locis Sanctis Scripta ab Adamniano c. 670*, Saint Petesburg, 1898, p. 13; J.R. MACPHERSON (tr.), *The Pilgrimage of Arculfus in the Holy Land*, London, 1895, p. 14. Quoted by G. STROUMSA, “Jewish Christianity,” p. 86.

53. M.A. AL-FĀDILĪ (ed.), Abu l-Faḥ aš-Šahrastānī, *Al-milal wan-nihal*, vol. 1, Beirut, 2010, p. 180-182.

Finally, the Ethiopic influence on the Qur'ān has been recognized for a long time, especially from the perspective of the comparative lexicography.<sup>54</sup> Even so, the studies on the possible theological influence from the Ethiopic side on Early Islam traditionally remained vague and rare, probably due to the little relevance of this field of studies in the framework of scientific research.<sup>55</sup> In the light of our approach, the presence alongside nascent Islam, *côte à côte*, of a Christian tradition strongly influenced by Judaism has raised enormous interest from some researchers. Beyond the Jewish practices clearly present in the Ethiopic Orthodox Church from at least the 5th century (most likely the product of different influences coming from the ancient Jewish Christianity and from local and South-Arabian Judaism),<sup>56</sup> the preservation within the Ethiopian Biblical Canon of books such as 1 Enoch is a fact that could explain the similarity of the Qur'ān with the images and narratives of this literature.<sup>57</sup> Apart from that, and from this standpoint, the epigraphic evidence is currently being studied, especially the Himyarite inscriptions with invocations to “Raḥmānān and His Messiah” (*rhmn w-ms'h-hw*) from the times of the Aksumite Abraha (d. a. 553), and its striking resemblance with the Qur'ānic Christological expressions. Some authors have suggested a Jewish-Christian origin of this formula with a clear Syriac influence, even though it might not be the only suitable explanation for this fact.<sup>58</sup>

### A brief note: Prophecy and Christology in early Islam

Guy Stroumsa has proposed applying a “principle of non-exclusivity” to identify the sources of early Islam, making explicit reference to the ques-

54. Th. NÖLDEKE, *Neue Beiträge zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, Strassburg, 1910, p. 31-66 (“Lehwörter in und aus dem Äthiopischen”); A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of Qur'ān*, Baroda, 1938.

55. M. KROPP, “Beyond Single Words: Mā'ida- Shayṭān – jibt and ṭaghūt. Mechanisms of transmission into the Ethiopic (Gəcəz) Bible and the Qur'ān,” in G.S. REYNOLDS (ed.), *The Qur'ān in its historical context*, Oxon-New York, 2008, p. 204-206.

56. Especially the circumcision, the observance of Sabbath, the persistence of laws of ritual purity, and the *kasberut*. E. ULLENDORF, “Hebraic-Jewish Elements in Abyssinian (Monophysite Christianity),” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956), p. 216-256; M. RODINSON, “Sur la question des ‘Influences Juives’ en Éthiopie,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 9 (1964), p. 11-19; J.T. PAWLINOWSKY, “The Judaic Spirit of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 4 (1971-1972), p. 178-199.

57. C.A. SEGOVIA, “Thematic and Structural Affinities between 1 Enoch and the Qur'ān,” p. 257-260.

58. Ch. ROBIN & S. TAYRAN, “Soixante-dix ans avant l’Islam: L’Arabie toute entière dominée par un roi chrétien,” *Comptes Rendus des Séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (2012/1), p.540; C.A. SEGOVIA, “Abraha’s Christological Formula Rhmn w-ms'h-hw and Its Relevance for the Study of Islam’s Origins,” *Oriens Christianus* 2016. Forthcoming,

tion of a Jewish-Christian influence on this religion and warning of the risk of over-simplifying reality. In this same context, Stroumsa states that there are two circumstances that impede the determination of the Jewish-Christian origin of some Qur'ānic terms and formulae: the sparse evidence of a movement such as this in the area, and the lack of knowledge of the mechanisms through which Jewish-Christian ideas were transmitted. For this reason, he says, it is only workable in accepting a hypothetical Jewish-Christian contribution within a context of the sources' plurality.<sup>59</sup> In my view, an equidistant position is valid if we regard early Islam as a *cluster* formed by isolated contributions, but I prefer to understand the Qur'ānic theological system as the sedimentation of different contributions of unequal value, which ended up forming a coherent unit—despite the inner contradictions—, thanks to the hermeneutic reading of the holy text. In this sedimentation it is possible to identify 1) the oldest elements, namely those characteristics of the primitive belief that led to a fully differentiated religion, 2) the elements making up structured notions added to that original stratum and 3) other contributions of unequal value.

We will put aside for now the numerous parallels that are being discovered between the Qur'ān and the literature or the expressions presumably originating in a Jewish context (coincidences in legal narratives, etc.), which can be considered as a circumstantial evidence or as mere coincidences,<sup>60</sup> what does seem likely is that the oldest ideological stratum in the Qur'ān presents a monotheistic faith of apocalyptic nature with some local features, allusively formulated, and which presupposed the knowledge of Christian and extra-biblical traditions by the audience.<sup>61</sup> A characteristic feature of this foundational faith is its conception of Prophecy that, united together with its peculiar Christology, forms a typically Jewish-Christian system.<sup>62</sup>

As I already noted on a previous occasion,<sup>63</sup> the key element of all the proto-Islamic argumentation is the conception of prophecy, very similar to the Jewish-Christian conception almost in three aspects: 1) the repro-

59. G. STROUMSA, "Jewish Christianity," p. 81-82, 90.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 86; H.M. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*; Kh.S. KHALIL, "The Theological Christian Influence on the Qur'ān. A Reflection," in G.S. REYNOLDS (ed.), *The Qur'ān in its historical context*, Oxon-New York, 2008, p. 143-144; F. DE BLOIS, "Islam in its Arabian Context," in A. NEUWIRTH (ed.), *The Qur'ān in Context. Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, Leiden-Boston, 2010, p. 621-623.

61. S.J. SHOEMAKER, "Muhammad and the Qur'ān" in S.F. JOHNSON (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Oxford, 2012, p. 1085 and 1090.

62. For example, T. ANDRAE, *Mohammed*, p. 88-110; G. LÜLING, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, p. 23-89.

63. F. DEL RÍO, "The rejection of Muhammad's message by Jews and Christians and its effect on Islamic theological argumentation," *Journal of Middle East and Africa* 6 (2015), p. 62-63.



duction of a history inspired by the five Covenants of early Christianity, in which the main axis is formed by the figures of Abraham, Moses and Jesus,<sup>64</sup> 2) the lack of progress in the Revelation, that is to say, a revelation without innovations, in which the Holy Scriptures are merely a repetition of a single message, and 3) the role of Muhammad as a copy of the Jewish-Christian Jesus' role. In this conception of Prophecy, the figure of Jesus is treated in a particular way, with a characterization (i. e. Christology), which is different to that adopted by other prophets, including Muhammad himself. As Gerald Hawting recently showed, the characteristics of the Qur'ānic Jesus and the specific significance of his titles in the narrative contexts of the holy book (*masīḥ*, *kalimat Allāh*, *rūḥ min Allāh*, etc.), his identification with Adam and his vaguely angelic and celestial character set up a Christology that leads us in the direction of Gnostic Jewish-Christian groups. This Christology has clear parallels with Epiphanius' descriptions of Jewish-Christian doctrines and especially with the mentioned Pseudo-Clementine literature.<sup>65</sup>

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64. Kh.S. KHALIL, "The Theological Christian Influence on the Qur'ān," p. 143-145.

65. G. HAWTING, "Has God sent a mortal as a messenger? (Q 17:95). Messengers and Angels in the Qur'ān," in G.S. REYNOLDS (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān in its historical context II*, Oxon-New York, 2011, p. 372-389.



# THE JEWS AND CHRISTIANS OF PRE-ISLAMIC YEMEN (HIMYAR) AND THE ELUSIVE MATRIX OF THE QUR'ĀN'S CHRISTOLOGY

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## A Problematic and Ambiguous Category

What exactly do we mean when we talk about Jewish Christianity and the origins of Islam? Certainly, it seems to imply something *more*, and indeed something *different*, than talking about its Jewish and Christian components, no matter whether we trace them back to Muḥammad himself or to the various materials of Christian and (less clearly) Jewish provenance gradually integrated into the qur'anic corpus.<sup>1</sup>

The hypothesis of an specifically Jewish-Christian influence on emergent Islam represents an incisive *counterpoint* to that of a Christian influence on the making of Islam and has been diversely explored by several scholars (notably Schlatter, Schoeps, Roncaglia, Gnilka, de Blois, Gallez, and Zellentin) since Adolf von Harnack first suggested it more than a hundred years ago and.<sup>2</sup> But however attractive this hypothesis may prove due to a number of apparent parallels existing between the ideas expressed in the Qur'ān and those found in the literature attributed to the Jewish

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1. As I have stated elsewhere, the apparently pro-Jewish passages that one finds in the Qur'ān (e.g. Q 2:40-61, 63-73, 87a, 89a, 122; 5:44) often prove tricky, as they are usually placed within, or next to, more or less violent anti-Jewish pericopes that bear the marks of Christian rhetoric (e.g. Q 2:40-71, 64-66, 74, 75-82, 83-103, 118-21, 123; 5:41-43, 46) despite a few occasional anti-Christian interpolations (e.g. Q 2:62, 111-14, 115-17); see C.A. SEGOVIA, "A Messianic Controversy behind the Making of Muḥammad as the Last Prophet?," paper presented at the First Nangeroni Meeting of the Early Islamic Studies Seminar (EISS), Milan, June 15-19, 2015, forthcoming in G. DYE ed., *Early Islam: The Religious Milieu of Late Antiquity*, Chicago, 2016. Notice too that the Qur'ān explicitly reproves the Jews not only for having corrupted their scripture, but also for their hostile attitude vis-à-vis Jesus (e.g. Q 2:87; Q 4:155-59; Q 61:5-6).

2. See G. STROUMSA, "Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins," in B. SADEGHI, A.Q. AHMED, A. SILVERSTEIN and R.G. HOYLAND (eds.), *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone*, Leiden - Boston, 2015, p. 72-96. See also É.-M. GALLEZ, *Le Messie et son Prophète. Aux origines de l'Islam*, 2 vol., Versailles, 2005, whose 2<sup>nd</sup> vol. essay goes unmentioned in Stroumsa's otherwise excellent survey.

Christians and other similar groups (e.g. the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and the *Didaskalia*), it presents *several* problems.

As Guy Stroumsa aptly notes, “our documentation on Jewish Christian communities rarely goes beyond the fourth century.”<sup>3</sup> Also, “the precise mechanisms through which ideas [were] transmitted [into Muhammad’s milieu and/or the Qur’ān] are too little known”<sup>4</sup> to draw a clear-cut conclusion as to the direct influence of Jewish-Christian motifs upon formative Islam. Yet there is another and even more fundamental problem with this hypothesis, as well – a kind of *denominational* quibble. For the very category “Jewish Christianity” is problematic itself, as Matt Jackson-McCabe and Daniel Boyarin have insightfully shown; in short, it is too theological and too anachronistic.<sup>5</sup>

It would make little sense, for instance, to distinguish between pagan (i.e. Pauline) and Jewish (i.e. non-Pauline) Christians within the early Jesus’s movement. We should rather talk of Christ-believing Jews as a subtype of Messianic- and/or Apocalyptic- and/or Enochic Jews,<sup>6</sup> and consequently distinguish between (a) the Christ-believing Jews that accepted Paul’s original message of integrating the gentiles *qua* gentiles into the people of God alongside Israel; (b) the Christ-believing Jews, be they originally born Jews or proselytes, that opposed Paul’s message by claiming that

3. G. STROUMSA, “Jewish Christianity,” p. 76.

4. G. STROUMSA, “Jewish Christianity,” p. 90.

5. “Two critical if typically unspoken assumptions,” writes Jackson-McCabe, “undergird this notion of a Jewish *Christianity*. The first is that, even if the name itself had not yet been coined, a religion that can usefully be distinguished from Judaism as Christianity was in fact in existence immediately in the wake of Jesus’ death, if not already within his own lifetime. The second is that those ancient groups who seem from our perspective to sit on the borderline between Judaism and Christianity are nonetheless better understood as examples of the latter.” M. JACKSON-McCABE, “What’s in a Name? The Problem of ‘Jewish Christianity,’” in M. JACKSON-McCABE (ed.), *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts*, Minneapolis, 2007, p. 29. In turn, Boyarin highlights that “everything that has traditionally been identified as Christianity in particular existed in some non-Jesus movements of the first century and later as well,” and that “there is no nontheological or non anachronistic way at all to distinguish Christianity from Judaism until institutions are in place that make and enforce this distinction, and even then we know precious little about what the nonelite and nonchattering classes were thinking or doing.” D. BOYARIN, “Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category [to which is Appended a Correction of my Border Lines],” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99.1 (2009), p. 28; on the late partings of the ways between “Christianity” and “Judaism,” see D. BOYARIN, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, DRLAR Philadelphia, 2004.

6. On the interconnectedness of these categories, see G. BOCCACCINI, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism*, Grand Rapids MI, 1998; *id.*, *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism: An Intellectual History, from Ezekiel to Daniel*, Grand Rapids MI, 2002; G. BOCCACCINI (ed.), *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables*, Grand Rapids MI, 2007.

the gentiles had to convert to Judaism; (c) the non-Jewish Christ-believers that sided with one or another of these options; and (d) the non-Jewish Christ-believers that refused to join Israel.<sup>7</sup> Labelling the Christ-believing Jews that opposed Paul's message as "Jewish Christians" implicitly deprives them of their Judaism and loses sight of the fact that Paul and those Jews who accepted his message were Christ-believing Jews as well.

As for the period elapsing between the first and the fourth century, why should we uncritically assume the view of the Christian heresiologists that the non-Pauline Christ-believing Jews and the gentiles who joined them need to be considered as Christians instead of Jews? Should we not equate Christianity with the somewhat artificial and political achievement of the aforementioned *d*-group alone, and thus exclusively label as Christians the people belonging to it whatever its eventual subdivisions?<sup>8</sup>

Given these problems, I would like to suggest here a different approach to the intertwining of Judaism, Christianity, and formative Islam. Instead of relying on a priori *theological* descriptions, I should like to focus on some intriguing events and late-antique South-Arabian inscriptions which are worth of being *symptomatically* re-examined.<sup>9</sup>

### A Symptomatic Approach to the Qur'an's Christology

Before, though, I would like to underline that the view that the Qur'an reflects *inter alia* anti-Christian- and/or non-mainstream intra-Christian polemical formulas needs to be nuanced.<sup>10</sup> To be sure, the Qur'an endorses the view that God has no son and contains a number of anti-trinitarian claims (cf. Q 2:116; 3:59; 4:171-72; 5:72-75, 116-17; 6:101; 9:30; 10:68; 17:111; 18:4; 19:35, 88-94; 23:91; 39:4; 43:81; 72:3; 112). Strikingly, however, one *also* finds in it support for mainstream Christian beliefs – an issue which heretofore has not received due attention.<sup>11</sup>

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7. See further C.A. SEGOVIA and G. BOCCACCINI (eds.), *Paul the Jew: Rethinking the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism*, Minneapolis (forthcoming in 2016).

8. On the making of Christianity see D. BOYARIN, *Border Lines*. On the subdivisions of "Jewish Christianity, S. C. M., *Le judéo-christianisme ancien. Essays historiques*, Paris, 1998.

9. I take the notion of "symptomatic reading" from L. ALTHUSSER (with É. BALIBAR), *Reading Capital*, London, 1970; reprint in London: Verso 2005, – it implies examining the "unsaid" of any given text, i.e. its silences and eventual contradictions, and conferring to it as much significance, if not more, as it is normally assigned to what is "said" in such text, which can thereby become different to what the interpreter a priori expects to find in it.

10. A typological presentation and a tentative chronology of such formulas can be found in C.A. SEGOVIA, "Messianic Controversy."

11. See once more C.A. SEGOVIA, "Messianic Controversy."

Take, for instance, Q 15:28-31 and 38:71-74, where Adam seems to share not only God's spirit, but also God's likeness – since the wording of Q 15:29 and 38:72 (*fa-'idā... nafaḥtu fīhi mina r-rūḥī*) is reminiscent of both Genesis 2:7 and 1:26-7.<sup>12</sup> Now, the same wording is tacitly applied to Jesus (despite Mary being the character therein alluded to) in 66:12 (*fa-nafaḥnā fīhi* [sic!] *min rrūḥinā*) and probably too 21:91\* (*fa-nafaḥnā fīhā* [\*fīhi?] *min rrūḥinā*).<sup>13</sup> One cannot but recall here Hebrews 1:6 and Philippians 2:10, which may be surmised to form, in addition to *Cave of Treasures* 2:12-13, 22-5 (Reynolds 2010: 50), the intertextual lens through which the author(s) of Q 15:28-31 and 38:71-4 had the two Genesis passages read; and suspect, therefore, that the Adam story in the Qur'an conceals a still visible, if partly erased, Adamic Christology.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, albeit the Qur'an contains a number of passages in which God is declared to be one and unique, there are several interrelated qur'anic passages in which Christ – notice that I am not speaking of the earthly Jesus – is implicitly understood as the true Adam and depicted in heavenly terms. But maybe this should not be deemed strange in a docu-

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12. Cf. G.S. REYNOLDS, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, London and New York, 2010, p. 51, who remarks that “the idea of humans as *imago Dei* is rejected by Islamic theology. Yet the Qur'an itself hardly rejects it.” He rightly points to Gen 2:7 as standing at the backstage of the qur'anic Adam narratives, but fails to observe their simultaneous connection to Gen 1:26-27.

13. Hereinafter \* stands for the hypothetical original wording of a given qur'anic passage; \*\* for its original content. In his brilliant analysis of the qur'anic Adam narratives, Reynolds, too, notices these parallels (see G.S. REYNOLDS, *Biblical Subtext*, 53), but does not mention the odd wording in Q 66:12, which in my view needs to be taken into account, as otherwise the implicit reference to Jesus in Q 21:91 remains somewhat tangential. Cf. moreover the possible downplaying of this tacit connection in 2:30-34 (where Adam is simply taught by God the names of his creatures) and 4:171 (where Jesus is merely declared to be a spirit from God). I am grateful to Guillaume Dye (private communication of February 12, 2015) for drawing my attention to the contrast existing between Q 2:30-34; 15:28-31; and Q 38:71-4.

14. In other words, I take Heb 1:6 and Phil 2:10 to be the core thematic subtext of the Adam narratives in Q 15:28-31 and 38:71-4, Gen 1:26-7 and 2:7 to be their additional intertexts, and *Cave of Treasures* 2:12-13, 22-5 to be their immediate source. On the complexities inherent in qur'anic intertextuality, whose study implies going beyond the identification of the Qur'an's eventual subtexts, see once more Reynolds 2010; see now also C.A. SEGOVIA, *The Qur'anic Noah and the Making of the Islamic Prophet: A Study of Intertextuality and Religious Identity Making in Late Antiquity*, Berlin and New York, 2015; *id.*, “‘Those on the Right’ and ‘Those on the Left’: Rereading Qur'an 56:1-56 (and the Founding Myth of Islam) in Light of Apocalypse of Abraham 21-2,” *Oriens Christianus* 2016 (forthcoming); G. DYE, “The Qur'an and Its Hypertextuality in Light of Redaction Criticism,” paper presented at the First Nangeroni Meeting of the Early Islamic Studies Seminar (EISS), Milan, June 15-19, 2015 (forthcoming in G. DYE (ed.), *Early Islam: The Religious Milieu of Late Antiquity*, Chicago, 2016).

ment whose anonymous prophet, or one of whose anonymous prophets,<sup>15</sup> encourages his followers to behave like Jesus's disciples, repeatedly defends Jesus against the "Jews," declares him to be the messiah and the Word of God (two titles that are never applied to other prophets like Noah, Abraham, and Moses), makes systematic use of a number of crucial Christian rhetorical moves, and quotes more or less verbatim the New Testament Apocrypha and the writings of several late-antique Christian authors.

Hence it is legitimate to *ask* whether these Christian- and/or pro-Christian notions may have entered the qur'anic corpus, or its *Grundschriften*, at a late stage of their textual development like, for example, Q 19:1-63\*\*, or else go back to Muḥammad himself.<sup>16</sup> If the former, an scenario northwards from the Ḥiḡāz would be most likely.<sup>17</sup> If the latter, then we would arguably need to look either into the Ḥiḡāz itself (of whose pre- and paleo-Islamic religious milieu, unfortunately, we do not know much) or else southwards from it.<sup>18</sup>

In the next section I will contend that mid-to-late-sixth-century South Arabia may provide us a generally overlooked *clue* as to the roots, in particular, of what I propose to call the elusive matrix of the Qur'ān's Christology, according to which Jesus is the *messiah* of God but not his *son*. I use here the adjective "elusive" to denote the non-straightforward *conceptual* premises and *political* implications of such formulation – which originally may have meant something different from which it came to mean after the Arab conquest of Syria-Palestine and Iraq – *versus* its habitual interpretation as an overtly anti-Christian argument.<sup>19</sup>

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15. C.A. SEGOVIA, *The Qur'anic Noah*, p. 16-17.

16. On Q 19:1-63\*\* see G. DYE, "Lieux saints communs, partagés ou confiqués: aux sources de quelques pericopes coraniques (Q 10:1-63)," in I. DÉPRET & G. DYE (ed.), *Partage du sacré: transferts, dévotions mixtes, rivalités inter confessionnelles*, Brussels-Fernelmont, 2012, p. 55-121; *id.*, "Hypertextuality."

17. That is to say, Q 15:28-31 and Q 38:71-74 may be seen as the product of the redactional work carried out by Christian scribes eventually hired by the *mu'minūn/muhāḡirūn* in the time of the Arab conquest of the Near East in order to achieve some kind of compromise between them and the Christian inhabitants of of Syria-Palestine and/or Iraq – a product that was thought of as inherently dangerous, and hence emended, by the later qur'anic editors.

18. The term "Paleo-Islam" has been recently coined by A. AL-AZMEH, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and His People*, Cambridge-New York, 2014. I do not share his views on the emergence of Islam in late antiquity; nonetheless, I find useful the term itself.

19. See for a different use of the concept of "elusiveness" within the study of early Islamic rhetoric and identity formation, C.A. SEGOVIA, "Identity Politics and Scholarship in the Study of Islamic Origins: The Inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock as a Test Case," in M. SHEEDY (ed.), *Identity, Politics, and Scholarship: The Study of Islam and the Study of Religions*, Sheffield - Bristol CT (forthcoming).

My two main reasons for bracketing the latter interpretation is that (1) the Qur'anic Jesus-passages which seemingly depict Jesus as no more than a prophet should not be read *doctrinally* as if their purpose was to downplay Jesus's own distinctiveness and special status, but *rhetorically* as claiming that he is to be conferred such distinctiveness and special status against any claim to the contrary on the part of the Jews;<sup>20</sup> and that (2) the denial of Jesus's divine sonship and the statement that God is childless belong in the Qur'ān to *two* quite different *series* of texts which cannot be *typologically* grouped, therefore, under the same category.<sup>21</sup> In my view, this often

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20. Notice e.g. the inclusive but non-uniform prophetic list provided in Q 2:136, which does not mention Abraham + Ishmael + Isaac + Jacob + the (twelve) tribes (of Israel) + Moses + Jesus followed by a general reference to God's many prophets, but a two-part list: (a) {Abraham + Ishmael + Isaac + Jacob + the tribes} + (b) {Moses + Jesus} followed by such general reference. Mentioning Jesus alongside Moses (cf. Q 2:87) makes good sense given the anti-Jewish polemical context of Q 2:122-41 (cf. the typical Christian rhetoric in 2:124, the parallel anti-Jewish claims made in 2:104, 137-8, and the possible Christian instruction behind 2:128, 135). Therefore, it is in my view necessary to read the first half of the concluding sentence in v. 136: "we make no difference between them [God's prophets] and we surrender to him" (cf. Q 2:285; 3:84) as meaning that Jesus should not be excluded from, but counted among, God's prophets (whatever else the Qur'anic authors had to say about him) against any Jewish claim to the contrary. Q 2:253 reinforces this interpretation, inasmuch as it explicitly stresses Jesus's distinction above all other prophets. This visibly goes against the mainstream interpretation of Q 2:136, according to which God's prophets are all equal, so that Jesus should not be conferred any special distinction above them. To my mind this is too-doctrinally oriented an interpretation, however, as it projects onto the Qur'ān the later Islamic doctrine that makes all prophets equal in rank instead of paying attention to the former's complex rhetoric.

21. Cf. Q 2:87, 253; 3:45; 4:57, 159, 171-72; 5:17, 46, 72, 78, 110, 112, 114, 116; 7:58; 9:30-31; 17:57, 104; 18:102; 19:34; 21:26, 91, 101; 23:50; 25:17; 33:7; 39:45; 43:57, 61; 57:27; 61:6, 14; 66:12 (on which see Section 3 below) and Q 2:116; 3:59; 4:171-72; 5:72-75, 116-17; 6:101; 9:30; 10:68; 17:111; 18:4; 19:35, 88-94; 23:91; 39:4; 43:81; 72:3; 112 (which I have already mentioned at the beginning of the present section), respectively. In my view these passages reflect two different trends of thought – the only overlapping between them being Q 4:171-72; 5:72, 116; and 9:30. See C. SCHEDL, *Muhammad un Jesus: die Christologisch relevanten Texte des Korans neu übersetzt und erklärt*, Vienna-Freiburg-Basel, 1978, p. 329, who albeit assuming as valid the traditional chronological distinction between Meccan and Medinan suras – which is useless in my view, as it projects onto the Qur'ān a totally external interpretative criteria – notices that there are several possibly early Qur'anic passages which do not specifically deny Jesus's divine sonship. I should like to add that there actually are not just two but six different types of Jesus-passages in the Qur'ān: (I) those passages that depict Jesus as a prophet or a righteous among others while simultaneously, if paradoxically, highlighting his prominence over them; (II) those that defend him against the Jews, which I take to be the key to understanding the I-group passages; (III) those that introduce him as the God's Messiah instead of God's Son, which in my view need not to be envisaged as being anti-Christian; (IV) those that explicitly claim that God has no son and counter



overlooked typological distinction may be seen to reflect, *ex hypothesis*, an early twofold religious-political background in which Dyophysite- and/or Dyophysite-oriented Christians for whom the earthly Jesus was God's messiah *merged* with a (Jewish-influenced?) monotheist community whose members claimed that God has no equal and were responsible, therefore, for the authorship of such texts as Q 112.<sup>22</sup> Also, I will try to show that such an alliance *may* have echoed that seemingly reached between the Dyophysite- and/or Dyophysite-oriented Christians and the Jews of pre-Islamic Yemen (Ḥimyar) during Abraha's reign (535-570s).

### From Pre-Islamic Yemenite Christology to Muḥammad's Politics?

Let me start, therefore, by summarising the events that took place in Ḥimyar in the first half of the 6th century, more precisely between 525/531 and the 540s.<sup>23</sup>

After 525 or 531 Aksumite authority and Christianity were imposed in Ḥimyar after a *longue durée* of Himyarite political independence and Jewish religious supremacy.<sup>24</sup> However, the king of Aksum did not annexed Ḥimyar. Instead, he maintained the Himyarite throne and placed on it a Himyarite prince called Sumyafa' Ašwa' (Greek Esimiphaïos), who very likely was of Jewish origin but had opportunely converted to Christianity.<sup>25</sup>

Esimiphaïos's inscriptions bear witness to the new official religion of Ḥimyar and must be regarded as the first inscriptions of this kind in pre-

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the trinity, which generally, as I have already underlined, do not belong to the same textual series than the III-group passages; (V) those that implicitly contain traces of a high Christology, which thus represent a very remarkable challenge; and (VI) those that expressly connect Jesus and Muḥammad. The problem lies in determining how types III, IV, and V should combine, both chronologically and conceptually. I intend to dedicate to this intriguing issue a future monograph which is provisionally titled *The Qur'anic Jesus: Traditional Views and New Insights*, and whose abstract can be accessed in [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu).

22. On Q 112 and its alleged antiquity, see M. KROPP, "Tripartite, but Anti-Trinitarian Formulas in the Qur'anic Corpus, Possibly Pre-Qur'anic," in G.S. REYNOLDS (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in Its Historical Context 2*, London - New York, 2011, p. 247-64.

23. A more detailed presentation of the argument developed in this section can be found in C.A. SEGOVIA, "Abraha's Christological Formula *Rḥmnn w-Ms'h-hw* and Its Relevance for the Study of Islam's Origins," *Oriens Christianus* 98 (2015): p. 52-63.

24. The exact date when this happened is unclear. See Ch.J. ROBIN, "Arabia and Ethiopia", in S.F. JOHNSON (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Oxford-New York, 2012, p. 283-84.

25. See I. GAJDA, *Le royaume de Ḥimyar à l'époque monothéiste. L'histoire de l'Arabie du Sud ancienne de la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'ère chrétienne jusqu'à l'avènement de l'Islam*, Paris, 2009, p. 115.

Islamic Yemen.<sup>26</sup> They contain various trinitarian and binitarian thanksgiving formulas on which the Ethiopian influence is perceptible.<sup>27</sup> This would change, however, within just a few years.

Around 535, Esimiphaïos's army commander Abraha deposed him and assumed the throne of Ḥimyar. Apparently, Abraha brought stability to Ḥimyar<sup>28</sup> and extended his rule to several neighbouring regions of the Arabian peninsula including not only Saba', dū Raydān, Ḥaḍramawt, Ṭawd and Tihāma, but also Yamāma – as Manfred Kropp perspicaciously pointed to me in a private communication of July 24, 2015<sup>29</sup> – and Yaṭrib (i.e. the future Medina) in the Ḥiḡāz.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, he refused to act as a vassal king of Aksūm, as can be safely deduced from the rhetoric of his inscriptions, which date to the 540s and 550s.<sup>31</sup>

Like Esimiphaïos before him Abraha had several monumental inscriptions set up.<sup>32</sup> Yet they denote Syrian, rather than Ethiopian, influence and hence evince to a curious shift in Abraha's linguistic and cultural pol-

26. Esimiphaïos's inscriptions Istanbul 7608 bis and Wellcome A 103664 can be accessed here: [http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/index.php?id=dasi\\_prj\\_epi&prjId=1&corId=0&colId=0&navId=800877863&recId=2410](http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/index.php?id=dasi_prj_epi&prjId=1&corId=0&colId=0&navId=800877863&recId=2410) and [http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/index.php?id=dasi\\_prj\\_epi&prjId=1&corId=0&colId=0&navId=800877863&recId=2459](http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/index.php?id=dasi_prj_epi&prjId=1&corId=0&colId=0&navId=800877863&recId=2459), respectively.

As Iwona Gajda puts it, "pour la première fois dans l'histoire de l'Arabie du Sud, des formules religieuses chrétiennes apparaissent dans un texte officiel" (I. GAJDA, *Le royaume de Ḥimyar*, p. 115).

27. See I. GAJDA, *Le royaume de Ḥimyar*, p. 115; M. KROPP, "»Im Namen Gottes, (d. i.) des gnädigen (und) B/(b)armherzigen«. Die muslimische Basmala: Neue Ansätze zu ihrer Erklärung," *Oriens Christianus* 97 (2013-14), p. 195.

28. See Ch.J. ROBIN, "Arabia and Ethiopia," p. 284-88.

29. For how else could *y(b)mn* and *ymnt* in CIH 541 l. 7; DAI GDN 2002-20 l. 10; and Ry 506 l. 2 be read?, he observed.

30. Cf. Ch.J. ROBIN, "Abraha et la reconquête de l'Arabie déserte: un réexamen de l'inscription Ryckmans 506 = Murayghan 1," *Jerusalem Studies on Arabic and Islam* 39 (2012), p. 1-93; *id.*, "Arabia and Ethiopia," p. 284-88; *id.*, "Note d'information. Soixante-dix ans avant l'islam: L'Arabie toute entière dominée par un roi chrétien," *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 2012.1 (2012), p. 525-53; *id.*, "À propos de Ymnt et Ymn: « nord » et « sud », « droite » et « gauche », dans les inscriptions de l'Arabie antique," in F. BRIQUEL-CHATONNET, C. FAUVEAUD and I. GAJDA (eds.), *Entre Carthage et l'Arabie heureuse. Mélanges offerts à François Bron*, Paris, 2013, p. 119-40.

31. See M. KROPP, "Abraha's Names and Titles: CIH 541,4-9 Reconsidered," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arab Studies* 21 (1991): p. 135-45; I. GAJDA, *Le royaume de Ḥimyar*, 119; Ch.J. ROBIN, "Arabia and Ethiopia," p. 285.

32. In particular I would like to refer in this paper to CIH 541, AI GDN 2002-20, and Ry 506, which can be accessed here:

[http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/index.php?id=dasi\\_prj\\_epi&prjId=1&corId=0&colId=0&navId=389874095&recId=2382](http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/index.php?id=dasi_prj_epi&prjId=1&corId=0&colId=0&navId=389874095&recId=2382); [http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/index.php?id=dasi\\_prj\\_epi&prjId=1&corId=0&colId=0&navId=800877863&recId=2391](http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/index.php?id=dasi_prj_epi&prjId=1&corId=0&colId=0&navId=800877863&recId=2391);

[http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/index.php?id=dasi\\_prj\\_epi&prjId=1&corId=0&colId=0&navId=800877863&recId=2447](http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/index.php?id=dasi_prj_epi&prjId=1&corId=0&colId=0&navId=800877863&recId=2447), respectively.

icy aiming perhaps at affirming his political independence from Aksūm.<sup>33</sup> The most striking thing in Abraha's inscriptions, however, is the *wording* relative to Jesus and Jesus's relation to God – for they repeatedly refer to Jesus as “God's messiah” instead of God's son.<sup>34</sup>

Why did Abraha use the term *Ms<sup>ḥ</sup>* (“Messiah”), which is unattested elsewhere in the whole corpus of ancient South-Arabian (ASA) inscriptions, to refer to Jesus instead of using the more common *Bn* (“Son”), which is the term commonly used in both Esimiphaios's inscriptions and the Ethiopic trinitarian *basmala*-s?<sup>35</sup> Should one acknowledge relevance to this unprecedented choice?

Several explanations have been provided so far. Alfred Beeston suggests that Abraha might have inclined towards Dyophysitism rather than Miaphysitism to stress his independence from Aksūm.<sup>36</sup> In turn, Irfan Shahid contends that Abraha probably converted to the Chalcedonian faith in order to obtain support from Byzantium.<sup>37</sup> Iwona Gajda discusses Beeston's (and implicitly Shahid's) view(s) and proposes that Abraha's peculiar wording may simply reflect a local usage.<sup>38</sup> Conversely, Christian Robin highlights the apparent Jewish-Christian nature of Abraha's formula.<sup>39</sup>

I take Shahid's interpretation to be too far-reaching, as there is no evidence to support it – despite the fact that emphasising Jesus's humanity might have proved effective in attempting to establish friendly relations with Byzantium, one may question how the term *Ms<sup>ḥ</sup>* could bear witness to Abraha's eventual conversion from Miaphysitism to Chalcedonianism.<sup>40</sup> Gajda's “local-usage” hypothesis has no evidence to support it, either – for, as I have underlined, Abraha's formula is unattested elsewhere in the ASA corpus. In turn, Robin's interpretation overlooks the various problems alluded to in the first section of this paper. As for Beeston's suggestion, I will now offer an additional argument that may give it some support.

33. See A.F.L. BEESTON, “Foreign Loanwords in Sabaic,” in N. NEBES (ed.), *Arabia Felix. Beiträge zur Sprache und Kultur des vorislamischen Arabien. Festschrift Walter M. Müller zum 60. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden, 1994, 42; I. Gajda, *Le royaume de Ḥimyar*, 121; Ch.J. ROBIN, “Soixante-dix ans avant l'islam,” p. 540.

34. Cf. CIH 541 ll. 1-3: *Rḥmnn w-Ms<sup>ḥ</sup>-hw*; DAI GDN 2002-20 ll. 1-4: *Rḥmnn mr' s'myn w-Ms<sup>ḥ</sup>-h[w]*; Ry 506 l. 2: *Rḥmnn w-Ms<sup>ḥ</sup>-hw*. See also Ch.J. ROBIN, “Soixante-dix ans avant l'islam,” p. 539-40.

35. See Ch.J. ROBIN, “Soixante-dix ans avant l'islam,” p. 540; M. KROPP, “Die muslimische Basmala,” p. 195.

36. A.F.L. BEESTON, “Abraha,” in H. A. R. GIBB *et al.* (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Islam*<sup>2</sup>, vol.1, Leiden: Brill - Paris, 1960, p. 105.

37. I. SHAHID, “Byzantium in South Arabia,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 33 (1979), p. 31.

38. I. GAJDA, *Le royaume de Ḥimyar*, 122.

39. Ch.J. ROBIN, “Soixante-dix ans avant l'islam,” p. 540.

40. C.J. BLOCK, *The Qur'ān in Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Historical and Modern Interpretations*, London - New York, 2014, p. 21.

Invocations of Jesus in late-antique Christianity normally mention “God (the Father) and his Son Christ.” Yet Dyophysites, who held that Christ was God’s Son (like the Miaphysites and the Chalcedonians), are known to have emphasised (against the Miaphysites and even more than the Chalcedonians themselves) Jesus’s human nature. Thus the well-known Dyophysite description of Mary as *Christotókos* (i.e. “Mother of the Messiah”) rather than *Theotókos* (“Mother of God”). Let me be clear: the formula “God and his Messiah” is not attested in the corpus of late-antique Dyophysite literature; but, as R. C. Zaehner rightly observes, it *implicitly* fits within the Dyophysite mindset.<sup>41</sup>

Now, we know that Dyophysite Christians lived in Ḥimyar albeit Ḥimyar was confessionally linked to Ethiopian Miaphysitism after 525/531.<sup>42</sup> Hence in my view it is reasonable to ask – as Beeston does – whether Abraha tried to distance himself from Aksūm by endorsing a Dyophysite-oriented Christology.

But it could also be that Abraha – who obviously was and presented himself as a Christian king – tried to avoid any sharp provocation against the Jews of Ḥimyar, a land that for several centuries had witnessed to an ongoing religious conflict (indirectly promoted by Byzantium and Persia) between Christians and Jews and that he attempted to rule in his own way.<sup>43</sup> Had Abraha intended not to offend his Jewish subjects, he could have done so by evoking God alone (instead of God plus his Messiah = Jesus); indeed, *Rahmānān* was (also) the south-Arabian Jewish name for God. Anyway, referring to Jesus as the Messiah would be less provoking for them than describing him as God’s divine Son.

In fact, these *two* hypotheses need *not* contradict themselves, as in antiquity Dyophysites and Jews did not collide as often as Miaphysites and Jews did. A survey of the anti-Jewish literature of late-antique Christianity

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41. R.C. ZAEHNER, “The Qur’ān and Christ,” in *id.* (ed.), *At Sundry Times: An Essay in the Comparison of Religions*, London, 1958; reprinted in Westport CT: Greenwood, 1977), p. 195-217. See Arius’s salutation to Eusebius of Nicomedia “on account of God and his Messiah,” which shows that Arians (and possibly Anomoeans later on, whose presence in fourth-century South Arabia is documented in the work of Philostorgius) shared a similar caution against the assimilation of God and Jesus, notwithstanding the Christological differences between Arianism/Anomoeanism and Dyophysitism.

42. See Ch.J. ROBIN, “Arabia and Ethiopia,” p. 282-83.

43. This hypothesis was suggested to me by Guillaume DYE in a private communication of July 13, 2015. On Ḥimyar, Ethiopia, Byzantium, and Persia between the fourth and the 7th centuries, see G.W. BOWERSOCK, *Empires in Collision in Late Antiquity*, Waltham MA: Brandeis University Press and Historical Society of Israel, 2012; *id.*, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam*, Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

further shows that not even a single extant anti-Jewish text can be attributed to the Dyophysites.<sup>44</sup>

Whatever Abraha's agenda, his Christological formula evinces that South-Arabian Christians in the sixth century (even mainstream Christians!) were not totally *unfamiliar* with the representation of Jesus as the Messiah instead of God's son – a feature that we also find in the Qur'ān from the viewpoint of the Jesus himself, who is repeatedly called there “the Messiah, son of Mary” instead of “son of God”.<sup>45</sup> If compared to Dyophysite Christology, the Qur'ān's Christology certainly operates on a different *level*, for it does not address the question of the relationship between Christ's divinity and his humanity, i.e. between Christ's divine and human hypostases. Nevertheless, it reflects its *premises* in so far as it takes the earthly Jesus to be a man and labels him the Messiah, son of Mary, instead of son of God. For, in contrast to Chalcedonian orthodoxy, the Dyophysites saw Jesus more as a teacher and example, so that Christ-believers could effectively imitate the pattern that the man assumed by the Logos had set;<sup>46</sup> otherwise, they argued, humanity would be deprived of the hope of salvation. Hence they gave the name Christ to the person of the union of both hypostases, the human and the divine, rather than to Jesus the human teacher; this, in turn, raised among their opponents the objection that they endorsed the view of a double sonship, one divine and the other human.<sup>47</sup> Actually, it was only with Babai the Great (c. 551-628) that an effort was made on the part of the Dyophysites to solve this and other related ambiguities (Pelikan, *Eastern Christendom*, 42-43) and to counter the threat of a growing Miaphysite influence between 571 and 610, which must in turn be seen as one of the reasons that led Ḥusraw II

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44. A.H. BECKER, “Beyond the Spatial and Temporal *Limes*: Questioning the ‘Parting of the Ways’ Outside the Roman Empire,” in A.Y. REED & A.H. BECKER (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003, p. 387.

45. See Q 2:87, 253; 3:45; 4:57, 159, 171-72; 5:17, 46, 72, 78, 110, 112, 114, 116; 7:58; 9:30-31; 17:57, 104; 18:102; 19:34; 21:26, 91, 101; 23:50; 25:17; 33:7; 39:45; 43:57, 61; 57:27; 61:6, 14; 66:12. The fact that Abraha's formula (“*Raḥmānān* and his Messiah”) is paralleled in the qur'anic corpus has not escaped Robin's attention (see Ch.J. ROBIN, “Soixante-dix ans avant l'islam,” p. 540). See also I. SHAHID, “Islam and *Oriens Christianus*: Makka 610-622 ad.,” in ed. E. GRYPEOU, M.N. SWANSON and D. THOMAS, *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, Leiden - Boston, 2006, p. 20-21, who, albeit he adduces no evidence thereof, interprets the qur'anic phrase “Jesus son of Mary” as a Dyophysite expression circulating in Mecca in Muḥammad's lifetime.

46. J. PELIKAN, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom, 600-17*, vol. 2 of *id.*, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, Chicago - London, 1974, p. 46.

47. J. PELIKAN, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*, p. 48.

to temporarily suppress the catholicate in 609.<sup>48</sup> Thus it is fair to ask what knowledge of such problems and conflicts might certain *peripheral* groups more or less inclined towards Diophysitism have had around that time, and if any of such groups might have eventually striven to uphold an even more *radical* distinction between Christ's divinity and humanity by stressing Jesus's exclusively human condition. The possibility that the Qur'ān *reflects* their hypothetical views cannot be excluded, either.<sup>49</sup> Lastly, it is also curious in this respect to notice the positive references to the religion of the Arab conquerors in several Dyophysite writings of the seventh century, including Iṣō'yahb III's letters (48B.97; 14C.251), the Khuzistan Chronicle (34), and John bar Penkāyē's *Book of Main Points* (141).<sup>50</sup>

Thus unless we represent Muḥammad himself as a *non-Christian* monotheist – but why should we?<sup>51</sup> – it is fair to ask whether his religious views were somehow influenced by Abrahā's, and thereby to what extent emergent Islam must be studied against the background of sixth-century South-Arabian Christianity.<sup>52</sup>

To put it in more forceful terms: Did Muḥammad, in his *political* ambition to conquer the Arabian peninsula after the disappearance of the Himyarite, Jafnid, Nasrid, and Hujrid Arab kingdoms (Segovia 2016c),

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48. See G.J. REININK, "Tradition and the Formation of the 'Nestorian' Identity in Sixth- to Seventh-Century Iraq," in B.H. ROMENY (ed.), *Religious Origins of Nations?*, *The Christian Communities of the Middle East*, Leiden-Boston, 2010, p. 217-50; G. GREATREX, "Khusro II and the Christians of His Empire," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 3 (2003), p. 78-88.

49. On the eventual connections between Dyophysites and Unitarian Christians (i.e. Christians who refused to see Jesus as anything else than a man and thus reserved the title "God" for the Father alone) in the late-6th- to mid-7th century Arabian peninsula and Iraq, see further Ph. WOOD, "Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula," paper presented at the First Nangeroni Meeting of the Early Islamic Studies Seminar (EISS), Milan, June 15-19, 2015, forthcoming in Guillaume DYE (ed.), *Early Islam: The Religious Milieu of Late Antiquity*, Chicago, 2016, whose references to the *Acta Arethae*, Iṣō'yahb I, and Thomas of Marga are particularly helpful. I am also grateful to Peter von Sivers for drawing my attention to the relevance of the early 600s in the making of a Dyophysite orthodoxy.

50. M.Ph. PENN, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam*, Oakland CA, 2015, p. 33, 36, 50, 88-89.

51. Even in the New Testament itself there is enough room to allow different Christologies, including the low-Christology of the authors of the *Didache*; cf. e.g. Luke 9:20; Acts 2:22; 3:13, 18; 4:27; John 3:51; 19:36; 20:17; 43:64. On Philippians 2:5-11 see S. STOWERS, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles*, New Haven - London, 1994, p. 219ff.

52. On Muḥammad's plausible Christian background see C.A. SEGOVIA, "Messianic Controversy," as well as the cross-references to Muḥammad's and Musaylima's Qur'ān-s, the Old Syriac version of the Gospels, and the New Testament parable of the mustard seed provided in C.A. Segovia, "Abrahā's Christological Formula," *in fine*. See also J.M.F. VAN REETH, "Ville céleste, ville sainte, ville idéal dans la tradition musulmane," *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 24 (2011), p. 121-31.

try – like Abraha had tried earlier with the Jews – to reach an *agreement* with either the Jews or a group of (Jewish-influenced?) monotheists (the Q 112 community),<sup>53</sup> or with both, or with the Jews first and then with that monotheist group, or with such group first and foremost and then occasionally with some Jews until the Jews themselves were excluded from his- or his followers' movement? – note that the recurrent Christian- or Christian-influenced anti-Jewish passages of the Qur'ān may either imply this latter possibility or the fact that the Jews were, together with the pagans, Muḥammad's opponents right from the start.<sup>54</sup> Be that as it may, in my view these questions can no longer be avoided.

### Afterword

To sum up: I am not affirming that sixth-century South-Arabian Christianity is the *key* to deciphering the origins of Islam. I am simply suggesting that it should be taken into consideration as a relevant, if hitherto often neglected, *factor* that may help to explain both the emergence of Islam and its South-Arabian component.<sup>55</sup> And that, if Abraha's Christological formula is susceptible of being interpreted as a *Konvergenztext* attempting to unify the Christians and the Jews of pre-Islamic Yemen under the label of an inclusive, Dyophysite-oriented political theology, and Muḥammad's mission, in turn, as an *adaptation* under different circumstances of Abraha's political agenda, then the interactions between the Jews and the Christians of Ḥimyar may be said to be of especial, if indirect, importance to understand the elusive Christology of the Qur'ān.<sup>56</sup>

In short, we do not need to fancy a "Jewish-Christian" influence on emergent Islam to explain its plausible Jewish-Christian roots. Yet deny-

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53. See section 2 above.

54. See further C.A. SEGOVIA, "Messianic Controversy." Overall this hypothesis – which lacking further information must remain tentative – contrasts with Fred Donner's recent description of the early Muhammadan community as an inclusive monotheistic confederacy (see F. M. DONNER, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge MA, 2010) in the sense that, if a confederacy led by Muḥammad did exist, in my view it must have been pragmatical- rather than ecumenical-oriented (cf. A.L. DE PRÉMARE, *Les fondations de l'islam. Entre écriture et histoire*, Paris, 2002, p. 85-105, and Muḥammad either a Jewish-influenced monotheist or, perhaps more likely, a Christian himself, as I have elsewhere suggested (C.A. SEGOVIA, "Messianic Controversy").

55. See further J. RETSÖ, "The Contradictory Revelation: A Reading of Sura 27:16-44 and 34:15-21," in H. RYDVIING (ed.), *Micro-Level Analyses of the Qur'an*, Uppsala, 2014, p. 95-103.

56. I take the notion of *Konvergenztext* from F. VAN DER VELDEN, "Die Felsendomschrift als Ende einer christologischen Konvergenztextökumene im Koran," *Oriens Christianus* 95 (2011), p. 213-46, who employs it in a different context (namely, the study of the Dome of the Rock inscriptions).

ing such influence is not the same as to say that Jewish and Christian components were attached to formative Islam merely because Muḥammad and his community, or their followers, lived within a religious milieu full of Jews and Christians to whose cultural influence they were exposed. If, as almost everyone would agree today, some kind of *Realpolitik* towards the Jews and the Christians was often fostered by the Arab conquerors of al-Šām, albeit due to diverging motivations and with uneven results each time, some kind of *Realpolitik* involving Christians, Jews, and perhaps other groups as well might have *also* been at stake in Muḥammad's lifetime – and it might have had Himyarite precedents.



# JEWISH CHRISTIANITY, NON-TRINITARIANISM AND THE BEGINNINGS OF ISLAM

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The term “Jewish Christianity” and its various derivatives (such as Jewish Christian or Judeo-Christian) are vague, outdated terms that should be abandoned in the study of ancient Christianity, not to mention early Islam. Although such terms were very much in vogue in scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the discipline of early Christian studies has evolved to a point where such language has now become increasingly unhelpful and even misleading. Indeed, Jewish Christianity was always at best a slippery category that invited much scholarly speculation and often unwarranted credulity in the reports of ancient Christian heresiologists.<sup>1</sup> Yet more importantly, what is really at stake in the early Christian debates that generated the conceptual category of Jewish Christianity is not so much the issue of Jewishness or non-Jewishness, as the name seems to suggest, but rather, what kind of Judaism a particular religious community decided to follow. There certainly is not a distinctively Jewish-Christian theology evident in the ancient church, which one can differentiate from “proto-orthodox” or “gentile Christian” ideas, as some previous scholars were wont to imagine.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, if one were to define Jewish Christianity as early Christians who utilized Jewish concepts and categories and/or were ethnically Jewish, as some have suggested, then one must surely include Paul as a prime example of a Jewish Christian. Yet, Paul is traditionally identified as the font of the “gentile” church and the nemesis of early “Jewish” Christians.

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1. See, e.g., J.E. TAYLOR, “The Phenomenon of Early Jewish Christianity: Reality or Scholarly Invention?,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990), p. 313-34.

2. A position advanced, perhaps most famously and fully in J. DANIELOU, *Théologie du judéo-christianisme, Bibliothèque de théologie Histoire des doctrines chrétiennes avant Nicée I*, Paris, 1958; *id.* (trans. J.A. BAKER), *The Theology of Jewish Christianity, The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea I*, London, 1964; and B. BAGATTI (trans. A. STORME), *L'Église de la Circoncision*, Jerusalem, 1965; *id.* (trans. E. HOADE), *The Church from the Circumcision: History and Archaeology of the Judaeo-Christians*, Jerusalem, 1971.

What distinguished Paul and the other so-called “gentile” Christians from “Jewish Christians” was neither their ethnic origin nor their use of Jewish religious ideas and symbols: it was instead their view of the Law.<sup>3</sup> Certainly there were in the early church Christians who, after confessing Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Messiah continued to observe much of the traditional Jewish Law. But it does not seem that gentiles were excluded from these communities, and accordingly, their boundaries were not defined by ethnicity; likewise, there were many Jews who, like Paul, decided that becoming a Christian Jew meant no longer following the full extent of Law. The use of Jewish genres and ideas cannot distinguish Jewish from Gentile Christianity, since these are equally employed by Gentile Christians, as Joan Taylor rightly observes: “Christianity is the child of Judaism. The notion of Christ is a Jewish concept. The Christian God is the Jewish God. The division between what is somehow exclusively Christian and what is Jewish is an impossible one to make in the early Church. Very many types of Jewish thought fed into the diversity of early Christianity. The corpus of the New Testament itself bears witness to a range of Jewish thought.”<sup>4</sup>

The main problem then with “Jewish Christianity” as a historical category is that it effectively obscures the fact that all kinds of early Christianity are, ultimately, Jewish. Perhaps the implicit bifurcation of Christianity from Judaism offered some unconscious comfort to the European scholars of nineteenth and early twentieth century who fostered the concept. Yet early Christianity in all its variety remains inescapably a type of Judaism, which we may call Christian Judaism, a religion defined primarily by its confession of Jesus as the messiah sent by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Christianity is thus one of the two main forms of Judaism to emerge out of the cauldron of first-century Roman Judaism following the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the other variety being Rabbinic Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism drew heavily on the traditions of the Pharisees, which it combined with other elements of first-century Judaism to realize a new Torah-centered and ethnically defined version of Judaism. Christian Judaism, on the other hand, began as a Jewish movement in Roman Palestine centered on the messiahship of Jesus, which then spread into the broader Mediterranean world, where it abandoned ethnocentricity and drew heavily on the traditions of Hellenistic Judaism in its embrace of Greco-Roman culture. Both Christian Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism

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3. See, e.g., J.E. TAYLOR, *Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins*, Oxford, 1993, p. 18-47; *id.*, “Phenomenon of Early Jewish Christianity;” and J.C. Paget, “Jewish Christianity,” in W. HORBURY, W.D. DAVIES and J. STURDY (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 3, *The Early Roman Period*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 731-75.

4. J.E. TAYLOR, “Phenomenon of Early Jewish Christianity,” p. 317.

then are types of Judaism, and so it makes little sense to imagine a difference between Christians who were somehow “Jewish Christians” and those who were somehow not “Jewish” in the early centuries of Christian history.

To be sure, there is a divisive debate within early Christianity about the status of the Law, and particularly how much of it was to be retained in this new formation, and it was this controversy that gave rise to the scholarly distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christianities in the first place. Yet it not the case that one sort of Christianity is Jewish while the other is not: both remain, from the perspective of the history of religions, varieties of Judaism. Instead, the issue in question focused on the degree to which observance of the Jewish Law was to be retained.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, it makes much better sense to me to speak instead of “Torah observant” and “Torah relaxing” communities within early Christianity, or alternatively some other sort of similar terminology that focuses squarely on the differences in practice among various early Christians. Such terminology and conceptualization of early Christian diversity likewise mirrors the different positions staked out within Roman Judaism more broadly, as some Jews embraced a relaxation of the Law while others insisted on its strict observance.<sup>6</sup> Thus, our question becomes: is there any relation between the beginnings of Islam and some Torah-observant form of Christianity?<sup>7</sup>

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5. R.E. BROWN, “Not Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity, but Types of Jewish/Gentile Christianity,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983), p. 74-79; and R.A. KRAFT, “The Multiform Jewish Heritage of Early Christianity,” in J. NEUSNER (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, vol. 3, Leiden, 1975, p. 174-199.

6. See, e.g., E.P. SANDERS, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, Philadelphia, 1977.

7. The idea that Islam emerged in relation to some sort of now mysterious and vague Jewish-Christian community in the Hijaz was popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at the height of speculation regarding ancient Jewish Christianity. See, e.g., A. SPRENGER, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammod*, 2nd ed., 3 vols., Berlin, 1869, vol. 1, p. 21-45; R. BELL, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*, London, 1926, p. 12-14; H.J. SCHOEPS, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums*, Tübingen, p. 334-42; M.P. RONCAGLIA, “Éléments Ebionites et Elkésaites dans le Coran,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 21 (1971), p. 101-25; G. LÜLING, *Über den Ur-Qur’an: Ansätze z. Rekonstruktion vorislam, christl. Strophenlieder Qur’an*, Erlangen, 1974. Cf. A. VON HARNACK, *Dogmengeschichte*, 4. verb. und bereicherte Aufl. ed., 4 vols., Grundriss der theologischen Wissenschaften, Tübingen, 1905, vol. 2, p. 537. For more recent efforts to establish such a connection, see F. DE BLOIS, “*Naṣrānī* (Ναζωραῖος) and *Hanīf* (ἕθνησός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and Islam,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65 (2002), p. 1-30; É.-M. GALLET, *Le messie et son prophète: aux origines de l’islam*, 2 vols., Versailles, 2005 and J. GNILKA, *Die Nazarener und der Koran: Eine Spurensuche*, Freiburg, 2007. De Blois’ work in particular is a linguistic tour de force, but his efforts to connect the Qur’anic *naṣrānī* with a specific Jew-

The answer, I think, must be a clear no, particularly since there is no reliable evidence of any Torah-observant Christian communities beyond the end of the fourth centuries, a point on which there is currently a strong consensus in early Christian studies.<sup>8</sup>

Holger Zellentin recently invites us to imagine that the legal culture of Torah-observant Christianity survived well into the seventh century, in order to explain certain similarities between the early third-century *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the *Pseudo-Clementine* literature and the Qur'ān. Although he is well aware of the problems with the evidence, Zellentin maintains that the particular sort of Judeo-Christian legal culture evidenced by these early Christian texts somehow "persisted at least until the seventh [century]" so that it could influence the Qur'ān.<sup>9</sup> Even though, by his own acknowledgement, "the historicity of Judeo-Christian groups past the fourth or fifth century is indeed more than uncertain," Zellentin nonetheless proposes that somehow the practices ascribed to these groups in fact persisted into the seventh century.<sup>10</sup> Since there is no proof available that such practices did not exist, he accordingly assumes that they did, arguing that "the burden of proof must thus be on those who want to stipulate the convenient disappearance of Judeo-Christianity."<sup>11</sup> I must say that I do not find this a very persuasive argument, and to the contrary, the burden of proof in this case lies instead with those who wish to maintain the existence of such a phenomenon in the absence of any positive evidence to support it.

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ish-Christian sect described by certain early Christian heresiologists are problematic. For instance, the attempt to link the Qur'ān's apparent indication that some Christians had deified Mary with Elchasaite mythology as described by Epiphanius of Salamis is a bit of a stretch. More importantly, however, much of the information concerning these Jewish-Christian groups is taken from Epiphanius and other heresiologists, whose reports are generally regarded with deep suspicion: see, e.g., A.S. JACOBS, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity*, Stanford, 2004, p. 44-51; A. CAMERON, "How to Read Heresiology," in D.B. MARTIN & P.C. MILLER, *Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography*, Durham, 2005, p. 193-212.

8. See, e.g., J.E. WANSBROUGH & G.R. HAWTING, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Amherst NY, 2006, vii. R. PRITZ, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period until its Disappearance in the Fourth Century*, Studia Post-Biblica, Jerusalem-Leiden, 1988: the title says it all. Even Bellarmino Bagatti, whose optimism about the possibility of recovering information concerning the Jewish Christians is perhaps unrivaled, concludes that by the early fifth century Jewish Christianity had disappeared: B. BAGATTI, *Church from the Circumcision*, p. 143-7. See also the important critique of BAGATTI's work raised by J.E. TAYLOR, *Christians and the Holy Places*, p. 5-47.

9. H.M. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*, Tübingen, 2013, p. 175; cf. e.g. p. 98, 125.

10. *Ibid.*, IX..

11. *Ibid.*, 98.

The only possible evidence for such a survival of Judeo-Christian legal culture seems to be the later transmission of texts like the *Didascalia* and the *Pseudo-Clementines* beyond the fourth century.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, there are not actually so many of exemplars of these texts, and one imagines that these works may have been copied for reasons other than the survival of Jewish-Christian practice. After all, one of the most important witnesses to the *Pseudo-Clementines* is a Latin translation by Rufinus of Aquileia (d. 395): I sincerely doubt that Rufinus undertook this task of translation (and not merely just copying) out of deep sympathy for the Jewish-Christian and anti-Pauline contents of this text. Rather, it seems that Rufinus' translation instead reflects an interest in the legacy of Clement in Rome, and its value for this purpose seemingly enabled him (and others) to gloss over potentially more objectionable content in the text. One would imagine that in other instances there were likewise similar factors involved that led to the reproduction of these texts.<sup>13</sup>

I suspect that more generally the impulse to locate Islam's origins in some sort of Torah-observant form of Christianity initially arose from an older perspective that sought to identify the source of Islam in a single, particular sort of religious community from sixth or early seventh-century Arabia. I further suspect that this older model derives at least in part from a sort of apologetic interest, which aimed to demonstrate Muhammad's lack of originality by finding the source of his ideas in an Arabian "Jewish Christian" sect. Yet it no longer seems wise, in my judgment, to continue searching for a single, specific origin for the Islamic tradition. Rather, I imagine that a number of different religious beliefs and practices influenced Islam's initial formation, presumably independently of one another and not from a single source, as I will explain in a moment. The strong imprint of Rabbinic Judaism on earliest Islam is clear, and there can be little doubt that this derives from significant early contact, indeed, overlap, between the community of the Believers and late ancient Judaism, as is well known from the Constitution of Medina, among other sources.<sup>14</sup> We do not need to invent a "Jewish Christian" group to explain these "Jewish"

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12. So is suggested in *ibid.*, 97.

13. Rufinus' translation was discussed most recently by C. CHIN at the 2010 meeting of the North American Patristics Society in her paper "Rufinus of Rome: Authorship and the Latin *Recognitions* of Clement." I thank Prof. Chin for sharing her paper with me. See also W. ULLMANN, "The Significance of the *Epistola Clementis* in the Pseudo-Clementines," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 11 (1960), p. 295-317.

14. See, e.g., F. M. DONNER, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community," *al-Abhāth* 50-1 (2002), p. 9-53, p. 13-16; *id.*, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge, 2010, p. 69-70, 75-7, 87, 134, 204, 206; S.J. SHOEMAKER, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam*, Philadelphia, 2012, 206-7.

features. They could just as easily, and in fact, more probably, have come directly from Rabbinic and perhaps other forms of early Judaism.

Presumably the Qur'ān's embrace of many Christian traditions alongside of a rejection of Christian Trinitarianism led earlier scholars to search for some sort of "Jewish Christian" origin for Islam. According to several early Christian heresiologists, many Torah observant Christian groups similarly embraced a low Christology such as we find in the Qur'ān. For instance, the Ebionites, an early Christian group known almost exclusively from their opponents, are famous for their alleged rejection of Jesus' divinity and their insistence on observance of the Torah.<sup>15</sup> Such a combination seems ready made for understanding the Qur'ān's combination of Jewish and Christian traditions alongside a certain respect for the Law and for Jesus, who is esteemed as one of God's prophets but not divine. Nevertheless, there is little chance that the Ebionites, or any Torah observant Christian group for that matter, survived until the seventh century, let alone in the Ḥijāz. Since we do not need a Torah observant group of Christians to explain the Qur'ān's interest in the Law, which came much more likely through the influence of other, non-Christian strains of Judaism, we accordingly should desist in the search for a Jewish Christian origin either for the Qur'ān or for Islam more generally.

The issue of the Qur'ān's non-Trinitarianism remains an interesting phenomenon, however, and how to explain its confession of Jesus as the Messiah born of a virgin while denying his divinity presents a bit of a puzzle in the context of sixth and seventh-century Near Eastern religious culture. Unquestionably this profession of Jesus as Messiah does not reflect the influence of non-Christian Jews, since this is the very article of faith that marks the primary boundary between these two types of Judaism. Likewise, the Qur'ān relates a large number of specifically Christian traditions, so that we must imagine some sort of contact and influence from Christianity. Should we then look for some sort of non-Trinitarian Christian community behind the Qur'ān, rather than a Torah-observant Christian group? In some respects, this proposal would seem to make more sense. Nevertheless, in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, I am not aware of any evidence for such a Christian group, particularly in Arabia. Outside of the Latin West, where there Arianism remained prominent among the Germanic invaders, there is simply no evidence for non-Trinitarian Christianity much beyond the beginning of the fifth century, and we have absolutely no basis for supposing that such a group lies behind the Christian traditions of the Qur'ān.

Even more problematic is the total lack of evidence for even the existence of Christianity in the Ḥijāz during the sixth and early seventh cen-

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15. See, e.g., A. F.J. KLIJN and G.J. REININK, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects*, Leiden, 1973, esp. p. 19-44.

turies. Although its presence there is routinely presumed, no doubt primarily on the basis of the Qur'ān and the tradition of its composition in Mecca and Medina, this assumption is nonetheless otherwise unfounded, so far as I have yet seen. It may be that someday such evidence will emerge, but for the present, it remains lacking. Christianity, it is true, had literally encircled the Ḥijāz by Muhammad's lifetime, but there is no indication of a Christian community in either Mecca or Medina.<sup>16</sup> While scholars of Near Eastern Christianity routinely assert that Christianity had penetrated the Ḥijāz by the seventh century, this is again largely assumed on the basis of the Qur'ān and much later Islamic source materials, whose accounts are quite suspect in this matter.<sup>17</sup> Yet even taking these early Islamic reports more or less at face value, they still afford no evidence of a Christian community in Mecca and Medina, but only anecdotes concerning a few individual converts.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it is rather telling that, as Wansbrough observes, any Christian characters appearing in the narratives of Islamic origins are "always from outside the Ḥijāz" and their introduction "is always gratuitous, and their alleged place of origin suspect."<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps then one might propose to find some sort of non-Trinitarian Christianity in Ethiopia or South Arabia that can explain the nature of the Qur'ān's Christian traditions. Yet here the evidence also is wanting. While there is certainly evidence for Christianity in both locations, there is simply no hint of any anti-Trinitarianism, particularly at this late date. In fact, we actually have correspondence from the Arian Roman Emperor Constantius II (r. 337-361) to King Ezana of Axum (ca. 320-360), expressing dismay that the latter had erroneously converted to a form of Christi-

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16. Even Bell was forced to acknowledge this problem in his rather ironically titled *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*: "there is no good evidence of any seats of Christianity in the Ḥijāz or in the near neighborhood of Mecca or even of Medina." R. BELL, *Origin of Islam*, 42-3. Likewise, F.E. PETERS, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam*, Albany, 1994, p. 1: "there were Christians at Gaza, and Christians and Jews in the Yemen, but none of either so far as we know at Mecca." See also G.R. HAWTING, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History*, Cambridge, 1999, p. 14-16.

17. S.H. MOFFETT, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1500*, San Francisco, 1992, p. 279-81; I. GILLMAN & H.-J. KLIMKEIT, *Christians in Asia before 1500*, Ann Arbor, 1999, p. 82-6. S.H. GRIFFITH, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Princeton, 2008, p. 8, notes concerning the spread of Christianity into the Ḥijāz that "while the documentation for this activity is sparse, it is not nonexistent." Nevertheless, Griffith does not here provide any references to such evidence outside of inference from the Islamic tradition.

18. G. OSMAN, "Pre-Islamic Arab Converts to Christianity in Mecca and Medina: An Investigation into the Arabic Sources," *The Muslim World* 95 (2005), p. 67-80.

19. J.E. WANSBROUGH, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford, 1978, p. 18 and 22; see also p. 5-6, 17-20, 40 and 43.

anity that professed Christ's divinity.<sup>20</sup> It seems improbable in the extreme then to posit that the Qur'an's Christian culture reflects some renegade group of non-Trinitarians hiding out somewhere along the Red Sea. To be sure, it would not be entirely impossible that such a group may have existed, but given the evidence that we do have about Christianity in this broader region it is highly unlikely, and nothing invites us to suppose the existence of non-Trinitarian Christianity in these locations, other than pure speculation based on an interest to explain the Christian contents of the Qur'an. Indeed, volume 2 part 4 of Aloys Grillmeier's magisterial work, *Christ and the Christian Tradition* ("The Church of Alexandria with Nubia and Ethiopia after 451") demonstrates beyond any doubt that the church of Ethiopia in late antiquity was thoroughly Trinitarian in its theology, and this should accordingly lay this old chestnut to rest.<sup>21</sup>

Quite recently, however, Christian Julien Robin has drawn attention to three South Arabian inscriptions from the reign of Abraha (ca. 535-565), which he alleges show signs of a move away from a Trinitarian understanding of Jesus and toward Christological beliefs more in line with, as he names them, the "Judeo-Christians."<sup>22</sup> Robin's proposed interpretation of these inscriptions is nevertheless extremely problematic and unfortunately shows some basic misunderstandings of Christian theological discourse as it had become established already for centuries before the rule of Abraha. Robin observes that in the sole surviving inscription from Abraha's predecessor, a South Arabian ruler named Sumūyafa who had been appointed by the Ethiopian king Kālēb around 530, Jesus is named differently from the inscriptions established by Abraha. In Sumūyafa's inscription, Jesus appears along with "Raḥmanān" ("the Merciful"), the South Arabian name for God, as "his Son Christ." According to Robin, this inscription reflects the "official doctrine...of Aksūm's church," particularly since as "a fresh convert just baptized" the king presumably "would have had little say in matters of doctrine."<sup>23</sup>

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20. Constantius II, *Concerning Frumentius the Bishop of Axum* (PG 25,631).

21. A. GRILLMEIER & Th. HAINTHALER, *Christ in Christian tradition*, trans. O.C. DEAN, Jr., vol. 2, *From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604)*, part 4, *The Church of Alexandria with Nubia and Ethiopia after 451*, Louisville, 1996, p. 295-393.

22. Ch.J. ROBIN & S. TAYRAN, "Soixante-dix ans avant l'Islam: L'Arabie toute entière dominée par un roi chrétien," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* (2012), p. 525-53 and 536-40 The same argument is made in a just published English article: Ch.J. ROBIN, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta in Late Antiquity: The Epigraphic Evidence," in G. FISHER (ed.), *Arabs and Empire Before Islam*, Oxford, 2015, p. 127-71 and 153-4.

23. Ch.J. ROBIN, "Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta," p. 153. See also Ch.J. ROBIN & S. TAYRAN, "Soixante-dix ans," p. 538-9.



Under Abraha, however, who followed, we find three inscriptions in which Jesus is named with Raḥmanān as “his Messiah,” omitting any reference to sonship and using a Syriac word, rather than a Greek calque (as we find in Aksūmite inscriptions), to name him “anointed.”<sup>24</sup> Robin concludes that this difference indicates a deliberate and “systematic” departure from the Christology reflected in Sumūyafa’s earlier Aksūmite inscription. Following his successful revolt against Ethiopia’s agent in South Arabia, Abraha introduced some noteworthy changes to the Christology of the Himyarite church, Robin maintains, so that Jesus would be called Messiah, but not designated as “son.” According to Robin, this change reflects a compromise aimed at the powerful Jewish influence among the elites of the Himyar. The result is a Judeo-Christian Christology promulgated by Abraha that corresponds nicely with the Qur’ān’s rejection of Christ’s divine sonship, or so Robin proposes.<sup>25</sup>

Robin’s hypothesis is extremely problematic on a number of fronts. In the first place, one might note the rather small sample size on which such wide-ranging conclusions rest. But the decision to name Jesus as Messiah rather than Christ is hardly of doctrinal significance, particularly in a Semitic context. The words mean exactly the same thing, “anointed,” and while the preference for one over the other perhaps says something about the prestige of different languages, theologically there is no difference. To confess Jesus as Christ in the sixth century, as all of these inscriptions do, is effectively to acknowledge his status as divine and as Lord. By this time, in these contexts, the established Christology of all the churches of the late ancient Near East ensured that to call Jesus Christ was to name him also as God.

Likewise, the absence of the title “son” from Abraha’s three inscriptions is of little to no significance. On the one hand, all Christians who were using any of the canonical writings of the New Testament, which had become fairly well established by this point, would simply have to accept the language and status of Jesus’ sonship. Indeed, I am hard pressed to think of any early Christian group, non-Trinitarian or otherwise, that rejected the title of Son for Jesus: only its meaning was disputed. If we are then to imagine a group in sixth-century South Arabia that deliberately rejected this title, then we must also suppose that they had an entirely different set of scriptures, which seems utterly improbable given what we know otherwise about Himyarite Christianity in this era. And as others have noted before me, the evidence seems to favor the ascendancy of miaphysite Christianity there, with a particular influx of Julianist

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24. Ch.J. ROBIN, “Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta,” p. 153. See also Ch.J. ROBIN & S. TAYRAN, “Soixante-dix ans,” p. 536.

25. Ch.J. ROBIN, “Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and Arabia Deserta,” p. 154. See also Ch.J. ROBIN & S. TAYRAN, “Soixante-dix ans,” p. 540.

miaphysites who fled from the Roman Empire after their position fell out of favor.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Robin seems to miss the point that simply calling Jesus son or even the Son of God is not the same as identifying him with Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as in orthodox Trinitarian thought. Quite to the contrary, there were innumerable Christians in the ancient church who would confess Jesus as Son of God even as they simultaneously denied his divinity or equality with Yahweh. Jesus' sonship was inescapably determined by the four canonical gospels, among other early Christian writings. So Arius and other non-Trinitarians, for instance, had no problem with the language of sonship: indeed, in their view sonship seemed to indicate both difference from and inferiority to God the Father. Therefore, these inscriptions are in fact a red herring, and in no way should they be seen as offering any evidence for either non-Trinitarian or Torah-observant Christianity in South Arabia during the mid-sixth century. The evidence for both remains decidedly wanting.

Thus, any persuasive solution to understanding the Qur'an's rejection of Christ's divinity will unfortunately not come very easily, I suspect. By the time Muhammad's religious movement began to take shape, there had not been any sort of Christianity that rejected Christ's divinity in the Near East for roughly two centuries, and even longer for Torah-observant forms of Christianity. Likewise, there remains again the issue that there is no evidence of any significant Christian presence in the Hijāz prior to Muhammad's new religious movement. The source of Qur'an's Christian traditions, including especially its opinions on Jesus' relation to the divinity, remains an enigma. Nevertheless, I think something like Fred Donner's model of Muhammad's religious movement as a community of various monotheistic "Believers" holds the most promise for comprehending these traditions, as well as many other puzzling questions regarding the formation of Islam.

According to Donner, Muhammad and his earliest followers did not initially seek to distinguish themselves as "a separate religious confession distinct from others."<sup>27</sup> Rather, they seem to have understood themselves an inter-confessional "community of the Believers" that welcomed Jews and seemingly also Christians to full membership, requiring only a simple profession of faith in "God and the last day" and a recognition of Muhammad's prophetic leadership. While this hypothesis is not entirely

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26. L. VAN ROMPAY, "Society and Community in the Christian East," in M. MAAS (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, Cambridge, 2005, p. 239-66 and 252-4.

27. F.M. DONNER, "From Believers to Muslims," p. 9. See also D. COOK, "The Beginnings of Islam as an Apocalyptic Movement," *Journal of Millennial Studies* Vol. 1 (2001). Available from <http://www.bu.edu/mille/publications/winter2001/cook.html>.

unproblematic, in my opinion it presents a much more persuasive synthesis of the earliest evidence than either the traditional Islamic accounts or any alternative explanation. This new religious movement was not, as Donner explains, so much “a new and distinct religious confession” as it was a “monotheistic reform movement” committed to advancing personal and communal piety in the face of a swiftly approaching final judgment.<sup>28</sup>

Yet perhaps the most problematic aspect of Donner’s hypothesis is how to explain the inclusion of Christians within the community of the Believers in light of Qur’ān’s polemics against the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Christ’s divinity. Such pronouncements would seem to preclude any Christian participation in Muhammad’s early religious movement, since, as just noted, the doctrines of the triune God and Christ’s full divinity were well established within Near Eastern Christianity by the early seventh-century. Indeed, any Christians that Muhammad and his early followers encountered would have been overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, Trinitarian. How then are the Qur’ān’s occasional polemics against the Trinity to be reconciled with this view of the early community? Donner suggests that perhaps such theological tensions could have been overlooked during early history of the community, as these differences were pushed to the side in favor of emphasis on the core themes of the impending Last Day, faith in the God of Abraham, and a call to piety. As the movement evolved, however, “it was precisely the theological implications of such passages as these in the Qur’ān text that made inevitable the eventual crystallization of Muslims as a religious confession distinct from other monotheisms.” Furthermore, prior to the establishment and dissemination of a standardized Qur’ānic text, Donner maintains, “Muslims actually knew very little of the Qur’ān,” which could perhaps explain apparent tension between these Qur’ānic passages and the more open boundaries of the early community.<sup>29</sup> This is all the more understandable if the Qur’ānic text was not fixed until somewhat later than the Islamic tradition maintains, perhaps as late as the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik, a view that Donner himself has increasingly come to embrace. In this case, these anti-Christian polemics would reflect the early community’s evolving identity into distinct religious confession, separate from Judaism and Christianity, which seems to have taken place especially during ‘Abd al-Malik’s reign.

In this case, the divinity of Jesus may not have initially been a deal breaker, as it were, in the earliest history of Muhammad’s movement. Only as the community gradually evolved into a distinctively Islamic confession of faith did this doctrine emerge as a primary boundary between

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28. F. M. DONNER, *Muhammad and the Believers*, p. 87.

29. F.M. DONNER, “From Believers to Muslims,” p. 26-7. See now also *id.*, *Muhammad and the Believers*, p. 77.

Christianity and Muhammad's new revelation of monotheism. Indeed, the emphasis on Muhammad's unique status among the prophets also seems to be a later development, not present in the Qur'an, which seems to regard all prophets as equals.<sup>30</sup> If then we envision a group of monotheists, Jews, Christians, and Arabs, gathered together initially under the banner of Muhammad's preaching of God and the last day, it is easy to imagine how the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus could over time have become contentious issues, especially between Jewish and Christian members of the community. It would appear that in this case the momentum was, for whatever reason, ultimately in favor of a lower Christology, which I suspect must have been more palatable to the majority of the movement's members. Jesus, his messiahship, his miraculous birth, and other Christian traditions were less problematic and so could all be retained. The Trinity and Christ's divinity, however, were proscribed because they chafed against the monotheism that was central to the group's identity. Still, Christ's prominence in other aspects of the Islamic tradition, in eschatology, mysticism, and reverence his mother, for instance, reflect what was clearly a significant Christian contribution to the formation of the community of the Believers.

Thus, I think that we should not look for anti-Trinitarianism or a rejection of Christ's divinity at the beginnings of Muhammad's movement; instead, we should see these positions as products of the "sectarian milieu" within which Islam was forming its confessional identity. These were not positions that Muhammad or the Qur'an took from some shadowy, historically improbable group of Judeo-Christians hiding somewhere in the Hijaz. Rather, the Qur'an's Christology emerged from the mixture of monotheisms shared among the early Believers. As the community moved to exclude belief in Christ's divinity and a triune God, Christian Believers must have faced a choice: either break with Muhammad's community in favor of the Christian faith or adjust their beliefs about Jesus according to the evolving nature of the new faith that they had embraced. I more than suspect that many Christian Believers may have opted for the latter option. In the face of eschatological conviction and political turmoil, one can easily imagine their willingness to believe that God had raised up anew a prophet for these troubling times. Indeed, the fact that Christians over the centuries have in large numbers abandoned faith in Christ's divinity in favor of Muhammad and the Qur'an shows that this would certainly not be unexpected. And all the more so in order that these Believers might remain a part of Muhammad's eschatological community of the righteous in order to meet the quickly approaching judgment of the Hour.

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30. J.E. WANSBROUGH, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, London Oriental Series 31, Oxford, 1977, p. 55.

**JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN LEGAL CULTURE  
AND THE QUR'ĀN:  
THE CASE OF RITUAL SLAUGHTER  
AND THE CONSUMPTION  
OF ANIMAL BLOOD**

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The term “Judaean-Christian legal culture” describes those strands within the Jesus movement that maintained a separation between Jewish and gentile ethnicity, and obliged gentiles to maintain those purity laws the Hebrew Bible had imposed on aliens residing in Israel. These purity laws include the avoidance of idol-meat, the unwarranted shedding of human blood, the consumption of blood or of improperly slaughtered animals, and the engagement in illicit sexual relations such as adultery, incest, or sexual relations during a woman’s menses. The slow development of these “gentile purity regulations,” the history of which forms the object of this article, can be traced from the Hebrew Bible, throughout Late Antiquity, and to the Qur’ān; they also form the basis of subsequent Islamic purity regulations.

At the example of the prohibition of the consumption of blood and of improperly slaughtered animals, the present contribution will illustrate how Judaean-Christian legal culture endured from the time of the Acts of the Apostles up to the time of the Qur’ān. The separation of Jewish and gentile ethnicity, though repeatedly questioned in various ways by many authors since the second century C.E., always remained a powerful hermeneutical paradigm in most forms of Christianity. The gentile purity observations, though partially softened or even questioned by a minority

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\* The writing of this article was made possible with the generous support from the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust. I am grateful to Daniel Weiss for his comments on this paper, to Francisco del Río Sanchez for having organized an inspiring session dedicated to the topic at hand, and to the other participants of the session for their helpful suggestions. The Greek text of the New Testament is that of Nestle Aland 27; the vocalized text of the Qur’ān is that of ‘Āṣim (transmitted by Ḥafṣ), i.e. the Cairo text. Translations of the Bible follow the New Revised Standard Version, translations of the Qur’ān follow that of Sayyid ‘Alī Qulī QARĀ’Ī (ed. and trans.), *The Qur’an with an English Paraphrase*, Qom, 2003, with slight modifications. All other translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

of church fathers since the fourth century, remained part of mainstream Christianity throughout Late Antiquity. Yet at the same time, some Christian authorities actually expanded the scope and the urgency of the gentile purity regulations, always in close dialogue with the Hebrew Bible and at times also with Encratic forms of Christianity. Judaeo-Christian legal culture was thus never constitutive of a separate group. Instead, it formed the mainstream of early Christianity, and then likely prevailed at the margins, yet within Christian or even Jewish groups; it simultaneously prepared the legal culture that forms the Qurʾān's point of departure.

Previous scholarship (by others and myself) has recognized the link between Leviticus and the early Christian purity regulations,<sup>1</sup> their applicability throughout Late Antiquity,<sup>2</sup> as well as the continuity between Christian ritual observances and those promulgated for the Muslims in the Qurʾān.<sup>3</sup> The novel contribution here presented is the illustration of the continuity with which those ritual laws the Hebrew Bible applied to non-Israelites were imposed on all of non-Jewish humanity from the first century of the Common Era to the seventh and beyond, often only in theory, sometimes also in practice. This hermeneutical continuity included a perpetual return to the gentile purity laws of the Hebrew Bible, the ongoing distinction between Jews and non-Jews, and the slow specification and expansion of the Levitical laws for non-Israelites which can be observed not only in early Christianity, but also throughout Late Antiquity and up to the Qurʾān. The following is part of my broader project of delineating a hitherto unnoticed continuity of the relevance of the Levitical laws for non-Israelites throughout early Christianity and rabbinic Judaism up to

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1. See for example F. AVEMARIE, *Neues Testament und Frühbrabbinisches Judentum*, Tübingen, 2013, p. 773-800; P.J. TOMSON, "Jewish Purity Laws as Viewed by the Church Fathers and by the Early Followers of Jesus," in M. J.H.M. POORTHUIS & J. SCHWARTZ (ed.), *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, Leiden, 2000, p. 73-91; W. LOADER, *The Septuagint, Sexuality, and the New Testament. Case Studies on the Impact of the LXX in Philo and the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, 2004; M. BOCKMUEHL, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics*, Edinburgh, 2000; and J. WEHNERT, *Die Reinheit des 'christlichen Gottesvolkes' aus Juden und Heiden: Studien zum historischen und theologischen Hintergrund des sogenannten Aposteldekrets*, Göttingen, 1997.

2. The classical study remains that of K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Das apostolische Speisegesetz in den ersten fünf Jahrhunderten: Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der quasi-levitischen Satzungen in älteren kirchlichen Rechtsquellen*, Paderborn, 1903; Böckenhoff's derisive attitude towards purity laws is typical of much of the scholarship. A more helpful approach is displayed by D. M. FREIDENREICH, *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law*, Berkeley, 2011.

3. See H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*, Tübingen, 2013; cf. F. DE BLOIS "Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanīf (ἕθνηός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65 (2002), p. 1-30.

the time of the Qur'ān; other works in progress present the ongoing relevance of the respective sexual laws along with the food laws, aiming for a broader synthesis of the material.<sup>4</sup>

I have introduced the concept of “Judaean-Christian legal culture” in the past; an argument for its relevance for both Late Antique and Qur'ānic studies necessitates a brief differentiation between this concept and the unstable term “Jewish Christianity.”<sup>5</sup> An illustrative definition of “Jewish Christianity” of special relevance for the present topic can be found in Patricia Crone’s recent article arguing for the value of this difficult concept for the study of the Qur'ān. Crone proceeds, to a degree, carefully, and almost always comprehensively, yet her following definition of the term—based in turn on that of Edwin Broadhead—considers the “Jewish-Christian” *separation* of ethnicities only in a limited way:

“Jewish Christianity” is a modern term for the beliefs of those followers of Jesus who saw devotion to Jesus as part of God’s covenant with Israel, not as a transfer of God’s promise of salvation from the Jews to the gentiles. Some of them regarded Jesus as a prophet, others saw him as a heavenly power, but all retained their Jewish identity and continued to live by the law.<sup>6</sup>

This definition is not so much false as it is incomplete, for the understanding of what “the law” prescribed for Jews and for non-Jews was rather different. The “followers of Jesus” which Crone groups together by and large saw themselves *either* as Jews *or* as gentiles, and their ethnicity determined their respective pursuit of purity. From the onset of the Jesus movement, those who endorsed the gentile purity regulations applied the entirety of the Biblical commandments—or at least those of ongoing rel-

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4. A first instalment of this work was my monograph *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*; a second part is titled “Judaean-Christian Legal Culture and the Qur'ān: The Case of Incest and other Sexual Transgressions,” in H. ZELLENTIN (ed.), *The Qur'ān's Reformation of Judaism and Christianity*, Routledge Studies in the Quran, New York, forthcoming. I am equally preparing a monograph, *Law and Literature from the Bible to the Qur'ān*, which is under contract with Oxford University Press.

5. For my definition of “Judaean-Christian Legal Culture” see below. Notable recent works on “Jewish Christianity,” include E.K. BROADHEAD, *Jewish Ways of Following Jesus: Redrawing the Religious Map of Antiquity*, Tübingen, , 2010; M. JACKSON-MCCABE, *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered*, Minneapolis, 2007; and Ch.E. FONROBERT, “Jewish Christians, Judaizers, and Christian anti-Judaism,” in V. BURRUS (ed.), *Late Ancient Christianity*, Minneapolis, 2005, p. 234–54.

6. P. CRONE, “Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part One),” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74 (2015), p. 225; see also *ead.*, “Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part Two),” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 75 (2016), p. 1-21; both essays are also published jointly in *ead.*, *The Qur'ānic Pagans and Related Matters: Collected Studies in Three Volumes*, Brill, 2015, Vol. 1, p. 225-276 and p. 277-314.

evance after the Temple's destruction—to Jews, and imposed only those Biblical purity laws pertaining to non-Israelites aliens found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy to gentiles —along with criminal and social laws often indistinguishable from those common throughout the Mediterranean and the Levant.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas Crone and others see “Jewish Christianity” as a religious movement separate from other forms of Judaism and Christianity, numerous scholars have dismissed the patristic evidence for such a separate group as historically doubtful; past the fourth century, it disappears in Western sources, and largely in the Eastern ones as well.<sup>8</sup> Despite the likely absence of independent groups, I have argued that especially past the fourth century C.E. we have scant yet clear evidence of the ongoing development Judaeo-Christian legal culture within the mainstream of Judaism and Christianity.<sup>9</sup> Such “Judaeo-Christian legal culture,” at the very least, included the dual endorsement of both the Torah and the Gospel, of Moses and of Jesus, as two religious symbols that do not diminish but complement each other—in their respective orientation towards either the Jews or towards the gentiles as two separate ethno-religious entities. The notion of a Judaeo-Christian legal culture, if understood as upholding rather than (con)fusing Jewish and gentile ethnicity, can indeed help us understand the discourse demanding a set of purity regulations for gentiles as different from those imposed on the Jews. The Qurʾān, in turn, endorses Judaeo-Christian positions as defined above, reforming them and ultimately seeking to supersede them along with Judaism and Christianity.

*Pace* Crone, we should thus not imagine Islam to have arisen out of “Jewish-Christian” communities. The ongoing differentiation of Jewish and gentile followers of Jesus will have made it difficult, if not impossible to allow for the creation or maintenance of such alleged separate groups, all the more so under the pressure of the rabbis’ and the churches’ increas-

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7. On the broad overlap of late ancient law, the Bible, and the Qurʾān see H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture*, p. 1-76.

8. See for example S. GRIFFITH, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the “People of the Book” in the Language of Islam*, Princeton, esp. p. 36-40. On earlier evidence on Jewish Christianity and the historical value of heresiology see the useful (if overstated) remarks by D. BOYARIN, “Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to which is Appended a Correction of my Border Lines),” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99 (2009), p. 7–36; see also E. IRICIN-SCHI & H. ZELLENTIN (ed.), *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, Tübingen, 2007; O. SKARSAUNE & R. HVALVIK (ed.), *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, Peabody MA, 2007, p. 649–653.

9. On the persistency of Judaeo-Christian legal thought see H. ZELLENTIN, “*Aḥbār* and *Rubbān*: Religious Leaders in the Qurʾān in Dialogue with Christian and Jewish Literature,” in A. NEUWIRTH & M. SELLS (ed.), *Qurʾānic Studies at the University of Chicago*, New York, 2016, p. 258-89; and H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture*, esp. p. 175-202.



ing emphasis on a parting of the ways after the fourth century.<sup>10</sup> Instead, I have argued and will now further illustrate, Judaeo-Christian legal culture permeated mainstream Christian groups, and we find echoes of it in parts of the rabbinic movement as well.<sup>11</sup> This legal culture informs the backdrop of the ritual laws with which the Qur'ān partially identifies, and which it partially seeks to supersede. I will attempt to prove my claims by way of illustrating the historical development that leads us from the double prohibition of blood to Noah in Genesis to that first in “Mecca” and then in “Medina.”<sup>12</sup> The most efficient way to argue for the ongoing continuity of the gentile purity laws is to trace them historically. We will first turn, then, to the onset of the tradition of the gentile purity requirements, or at least to what is likely their earliest attestation, namely in the Covenant of Noah (I). This will be followed by a consideration how these requirements were extended to all of humanity, a turn attested to in the Acts of the Apostles (II). We will then further trace the development of the gentile purity regulations throughout Late Antiquity (III) and up to the Qur'ān (IV), concluding this essay with an evaluate of the evidence.

### I. Gentile Ritual Purity Regulations from the Noahide Covenant to the Holiness Code

In its historical narrative, the Hebrew Bible places the laws pertaining to Israelites alone in the framework of a God's much older relationship with all of humanity. The purity laws given to Moses and viewed as binding to all Israelites, namely, were preceded by another covenant between God and Noah; it is this covenant that determined all later gentile purity regulations. After the flood, God explicitly allowed all humans to consume animals, yet He also required them simultaneously never to consume blood and not to spill human blood (Genesis 9):

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10. Evidence for the largely rhetorical nature of the “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity has been collected in the often-cited volume edited by A. BECKER and A. Yoshiko REED, *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, 2007; cf. also D. BOYARIN, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia, 2004.

11. See H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*, p. 180-99; *id.*, *Rabbinic Parodies*, p. 51-94 and 137-227; see also Ph. ALEXANDER, “Jewish Believers in Early Rabbinic Literature (2d to 5th Centuries),” in O. SKARSAUNE & R. HVALVIK (ed.), *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, Peabody MA, 2007, p. 659-744.

12. On the usefulness of the Jewish evidence for establishing a chronology of the Qur'ān see H. ZELLENTIN, “The Synchronic and the Diachronic Qur'ān: *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, Lot's People, and the Rabbis,” in A. HILALI (ed.), *The Fragment and the Whole: Approaching Religious Texts in a New Perspective, from Mesopotamia to Arabia*, Abingdon: Routledge, forthcoming. I argue for a spatial and chronological differentiation between these materials; the identification of “Mecca” and “Medina” with the actual places on the Arabian Peninsula is likely, yet not yet verified.

3. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.

4. Only, flesh with its soul, its blood (בשר בנפשו דמו), you (pl.) shall not eat

5. For your own soul-blood (pl., את דמכם לנפשתיכם) I will surely require a reckoning; from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for the human soul (את נפש האדם).

6. Whoever sheds the blood of a human (שפך דם האדם), by a human shall that person's blood be shed (באדם דמו ישפך), for in His own image God made humankind.

Genesis here thematically associates two prohibitions which remain interdependent in later jurisprudence: the consumption of animal blood is here associated with the spilling of human blood.<sup>13</sup> These two prohibitions, we will see, form the very basis of all later gentile purity regulations from those of the Bible to those of the Qur'an. The language in Genesis, however, does not yet mention purity. This is not surprising, for overall, the Biblical purity regulations are generally focused on Israelites; in later Jewish thought, gentiles as such cannot, in general, be defiled or defiling—as the Talmud puts it quite correctly, “who has no purity law cannot contaminate.”<sup>14</sup> Yet contrary to this general strand in Israelite and then Jewish thought, priestly sources including the Holiness Code—the passage comprising Leviticus 17–26 that most scholars see as redacted independently of the main body of Leviticus—came to understand the Noahide covenant to imply that the slaughter of animals to idols, the consumption of animal blood, the shedding of human blood as well as the touching of corpses and sexual contact with menstrual discharge, actually *defile* gentiles as well as Israelites.<sup>15</sup>

While it is not possible to give a detailed account of the central and manifold function of ritual purity in the cultures to be discussed in the following, it is clear enough that purity, in the Hebrew Bible, functioned

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13. It is unclear whether the capital punishment for the spilling of human blood is to be administered by other humans (“by a human that person’s blood shall be shed,” as translated here and widely endorsed) or left to divine justice (“for a human that person’s blood shall be shed,” as argued by B. JACKSON, *Wisdom-Laws: A Study of the Mishpatim of Exodus 21:1-22:16*, Oxford, 2006, p. 146 note 145.

14. See Babylonian Talmud *Nazir* 6a-b and note 22 below.

15. See Ch. HAYES, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Inter-marriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmuds*, Oxford, 2002, p. 39. On the concept of the Holiness Code see especially J. MILGROM, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary; New Haven, 2007; I. KNOHL, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School*, Winona Lakes, 2007.

mostly within the symbolical discourse based on the sanctuary. Late Antique purity discourse, we will see, first moves towards recontextualizing purity in the framework of demonology (in continuity cognizant of the Biblical association of idolatry with impurity). While the Meccan Qur'ān preserves reminiscences of identifying demons with impurity, the Medina Qur'ān, we will see, eventually returns to the Biblical paradigm of associating purity with a holy space and the pilgrimage, eventually declaring the gentile purity laws to be universally applicable. In a broader sense, the issue of gentile purity inherent to the Hebrew Bible explains much about the history of late antique religions: whereas the rabbis and some church fathers saw purity as never applicable to gentiles, Judaeo-Christian legal culture and the Islamic tradition did.<sup>16</sup>

In the Bible's priestly sources, food regulations are understood in the context of avoiding the pollution one incurs through idol worship, and the associative prohibition of improper slaughter and shedding human blood is reinforced as "defiling the land"—a term, we will see, used explicitly to proscribe bloodshed in Numbers to both Israelites and gentiles and evoked in Leviticus by associating blood spilled while sacrificing to demons with the blood of murder. Idol worship, to begin with, is prohibited to Israelite and resident alien alike also in Deuteronomy (Dtn. 29:10-29), and the prohibition of idol worship provides the frame narrative in which the gentile purity laws are presented in Leviticus 17 as well. After a short condonation of consuming properly slaughtered animals, this text likewise denounces the Israelite practice to "offer their sacrifices for goat-demons, to whom they prostitute themselves" (Lev. 17:7), and then extends *some* purity regulations not only to Israelites but also to the *gerim*, the non-Israelites that formed part of Israelite society.<sup>17</sup> While these gentiles were required to follow certain ritual laws and enjoyed certain privileges, the Hebrew Bible allows for the circumcision of those aliens who wish to partake of the paschal feast, but it does not demand them to be circumcised in general terms (see Ex. 12:48-49 and Num. 9:14). In other words, even resident aliens remain separate from Israel, unless they undergo circumcision.

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16. The continuity of the Judaeo-Christian legal culture and Islamic views of purity—Sunni as well as especially Shi'ite—remains under-theorized; see the helpful notes on the relationship of Biblical and Qur'ānic purity by M. H. KATZ, *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunnī Law of Ritual Purity*, Albany, 2002, esp. p. 29-58; and see now D.M. FREIDENREICH, "Holiness and impurity in the Torah and the Quran: Differences within a common typology," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 6 (2010), p. 5-22.

17. On the term *ger* in its Biblical context see for example J. MAYSHAR, "Who was the "toshav"?:" in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133 (2014), p. 225-246; see also S. OLYAN, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult*, Princeton, 2000, p. 69-74.

In detail, Leviticus upholds the Noahide Covenant as binding; it therefore prohibits both Israelites and resident aliens to consume blood of any sort in clear terms. Yet Leviticus also specifies and expands the regulations concerning blood established in Genesis. It is the combination of law and legal narrative that marks the onset of the “legal culture” at the basis of the later Judaeo-Christian discourse. It is worthwhile recalling the remainder of the short chapter Leviticus 17 since it forms in several ways the legal basis of all later gentile purity regulations:

8. And you shall say to them (i.e. to “all the people of Israel), “Whoever there is of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among you (הגֵר אֲשֶׁר יגֹר בְּתוֹכְכֶם), who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice,

9. And brings it not to the door of the Tent of Meeting, to offer it to the Lord; that man shall be cut off from among his people.”

10. And whoever there is of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among you (pl., וּמִן הַגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם), who eats any kind of blood (כָּל דָּם); I will set my face against that soul who eats blood (אֵת הַדָּם), and will cut him off from among his people.

11. For the soul of the flesh is in the blood (כִּי נַפְשׁ הַבֶּשֶׂר בַּדָּם); and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul.

12. Therefore I said to the people of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who sojourns among (pl., וְהַגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם) you eat blood.

13. And whoever there is of the people of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among you (וּמִן הַגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם), who hunts and catches (יִצְוֹד צִיד) any beast or bird to be eaten: he shall spill its blood (וּשְׂפַךְ אֵת דָּמוֹ), and cover it with dust.

14. For it is the soul of all flesh; the blood of it is for its soul; therefore I said to the people of Israel, “You shall not eat the blood of any kind of flesh; for the soul of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.”

15. And every soul who eats that which died of itself (נִבְלָה), or that which was torn by beasts (וִטְרֵפָה), whether he is one of your own country, or a stranger (וּבֵגֵר), he shall both wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean (וְטָמֵא) until the evening; then shall he be clean.

16. But if he washes them not, nor bathe his flesh; then he shall bear his iniquity.

Leviticus here emphatically reiterates the idea already expressed in Genesis: the spilling of blood, even that of animals, requires atonement: it is for this reason that all animals killed must be brought to the altar. (The “secular” killing of animals in towns “too far” from the sanctuary, according to Dtn. 12:25-21, remains unaffected by the specific demand to present the meat to the altar; here, the spilling of the blood is sufficient.) The text does not explicitly state that the spilling of animal blood is tantamount to the spilling of human blood. Nevertheless, it states that “the man” who

fails to bring the killed animal to the altar “has shed blood” (לאיש ההוא, דם שפך, Lev. 17:4), symbolically evoking the general prohibition of human bloodshed in Genesis, “whoever sheds the blood of a human” (שפך דם, האדם, Gen. 9:6). The wrongful shedding of human blood thus constitutes much more than a “crime” in the modern sense, as an injustice directed against an individual or society. Spilling human or animal blood in any circumstance other than those narrowly defined in the Bible—avenging a murderer or properly slaughtering an animal, in the Temple if possible, by draining its blood—constitutes an offence against God, akin to blasphemy, which Leviticus equally prohibits to Israelites and resident aliens, again in the context of prohibiting murder (see Lev. 24:16).

In this respect, Leviticus participates in a discourse attested throughout the Pentateuch, which considers the spilling of human blood as defiling, for “blood pollutes the land (כי הדם הוא יחניף את הארץ).... and you (sg.) shall not defile the land (ולא תטמא את הארץ)” (Nb. 35:33-4). The Biblical decree is categorical: a ransom is not acceptable for murderers, and even people merely guilty of unintentional manslaughter, Israelite and resident alien alike, must flee the Holy Land and cross the Jordan in order to find refuge. Only the shedding of their own blood would otherwise purify the blood they had unintentionally shed, just as the shedding of the blood of a murderer atones for the deed (see e.g. Numbers 35 and Deut. 35:15). According to Leviticus, the consumption of animal blood, as well as murder, equally came to be seen as defiling Israelites as well as gentiles alike—both in explicit law and in the legal narratives that develop along with the actual rules.<sup>18</sup>

The strict prohibition of the consumption of blood in Genesis required the adjacent adjudication of borderline cases, a natural legal tendency that is traceable in all legal cultures—including the gentile purity regulations from the Bible to the Qur'ān, as we will see. Leviticus, already specifying the general prohibition of blood in Genesis, clarifies three common cases in which the killing of an animal could not easily be conducted in a proper way: that of carrion (נבלה), i.e. a naturally deceased animal, that of an animal torn by wild beasts (טרפה), and that of hunting. In the case of hunting, Leviticus offers a simple dispensation: the hunter simply has to drain the blood of the animal after killing it; the covering of the blood with sand here takes the place of the ritual slaughter at the altar (see Lev. 17:13). The case of carrion or animals torn by wild beasts was more difficult. Here, the blood has obviously not been removed from the animal, and, due to the onset of cardiovascular decay, doing so has become impossible. The same ambiguity is also dealt with in Deuteronomy, which cat-

18. See Ch. HAYES, *Gentile Impurities*, p. 19-44, and J. MILGROM, *Leviticus 17-22*, passim. The consumption of blood, needless to say, is also prohibited to Israelites, see Dtn. 12:23

egorically prohibits the consumption of carrion precisely *not* to gentiles, but to all of Israel: instead, “you (pl.) will give it to the alien within your gates, and he will eat it” (לגר אשר בשעריך תתננה ואכלה) (Deut. 14:21). Pious resident aliens, in Deuteronomy, could be pure, but they were not holy.<sup>19</sup>

In Leviticus, however, only the priests and Levites were prohibited from eating carrion and animals torn by wild beasts (see Lev. 22:8 and 30). This reflects likely an older view than that of Deuteronomy, since it is also attested in Ezekiel 44:31 (cf. Ez. 4:14). In this older view, the consumption of such animals, while defiling common Israelites and resident aliens, is here not categorically prohibited. Instead, anyone, Israelite or resident alien alike, who consumes carrion simply contracts impurity, likely through contact with the corpse of the dead animal rather than by the actual ingestions (see Lev. 17:15-6 and already the similar law for Israelites in Lev. 11:39-40). Whoever touches such a dead animal, which one must do in order to consume it, must wash, an act which by the evening will have removed the impurity contracted.<sup>20</sup> According to Leviticus, eating a naturally deceased or mangled animal, for Israelites as well as for gentiles, thus forms a borderline case of a purely ritual defilement that can easily be removed—akin, for example, to that contracted by *Israelites* through regular marital intercourse, which is removed by washing and waiting until the evening (see. Lev. 15:18), an issue that will enter the gentile purity regulations eventually.

A discrepancy then prevails between the Israelite purity regulations of Deuteronomy and Leviticus regarding carrion; while the former prohibits the consumption of carrion to Israelites and allows it for gentiles, the latter does not prohibit to common Israelites, but renders it problematic to them as well as to the gentiles; both can eat it under the condition of subsequent purification. The underlying question leading to the divergence of law seems to be whether the prohibition of blood in the Noahide Covenant only concerns fresh blood flowing from an animal, as Leviticus seems to hold, or blood in general, as Deuteronomy seems to imply, yet only for Israelites. The issue forms the background of one of the few discrepancies between the respective gentile purity legislations in rabbinic law on the one hand, and in Christian and Islamic law on the other, eventually leading to the intriguing situation in which rabbinic gentile purity regulations, prohibiting only flowing blood to gentiles, were actually less

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19. The juxtaposition between “holiness” and the “stranger” is emphasized e.g. in Ex. 29: 33 and Lev. 22:10.

20. The rabbis understood clearly that the actual eating rarely causes impurity; it is instead caused by touching the animal during consumption. See M. KISTER, “Law, Morality and Rhetoric in Some Sayings of Jesus,” in J. KUGEL (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Midrash*, Cambridge MA, 2001, p. 145-54.

strict than Christian and Muslim rules, prohibiting blood even in carrion and beasts torn by wild animals.

The rabbis understood the prohibition of “flesh with its soul, its blood” (דמו בנפשו בשר) in Genesis 9:4 as a double prohibition of a limb (“flesh”) and the blood of a *living* animal (“with its soul”). The rabbis thereby only prohibit “live” blood to gentiles, be it in the form of pure blood from a living animal or in the form of the consumption of the blood contained the flesh of an animal that was still alive at the time of the separation of its limb.<sup>21</sup> They did, conversely, allow gentiles the consumption of carrion and of animals torn by wild animals, thereby understanding the law in Deuteronomy as effectively abrogating the more lenient attitude attested in Leviticus and Ezekiel. The rabbis’ lenient attitude towards gentile consumption of carrion clearly rests on Deuteronomy, but it equally relates to their increasingly strong “Pauline” idea that gentiles are not susceptible to impurity, in clear contrast to the mainstream of Christian teaching, as we will see.<sup>22</sup> While we cannot consider these implications of this situation in all its details in the present article, it is clear that the rabbinic and the Christian tradition, as well as the nascent Muslim community, all found good reasons for their rules in the Hebrew Bible.

## II. The Blood Prohibition at the Turn of the Second Century C.E.

Some late Biblical sources, especially after Ezra and Nehemiah, emphasize the impurity of non-Israelites, who are here associated with idol-worship.<sup>23</sup> Some Jewish texts written in the Second Temple period, such as Jubilees and the Damascus Document, consider regulations for gentiles, yet these texts do not come near to considering gentile purity.<sup>24</sup> Yet the preserved texts may represent minority positions, and it is possible that the mainstream Jewish attitude towards gentiles considered them pure, and that the applicability of the laws given to the strangers living in Israel, in Levit-

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21. On the rabbinic Noahide Laws see most recently Y. KIEL, “Noahide Law and the Inclusiveness of Sexual Ethics: between Roman Palestine and Sasanian Babylonia,” *Jewish Law Annual* 21 (2015), p. 59-109; M. LAVEE, “The Noahide Laws: The Building Blocks of a Rabbinic Conceptual Framework in Qumran and the Book of Acts,” *Megillot: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls* 10 (2013), p. 73-114 [Hebrew]; and the classical study by D. NOVAK, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws*, New York, 1983; but see the pertinent comments on Novak by B.S. JACKSON, “The Jewish View of Natural Law,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 52 (2001), p. 136-145.

22. On the rabbis’ view that gentiles cannot contract impurity see Ch. HAYES, *Gentile Impurities*, p. 107-45 and note 14 above; on the historical Paul see note 30 below.

23. See Ch. HAYES, *Gentile Impurities*, esp. p. 27-34.

24. For a useful recent discussion of the evidence see esp. M. LAVEE, “The Noahide Laws,” esp. p. 87-90.

icus 19-26, was simply assumed to be applicable.<sup>25</sup> Paul, for example, in his preserved letters, seems to endorse the separation of Jews and gentiles, and he discusses the consumption of idol meat by gentiles (see 1 Cor. 8 and 10), but not that of ritual slaughter or of the consumption of blood. While Paul thus participates in what I termed the Judaeo-Christian legal culture to a degree, and while he seems to apply prohibitions of “fornication” as defined by Leviticus 18 to gentiles, his lack of explicit discussion largely excludes him from the present consideration.<sup>26</sup> It is the Acts of the Apostles, redacted in the late first or early second century C.E., which give the fullest early picture of the discourse which helped pave the way for the Christian and Islamic relevance of the gentile purity regulations.

Along with the Gospel of Matthew and Revelation, Acts is one of the texts within the New Testament canon that maintains a clear separation between Jews and gentiles along with a clear focus on ritual purity (even if its context of transmission within the Christian canon has been understood, un-historically, to dismiss such notions).<sup>27</sup> The emphasis on purity is emphasized explicitly by Acts itself, which portrays Paul as dismissing related slander against him. The slanderers alleged that Paul taught “all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses” and “not to circumcise their children or observe the customs” (Acts 21:21), an idea that the text strongly dismisses. Acts portrays the apostles as dismissing such

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25. In order to determine the ritual status of gentiles in the Jewish mainstream in Palestine and in the Diaspora, the best evidence may be archaeological; access to the Temple’s precinct for gentiles would be an especially interesting case, and Josephus and Philo allow for some inferences on gentile purity. Yet the greatest difficulty in determining Second Temple gentile purity regulations would remain a definition of “mainstream” or “common Judaism” (perhaps along with the underlying notion of “covenantal nomism” as first formulated by Ed Parish Sanders); see e.g. A. REINHARTZ & W. O. MCCREADY (ed.), *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism*, Minneapolis, 2011; S. SCHWARTZ, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.*, Princeton, 2001. It is crucial to remember that most of our historical records relate to sectarian groups, whose attitudes may have evolved in conscious delineation from a real or perceived majority or elite.

26. We will, however, discuss the way in which Paul shaped patristic thought, especially that of Origen and Augustine. On the issue of the laws of idol meat in Paul and his successors see e.g. D. FRANKFURTER, “Jews or not? Reconstructing the “Other” in Rev. 2:9 and 3:9,” *Harvard Theological Review* 94 (2001), p. 403-425; and A. T. CHEUNG, *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy*, Sheffield, 1999. On Paul’s ethnic identity politics see now the useful essays in M.D. NANOS & M. ZETTERHOLM (ed.), *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, Minneapolis, 2015.

27. On law and ethnic identity in the Gospel of Matthew see H. ZELLENTIN, “Jesus and the Tradition of the Elders: Originalism and Traditionalism in Early Judean Legal Theory,” in L. JENOTT et al. (ed.), *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine H. Pagels*, Tübingen, 2013, p. 379-403; on Revelation see note 26 above.



scandalous gossip; in Acts 21:26, Paul is portrayed as responding to it by endorsing ritual purity publicly and unapologetically, in word and in deed:

Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having purified himself, he entered the temple with them, making public (διαγγέλλων) the completion of the days of purification (τοῦ ἁγνισμοῦ) when the sacrifice would be made for each of them.

The text, far from enacting or demanding any actual form of the law's abrogation, enacts and demands of Jews to keep the law, and presents Paul as a fully observant Jew, having "in no way committed an offence against the law of the Jews" (Acts 25:6) until the end of his recorded ministry. The law, for Jews, includes the entirety of the Bible's purity regulations. With Acts—a text, nonetheless, that was fundamental in the shaping of the term "Christian"—Christianity thus contains a seed that, long after Jesus' death and the destruction of the Temple, still presupposed the *Jewish* observance of ritual purity.<sup>28</sup>

Acts, likewise, does not contemplate the fusion of gentile and Jewish ethnicities. Instead, it maintains such a separation, and specifies certain purity requirements as binding for believing gentiles. In doing so, Acts orients itself towards the Noahide Covenant and the requirements for resident aliens spelled out in Leviticus. In order to dispel the impression that imposing these purity laws on the believers residing outside the Holy Land would constitute an innovation, the text emphasizes that the apostles were divinely guided, and that they followed the Law of Moses in doing so. The key passage, for our purposes, is the famous "Council of Jerusalem" in Acts 15, which illustrates the text's firm commitment to gentile purity. James, in his reported address to the gentiles, writes as follows (Acts 15:29):<sup>29</sup>

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28. A similar attitude towards the law can be found in the Gospel of Luke, see already S.G. WILSON, *Luke and the Law*, Cambridge, 1983, p. 56-7.

29. Note also the parallels in Acts 15:20, to be discussed below, and in Acts 21:25. For the manuscript evidence—and especially the case of the so-called "Western" tradition that lacks the references the "things strangled"—see J. WEHNERT, *Die Reinheit des 'christlichen Gottesvolkes' aus Juden und Heiden*, p. 21-106. The inclusion of "strangled" meat is clearly original; the omission occurs only in the Greek manuscript Cambridge University Library, Number 2.41 (the so-called "Codex Bezae"), and in the Latin Codex Gigas. The omission is likewise attested in Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.12.17 (=3.12.14.20, only the Latin is preserved, see W.W. HARVEY, *Sancti Irenaei episcopi Lugdunensis Libros quinque adversus haereses*, Cambridge, 1857, vol. 2, 70; in Cyprian, *Treatise 12* (To Qurinius), 3.119, see W. HARTEL, *S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani Opera Omnia*, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 3.3, Vienna, 1871; ad loc., as well as in the fourth century pseudonymous commentary on *Galatians* attributed to Ambrosiaster (2:2), see H.J. VOGELS, *Ambrosiaster: In epistulam ad Galatas*, Vienna, 1966, ad loc., and See K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Das apostolische Speisegesetz*, p. 90-3. Despite its extremely poor

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to impose on you (pl., μηδὲν ... ἐπιτίθεισθαι ὑμῖν) no further burden (βάρος) than these required ones: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols (εἰδωλοθύτων) and from blood (αἵματος) and from what has been strangled (πνικτῶν) and from fornication (πορνείας).

The most important word in this passage is the plural “you.” The context makes it very clear that this so-called “decree of the Apostles,” issued by James, is directed to “the gentiles” (τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν, Acts 15:19). In this decree, Acts does not broach the subject of the ways in which Jews who endorsed Jesus were to observe the Jewish law. As we have seen, full observance is taken for granted, and the allegation of aberration therefrom an insufferable insult. In line with its endorsement of the Israelite law, Acts even depicts Paul as commissioning the circumcision of one of his gentile acolytes “because of the Jews who were in those places” he intended to visit (see Acts 16:3). Difficult as it may be to square this act may with the thoughts expressed by the historical Paul, Acts text here does not advocate the idea that all gentiles should “be circumcised and ordered to keep the Law of Moses” (Acts 15:5, see also 15:1).<sup>30</sup> This is the view of the believing Pharisees, which Acts rejects, based on Peter’s dream that showing him that gentiles should not be called “profane or unclean” (Acts 10:28). The attitude of Acts, which allows individuals to be circumcised without demanding circumcision for all gentiles, rather, aligns itself with that of the Hebrew Bible towards its resident aliens, who require no circumcision even for Temple worship, yet are free to get circumcised should they want to.

Indeed, Acts follows the injunctions imposed on resident aliens in Leviticus very closely. While the text does not “cite” Leviticus in our sense of the word, it can be shown to take knowledge of the laws for granted, as scholars have long noted.<sup>31</sup> Acts, when first iterating its decree, points

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attestation and further signs of interpolation, this version has been eagerly accepted as the original form by some scholars; see the summary in J. WEHNERT, *Die Reinheit des ‘christlichen Gottesvolkes’ aus Juden und Heiden*, p. 26 note 8. Freidenreich suggests that Tertullian would be familiar with the decree in its “Western variant (omitting reference to “strangled meat”);” this is obviously not the case as we will see below; see D.M. FREIDENREICH, *Foreigners and their Food*, p. 253.

30. For the view of the historical Paul on circumcision see Galatians 2 and Romans 3-4; for a magisterial discussion of the evidence in Romance see S. STOWERS, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

31. The most complete work on the topic remains that of J. WEHNERT, *Die Reinheit des ‘christlichen Gottesvolkes’ aus Juden und Heiden*; Wehnert presents a helpful history of previous scholarship on p. 14-20. The first work to argue for the engagement of Leviticus 17 in the Decree of the Apostles may have been A. RITSCHL, “Das Verhältnis der Schriften des Lukas zu der Zeit ihrer Entstehung,”

both to the issue of ritual purity and to the Biblical source of its reasoning, as can be seen in Peter's statement in Acts 15:19-21:

Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain (τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι) from the pollutions (τῶν ἀλισγημάτων) caused by idols (τῶν εἰδωλῶν) and by fornication (καὶ τῆς πορνείας) and by things strangled (καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ) and by blood (καὶ τοῦ αἵματος). For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every Sabbath in the synagogues.

As Wehnert has shown, the term "strangled" meat, though rare in the first two centuries, occurs a handful of times in rabbinic and in other Jewish, and Christian sources to indicate improperly slaughtered meat.<sup>32</sup> Acts, in its prohibition of the *pollutions* incurred through idol meat, through fornication, through things strangled and through blood, thus explicitly promulgates for all gentile followers of Jesus four of the injunctions that the Hebrew Bible had already imposed on resident aliens.<sup>33</sup> By prohibit-

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*Theologische Jahrbücher* 6 (1847), p. 293-304; see also the influential work by S.G. WILSON, *Luke and the Law*.

32. The consumption of "strangled" (ἀποπνίγοντες) meat is discussed in Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 4:122, L. COHN, *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*, Berlin, 1962, vol. 5, p. 237. Wehnert notes that Clement of Alexandria, in a discussion of Jewish laws in *Paedagogus* 2:1:17, equally speaks of the prohibition to touch "strangled" meat (ἀποπεπνιγμένα); for him, the use of the same Greek term suggests that both share the same technical vocabulary; see M. HARL et al. (ed.), *Clément d'Alexandrie. Le pédagogue*, Paris, 1976, I, ad loc and see J. WEHNERT, *Die Reinheit des 'christlichen Gottesvolkes' aus Juden und Heiden*, p. 228-30. More importantly however, is the rabbinic evidence. Wehnert persuasively argues that the Hebrew term קִנּוּי can be shown to be a synonym of פֶּסוּל and נבלה, i.e. of animals not properly slaughtered; the key passage is Mishna *Hullin* 1:2; cf. the parallel in Tosephta *Hullin* 1:7, and see J. WEHNERT, *Die Reinheit des 'christlichen Gottesvolkes' aus Juden und Heiden*, p. 221-232. We should also note that Julian, like Clement, summarizes the Jewish food laws as including a prohibition of "pork or any animal that has been strangled (πνικτοῦ) or had the life squeezed out of it (τοῦ ἀπολιβέντος)," see Julian, *Letter to Theodorus*, W.C. WRIGHT, *Julian the Apostate in Three Volumes*, London, 1923, p. 58-9. By using the term as a broad category for all improperly slaughtered food, Julian, who seemed well informed about details of Jewish law, gives us an important outside perspective; on Julian's knowledge of Jewish law see A. FINKELSTEIN, "The Use of Jews in Julian's Program: Ari Finkelstein The Use of Jews in Julian's Program 'Dying for the Law' in the Letter to Theodorus – A Case Study," in J. D. ROSENBLUM, N. DESROSIERS and L. VUONG (ed.), *Religious Competition in the Third Century CE: Jews, Christians, and the Greco-Roman World*, Göttingen, 2014, p. 169-70.

33. The verb ἀπέχεσθαι τινος determines the genitive of τῶν ἀλισγημάτων, "of the pollutions;" note that the ongoing genitival form of all nomina describing the four prohibited categories in turn indicates that pollution occurs through each of them; see already J. WEHNERT, *Die Reinheit des 'christlichen Gottesvolkes' aus Juden und Heiden*, p. 239-45.

ing “blood” it evokes the double prohibition against shedding and consuming blood already given in Genesis 9:6 and repeated in Leviticus. Leviticus 17 equally prohibits idol meat, improperly slaughtered meat, and fornication.<sup>34</sup>

The philological analysis can be corroborated contextually. Acts evokes “the Law of Moses” in its decision, pointing to the origin of its rules in Leviticus.<sup>35</sup> By stating that his laws have been read “in every town,” it points to the applicability of the laws even outside the land of Israel, along for the identification of the *gerim* in Leviticus with *all gentiles* in the entire known world. Simultaneously, the text here evokes the gentile visitors of synagogues which it takes for granted (see e.g. Acts 14:1); since these gentiles already have heard the law, imposing the Mosaic purity laws for non-Israelites on them would not constitute an innovation at all. Peter had no authority to invent these laws: indeed, he clearly weighed the option proposed by his opponents, to require gentile believers in Jesus to convert to Judaism, against the requirements for resident aliens found in Leviticus. He chose the latter option; the pollutions to be avoided by the *gerim* dwelling among Israel thereby became the model for the gentile purity regulations in Acts, and these gentile purity regulations in Leviticus in turn became the dominant model for Judaism, Christianity and Islam.<sup>36</sup>

### III. The Gentile Purity Regulations Throughout Late Antiquity

In my view we can see that the reception of the Decree of the Apostles divides late antique religious groups into three broad traditions; without claiming a clear-cut taxonomy, these attitudes can be characterized as appreciative, dismissive, and expansive. Böckenhoff has long shown that the mainstream tradition in Late Antique Christianity, at least for the first four centuries of the Latin, the Greek and in the Syriac churches was the one I suggest calling appreciative; while his overview is not exhaustive,

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34. See J. WEHNERT, *Die Reinheit des ‘christlichen Gottesvolkes’ aus Juden und Heiden*, p. 239-45.

35. It should be noted that the author of Acts acutely remembers the covenant with Abraham and the narratives of Genesis (see e.g. Act 3:25 and 7:8, cf. Luke 1:72 and 22:20); the prominence of the covenant with Noah and the laws given to the resident aliens do not, therefore, stand out thematically.

36. It seems that Acts simply dismisses the possibility, specified in Leviticus 17:15, to purify oneself by washing should one consume carrion or meat torn by wild animals, along with the general permission—to gentiles—to consume it in Deuteronomy. While this ruling, in Acts, effectively makes one of the legal “burden” on the gentiles more stringent, it actually simplifies the law and reduces its ambiguity in a way that proved effective through late antiquity and beyond, as we will see.

subsequent scholars have endorsed his overall sense that most Christians, by and large, simply followed “the law” for gentiles.<sup>37</sup> The doubly canonical origin of the Decree of the Apostles within the Christian Bible (i.e. in Leviticus and in Acts) was clear to all church fathers. The acknowledgment of the decree is thus not surprising, and a few examples easily illustrate how broadly the decree was officially endorsed in its entirety by the churches of East and West: the examples collected by Böckenhoff amount to an overwhelming sense that the synods, the church canons, the church historians and individual church fathers up to the time of the Qur'ān endorsed the gentile purity regulations almost unanimously; thereafter, many later testimonies suggest a general continuity with the endorsement of the decree.<sup>38</sup>

The decree is confirmed by the Synod of Gangra in the fourth century C.E.,<sup>39</sup> and reconfirmed by the Second Council of Constantinople in the sixth century C.E.,<sup>40</sup> as well as by the Council in Trullo (i.e. the Quinisext Council) at the end of the seventh century.<sup>41</sup> The Apostolic Constitutions, in the fourth century, endorse the decree and explicitly identify it with the laws given to Noah and other figures living before the law (6:12),<sup>42</sup> and the decree is confirmed in the Latin as well as in the Syriac version of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (chapter 24), to which we will return.<sup>43</sup> The

37. See K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Das apostolische Speisegesetz*.

38. See K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Das apostolische Speisegesetz* and *id.*, *Speisesatzungen mosaischer Art in Kirchenrechtsquellen des Morgen- und Abendlandes*, Münster, 1907.

39. Synod of Gangra, Canon II, see J.-P. MIGNÉ (ed.), *Dionysii Exigui justi, facundi opera omnia. Patrologia Latina* 67, Paris, 1848, c. 55–6; the observance is reaffirmed in the epitome, ad loc., see also K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Das apostolische Speisegesetz*, p. 78–9.

40. See R. PRICE, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553: With Related Texts on the Three Chapters Controversy*, Liverpool, 2009, 111.

41. Council of Trullo, 692, canon 67, see E. SCHWARTZ et al. (ed.), *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum, Series Secunda II, Pars 4: Concilium Constantinopolitanum a. 691/2 in Trullo habitum*, Berlin, 2013, ad loc.; see also K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Speisesatzungen mosaischer Art*, p. 4.

42. See J.B.F. PITRA, *Juris ecc. Graecorum historia et monumenta*, Rome, 1864, vol. I, ad loc. see also K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Speisesatzungen Mosaischer Art*, p. 81.

43. See R. H. CONNOLLY, *Didascalia Apostolorum: The Syriac Version Translated and Accompanied by the Verona Latin Fragments*, Oxford, 1929, p. 209; A. VÖÖBUS, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac II*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 408, Louvain, 1979, p. 237. See also *id.*, “Further canons of Jacob of Edessa” in A. VÖÖBUS, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Louvain, 1975; as well as Athanasius of Balad, *Letter*, F. NAU, “Littérature canonique syriaque inédite,” *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 14 (1909), p. 128–30, on Athanasius also R.G. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton: Darwin 1997, p. 148 and H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*, p. 5–17.

*Canons of the Apostles*, likely at the turn of the sixth century C.E. prohibit “flesh with the blood of the life thereof, or anything killed by beasts, or that dies of itself,” clearly understanding the prohibition of “strangled meat” in light of both Genesis 9:6 and Leviticus 17:15.<sup>44</sup> The Decree is of course equally endorsed by prominent church historians such as Socrates Scholasticus;<sup>45</sup> among the church fathers that clearly endorse the Decree—many of whom duly noted by Böckenhoff—it suffices to mention Clement of Alexandria, who disgustingly accuses the Arab nomads to drink the blood of their camels even when they do so in order to escape death,<sup>46</sup> Jerome, who, following Ezekiel, includes “that what dies of itself and what is captured by wild animals” (*omne morticinum et captum a bestia*) under “strangled” meat,<sup>47</sup> and notably Cyril of Jerusalem, who emphasizes that the Decree is “universal from the Holy Ghost.”<sup>48</sup> Cyril depicts as savage those who “living like dogs, both lap up blood, in imitation of the manner of the fiercest beasts, and greedily devour things strangled.”<sup>49</sup>

The punishment of the deliberate transgression of the gentile purity regulations was usually excommunication (in conscious parallel to the punishment of being “cut off” from the people in Leviticus); yet Böckenhoff lists a number of cases in which both Eastern and Western church fathers who explicitly permitted the consumption of foodstuff normally

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44. Canon LXIII, see J.B.F. PITRA, *Juris ecc. Græcorum historia et monumenta*, Rome 1864, vol. I, 2:57; see also K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Speisesatzungen mosaischer Art*, p. 37-8.

45. Socrates Scholasticus, Church History 5:22, P. PÉRICHON et al. (ed.), *Socrate de Constantinople, Histoire ecclésiastique* (Livres IV–VI), Paris, 2006, ad loc.

46. See Clément of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 2:7 and esp. 3:3, in M. HARL et al. eds., *Clément d'Alexandrie. Le pédagogue*, Paris, 1976, I, ad loc; see also *Stromata* 4:15:97, in L. FRÜCHTEL et al. (ed.), *Clemens Alexandrinus*, Berlin, 1960, ad loc., and see K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Das Apostolische Speisegesetz*, p. 41-4.

47. Jerome understands the prohibition in Ezekiel 44:31 to apply to all Christians; the passage reflects the milder prohibition of carrion and animals torn by wild beast found in Leviticus 17:15; see Jerome, *In Ezechielem Liber XIII, Caput XLIV*. J.-P. MIGNE (ed.), *S. Eusebii Hieronymi, Opera Omnia. Patrologia Latina* 26, Paris: 1845, c. 444; see also Jerome, *Against Jovinianus*, I:34, see J.-P. MIGNE (ed.), *S. Eusebii Hieronymi, Opera Omnia. Patrologia Latina* 23; Paris, 1848, c. 268; and see K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Das Apostolische Speisegesetz*, p. 95-7.

48. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 17:29, see W. K. REISCHL and J. RUPP, *S. Patris nostrii Cyrilli, hierosolymorum archiepiscopi. Opera, que supersunt omnia*, Hildesheim, 1967 [1848], volume 1, ad loc., translation according to P. MCCAULEY & A.A. STEPHENSON, *The works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem*, Washington DC, 1969–1970, ad loc., see also K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Das Apostolische Speisegesetz*, p. 75-7.

49. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture* 4:28, see W.K. REISCHL & J. RUPP, *S. Patris nostril Cyrilli*, volume 1, ad loc., translation according to P. MCCAULEY & A.A. STEPHENSON, *The works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem*, p. 133.

prohibited under duress (a ruling we will equally find in the Qur'ān).<sup>50</sup> While church fathers such as Clement (and, as we will see, Origen and Tertullian) subscribed to a more expansive attitude towards the Decree of the Apostles, the vast majority of Christians simply upheld it without expanding or even explaining its provisions. We can therefore define the appreciative attitude towards the gentile purity regulations as constituting the mainstream in the late Antique Christianity.

The tradition dismissive of gentile purity regulations can be shown in both Latin and Greek forms of Christianity from the fourth century onwards. While of secondary concern for the present inquiry, it should be noted that the dismissive attitudes proved dominant in Latin and later in Protestant forms of Christianity—yet not in the Greek Orthodox Church.<sup>51</sup> More importantly, however, even the testimony of church fathers dismissive of the gentile purity regulations attests to their prevalence among their contemporaries, and to the fact that the church fathers were keenly aware of the Levitical basis of the Decree of the Apostles. It seems that the turn away from gentile purity in parts of the Greek and the Latin and Greek, despite the canonical prohibitions, began to develop in the fourth century C.E., as a brief look at two prominent church fathers illustrates: John Chrysostom and Augustine.<sup>52</sup>

Chrysostom, to begin with, undermines the applicability of the gentile purity regulations in the Decree of the Apostles that “these things the New Testament did not severely ordain (διετέτατετο), we nowhere find that Christ discoursed about these matters; but these things they (i.e. the apostles) take from the Law.”<sup>53</sup> Chrysostom nominally gives a nod to the claim, in Acts, that the Apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit, to which John’s contemporary Cyril had pointed so emphatically. John, however, by indicating the decrees scriptural origin, effectively calls for the decree’s supersession along with that of the Torah. John thus follows a double strategy of downplaying the importance of the Decree as well as “Judaizing” it—incidentally showing that he was fully aware of how deeply rooted the Decree really is in Leviticus. At the same time, Chrysostom completely

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50. See K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Speisesatzungen mosaischer Art*, p. 1-10; see also the incidents of forceful consumption under Julian described in *id.*, *Das Apostolische Speisegesetz*, p. 74-5.

51. See K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Speisesatzungen mosaischer Art*.

52. It should be noted that a few New Testament texts did not accept the gentile purity regulations stipulated in Acts; on Paul, see above, see further e.g. 1 Timothy 4:3 and Hebrews; and see D. WEISS & H. ZELLENTIN, “Impurity and the West,” in R. DUSCHINSKY et al. (ed.), *Purity & Impurity Across Anthropology, Psychology & Religious Studies: Contaminating Disciplines*, Cambridge (forthcoming).

53. John Chrysostom *Homilia XXXI*, 32–33, J.-P. MIGNÉ (ed.), *Joannis Chrysostomi Opera Omnia. Patrologiae Graeca* 60, Paris, 1860, c. 240.32–3, see also K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Speisesatzungen mosaischer Art*, p. 84-5.

rejects any implication of ritual purity inherent to the decree, interpreting both the prohibition of “things strangled” of “blood” as mere prohibitions of “murder”—an interpretation that incidentally heeds the hermeneutics behind the Noahide association of the double prohibition of spilling blood only in order partially to dislodge it.<sup>54</sup> Chrysostom represents one of the most restrictive interpreters of the Decree. In his downplaying of the decree, which the Byzantine church did not of course endorse, John falls in line with the scribe of the one manuscript that simply excised the prohibition of strangled animals—and thereby the strict prohibition of non-flowing forms of blood—from his manuscript altogether.<sup>55</sup>

Both of Chrysostom’s hermeneutical strategies, of undermining and reinterpreting the decree, are equally present, and even more fully spelled out in Augustine. The Latin father, just like the Greek one, dismisses any ritual aspect of the Decree of the Apostles, as Böckenhoff has duly noted.<sup>56</sup> Citing the historical Paul, Augustine begins with the prohibition of idol meat, and then moves to blood and carrion, writing as follows:

Again, if you ask why, of all the kinds of food prohibited in the former typical dispensation, we abstain only from what dies of itself (*morticino*) and from food offered to idols (*immolatio*), you shall hear, if for once you will prefer the truth to idle calumnies. The reason why it is not expedient for a Christian to eat food offered to idols is given by the apostle: “I would not,” he says, “that you should have fellowship with demons” (1 Corinthians 10:20)... If the nature of the sacrificial flesh were unclean (*esset immunda*), it would necessarily pollute (*contaminaret*) even when eaten in ignorance. But the reason for not partaking knowingly is not in the nature of the food, but, for conscience sake, not to seem to have fellowship with demons.<sup>57</sup>

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54. Chrysostom *Homilia XXXI*, 32–33, see J.-P. MIGNÉ (ed.), *Joannis Chrysostomi Opera Omnia*, 240. c. 32–3, see also Chrysostom’s *Homily 46* on the Acts of the Apostles, in *Homily 74* on Matthew, Chrysostom correctly identifies the dual prohibition of shedding and consuming blood as deriving from Genesis 9:5. On the prohibition of “blood” as “murder” see the testimony of Tertullian and the Clementine Homilies below.

55. See note 29 above.

56. See K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Das Apostolische Speisegesetz*, p. 98–103. Böckenhoff here points out that Augustine’s discussion of the purity laws should be understood in the context of his anti-Manichean polemics; see also D.M. FREIDENREICH, *For-eigners and their Food*, p. 116–7.

57. Augustine, *Contra Faustum XXXII.13*, J.-P. MIGNÉ, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini, Hipponensis Episcopi, Opera Omnia. Patrologia Latina* 42, Paris, 1865, c. 404; modified translation according to R. TESKE & B. RAMSEY, *The Works of St Augustine. Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, Hyde Park NY, 2007, p. 415–6, see also Augustine, *Epistle 82* (to Jerome) 2:9, J.-P. MIGNÉ (ed.), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini, Hipponensis Episcopi, Opera Omnia. Patrologia Latina* 33, Paris 1865, c. 279.



The prohibition of idol meat, for Augustine, has nothing to do with the sacrificial meat itself, but is valid only “for conscience sake, not to seem to have fellowship with demons,” as he understands Paul’s words.<sup>58</sup> Yet Augustine also speaks of the prohibition of carrion, of “what dies of itself,” which Augustine lists as the only other Christian food requirement whose observation he condones. Carrion, of course, is not part of the explicit list in Acts, yet in line with the correct understanding of the term “strangled” as a summary category for carrion—explicated equally in several other witnesses—it had become common Christian practice to understand “things strangled” to include it. Augustine reluctantly endorses the prohibition; for him, however, it has nothing to do with purity, it is merely a matter of health: “I suppose the reason why such food was prohibited was that the flesh of animals which have died of themselves is diseased, and is not likely to be wholesome, which is the chief thing in food.”<sup>59</sup> Augustine therefore attests to decree’s prevalence in his own time, even as he dismisses it.

Augustine also mentions the prohibition of blood, but, like Chrysostom, he also dismisses it either simply as a prohibition of murder, or as a symbolical reminder of the covenant of Noah. He argues that it is merely a relic of the early church, whose pertinence has disappeared along with the presence of practicing Jews in the church he knows:

Now that the Church has become so entirely Gentile (*gentium*) that none who are outwardly Israelites (*Israelita carnalis*) are to be found in it, no Christian feels bound to abstain from thrushes or small birds because their blood has not been poured out (*nisi quarum sanguis effusus est*), or from hares because they are killed by a stroke on the neck without shedding their blood (*nullo cruento vulnere occisus est*). Any who still are afraid to touch these things are laughed at by the rest (*a ceteris irridentur*).<sup>60</sup>

Augustine’s testimony here is again instructive. Fully dismissive of the notion of purity, the church father shows how well-versed he is in the laws of Leviticus. The cases of improperly slaughtered animals Augustine presents as examples, the bird and the hare, fall precisely under the categories outlined in Leviticus 17:13 discussed above, describing a gentile “who hunts and catches any beast or bird that may be eaten; he shall pour out its blood.” Augustine, like Chrysostom, thus again implicitly confirms how clearly the Decree of the Apostles is rooted not only in the Noahide Covenant but also in Leviticus; “strangled meat,” for Augustine, thus

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58. Augustine, *Contra Faustum* XXXII.13.

59. Augustine, *Contra Faustum* XXXII.13.

60. Augustine, *Contra Faustum* XXXII.13; intriguingly, the Babylonian Talmud likewise rules that fowl would in theory not need to be slaughtered according to Scripture, see e.g. *Nazir* 29a and *Kiddushin* 71a.

includes not only carrion but also any improperly slaughtered animal, as it does for almost every other Christian authority that specified the term (with the exception of those who excised or reinterpreted the term, such as Codex Bezae and Chrysostom). In his ridicule of the observation of these laws within his gentile community, Augustine gives an important testimony to the ongoing observance of what long constituted the Christian mainstream opinion. The medieval Latin church, of course, maintained aspects of the prohibition of blood, and the positions of Augustine and Chrysostom gained popularity only very slowly, if at all.<sup>61</sup>

Chrysostom and Augustine, in their own ways, thus equally attest to the fact that even in their time, Christians still did abstain from carrion, “that which dies of itself,” and from improperly slaughtered animals, even though this prohibition is one of those left implicit in Acts, whose pertinence can *only* be understood if reading Acts alongside Leviticus, as both church fathers seem to do. Augustine, finally, also attests that some Christians in his time continued to drain the blood of birds and hares, exactly as they are instructed in Leviticus 17:13, and again, only a Christian culture that understood and lived the Decree of the Apostles in light of Leviticus would explain the practices that Augustine rationalizes or dismisses. It should be noted that some recent scholars, in line with Chrysostom’s and Augustine’s understanding of “blood” as “murder” alone, have likewise argued for an alternative explanation of the Decree: that the prohibition of blood in Acts would only refer to the shedding of human blood, or that the purity rules in Acts were “simply” invented to ease Jewish-gentile relations, as Augustine suggests—perhaps in the same way that Paul, in Acts, has a gentile circumcised “because of the Jews,” or in the same way that the historical Paul suggested that one should not eat idol meat in order to “give no offence to the Jews” (1 Corinthians 10:32).<sup>62</sup> There is of course no way to disprove such alleged pragmatism, which may or may not have played a role even in a text as uncompromising as Acts, yet the underlying motivation in such arguments seems to be to downplay the sticky and enduring notion of ritual purity at the heart of Late Antique Christian discourse that emerges from the majority position sketched above—which is the appreciative one.

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61. See note 38 above. Note that K. BÖCKENHOFF also counts Cyril of Alexandria as an “opponent” of the decree of the Apostles; in his case, however, the evidence is not as clear-cut, see K. Böckenhoff, *Das Apostolische Speisegesetz*, p. 103-7.

62. See 1 Corinthians 10:23-33, and 1 Corinthians 8 and 9, where Paul argues that one should abstain from idol meat in order to prevent the conscience of “weak believers” from being “defiled.” For a thorough consideration of the evidence from this perspective see R. DEINES, “Das Aposteldekret – Halacha für Heidenchristen oder christliche Rücksichtnahme auf jüdische Tabus?” in J. FREY et al. (ed.), *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, Leiden, 2007, p. 323–95.

Moreover, an interpretive direction opposite to that of Augustine and Chrysostom, expanding the urgency and applicability of the Decree of the Apostles, had been taken by some of the early fathers, such as Clemens, Origen, and Tertullian. It is these fathers who most fully maintained the Decree's emphasis on ritual purity—an emphasis that proved central for the later expansive development of gentile purity regulations in the Clementine Homilies and in the Qur'ān. It is also Clement, Origen and Tertullian who emphasize the novel ethnic identity of Christianity, as Denise Kimber Buell has nicely illustrated.<sup>63</sup> Yet Buell's finding can be augmented by considering that these two authors also were among the first to emphasize the importance of gentile purity. Tertullian, in his apology, written in the summer of 197 C.E., most likely in Carthage, addresses his gentile audience—whom it accuses of devouring blood, and even human blood, as follows:

Blush for your vile ways before the Christians, who have not even the blood of animals at their meals of simple and natural food; who abstain from things strangled and that die a natural death (*qui propterea suffocatis quoque et morticinis abstinemus*), for no other reason than that they may not be contaminated (*contaminemur*), so much as from blood secreted in the viscera. To clench the matter with a single example, you tempt Christians with sausages of blood, just because you are perfectly aware that the thing by which you thus try to get them to transgress they hold illicit (*illicitum*).<sup>64</sup>

Tertullian, like Augustine would later do, attests to the expansive reading of the Decree of the Apostles in light of Leviticus, including the strict prohibition of carrion—to which he, unlike his famous Latin successor, wholeheartedly adhered. By pointing to the “blood secreted in the viscera” of animals that are strangled or “die a natural death,” Tertullian furthermore continues the discourse that already typified the relationship of Leviticus to Genesis and of Acts to Leviticus: he is part of the long process of legal explanation and specification of the gentile purity regulations, which lasted well into the seventh century C.E. and beyond. Even

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63. See D. K. BUELL, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*, New York, 2005, esp. p. 70-75.

64. Tertullian, Apology 9.13, see T.R. GLOVER, *Tertullian: Apology; De spectaculis*, London, 1931, p. 50-3. Tertullian, despite endorsing the prohibition of the consumption of blood, states that *interdictum enim sanguinis multo magis humani intellegemus*, clearly understanding the prohibition of murder in line with Genesis 9:6, see Tertullian, *De Pudicitia* 12.4-5, C. MICHAELLI & C. MUNIER (ed.), *La pudicité*, Paris, 1993, ad loc., as observed already by D.M. FREIDENREICH, *Foreigners and their Food*, p. 253 note 17. On the consumption of human blood in ancient Rome see e.g. A. KARENBERG, “Between Horror and Hope: Gladiator's Blood as a Cure for Epileptics in Ancient Medicine,” *Journal of the History of Neurosciences* 12 (2003), p. 137-43.

more impressively than Augustine, Tertullian fully confirms the suggested critical understanding of the prohibition, in Acts, of “strangled” meat as a general specification of the prohibition of blood in all animals that were improperly slaughtered, for only through proper slaughter and the shedding of all blood can one avoid the blood secreting from the viscera. Just as importantly, Tertullian also describes the observance in terms of purity and law: contracting “pollution,” for him, has nothing to do with purity of the mind alone, or with the presence or absence of Jews; it would simply “contaminate” and be “illicit.”

The development of a legal narrative of purity rules, alongside the actual laws, can be appreciated in Tertullian’s contemporary, Origen, who wrote at the opposite eastern end of North Africa, in Alexandria. Origen cared deeply about menstrual purity, and the Alexandria church, in general, maintained a special focus on ritual purity;<sup>65</sup> many of the canons prohibiting women from partaking of the Eucharist during their menses, for example, come from Egypt.<sup>66</sup> Origen, in his *Commentary on Matthew*, dismisses the *Israelite* food laws given “in Leviticus and Deuteronomy” explicitly, yet at the same time he teaches us about the importance of the gentile purity regulations. Teaching us about the affinity between impurity, blood, sacrifice, and demons, Origen, like Augustine will do later, bases his views on Paul’s teachings in 1 Corinthians 10. And just like Augustine, Origen not only considers the case of idol meat, but also that of blood and “strangled things,” the consumption of which he prohibits in no unclear terms:

But as for us who know that some things are used by demons (δαίμονιοις), or if we do not know, but suspect, and are in doubt about it, if we use such things, we have used them not “to the glory of God” (1. Cor. 10:31) nor in the name of Christ; for not only does the suspicion that things have been sacrificed to idols (εἰδωλόθυτα) condemn him who eats, but even the doubt concerning this.... He then eats in faith who believes that that which is eaten has not been sacrificed in the temples of idols (μη̄ ἐν εἰδωλείοις τεθυσθαι), and that it is not strangled (πνικτὸν) nor blood (αἷμα); but he eats not of faith who is in doubt about any of these things. And the man who knowing that they have been sacrificed to demons

65. See G. ROUWHORST, “Leviticus 12-15 in early Christianity,” in M.J.H.M. POORTHUIS & J. SCHWARTZ (ed.), *Purity and Holiness. The Heritage of Leviticus*, Leiden - Boston - Köln, 2000, p. 181-193.

66. See S. COHEN, “Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity,” in S. B. POMEROY, *Women’s History and Ancient History*, Chapel Hill, 1991, p. 287-90; D. WENDEBOURG, “Die alttestamentlichen Reinheitsgesetze in der frühen Kirche,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 95 (1984), p. 149-170; V. LARIN, “Ritual Impurity,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 52 (2008) p. 275-92; P.J. Tomson, “Jewish Purity Laws,” p.73-91; and H. Zellentín, *The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture*, p. 93 note 23, and note 73 below.

(δαιμονίοις τεθύσθαι) nevertheless uses them, becomes a communicant with demons (κοινωνός δὲ τῶν δαιμονίων), while at the same time, his imagination is polluted with reference to demons participating in the sacrifice (μετὰ μεμολυσμένης τῆς περὶ τῶν δαιμονίων κοινωνησάντων τῷ θύματι φαντασίας).<sup>67</sup>

For Origen, the consumption of blood was not only as detrimental as idol worship, as it is for Tertullian; for Origen, the consumption *amounts* to idol worship, since demons participated in the human consumption of blood.<sup>68</sup> Origen here understands Paul's letters in the line of the theory about demonic spirits of Clement, whose rigorous prohibition of blood we saw above, yet Origen goes further than both of his contemporaries.<sup>69</sup> By equating the consumption of improperly strangled meat and blood with idol worship, Origen created a powerful new paradigm for the hermeneutical contextualization of the Decree of the Apostles, which was subsequently adopted and further developed by the Clementine Homilies.

The Clementine Homilies, whose preserved text was edited in the fourth or fifth century C.E., combine the early Christian focus on the danger of demons with several specifications of the gentile purity requirements. The Homilies were written in the narrative form of a Late Antique romance that form the framework of its extensive apostolic teachings, usually given in form of theological-philosophical dialogues—the name “homilies” is as ill-fitting as their secondary attribution to Clement of Rome and therefore their common moniker as pseudepigraphical.<sup>70</sup> As in the case of the New Testament documents we have briefly considered, the Homilies' ethnic

67. Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Book XI*, 12.48-63, R. GIROD, *Origène. Commentaire sur l'évangile selon Matthieu*, vol. 1, Paris, 1970, ad loc. See also Origen, *Contra Celsus* 8:30, M. BORRET, *Origène. Contre Celse*, Paris, 1969, vol. IV, ad loc. See also J. WEHNERT, *Die Reinheit des 'christlichen Gottesvolkes' aus Juden und Heiden*, p. 215 note 17.

68. In his argument, Origen makes both a legal and a theological case that is well worth unpacking. On the legal side, he specifies that the meat one consumes must be of traceable origin: it is upon the believer to erase not only a founded “suspicion” about the meat's origin. The merest “doubt” disqualifies it from consumption—taking a view on due diligence in case of uncertainty that evokes Paul's own reasoning in 1 Corinthians 8:7 and 10:27 (which Origen clearly had in mind, since he cites not only 1 Cor. 10: 31 but also 8:8 as well as Rom. 14:23), all the while reaching a far stricter conclusion than Augustine and perhaps even Paul envisioned.

69. On Clement's view of demons see *Paedagogus* 2:1, in M. HARL et al. (ed.) *Clément d'Alexandrie. Le pédagogue*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 1976, I, ad loc, and see K. Böckenhoff, *Das Apostolische Speisegesetz*, p. 41-4.

70. A collection of useful study of the Clementine Homilies is S.F. JONES, *Pseudoclementina Elchasaïticaque inter judaeochristiana: collected studies*, Leuven, 2012. For a lucid presentation of the text see also A. Y. REED, “Heresiology and the (Jewish-)Christian Novel: Narrativized Polemics in the Pseudo-Clementines,” in E. IRICINSCHI & H. ZELLENTIN (ed.), *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, Tübingen, 2008, p. 273-98.

considerations parallel their approach to Israelite and gentile purity. The text clearly stipulates what seems to underlie at least the legal reasoning of Acts, namely that there are two distinct ways to salvation. Jews need to obey the Mosaic Law, gentiles need to follow the teaching and the laws given by Jesus, the true prophet. The Clementine Homilies thus explicitly formulates the framework of ethnic separation and concomitant endorsement of Judaism and “Christianity” that we saw at work in the Acts of the Apostles and other earlier texts; I suggest designating this ethnic framework as Judaeo-Christian. While the Homilies are rather conservative in their approach to the gentile purity regulations, they spell out a theological position not explicated in any other text belonging to the Jesus-movement: Jews, at least in theory, do not need Jesus, the gentiles, at least in practice, do not need Moses.<sup>71</sup> In this, the Homilies spell out the theological model of the ethnic separation between Jews and gentiles akin to the one that was largely self-understood for the authors of Acts and other earlier texts. Accordingly, the Homilies summarize God’s commandments to the gentiles in the words of the apostle Peter, as follows:

And this is the service He has defined:

To worship Him only, and believe only in the prophet of truth (τῷ τῆς ἀληθείας μόνῳ πιστεύειν προφήτῃ),  
 and to be immersed (βαπτισθῆναι) for the remission of sins (εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν),  
 and thus by this pure dye (τῆς ἀγνοτάτης βαφῆς) to be born again unto God by saving water (διὰ τοῦ σώζοντος ὕδατος);  
 to abstain from the table of demons (τραπέζης δαιμόνων), that is, from food offered to idols (εἰδωλοθύτων),  
 from carrion (νεκρῶν),  
 meat strangled (πνικτῶν) or caught by wild beasts (θηριαλώτων),  
 and from blood (αἷματος);  
 not to live any longer impurely (μὴ ἀκαθάρτως βιοῦν);

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71. The text states the following: “Neither, therefore, are the Hebrews (Ἑβραῖοι) condemned on account of their ignorance of Jesus, by reason of Him who has concealed him, if, doing the things commanded by Moses, they do not hate him whom they do not know (ὃν ἠγνόησαν μὴ μισήσωσιν). Neither are those from among the nations (οἱ ἀπὸ ἔθνῶν) condemned, who know not Moses on account of Him who has concealed him, provided that these also, doing the things spoken by Jesus, do not hate him whom they do not know (μὴ μισήσωσιν ὃν ἠγνόησαν),” Clementine Homilies 8:7; B. REHM, *Die Pseudoklementinen I: Homilien*, Berlin, 1969, ad loc, translation according to A. ROBERTS & J. DONALDSON, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Volume XVII: The Clementine Homilies*, Edinburgh, 1870, ad loc; see H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture*, p. 23-4. Note that the Clementine *Recognitions* do not maintain a similar separation of Jewish and gentile ethnicity, instead constructing Christians as Israelites; see BUELL, *Why this New Race*, p. 71-3.

to wash after lying with a woman (ἀπὸ κοίτης γυναικὸς λούεσθαι);  
 that they (i.e. the women) observe the menses (ἄφεδρον φυλάσσειν);  
 that all should be sober-minded,  
 given to good works (εὖ ποιεῖν),  
 refraining from wrongdoing (μὴ ἀδικεῖν),  
 looking for eternal life from the all-powerful God,  
 and asking with prayer and continual supplication that they may win it.<sup>72</sup>

This list of observances, like that in Leviticus, is mainly addressed to men, but a side-note about menstruation also addresses women.<sup>73</sup> The teaching of Jesus as portrayed in the Clementine Homilies, we will see, constitutes a somewhat ecumenical summary of Christian, rabbinic, and Judaeo-Christian understandings of gentile purity regulations. While one should never reduce a text to the sum of its elements, the precise identification of antecedents to both the concepts and the language used in the Homilies shows how deeply the text is immersed in a broad tradition:

1. Peter's speech in the Clementine Homilies is partially modelled on the one Peter gives during the Pentecost in Acts 2; the call here to the audience to immerse (βαπτισθήτω) for the "remission of your sins" (εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν) follows the text quite closely—save, of course, the reference to immersion in the name of Jesus Christ in Acts, which the Homilies replace by a baptism unto God.<sup>74</sup>
2. The Homilies' imagery of "saving water" had been phrased similarly already by Origen and Cyprian of Carthage.<sup>75</sup>
3. The Homilies require washing after sexual intercourse, and, as indicated elsewhere, before prayer, stands in line with the injunction to do so given to Israelites—but not to gentiles—in Leviticus 15:18. Gentiles, of course, are required to wash after contracting impurity according to Leviticus 17:15, and the practice seems to have been widespread in early Christianity. Tertullian, likewise, requires Christians to wash their hands after sexual intercourse, and both the Latin and the Syriac Didascalia elaborately dismiss the practice, thereby attesting to its continuity among its congregation. Despite the qualms about the prac-

72. Clementine Homilies 7:8; see also 7:4 and 8:19.

73. On the importance of the issue of menstrual purity see Ch.E. FONROBERT, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender*, Stanford, 2000, H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur'an's Legal Culture*, esp. p. 90-3, and note 66 above.

74. The precise phrase "for the remission of sins" (εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν) is also used in the New Testament in order to institute the Eucharist, see Matthew 26:28, see also Mark 1:4, Luke 1:77, 3:3, and 24:47.

75. Origen, Commentary on John 13:176, C. BLANC, *Origène. Commentaire sur saint Jean*, Paris, 1975, ad loc.; see also Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle LXXII* (To Jubaianus) 1, W. HARTEL, *S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani Opera Omnia*, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 3.3, Vienna, 1871; ad loc.

tice by some authorities, hence, the regular washing of hands before prayer, especially after intercourse, seems to have persisted in many churches.<sup>76</sup>

4. The Homilies present the problematic nature of idol meat in line with the views originally expressed by Paul, further developed by Origen as discussed above, as food pertaining to the “table of the demons” (τραπέζης δαιμονίων, see 1. Corinthians 10:22).
5. The text then presents the teaching of Jesus and his disciples, as preserved by the apostles, as containing the clear and unequivocal endorsement of the purity observances known from Acts: the prohibition of meat sacrificed to idols, of blood, and of strangled meat, using the very wording used in the Acts of the Apostles (see e.g. Acts 21:25, “that they may guard themselves from idol meat and blood and strangled meat and fornication,” φυλάσσεσθαι αὐτοὺς τὸ τε εἰδωλόθυτον καὶ αἷμα καὶ πνικτὸν καὶ πορνείαν). The gentile purity laws in the Homilies focus on ritual purity, yet instead of using the term we found in Acts, “fornication”—prohibition of which is of course taken for granted—the Homilies only specify one aspect of “the uncovering of nakedness” found in Leviticus: the abstinence from intercourse during a woman’s menses, as specified in Leviticus 18:19.<sup>77</sup>
6. Moreover, the Homilies intersperse the items originally listed in Acts with two prohibitions based on two categories of meat problematic for gentiles that are also found in Leviticus 17: after the prohibition of idol meat, the Homilies explicate the prohibition of carrion (νεκρῶν); after the prohibition of strangled meat, the Homilies explicate the prohibition of animals called by killed by wild beasts, using the same term we find in the Septuagint’s rendering of the Leviticus (θηριάλωτον, Lev. 17:15). The same understanding of “strangled” meat, we have seen, was found in Jerome and in the Canons of the Apostles, and likely shared by Augustine most Christian authorities.

The Clementine Homilies continue the long Christian return to Leviticus. After the prohibition of “blood,” the Homilies stipulate the necessity not to live impurely, repeatedly emphasizing the ritual framework of their prohibitions. The Clementine Homilies thus explicate their understanding of the Decree of the Apostles in light of Leviticus 17, and in light of the

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76. Tertullian, *On Prayer* 13, defends washing after sexual intercourse (*conversationalis humanae*), in E. EVANS, *Tertullian’s Tract on the Prayer: The Latin Text, with Critical Notes, an English Translation, an Introduction and Explanatory Observations*, London, 1953, p. 18-9; see also J. ZELLINGER, *Bad und Bäder in der altchristlichen Kirche. Eine Studie über Christentum und Antike*, München, 1928, 101-4; on washing before prayer in the Clementine Homilies and the Didascalia see H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur’an’s Legal Culture*, p. 86-105, and D. WENDEBOURG, “Die alttestamentlichen Reinheitsgesetze,” p. 164.

77. The Clementine Homilies, of course, denounce adultery in general, see e.g. 3:49 and esp. 4:20.



way in which it has been understood in previous Christian tradition, adding, just as Jerome and the Canons of the Apostles, the two types of meat which had been problematized in Leviticus 17:15 as הֶלֶלֶת and הִפְרָט in the Hebrew and as θνησιμαῖον and θηριάλωτον in the Greek of the Septuagint. The Clementine Homilies, it seems, explicate the two categories which had been included under “strangled meat” for centuries by church fathers who endorsed them as well as by those who dismissed them. The text’s “expansive” attitude, hence, manifests itself first and foremost by explicating laws previously implied and by the stringency of the observation of the gentile purity regulations.

In a later passage, the Homilies rephrase these food prohibitions in ways that again evoke the language of Leviticus, as well as the way in which the rabbis had understood these laws. Here, God is portrayed as explaining to the demons directly a list of the actions He prohibits to the gentiles, including the following:

Worshipping you and sacrificing and pouring libations (καὶ θύων καὶ σπένδων),  
 and partaking of your (i.e. the demons’) table,  
 or accomplishing anything else that they ought not,  
 or shedding blood (ἢ αἷμα χέων),  
 or tasting dead flesh (σαρκῶν νεκρῶν γευόμενος),  
 or filling themselves with a piece left by a beast of prey (θηρίου λειψάνου),  
 or that which is separated (τμητοῦ),  
 or that which is strangled (πνικτοῦ),  
 or anything else that is unclean (ἀκαθάρτου)...

In line with Tertullian, Clement, and especially Origen, the Homilies understand purity in terms of the danger of demons.<sup>78</sup> They thus transform the Biblical understanding of gentile purity, which, as part of the Israelite collective purity system, focused on the Sanctuary (the instructions regarding which the Homilies do not consider to be part of the Torah in the first place) into a system of purity that focuses on the individual.<sup>79</sup> Purity becomes necessary in order to fend off the evil spirits, who are allowed to attack only once someone willingly brings impurity over him or herself. The dangers of pollution in the Clementine Homilies include language and concepts also found in precisely the Biblical and post-biblical sources we have discussed so far, including the rabbinic ones:

78. See already See K. BÖCKENHOFF, *Das apostolische Speisegesetz*, p. 61-3.

79. The Clementine Homilies, for example in its third chapter, consider commandments concerning sacrifice a satanic interpolation of Scripture, see e.g. D.H. CARLSTON, *Jewish-Christian Interpretation of the Pentateuch in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*, Minneapolis, 2013, p. 51-77; see already K.M. VACCARELLA, *Shaping Christian Identity: The False Scripture Argument in Early Christian Literature*, PhD Dissertation, Tallahassee FL: Florida State University 2007.

1. the association of idol worship and the table of the demons, we have seen above, goes back to the historical Paul and to Origen's teachings;
2. prohibition of shedding blood (*ἡ αἷμα χέων*), as causing impurity goes back to the Noahide Covenant (see Genesis 9:6, "whoever sheds the blood of a human being," *ὁ ἐκχέων αἷμα ἀνθρώπου*), pointing to the ongoing relevance of the double prohibition of shedding human blood and consuming animal blood;
3. the prohibition of dead flesh, or of a piece left by a beast of prey, we have seen above, and of adultery, comes from Leviticus 17 and was likely part of Christian practice more broadly;
4. the prohibition of "that which is separated" from an animal reflects the rabbinic understanding of the gentile purity regulations in Leviticus 17 according to the Tosephta and later rabbinic sources, which prohibit "the blood" as well as "the limb of a living being" specifically to all gentiles.<sup>80</sup>
4. the prohibition of tasting that which is strangled (*πνικτοῦ*), finally, goes back to the way in which the Decree of the Apostles understands the general prohibition of blood in Leviticus, as we have seen above.

The Clementine Homilies, thus, even if often perceived as a marginal text, integrate the entirety of the gentile purity regulations promulgated from the times of the Bible to the rise of Christianity, equally including aspects found in the rabbinic understanding of Leviticus.<sup>81</sup>

The development of the gentile purity regulations which Acts based on Leviticus can thus be traced throughout Late Antiquity. Some church fathers abandoned or at least de-emphasized the observances, the Eastern churches generally maintained them quietly, and one legal strand of the Jesus movement—unlikely to be embodied in a separate community, yet intellectually traceable from Origen and Tertullian to the Clementine Homilies—expanded them and began to elaborate them ever more emphatically at the same time that these observances came under pressure from some church fathers. The evidence for Judaeo-Christian legal culture up to the fourth century, C.E. is thus relatively clear from the point of

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80. See note 21 above.

81. It may be precisely the Homilies' inclusiveness of both Christian and Jewish traits which depicts its "Judaeo-Christian" character, for neither the Christian nor the rabbinic orthodoxies would suffer such a heresy as combining—and therefore seeking to transcend—elements of a tradition the church fathers as well as the rabbis colluded to construct, mutually exclusively, as either Judaism or Christianity. Rabbis and church fathers created a rift on which the orthodox dogma increasingly rested on both sides of the divide. Depicting a combination of Judaism and Christianity as "syncretistic," in turn, constitutes nothing but a reiteration of patristic and rabbinic heresiology, especially when ignoring the ongoing ethnic and legal separation of Jews and gentiles within Judaeo-Christianity; cf. D. BOYARIN, "Rethinking Jewish Christianity."

view of its content, and it is clearly geographically widespread. The evidence past the fourth century C.E., by contrast, is restricted to text such as the Clementine Homilies and a few others, which can be located geographically in Western Asia through a handful of geographical markers.

A few outside texts which denounce many of the gentile purity laws embraced by the Clementine Homilies give some minimal guidance. Epiphanius of Salamis, writing in the late fourth century C.E., denounces practices very much akin to those endorsed in the Clementine Homilies and attributes them to the Ebionites of Palestine, a place he knew intimately.<sup>82</sup> Despite Epiphanius' fanciful elaborations and his dependence on previous authorities, we cannot dismiss the likelihood that some of the practices he describes were actually followed in Palestine—albeit not necessarily in separate “Ebionite” or “Nazarene” communities, as he wants us to believe. Likewise, the Latin and the Syriac version of the Didascalia, dated to the very late fifth and the early eighth century C.E., respectively, denounces similar practices *within* its community that resemble those of the Clementine Homilies acutely.<sup>83</sup> As I have previously illustrated, this text—which of course endorses the Decree of the Apostles—rejects a list of expansive—in its view, Jewish and Encratic—practices within its community that corresponds quite closely to those endorsed in the Clementine Homilies: the prohibition pork and wine, to which the Homilies are gravitating, the necessity of ritual washing after sexual intercourse and before prayer, which the Homilies advocate, and the abstinence from intercourse during a woman's menses, which is again a central prohibition in the Homilies, yet eventually rejected in the Didascalia.<sup>84</sup> While the testimony of Epiphanius may reflect a group that disappeared after the fourth century, that of the Didascalia—especially if read alongside the Clementine Homilies—shows the persistence of the expansive understanding of the gentile purity regulations, whose origin can be traced back to the second or third century C.E. regulations, at least into the fifth or sixth century. Yet the full relevance of these regulations, and their attestation in the early seventh century C.E., only comes to the fore if we admit the Qur'ān itself not only as an object of study, but as historical testimony of late antique practice.

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82. See e.g. P. CRONE, “Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part One);” *ead.*, “Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part Two);” A. EKENBERG, “Evidence for Jewish Believers in ‘Church Orders’ and Liturgical Texts,” in O. SKARSAUNE and R. HVALVIK (ed.), *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, Peabody MA, 2007, p. 649–653; and A.F.J. KLIJN and G.J. REININK, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects*, Leiden, 1973.

83. See H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*, p. 41–53 (on the chronological and geographical origins of the Didascalia) and p. 175–202 (on the triangular evidence in the Didascalia, the Clementine Homilies, and the Qur'ān).

84. See H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*, p. 77–126.

The Didascalia circulated widely across several socio-linguistic boundaries, its testimony therefore does not allow us precisely where to place those followers of Jesus who continued to endorse and even expand the gentile purity regulations.<sup>85</sup> Yet the double attestation of the expansive view of the gentile purity regulations in Palestine and in the Syriac speaking church—which jibes well with the greater role these regulations continued to play in Eastern Christian discourse—allows us to locate the expansive tradition of understanding the Decree of the Apostles in Western Asia, and thereby within the immediate network of the Arabian trade routes. The admittedly vague geographical and chronological data is sufficient, however, to set the stage for an understanding how the Qurʾān came to be the only text that reflects a further endorsement and even a further development of precisely the rules we find attested in the Clementine Homilies and in the Didascalia Apostolorum—especially since the Qurʾān continued to consider the gentile purity regulations in dialogue with Leviticus, thus sharing the same scriptural hermeneutics prevalent throughout late antique Christianity.

#### IV. The Gentile Purity Regulations in the Qurʾān

The Qurʾān can be argued to endorse aspects of Judaeo-Christian legal culture in as far as it constitutes part of the Jesus-movement, recognizes Jews and Christians as separate groups, and continues to impose the expansive tradition of the gentile purity regulations to non-Israelites. Yet at the same time, the Qurʾān clearly departs from its Judaeo-Christian predecessors in several clear ways. In line with Syriac churches that saw themselves not only as the spiritual or the true but as the ethnic Israel—constituted of “the people” and “the peoples”—the Qurʾān recasts both Jews and Christians as two factions among the one people of Israel.<sup>86</sup> The ethnic fusion of Jews and Christians as two groups of Israel includes the Qurʾān’s reconstitution of its own Muslim community as the truly “gentile” alternative to both Israelite sub-groups, preparing its claim to return to the original “Abrahamic” purity laws.<sup>87</sup> This original law, in the Qurʾān’s view, predates the punitive purity laws given to Israel as a

85. See note 83 above.

86. See H. ZELLENTIN, “*Ahbār and Rubbān*,” p. 287, note 12, P. CRONE, “Jewish Christianity and the Qurʾān (Part One),” p. 230, and H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qurʾān’s Legal Culture*, p. 163-4.

87. In a forthcoming publication, I argue that the Qurʾān formulates a theological narrative meant to supersede the erroneous “Israelite” particularism it associates with each of the two “groups among the sons of Israel (*ṭāʾifatun min bani ʾisrāʾīla*, see Q 61:14),” see H. ZELLENTIN, “Triological Anthropology: The Qurʾān on Adam and Iblis in View of Rabbinic and Christian Discourse,” in R. BRAUN & H. ÇIÇEK (ed.), *The Quest for Humanity – Contemporary Approaches to Human Dignity in*

result of their sins such as that of the Golden Calf; these punitive laws were in turn abrogated by Jesus (a view shared with the Didascalia Apostolorum). While endorsing the ethnic distinctiveness of Israel, the Qur'ān thus equally undermines this distinctness as historically contingent. The Qur'ān equally erodes the borders between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim food regulations. Practically, this constitutes the abrogation of most Jewish food laws (the legal intervention which it attributes to Jesus) and the expansion of Christian food laws in the Medinan period; the Qur'ān therefore shares the expansive tradition of the gentile purity regulations and decries the dismissive one discussed above.<sup>88</sup> We can thus consider the Qur'ān to be a turning point and an end-marker of the Judaeo-Christian legal culture, at least in the way it has manifested itself throughout late antiquity.

At the same time, we can trace a clear development from the (earlier) Meccan to the (later) Medinan formulation of the Qur'ān's gentile purity regulations, which allows us to understand their initial affinity with Genesis and Leviticus, and their later expansion in demonstrable dialogue with the Hebrew Bible and with expansive tradition of the Decree of the Apostles. The Meccan passage Q6 *Sūrat al-An'ām* 145-6 differentiates between Jewish and gentile purity regulations in the following way:

145. Say, 'I do not find in what has been revealed to me that anyone be forbidden to eat anything except (*mā ... 'alā tā'imīn yaʿamuhū*) carrion (*maitatan*) or spilt blood (*daman masfūhan*), or the flesh of swine (*lahma binzīrin*) —for that is indeed unclean (*riḡsun*)— or an impiety (*fisqan*) offered (*uhilla*) to other than God.' But should someone be compelled, without being rebellious or aggressive, indeed your Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful. 146. To the Jews We forbade every animal having an undivided hoof, and of oxen and sheep, We forbade them their fat, except what is borne by their backs or the entrails or what is attached to the bones. We requited them with that for their rebelliousness, and We indeed speak the truth.

The "Jewish" laws indicate in verse 146 serve as an exemplary summary of the entirety of the Jewish food laws given in the Torah without fully

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*the Context of the Qur'ānic Anthropology*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, in preparation. On the Qur'ān's concept of the Muslims as "gentiles" see note 3 above.

88. On the legal implications of the Qur'ān's return to the religion of Abraham see e.g. H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*, p. 155-74 and J. WITZTUM, *The Syriac Milieu of the Quran: The Recasting of Biblical Narratives*, PhD Dissertation. Princeton: Princeton University 2010, p. 277. The "prophetology" of the Qur'ān, as exemplified most clearly in *Sūrat ash-Shu'arā'* (Q26), has recently been discussed by S. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, p. 54-96. On the food laws of the Qur'ān see also J.J. RIVLIN, *Gesetz im Koran: Kultus und Ritus*, Jerusalem, 1934, p. 64-70.

expounding them.<sup>89</sup> The passage illustrates that the Jews were ordered to keep laws that go beyond those imposed upon the gentiles. The Meccan Qur'ān thereby positively endorses the "Judaeo-Christian" separation of Jewish and gentile ethnicity (which the Medinan Qur'ān will later undermine by fusing Jewish, Christian, and Islamic food laws). The gentile laws, by contrast, are those given in verse 145, which partially overlap with those that Genesis, Leviticus, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Christian tradition imposed on non-Israelites:

1. the prohibition of "blood" recalls the prohibition of blood in the covenant with Noah in Genesis, the term *daman masfūhan*, "spilled blood," especially reminds us of the requirement "to spill its blood" (וַשְׁפֹךְ אֶת דָּמּוֹ), i.e. that of the killed animal, in Leviticus 17:13. While the Arabic verb *sīn fā hā* in the sense used here constitutes a *hapax legomenon* in the Qur'ānic corpus, the Medinan passage Q2:84 uses the related verb *sīn fā kāf* to indicate God's prohibition of bloodshed, here using a cognate to Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac *š-p-k*, "to spill" or "to pour." The Qur'ān thus endorses the double prohibition of the unwarranted shedding of human blood and the consumption of animal blood found in Genesis 9:6, whose wording it evokes.
2. The Qur'ān, however, does not only forbid "flowing blood," as the rabbis understood the gentile prohibition, but also "carrion," thereby dismissing the permission given in Deuteronomy and in the Tosephta and siding with Leviticus, Acts, and the Christian majority view. "Carrion" rather than "strangled" meat here constitutes the chief category, departing from the terminology—but not the actual law—found in the Decree of the Apostles. The Qur'ān thus returns to the usage of the term "carrion" as the chief category also used in the Hebrew Bible, which had also been used by some of the Christian writers we have discussed above. This change in terminology makes clear that the Meccan formulation of the gentile purity regulations reflects broad Christian terminology and practice without necessarily standing in a direct literary conversation with the wording of the Decree of the Apostles—whose wording, we will see, plays a central role the Medinan Qur'ān.<sup>90</sup>
3. The prohibition to eat the "flesh of swine (*lahma hīnzīrin*)"—for that is indeed unclean (*riḡsun*)" recalls phrasing (but not all the lexemes) of

89. On the nature of the cited laws as a summary for the entirety of the punitive food regulations given to Israel see H. Zellentín, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*, p. 164-5, see also D. M. Freidenreich, *Foreigners and their Food*, p. 134 and 274.

90. On carrion and purity in mature Islam see e.g. M.H. KATZ, *Body of Text*, p. 2-10, and M.H. BENKHEIRA, "Chairs illicites en Islam. Essai d'interprétation anthropologique de la notion de *mayta*," *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996), p. 5-33; and M. COOK, "Early Islamic Dietary Law," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986), p. 217-77.

the prohibition of pork in Leviticus 11:7 (“and the pig... it is unclean for you... their flesh you shall not eat” (וַאֲת הַחִזִּיר ... טָמֵא הוּא לָכֶם) (מִבְּשָׂרָם לֹא תֹאכְלוּ). As I have argued previously, proponents of the expansive tradition of understanding the Decree of the Apostles had likely included pork among the prohibitions of the gentile purity regulations for centuries.<sup>91</sup>

4. Finally, in its prohibition of “an impiety offered (*ʿubilla*) to other than God,” the Meccan Qurʾān equally follows the central prohibition of idol meat in the Decree of the Apostles. The verb *hā lām lām*, moreover, a cognate of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac *h-l-l*, occurs exclusively in the four Qurʾānic passages repeating the gentile purity regulations as indicated here; it thus constituting another topical *hapax legomenon*.

Already in its Meccan iteration, the Qurʾān’s gentile purity regulations can thus be associated with the gentile purity regulations first formulated in Leviticus, which equally prohibit blood, carrion, and idol meat. The inclusion of pork points to the prevalence of the expansive tradition of understanding these laws; the Qurʾān’s eventual prohibition of wine—equally associated with demons in the Clementine Homilies and forbidden by proponents of the expansive attitude towards the decree of the Apostles attested by the Didascalia—follows the same pattern.<sup>92</sup> The recurrent presence of *hapax legomena* in this passage, moreover, indicates affinity with extra-Qurʾānic culturemes, especially given that the Arabic terms here used tend to have a special affinity to their Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac cognates. Yet the formulation of the Decree of the Apostles itself, which had shaped Christian formulations of the gentile purity regulations for centuries, does not seem especially relevant for the Meccan Qurʾān: while the three prohibitions of idol meat, blood, and carrion correspond to the decree very closely, the usage of the term “carrion” rather than “strangled” is noteworthy. Moreover, while the Qurʾān of course prohibits sexual misconduct in a way that stands in the tradition of the laws given to gentiles in Leviticus 18, it does not mention this prohibition here at all.<sup>93</sup> It thus seems that the Meccan Qurʾān’s formulation of the gentile purity laws orients itself less towards the Decree of the Apostles, and more towards the Hebrew Bible, or perhaps to its likely oral Arabic rendering.<sup>94</sup> At the same

91. On the prohibition of wine and pork in the Clementine Homilies, the Didascalia, and the Qurʾān see H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qurʾān’s Legal Culture*, p. 110-25. On the prohibition of pork in late Islamic law see e.g. R.A. LOBBAN, “Pigs and their Prohibition,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (1994), p. 57-75.

92. See note 83 above.

93. On fornication in the Qurʾān see note 4 above.

94. On the likely oral circulation of translations of the Bible into Arabic see, S. GRIFFITH, *The Bible in Arabic*, p. 7-126 and R. G. HOYLAND, “Mount Nebo, Jabal Ramm, and the Status of Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Old Arabic in Late

time, we can safely replace the idea of “Jewish influence” on the Qur’ān’s ritual laws with a much broader category of the Qur’ān’s engagement of the gentile purity regulations as found in Leviticus and expansively understood first by the Christian tradition, and only secondarily so by the rabbinic one.<sup>95</sup>

At the same time, the Qur’ān does not share the stringency regarding the gentile purity regulations that we can find in the Clementine Homilies and in the rabbinic tradition. As we have seen above, Origen associates the consumption of blood with idolatry, and the result of transgressing the regulations in the Homilies is near-irreversible harm to the soul.<sup>96</sup> Later Christian authorities, we have seen, did allow for much more lenience in times of crises, just as the Qur’ān allows for the consumption of any foodstuff under duress, “should one be compelled.”<sup>97</sup> The Qur’ān’s purity laws are thus consistently more lenient than the proponents of the expansive tradition of understanding the gentile purity regulations; elsewhere, it even warns against too expansive a view of these laws. In *Sūrat al-Nahl*, a Meccan text, the Qur’ān repeats the prohibitions and the dispensation (under duress) given in Q6:145; it then specifies that God has “forbidden only” (*‘innamā ḥarrama*) the four items named above (i.e. carrion, blood, pork, and idol meat), and warns against expanding or dismissing the gentile purity regulations, “asserting falsely with your tongues, ‘This is lawful, and this is unlawful,’ to fabricate lies against God” (Q16:115). In short, the Meccan Qur’ān can be said to follow its very own version of the gentile purity regulations, situated between the appreciative and the expansive view, that include a general dispensation under duress and a clear prohibition of further expansions along with a direct focus on the Biblical laws.

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Roman Palestine and Arabia,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 40 (2010), p. 29-45. On the Qur’ān’s participation in oral culture see H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture*, p. 14–5 and p. 49–50 note 59.

95. The inadequate equation of the Qur’ān’s affinity with Hebrew with its alleged “dependence” on Judaism can be found most clearly in some classical works as e.g. A. JEFFERY, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān*, Leiden, 2007 [1938]; J. HOROVITZ, “Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Qur’an,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* (1925/2), p. 145-228; W. RUDOLPH, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum*, Stuttgart, 1922; and A. GEIGER, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*, Bonn, 1833. Important corrections to this paradigm have been offered by C. PENNACCHIO, “Lexical Borrowing in the Qur’ān,” *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem* 22 (2011), online (<http://bcfrf.revues.org/6643>); J. WITZTUM, *The Syriac Milieu of the Quran*, and G.S. REYNOLDS, *The Qur’ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, London, 2010.

96. Note that the rabbis demand the penalty of death for the transgression of the Noahide laws (without showing any intent or possibility of enforcing it), see e.g. Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 56a, see also B.S. JACKSON, “The Jewish View of Natural Law.”

97. See note 50 above.



The Medinan Qur'ān, of course, endorses the Meccan gentile purity regulations, but it also adds a list of specifications that reflect the expansive tradition of the Decree of the Apostles already noticeable in the Meccan inclusion of pork. The Medinan passage Q2 *Sūrat al-Baqarah* 173, to begin with, indicates the inner-Qur'ānic continuity of the gentile purity regulations. It equally repeats that God has “only forbidden” four items to gentiles: “carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been offered to other than God,” followed by the same dispensation should one act under duress we have already seen in Q6:145 and in Q16:115). Both the list and the dispensation are repeated, slightly differently, in the Medinan *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, whose opening with legal matters is rather unique in the Qur'ān.<sup>98</sup> The surah's opening passages have rightly been identified as a foundational speech to the nascent Muslim community that recreate the foundation of the Israelite community as portrayed, for example, in Deuteronomy 5:1.<sup>99</sup> The surah's actual laws, in turn, reflect the gentile purity regulations of the Hebrew (or Arabic) Bible and the Judaeo-Christian legal culture as much as they reflect the Qur'ān's unique Arabian context, notably the laws of hunting and of the pilgrimage.

In *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, namely, the same list of observances already found in the passages discussed so far is presented within the context of laws pertaining to hunting (*al-ṣayd*) and purity during the holy months and the Hajj (see Q5:1-2 and 4).<sup>100</sup> The “hunting” (٧٢٣) of animals, is equally allowed to gentiles in Leviticus 17:13, as long as the animals' blood is properly spilled. The actual law regarding hunting in the Qur'ān expands

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98. A similar opening of a surah with legal, in this case contractual obligations towards hostile religious groups during and after the sacred months, can be equally found in the Medinan *Sūrat al-Tauba*. Sh.D. GOITEIN stipulated that increased contact with rabbis in Medina led Muhammad to formulate an independent lawcode; see id., “The Birth-Hour of Muslim Law,” *The Muslim World* 50 (1960), p. 27; while this is not impossible, it overlooks the importance of Biblical and Christian law-codes.

99. In Deuteronomy 5:3, Moses recites “the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today (*ha-yom*),” just as God has His prophet announce that “today I have perfected your religion” (*al-yauma 'akmaltu lakum dīnakum*) in Q 5:3; both passages describe the affirmation of communal identity by establishing a specific code of law. This view is also reflected in Q 5:48, which states “a code of law and a custom” (*ṣir'atan wa-minhāḡan*) has been appointed to each “community” (*umma*, Q 5:48). The word *minhāj* constitutes another hapax legomenon; W. HALLAQ aptly notes that the Qur'ān repeatedly stresses “that believers must judge by what was revealed to them .... It is noteworthy here that the ‘normative way’ is represented by the term *minhāj*, a cognate of the Hebraic word *minhāḡ* [custom]. The creation of an Islamic parallel here speaks for itself,” id., *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*, Cambridge, 2005, p. 21; see also H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*, p. 171-2.

100. Note that the root *ṣād yā dā* occurs only in this surah and is a cognate of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac *ṣ-w-d* and *ṣ-y-d*, see Q 5:1-2 and 94-6.

that of the Bible. In Q5:4, in line with Q22:34, which specifies that one must “mention God’s name over it” (*li-yadkuru sma llāhi*), i.e. over the victim during slaughter, we now learn that the hunter must mention God’s name over the victim after its death, a law unique to the Qur’ān. The necessity of the spilling of the blood of the hunted animal after its death, as prescribed by the Bible, is likely implied, as this would consider the hunted animal—and especially that hunted with the help of trained animals—tantamount to an animal mangled by a beast of prey, on which more below.<sup>101</sup> Likewise, it is important to note that the main context of the Qur’ānic purity regulations in this surah are the holy months and the Hajj. Judaeo-Christian legal culture had largely ignored if not outright rejected the Sanctuary and the festivals requiring pilgrimage (אָפּ) as legislated in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>102</sup> The Qur’ān’s Medinan laws, by contrast, as well as its legal narrative, reach back not only to the laws given to the *gerim* in Leviticus, but also to the understanding that these form part of the purity provisions for entering the sanctuary, here in *Sūrat al-Mā’ida* as well as in *sūrat al-Ḥaḡḡ*. The Medinan Qur’ān then introduces not only a sanctuary for gentiles and a pilgrimage, but also identifies the respective laws governing gentile holiness during its performance.<sup>103</sup>

It is within this framework that the Qur’ān presents the bulk of its prohibitions, which expand those given in the Meccan surahs by specifying them in dialogue with the same understanding of Leviticus 17 and of the Decree of the Apostle that marked the expansive tradition of the gentile purity regulations. In its first verse, *Sūrat al-Mā’ida* specifies that “you (pl.) are permitted animals of grazing livestock (*bahīmatu l’an’āmi*), except what is announced to you.”<sup>104</sup> The actual regulations, sandwiched in between the hunting laws, are given in Q5:3 and phrased as follows:

You are prohibited carrion (*al-maitatu*),  
Blood (*al-dam*),

101. On the context of the Qur’ānic legislation see E. GRÄF, *Jagdbeute und Schlachttier im islamischen Recht. Eine Untersuchung zur Entwicklung der islamischen Jurisprudenz*, Bonn, 1959, p. 8-66, and now also A. AL-AZMEH, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People*, Oxford, 2013, p. 412 note 340.

102. Judaeo-Christian legal culture of course developed after the Temple’s destruction, yet so did rabbinic culture, which maintained a clear focus on the pilgrimage; see H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture*, 131-2. On the Biblical context of the three pilgrimage festivals see e.g. C. MEYERS, “The Function of Feasts: An Anthropological Perspective on Israelite Religious Festivals,” see S. OLYAN ed., *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect*, Atlanta, p. 141-68.

103. On the Hajj in the Qur’ān see F.E. PETERS, *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places*, Princeton, 1994, p. 3-59 and J.J. RIVLIN, *Gesetz im Koran*, p. 21-49.

104. Cf. also Q 22:30; the term *bahīma*, which only occurs here and in Q 22:28 and 34, is a close cognate of Hebrew בַּהֵמָה, “cattle,” and has likely the same meaning, see A. JEFFERY, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān*, p. 34-5.

the flesh of swine (*al-ḥinzīr*),  
 And what has been offered to other than God.  
 And the animal strangled (*al-munḥaniqatun*)  
 or beaten to death,  
 And that which dies by falling  
 or is gored to death,  
 And that which is eaten by a beast of prey (*al-sabū'u*)  
 – barring that which you may purify (*'illā mā dakkaitum*)–  
 And what is sacrificed on stone altars (*mā ḍubiḥa 'ala l-nuṣubī*),  
 And that you should divide with arrows (*wa-'an tastaqsimū bi-l-'azlāmi*).  
 All that is transgression.

The Medinan Qur'ān here first repeats those prohibitions of blood, carrion, pork, and of “what has been offered to other than God,” we have already seen in the Meccan surahs and in Q2:173. These prohibitions, we have seen, stood in close relationship to the gentile purity regulations in Genesis and Leviticus as understood by their expansive tradition. At the same time, it was clear that the Meccan formulation of the gentile purity regulations did not reflect the language of the Decree of the Apostles as preserved either in the New Testament or in any of its later renderings, but reflected more direct engagement with Leviticus—as it also had in previous Christian iterations of the decree. The Medinan specifications of the earlier rules, by contrast, maintain the focus on the Bible, yet equally engage the wording of the Decree of the Apostle directly—yet again by following the expansive tradition of understanding it, to whose oral and living development it likewise attests:

1. The prohibition of the chief category of “carrion” is now specified by using a list of several technical terms that are unique to this surah. The first one of these specifications, unsurprisingly, is “strangled” meat (*al-munḥaniqatun*), the term that throughout late antiquity had functioned as the chief category designating “carrion.” By reintroducing “strangled” meat as the first subcategory of “carrion,” the Qur'ān effectively regularizes the unique terminology of Acts, the Tosephta, and several patristic authors which had dominated Christian—but not later rabbinic—discourse throughout Late Antiquity. Since the term *al-munḥaniqatun* is a *hapax legomenon* that constitutes a cognate to the Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac term *h-n-q*, it seems likely that the Qur'ān here reflects the pervasive Syriac and possibly Arabic rendering of the Decree of the Apostles, which, in the Peshitta of Acts 15:29, equally prohibits *ḥnyq'*, “things strangled,” as we have seen above.
2. The Qur'ān then specifies carrion further by including animals that were “beaten” to death (*al-mauqūdatu*), that “fell” to death (*al-mutaraddiyatu*) or that were “gored” to death (*al-naṭīḥatu*). The first and the third term are equally unique in Qur'ānic terminology, making it likely that the Qur'ān here engages an existing law code.

Indeed, it seems that the Qurʾān engages and expands Leviticus 17 by turning to Exodus 21, the *locus classicus* of Biblical tort law: here, we learn about how to deal with the restitution of animals that died because they “fell” (נפל) into a pit, that were “beaten” to death (הג) or were “gored” (הג) to death (Ex. 21:31-6). The presence of all three concepts, “beating,” “falling,” and “goring” in both corpora can hardly be coincidental (even though they use different roots).<sup>105</sup> Yet the Qurʾānic prohibition of the meat of such animals is far stricter than that in Exodus. Exodus, namely, seems to reflect the older, more lenient understanding of the Biblical laws of carrion equally displayed in Leviticus 17, and only prohibits the consumption of the meat of an Oxen that has killed a human being and is subsequently stoned to death (Ex 21:28). This implies that the meat of the other dead animals in Exodus—whose carcass the person making restitution “may keep” (Ex. 21:34 and 36)—were not originally prohibited, or even classified as carrion. While the rabbis equally prohibited the consumption of such animals to Jews, following the stricter attitude towards carrion in Deuteronomy, but allowed such meat for gentiles, the Qurʾān here again stands closest to the Christian tradition which, as we have seen above, largely observed the prohibition of carrion for gentiles formulated in Leviticus 17:15.

3. Animals mangled by beasts of prey, the next item on the Qurʾān’s list, constitutes part of the tradition expanding the gentile purity items we have already encountered in Jerome, in the Canons of the Apostles, and in the Clementine Homilies, which equally prohibit “a piece left by a beast of prey (θηρίου λειψάνου)” explicitly. The Homilies dismissed the more lenient attitude regarding the permissibility of such meat for gentiles in Deuteronomy and, following the problematization of such meat in Leviticus 17:15, prohibit it altogether (corresponding to the majority of Christian practice in Late Antiquity). For the Qurʾān, likewise, animals mangled by beasts of prey are generally prohibited, the term “wild animal” (*al-sabūʾu*) in this meaning constitutes yet another *hapax legomenon*.
4. The Qurʾān then offers an exemption for forms of carrion “which you may purify” (*mā ḍakkaitum*); while the formulation leaves open the possibility that this exemption extends to all forms of carrion, it seems likely that it specifies only the one item immediately preceding

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105. It is not unlikely that the Qurʾān here engages with an existing (likely oral) translation of the Hebrew Bible into Arabic, see note 94 above. It is evident that in this case, all three terms used to designate “to beat,” “to fall,” and “to gore,” used in Exodus 21 in the Hebrew Bible (as well as its Aramaic and Syriac translations) are different from the ones used in the Qurʾān. Note Mishna equally turns to Exodus 22 in order to establish legal categories; unlike the Qurʾān, however, it uses “the ox” and “the pit” rather than “goring” and “falling,” see e.g. Mishna *Bava Qamma* 1.1 and the commentary in both Talmudim.

it, animals mangled by beast of prey, and even among those only the ones on the verge of death, as tradition relates on the verse.<sup>106</sup> The actual method of purification for such meat, in addition to mentioning God's name as specified above, seems to be the one detailed in Leviticus 17:13, that of the removal of the blood by a form of secondary slaughter. Intriguingly, the Qur'ān here also evokes the wording of the exemption formulated in Leviticus 17:15. There, following the permission given for hunted animals, we learn that a gentile “who eats carrion, or that which was torn by beasts (נבלה וטרפה), must wash himself and his clothing; he then remains unclean (וטמא) until the evening; then shall he be clean (טהר).” The term “clean,” describing the purity of the eater in the Hebrew Bible, is rendered as *d-k-y* in the Aramaic and Syriac translations of the Bible. This term, in turn, constitutes a clear cognate to the Arabic term “to purify,” *dhāl kāf wāw*, which, in Q5:3, constitutes yet another *hapax legomenon*.<sup>107</sup> The Qur'ān, like the Leviticus, thus enables gentiles to consume meat mangled by a beast of prey in some circumstances, and uses the same root to describe the required purity. Yet whereas according to Leviticus, the gentile who ate the meat needs to be purified after the consumption, it is the meat itself that is in need of purification prior to its consumption in the Qur'ān.<sup>108</sup>

The Medinan Qur'ān, we can thus summarize, specifies what is already prohibited in the Meccan Qur'ān, and does so in intimate dialogue with the expansive tradition of the gentile purity laws and with the Bible itself, and especially with Leviticus 17, to which the expansive tradition had previously turned. The laws given to the non-Israelites in the Bible thus form the framework not only of the Christian and rabbinic understanding of gentile purity laws, but also that of Judaeo-Christian legal culture—which the Qur'ān partially affirms at the same time as seeking to transcend it. When the sequel of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, famously, equates the food permissible to Muslims to the same as the food permissible for “those who were given the book”—i.e. Jews and Christians—the Qur'ān removes one of the main markers of ethnic difference. At the moment it sets the early Muslim community on equal terms with the ancient Israelites, the Qur'ān thereby abrogates part of the laws that distinguished between Israelites and gen-

106. See note 101 above. Note that the rabbis, in the tractate *Hulin* 3 of the Mishna and in its Talmudic commentaries, take a comparable approach and appraise each mangled animal according to the wounds it sustained, declaring some fit for consumption by Jews while declaring others *terefah*.

107. The Hebrew term *z-k-h*, as well as its Aramaic and Syriac cognate *d-k-y*, equally denote restoration to Levitical purity; see A. JEFFERY, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, p. 135.

108. On the cases of stone altars and that which is divided by arrows see H. ZELLENIN, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture*, p. 77-8 and p. 120-1.

tiles, and in a way repeats, in its very own context, the fusion of Jewish and gentile ethnicities endorsed by Latin, Greek, and Syriac churches in their own way.<sup>109</sup> It is thus clear that the Medinan Qurʾān, while endorsing much of Judaeo-Christian legal culture throughout the Meccan and Medinan period, eventually seeks to transcend and to supercede it.

### Conclusion

Considering the way in which the prohibition of blood and carrion to non-Israelites developed throughout the centuries is a most rewarding enterprise, teaching us as much about Late Antiquity as it does about the Qurʾān. The broader tradition that emerges from the way in which the Decree of the Apostles first implements the purity regulations for non-Israelites found in Leviticus to the way in which the Qurʾān eventually “completes” this project allows us to see a firm “canonical” bracket around the Judaeo-Christian legal culture—a bracket which, it must be admitted, it not known to most current members of the two traditions that lay claim the two Scriptures. Considering late antiquity from the point of view of the development of the gentile purity regulations, regardless, allows us to see three phenomena that have not been duly considered in previous scholarship.

First and foremost, we have to come to terms with the ways in which the heritage of the gentile purity regulations formulated in Leviticus 17 shaped Christianity, Judaism, and Islam throughout Late Antiquity. The evidence here presented amounts to less than half of this continuity—as mentioned above, I am currently preparing a parallel study on the laws on sexual misconduct that will reinforce the evidence discussed above. The legal relevance of Leviticus for Acts of the Apostles had been well established by Wehnert and others, and its importance for the rabbis and for the church fathers may not surprise. Yet it is quite remarkable that Leviticus is also invoked even by those church fathers who seek to dismiss the provisions of the Decree of the Apostles, and it is of the greatest importance for the emergent field of Late Antique Qurʾānic studies how intimately the nascent Muslim community engaged the Hebrew, or perhaps even the Arabic Bible.

Secondly, a longitudinal study of the three divergent traditions of understanding the Decree of the Apostles—what I have termed the appreciative, the dismissive, and the expansive tradition—shows that Augustine and Chrysostom argued a minority position. While previous studies were well aware that the gentile purity regulations were widely obeyed through-

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109. The Qurʾān, in other words, expands the gentile purity regulations to Jews and gentiles alike, returning to the idealized state of the law before the Golden calf; H. ZELLENTIN, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture*, p. 155-74.

out Late Antiquity and of course remained legally binding throughout much of the Middle Ages, their importance for the formation of late antique Jewish and Christian identity emerged clearly in the present study. The neglect, if not the factual abrogation of the Decree of the Apostles by parts of the Latin, Greek, and even the Syriac church past the fourth century can now be seen in a starker contrast to the earlier Christian mainstream attitudes, which in turn stand closest to that of Islam.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, we can see that the precise continuity of the legal tradition of understanding the Decree of the Apostles in an expansive way. While textual evidence based on three main sources—the Clementine Homilies, the Didascalia Apostolorum, and the Qur'ān—should rightly be scrutinized as being minimally sufficient, we are nevertheless dealing with three texts that show the most detailed affinities not only regarding their actual rulings on the gentile purity laws, but also regarding the wider laws and legal narratives. Yet it is the broad legal consensus with which the Christian majority endorsed the appreciative view of the Decree of the Apostles as deriving from Leviticus that allows us safely to state that the continuity of the Judaeo-Christian legal culture can only be explained by the fact that it must have been endorsed by members of the Jesus-movement from the fourth to the seventh century. The legal affinities discussed cannot be explained either by literary dependency, which is minimal, or by the existence of a “Jewish-Christian” community separate from church or synagogue, for which we would have, *pace* Crone, no evidence after the fourth century of the Common Era. Rather, it seems that the gentile purity regulations were accurately transmitted to the nascent Muslim community. The Qur'ān, in turn, show signs that these laws were further developed through the same hermeneutical—i.e. Biblical—principles that marked earlier specifications and expansions. In the absence of literary influence or the existence of a separate group, the combination of legal and hermeneutical continuity means most likely that the expansive attitude of understanding the Decree of the Apostles part of the living culture at the turn of the seventh century not only in the Syriac world but also in Arabia. Judaeo-Christian legal culture thus constituted the mainstream of nascent Christianity, and was recast in the particular context of early Islam.





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