

# The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom?



## **Orientalia Judaica Christiana**

**3**

Orientalia Judaica Christiana, the Christian Orient and its Jewish Heritage, is dedicated, first of all, to the afterlife of the Jewish Second Temple traditions within the traditions of the Christian East. A second area of exploration is some priestly (non-Talmudic) Jewish traditions that survived in the Christian environment.

# **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**

**Edited by  
Carlos A. Segovia  
Basil Lourié**



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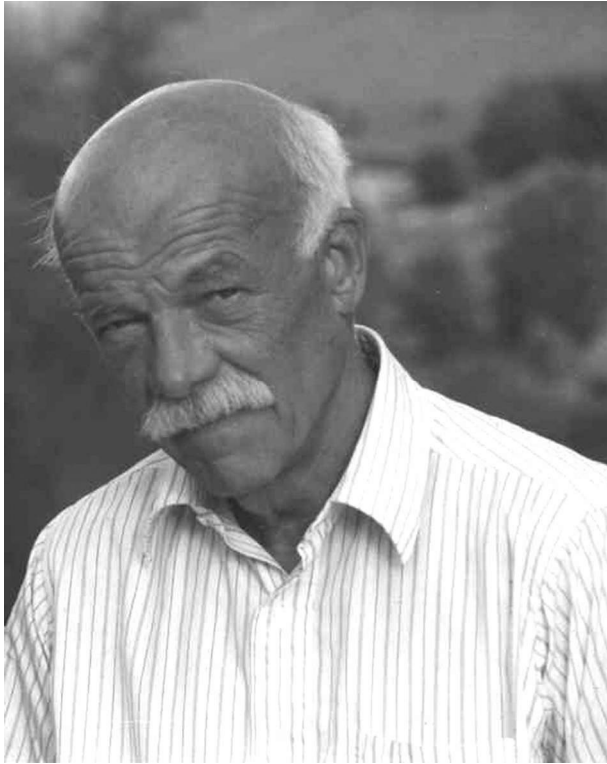
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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AB</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>BIFAO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
<i>BHG</i>	Halkin, F. <i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i> , vol. I–III. Subsidia Hagiographica, 8a. Bruxelles, 1957.
<i>BHL</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina</i>
<i>BHO</i>	Peeters, P. <i>Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis</i> . Subsidia hagiographica, 10. Bruxellis, 1910 [reprint: 1970]
<i>BP</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Persica</i>
<i>BTS</i>	Beiruter Texte und Studien
<i>CRINT</i>	Compendium Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
<i>CSCO</i>	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>DRLAR</i>	Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion
<i>EI</i>	Houtsma, M. T., et al., ed. <i>The Encyclopaedia of Islam: A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples</i> . 4 vols. plus supplement. Leiden, 1913–1938. Repr. 1987.
<i>EM</i>	<i>Evangelische Missionsmagazin</i>
<i>EQ</i>	Dammen McAuliffe, Jane, et al., ed. <i>Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān</i> , 6 vols. Leiden, 2001–6.
<i>IHC</i>	Islamic History and Civilization
<i>IOS</i>	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JMEOS</i>	<i>Journal of the Manchester Egyptian and Oriental Society</i>
<i>INARAH</i>	Institut zur Erforschung der frühen Islamgeschichte und des Koran
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>

JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplements
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>MIDEO</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales</i>
<i>MScRel</i>	<i>Mélanges de Science Religieuse</i>
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
PO	Patrologia orientalis
<i>PAAJR</i>	<i>Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research</i>
PASC	Problemi Attuali di Scienza e di Cultura
<i>PLASH</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities</i>
PSME	Princeton Series on the Middle East
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des Études Juives</i>
REMMM	<i>Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée</i>
ROC	<i>Revue de l'Orient Chrétien</i>
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
SL	The Schweich Lectures
SLAEI	Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam
SSGKIO	Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients
SSNES	State University of New York Series on Near Eastern Studies
<i>TRE</i>	Müller, Gerhard, Horst Balz, und Gerhard Krause, eds. <i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i> . 36 vols. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1976–2004
VCSS	Variorum Collected Studies Series
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>WZKM</i>	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>



## PREFACE

John Wansbrough (1928–2002) once coined the expression “sectarian milieu” to thus label the agglomeration of Christian and Jewish traditions which became the nutrient medium out of which Islam emerged. He chiefly discussed the beginnings of Islam as an *islamisant*. No wonder that the problem of Islamic origins represents a particular field of research within Islamic studies. However, those who study marginal Christian and Jewish traditions in the sixth and seventh centuries have recently become aware that formative Islam is a gold mine for them as well. In other words, Islamic sources can be also relevant for researches developed in their own areas.

The sixth and the seventh centuries were in fact crucial in the history of both Judaism (especially regarding the shaping of non-Talmudic Jewish traditions) and Christianity. It was an epoch of rapid and profound changes, a period of transition from late antiquity to the mediaeval world which entailed for Christians and Jews alike cohabitation with Muslims. Many Jewish and Christian traditions then competing with those that now seem to us mainstream ones did not survive at all or were forced back to the remote corners of the civilized world. The study of such either disappeared or severely suppressed traditions is a rather thankless but necessary task.

Therefore, the border between pre-Islamic Christianity and Judaism, on the one hand, and formative Islam, on the other hand, must be approached from both sides. This is the main goal of the present volume, which is dedicated to the memory of John Wansbrough—the scholar who was also the very first to describe the field of this kind of research.

We mention in the title of the volume the term “Comforter/Paraclete,” in allusion to the name given to the bearer of divine revelation in a well-known saying of Jesus which was differently understood by Christians and Muslims and which furthermore became a common topos in Islamo-Christian polemics. This

“Comforter,” together with his variant interpretations, is then a symbol of the unity and difference between Islam and Christianity, and hence, likewise, a symbol of the border that must be, as said above, approached and excavated from both sides.

The editors would like to express their gratitude to Elisabeth Wansbrough-Abdi for her encouragement and help since the very beginning of their work.

Basil Lourie

**JOHN WANSBROUGH  
AND THE PROBLEM OF ISLAMIC ORIGINS  
IN RECENT SCHOLARSHIP:  
A FAREWELL  
TO THE TRADITIONAL ACCOUNT**

CARLOS A. SEGOVIA

In a recent study dealing with the historical setting and the literary development of ancient narratives on a concrete subject, John van Seters has rightly made the point that “[t]oo often a social and historical context is put forward, and then the narrative sources are made to fit this context, and finally the fit is used to confirm the reality of the historical context—a complete circularity of argument”.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, he writes, “[a]ny search for a controlling for narrative sources or background must establish a sufficient level of confidence outside this hermeneutical circle to be effective.”<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps there is no other field of study in which such circularity of argument has by and large prevailed in past and present scholarship as that of the rise and early development of the Islamic faith and its scriptural (both religious and historiographical) corpus. Regardless of the very late date of the earliest Muslim writings and in spite of the lack of other textual sources that could validate them, they are usually taken to describe with a certain measure of accuracy the hypothetical—in fact not at all clear—events they depict, which, in

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<sup>1</sup> Seters, J. van. *The Biblical Saga of King David*. Winona Lake, IN, 2009, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

rigour, cannot be deduced but from those very same writings. Neither their quite frequently literary nature nor their didactic and political concerns is usually regarded as a decisive challenge to the veracity of the presumed historical records included within them. The events referred to in such literature were so firmly established by the weight of the Muslim tradition, and they have come to be so familiar to everyone, that almost no one questions them. Moreover, they tend to “provide” the historical setting for such literature, which is in turn read in light of them. In short, the effect becomes the cause, and the conceptual movement by which such paralogical exchange is made possible is either ignored or else obliterated.

On the other hand, there is also a supplementary problem brought about by the comparison of current Jewish, Christian and Islamic studies regarding the emergence of each particular religion. To put it briefly: the historical-critical method successfully applied in the past two centuries to the study of early Judaism and nascent Christianity has almost gone unparalleled in the study of Islamic origins, which does represent an anomaly of very significant proportions, therefore, within the field of comparative religious studies. Yet only very few scholars seem to be aware of this and even a more reduced number of scholars working on the field of early Islamic studies can be said to care much of such an astonishing asymmetry.

And there is, finally, the problem of interdisciplinarity. Scholars working on early Islamic studies are not always adequately informed about the progress made by their colleagues in the study of late antique Judaism and Christianity. They frequently go their own path without noticing that, here and there, their research proceeds along a complex crossroad.

Hence it is not only a question of method. Nor is it only a question of hermeneutical caution. Scholarship on Islamic origins must also come out of the deceitful isolation in which more often than not it still dwells. Yet this conviction is, to be sure, far from being a mere claim in the desert. One need only reflect on the very suggestive works published in the past four decades or so by several scholars either present or not in this volume—which is of necessity, as any other book, unhappily limited in both its scope and extension—to perceive that things are changing at last (albeit not as rapidly as one would perhaps desire!). And it is fair to say that, at least to a certain measure, it all began some forty years ago with the

work of the late John Wansbrough, to whose memory we would wish to dedicate this miscellaneous volume.

In the late 1970s Wansbrough published two groundbreaking, complementary studies on which he had started working a few years earlier: *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*,<sup>3</sup> and *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*.<sup>4</sup> Whereas he devoted the latter to the study of early Muslim historiography and to its sectarian milieu, in the former he addressed the Qurʾān “as a document susceptible of analysis by the instruments and techniques of Biblical criticism.”<sup>5</sup> This, of course, was—and to be precise still is in some measure—something entirely new and much provocative within the realm of Quranic studies. For “[n]ot merely dogmas such as those defining scripture as the uncreated Word of God and acknowledging its formal and substantive inimitability, but also the entire corpus of Islamic historiography, by providing a more or less coherent and plausible report of the circumstances of the Quranic revelation, have discouraged examination of the document as representative of a traditional literary type”<sup>6</sup> whose historical setting should be also investigated instead of taken for granted. Accordingly, he attempted at “a systematic study of the formal properties of scriptural authority as merely one (though possibly the major one) factor contributing to the emergence of an independent and self-conscious religious community,”<sup>7</sup> which meant examining “the literary uses, and hence communal functions, of scripture,”<sup>8</sup> its sectarian background within “the marginalia of Judaeo-Christian history,”<sup>9</sup> the “traditional stock of monotheistic

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<sup>3</sup> Wansbrough, J. *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*. LOS. Oxford, 1977; repr. Amherst, NY, 2005, with Foreword, Translation and Expanded Notes by A. Rippin.

<sup>4</sup> Wansbrough, J. *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*. LOS. Oxford, 1978; repr. Amherst, NY, 2006, with Foreword, Translation and Expanded Notes by G. R. Hawting.

<sup>5</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, xxi.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii.

imagery”<sup>10</sup> upon which the Qur’ān drew, and its canonization as scripture, an achievement by which “the document of revelation was assured a kind of independence, both of historical traditions commonly adduced to explain its existence and of external criteria recruited to facilitate its understanding.”<sup>11</sup>

Now, whilst it is true that scholars such as Abraham Geiger, Theodor Nöldeke, Tor Andrae, and Karl Ahrens, to just mention a few names, had already written on the unquestionable dependence of the Muslim scriptures upon several Judaeo-Christian motifs, they had not gone as far as Wansbrough in this respect; nor had they offered a systematic exposition of the whole matter—which becomes in Wansbrough a most complex historical and theoretical problem of the greatest importance in the study of Islamic origins—within their writings. Likewise, other authors such as Siegmund Frankel, Alphonse Mingana, Arthur Jeffery, and Heinrich Speyer, had previously studied quite convincingly the foreign vocabulary of the Qur’ān; yet their respective contributions had been mainly punctual. Conversely, opting for a reconstruction of the Muslim scriptures on the basis of their presumed Christian *Urtext*, as suggested by Günter Lüling in the early 1970s, seemed to Wansbrough too ventured, though he regarded many of Lüling’s conjectures not unreasonable. On the other hand, although Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht had also questioned the alleged historicity of the prophetic *logia* which are (together with the Qur’ān) the very basis of Muslim jurisprudence, they were still confident upon other various traditional records and “data.” Doubtless, Wansbrough relied on them all as well as on Walter Baur, who provided him a model for the late development of orthodoxy, Adolf von Harnack, Wilhelm Schlatter, Hans-Joachim Schoeps, and Chaim Rabin, who had either mentioned (von Harnack and Schlatter) or explored (Schoeps and Rabin) the possible influences of Judaeo-Christianity upon formative Islam. Yet he moved a step further questioning the pre-existence of an autonomous entity upon which influence could be exerted, and hence settled the criti-

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<sup>10</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

cal foundations of contemporary scholarship on Islamic origins. As Gerald R. Hawting puts it,

scholars have postulated the existence of one or other religious group in Arabia and suggested how Muhammad might have come into contact with it and been influenced to develop the ideas to which he gave expression as Islam. This is often put as the operation of “influences” or the acceptance of “borrowings.” For example, many academic scholars, concerned with the common monotheistic or biblical stories and allusions that one finds in the Qur’ān, have assumed that Muhammad must have come to know them by coming into contact with Jews or Christians of various sorts.

Wansbrough entirely eschews the idea of influences or borrowings of this sort, usually in Arabia but perhaps on journeys that the traditional account tells us he made to Syria as a young man. Wansbrough entirely eschewed the idea of influences or borrowings from this sort, which assume an already existing entity that can be influenced from outside. He does not talk of Muhammad coming into contact with sectarian circles but understands the religion that will eventually evolve into Islam as arising out of the sectarian circles themselves. There is no suggestion here of something that already exists taking on foreign characteristics, but of Islam as the further development of tendencies already there in sectarian monotheistic circles. Furthermore, he does not envisage Arabia as the likely setting for this, but the regions outside Arabia where the existence of such groups is attested before Islam. . . .

His suggestion, although not spelled out in detail, is that a religious elite responsible for elaborating the beginnings of Islam in the sectarian setting was able to establish a relationship with the originally religiously undefined Arab state so that gradually Islam became a symbol of association with the state and the early history of the state came to be defined as the early history of Islam.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hawting, G. R. “Foreword.” In Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, i–viii, here vi–vii.

In short, Wansbrough considered that identification of the earliest Islamic community may and ought to be “regarded as the investigation of process rather than of structure.”<sup>13</sup> At a given time and place and under certain circumstances, a new defined religious community emerged from within a composite sectarian milieu. Most likely, however, this did not take place in 7th-century Arabia but somewhere else much later on—probably from the 8th to the 9th centuries;<sup>14</sup> and it resulted from “polygenesis” rather than constituting the effect of a single development.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Wansbrough was very careful not to set forth any explanatory hypothesis which could be regarded as historically reductive in one way or the other. This explains, in turn, his caution when moving from the literary level (which was the object par excellence of his studies) to the historical domain. Yet this is not to mean that he endorsed a purely deconstructionist view on the early history of Islam. Analysing texts in what they are and in what they are good for (i.e. according to their form and function) is another way of writing history, though certainly not the showiest one. And even if it implies abandoning the rather contradictory and unsatisfactory traditional account of Islamic origins, as it did for Wansbrough, one can legitimately expect to learn more from it than from the non-critical and monotonous repetition of certain well-known yet awkward topics.

To sum up, Wansbrough opened a good number of questions concerning the academic study of Islamic origins which have found echo in other scholars. It must be also noted, however, that several authors have proceeded along a similar path independently from Wansbrough’s much debated insights.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, in 1977, Patricia Crone and Michael A. Cook published a coauthored volume on the making of the Islamic world in which

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<sup>13</sup> Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 128.

<sup>14</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 49.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii, 21ff.

<sup>16</sup> See, for an overall criticism of Wansbrough’s methodological assumptions and a reconstruction of the beginnings of Islam which tries to fit the traditional account (albeit placing some chronological order within its often contradictory strata), Donner, F. M. *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*. Princeton, NJ, 1998.



they sought to demonstrate the Jewish messianic roots of the Arab conquest.<sup>17</sup> Whereas Cook produced shortly after a critical study on the early Muslim dogma<sup>18</sup> and has later devoted several essays to the study of early Islamic culture and tradition,<sup>19</sup> Crone has continued to work on certain controversial aspects of early Islamic history of which she has proposed alternative readings.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the late Yehudah D. Nevo, an Israeli archaeologist working at the Negev area ahead of the Negev Archaeological Project, and Judith Koren, an information specialist who collaborated with Nevo for many years, thoroughly examined the archaeological and epigraphic evidence contemporary with the Arab conquest and offered in a series of studies published between 1990 and 2003 a provoking theory on the origins of the Arab religion and the Arab state according to which the latter, once established after the Byzantine withdrawal from the Near East, did not fully promote Islam until the rise of the Abbasids.<sup>21</sup> No less contentious are the studies of the late Druze Arab scholar Suliman Bashear, who subjected to scrutinizing criticism the earliest Muslim sources and argued that Muḥammad's biography is partly based upon the narratives about the life of the mid- to late 7th-century Arab "prophet" Muḥammad b. al-Hanafīyya.<sup>22</sup> A somewhat more nuanced, though by no means

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<sup>17</sup> Crone, P., and Cook, M. A. *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*. Cambridge, 1977.

<sup>18</sup> Cook, M. A. *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study*. Cambridge, 1981.

<sup>19</sup> Cook, M. A. *Studies in the Origins of Early Islamic Culture and Tradition*. Aldershot, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Crone, P. *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity*. Cambridge, 1980; idem, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*. Princeton, 1987; idem, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law: The Origins of the Islamic Patronate*. Cambridge, 1987; idem, and Hinds, M. *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*. Cambridge, 1986. See also Bacharach, J. L., Conrad, L. I., and Crone, P., eds. *Studies in Early Islamic History*. Princeton, 1996.

<sup>21</sup> See especially Nevo, Y. D., and Koren, J. *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State*. Amherst, NY, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Bashear, S. *Muqaddima fi l-ta'rikh al-akbar*. Jerusalem, 1984; idem. *Liqrat historyah islamit aberet?* Jerusalem, 1985. See also idem, *Arabs and*

conventional, approach to the early stages of Islamic history within the monotheist religious tradition of the ancient Middle East and to the development of Islamic rule from the mid-7th to the mid-8th century can be found in the works of Wansbrough's former disciple Gerald R. Hawting, who has also translated into English two volumes of Ṭabarī's *History*,<sup>23</sup> and Jonathan P. Berkey.<sup>24</sup> Herbert Berg's edited volume on current methodologies in the study of Islamic origins must be also alluded to at this point.<sup>25</sup> Finally, two French scholars deserve being mentioned as well, namely Alfred-Louis de Prémare and Édouard-Marie Gallez. Prémare has questioned on very solid grounds the traditional account of Islamic origins, the difficulties inherent to which he has analysed with some detail in a study published in 2002.<sup>26</sup> Less convincing perhaps, by reason of its often precipitated arguments, is the two-volume study published by Gallez in 2005, in which the author holds the view that the Arab conquest was the last of many efforts by heterodox Christians Jews to gain Jerusalem and other Byzantine territories.<sup>27</sup>

At a close look, it is not difficult to perceive that, however different their respective approaches and conclusions, these scholars are, in their majority, indebted in one way or another to Wans-

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*Others in Early Islam*. Princeton, 1997; idem, *Studies in Early Islamic Tradition: Collected Studies in Arabic and Islam*. Jerusalem, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Hawting, G. R. *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History*. Cambridge, 1999; idem, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661–750*. London, 2000. See also idem, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 20: *The Collapse of the Sufyanid Authority and the Coming of the Marwanids*. Edited by G. R. Hawting. SSNES/BP. Albany, NY, 1989; idem, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 17: *The First Civil War*. Edited by G. R. Hawting. SSNES/BP. Albany, NY, 1996; idem, ed. *The Development of Islamic Ritual*. Aldershot, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Berkey, J. P. *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800*. Cambridge, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Berg, H., ed. *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*. Leiden, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Prémare, A.-L., de. *Les fondations de l'Islam: Entre écriture et histoire*. Paris, 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Gallez, É.-M. *Le messie et son prophète*. 2 vols. Versailles, 2005.

brough, whom they often mention and who was, in sum, the first to overtly challenge the reliability of the traditional account of Islamic origins as a whole by questioning the alleged historicity of its sources. Whatever the new lines of research essayed in the past decades, the scholarly community still owes much to him and to his idea of the “sectarian milieu” out of which the Islamic religion arose.

As to the Qur’ān (i.e. Wansbrough’s other major subject of study), it would be beyond the scope of this prologue to survey the quality and quantity of recent scholarship on this area, on which Wansbrough’s influence has been as punctual as it has been substantial; for there where its traces can be observed it has encouraged further relevant developments. A few titles may nonetheless provide the reader with information on some of the most significant lines of research in this field and on the reception of Wansbrough’s theories and method amidst other scholars.<sup>28</sup> These are Andrew Rippin’s *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān*,<sup>29</sup> *The Qur’ān and Its Interpretative Tradition*,<sup>30</sup> *The Qur’ān: Style and Contents*,<sup>31</sup> and *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’ān*,<sup>32</sup> Gerald R. Hawting’s and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef’s *Approaches to the Qur’ān*,<sup>33</sup> Herbert Berg’s *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam*,<sup>34</sup> Jane

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<sup>28</sup> On which see also Firestone, R. “The Qur’ān and the Bible: Some Modern Studies of Their Relationship.” In Reeves, J. C., ed. *Bible and Qur’ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, 1–22. SBLSS, 24. Atlanta, 2003; Rippin, A. “Literary Analysis of Qur’ān, Tafsīr, and Sīra: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough.” In Martin, R. C., ed. *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, 151–63. Tucson, AZ, 1985; idem, “Foreword.” In Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, ix–xix.

<sup>29</sup> Rippin, A., ed. *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān*. London, 1988.

<sup>30</sup> Rippin, A. *The Qur’ān and Its Interpretative Tradition*. Aldershot, 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Rippin, A. *The Qur’ān: Style and Contents*. Aldershot, 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Rippin, A., ed. *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’ān*. Malden, MA/Oxford, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Hawting, G. R., and Shareef, A.-K. A., eds. *Approaches to the Qur’ān*. London, 1993.

<sup>34</sup> Berg, H. *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*. Richmond, 2000.

Dammen McAuliffe's *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*;<sup>35</sup> Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi's *Dictionnaire du Coran*;<sup>36</sup> Manfred Kropp's *Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur'an*;<sup>37</sup> and Gabriel Said Reynolds' *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*,<sup>38</sup> and *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*.<sup>39</sup>

But enough has been said so far to offer the reader a general overview of the problem and its most immediate implications.

The present volume aims at exploring afresh the "sectarian milieu" out of which Islam emerged by bringing together contributions from several scholars working on a wide variety of fields, not only early Islamic history, but also the Jewish and Christian milieus of the 6th, 7th and 8th centuries that may help to explain the rise of Islam. Its main concern is, therefore, to examine the diverse chronologies and geographies one should alternatively look at and the religious components one should likewise take into account if attempting to define the historical, conceptual, theological, scriptural, exegetical, and liturgical boundaries of that hypothetical "sectarian milieu." The idea first arose out of the Fifth Enoch Seminar held in Naples in June 2009, during which sessions Basile Lourié and I long debated on these and other related issues, as well as on Wansbrough's decisive contribution to the critical study of Islamic origins.

To end with, I should like to express our gratitude to Mrs. Elizabeth Wansbrough for her kind and generous support and to those scholars who have accepted to participate in this volume for their willingness to contribute to it and their most valuable work. We are also grateful to those scholars who have declined our invitation but have nonetheless assisted us with their advice, namely Profs. Michael A. Cook, Patricia Crone, Gerald R. Hawting, and Guy G. Stroumsa.

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<sup>35</sup> McAuliffe, J. D., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*. Cambridge, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Amir-Moezzi, M. A., ed. *Dictionnaire du Coran*. Paris, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Kropp, M., ed. *Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur'an: The Question of the Historio-Critical Text of the Qur'an*. Beirut, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Reynolds, G. S., ed. *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*. London, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Reynolds, G. S. *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*. London, 2010.

**PART ONE:**  
**FORMATIVE ISLAM WITHIN**  
**ITS JEWISH-CHRISTIAN MILIEU**



**DES TEXTES PSEUDO CLEMENTINS  
A LA MYSTIQUE JUIVE  
DES PREMIERS SIECLES  
ET DU SINAÏ A MA'RIB.  
Quelques coïncidences entre  
contexte culturel  
et localisation géographique  
dans le Coran**

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Un nombre de plus en plus important d'islamologues reconnaissent aujourd'hui ce que la communauté scientifique doit à John Wansbrough pour ses travaux d'approche du texte coranique dégagés des *a priori* que véhiculent les exégèses historicisantes inspirées de certaines Traditions prophétiques, de la *Sîra* ou encore des *Asbâb al-nuzûl*.<sup>1</sup> C'est par rapport à cette perspective d'ordre méthodologique d'une importance primordiale que nous estimons pouvoir

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<sup>1</sup> Notre position sur ce point est certainement plus drastique que la sienne. Néanmoins, les nombreux parallélismes qu'il établit avec l'exégèse rabbinique doivent être envisagés sous l'angle de leur contribution au repositionnement constant de la vision que l'on peut avoir des rapports entre Coran, *Sunna* et *tafsîr*. Voir à ce sujet le chapitre II « Emblems of prophethood » de son ouvrage *Quranic Studies, Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation, Foreword, Translations and expanded notes by Andrew Rippin*, 53–84. New-York : Prometheus Books, 2004 (édition originale : Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1977).

lui rendre hommage dans la présente contribution. Nous aborderons, pour ce faire, deux questions qu'il a souvent évoquées et qui se situent dans le prolongement direct de ses orientations de recherche, à savoir la fonction des thèmes judaïques et judéo-chrétiens mentionnés dans le Coran et le problème de la localisation de son milieu d'émergence.

Nous tenterons de montrer de quelle manière et jusqu'à quel point elles peuvent être liées en nous appuyant sur l'avancée actuelle de nos propres investigations, entreprises il y a maintenant plus de dix ans. On remarquera à cette occasion que si les hypothèses que nous formulons ne coïncident pas à la lettre avec les propositions de Wanbrough, elles s'en approchent néanmoins considérablement par l'esprit, qui implique une totale indépendance par rapport aux méthodes traditionnelles de l'islamologie. C'est pourquoi il nous a semblé qu'il pourrait être utile de témoigner du fait que, tout en ayant suivi un cheminement personnel au cours duquel les méthodes de lecture que nous allons mettre en œuvre ici ont pris forme progressivement, nos constatations sont comparables aux siennes sur quelques points fondamentaux.

Il convient d'ajouter, avant de pénétrer au cœur du sujet, que les problématiques qui vont être abordées nécessitent la prise en compte d'un certain nombre d'explorations préalables qu'il serait beaucoup trop long de reprendre entièrement. Nous en présenterons donc uniquement les lignes essentielles, en renvoyant pour plus de détails aux articles et aux communications dans lesquels nous les avons développées. C'est en effet à partir du socle constitué par la corrélation d'acquis successifs qu'il est possible d'examiner à présent comment se rencontrent, dans le Coran, textes de référence et lieux de l'histoire sacrée pour dévoiler peut-être, à mots couverts, quelque chose de sa propre histoire.

## **UN APERÇU DES TEXTES PSEUDO CLEMENTINS**

### **EN TANT QUE SEUILS HERMENEUTIQUES DU CORAN**

Le premier concept préalable à la présente réflexion est celui que nous avons appelé : « seuils herméneutiques du Coran ». Il résulte d'une découverte fortuite qui nous a permis de réaliser que le texte coranique requiert en quelque sorte de son lecteur, de manière plus ou moins implicite selon les cas, pour être mieux compris, la connaissance de corpus antérieurs qui débordent souvent du domaine des textes bibliques et parabibliques. Ils constituent ce que l'on



pourrait nommer un « paysage conceptuel », sur lequel ses propres enseignements prennent un relief qui en éclaire la plupart du temps de façon décisive les tenants et les aboutissants.

### **Introduction aux seuils herméneutiques : Coran et théologie lactancienne**

Les *Institutions Divines* et l'*Épitomé des Institutions Divines* de Lactance représentent le premier de ces seuils herméneutiques que nous ayons mis en évidence.<sup>2</sup> Il nous a alors été possible, grâce aux éclairages qu'il apporte, de mieux saisir un ensemble de principes théologiques fondamentaux du Coran, ainsi que les interrelations qui les caractérisent. Leur pivot central est la notion de « nature monothéiste originelle » (*fitra*), définie comme le fait de dresser son visage vers le ciel en vue d'y chercher la vraie religion (Coran 30, 30–31), qui correspond de manière très précise à la situation de l'*anthropos* de Lactance, l'homme « debout », créé dans la position droite pour pouvoir contempler le ciel et y trouver, précisément, sa religion (*Institutions divines*, II, 1, 17). La deuxième correspond à une prise de recul par rapport aux théories des stoïciens sur cette question, qui correspond en l'occurrence à la réfutation de leur adoration des corps célestes (*Institutions divines*, II, V, 20–25), une attitude dont Abraham, en tant que *hanîf* représente le modèle par excellence pour le Coran (Coran 6, 76–77),<sup>3</sup> tout comme pour certains autres de ses seuils herméneutiques, en particulier

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<sup>2</sup> Cette présentation a fait l'objet de notre première intervention dans le cadre de l'INARAH, « Grundlinien der Theologie des Koran, Grundlagen und Orientierungen ». Dans Gros, Markus, und Karl-Heinz Ohlig, dir. *Schalglichter Die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte, Inārah 3, Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte zum Koran*, 320–70. Verlag Hans Schiler, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> « Lorsque la nuit l'enveloppa, il vit une étoile et dit ; “Voici mon Seigneur”. Mais il ajouta, lorsqu'elle eut disparu : “Je n'aime pas ceux qui disparaissent”. Lorsqu'il vit la lune qui se levait, il dit : Voici mon Seigneur. Mais, lorsqu'elle eut disparu : “Si mon Seigneur ne me dirige pas, je serai au nombre des égarés”. Lorsqu'il vit le soleil qui se levait, il dit : Voici mon Seigneur, c'est le plus grand. Mais, lorsqu'il eut disparu : Ô mon peuple, je désavoue ce que vous associez à Dieu ».

l'*Apocalypse d'Abraham* (VII, 1, 7).<sup>4</sup> La troisième notion correspond à l'idée que ce monothéisme naturel resurgit tout au long de la vie dans les situations critiques, comme par exemple lorsque les hommes se trouvent sur un bateau en pleine tempête : Coran 17, 67 : « Quant un malheur vous touche en mer, ceux que vous invoquez s'égareront, sauf lui » à mettre en parallèle avec (*Institutions Divines*, II, I, 8–12) : « Cela (reconnaître et proclamer un dieu suprême) ils ne le font pas quand leur situation est prospère ; mais pour peu que quelque pesante difficulté les accable, les voilà qui se souviennent de Dieu. Si quelqu'un, en mer, est ballotté par un vent furieux, c'est lui (Dieu) qu'il invoque ». A ce propos le Coran, comme les *Institutions Divines*, met en garde contre une autre tendance spontanée de la nature humaine : la faculté d'oublier : « Lorsqu'il (Dieu) vous a sauvés et ramenés à terre, vous vous détournez. L'homme est très ingrat » Quant à Dieu, qu'ils avaient imploré au milieu de leurs besoins, ils n'ont même pas une parole pour le remercier ». <sup>5</sup>

Enfin, nous avons souligné l'importance du raisonnement, commun aux deux corpus, selon lequel la croyance en un monothéisme transcendant exclut toute utilisation de la violence pour obtenir une conversion dans la mesure où la foi en une divinité qui ne subit elle-même aucune contrainte ne peut être ordonnée sous la

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<sup>4</sup> « Plus que la terre, j'appellerai digne de vénération le soleil, car il éclaire de ses rayons le monde et les différentes atmosphères. Mais celui-là non plus je ne le placerai pas parmi les dieux, car la nuit sa course est assombrie par les nuées » et « Et pas plus je ne nommerai "Dieu" la lune et les étoiles, car elles aussi, en leur temps, la nuit, obscurcissent leur lumière ». Voir aussi à ce sujet notre article « Hanif » dans Amir Moezzi, M. A., dir. *Dictionnaire du Coran*, 341–44. Paris : Robert Lafont, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Une notion comparable figure dans les *Homélies* et dans les *Reconnaissances pseudo clémentines*, il s'agit de l'espoir de la pluie. Voir par exemple *Homélies* XI, 13, 3–4 ; « (3) Pourquoi donc quand les pluies cessent, tournez-vous toujours les yeux vers le ciel en adressant vos prières et vos supplications et, quand vous avez obtenu satisfaction, vous empressez-vous d'oublier ? (4) Car une fois la moisson ou la vendange faite, vous avez tôt fait d'en offrir les prémices aux idoles qui ne sont rien, oubliant bien vite l'auteur du bienfait qui est Dieu ».

contrainte, car elle s'impose d'elle-même (*Institutions Divines*, II, IV, 7) : « Où est la vérité ? *Ubi ergo veritas est ?* Là où aucune contrainte ne peut peser sur la religion *Ubi nulla vis adhiberi potest religioni*, où rien ne peut être victime de violence *ubi nihil quod violari possit apparet*, là où il ne peut y avoir de sacrilège », passage complété par : « Il n'est pas besoin de violences et d'injustices pour convaincre, parce que la (vraie) religion ne peut pas naître de contraintes (*non est opus vi et injuria quia religio eogi non potest*. Il faut utiliser plutôt le verbe que les verges pour qu'il y ait acte volontaire. C'est pourquoi nul n'est jamais retenu par nous malgré lui, et pourtant nul ne s'éloigne, car à elle seule la vérité retient dans nos rangs. » (*Institutions divines* V, XIX, 11–13). Ces passages constituent, à notre sens, la clé de lecture adéquate de la célèbre déclaration : « Pas de contrainte en religion », qui suit, étape par étape, le même raisonnement (2, 255–256) : « Dieu, il n'y a de Dieu que Lui, le vivant, celui qui subsiste par lui-même ! Ni l'assoupissement ni le sommeil n'ont de prise sur lui ! Tout ce qui est dans les cieux et sur la terre lui appartient. Qui intercèdera auprès de lui sans sa permission ? Il sait ce qui se trouve devant les hommes et derrière eux, alors que ceux-ci n'embrassent de sa science que ce qu'il veut. Son trône s'étend sur les cieux et sur la terre : leur maintien dans l'existence ne lui est pas une charge ; il est le Très Haut, l'inaccessible. (256) Pas de contrainte en religion. La voie droite se distingue de l'erreur. »<sup>6</sup>

Le rapide tour d'horizon de ce premier seuil herméneutique permet de dégager deux principes essentiels qui éclairent à leur tour les thèmes qui vont suivre. Le premier réside dans l'importance conférée à l'existence d'un monothéisme naturel et universel, commun à tous les hommes dès leur naissance. Le second consiste dans l'idée que la pureté même de ce monothéisme exclut tout usage de la violence dans le domaine religieux, un consensus devant émerger de façon nécessaire lorsque des hommes décident de se regrouper autour d'un culte susceptible de s'imposer autant par la raison que par la foi. Cette option théologique se trouve complétée par les

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<sup>6</sup> Voir pour cela notre article « Les Pères de l'Église et la pensée de l'islam », contribution en hommage à G. Troupeau, *L'Orient chrétien dans l'empire musulman*, Les éditions de Paris, octobre 2005, pp. 59–90.

principes correspondant à un autre seuil herméneutique : celui des textes pseudo clémentins à la lumière desquels le Coran apparaît comme le modèle par excellence du rejet de tout contenu, expression ou formulation qui pourrait s'avérer négatifs à l'égard de Dieu, d'un prophète ou de n'importe quel juste de l'Écriture. Admettre le contraire reviendrait à faire violence à la pureté et à la noblesse de la révélation divine elle-même.

**Les *Homélie pseudo clémentines*,  
seuil herméneutique de la notion d'abrogation.**

Les *Homélie Pseudo Clémentines* sont le deuxième seuil herméneutique essentiel que nous avons pu mettre en évidence. Il s'agit d'un corpus témoin, comme le précise Alain Le Boulluec, « de la réflexion menée par des juifs chrétiens sur le judaïsme, sur leur adhésion à la foi en Jésus et sur leur rapport au monde païen.<sup>7</sup> Il accorde une place considérable à la question de l'abrogation et nous a permis de saisir qu'en réalité le Coran ne s'abroge jamais lui-même, mais qu'il révisé uniquement des idées, des expressions ou des informations appartenant à des textes antérieurs.<sup>8</sup> Dans cette optique il se présente comme un guide de lecture des Écritures, dont, agissant comme un commentaire inspiré, il « rectifie » certains points, en fonction de critères bien spécifiques. Il s'inscrit par cette démarche dans la continuité d'une très ancienne tradition de lecture critique de l'Ancien Testament développée en particulier chez les premiers gnostiques comme Basilide (m. 130), Valentin (m. 165), Marcion (m. vers 135) et Montan (m. fin du II<sup>e</sup> s.).<sup>9</sup> Mani

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<sup>7</sup> Introduction aux *Homélie pseudo clémentines*, *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, II, 1183. Paris : La Pléiade, NRF Gallimard, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Voir à ce sujet notre article : « Der Begriff Buch im Koran im Licht der pseudoclementinischen Schriften » (La notion de livre dans le Coran à la lumière des écrits pseudo clémentins), dans Gros, Markus, und Karl-Heinz Ohlig, dir. *Vom Koran zum islam, Inārah 4 Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte zum Koran*, 397–482. Berlin : Verlag Hans Schiler, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Pour Marcion « l'Ancien Testament se présentait comme la négation formelle du Nouveau. L'un révélait un tyran borné et fantasque, mal-faisant et menteur, qui prescrivait le vol et l'homicide, l'autre un Père aussi sage et prévoyant que bon et bienfaisant, toujours appliqué à réparer le

(m. 276), quant à lui, était issu d'un milieu baptiste qui rejetait déjà une grande partie des Ecritures du judaïsme. Imprégné de ces doctrines, il les dépassa, semble-t-il, en affirmant dans son *Trésor* que les Ecritures juives sont tout entières l'œuvre du diable.<sup>10</sup> Le véritable problème était, pour lui comme pour les gnostiques, la Loi de Moïse, qu'ils décrivaient comme renfermant « un ministère de mort » organisé.<sup>11</sup> Les reproches qu'il faisait à cette Loi étaient d'enseigner ce qui va à l'encontre de la Loi de paix et d'amour de Jésus. Il avançait pour cela un certain nombre d'arguments, tirés des textes, dont certains coïncident avec des exemples que nous avons pu mettre en évidence dans le Coran. Il disait, entre autres, que l'auteur de la Loi ancienne exalte les richesses (Proverbes XXII, 2), alors que l'autre en commande l'abandon (Luc XIV, 33), et aussi que Moïse dit : « œil pour œil, dent pour dent, tandis que Jésus veut que, frappé sur une joue, on tende l'autre ; c'est pourquoi la loi mosaïque donne la mort, alors que celle du Sauveur procure la vraie vie ».<sup>12</sup> Ces groupes critiquaient également avec force le christianisme dans la mesure où celui-ci avait établi son canon biblique en associant dans un seul Livre l'ancienne et la nouvelle Loi, l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament. Ils lui reprochaient son aveuglement face à des contradictions qu'ils estimaient irréductibles en estimant que « l'on ne peut sans danger adjoindre cette loi de Moïse au Nouveau Testament comme si celui-ci venait du même maître »<sup>13</sup> Un certain nombre de textes, comme les *Acta Archelai*, témoignent de ces joutes entre défenseurs de l'orthodoxie chrétienne et gnostiques ou manichéens hantés par l'idée que s'appuyer sur les textes de l'Ancien Testament reviendrait à confier son âme au démon.

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mal causé par le premier ». Alfarcic, Prosper. *Les Ecritures manichéennes*, 2 t., publication encouragée par la Société Asiatique. Paris : Nourry, 1918, tome II, étude analytique, p. 140, note 4 citant Tertullien, *Adv. Marc.*, I, 19 ; II, 26–29 ; IV, I et suiv.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 140, note 6 citant Sérapion de Tmuis, *apud* Titus de Bostra, *Contr. Man.*, III, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 142 citant *Acta Archelai*, 40.

<sup>12</sup> *Acta Archelai*, 40 Voir Alfarcic, *Les Ecritures manichéennes*, t. II, 142, note 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 142.

A ces arguments se trouvait combinée, en particulier dans le manichéisme, la notion de déformation des Ecritures (*tabrif*). Mani estimait que les Ecritures antérieures à ses propres textes comportaient de profondes et graves erreurs parce qu'elles n'avaient pas été mises par écrit par les prophètes qui en avaient reçu la révélation, mais par des scribes qui ne possédaient pas leur infailibilité. C'est dans ce cadre conceptuel que la tradition manichéenne a fait de son prophète le scribe scrupuleux et précis de sa propre révélation.<sup>14</sup> Cependant le corpus manichéen, dont la majeure partie a été très tôt détruite, n'est pas en mesure d'apporter actuellement beaucoup de précisions supplémentaires sur la question. En revanche, les *Homélies pseudo clémentines*, qui ont sans doute, selon de nombreux spécialistes, été pour Mani lui-même une source d'inspiration sur ces questions,<sup>15</sup> ont permis de conserver des détails qui éclairent des remarques du Coran souvent restées sans écho, faute d'une clé herméneutique adéquate.

La dénonciation des interpolations dues à des erreurs inspirées par les démons aux premiers scribes des Ecritures se trouve en effet exprimée sous la forme la plus explicite dans les *Ecrits pseudo clémentins*. Le milieu judéo chrétien dans lequel ils ont circulé au début semble avoir été l'un des premiers, et peut être le seul à l'époque (deuxième siècle, tout début du troisième), à avoir formulé l'idée, contrairement au manichéisme qui a rejeté presque en bloc l'ensemble des Ecritures canoniques, qu'il était impératif de se

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<sup>14</sup> Il s'agissait là d'une conception très ancienne. André Lemaire donne l'exemple de l'*apilum* du Dieu Shamash, qui, soucieux que Yasim-El, représentant local du roi de Mari, ne gauchisse son discours, refuse de lui communiquer le message du dieu Shamas et exige qu'on lui procure un scribe à qui il puisse le dicter. *Prophètes et rois. Bible et Proche-Orient*, 31. Lectio divina, hors série. Paris : Le Cerf, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Alfarcic, *Les Ecritures manichéennes*, t. II, 178 : « Les *Homélies* et les *Recognitions* qui nous sont arrivées sous le nom de Clément, portent, en dépit des retouches catholiques très nombreuses, des marques évidentes d'une origine ébionite. Elles professent, en divers endroits, un dualisme étroitement apparenté à celui qui avait cours chez les Sabéens en Babylonie, à l'école desquels Mani s'est formé d'abord ». L'auteur renvoie à Kessler, *Mani, Forschungen über die manichäische Religion*, 207–8. Berlin, 1889.

défaire seulement de ce qui, dans l'Ancien Testament, allait à l'encontre de la loi de Jésus. L'abrogation de tous ces passages avait pour but de proposer une solution permettant de concilier totalement les deux lois en élaguant tout ce qui, dans l'ancienne, aurait pu entrer en contradiction avec la nouvelle.

Les *Homélie*s affirment, de plus, rappelons-le, que c'est Jésus qui est venu corriger l'Ancienne loi en la transformant, non seulement au niveau de la pratique légale, mais aussi et surtout en enseignant selon quels principes il convenait de dénoncer une à une les interpolations diaboliques qui se seraient introduites dans les récits concernant les faits et actes des prophètes de l'Ancien testament. Dans une telle optique, rien, dans les Evangiles, ne peut être remis en cause. Il en allait autrement pour les manichéens. En effet, les *Acta Archélaï* rapportent par exemple que Mani affirmait que le passage de l'Evangile de Matthieu dans lequel Jésus dit : « Je ne suis pas venu détruire la Loi, mais l'accomplir » (5, 17) ne pouvait, entre autres, pas être authentique parce que démenti par les faits.<sup>16</sup> Sur ce point précis la démarche coranique est plus proche, dans son principe, de celle de Mani dans la mesure où tout un chacun peut constater qu'il propose l'amendement d'un certain nombre de passages évangéliques.

Pour rappeler de manière succincte cette question, à laquelle nous avons déjà consacré plusieurs publications, il convient d'en récapituler ici les points essentiels :

1—Le Coran, comme les *Homélie*s, propose d'apporter toutes les corrections qui s'imposent aux Ecritures antérieures. La seule différence est que, pour les *Homélie*s, c'est Jésus le prophète inspiré, le *Verus prophetas* qui réalise parfaitement ces corrections en détectant toutes les interpolations introduites dans les Ecritures antérieures, alors que le Coran affirme apporter lui-même ces corrections. Voir *Homélie*s II, 15, 1–5 ; III, 15 ; 49, 2 ; 50, 1–2 ; Coran 2, 105.

2—Le Coran, comme les *Homélie*s, considère que ces interpolations ont été dues à une intervention des démons qui ont induit en tentation les scribes qui avaient mis par écrit les textes sacrés. *Homélie*s II, 38, 1 ; Coran 2, 79 ; 2, 102. Le Coran ajoute toutefois que

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<sup>16</sup> *Acta Archélaï*, 40 ; Alfarcic, *Les Ecritures manichéennes*, t. II, 162.

les prophètes antérieurs à l'Envoyé coranique, en particulier Moïse, ont eux-mêmes été trompés par le démon, dont ils ne s'étaient pas suffisamment protégés, sur des points essentiels pour les croyants, mais qui n'engagent en rien leur culpabilité, ni même leur responsabilité (Coran 2, 104 ; 4, 46 ; 16, 98–100 ; 22–52).<sup>17</sup>

3—Le Coran, à l'instar des *Homélie*s, considère cet état de fait comme une épreuve agréée par Dieu, qui laisse un délai au démon pour tester les humains (*Homélie*s II, 38, 1 ; Coran 2, 102 ; 38, 79 ; 3, 6–7) et, pour ce qui est relatif au délai, mais uniquement dans le cadre d'une tentation d'ordre général : *Institutions Divines* II, XVII, 1.

4—Le Coran, comme les *Homélie*s, estime que les textes antérieurs doivent être conservés tels quels pour que les humains puissent exercer leur liberté jusqu'à la fin des temps (*Homélie*s II, 38, 1 et II, 51, 1 ; Coran 3, 6–7 et 4, 136) : « Croyez en Dieu et dans son envoyé, ainsi que dans le Livre qu'il a fait descendre sur son Envoyé et le Livre qu'il a fait descendre auparavant ».

5—Le Coran, comme les *Homélie*s, propose des rectifications aux textes antérieurs fondées sur des critères essentiellement éthiques : pureté d'intention, bonté, générosité, détachement de toute passion, rejet de la violence et de l'usage de la contrainte. Tout passage des Ecritures antérieures qui tendrait à mettre en doute les décisions divines et les comportements des prophètes et des justes par rapport à ces critères doit être, soit rejeté en bloc, soit amendé de manière très claire.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Voir à ce sujet nos articles : « L'abrogation (*nâsikb* et *mansûkb*) dans le Coran à la lumière d'une lecture interculturelle et intertextuelle ». *Al-Mawâqif*, numéro spécial, actes du premier colloque international sur « Le phénomène religieux, nouvelles lectures des sciences sociales et humaines », Mascara les 14–15 et 16 avril 2008, Publication du Centre Universitaire Mustapha Stanbouli, Mascara, 2008, p. 6–19 et « Ibn Kammûna (m. 1284) une pensée de l'harmonie entre soi et non-soi » dans Balutet, Nicolas, Paloma Otaola, et Delphine Tempère, coord. *Contrabandista entre mundos fronterizos, hommage au Professeur Hugues Didier*, 33–79, 74–75. Collection terres hispaniques. Paris : éditions Publibook, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Il s'agit d'une règle simple : « Tout ce qui est dit ou écrit contre Dieu est faux » (*Homélie*s, II, 40, 1). Le Coran n'explique pas cette règle, mais la met constamment en application.



6—Enfin, toute attitude qui tendrait à placer une barrière entre la Loi de Moïse et la Loi de Jésus, que le croyant doit considérer comme une, est nettement dénoncée dans les deux corpus. Il s'agit de la doctrine centrale du judéo christianisme, à savoir le fait que Moïse et Jésus transmettent au fond une même Loi (*Nomos*) éternelle<sup>19</sup> (Homélie VIII, 5–7) (Coran 2, 284 : « Nous ne faisons pas de différence entre ses prophètes »).

Nous avons montré par ailleurs que le premier exemple de correction de passages bibliques donné par le Coran est relatif à deux extraits concernant Salomon. Ils figurent au verset 2, 102, et font office d'introduction à la définition de l'abrogation qui figure au verset 2, 106. Il s'agit en premier lieu d'abroger le contenu de (1 Rois 10, 26) : « Salomon rassembla des chars et des chevaux ; il eut mille quatre cents chars et douze mille chevaux et les cantonna dans les villes des chars et près du roi à Jérusalem. Le roi fit que l'argent à Jérusalem était aussi commun que les cailloux. Un char était livré d'Egypte pour six cents sicles d'argent », qui fait de Salomon un Roi n'ayant pas respecté toute la Loi divine. Le Coran l'abroge à la Sourate 38 « (31) Quant un soir on lui présenta les nobles cavales, (32) il dit : « J'ai préféré l'amour de ce bien à la mention de mon Seigneur, jusqu'à ce que ces chevaux aient disparu derrière le voile. (33) Ramenez-les moi ». Il se mit alors à leur trancher les jarrets et le cou. (34) Oui nous avons éprouvé Salomon en plaçant un corps sur son trône ; mais il se repentit ensuite ». C'est cette abrogation qui est rappelée en 2, 102 : « Ils (Les détenteurs des Ecritures) ont approuvé ce que les démons leur racontaient touchant le règne (*mulk*, qui signifie aussi les possessions, l'attitude vis-à-vis de celles-ci conditionnant la réputation du règne, en raison de la possibilité, dans certains cas, de la mise en œuvre d'une polysémie simultanée dans le Coran<sup>20</sup>) de Salomon ».

<sup>19</sup> Pour l'éternité de cette loi, voir *Homélie* III, 51, 3 ; VIII, 10, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Un autre exemple est celui du mot *kufr*, qui signifie en même temps « recouvrir », par exemple en 2, 102 qui précise que Salomon n'a pas recouvert sa foi en Dieu par des actes d'incroyance alors que les démons ont recouvert, dans le texte de la Bible, la vérité le concernant par une information erronée. L'image du recouvrement de la vérité par l'erreur va être développée ici dans le passage relatif à l'épreuve subie par la reine de

En second lieu, le Coran nie le comportement qui lui est attribué en raison de sa possession de multiples épouses étrangères évoqué en (1 Rois, 11, 4) : « Quand Salomon fut vieux, ses femmes détournèrent son cœur vers d'autres dieux et son cœur ne fut plus tout entier à Yahvé, son Dieu, comme avait été celui de son père David. Salomon suivit Astarté la divinité des Sidoniens et Milkom, l'abomination des Ammonites. Il fit ce qui déplait à Yahvé et il ne lui obéit pas parfaitement comme son père David. C'est alors que Salomon construisit un sanctuaire à Kemosh, l'abomination de Moah sur la montagne à l'Orient de Jérusalem et à Milkom, l'abomination des Ammonites. Il en fit autant pour toutes ses femmes étrangères qui offraient de l'encens et des sacrifices à leurs dieux » au moyen de la déclaration suivante : « Salomon ne fut pas mécréant, mais les démons sont mécréants ». On peut trouver là des échos, non seulement de la déclaration des *Homélie*s : (II, 52, 1–3) « C'est avec raison qu'allant au devant des sentiments impies, je ne crois rien de ce qui est contraire à Dieu ou aux justes qui sont mentionnés dans la Loi (c'est-à-dire la révélation faite à Moïse) : J'en suis persuadé, Adam ne commettait pas de transgression, lui qui fut conçu par les mains de Dieu, Noé ne s'enivrait pas, lui qui a été trouvé l'homme le plus juste du monde entier (...) Moïse n'était pas un meurtrier et ce n'est pas auprès d'un prêtre des idoles qu'il apprenait à juger, lui qui a été le prophète de la Loi de Dieu pour le monde entier (...),<sup>21</sup> mais aussi de la réflexion rabbinique sur la question, qui mettait en évidence le fait que Salomon n'aurait pas dû enfreindre la Loi du Roi : « Quand Salomon, au comble de la richesse et de la prospérité, devint oublieux de son Dieu et, à l'encontre des injonctions de la Torah faites aux rois, multiplia les épouses, fut obsédé par le désir de posséder de nombreux chevaux et beaucoup d'or, le livre du *Dentéronome* se présenta devant Dieu et dit : « Seigneur du monde, Salomon veut m'ôter un *yod*, car tu as

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Sabâ' qui, en raison de sa propre erreur religieuse, voit le sol du palais de Salomon recouvert par de l'eau.

<sup>21</sup> *Homélie*s pseudo clémentines, *Ecrits apocryphes chrétiens* II, 1276. Les *Reconnaissances* ont, à ce sujet, une position différente puisqu'elles ne font aucune allusion à la théorie sur l'existence de faux passages dans l'Écriture. *Introduction au Roman pseudo clémentin*, *Ecrits apocryphes chrétiens*, II, 1185.

écrit : « le roi ne multipliera pas les chevaux pour lui-même, de même qu'il ne multipliera pas les femmes et qu'il ne multipliera pas ses possessions d'argent et d'or » (*Deutéronome* 17, 16); mais Salomon a acquis de nombreux chevaux, de nombreuses femmes et énormément d'argent et d'or. Alors Dieu dit : « Sur ta vie, Salomon et cent autres de son espèce seront anéantis avant qu'une seule de tes lettres soit effacée. »<sup>22</sup>

L'attention particulière manifestée à l'égard de ce personnage de l'histoire sacrée, prophète selon le Coran, cité comme exemple par excellence de ce que qu'il entend rectifier dans sa lecture du texte biblique, nous a incitée à nous pencher plus précisément sur le rôle qui lui est attribué par ailleurs. C'est ainsi que nous avons pu identifier le troisième seuil herméneutique que nous allons exposer ici pour la première fois,—ce qui explique le volume important de la seconde partie de cette contribution—à savoir la Torah elle-même, dans le cadre particulier d'une lecture tannaïtique : celle de Rabbi 'Aqiba et de son Ecole, de tendance à la fois allégorique et mystique.

Pour en revenir aux Ecrits pseudo clémentins, appellation qui englobe aussi bien les *Homélies* que les *Reconnaissances pseudo clémentines*, sollicitées toutes deux par le Coran, il ne faut pas perdre de vue qu'ils se présentent comme seuils herméneutiques de nombreuses questions, en sus de celle de l'abrogation. Nous nous limiterons cependant ici à l'exposé de celle qui évoque un thème d'une importance capitale pour l'histoire sacrée en général et pour le christianisme en particulier : le symbole de l'arbre de vie assimilé à l'olivier, que le Coran présente dans son lien étroit au Mont Sinai.

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<sup>22</sup> Ginzberg, *Les légendes des juifs*, t. 5, *Josué, les Juges, Samuel et Saül, David, Salomon*, trad. Gabrielle Sed-Rajna. Collection Patrimoines Judaïsme. Paris : Le Cerf, 2004, pp. 119–20 et 246–47 note 81, qui renvoie à *Yerushalmi Sanhedrin (Talmud de Jérusalem, traité Sanhédrin, IV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, 2, 20c ; *WR* 19, 2 *SbR* (Cantique Rabba ou Shir ha-Shirim Rabba, VI<sup>e</sup> siècle), 6 ; *Tan Wa-Era* (Midrash Tanhuma, ed. S. Buber, Vilna 1885, réimp. Jérusalem, 1964, édition critique), 5 ; *Tan B.* II, 18 ; *Aggadat Bereshit* (daté communément du X<sup>e</sup> siècle), 75, 146.

### Le figuier et l'olivier au pays où règne la sécurité

Dans la mesure où l'on peut considérer à présent comme établi que les écrits pseudo clémentins étaient connus dans le milieu d'émergence du Coran, il convient de se demander en quels lieux proches de l'Arabie ils ont pu être connus vers la fin du VI<sup>e</sup> et au début du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Selon Pierre Geoltrain, les deux versions du roman pseudo clémentin ont assez largement circulé dans les milieux chrétiens orientaux à partir du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle, bien que les *Reconnaissances* aient bénéficié d'une tradition manuscrite plus importante. Ce spécialiste propose deux raisons essentielles à ce phénomène : l'intérêt des chrétiens pour la personnalité de Clément, évêque de Rome, présenté comme étant leur auteur, et pour les informations sur la vie communautaire (catéchèse, baptême etc...) à l'époque apostolique apportées par ces textes.<sup>23</sup>

Ils devaient donc être transmis, même discrètement ou sous le manteau, dans des milieux religieux chrétiens lettrés et, plus particulièrement, monastiques, lieux par excellence de la traduction et de la copie des manuscrits. Or, l'une des bibliothèques les plus connues à l'époque et dans la région n'est autre que celle du monastère Sainte Catherine du Sinaï parmi les manuscrits de laquelle on a trouvé un exemplaire du Nouveau Testament datant du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle, le Codex Sinaiticus.<sup>24</sup> Certes, pour l'instant, les spécialistes n'ont pu repérer, dans la masse considérable des documents qu'elle contient, aucun autre manuscrit aussi ancien et certains estiment actuellement que l'on a peu de chances d'en trouver, les plus vieux textes recensés à ce jour remontant au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle.<sup>25</sup> Néanmoins, outre le fait que le dernier mot sur la

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<sup>23</sup> *Ecrits apocryphes chrétiens* II, op. cit., p. 1187.

<sup>24</sup> Mouton, J.-M., et Popescu-Belis A. « La fondation du monastère Sainte-Catherine du Sinaï selon deux documents de sa bibliothèque : codex *Arabe 692* et rouleau *Arabe 955* ». *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 2 (2005) : 141–206, p. 142.

<sup>25</sup> Il s'agit, entre autres de l'opinion de Gehin, Pierre. « La bibliothèque de Sainte Catherine du Sinaï : Fonds ancien et nouvelles découvertes ». Dans Valbelle, D., et C. Bonnet, eds. *Le Sinaï durant l'Antiquité et le Moyen Âge 4000 ans d'histoire pour un désert*, 157–64. Paris, 1998, cité dans « La

question est encore loin d'avoir été dit<sup>26</sup> il faut noter que cette bibliothèque du Sināï est la seule qui abrite un document en langue arabe directement apparenté au corpus pseudo clémentin. Il s'agit d'un épitomé des *Reconnaisances pseudo clémentines* qui a été soigneusement étudié par Margaret Dunlop. Voici ce qu'elle en dit : « Il appartient à un ensemble de manuscrits arabes et syriaques portant le n° 508<sup>27</sup> et contenant onze autres textes dont, en particulier, un ouvrage attribué à Clément. Il est incontestablement beaucoup plus ancien que celui du British Museum, mais il n'a pas pu être daté, car son colophon a été perdu. Elle émet néanmoins à son sujet l'hypothèse suivante : « L'écriture du texte telle qu'elle apparaît sur le Feuillet de garde est comparable à celle que l'on trouve sur la plaquette XX, 2<sup>ème</sup> partie, des facsimilés des anciens manuscrits orientaux de la Société Paléographique, dont la date de l'original est 885 de l'ère chrétienne ». <sup>28</sup> L'existence de ce texte prouve en tout

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fondation du monastère Sainte-Catherine du Sināï selon deux documents de sa bibliothèque : codex *Arabe 692* et rouleau *Arabe 955* », 143, note 3.

<sup>26</sup> Mouton et Popescu-Belis notent en effet qu'il « n'est pas exclu que des copies ou des traductions de documents remontant à l'époque de la fondation se trouvent parmi les manuscrits catalogués, dès lors que la valeur historiographique de nombreux manuscrits, surtout grecs, est encore à évaluer. En outre, il n'est pas exclu que des chroniques ou archives plus systématiques du monastère soient conservées en dehors de la bibliothèque ». Mouton et Popescu-Belis, « La fondation du monastère Sainte-Catherine ... », 143–44.

<sup>27</sup> Le codex consiste en 156 feuillets, tous en papier, à l'exception de cinq, qui sont en *vellum*, et il mesure 20x15 centimètres. La traduction anglaise occupe dans *Studia Sinaitica* V les pages 16–26 pour le manuscrit du Sināï et 27–43 pour le manuscrit du British Museum; et l'édition du texte arabe, des pages 14–27 pour le manuscrit du Sināï et 30–57 pour le manuscrit du British Museum.

<sup>28</sup> *Apocrypha Arabica*. *Studia Sinaitica*, n° VIII. London : C. J. Clay and Sons, 1901, Introduction. Ce texte a été réimprimé en 2007 aux USA, par Kessinger publisher. Dans son introduction à l'édition des *Anaphora Pilati*, Margaret. Dunlop précise ne pas savoir lequel des deux manuscrits est le plus ancien, le n° 445, daté de 799 ou le n° 508. Voir l'Introduction de *Studia Sinaitica* V, p. XIV.

cas qu'un moine de Sainte Catherine s'est intéressé, aux alentours du IX<sup>e</sup> s., à ce texte, au point qu'il a tenu à en réaliser l'épitomé dans lequel on décèle un net souci de retour aux sources évangéliques, c'est à dire à une forme « d'orthodoxie » chrétienne. Même si l'original dont il s'est servi ne figure pas ou plus dans la bibliothèque du monastère, l'existence même de ce résumé permet de supposer qu'il a pu s'y trouver auparavant, au moins durant un certain temps. On ne peut pas, bien entendu, en conclure que les Ecrits pseudo clémentins n'ont circulé que dans ce lieu. Au contraire, il est certain que l'on devait les trouver antérieurement dans de nombreuses bibliothèques dont il n'est rien resté eu égard aux guerres et aux mouvements de population qui ont affecté la péninsule arabique depuis le début du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle et se sont poursuivis lors de l'expansion musulmane. L'intérêt de la bibliothèque du Sinaï, la seule qui ait survécu en grande partie à toutes les vicissitudes du temps, est d'apporter un témoignage concret de la conservation et de la circulation de ces textes.

S'ajoutant à cet aspect historique de la question, trois passages coraniques établissent à des niveaux différents des relations étroites entre le Sinaï et deux thèmes spécifiques du corpus pseudo clémentin. Il s'agit, d'une part, du vœu, dans lequel entre en jeu l'olivier comme symbole de paix, que se trouvent effacées les barrières et des oppositions qui séparent le judaïsme et le christianisme, d'autre part de l'olivier comme producteur d'une huile destinée à l'onction des rois, mais aussi à l'illumination du temple en faisant office de médiation entre le ciel et la terre. Les trois versets en question sont en effet tous liés à l'olivier et à ses diverses significations.

Le premier est présenté sous la forme du serment qui figure au début de la sourate 95 : « Par le figuier et l'olivier, par le mont Sinaï (Sinîn : littéralement : le mont des arbres) par cette contrée (où règne) la sécurité ».

Les commentateurs ont souvent pensé qu'il s'agissait là d'un serment sur trois monts : le Sinaï, le Mont des oliviers et un certain « Mont du figuier » qui a reçu plusieurs identifications différentes sans qu'aucun consensus n'ait pu se dessiner à son sujet.<sup>29</sup> Or, une

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<sup>29</sup> Voir Heidi Toelle, article « Olivier » dans *Dictionnaire du Coran*, 614.

telle hypothèse semble difficilement admissible dans la mesure où le texte sépare nettement deux parties de serment : (1) : (*wa (al-tîn wa-ṣ-ṣaytûn)*) (2) : *wa (tawr Sînîn)* que leur présentation formelle différencie nettement. Figuier et olivier sont en effet regroupés dans la première partie de la formule en tant que termes isolés, désignant deux objets appartenant à une même catégorie, les arbres. Le Sinaï (Sînîn), apparaît comme différent du fait qu'il est caractérisé par un terme qui le qualifie : il s'agit d'un mont (*tawr*), mot qui, dans la majorité des autres occurrences coraniques, suffit d'ailleurs pour le désigner. Il y est simplement appelé *al-tawr*, le Mont, étant en fait le seul mont cité dans le Coran.<sup>30</sup> Par contraste, les deux autres termes relèvent d'une catégorie différente. S'il en avait été autrement, on aurait trouvé en effet : *wa-s-Sînîn* et non pas *wa-tawr Sînîn*, qui précise sa qualité de mont. Le serment se rapporte donc, apparemment sans ambiguïté, aux deux arbres : le figuier et l'olivier. En revanche, il paraît vraisemblable, dans la mesure où le Sinaï évoque un contexte scripturaire, qu'il s'agisse d'arbres ayant valeur symbolique ou allégorique, comme c'est le cas dans de nombreux passages bibliques. Dans une telle perspective, leur signification laisse peu de place au doute. En effet, le mont Sinaï est par excellence un haut lieu commun aux juifs et aux chrétiens et le figuier représente précisément, dans la Bible, la foi des juifs, comme on le trouve précisé, entre autres, dans Osée 9, 10 : « J'ai vu vos pères comme les premiers fruits d'un figuier »,<sup>31</sup> symbole repris

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<sup>30</sup> Versets 52, 1 ; 28, 29 et 46 ; 20, 80 ; 19, 52 ; 7, 143 et 171 ; 4, 154 ; 2, 63 et 93.

<sup>31</sup> Voir également à ce sujet : Jérémie 4.1 « L'Éternel me fit voir deux paniers de figes déposés devant le temple, ... L'un des paniers contenait de très bonnes figes, comme les figes de première récolte, et l'autre panier de très mauvaises figes, qu'on ne pouvait manger à cause de leur mauvaise qualité » et : « La parole de l'Éternel me fut adressée en ces mots : Ainsi parle l'Éternel, le Dieu d'Israël : comme tu distingues ces bonnes figes, ainsi je distinguerai, pour leur être favorable, les captifs de Juda, que j'ai envoyés de ce lieu dans le pays des Chaldéens. Je les regarderai d'un œil favorable, et je les ramènerai dans ce pays ; je les établirai et ne les détruirai plus, je les planterai et ne les arracherai plus ». Jérémie 4.4 à 6.

par Jésus selon les Evangiles.<sup>32</sup> Quant à l'olivier, il est étroitement lié à la personne de Jésus lui-même, non seulement par le biais de sa relation au mont des Oliviers dans le cadre évangélique, mais également dans des spéculations théologiques plus tardives rattachées au baptême et à l'onction d'huile qui l'accompagnait. Ainsi, Cyrille de Jérusalem (évêque de cette région de 350 à 386), l'identifie à cet arbre par les paroles qu'il adresse aux fidèles nouvellement baptisés : *Vous avez été oints d'huile exorcisée et ainsi vous avez participé aux fruits de l'olivier fécond qui est Jésus-Christ*. Il n'y a donc rien de particulièrement étonnant à ce que le Sinaï se trouve cité dans la sourate 95, conjointement à une évocation des deux groupes. Concernant les juifs, le Coran se fait largement l'écho de leur relation au Sinaï en rappelant successivement les rendez-vous donnés par Dieu à Moïse sur le Mont (20, 80), sa destruction devant la face de Dieu que Moïse n'a pu voir (7, 143 ; 171), enfin, en renvoyant à un passage talmudique, la manière dont Dieu l'utilise, en le brandissant comme un tonneau au-dessus de leurs têtes, pour impressionner les hébreux qui hésitaient à accepter le fardeau de la Loi (4, 154 ; 2, 63 ; 93).<sup>33</sup> Concernant les chrétiens, en sus de leur adoption de l'Ancien Testament et des références à l'olivier citées plus haut, il convient de rappeler la présence au Mont Moïse, emplacement traditionnellement reconnu comme étant le Sinaï,<sup>34</sup> de moines orthodoxes depuis le IV<sup>e</sup> siècle et surtout, depuis 560, celle du monastère fortifié au pied du Mont, un

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<sup>32</sup> Voir par exemple la parabole du figuier stérile auquel on laisse un délai pour porter du fruit : Lc. 13, 6–9 et celle selon laquelle le figuier en fleurs annonce la fin des temps : Lc. 21, 29–33 (Voir également Mt. 21, 18–22 ; 24, 32 et Mc. 11, 12 ; 13, 28–32 ; 11, 20–25).

<sup>33</sup> Talmud *Chabbat*, 88. Il convient de noter que dans le Coran Dieu étend cette menace à la transgression de tous les commandements transmis par Moïse et non pas au seul sabbat, comme dans le Talmud.

<sup>34</sup> Les discussions, voire même les polémiques entre spécialistes ne manquent pas en ce qui concerne la situation du Mont Sinaï. Néanmoins l'essentiel est ici que les indications données par le Coran laissent entendre qu'il s'agit pour lui du mont Moïse. Pour de plus amples informations à ce sujet voir : Koenig, Jean. « Pourquoi le Horeb après le Sinaï ? » *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 221 n°1 (2004) : 63–82.



bâtiment construit par Justinien pour protéger et pour durer, un lieu voué à la sécurité et à la paix, celui-là même que le visiteur peut encore contempler de nos jours. L'expression « pays de paix » utilisée par le Coran semble d'autant plus justifiée que des documents anciens font état d'une construction fortifiée, élaborée par Justinien pour protéger non seulement les édifices religieux, chapelle de la Vierge et monastère, mais aussi tous les villages de Palestine avoisinants.<sup>35</sup>

Le serment de la sourate 95, 1–3 semble donc se donner pour fonction de célébrer cette situation de partage du mont par les deux groupes, le figuier et l'olivier étant évoqués avec le Sinaï, lieu sacré pour les juifs autant que pour les chrétiens, où doivent par excellence régner la paix et la sécurité figurées par la présence du monastère, protégé par ses murs autant que par ses gardiens<sup>36</sup>. La teneur du serment se précise alors : sur le mont Sinaï il y a place pour les deux communautés que représentent le figuier et l'olivier et aucune d'elle n'a de titre à évincer l'autre, la révélation divine n'appartenant pas à un seul et sa parole étant destinée à tous les croyants. C'est ici qu'intervient le seuil herméneutique des textes pseudo clémentins qui ne cessent d'affirmer que celui qui accepte la loi de Moïse doit aussi accepter la loi de Jésus et réciproquement, car la loi, commune à Moïse et à Jésus, est offerte à tous ceux qui le

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<sup>35</sup> « Procope sépare la construction d'une église dédiée à la Vierge (*Theotokos*) de l'édification d'un ouvrage fortifié, dont le rôle défensif est étendu par lui à l'ensemble des « villages de Palestine » et non aux seuls moines comme dans nos deux documents. Selon Procope : « Au pied de la montagne, cet empereur (Justinien) fit construire une forteresse redoutable et y établit une importante garnison de soldats, pour que les barbares Saracènes ne puissent pas faire depuis cette région, qui est, comme je l'ai dit, inhabitée, des incursions imprévisibles vers les villages de Palestine ». Procope de Césarée, *Histoire secrète*, trad. P. Maraval. Paris, 1990. XIII, I, p. 78 cité par Mouton et Popescu-Belis, « La fondation du monastère Sainte-Catherine ... », 154.

<sup>36</sup> Voir à ce sujet : Popescu-Belis, A. « Légende des origines, origines d'une légende : les Gabaliya du mont Sinaï ». Dans Mouton, J.-M., éd. *Le Sinaï : de la conquête arabe à nos jours*, 107–46. Cahiers des Annales Islamologiques, 21. Le Caire : IFAO, 2001.

veulent, y compris les païens.<sup>37</sup> Le figuier et l'olivier se trouvent donc rattachés au mont Sinäï, désigné en l'occurrence par le terme *Sînîn*, alors que dans l'unique autre occurrence coranique où il est cité par son nom, il est appelé *Sînâ'*. Les commentateurs semblent ne pas avoir accordé une grande importance à cette différence. Pourtant, comme nous l'avons montré à plusieurs reprises, l'une des règles de composition du Coran est l'absence totale de synonymie.<sup>38</sup> Dans ce cas, *Sînîn*, même s'il désigne de toute évidence le Sinäï, a ici une raison d'être qui consiste à l'évoquer sous un angle particulier et en fonction d'une représentation spécifique. Or, la seule explication que proposent les anciens philologues est celle d'une annexion, *sînîn* étant le pluriel de *sînîniyya* qui désigne un arbre dont l'espèce n'est pas précisée. Voici ce qu'ils en disent : *al-sînîniyya* est un arbre selon Abû Hanîfa, qui rapporte cela d'al-Ahfash. Son pluriel est *sînîn*. Il a ajouté : Al-Ahfash a prétendu que l'expression *tanr sînîn* est une annexion,<sup>39</sup> c'est-à-dire en fait qu'il faut la comprendre comme : « Mont des arbres ». Cette lecture, non seulement fait écho au figuier et à l'olivier, mais rappelle aussi l'étymologie hébraïque de Sinäï : *sêneh*, le buisson, dont elle pourrait avoir été dès l'origine une transcription en arabe. De plus, *Sînîn* se trouve placé en parallèle avec *amîn*, de sorte que l'accent se trouve clairement mis sur le fait qu'il s'agit d'évoquer un environnement caractérisé par la sécurité et la quiétude. La signification qui en ressort semble donc être la suivante : « *Par le figuier et l'olivier, par le*

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<sup>37</sup> *Homélies*, VIII, 5, 3 : « Pour ceux des hébreux, comme pour ceux des gentils qui ont reçu l'appel, la foi accordée aux Maîtres de vérité vient de Dieu (...) et le salaire revient en toute justice à ceux qui font le bien ».

<sup>38</sup> Il s'agit d'une constatation qui s'est imposée à nous, suite à une longue fréquentation du texte. Elle correspond à une conception tacitement admise par de nombreux exégètes, mais qui n'a été théorisée qu'assez tardivement pour la première fois par al-Hakîm al-Tirmidhî qui, dans son *Kitâb al-furûq*, l'a généralisée, en partant d'un point de vue religieux, à la langue arabe tout entière. Voir : *Al-Hakîm al-Tirmidhî, Le Livre des nuances ou : de l'impossibilité de la synonymie*. Traduction commentée, précédée d'une étude des aspects historiques, thématiques et linguistiques du texte par Geneviève Gobillot. Paris : Geuthner, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> *Lisân al-'arab*, entrée *sînîniyya*.

*mont Sinaï* (litt. : « mont des arbres ou, encore plus précisément : « Mont les arbres »), *par ce lieu où règne la sécurité* » au sens où le Sinaï est le lieu par excellence qui évoque la paix entre les communautés représentées par les deux arbres, le pluriel pouvant, de plus, rappeler que cette paix concerne aussi les autres monothéismes.

Le serment tout entier s'adresserait donc en réalité à des représentations : le figuier évoque les Fils d'Israël, l'olivier ceux qui suivent la voie de Jésus et le Sinaï (mont des arbres), le lieu qui les réunit figurant la paix qui doit régner d'abord entre les deux communautés en question, puis de manière élargie, à toutes celles qui se réclament d'une révélation céleste. Quant à ce lieu rempli de quiétude et de sécurité (*hadhâ-l-balad al-amîn*), il est susceptible d'évoquer aussi le monastère, double symbole de cet état de paix et de sérénité, puisque d'une part telle est la vocation de la vie monastique et que d'autre part il a été construit pour garantir par une sécurité temporelle la sérénité spirituelle de ses habitants.

Dans le deuxième verset, le Coran reprend un autre type d'association de l'olivier au Sinaï, à savoir la présence concrète de cet arbre au pied du Mont -d'ailleurs toujours d'actualité puisque de nombreux oliviers poussent aujourd'hui encore dans l'enceinte même du monastère- dans le verset : (23, 20) que nous lisons ainsi : « Et (nous avons fait pousser) un arbre qui sort du mont Sinaï, qui produit l'huile et une onction pour les rois (*shajara takhruju min tawr Sînâ' tanbutu bi-d-dubn wa-sibghin lil-akilîn* ». Comme dans le cas du mont et des arbres, ce verset doit être lu par référence à son contexte immédiat, en l'occurrence le verset 19, avec lequel il constitue un faux parallélisme. En effet, celui-ci traite des palmiers et des vignes que Dieu a fait pousser sur la terre « et dont vous mangez les nombreux fruits « *fihâ favâkib kathîra minhâ ta'kulûn* ». Cette forme conjuguée de la racine *akala* est reprise telle quelle au verset 21 où elle évoque l'acte de manger de la chair de certains animaux, de sorte que le verset de l'olivier s'en trouve encadré. Le lecteur est donc doublement invité à prêter attention au contraste qu'elle constitue avec la forme nominale *akilîn* dans un texte dont toute synonymie est exclue, comme on vient de le rappeler. La seule possibilité dans le cas présent est donc que *akilîn* désigne non pas « ceux qui mangent » puisqu'ils sont expressément désignés par deux fois, avant et après, d'une manière différente, mais « les rois », deuxième signification possible du terme. Un autre détail particulièrement significatif incite à se tourner vers ce sens, il

s'agit de l'utilisation pour désigner l'onction de la racine *ḡ. b. ḡb.* qui, dans un autre passage du Coran, représente, sous la forme *ṣibgha* le baptême spirituel conféré par Dieu à tout homme à sa naissance.<sup>40</sup> Le rapprochement s'impose d'autant plus qu'il s'agit là des deux seules occurrences de cette racine dans le texte coranique. De surcroît, il est clairement spécifié dans la Bible que les rois d'Israël étaient oints exclusivement avec de l'huile d'olive, à la différence des sacrificateurs qui l'étaient par une composition dont elle ne constituait que l'un des éléments.

Cette onction des rois, évoquée en 1 Samuel 10, 1 ; 16, 1 ; 13, 1 et 1 Rois 1, 39 ; 2 Rois 9, 1–6 était appelée sainte parce qu'elle se trouvait employée au nom de Dieu (Ps 89, 21). Le premier roi-oint fût Saül, que Dieu rejeta ensuite en raison de sa désobéissance. Pour le remplacer, le Seigneur envoya son prophète Samuel oindre David, l'homme qui était selon le cœur de Dieu. Dans les deux cas, la manifestation de l'Esprit de Dieu accompagna l'onction d'huile. Concernant Saül, selon 1 Samuel 10:1 Samuel prit une fiole d'huile, qu'il répandit sur la tête de Saül. Il le baisa, et dit: L'Éternel ne t'a-t-il pas oint pour que tu sois le chef de son héritage? Et en 10, 6–7 : « L'esprit de l'Éternel te saisira, tu prophétiseras avec eux, et tu seras changé en un autre homme. Lorsque ces signes auront eu pour toi leur accomplissement, fais ce que tu trouveras à faire, car Dieu est avec toi ». Selon 10, 9–10, aussitôt que Saül eut tourné le dos pour se séparer de Samuel, Dieu lui donna un autre cœur ; et tous ces signes s'accomplirent le même jour. Lorsqu'ils arrivèrent à Guibea, voici, une troupe de prophètes vint à sa rencontre. L'esprit de Dieu le saisit, et il prophétisa au milieu d'eux. Concernant David, selon 1 Samuel 16:13 Samuel prit la corne d'huile, et oignit David au milieu de ses frères. L'esprit de l'Éternel saisit David, à partir de ce jour et dans la suite. Samuel se leva, et s'en alla à Rama. Par la suite certains rois d'Israël continuèrent d'être oints, mais plusieurs d'entre eux n'observèrent pas la conduite devant résulter en principe de cette

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<sup>40</sup> Voir à ce sujet : Gobillot, G. « Baptême, baptistes ». Dans *Dictionnaire du Coran*, 111–13, et *La conception originelle (fiṭra), ses interprétations et fonctions chez les penseurs musulmans*. Cahiers des Etudes Islamologiques de l'I.F.A.O., n° 18. Le Caire, 2000, chapitre 7 (*fiṭra* et *ṣibgha*, pureté, purification et marque d'appartenance religieuse), pp. 71–87.

investiture. David, malgré ses faiblesses, demeura fidèle à l'esprit de l'onction. Salomon, quant à lui, eut, selon la Bible, un comportement très différent de celui de son père, ce que, précisément, le Coran conteste et abroge, comme on l'a vu plus haut.

On peut retenir de ce qui précède que, dans certains cas, l'onction du roi par l'huile de l'olivier allait de pair avec l'onction d'ordre purement spirituel conférée par Dieu aux prophètes,<sup>41</sup> comme si une certaine relation s'était trouvée établie, par l'intermédiaire de cette huile entre le ciel et la terre. Mais en réalité, dans tous les cas l'Esprit de Dieu a reposé sur celui qui était oint. Dans le cas contraire, l'onction d'huile n'aurait été qu'un acte liturgique traditionnel dénué de signification spirituelle.

C'est précisément à cet aspect du processus de l'onction que les *Reconnaisances pseudo clémentines* consacrent un chapitre (I, 45–48), rappelant que l'oint par excellence n'est autre que le Messie, le Christ Jésus. On en retiendra les points suivants :

1—« Le Christ est appelé ainsi en vertu d'un rite religieux spécial. En effet, de même que certains noms sont communs aux rois, comme Arsace chez les Perses, César chez les Romains, Pharaon chez les Egyptiens, de même chez les juifs, le nom commun qu'on donne aux rois est Christ.<sup>42</sup> La raison de cette

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<sup>41</sup> Elle n'est pas générale. Nous lisons que le prophète Élie a, sur l'ordre de Dieu, oint son serviteur Élisée pour lui succéder. Or, Élie s'est servi de son manteau pour revêtir Élisée d'une manière symbolique, figurant le revêtement du Saint-Esprit qui devait se réaliser lors de l'enlèvement du prophète : « Élisée releva le manteau qu'Élie avait laissé tomber. Puis il retourna, et s'arrêta au bord du Jourdain; il prit le manteau qu'Élie avait laissé tomber, et il en frappa les eaux, et dit: Où est l'Éternel, le Dieu d'Élie? Lui aussi, il frappa les eaux, qui se partagèrent çà et là, et Élisée passa. Les fils des prophètes qui étaient à Jéricho, vis-à-vis, l'ayant vu, dirent: L'esprit d'Élie repose sur Élisée! » 2 Rois 2.13/15 Concernant l'onction des prophètes dans l'Ancien Testament, Élisée semble être une exception. Les prophètes étaient suscités directement par l'Éternel et, leur onction étant uniquement spirituelle, l'Esprit de Dieu reposait sur eux.

<sup>42</sup> Comme l'a constaté Wei Wang, « 2S 7,1–17 en contexte historique, évaluation de la mise en forme et de la transmission du texte dans le débat portant sur la tradition deutéronomiste », Université de Montréal, Faculté de

appellation est que, bien qu'il fut le Fils de Dieu et le commencement de toutes choses, il fut fait homme. C'est pourquoi il est le premier que Dieu oignit de l'huile tirée du bois de l'arbre de vie. Lui-même, conformément au dessein de son père oindra aussi d'une huile semblable tous les hommes pieux quand ils arriveront dans son royaume ».

2—« Dans la vie présente, Aaron, le grand prêtre, reçut le premier l'onction d'un chrême, mélange préparé à l'image de l'huile spirituelle dont nous venons de parler. Il fut prince du peuple et, à l'instar d'un roi, percevait du peuple les prémices et le tribut par tête et, ayant reçu la mission de juger le peuple, il jugeait des choses pures et des choses impures. Et si quelqu'un d'autre avait reçu cette même onction, comme s'il en tirait un pouvoir, il devenait lui aussi roi, prophète, ou grand prêtre. Or, si ce signe de grâce temporelle, composé par les hommes, a eu tant d'influence, il faut comprendre quelle puissance a l'onguent tiré par Dieu de l'arbre de vie ».

3—« Un grand prêtre ou un prophète, ayant reçu l'onction du baume composé, lorsqu'il embrasait l'autel de Dieu, était tenu pour illustre dans le monde entier. Mais après Aaron, qui fut grand prêtre, un autre fut retiré des eaux. Non pas Moïse, mais celui qui, dans les eaux du baptême, par Dieu fut appelé son Fils. Car c'est Jésus qui a éteint, par la grâce du baptême, le feu qu'allumait le grand prêtre pour nos péchés. Depuis le temps où il est apparu, le

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Théologie et de sciences religieuses, Mémoire présenté à la Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales en vue de l'obtention du grade de Maître ès arts (M.A.) Théologie—études bibliques, 2009, p. 14, note 33 : En dehors de quelques passages particuliers, les références à l'onction se situent presque toutes dans le giron de la cour royale de Jérusalem, plus particulièrement de la cour de David et Salomon. Cf. David, R. « Proposition pour une interprétation du messianisme dans l'Ancien Testament ». Dans Idem, éd. *Faut-il attendre le Messie? études sur le messianisme*, 35–56. Montréal : Médiaspaul, 1998. Il suffit de se référer à une concordance biblique: nous y trouvons 39 attestations du mot משיח, dont la majorité désigne le roi. Elles se rencontrent essentiellement dans le livre de Samuel (15 occurrences), où l'onction dispensée par le prophète dans la consécration des premiers rois est désignée sous le nom de Melekh hamashia'h.

chrême a pris fin ; par lequel étaient conférées, soit la dignité de grand prêtre, soit le don de prophétie, soit le titre de roi ».

C'est précisément l'image d'un « recouvrement » de l'huile temporelle, désignée par le terme *dubn*, évoquée au verset 23, 19, par l'huile céleste appelée *zayt* que mentionne le Coran dans les célèbres versets de la sourate al-Nûr (24, 35–36):

« (35) Dieu est la lumière des cieux et de la terre ! Sa lumière est comparable à une niche où se trouve une lampe. La lampe est dans un verre ; le verre est semblable à une étoile brillante. Cette lampe est allumée à un arbre béni : l'olivier qui n'est ni oriental ni occidental et dont l'huile est près d'éclairer sans que le feu la touche. Lumière sur lumière ! Dieu guide vers sa lumière qui veut être guidé. Dieu propose aux hommes des paraboles (amthâl). Dieu connaît toute chose. (36) Cette lampe se trouve dans les bâtiments consacrés (buyût) que Dieu a permis d'élever, où son nom est invoqué, où les hommes célèbrent ses louanges à l'aube et au crépuscule ».

A l'instar des *Reconnaisances*, le Coran veut mettre ici en évidence le « recouvrement » de la substance de l'huile terrestre par celle qui provient directement de Dieu, cette transmutation étant envisagée comme totalement symbolique, ainsi que le précise le Coran lui-même par l'utilisation du terme *mathal*. En effet, si dans les *Reconnaisances*, Saint Pierre exprime le fait qu'avec Jésus la nécessité de l'onction a totalement disparu du monde, tout comme a disparu la nécessité de faire brûler cette huile sur l'autel du temple, puisque Jésus a effacé les péchés des hommes, le Coran fait allusion pour sa part exclusivement à la seconde fonction de cette huile, qui est d'être allumée dans les lieux consacrés. Le texte coranique indique que cette dernière a pour fonction de symboliser la présence de l'huile divine tiré de l'arbre béni, l'olivier, équivalent de l'arbre de vie des *Reconnaisances*, comme l'a compris al-Hakîm al-Tirmidhî qui présente l'olivier comme un autre nom donné à l'arbre de Tûba, l'arbre de vie qui est au Paradis.<sup>43</sup> L'huile de l'arbre

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<sup>43</sup> « En ce qui concerne l'olivier, il a pris son origine et son germe dans l'arbre de Tûbâ qui est au Paradis. Dieu l'a offert à Adam le jour où il s'est repenti devant lui et il le lui a donné comme viatique. Il lui a alors attribué

terrestre doit être considérée comme presque totalement effacée par la présence réelle de ce qu'elle symbolise, à savoir la lumière divine : *nûr 'âlâ nûr*, une lumière éternelle et suprême qui éclipse par son éclat unique la lumière terrestre des lampes rituelles. C'est pourquoi il est précisé que ce sont la foi et l'agrément divin qui permettent la présence de cette lumière dans les temples et non pas la seule médiation des huiles consacrées.<sup>44</sup>

Le Coran ajoute enfin que cette lumière divine, qui guide celui qui veut être guidé, une fois de plus, n'exclut personne. C'est pourquoi elle est présentée comme provenant de l'olivier béni qui échappe à toute localisation matérielle et n'est ni oriental ni occidental au sens où le Coran précise ailleurs que Dieu est le Seigneur de l'Orient et de l'Occident et que partout où l'on se tourne, on rencontre sa face.<sup>45</sup> Cette expression fait écho à d'autres passages pour rappeler les différences de direction de prière entre les hommes et signaler leur absence totale de signification profonde, puisque Dieu est le roi de tout l'univers. C'est par exemple le cas du

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un autre nom que celui de *Tûbâ*, qui est l'olivier », Gobillot, Geneviève. *Le Livre de la Profondeur des Choses*, 249. Racines et modèles. Lille : Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1996.

<sup>44</sup> Notons au passage qu'une relation entre le Sinaï et le tabernacle figure dans un texte largement mis à contribution par le Coran : le Livre d'Hénoch chapitre I : « 2. Ces anges me révélèrent toutes choses et me donnèrent l'intelligence de ce que j'avais vu, qui ne devait point avoir lieu dans cette génération, mais dans une génération éloignée, pour le bien des élus. 3. C'est par eux que je pus parler et converser avec celui qui doit quitter un jour sa céleste demeure, le Saint et le tout-puissant, le Seigneur de ce monde 4. Qui doit fouler un jour le sommet du mont Sinaï, apparaître dans son tabernacle, et se manifester dans toute la force de sa céleste puissance ».

<sup>45</sup> Verset 2, 115 : « A Dieu appartiennent l'Orient et l'Occident et quelle que soit la direction vers laquelle vous vous tourniez, vous vous trouverez juste face à Lui ». Il est intéressant de noter à ce sujet que la forteresse construite au pied du Mont Moïse sur ordre de l'empereur Justinien Ier vers 527 pour sécuriser les religieux et des pèlerins, achevée en 560, année de la mort de Justinien, est caractérisée par le fait que les angles de sa muraille massive de 2,50 mètres d'épaisseur et de 11 mètres de haut en blocs de granite équarri, sont orientés vers les quatre points cardinaux.



verset 2, 177 : « La piété ne consiste pas à tourner votre face vers l'Orient ou vers l'Occident ». L'affirmation que Dieu est la lumière des cieux et de la terre complète en quelque sorte, tout en la rectifiant par la restitution à Dieu seul, de ce qui a été dit du Christ, à savoir qu'il est la lumière du monde: « Je suis la lumière du monde, qui me suit ne marchera pas dans les ténèbres [...] » (Jean VIII, 12).<sup>46</sup> En vérité Dieu n'est ni d'un côté ni de l'autre, il est partout et sa lumière éclipe toutes les lumières terrestres, de même que sa royauté éclipe toutes les royautés de ce monde, comme on va le voir dans les récits relatifs à Salomon et à la reine de Sabâ'.

### LECTURE MYSTIQUE ET UNIFICATION DES ECRITURES : L'HERITAGE ECHU AUX SABA'

La personnalité de Salomon, non seulement roi, mais aussi prophète selon le Coran, y revêt un relief particulier dans la mesure où, comme nous l'avons montré plus haut, les premiers exemples qu'il donne de correction du texte biblique ont pour objet de rendre justice à son règne par la réhabilitation de son comportement à l'égard de la Loi du Roi.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Selon la Genèse II, 8, le paradis terrestre se trouve à l'est et selon les légendes antiques, l'Hadès, le royaume des morts, se trouve à l'ouest. Aussi, le retour du Christ sur terre, à la fin des temps, est situé dans l'Orient: « Comme l'éclair, en effet, part du levant et brille jusqu'au couchant ainsi sera-t-il à l'avènement du fils de l'homme (Luc I, 78). Depuis l'époque paléochrétienne, les églises se trouvent sur l'axe est ouest. En Grèce, en Asie mineure et en Afrique du Nord, avec peu d'exceptions, les églises furent orientées, avec leur abside tournée vers l'orient, à partir du V<sup>e</sup> siècle. En Occident, au cours du Haut Moyen Âge, l'orientation du chevet des églises gagna de plus en plus de terrain et au XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles, ce principe était devenu une règle quasi générale.

<sup>47</sup> Il est évident qu'il s'insère là dans une polémique autour du Temple et de son culte qui existait déjà dans le judaïsme antique tardif et qui figurent également dans les attaques marcionites et manichéennes contre la royauté de l'ancien testament. (Voir à ce sujet l'Introduction aux Homélie pseudo clémentines par Alain le Boulluc, *Ecrits apocryphes chrétiens* II, 1211) Il est aisé de constater que le Coran s'inscrit à l'encontre de ces tendances.

Ne pouvant aborder ici tous les aspects de la fonction essentielle attribuée à ce personnage dans le texte coranique, nous en développerons un en particulier. Il s'agit de son rôle d'initiateur de la reine de Sabâ', souveraine des ancêtres du peuple des Sabâ', sud-arabiques de l'antiquité tardive habitant la cité de Ma'rib, connue en particulier pour la rupture de sa digue, un événement présenté dans le texte coranique comme une conséquence de leurs erreurs.

**Salomon et les Sabâ':  
une entrée dans l'exégèse unifiée des Ecritures**

Pour ramener la reine de Sabâ' à une foi monothéiste véridique, Salomon, selon le récit de la sourate 27, doit contrer l'effet négatif de séductions démoniaques. Or, il existe, comme on le sait, beaucoup de points communs entre le Midrash et le Coran lorsqu'il s'agit de présenter ce roi comme un personnage qui, avec sa sagesse, a reçu la capacité de dompter les démons, de les faire obéir à ses ordres, et même de les abuser et de les confondre, comme il le fit pour Asmodée<sup>48</sup>. En revanche, la présentation coranique de l'épisode de la reine de Sabâ' recèle un nombre important d'éléments étrangers à la tradition rabbinique classique ainsi, qu'apparemment du moins, à la Bible elle-même. Par exemple, 1 Rois 10, 1–13 précise seulement que la reine de Saba, après avoir été informée de la renommée de Salomon, vint l'éprouver par des

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<sup>48</sup> Le *Testament de Salomon*, rédigé en grec au III<sup>e</sup> ou IV<sup>e</sup> siècle est, selon Pablo A. Torrijano, porteur de traditions juives remontant aussi haut que 1<sup>er</sup> siècle après J.-C. Ce texte complète le dialogue de Gabaon, entre Dieu et Salomon en 3 R., 3, 5–15, de sorte que Dieu promet à Salomon : « Tu enfermeras tous les démons, mâles et femelles ... et grâce à eux, tu construiras Jérusalem, quand tu porteras ce sceau de Dieu ». Torrijano, Pablo A. *Solomon the esoteric king, from king to magus, development of a tradition*, 57 et n. 28–29. *Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism*, 73. Leyde : E. J. Brill, 2002, cité par Beylot, R. *La gloire des rois ou l'histoire de Salomon et de la reine de Saba*, Introduction, traduction et notes par Robert Beylot, 89. Apocryphes collection de poche de l'AELAC, 12. Brepols, Belgique, 2008. Pour l'épisode relatif à Asmodée, voir Ginzberg, *Les légendes des juifs*, t. 5, 108–9, qui renvoie, entre autres, à Koheleth 2, 5 et PK 5, 45b.

énigmes. Celui-ci lui ayant fourni des réponses dont le détail n'est pas précisé, elle considéra sa sagesse, ainsi que le palais qu'il s'était construit, sa munificence, son pouvoir et les holocaustes qu'il offrait au temple de Yahvé. C'est alors que (10, 5) « Le cœur lui manqua (6) et elle dit au roi :—Ce que j'ai entendu dire sur toi et sur ta sagesse dans mon pays était donc vrai (...) Tu surpasses en sagesse et en prospérité la renommée dont j'ai eu l'écho (...) Béni soit Yahvé ton Dieu qui t'a montré sa faveur en te plaçant sur le trône d'Israël ; c'est parce que Yahvé aime Israël pour toujours qu'il t'a établi roi pour exercer le droit et la justice ». Elle lui offrit ensuite un grand nombre de cadeaux précieux dont certain lui servirent à construire le temple de Yahvé. Lui-même lui donna tout ce qu'elle souhaitait recevoir, puis elle s'en retourna vers son pays avec ses serviteurs.

Le Coran transforme cet épisode de visite, en apparence de type protocolaire, au cours de laquelle la reine se contente d'exprimer un enthousiasme respectueux à l'égard de Yahvé et de Salomon lui-même, en une convocation à une rencontre initiatique aboutissant à sa conversion à la vraie foi, ou, plus précisément, à son retour à cette foi dont elle-même et son peuple s'étaient éloignés après l'avoir adoptée. Il précise en effet à ce sujet que le Démon avait séduit la reine de Sabá' et ses gens (27, 23) : « Le Démon a embelli leurs actions à leurs propres yeux (définition de l'une des illusions produites par la magie) ; il les a écartés du droit chemin ; ils ne sont pas dirigés », ce qui signifie qu'ils se trouvaient auparavant dans ce droit chemin, comme le précise d'ailleurs la reine elle-même un peu plus loin, au verset 42 : « La Science (religieuse) nous a été donnée et nous sommes soumis ! » Or, l'embellissement des actions négatives aux yeux de ceux qui les commettent est présenté, selon le Coran, comme l'un des principaux procédés magiques illusoire (*sifr*) mis en œuvre par le démon, à savoir le contentement que tout un chacun tire de ses propres opinions et conjectures, estimant que ce qui vient de lui-même ne peut être qu'une vérité indiscutable.<sup>49</sup> C'est à ce moment-

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<sup>49</sup> Comme en témoignent les versets du Coran 23, 52–53 : « Cette communauté qui est la vôtre est une communauté « une » (C'est l'enseignement qui a été donné à Jésus et à Moïse) « Ils (les juifs et les

là que, retrouvant son rôle de vainqueur des démons, Salomon va libérer la reine et, par son intermédiaire, tout son peuple, de cette emprise en lui faisant prendre conscience du fait qu'ils ont été victimes d'une illusion, et ce en deux étapes : la première fois en lui rendant son trône méconnaissable (27, 41–42), la seconde en l'invitant à marcher sur un sol dallé de cristal qu'elle prend pour de l'eau (27, 43), lui permettant par là de mesurer à la fois les raisons, l'étendue et les conséquences futures d'un tel égarement. Ayant finalement, grâce à la prise de conscience qu'ont suscitée en elle ces erreurs d'appréciation, réalisé son erreur en matière religieuse, la reine revient au culte du Dieu unique prôné par Salomon.

Pour annihiler la tromperie des démons qui avaient entraîné les Sabâ' à croire qu'ils agissaient bien en adorant le soleil : (27, 21), Salomon va donc, à son tour, jouer sur l'illusion pour ramener leur reine dans le droit chemin. Il va d'abord provoquer chez elle un trouble, afin d'évaluer le degré de son égarement : (27, 38) « Salomon dit encore : « Ô vous les chefs de mon peuple ! Qui de vous m'apportera ce trône avant que les Sabâ' ne viennent à moi, soumis ? (39) « Un *'ifrit* (sorte de démon) parmi les djinns (génies) dit : « Moi je te l'apporterai avant que tu n'aies eu le temps de te lever de ton siège. Moi j'en ai la capacité et je suis digne de confiance ». (40) Quelqu'un qui détenait une science du Livre dit : « Moi je te l'apporterai avant

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chrétiens) se sont divisés en sectes, chaque faction étant satisfaite de ce qu'elle détenait et 30, 31–32 « Ne soyez pas au nombre des polythéistes (32) ni de ceux qui ont divisé leur religion et qui ont formé des sectes, chaque faction se satisfaisant de ce qu'elle détient » ainsi que 53, 23 : « Ce ne sont (les multiples divinités) vraiment que des noms que vous et vos pères leur avez attribués. Dieu ne leur a accordé aucun pouvoir. Vos pères ne suivent qu'une conjecture et ce qui passionne les âmes ». Ici le thème du polythéisme issu de la conjecture est également présent dans les Ecrits pseudo-clémentins : *Homélies* II, 8, 1–2 « (1) Ce qui amène chaque individu, qui cherche à apprendre par lui-même, à adopter une opinion, ce n'est pas du tout le vrai, mais le fait d'être satisfait. Il s'ensuit que l'un se satisfait d'une chose et que l'autre en confirme une autre comme vraie. (2) Mais le vrai est ce que le prophète juge tel, non ce qui plaît à chacun. Car si le fait d'être satisfait était identique au vrai, l'un serait multiple, ce qui est impossible ».

que ton regard n'ait eu le temps de revenir sur toi (...) (41) Salomon dit encore :—Rendez-lui son trône méconnaissable (litt. : fais de son trône quelques chose qu'elle puisse renier); nous verrons, alors, si elle est bien dirigée ou si elle est au nombre de ceux qui ne sont pas dirigés. (42) Lorsqu'elle fut arrivée, on lui dit :—Ton trône est-il ainsi ? Elle dit :—Il semble que ce soit lui. La Science (religieuse) nous a été donnée et nous sommes soumis ! ».

On voit que Salomon, dans ce passage, reçoit de deux personnages différents la proposition de lui apporter dans les plus brefs délais le trône de la reine. La première émane d'un être de type démoniaque (*'ifrīt* des djinns) qui l'invite, dans les termes mêmes utilisés par Iblis avec Adam et Eve, à avoir confiance en lui. « Je suis de force à le faire (*innī qawī 'alayhi*) et digne de confiance (*amīn*) » (verset 7, 68). Le lecteur comprend, du fait qu'une seconde proposition suit, que, se fiant à sa sagesse, Salomon n'a pas donné suite à la première. C'est donc de toute évidence la seconde offre, qui promet un résultat encore plus rapide, mais surtout émane de « quelqu'un qui détenait une science du Livre » qu'il adopte. Cette décision est d'ailleurs immédiatement perçue par lui comme une « épreuve » que Dieu lui fait la grâce de lui envoyer : « Ceci est une grâce de mon Seigneur pour m'éprouver (*liyabluwānī*) » (27, 40), la racine *b. l. w.* étant utilisée dans le Coran pour décrire des situations où il est demandé de savoir distinguer et se déterminer entre le bien et le mal, le vrai et le faux, le juste et l'injuste.<sup>50</sup> Cette épreuve, dont, de toute évidence, il est sorti vainqueur, préfigure les épreuves initiatiques que lui-même va imposer à la reine de Sabâ'.

Ce passage est, à notre sens, d'une importance capitale dans la mesure où il revêt une double fonction. En effet, non seulement il rappelle au niveau du récit lui-même, que Salomon, contrairement aux Sabâ' et à leur reine, ne se laisse pas abuser par les illusions mensongères des démons, mais se fie seulement à ceux qui détiennent « une science du Livre » que les Sabâ' estimaient, à tort, posséder encore (v. 42), mais il remplit également un autre rôle, tout aussi essentiel. Il s'agit d'avertir le lecteur du Coran lui-même que le récit dont il est en train de prendre connaissance s'inscrit, précisément, dans le cadre d'une « science » particulière du Livre.

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<sup>50</sup> Voir par exemple : Coran 21, 35 ; 5, 48 ; 6, 165.

Cette seconde fonction se dévoile d'elle-même à travers la phrase prononcée par le personnage auquel elle est attribuée, la formulation de sa proposition se caractérisant par un fonctionnement basé sur l'analogie verbale. Ce procédé de composition, et, donc, de lecture, tout à fait spécifique, se manifeste à travers l'expression « Avant que ton regard ne revienne sur toi » (*qabla an yartadda ilayka tarafuka*) dont le caractère singulier n'a pas manqué d'attirer l'attention des exégètes. Néanmoins, ceux-ci n'ont pas remarqué qu'elle figurait une autre fois dans le texte coranique, au verset (14, 41–42) : « Ne pense pas que Dieu soit inattentif aux actions des injustes. Il leur accorde un délai jusqu'au Jour où leurs yeux resteront fixes. Tandis qu'ils viendront suppliants, la tête immobile, leurs regards ne se retourneront pas sur eux-mêmes (*lā yartaddu ilayhim tarafuhum*) et leur cœur sera vide ». La fonction de cette analogie verbale, qui rappelle le jugement dernier, éclaire d'entrée de jeu sur le fait que l'épisode qui suit vise non seulement à mettre en scène l'histoire de la reine de Sabâ' et de son peuple, mais aussi à évoquer la situation de tous les ressuscités qui seront jugés par Dieu dans l'autre vie, comme la reine va l'être en ce monde par Salomon.

A travers ces deux passages, le processus d'analogie verbale est, de plus, totalement réciproque, la rapidité évoquée au verset 27, 40 rappelant à son tour que le délai mentionné au verset 14, 41, qui sépare chaque homme du jugement dernier (jour où les yeux seront fixes en raison de la terreur, les regards des hommes ne pouvant se retourner vers eux-mêmes), sera proportionnellement aussi bref pour tous que le temps qu'il faut à celui qui possède une science de l'Écriture pour apporter le trône de la reine à Salomon. La brièveté de ce délai est en effet rappelée de façon récurrente dans plusieurs passages, entre autres dans la sourate 18, au verset (19) : « Nous les avons ressuscités pour leur permettre de s'interroger mutuellement. L'un d'entre eux dit : « Combien de temps êtes-vous restés ici ? Ils répondirent : Nous sommes restés un jour ou une partie d'un jour. Ils dirent :—Votre Seigneur sait parfaitement combien de temps vous êtes restés ici ». <sup>51</sup> On perçoit ainsi dès le premier abord un

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<sup>51</sup> Voir aussi à ce sujet Coran 2, 259.

certain nombre de résonnances internes qui éclairent sur le mode de composition des passages coraniques concernés.

Avant d'analyser les autres analogies verbales qui émaillent l'ensemble de ce récit, une rapide définition de la méthode de composition qui conditionne cette lecture s'impose. Il s'agit d'un procédé directement lié au texte biblique lui-même, dont Bernard Barc a donné la définition suivante : « La règle d'interprétation la plus connue de l'Ecole d'Aqiba (du nom de Rabbi Aqiba, un représentant de la seconde génération des Tannaim : 90–130 après Jésus-Christ, mort en 135) portait le nom de *héqèch*, que l'on peut traduire par « analogie verbale ». Cette règle se fonde sur le dogme de l'intentionnalité de chaque choix d'écriture. Concernant le vocabulaire, elle pose comme principe que chacune des occurrences d'un mot doit nécessairement participer à la construction d'un sens cohérent qui ne se laisserait pleinement saisir qu'après la mise en relation de chacune des occurrences du mot dispersées dans le texte.<sup>52</sup> Ce spécialiste ajoute qu'il est difficile de vouloir percer par ce moyen tous les secrets du texte, dans la mesure où l'analogie verbale, en posant comme principe que chaque mot d'un texte doit être interprété à la lumière de chacune de ses occurrences dans l'ensemble de la Torah, provoque inévitablement une réaction en chaîne qui, si l'on n'y prend garde, conduit à papillonner sans fin à travers la Torah entière.<sup>53</sup> Concernant le Coran, il semble, du moins suite aux investigations que nous avons pu mener, que cette difficulté soit moindre, le procédé s'y trouvant modulé de manière à ne s'imposer pour une lecture pertinente, sauf exception, que dans des cas d'analogies entre des mots ou des expressions qui apparaissent au maximum une dizaine de fois dans le texte.

Notons, par ailleurs, que, dans la perspective de l'amendement des textes bibliques évoquée plus haut, le récit de la sourate 27 propose une présentation différente du récit biblique dans la mesure où les rôles des personnages se trouvent inversés. En effet, selon le Livre des Rois, la reine de Sabâ' s'était rendue d'elle-même

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<sup>52</sup> Barc, Bernard. *Les arpenteurs du temps, Essai sur l'histoire religieuse de la Judée à la période hellénistique*, 88. Histoire du texte biblique, 5. Lausanne : Editions du Zèbre, 2000.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 89.

auprès de Salomon pour l'éprouver avec des énigmes et c'est suite aux réponses justes qu'elle avait reçues qu'elle a reconnu la grandeur de son Dieu, Yahvé, et proclamé sa gloire. Le texte précise : « La reine de Sabâ' ayant appris la renommée de Salomon, vint l'éprouver par des énigmes. Celui-ci l'ayant éclairé sur toutes ses questions, elle considéra sa sagesse, ainsi que le palais qu'il s'était construit, sa munificence, son pouvoir et les holocaustes qu'il offrait au temple de Yahvé » (1 Rois 10, 1–13). Dans le Coran, c'est au contraire Salomon qui la convoque (verset 27, 3 : « Venez à moi, soumis »), puis lui présente deux épreuves à l'issue desquelles elle reconnaît ses erreurs, s'en désole, et revient au vrai monothéisme.

La première de ces épreuves est celle de la reconnaissance de son trône métamorphosé qui semble lui causer une difficulté sur laquelle nous reviendrons plus loin; la seconde est relative au curieux épisode du dallage de cristal :

27, 43 : Ce qu'elle adorait en dehors de Dieu l'avait égarée. Elle appartenait à un peuple incrédule. (44) : « On lui dit : « Entre dans le palais ! Lorsqu'elle l'aperçut, elle crut voir une étendue d'eau profonde (agitée de vagues), et elle découvrit ses jambes. Salomon dit :—C'est un palais dallé de cristal. Elle dit :—Mon Seigneur ! Je me suis fait tort à moi-même ; avec Salomon, je me soumetts à Dieu, Seigneur des mondes »

Notons tout d'abord que la confusion d'un sol lustré avec de l'eau figure dans le midrash, mais, apparemment, les versions qu'il en donne tirent toutes de l'anecdote une conclusion relative, d'une part au fait que cette épreuve était destinée à s'assurer que la reine n'était pas un être démoniaque doté de pieds fourchus, d'autre part à l'obligation que les femmes ont de s'épiler les jambes.<sup>54</sup> Il se

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<sup>54</sup> « Benayahu conduisit la reine auprès de Salomon, qui s'était assis dans une demeure de verre pour la recevoir. La reine fut trompée par une illusion : elle crut que le roi était assis dans l'eau et, quand elle alla vers lui, elle leva sa robe pour la garder sèche. Sur son pied nu, le roi aperçut des poils et il lui dit : « Ta beauté est la beauté d'une femme, mais tes poils sont d'un homme ; les poils sont un ornement pour un homme, mais ils défigurent une femme. » voir Ginzberg, *Les légendes des juifs*, t. 5, 105, avec renvoi à 2 Alphabet de Ben Sira 21b.



trouve que la plupart des commentateurs musulmans ont repris ces interprétations.<sup>55</sup>

Pourtant, de toute évidence, le Coran confère à ce passage une tout autre acception. En effet, il apparaît clairement que cet épisode est lié à la prise de conscience de la reine concernant son erreur en matière religieuse et à son retour à une sincère soumission à Dieu seul. La plupart des commentateurs, même s'ils ont conservé les explications midrachiques relatives au système pileux de la reine, sont d'accord là dessus. Néanmoins, le mécanisme précis et les modalités de cette prise de conscience, ainsi que le contenu de l'initiation proposée par Salomon, semblent leur avoir échappé. Le seul, parmi les spécialistes actuels, qui, à notre connaissance, a évoqué l'unique solution susceptible de rendre compte de ce récit est Jean-Louis Déclais. Voici ce qu'il en dit : « Les récits initiatiques de la mystique juive suggèrent que ceux qui veulent entreprendre le grand voyage vers la présence de Dieu, d'après les Aggadoth du Talmud de Babylone, reçoivent cet avertissement : « Lorsque vous parviendrez devant les pierres lisses, n'allez pas vous écrier ; « De l'eau, de l'eau », à cause du passage : « Celui qui dit des mensonges ne subsistera pas en ma présence » (Ps. 101, 7). Si la rédaction coranique conserve un écho de cette tradition, peut-être veut-elle suggérer que la reine n'a pas réussi son épreuve initiatique et, reconnaissant son échec, s'est soumise au Dieu de Salomon ? »<sup>56</sup>

Bien qu'une réflexion des plus justes ait conduit ce chercheur sur la piste du véritable seuil herméneutique de ce passage du Coran, il y voit seulement l'« écho d'une tradition », ce qui ne permet pas de se faire une juste idée de la position précise du Coran par rapport aux traditions juives en question. En effet, bien loin d'être une vague réminiscence, ce récit coranique de la rencontre entre Salomon et la reine de Sabâ' témoigne, comme on va pouvoir le constater, d'une connaissance approfondie, non seulement de ses divers tenants et aboutissants, mais encore de son histoire, de son évolution, ainsi que de celle de ses contextes interprétatifs. Plus encore, cette tradition constitue à notre sens

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<sup>55</sup> Voir, Déclais, J.-L. « Salomon ». Dans *Dictionnaire du Coran*, 185–87, p. 186.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, même page.

l'une des clés de lecture essentielles du texte coranique, clé à laquelle le lecteur est censé accéder en même temps que la reine de Sabâ' accède à la vraie science du Livre que lui transmet Salomon. Mais il faut, pour saisir ces précisions, remonter à la toute première origine de ce passage du Talmud.

Or, il se trouve que la source des Agaddoth (vers le VI<sup>e</sup> s.) évoquée par J.-L. Desclais remonte à une tradition beaucoup plus ancienne d'interprétation des Ecritures attribuée précisément à Rabbi Aqiba lui-même : « Quatre furent introduits en vue du Paradis. Ce sont : le fils de Azzaï, le fils de Zoma, un autre et Rabbi Aqiba. Rabbi Aqiba leur avait dit : - Quand vous serez introduits auprès des pierres de marbre pur, soyez avertis (par illumination) que vous ne devez pas dire :—Eaux ! Eaux ». <sup>57</sup> Bernard Barc commente ainsi ce passage : le Paradis est le paradis de l'interprétation de la Torah. C'est pour étudier la Torah que ces voyageurs entrent au Paradis. Dans la littérature judéenne antérieure à Aqiba, le Paradis est le jardin d'Eden où coulent les quatre fleuves de la Sagesse. Ce thème sera amplifié dans la littérature postérieure et les lettres même du mot paradis (PRDS) deviendront les symboles des quatre niveaux d'interprétation de l'Écriture (P = *Pchat* (simple) = interprétation littérale ; R = *Rémèz* (allusion) = interprétation allégorique ; D = *Drach* (exposition) = commentaire homélitique ; S = *Sod* (mystère) = interprétation ésotérique) ». A partir de cela, le sens qu'il propose à la mise en garde du maître : « Ne dites pas :—Eaux ! Eaux » est la suivante : La valeur du duel du mot « eaux » (*mayim*) est bien réelle et définie comme telle dans le texte biblique, puisqu'on accorde le verbe au pluriel : « Que les eaux se rassemblent » (*yiqawwu hammayim*) (Genèse 1, 9). On en conclura que *mayim* désigne des eaux doubles dans ce texte. Or, le modèle de ces eaux est décrit dans le récit de la création (Genèse 1, 6–9) qui montre des eaux doubles supérieures et des eaux doubles inférieures en mouvement vers un firmament nommé « cieux ». Cette division tétradique des eaux n'est donc que transitoire et prélude à leur réunification dans le firmament. Néanmoins, alors qu'aucune réunification n'est prévue pour les eaux supérieures avant qu'elles n'atteignent le firmament, les eaux inférieures doivent

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<sup>57</sup> Il s'agit de la traduction donnée par Barc, *Les arpenteurs du temps*, 70.

se rassembler dans un lieu unique. Dans la Torah, ce lieu (*maqom*) est l'endroit où Yahvé fera résider son Nom : le temple de Jérusalem, un lieu unique, comme le nom de Yahvé qui y réside est unique (*Deutéronome* 6, 4). La synthèse des eaux inférieures se fera donc dans le temple de Jérusalem avant qu'une synthèse générale des eaux inférieures et supérieures ne s'opère dans le firmament. La conclusion de ce récit est donc : « Que celui qui s'adonne à l'étude de la Torah se garde d'en donner des interprétations contradictoires » Aqiba ne fait que rappeler aux trois autres personnages les règles d'or de son école : « réunifier l'interprétation ». <sup>58</sup> Selon cette explication, les pierres de marbre sont donc les supports sur lesquels l'Écriture est gravée et Aqiba les place dans le firmament, lieu de médiation entre Dieu et l'homme. <sup>59</sup>

Il est tout à fait remarquable de constater que cette tradition relative à un sol donnant l'illusion de l'eau apparaît précisément dans un contexte coranique particulièrement dense en analogies verbales, méthode caractéristique de l'École d'Aqiba. Un tel cas de figure conforte le lecteur dans le fait qu'il se trouve introduit dans un univers de composition textuelle qui correspond à la définition d'une « science » bien spécifique de l'Écriture. Le Coran s'appuie, de surcroît, comme on vient de le voir, manifestement sur ce procédé, pour mettre en lumière l'opposition entre la science de Salomon, vraie science de l'Écriture, et celle des Sabâ', interprétation erronée, contradictoire et, comme on va le voir plus loin, « désunie » de cette même Écriture. En effet, leur reine, comme on l'a noté plus haut, n'était pas à l'origine une polythéiste ignorante de la Torah, puisqu'elle précise dans le verset 27, 42 : « La science nous avait été donnée avant cela et nous sommes soumis à Dieu (c'est-à-dire : nous avons reçu la Torah et nous la mettons correctement en pratique) ». Ce faisant, elle reste attachée, malgré le trouble que lui cause la transformation de son trône, à son interprétation erronée, ce qui lui fait dire, non seulement qu'elle continue à revendiquer ce siège, mais qu'elle revendique aussi le faux culte qu'il représente, affirmant qu'il s'agit de la science sacrée qui conduit à la soumission à Dieu. Elle et son peuple adorent en

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<sup>58</sup> Barc, *Les arpenteurs du temps*, 73.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., même page, paragraphe 17.

effet quelque chose, à savoir le soleil, en dehors du Dieu unique, persuadés que c'est ainsi qu'il faut agir pour le contenter (27, 23). Or, cette croyance, inculquée par les démons qui la leur ont faite envisager comme juste (27, 23), les éloigne en réalité de la vérité de l'Écriture (verset 27, 43) : « Ce qu'elle adorait en dehors de Dieu l'avait écartée. Elle appartenait à un peuple mécréant ». Salomon va, littéralement parlant, la « reconduire » à l'exégèse juste des Écritures à travers, précisément, l'épreuve de l'eau commentée par Rabbi Aqiba. Mais il convient avant cela de finir de détailler les processus régissant les éléments textuels qui renvoient à des traits de l'initiation par le trône familière à la Maassé Merkaba.

### L'initiation par le Trône :

#### abrogation de quelques aspects de la *Maassé Merkaba*

Le mode de lecture qui implique, entre autres, la prise en compte de toutes les analogies verbales mises en œuvre, permet d'éclairer le fait que les démons, non contents d'avoir trompé les Sabâ', veulent également tenter Salomon. Pour ce faire, l'un d'entre eux, en l'occurrence l'*'ifrîl* qui s'adresse à lui au verset 27, 39, utilise, du moins en apparence, les règles du langage correspondant à la « science de l'Écriture » qui vient d'être évoquée. Pour gagner sa confiance, il lui dit en effet : « Je te l'apporterai (le trône (*'arsb*) de la reine de Sabâ) avant que tu ne te lèves de ton *maqâm*, transposition arabe de *maqom*, terme hébreu qui, comme on vient de le voir, désigne le Temple qu'il a construit, lieu de la Présence divine, littéralement : siège de Dieu sur la terre. Je suis de force à le faire (*innî qawî 'alayhî*) et digne de confiance (*amîn*) ». Dans ce cadre, le mot *maqâm* semble avoir été sous interprété par la majorité des commentateurs qui l'ont identifié au « siège de justice » (*majlis*) de Salomon, estimant que son interlocuteur avait voulu lui dire : « Je t'apporterai ce trône avant que tu n'aies levé ta séance de jugement.<sup>60</sup> Pourtant, l'expression *taqûma min maqâmika* indique clairement qu'il ne peut s'agir, littéralement, de « lever une séance », mais bien de « se lever d'un siège sur lequel on se trouvait assis »,

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<sup>60</sup> Voir par exemple le commentaire de ce verset dans le *tafsîr* de Muqâtil.

comme l'a traduit avec justesse Denise Masson. Ce défaut d'appréciation semble avoir été causé par l'omission du fait que le Coran fait ici usage d'une analogie verbale. En effet, si l'on prête attention à cet aspect du texte, il apparaît clairement que le démon a commis là une maladresse qui, en fonction de l'utilisation coranique de ce terme, l'a disqualifié aux yeux de Salomon pour la mission de la recherche du trône. Il s'agit de l'attribution qu'il lui a faite du *maqâm*, dont l'appartenance indiscutable et exclusive à Dieu est déclarée au verset 14, 14 : « Voilà pour celui qui redoute ma présence (*maqâmi*). C'est-à-dire que le terme *maqâm*, lorsqu'il désigne un lieu, ce qui est le cas au verset 27, 39, ne peut être compris que comme la propriété par excellence de Dieu, dont il indique, simultanément, la présence et le siège au sens élargi, à savoir le Temple. Salomon étant justement le constructeur de ce *maqâm* divin, le démon, vraisemblablement pour le flatter, lui en attribue la possession, alors que ce lieu, pour tout lecteur ayant une vraie science de l'Écriture, ne peut être attribué qu'à Dieu seul. On saisit alors que pour donner plus de poids à ses déclarations trompeuses cet *'ifrit* tente de se faire passer pour un prophète en s'auto désignant, comme Moïse, par l'expression *qawî, amîn* (28, 26), de même qu'Iblîs s'était dit être un conseiller fiable (*amîn*), (7, 68) pour Adam et Eve,<sup>61</sup> selon une autre analogie verbale significative.

Salomon, quant à lui, ne tombe pas dans le piège du désir d'égaliser Dieu. Il ne donne en effet aucune réponse à l'*'ifrit* et écoute la proposition du personnage qui possède véritablement « une science de l'Écriture ». Celui-ci, comme on l'a vu plus haut, utilise à son tour l'analogie verbale, mais pour évoquer cette fois la réalité de la situation, à savoir que Salomon va se livrer à un jugement, prélude et image terrestre du Jugement dernier, lequel, tout comme le transport du trône, adviendra dans un temps particulièrement bref. En l'occurrence, ce jugement, qui mobilise tous les ressorts de la psychologie que Salomon maîtrise par sa sagesse, portera sur la fausse croyance des Sabâ'. C'est aussi pourquoi il accepte cette seconde proposition.

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<sup>61</sup> Ce dernier terme est en réalité celui par lequel l'ensemble des prophètes se présentent à ceux qu'ils viennent avertir (sourate 26, versets 107, 125, 143, 162, 178).

Or, il se trouve que la première étape de la stratégie adoptée par lui pour mettre en place les conditions de ce jugement qui doit aboutir à une initiation, concerne un autre type de siège, à savoir un trône, en l'occurrence celui de la reine de Sabâ qui s'est, pour sa part, attribué un *'arsh*, qui, tout comme le *maqâm*, est censé appartenir en propre à Dieu seul. Le verset 27, 23 précise même que cette reine prétend posséder un « trône sublime » (*'arsh 'azîm*), expression utilisée, précisément, pour désigner le trône divin dans plusieurs versets, dont, en particulier le 27, 26. Dans ce verset Salomon rappelle d'ailleurs, par le biais de sa missive à la reine, avant même de l'avoir rencontrée, que le seul possesseur de ce trône sublime est Dieu (*lahu al-'arsh al-'azîm*) « C'est à lui qu'appartient le trône sublime ». Selon le Coran, le *'arsh* représente donc le trône céleste de Dieu, alors que le *maqâm* désigne son siège (au sens de « lieu » de résidence terrestre). Le siège portant le nom de *'arsh* lui est en effet exclusivement réservé dans toutes ses occurrences. Dans cette perspective, on comprend clairement que la reine s'est attribué de manière injuste ce trône ou en tout cas cette conception de son trône, alors que, de son côté, Salomon a refusé de s'attribuer le *maqâm* dans des conditions comparables.

De plus, il convient de rappeler, à propos de ce trône de la reine de Sabâ', que les recoupements de nombreux récits anciens évoquent le fait qu'il s'agissait sans doute d'un trône de type solaire, ou du moins dédié au soleil, fausse croyance qui lui est attribuée, ainsi qu'à son peuple (27, 22), dans le Coran. Robert Beylot précise que cette thématique a très tôt émergé d'interprétations de la vision de *l'Apocalypse de Jean* (12), qui ont fait de la reine de Sabâ' une figure de l'Eglise des Nations, de surcroît figure héliomorphe, une conception qui recouperait les nombreuses données relatives à l'origine nubienne de cette reine, parfois désignée comme une fille d'Amon, le culte du soleil étant attribué à ces peuples dans de nombreux récits, en particulier, les *Ethiopiennes d'Héliodore*, roman grec du III<sup>e</sup>-IV<sup>e</sup> s.<sup>62</sup> Ajoutons que les données archéologiques

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<sup>62</sup> Il faut ajouter à cela les indications publiées par ce même chercheur dans *Aethiopia, International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 74-83. Institut für Afrikanistik und Aethiopistik der Universität Homburg, 7. Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004, qui le conduisent à la conclusion suivante : « Si l'on rapproche

actuelles prouvent que les Sabéens sudarabiques de l'antiquité, qui s'étaient eux-mêmes rendus en Éthiopie<sup>63</sup> adoraient également le soleil.<sup>64</sup> Dans une telle perspective, l'acte de rendre le trône de cette reine méconnaissable semble avoir pour but dans le Coran de le modifier au point que, non seulement elle ne le reconnaisse plus avec certitude, mais surtout qu'elle n'en revendique plus la possession, cette « non reconnaissance » s'apparentant alors à un reniement (évoqué par la racine *n.k.r.* : (*nakkirû labâ 'arshabâ*) littéralement : « faites en sorte qu'elle renie son trône »), attitude susceptible de la conduire à abandonner sa croyance en ce qu'il représente, à savoir le soleil. Néanmoins, comme on vient de le voir, pour ce qui la concerne, cette tentative échoue en grande partie puisqu'elle finit par reconnaître tout de même ce trône, tout en réaffirmant la légitimité du culte erroné qui accompagne sa possession. Ainsi l'épreuve préparée par Salomon a eu pour seul résultat de la déstabiliser un instant, mais elle a permis au roi de conclure qu'elle était vraiment égarée.

Quant au trône de Salomon lui-même, il est désigné dans le Coran par le terme de *kursî* (verset 38, 34). Or ce mot est employé

Flavius Josephé (*Antiquités juives* II, 5 et VIII, 6 qui fait de la reine de Saba une reine d'Égypte et d'Éthiopie) du texte copte-arabe intitulé *Comment le royaume de David passa aux mains du roi d'Abyssinie* (Sévère Ibn al-Muqaffa' peut remonter à des dates antérieures) et les plus anciennes versions du *Roman grec d'Alexandre*, on est en droit de penser que la reine de Saba est la fille du dieu bélier Amon, si connu en Nubie », p. 76.

<sup>63</sup> Voir Ryckmans, Jacques. « Le panthéon de l'Arabie du sud préislamique : état des problèmes et brève synthèse ». *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 206, n°2 (1989) : 151–69.

<sup>64</sup> Comme en atteste Théophraste : 6. *Historia Plantarum*, IX, iv, § 5 (texte latin dans K. Conti Rossini, p. 1), où cet auteur dit en parlant du Pays de l'encens que l'encens est rassemblé dans le temple du Soleil des « Sabéens », c'est-à-dire, visiblement, des habitants de Shabwa. Un passage parallèle de Pline (*Nal. JlisL*, XII, § 63, p. 22, chez K. Conti Rossini, 1931) dit que l'encens récolté est amené à dos de chameau à Sabota (Shabwa), où les prêtres prélèvent la dîme pour le dieu qu'ils appellent Sabin (syn). Cité par Ryckmans, « Le panthéon de l'Arabie du sud préislamique ... », 165.

une seule fois ailleurs (verset 2, 255) pour désigner un siège appartenant aussi exclusivement à Dieu : « Son trône (*kursîyihî*) s'étend sur les cieus et sur la terre ». Ainsi que le rappelle Robert Beylot, un texte ancien comme le *Bemibdar Rabbah* (12, 17) commentant 1 R, 10, 18–20, précise que « le trône à six marches de Salomon était fait sur le modèle divin. De même que le trône de Dieu est dans le septième ciel, au dessus de six degrés ». <sup>65</sup> Mais, en raison des contextes coraniques dans lesquels il est présenté, à la différence du trône désigné par le mot *'arsh*, il ne peut en aucun cas être confondu ni même comparé à un trône humain. En effet, le *kursî* divin (*kursîyihî*) est montré, comme dans la Torah : s'étendant sur les cieus et la terre réunis (Voir Isaïe, 66, 1 : « Le ciel est mon trône et la terre mon marchepied »). Il dépasse donc par ses dimensions toute chose existant au monde, alors que le *kursî* de Salomon (également introduit sous la forme grammaticale annexée *kursîyihî* : son trône) est décrit comme étant d'une taille exactement adaptée à recevoir un corps humain. Cette analogie verbale d'un genre particulier, puisqu'elle exprime une correspondance qui se réalise à travers une opposition radicale au niveau de la dimension des trônes, éclaire pourtant de façon remarquable le verset (38, 34) « Nous avons éprouvé Salomon en plaçant un corps (*jasad*) sur son trône (*kursîyihî*) » dont l'aspect initiatique apparaît alors bien plus clairement. En effet, ce passage, qui renvoie en apparence au mid-rash rapportant que Salomon, de retour après une longue absence, se trouva devant un être qui occupait son trône, c'est-à-dire le démon Asmodée qui avait pris sa place, lui donne en réalité une tout autre dimension. En effet, à la différence de la tradition juive qui met l'accent sur le fait que Salomon avait été profondément affecté de voir ce personnage néfaste sur son trône, le Coran présente de manière tout à fait impersonnelle un corps, c'est-à-dire une entité en quelque sorte « chosifiée ». Il en ressort que l'épreuve que représente cette vision ne consiste pas, selon cette optique, dans la perte de son trône au profit d'un démon qui l'aurait usurpé, mais bien dans une vision en quelque sorte extérieure et détachée de son trône portant un corps. Dans cette situation précise, le trône se trouve défini exclusivement en fonction de ce corps/objet qu'il

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<sup>65</sup> Beylot, *La Gloire des Rois*, 52.



porte, abstraction totale étant faite de l'être qui le possède, que ce soit le démon Asmodée ou un autre. L'essentiel est que ce qui frappe Salomon à l'instant où il perçoit cette présence sur son trône est la vue d'un corps anonyme et surtout sans vie, ce qu'exprime le mot *jasad* (littéralement : le corps en tant qu'agrégat de matière, cité dans le Coran en 7, 148 et 20, 88 pour désigner le veau d'or qui, malgré les apparences illusoires, n'est pas doté de vie et en 21, 8 pour désigner les enveloppes corporelles apparentes que revêtent les êtres spirituels). Une telle vision est susceptible d'informer celui qui la reçoit sur deux points. Il s'agit d'une part, pour ce qui le concerne directement, de la précarité et de la fragilité de sa propre vie, dans une vision prémonitrice de ce que sera un jour son corps : un amas de matière posé en équilibre sur ce trône et n'ayant plus de pouvoir que sur les djinns, jusqu'à ce qu'il tombe en poussière (Coran 34, 14) : « Lorsque nous avons décrété sa mort, il ne donna pas aux djinns d'indications relatives à son décès. Ce n'est que lorsque la bête de la terre eut rongé son bâton et qu'il se fut écroulé que les djinns s'aperçurent que s'ils avaient eu une science de l'invisible ils n'auraient pas subi aussi longtemps un châtement ignominieux ». D'autre part, pour ce qui concerne le trône lui-même, la vision de Salomon met en évidence la mesure réduite de ce siège destiné à recevoir un objet qui ne dépasse pas les dimensions d'un corps humain. Le Coran invite donc par là à comprendre que Salomon s'est trouvé saisi par la prise de conscience à la fois de la finitude et de la vanité de sa propre vie et par la différence incommensurable existant entre son *kursi* de roi terrestre et le *kursi* de Dieu, qui englobe les cieux et la terre. L'indication confirmant ce point est le fait que c'est à ce moment-là qu'il est présenté comme subissant la *catharsis* qui lui permet de réaliser la vanité de toutes ses possessions et qu'il se repent en les abandonnant totalement « Il se repentit ensuite » (verset 38, 34 qui fait allusion au verset 38, 32 qui décrit Salomon égorgeant ses cavales).

Ainsi, dans un remarquable parallélisme avec le cas de la reine de Sabâ, c'est son trône qui sert à Salomon de révélateur. Le Coran semble, dans ce cas précis, également suggérer une interprétation nuancée du verset biblique 1 Chroniques 29, 23 : « Salomon s'assit

sur le trône de Yahvé (*'al kisé yahvé*) pour régner », à propos duquel la tradition rabbinique s'est longuement interrogée,<sup>66</sup> en montrant que Salomon, s'il occupe un trône en apparence comparable à celui de Dieu, a une conscience aigüe du fait qu'il lui est impossible d'occuper le trône divin, tout comme il a refusé de siéger à Jérusalem sur le lieu (*maqâm*) réservé à Dieu.

Rappelons, dans cette perspective, que la description d'un trône aux dimensions de l'univers était l'un des motifs centraux de la *Maassé Merkaba*, tradition consacrée à une forme d'initiation mystique par le trône selon laquelle « La figure mystique assise sur le Trône apparaît comme celle du Créateur de l'univers. *Yoser Bereschit* ; de son manteau cosmique, dont il est question à plusieurs reprises, irradiant les astres et les firmaments ». <sup>67</sup> L'insistance du Coran sur les divers aspects du trône, et en particulier le rôle de médiation de la *catharsis* qu'il lui confère ne peut manquer d'évoquer la pensée de ces mystiques, précisément liée aux commentaires des tannaïms, comme Rabbi Aqiba et ses disciples. En effet l'un des traits caractéristiques essentiels, si ce n'est le trait principal de cet enseignement concerne la vision de Dieu sur son trône, le *Shi'ur Qoma* qui, comme le précise Ghershom Scholem, « apparaît comme la figure du Créateur de l'univers ». Il y est question de toute une série de méditations consacrées à la perception du corps de Dieu sur le trône : à la fois visible, mais trop transcendant pour être saisi par les sens. Comme l'explique ce spécialiste, le monde mystique de la Merkaba, qui semble avoir connu son plein développement au II<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans le milieu des anciens Tannaïtes, se présente avant tout comme la description d'une expérience correspondant à celle d'Ezékiel (1, 26), qui a eu la

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<sup>66</sup> Comme le remarque Marie Joseph Pierre: « Est-il possible pour un mortel de s'asseoir sur le trône du Seigneur, de celui dont il est écrit « Car YHWH est un feu dévorant » (Deutéronome, 4, 24) et encore « Son trône était flamme de feu » (Deutéronome, 7, 9). Traduction Sed-Rajna, G. *La Bible hébraïque*, 149. Office du Livre, 1987, cité dans *Les Odes de Salomon*, traduction, introduction et notes par Marie Joseph Pierre, 28. Apocryphes collection de poche de l'AEELAC, 4. Brepols, Belgique, 1994.

<sup>67</sup> Scholem, Gershom. *Les origines de la Kabbale*, 31. Pardes, Etudes et textes de mystique juive. Paris : Aubier-Montaigne, 1966.

permission de voir « la figure ayant l'apparence d'un homme » et par là, lui a été révélée, la « mesure du corps » (*shi'ur Qoma*). Ghershom Scholem a d'ailleurs souligné que cette mystique avait été considérée comme « très choquante pour la conscience des siècles postérieurs »<sup>68</sup> en dépit du fait qu'elle parte d'une conception absolument monothéiste, en raison de la représentation anthropomorphique qu'elle pourrait donner de la divinité.<sup>69</sup>

Il apparaît alors clairement que c'est en premier lieu cette question que le Coran propose de clarifier à travers la vision de Salomon d'un corps sur son trône. L'image qu'il décrit, tout en faisant manifestement allusion à la vision du *Shi'ur Qoma*, en propose en effet une rectification radicale au sens où la vision reçue par Salomon ne concerne pas le trône divin, mais son propre trône, sur lequel figure un corps de dimensions si réduites qu'il ne peut en aucun cas être confondu avec la grandeur de la divinité. La leçon qu'apporte ici le Coran, comme en témoignent les analogies verbales mises en jeu, concerne donc avant tout la comparaison débouchant sur la vision d'une distance incommensurable entre le trône de Dieu et celui de Salomon, dont la prise de conscience constitue le véritable déclin de l'épreuve initiatique (*fitna* : voir verset 38, 34 : *fatannâ Sulaymân*), conférée à ce personnage par le biais du trône. En d'autres termes, il s'agit là d'une vision de type apophatique de la majesté divine, se présentant comme la figuration imagée d'une approche théologique, par ailleurs bien connue, de la

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<sup>68</sup> Scholem, *Les origines de la Kabbale*, 29

<sup>69</sup> Notons que les *Homélies pseudo clémentines* abordent également la question d'une « forme » de Dieu correspondant par certains aspects à la forme de l'homme qui a été créée sur son modèle. Il est intéressant de remarquer que, pour préserver la différence absolue entre Dieu et sa créature en dépit de cette ressemblance de forme, les *Homélies* insistent, comme le Coran, essentiellement sur la différence au niveau de la dimension, évoquant par delà les siècles « le cercle dont le centre est partout et la circonférence nulle part » de Pascal. Dieu est ainsi défini comme « celui qui sous sa figure surpasse réellement toutes choses, qui, où qu'il soit, est dans l'infini comme son milieu, tout en étant la limite de tout » (*Homélies* XVII, 9, 2).

connaissance de Dieu par le biais de ce qu'il n'est pas.<sup>70</sup> L'initié, en recevant cette *catharsis* accède à une saisie de la Grandeur divine par son opposé même, qui est la petitesse de sa propre personne, tout comme selon le système des émanations de l'ismaélisme fatimide chaque intelligence du plérôme, pour pouvoir occuper la place qui lui revient dans l'univers en cours de création et devenir elle-même lieu de surgissement d'un nouvel être, doit d'abord se considérer elle-même et se dénier toute divinité avant de se tourner vers la divinité unique.<sup>71</sup> Il apparaît donc que le Coran poursuit, à travers ce cas précis, sa « révision », non seulement des textes, mais aussi des expériences mystiques antérieures, qui se manifeste par une mise au point fondée sur la primauté des principes de transcendance et de grandeur divines. Ceci dit, il conserve en commun avec la *Maassé Merkaba* les maîtres mots de : saisissement, crainte, tremblements et royauté. Mais cette crainte et ces tremblements se manifestent selon le Coran, non pas en raison d'une rencontre directe avec Dieu, mais d'une approche indirecte, par le biais du contraste entre la petitesse humaine et sa grandeur et par la crainte du Jugement. En effet, le Coran décrit Salomon dans un état de saisissement dû au fait qu'il réalise la distance qui sépare son propre

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<sup>70</sup> Option théologique qui a dominé l'ensemble de la pensée byzantine et qui, selon J. Meyendorff est généralement associée au mystérieux auteur du *Corpus Areopagiticum* et se trouvait en fait entièrement développée au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle dans les écrits des Cappadociens dirigés contre Eunome dans le but de rejeter son opinion sur la possibilité de l'esprit humain d'atteindre l'essence même de Dieu. Pour ce faire, ils affirmaient la transcendance absolue de Dieu en excluant toute tentative de l'identifier à des concepts humains. Meyendorff J. *Initiation à la théologie byzantine*, 20–21. Paris : Le Cerf, 1975.

<sup>71</sup> Voir à ce sujet Corbin, Henry. *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, 121–122. Idées. Paris : NRF Gallimard, 1964, ou encore comme chez les mystiques et en particulier Ibn 'Arabî, la connaissance de Dieu a pour condition première la prise de conscience par l'initié du néant de son propre être et de la relativité absolue de son existence. Voir à ce sujet Chodkiewicz, Michel : « Dans la prière parfaite, Dieu est premier ou plutôt il est seul », *Un océan sans rivage, Ibn Arabi le Livre et la Loi*, 160. Paris : Le Seuil, 1992.

trône de celui de Dieu, et, par là, son essence de celle de Dieu. Il décide alors, tout comme le fera à son tour la reine de Sabâ', de changer radicalement son comportement, et rend au néant les attributs de sa propre puissance pour vouer au Créateur le culte exclusif qui lui revient. Pour traduire ce processus en termes plus généraux, le Coran invite les rois de ce monde, en quelque sorte, à se « dédiviniser ».

Cette initiation par le trône ne concerne en effet pas seulement les personnes de Salomon et de la reine de Sabâ' en tant que simples individus ; elle touche également à la conception qu'ils ont de leur royauté et, par là, indique celle qu'il convient d'avoir de toute royauté terrestre. Ainsi, l'utilisation par le Coran des trois termes (*maqâm*, *'arsh* et *kursî*) désignant des lieux où l'on siège de manière générale et des trônes en particulier, en renvoyant chaque fois par le biais de l'analogie verbale à leur origine en tant que sièges divins, rappelle que tous les trônes appartiennent en réalité à Dieu, seul vrai roi de l'univers.<sup>72</sup> Ce thème constitue un autre aspect des expressions de la « royauté divine », motif étroitement lié à celui de la religion naturelle.<sup>73</sup> Dans cette perspective, les trônes

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<sup>72</sup> Ibn 'Arabî identifie le trône divin à la sphère qui embrasse tous les êtres : « Une fois existenciée la sphère qui englobe tous les êtres et que l'on appelle le trône (*'arsh*) ou siège royal (*sarîr*), il lui fallait un roi. Voir : Ibn 'Arabî, *Traité de mystique musulmane, Le dévoilement des effets du voyage*, bilingue, texte arabe établi, traduit et présenté par Denis Gril, 1999, Cérès, Tunis (première éd. : 1994, éd. de l'Eclat), p. 15, paragraphe 11.

<sup>73</sup> Cette relation se fait par l'intermédiaire du Pacte coranique des fils d'Adam (7, 172), première alliance entre Dieu et les descendants des fils d'Adam, aux termes de laquelle ils reconnaissent Dieu comme Seigneur (*rabb*). Or, cette première attestation de la suzeraineté ou de la royauté divine figure dans les principes théologiques de Lactance aussi bien que dans ceux des *Homélies pseudo clementines*. Voir par exemple à ce sujet la déclaration de Lactance, selon laquelle il faut reconnaître : « Un seul roi du monde » (*Institutions Divines*, I, 3). Ce thème de la suzeraineté absolue de Dieu correspond à ce que les *Homélies pseudo clementines* avaient présenté, antérieurement aux *Institutions Divines*, comme étant la « royauté divine ». Elles appellent en effet à ne reconnaître qu'un seul maître, condition nécessaire pour accéder ensuite au plus haut degré de développement

humains n'ont de légitimité que par la justesse de leurs relations à ces trônes divins, c'est-à-dire par la manière dont les rois terrestres situent leur personne, mais aussi leur fonction, avec l'humilité qui convient dans leur rapport à Dieu. Ainsi, le *'arsh* solaire de la reine de Sabâ ne doit pas lui faire oublier qu'il lui faut rester soumise au vrai roi de l'univers. De même, le *kursî* de Salomon—en dépit du fait qu'il rappelle, par le double jeu de l'analogie verbale le concernant, que sa royauté, à l'image de celle de Dieu, a une vocation universelle<sup>74</sup>—ne doit pas lui faire oublier que sa puissance est néant comparée à celle du Seigneur.<sup>75</sup>

On saisit alors mieux à la lumière de ces précisions pourquoi Salomon décide, selon le Coran, de commencer par dépouiller la reine de Sabâ de son trône de type divin solaire, ce qui devrait avoir

spirituel : « Comment un homme pourrait-il donner un maître unique à son âme (littéralement avoir l'âme monarchique) et devenir saint s'il a préjugé qu'il y a de nombreux dieux et non un seul ? » (*Homélie*, II, 42, 2) Le texte ajoute aussi que « ceux qui n'auront jamais donné la préférence à cette monarchie (divine) ne pourront jamais obtenir miséricorde » (*Homélie*, III, 3, 2).

<sup>74</sup> C'est en fonction de cette dimension universelle, qui établit un rapprochement de l'ordre de la comparaison relative entre le trône de Dieu et celui de Salomon que les rabbins ont interprété le verset 1, Chroniques, 29, 23 cité plus haut : « Salomon s'assit sur le trône de Yahvé » : En réalité, cela signifie : comme le trône du Saint, béni soit-il, dominait d'un bout du monde à l'autre, il en était de même du trône de Salomon ». Cité par Marie Joseph Pierre, *Les Odes de Salomon*, Introduction, p. 28. Une fois de plus, le Coran se réfère à la tradition juive tout en la rectifiant sur certains points. Ici, il se montre plus exigeant dans l'établissement du parallélisme entre les deux trônes en insistant sur la différence incommensurable entre leurs dimensions respectives.

<sup>75</sup> Une attitude comparable est attribuée à Salomon dans le *Kebru Nagash* qui le montre s'adressant ainsi à la reine de Sabâ : « Quel profit avons-nous, genre humain, si nous ne faisons pas pénitence et miséricorde sur terre ? Ne sommes-nous pas tous vanité, une herbe de la campagne qui sèche aussitôt et le feu la brûle ». Beylot, *La Gloire des Rois*, 164–65. Le Coran en donne une autre expression à propos de l'édification reçue par Salomon de la part d'une fourmi (27, 19).

pour effet immédiat de la priver de la confiance en son propre jugement, erreur qui l'avait rendue vulnérable aux pièges des démons.

Il commence donc par la détacher de l'illusion de puissance que pouvait lui procurer cet objet, avant de la déstabiliser au moyen d'une sorte de contre-illusion qu'il crée lui-même en rendant son trône méconnaissable et même en état d'être « renié » par elle. Il va ensuite lui faire comprendre, grâce au dallage de cristal et à la seconde illusion qu'il procure, son erreur au niveau de la science religieuse, c'est-à-dire l'aspect factice et erroné de son interprétation. Le fait qu'elle voie de l'eau alors qu'il n'y en a pas lui apparaît en effet comme le miroir qui reflète son erreur d'appréciation en matière religieuse et plus précisément d'interprétation du Livre de Dieu, ainsi que le suggère la tradition de Rabbi Aqiba. Salomon, en rétablissant la vérité du sol qu'elle foule, lui montre à travers un symbole (au double sens de représentation abstraite et de miroir) la véritable interprétation de la Torah, qui unifie tout autour du Dieu unique. C'est pourquoi elle reconnaît finalement qu'elle s'est fait du tort à elle-même et revient à Dieu, Seigneur des univers (v. 27, 43). Salomon est donc présenté dans ce passage comme interprète juste du Livre grâce à sa sagesse<sup>76</sup> en illustrant dans le Coran la leçon donnée par Aqiba : « Quand vous serez introduits auprès des pierres de marbre pur, soyez avertis (par illumination) que vous ne devez pas dire :—Eaux ! Eaux ! »

### **L'initiation par la vision des eaux : mystique des *Hékhalot* et vision d'Ezékïel**

Les références du Coran au seuil herméneutique représenté par la tradition des « quatre qui sont entrés au Paradis » de Rabbi Aqiba ne s'arrête pas à une interprétation de type théologique relative à l'unification de l'exégèse monothéiste. Il fait en effet conjointement référence aux méditations auxquelles elle a donné lieu dans le cadre des *Hékhalot* (*Les palais*), ensemble de corpus mystiques qui englobe

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<sup>76</sup> Voir à ce sujet Ginzberg, *Les légendes des juifs*, t. 5, 94–103, qui note que Tehillim 72, 324 précise que la sagesse de Salomon fut, d'une certaine façon, semblable à la sagesse divine car, comme Dieu il pouvait juger sans avoir besoin des preuves des témoins, car il pénétrait les arcanes de la pensée humaine.

lui-même la plupart des éléments de la *Maassé Merkaba* qui vient d'être évoquée. Celles-ci ont produit au V<sup>e</sup> siècle un texte, d'une origine sans doute contemporaine aux premiers tannaïms, et dont le rapport à la tradition des quatre au Paradis de Rabbi Aqiba a été mis en évidence, entre autres, par Gershom Scholem. Or, le Coran, en sus de la question de l'interprétation, renvoie clairement à l'initiation mystique évoquée par ce texte. Pour mieux comprendre son processus opératoire à ce niveau, il convient d'examiner en parallèle les deux passages concernés:

<i>Hékhbalot</i>	Coran 27, 42–44
<p>« Si l'un était indigne de voir le Roi dans sa beauté, les anges placés aux portes ont troublé ses sens et l'ont confondu. Et quand les anges lui dirent ; « Viens », il est entré ; et instantanément ils l'ont poussé et jeté dans le courant bouillant de lave. A la porte du sixième palais, apparaissent des centaines de mille et des millions de vagues d'eau qui se jetaient contre lui ; cependant il n'y avait pas une goutte d'eau, mais seulement l'éclat éthéré des plaques de marbre dont le palais était pavé. Mais celui qui était entré se tenait en face des anges et quand il demandait : « Qu'est-ce que signifient ces eaux ? » les anges commençaient par lui jeter des pierres et lui disaient : « Malheureux, ne vois-tu pas avec tes propres yeux ? Es-tu peut-être un descendant de ceux qui adoraient le veau d'or et n'es-tu pas digne de voir le Roi dans sa beauté ? Et il ne s'en allait pas sans que les anges ne l'aient frappé à la tête avec des barres de fer et ne l'aient blessé. Et ce sera un signe pour tous les</p>	<p>(42) Lorsqu'elle (la reine) fut arrivée, on lui dit : « Ton trône est-il ainsi ? Elle dit :—Il semble que ce soit lui. La Science nous avait été donnée et nous sommes soumis. (43) Ce qu'elle adorait en dehors de Dieu l'avait égarée. Elle appartenait à un peuple incrédule. (44) On lui dit— Entre dans le palais ! Lorsqu'elle l'aperçut, elle crut voir une étendue d'eau profonde (agitée de vagues) (<i>hujja</i>), et elle découvrit ses jambes (<i>kashafat 'an sâqayhâ</i>). Salomon dit :—C'est un palais dallé de cristal d'argent (<i>qawârîr</i>). Elle dit :—Mon Seigneur ! je me suis fait tort à moi-même ; avec Salomon, je me soumetts à Dieu, Seigneur des mondes. »</p>



temps que personne n'errera à la porte du sixième palais et ne verra l'éclat éthéré des plaques et ne posera une question sur elles et ne les prendra pour de l'eau, sans se mettre lui-même en danger. » <sup>77</sup>	
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En dépit des apparences qui pourraient être liées à une lecture superficielle, les parallélismes entre les deux textes sont à la fois nombreux et extrêmement précis. Ils interviennent tout d'abord au niveau des situations vécues par les personnages. Dans les deux cas, ceux-ci se rendent « chez le roi ». Dans les *Hékhalot*, ce roi n'est autre que Dieu ; dans le Coran, il s'agit de Salomon, roi/prophète et porte parole de la vérité divine dans le monde. Dans les deux cas également, les voyageurs sont invités à pénétrer dans un palais : sixième palais céleste selon les *Hékhalot*, palais de Salomon selon le Coran. Enfin, il est précisé dans les *Hékhalot* que les anges placés aux portes sèment la confusion et le trouble dans leur esprit. Or, c'est précisément une telle action qu'accomplit Salomon lorsqu'il rend méconnaissable le trône de la reine et lui demande ensuite de l'identifier. Il est aisé en effet de constater que sa réponse reflète bien un trouble et une incertitude : « Il semble que ce soit lui », réaction néanmoins immédiatement suivie néanmoins d'une réappropriation de ses erreurs antérieures : « La Science nous avait été donnée avant cela et nous sommes soumis », ce qui signifie que cette première *catharsis* a été insuffisante pour la ramener à une juste lecture de la Torah qu'elle se souvient avoir reçue et à laquelle elle est sûre d'être fidèle.

Dans les deux cas, enfin, les personnages arrivant au seuil confondent le sol brillant du palais avec une étendue d'eau.

Les points qui viennent d'être énumérés concernent les parallélismes les plus immédiatement évidents. Un rapprochement moins direct, mais dont l'importance n'est pas moindre, nécessite une mise en œuvre de la méthode de lecture qui, selon Rabbi Aqiba devait être appliquée à la Torah, et qui, bien entendu, présuppose

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<sup>77</sup> Barc, *Les arpenteurs du temps*, 68.

d'admettre que ce passage coranique a été composé, tout comme la Torah, en vue de n'être vraiment compris qu'en fonction de ces critères. Il s'agit une fois de plus de la méthode d'analogie verbale dont les premiers exemples sont apparus avec les propositions relatives au rapt du trône. On constate alors très vite que cette méthode d'écriture se trouve mise à contribution de manière particulièrement soutenue dans les versets relatifs à l'initiation de la reine.

La première des analogies verbales qui entrent dans la constitution du récit de la confrontation de la reine de Sabâ' avec l'illusion de l'eau est relative au terme utilisé par le Coran pour désigner cet élément. Le mot « eau » n'apparaît pas en tant que tel, mais la réalité de la substance aqueuse est représentée par le terme *lujja*, que Denise Masson et Blachère ont traduit tous deux par « pièce d'eau ». Or, la racine de ce mot (*l,j,j.*) ne figure qu'une autre fois dans le Coran, sous la forme *lujjin* qui caractérise la mer, plus précisément une mer profonde sur laquelle se succèdent les vagues : *bahri lujjin yaghsbabu manj min fawqihî manj min fawqihî* : une mer profonde ; une vague la recouvre sur laquelle monte une autre vague » (24, 40), mer qui représente elle-même de façon allégorique les actions des incroyants. On rejoint donc à travers ce détail, précisément, la description des *Hekbalot*, d'une surface sur laquelle : « apparaissent des centaines de mille et des millions de vagues d'eau ». <sup>78</sup>

On constate donc que le Coran, comme il le fait en d'autres occasions, rassemble ici plusieurs aspects d'une même question. Pour ce faire, il inscrit son récit d'initiation non seulement dans le cadre théologique de la tradition de Rabbi Aqiba relative à l'illusion produite par un sol brillant, mais également dans celui des développements mystiques qui en ont été réalisés en parallèle. En effet, les *Hekbalot* mettent l'accent sur une autre facette de cette erreur d'appréciation, la vision faussée du sol provenant, dans ce contexte, du fait que l'aspirant n'a pas su se libérer des obscurités de son

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<sup>78</sup> Selon André Neher, il faut tenir compte du fait que les dalles d'albâtre reflétant la lumière donnent précisément l'illusion des vagues qui agitent la surface de l'océan, « Le voyage mystique des quatre ». *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 140, n°1 (1951) : 59–82, pp. 62–63.

« moi » dont les activités forment une barrière infranchissable l'empêchant d'accéder à la contemplation du Roi divin et d'entrer dans son palais. Cette dernière acception, qui renvoie au contentement relatif à leurs propres opinions que les démons avaient exploité pour tromper les Sabâ', peut aussi être envisagée comme un écho au verset dans lequel le personnage qui a une science de l'Écriture annonce à Salomon qu'il ramènera le trône avant que celui-ci n'ait pu tourner son regard vers lui-même. Cette expression, en sus de la paralysie due à la crainte du Juge suprême, rappelle en effet que l'initiation ne peut avoir lieu que si la personne concernée, en l'occurrence Salomon, se trouve dans un état de détachement total par rapport à elle-même. Le texte coranique ouvre ainsi, de façon évidente, par le biais de ces rapprochements, la porte du niveau de la lecture spirituelle, procédé que de nombreux soufis n'ont pas manqué de remarquer, si ce n'est pour ce sujet précis, du moins à propos d'autres passages.

Ajoutons que deux autres caractéristiques mettent ce récit particulièrement en relief dans le Coran. La première est le fait que, de façon assez exceptionnelle, l'histoire de Salomon et de la reine de Sabâ' figure en un seul bloc dans une même sourate, la 27, alors que dans leur grande majorité et quelle qu'ait été leur importance, les autres thèmes abordés sont répartis dans le texte de manière plus ou moins éclatée. Une telle configuration attire en tout cas l'attention sur ce passage, porteur d'une autre caractéristique encore plus remarquable, qui, cette fois, a été soulignée par de nombreux commentateurs. Il s'agit du fait que cette sourate est la seule à contenir, à l'intérieur, en sus du début de texte, la formule *Bi-s-mi-l-Lâh ar-raḥmân ar-raḥîm* (au nom de Dieu, le Tout miséricordieux, qui fait miséricorde) qui figure dans tous les autres cas exclusivement au début de chaque sourate, sauf la 9, dont elle est totalement absente. Cette *Basmallah* est présentée dans la sourate 27 comme constituant l'en-tête du message adressé aux Sabâ' par Salomon (27, 30). Cet « écrit dans un écrit » renvoie le lecteur à une image en miroir chère au Coran dont nous avons déjà signalé l'importance.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Voir à ce sujet notre intervention : « Coran et Histoire : les ambiguïtés d'un jeu de miroirs » au colloque des 28 et 29 janvier 2010,

Elle l'informe que cette formule a précédé dans le temps l'apparition du texte coranique lui-même, tout en lui fournissant une indication sur le personnage biblique qui aurait été le premier à l'avoir mise par écrit. Dans cette optique, la reprise, au début de chaque sourate, de cette même formule, non seulement souligne l'importance du personnage de Salomon, mais encore désigne clairement le Coran comme héritier de sa sagesse.

Dans un tel contexte, le récit initiatique de Salomon et de la reine de Sabâ se trouve revêtu d'une importance spécifique, voire unique, qui le situe au cœur même du texte coranique, cette *basmallah* figurant de surcroît non seulement au milieu de la sourate 27, mais encore relativement près du centre du texte coranique lui-même, situation vouée, de toute évidence, à attirer l'attention.

Le deuxième cas d'analogie verbale de ce passage correspond à un thème directement lié à l'illusion de l'eau. Il s'agit du fait que la reine, face à ce qu'elle croit être une étendue d'eau parcourue de vagues, « met ses jambes à nu » (*kashafat 'an sâqaybâ* : littéralement : *dévoile ses deux jambes*). Comme on l'a vu, l'illusion provoquée par le sol lustré avait été interprétée par le midrash comme une épreuve destinée par Salomon à la reine de Sabâ pour s'assurer que celle-ci n'était pas un être démoniaque et/ou pour lui demander de se raser les jambes. Il est aisé de constater que, dans le cas d'une telle lecture, le récit de Aqiba perd sa signification profonde, tout comme d'ailleurs le récit coranique lui-même. Au contraire, si l'on prête attention à l'avertissement relatif à la science de l'Écriture, on s'aperçoit que, par le jeu de l'analogie verbale, le texte coranique renvoie son lecteur au seul autre verset qui contient cette expression. Il s'agit une fois de plus de la situation des ressuscités lors du Jugement dernier (68, 42) : « Le Jour où une jambe sera mise à nu (dévoilée) » (*yawm yukshafu 'an sâqin*) ; ils seront appelés à se prosterner et ils en seront incapables ». Cette évocation du jugement dernier rejoint l'analogie verbale relative au regard qu'ils ne peuvent tourner vers eux-mêmes, évoquée plus haut. Cette impossibilité évoquait à la fois le saisissement des ressuscités qui resteront le regard fixe, et le détachement nécessaire pour ceux qui

veulent être initiés à la contemplation divine. De même, les jambes des ressuscités seront raides, en raison de la terreur qu'ils ressentiront. Comme on peut le constater, les deux expressions renvoient à deux manifestations différentes d'un état de paralysie, des membres dans un cas, du regard dans l'autre, sous l'effet du saisissement causé lors de la résurrection par la rencontre avec le Juge suprême. L'idée qui en ressort est que la reine de Sabâ', se présentant avec sa fausse interprétation des Ecritures, se trouve devant Salomon dans une situation de saisissement comparable à celle des ressuscités lors du Jugement Dernier, devant Dieu, puisque celui-ci exerce à son égard ici-bas la fonction de juge. Ajoutons, comme l'a remarqué Ibn 'Arabî, que l'image de la jambe découverte évoque, dans le Coran, en sus du Jour du Jugement, le « dévoilement » d'un secret qui aura lieu à ce moment-là.<sup>80</sup> L'hypothèse de ce mystique se trouve confirmée par le seul autre passage coranique dans lequel *kashafa* est utilisé pour désigner l'acte de dénuder en faisant tomber un voile. Il s'agit du verset 50, 22 ; « Tu restais indifférent à cela ; nous avons ôté ton voile ; ta vue est perçante aujourd'hui ». Or, ce dévoilement désigne précisément, la prise de conscience, par l'homme qui se trouve brusquement confronté à la vérité par l'ivresse de la mort (50, 20), de la réalité que recouvrait la menace du Jugement et du châtement qui attend les injustes (50, 24). C'est ici un voile d'ordre psychologique et mental qui tombe de devant ses yeux, sa vue acquérant alors l'acuité du tranchant du métal (*ḥadîd*). Outre le fait que l'on puisse en déduire qu'Ibn 'Arabî semble avoir utilisé, au moins dans ce cas, une méthode de lecture fondée sur l'analogie verbale, on saisit là parfaitement dans toute sa dimension la situation dans laquelle se trouve la reine de Sabâ', à qui est dévoilée brusquement une vérité qu'elle avait occultée. Cette vérité n'est autre que la menace qui pèse sur elle d'un Jugement dernier qui risque fort de lui être défavorable. Dans cette situation, Salomon assume donc une double fonction : celle de juge, qui rend sur terre une justice parfaite et infaillible, reflet de celle que Dieu rendra au dernier Jour et celle d'accompagnateur de la reine dans ce voyage anticipé vers l'au-delà, conformément à ce que précisent les

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<sup>80</sup> Ibn 'Arabî, *Traité de mystique musulmane, Le dévoilement des effets du voyage*, 50.

versets 50, 20–21 : « On soufflera dans la trompette. Ce sera le Jour de la menace (*wa'id*). Chaque personne (âme, *nafs*) sera accompagnée d'un conducteur et témoin (*sâ'iq wa-shahîd*) ».

Ajoutons que, si lors de la résurrection une seule jambe est dévoilée—celle qui émerge la première du tombeau—, image qui renvoie, comme on vient de le voir, au dévoilement de la vérité du Jugement, la position physique de la reine de Sabâ en train de marcher a pour conséquence logique qu'elle dévoile ses deux jambes en croyant voir de l'eau. Néanmoins cette différence n'indique pas seulement une situation qui la distingue des morts en soulignant qu'elle se trouve dans un état d'anticipation des sentiments que ressentiront les défunts. Il s'agit aussi, dans son cas, d'une allusion au dévoilement, non pas d'un, mais de deux secrets. On vient de voir que le premier est relatif à la punition (*'adhâb, rajz*), dont l'aspect terrible et l'imminence seront ressentis le Jour du Jugement par les pécheurs. Par l'initiation qui la place dans la situation où elle se trouvera ce Jour là, la reine est en mesure de réaliser le mal irrémédiable que pourrait lui causer son obstination dans la voie erronée qu'elle a suivie. La deuxième prise de conscience, qui sera suivie de son exclamation : « Je me suis fait du tort à moi-même », va être examinée dans les paragraphes qui suivent.

Mais avant d'aborder la question de ce second dévoilement, il convient de remarquer que les deux analogies verbales réalisées par le Coran à propos du saisissement des ressuscités face à leur Juge renvoient elles-mêmes, par analogie purement sémantique cette fois, au passage du Livre des Rois selon lequel la reine de Sabâ' « Alors que le cœur lui manquait » confesse que : « C'est parce que Yahvé aime Israël pour toujours qu'il t'a établi roi pour exercer le droit et la justice ». En effet, ce que le traducteur de la Bible a rendu par l'expression « le cœur lui manqua » n'est autre que l'expression massorétique « *ve lo haya bab o'd ruah* » (1 Rois 10,5) qui signifie littéralement « et elle n'avait plus de souffle »<sup>81</sup> que l'on peut traduire par « et elle perdit l'esprit » ou « et elle eut le souffle coupé » sachant que « *ruah* » possède les deux acceptions de « souffle » et « esprit ». Cette expression peut en tout cas en hébreu

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<sup>81</sup> Nous remercions ici Dan Jaffe pour les informations qu'il nous a fournies à ce sujet.

exprimer justement un état de paralysie momentanée dû à un saisissement d'ordre psychique, tout à fait comparable à celle des jambes et des yeux des ressuscités selon le Coran, qui suggère par là que ce passage biblique lui-même pourrait bien comporter, à l'origine, un aspect initiatique que peu de lecteurs avaient vu, une profondeur insoupçonnée relativement à la prise de conscience de la grandeur de Dieu :

1 Rois 10, 5	Coran 27, 40	Coran 27, 44
<p>La reine de Saba eut le souffle coupé (paralysie momentanée de la reine devant la magnificence de Salomon, mais aussi et surtout devant la Majesté de Yahvé qu'elle laisse entrevoir) Elle reconnaît alors la puissance du Dieu d'Israël.</p>	<p>Le trône de la reine de Sabâ' sera amené à Salomon avant qu'il ait eu le temps de tourner son regard vers lui-même (regard fixe, paralysie des yeux des ressuscités) Celui qui connaît les Ecritures surprend Salomon en faisant allusion à une rapidité qui constitue, pour un interlocuteur averti, un indice de la proximité du Jugement dernier.</p>	<p>La reine de Sabâ' dénude ses jambes. Un premier secret se révèle à elle : il s'agit de son erreur en matière d'interprétation de l'Ecriture ainsi que ses conséquences à venir, perçues en l'occurrence comme immédiates. Elle est alors comme les ressuscités dont les jambes sont rigides en raison de leur saisissement (paralysie des jambes des ressuscités). Elle reconnaît alors l'unicité et la Toute Puissance de Dieu.</p>

Il convient, pour finir, de remarquer que la *catharsis* qui entraîne la déclaration de la reine de Sabâ' concernant le tort qu'elle s'est fait à elle-même intervient au verset 27, 44 suite à deux événements liés au dénudement de ses deux jambes.

Le premier est celui qui est directement causé par l'illusion de l'eau et qui déclenche chez elle le réflexe de dénuder ses jambes. Ainsi, elle s'aperçoit presque simultanément de deux choses : la première est son erreur d'appréciation (elle a cru voir de l'eau là où il n'y en avait pas) la seconde est la prise de conscience qui en

découle du caractère purement allégorique que revêt alors le dévoilement même de ses jambes. Cet acte la place dans l'attitude qui sera celle des morts à l'instant où l'on soufflera dans la trompette pour annoncer la résurrection, autrement dit dans un état d'anticipation de sa propre mort suivie de son retour à la vie. Se retrouvant alors devant Salomon dans la position qui sera la sienne le Jour de la Résurrection et du Jugement dernier, elle est prise de saisissement et momentanément paralysée. Comme dans un certain nombre d'autres cas, le Coran, dans l'image miroitante que reflète le sol de cristal, abolit complètement le temps, la reine de Sabâ' réalisant par une expérience vécue, en un même instant la gravité de son illusion et la position qui sera la sienne lorsqu'il faudra en rendre compte.<sup>82</sup>

Le second est relatif au terme employé par Salomon pour désigner la nature du pavement de son palais. Il explique à la reine qu'il s'agit d'un sol dallé de cristal. Il importe de noter que ce détail est le seul qui ne correspond pas au récit des *Hékaloth* ni d'ailleurs à aucun de ceux qui ont été transmis par le biais de traditions juives qui toutes, font état d'un sol de marbre ou d'albâtre. La seule version d'un récit de ce genre qui fasse état d'un sol de cristal est celle du *Mababharata* selon laquelle « le héros Duryodhana visite la *sabha* (grand hall d'entrée d'un palais royal, ouvert sur l'intérieur comme sur l'extérieur du palais, qui peut être une cour royale...où le roi rend la justice) de Yudhitshira et relève ses vêtements pour traverser ce qu'il croit être une étendue d'eau alors qu'il s'agit d'une surface de cristal ». <sup>83</sup> Il n'est nullement exclu, au regard de ce que nous savons à présent, que le Coran ait combiné dans ce passage deux seuils herméneutiques, la tradition indienne présentant l'intérêt de préciser que l'initié est introduit dans la cour d'un roi/juge, ce qui est exactement le cas de Salomon.

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<sup>82</sup> Ce procédé narratif se retrouve également à la sourate 85 pour désigner la situation des damnés qui vivent par anticipation en même temps la punition qui les attend et son témoins du mal qu'ils font à ceux qu'ils persécutent injustement Voir à ce sujet notre intervention : « Coran et Histoire : les ambiguïtés d'un jeu de miroirs » citée plus haut (note 79).

<sup>83</sup> Beylot, *La Gloire des Rois*, 45.



Cependant, les rapprochements avec ce texte s'arrêtent là, dans la mesure où le Coran utilise un mot qui fait référence à un cristal tout à fait particulier (*qawâritr* sing. *qâritra*), à savoir celui dont on fait les flacons et autres récipients destinés à contenir un liquide précieux. La règle coranique d'analogie verbale renvoie dans ce cas à la seule autre occurrence de ce terme. Il s'agit des coupes de cristal qui contiennent les boissons des Gens du Paradis : 76, 15–16 : « On fera circuler parmi eux des vaisseaux d'argent et des coupes de cristal (*qawâritr*), de cristal d'argent et remplies jusqu'au bord ». Outre le rappel du Paradis qui, lui-même, renvoie dans le contexte présent au Paradis de l'interprétation des Ecritures du récit de Rabbi Aqiba, ce terme, qui se rapporte à un contenant tout autant qu'à un matériau, évoque le fait que l'eau, symbole de la science sacrée, comme l'ont noté de très nombreux commentateurs mystiques,<sup>84</sup> ne peut pas représenter une connaissance véritable si elle coule « à la surface » du texte. Une telle situation évoque en effet une interprétation galvaudée et imposée de l'extérieur par les hommes, une interprétation qui « recouvre » la vérité au sens de *kufr* comme l'évoque le verset 2, 102,<sup>85</sup> tandis que la vraie science est celle qui se trouve contenue à l'intérieur du contenant de cristal ou sous la pierre lisse sur lesquels le texte sacré est gravé, c'est-à-dire au cœur des Ecritures elles-mêmes. C'est une science ésotérique dont le sens jaillit de l'intérieur et non pas une compréhension illusoire et fautive qui « recouvre » le vrai sens des Ecritures. Ainsi, à lui seul, le mot *qawâritr* renvoie une fois de plus à l'image de la « science de l'écriture » évoquée par l'auxiliaire de Salomon, qui signifie que les sens du texte coranique, entre autres, ne doivent pas être imposés de l'extérieur par son lecteur, mais

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<sup>84</sup> Voir Tirmidhî. Ce symbolisme de l'eau est, pourrait-on dire, universel à l'époque. Ibn 'Arabî le reprend à la suite de Tirmidhî, l'exprimant de la manière suivante : « L'eau symbolise la science, la vie provenant de l'une sur le plan sensible, de l'autre sur le plan spirituel. Aussi périrent-ils (les contemporains de Noé) par l'eau pour avoir refusé la science ». *Traité de mystique musulmane, Le dévoilement des effets du voyage*, 49, par. 40.

<sup>85</sup> Ce verset évoque le « recouvrement » de la vérité sur Salomon par les scribes de la Torah sur l'instigation des démons.

recueillis à partir de ce qui émane de lui-même. Dans le texte, Salomon rectifie ainsi la fausse interprétation de la reine qui « couvrait », littéralement parlant, le texte de la Torah au moyen de sa fausse appréciation du sens, par sa juste compréhension, celle qui réside à l'intérieur du texte. C'est pourquoi il la compare à l'eau qui se trouve dans les flacons transparents des Gens du Paradis.

Rappelons par ailleurs, que, nous plongeant dans l'univers de la pensée des *Hékebalot*, qui, comme le rappelle André Neher, n'est autre qu'un aspect de la pensée juive elle-même,<sup>86</sup> l'eau qui semble jaillir sur les pierres brillantes du palais n'est pas sans évoquer les eaux qui s'écoulent dans le temple, « jaillissant de dessous le seuil du Sanctuaire et qui ont leur source dans les dalles d'albâtre ». Ce spécialiste a constaté qu'une telle image, intimement liée à la vision d'Ezékiel, dont le rappel traverse le Coran de part en part comme nous avons eu l'occasion de le remarquer,<sup>87</sup> doit être mise en relation avec celle de la *Tosefta* qui précise qu'un jour « toutes les eaux de la création jailliront comme de l'orifice d'un cruchon (ou d'un flacon) (*kemin py hapak*).<sup>88</sup> Ainsi, le cruchon, évoqué par le terme de *qamârîr* est susceptible de renvoyer, à travers son rapport au jardin du Paradis, doublement au Temple. En effet, le jardin n'est autre que le Temple lui-même en tant que figuration terrestre et avant-goût du paradis<sup>89</sup>.

Il est possible de comprendre à partir de cela que la reine de Sabâ' réagisse à deux niveaux lorsque Salomon lui parle des *qamârîr*. Le premier est celui de l'évocation de l'interprétation juste, c'est-à-dire unifiée des Ecritures, dont elle-même se trouve en cet instant très loin, le second est l'image évoquée par le renvoi de ce terme au « cruchon » de la *Tosefta*, une image susceptible elle-même de rappeler : « le jour où les eaux surgiront », comme le préconise le texte

<sup>86</sup> Neher, « Le voyage mystique des quatre », 70 et 74.

<sup>87</sup> Voir à ce sujet notre contribution au colloque de Sarrebruck de mars 2010 organisé par INARAH : « Les « légendes des anciens dans le Coran. Récit des Dormants de la caverne et *Roman d'Alexandre* à partir de la sourate 18 » à paraître dans INARAH n° 6 (2011).

<sup>88</sup> Notion reproduite en deux passages, par la *Michna Cheqalim*, IV, 2 et *Middot*, II, 6, voir Neher, « Le voyage mystique des quatre », 66.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

biblique de la vision d'Ezékïel (verset 1), « de dessous le seuil de la maison (*bayt*) (entendez : de dessous le seuil du sanctuaire proprement dit, c'est-à-dire du *hekal*), rejoindront la porte de l'eau et de là se déverseront, avec toutes les eaux de la création, sur la face de la terre ».<sup>90</sup> En effet, comme le constate André Neher, « si dans la Bible le surgissement des eaux de dessous le seuil du temple entraîne la régénération d'un coin du territoire palestinien ; dans la *Tosefta*, il s'agit de la résurrection et de la re-création du monde ».<sup>91</sup>

Cette vision représente, semble-t-il, le deuxième secret révélé à la reine de Sabâ', à savoir l'annonce du Jour où toutes les eaux d'en bas se rejoindront, les eaux de la vie jaillissant de dessous le seuil du temple de Salomon et venant revivifier les eaux fétides de la mer morte et, par delà toutes les eaux de l'univers, lors de la re-création du monde nouveau qui sera donné par Dieu aux justes. Cet événement est celui même qui doit, selon Rabbi Aqiba, précéder la réunification de toutes les eaux, célestes et terrestres, c'est-à-dire, une fois encore, le moment de la Résurrection et du Jugement dernier, accompagné de la vision du monde nouveau qui sera réservé aux justes dont la reine de Sabâ' peut à juste titre craindre en cet instant de ne pas faire partie. Salomon, par l'utilisation du terme *qawârîr*, informe la reine qu'il y a donc bien, au fond, de l'eau là où elle en a vu, mais que celle-ci est encore retenue sous le seuil du Temple d'où elle ne sortira que lors de l'accomplissement des temps. Elle existe en attendant à l'état de promesse de la re-création de l'univers pour les justes. Cette promesse révélée subitement à la reine fait pendant à la menace du Jugement et présente ici une illustration particulièrement intéressante du concept d'*al-wa'd wa-l-na'id* (la promesse et la menace) sur lequel les théologiens mu'tazilites ont tant insisté. La différence est que le Coran attribue à Salomon une pédagogie qui présente les deux termes dans un ordre inverse, l'initiation de la reine commençant par la menace qui cause le saisissement et la prise de conscience et s'achevant sur la promesse suite à laquelle elle reconsidère sa situation et prend la décision de revenir au véritable monothéisme. Notons pour finir que cette promesse de résurrection faite à la reine de Sabâ' renvoie,

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<sup>90</sup> Neher, « Le voyage mystique des quatre », 67.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 66.

de surcroît, à un passage évangélique bien connu, celui de la résurrection de la Reine du Midi, qui, à son tour, deviendra juge de ceux qui auront refusé de suivre Jésus : Matthieu 12–42 : « La Reine du Midi se lèvera, au Jour du Jugement, avec cette génération et la condamnera, parce qu'elle vint des extrémités de la terre pour entendre la sagesse de Salomon, et voici, il y a ici plus que Salomon ». Dans Luc XI, 31 : « La Reine du Midi se lèvera, au Jour du Jugement, avec les hommes de cette génération et les condamnera, parce qu'elle vint des extrémités de la terre pour entendre la sagesse de Salomon, et voici, il y a ici plus que Salomon<sup>92</sup> ».

On peut donc constater ici comment le Coran, par la médiation d'un seul mot : *qawârit*, renvoie conjointement à deux thèmes relevant de l'univers de pensée qui émane de la lecture de la Torah par Rabbi Aqiba et son Ecole : la nécessité, lorsque l'on atteint le

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<sup>92</sup> Marie Joseph Pierre rappelle à ce sujet que Jésus affirme dans le Nouveau Testament sa fonction de « Roi venu dans le monde pour rendre témoignage à la vérité (Jn, 18, 36–37) et enseigne au temple sous le portique de Salomon, c'est-à-dire le seul lieu dans le second temple construit par Hérode qui a conservé la mémoire du « vrai sanctuaire d'éternité », bâti par son ancêtre, sur lequel avait séjourné la nuée de gloire, résidence de Dieu à jamais (1 Rois 8, 13) et qui avait reçu la promesse : « Je maintiendrai pour toujours ton trône royal sur Israël (...) Il ne te manquera jamais un descendant sur Israël » (1 Rois, 9, 5). Elle ajoute que dans la Bible Salomon est « Messie » ou « Christ », c'est-à-dire oint du Seigneur (1 Rois 1, 39) et la royauté salomonienne ouvre une ère de paix et de repos sur Jérusalem (1 Rois, 8, 56) (...) Il est sage et c'est cet héritage que Jésus revendique dans les citations évangélique de Mathieu et de Luc. Dans ce cadre apparaît ce que l'on pourrait appeler les « signe de Salomon » (l'ouverture de la sagesse et du salut aux païens du monde entier, grâce à la venue de la reine du Midi). Ce signe est quasi assimilé au signe de Jonas, c'est-à-dire aux trois jours et trois nuits du mystère de la mort-résurrection en *Matthieu* 12, 40–42 et *Luc* 11, 29–32. Ce signe de Salomon était déjà préfiguré par les trois jours de la Pâque où Jésus était resté au Temple « dans la maison » et « aux affaires » se son père (Salomon ou Dieu ?) ! cf. *Luc* 2, 41–50, le traité juif sur l'histoire du monde appelé *Seder 'Olam Rabba*, 14 signale en effet que c'est à l'âge de 12 ans que Salomon prit en mains les affaires de son père. (*Les Odes de Salomon*, 30 et note 14).

Paradis de l'interprétation, de réaliser son unification, et la symbolique des eaux qui indique que lorsque cette unification aura été réalisée, les eaux terrestres se rassembleront afin que surgisse le monde renouvelé des justes, puis que celles-ci s'unifieront à leur tour avec les eaux célestes pour que la résurrection puisse avoir lieu. Toutes ces concordances confirment, en leur temps et lieu, le fait que le lecteur est entré avec ce récit de Salomon dans un univers où il ne peut progresser que s'il est muni d'une vraie science de l'Écriture, qui aboutit elle-même à une « unification des Écritures ».

Le Coran introduit en effet son public, à partir de ce récit d'initiation de la reine de Saba, non pas dans une nouvelle Torah, mais dans un « univers renouvelé de la Torah » dans lequel il lui incombe de progresser grâce à un mode de lecture qui s'enracine en réalité dans les traditions les plus anciennes de lecture des Écritures. Le texte coranique construit ici sa propre structure textuelle à partir des règles d'analogie verbale et de non synonymie des textes sacrés. Ce faisant, il se rattache doublement à l'essence même du récit biblique, puisque dans certains cas, comme par exemple celui des signes de paralysie devant la grandeur divine et l'imminence du Jugement, sa lecture dépend de deux critères conjoints : ses analogies internes propres, conçues « à la manière » de la Torah selon l'école de Rabbi Aqiba et des analogies avec les contenus bibliques eux-mêmes, y compris des analogies verbales avec des termes de même racine comme dans le cas de *maqâm/maqom*. Le Coran fonctionne alors en interaction complète avec la Bible. A ce moment là le lecteur se trouve placé dans une position qui sollicite de sa part une démarche exégétique extrêmement rigoureuse et l'effort de compréhension (*ijtihad*) qu'il lui faut alors entreprendre prend tout son sens et révèle toutes ses dimensions. Il se trouve en effet lui-même investi, à son niveau, de la réalisation de l'exégèse unifiée prônée par Aqiba et qui, dans le Coran, se déploie selon une acception bipolaire: une compréhension de la vérité divine qui soit une à travers une lecture elle-même unifiée et harmonisée de l'ensemble des Livres divins.

Cet univers de pensée s'étend en cercles concentriques à partir du récit d'initiation de la reine de Sabâ', qui, rappelons-le, est en même temps une initiation pour le lecteur. Il se propage ensuite sous la forme d'une onde qui va englober aussi bien les événements passés que futurs, eux-mêmes étroitement liés les uns aux autres et répartis dans des versets qui, par rapport au fil du texte, peuvent se

situer indifféremment « avant » ou « après » cet épisode initiatique. Nous nous intéresserons ici exclusivement au futur, pour lequel il projette directement le lecteur dans l'histoire des Sabâ' de l'antiquité tardive, autrement dit les sud arabiques du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle, présentés comme les descendants et héritiers de l'antique peuple de la reine du même nom, leur histoire étant introduite, à la sourate 34, verset 14, directement à la suite du récit de la découverte de la mort de Salomon par les djinns.

### **Les Sabâ' de Ma'rib :**

#### **leurs jardins, leurs pèlerinages et leurs Livres**

Comme on va pouvoir le constater dans ce qui suit, le Coran étend son utilisation des analogies verbales et des allégories en relation avec le texte biblique et ses commentaires tannaïtiques à un long passage de la sourate 34, relatif aux Sabâ' de l'antiquité tardive. Ce faisant, il revendique implicitement pour les tribus arabes du sud qui se sont réclamées d'eux l'héritage de la sagesse du roi Salomon.<sup>93</sup>

Voici ce qu'il dit à leur sujet dans un premier ensemble de versets :

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<sup>93</sup> L'importance de ce thème a été soulignée par un savant maronite du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Abraham Ecchellensis, nommé professeur de syriaque et d'arabe au Collège de France, alors Collège royal, en 1645, qui revendique l'héritage de Salomon pour les arabes en général, abstraction faite de l'Islam. Voir Geneviève Gobillot, « Abraham Ecchellensis, philosophe et historien des sciences » communication au Colloque « *Abraham Ecchellensis* » Collège de France, 9 et 10 juin 2006, *Orientalisme, science et controverse : Abraham Ecchellensis (1605–1664)*, 171–91. Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Etudes en sciences religieuses, 143. Brepols/Turnhout, Belgique, 2010, p. 182 : « Il fait allusion à un ouvrage arabe attribué à Salomon, dans lequel il est question « du cèdre, un bois du Liban, et de l'Physope, qui pousse sur les murs, des chevaux, des oiseaux, des reptiles et des poissons ». Il ajoute que les arabes, qui ont transmis ce livre sous ce nom, disent aussi que la reine de Saba, étant arabe, s'est adressée à Salomon dans cette langue, et il conclut que, même si l'ouvrage n'est pas de Salomon, il ne serait pas indigne de l'être. »

34, 15–16: (15) « Il y avait dans leur contrée un signe (*âya*) pour les Sabâ' : deux jardins, l'un à droite et l'autre à gauche : « Mangez le viatique de votre Seigneur et soyez reconnaissants envers lui : voici un excellent pays et un seigneur qui pardonne (*ghafîr*) (16) Mais ils se détournèrent. Nous avons alors déchaîné contre eux l'inondation des digues : Nous avons changé leurs deux jardins en deux autres jardins (le judaïsme et le christianisme tenant à se séparer, voire à s'opposer l'un à l'autre) aux fruits amers tels que des tamaris et quelques jujubiers. » et : « 34, 20 : Iblîs a réalisé ses intentions à leur égard ; ils l'ont donc suivi, à l'exception d'un groupe de croyants (un reste que l'on peut rapprocher de celui évoqué par Isaïe 61, 3) ».

D'après les historiens, les jardins (ou plus précisément les vallées) en question furent noyés plusieurs fois au cours du temps en raison de la rupture de la digue de Ma'rib, événement dont l'évocation apparaît au verset 16, qui la désigne, pour lever toute ambiguïté, par le terme sudarabique de *'arim*. Mais avant d'aborder l'aspect historique de cette question, il importe de noter que le Coran focalise d'entrée de jeu l'attention du lecteur sur le fait que c'est l'existence même des deux jardins, à droite et à gauche de la digue, qui représentait, selon lui, avant même et indépendamment de leur destruction, un « signe » pour les Sabâ'. La question centrale de ce passage est donc avant tout de comprendre à quelle réalité renvoient ces deux jardins dans le texte coranique.

On a vu plus haut que, selon la tradition de Aqîba et même bien antérieurement à elle, le Paradis de l'interprétation était assimilé à un jardin, en l'occurrence le jardin d'Eden, tandis que la mystique des Hékhâlot comparait le jardin au Temple lui-même. Ainsi, dans la mesure où le Coran se réfère à ce contexte exégétique, les deux jardins présentés explicitement comme des signes doivent renvoyer à quelque chose qui se trouve en relation avec ce paradis de l'interprétation, et, plus précisément encore, qui évoque directement l'unification de l'interprétation des Ecritures. Dans ce cas, ils ont toutes les chances de représenter les deux entités religieuses principalement concernées par cette unification. Etant, de plus, décrits comme à la fois proches, symétriques et arrosés par le même cours d'eau, tout en restant distincts dans leurs orientations respectives (à droite et à gauche), il ne peuvent man-

quer d'évoquer les deux grands courants des religions révélées de l'époque, à savoir le judaïsme et le christianisme et, plus précisément ici, les lectures juive et chrétienne des Ecritures.

Il convient alors de se demander à quelle situation historique correspond un tel cas de figure. Il faut en effet, selon la description coranique, qu'il s'agisse d'une période durant laquelle les deux ont non seulement cohabité de la manière la plus harmonieuse possible, mais encore se sont présentés comme des jardins paradisiaques d'interprétation assez ouverts pour que les Sabéens puissent manger des fruits de l'un et de l'autre en toute liberté, comme Dieu le leur ordonne au verset 34, 15. Or, une seule période historique est susceptible de correspondre à cette description. Il s'agit du moment où le royaume himyarite après avoir, au III<sup>e</sup> siècle, conquis ceux de Sabâ<sup>94</sup> et du Hadramawt, unifia l'ensemble de l'Arabie méridionale et étendit ensuite son influence sur l'Arabie centrale et occidentale au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle, contrôlant ainsi près de la moitié de la péninsule, et ce jusqu'à la première moitié du sixième siècle.

Sur le plan religieux, cette dynastie himyarite s'est caractérisée par deux traits essentiels : le rejet officiel du polythéisme et l'adoption, à côté du judaïsme dans la sphère privée, d'un monothéisme officiel tout à fait neutre « acceptable par tous, juifs, chrétiens ou partisans d'autres courants aujourd'hui disparus<sup>95</sup> ». Les découvertes épigraphiques nous renseignent sur le fait que le rejet officiel du polythéisme intervint dans la région au début des années 380 et que, dès lors, toutes les inscriptions sont mono-

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<sup>94</sup> Sabâ' avait auparavant occupé, au VII<sup>e</sup> s. av. J.-C. presque tout le Yémen occidental. Voir Robin, Christian. « Quelques épisodes marquants de l'histoire sudarabique ». *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 61.1 (1991) : 55–70, p. 57. La puissance de Sabâ' s'exerça encore au III<sup>e</sup> siècle, époque où il conquiert le Hadramawt, avant d'être incorporé lui-même dans le nouveau royaume himyarite vers 275. Voir Ryckmans, « Le panthéon de l'Arabie du sud préislamique : état des problèmes et brève synthèse », 153.

<sup>95</sup> Christian Robin, Directeur de l'UMR Orient et Méditerranée, Membre de l'Institut, « Le Yémen entre judaïsme et christianisme », février 1998, *Clio*, 2007, p. 1.



théistes ou juives jusque vers 530.<sup>96</sup> Ainsi que le décrit Christian Robin, pour mieux asseoir son emprise, la dynastie himyarite s'était efforcée d'unifier religieusement le pays et le monothéisme était dans l'air du temps. Le choix du christianisme présentait l'inconvénient d'impliquer un assujettissement à Byzance. Les rois de Himyar firent donc le choix du judaïsme, auquel ils se convertirent, mais ils n'en firent pas la religion officielle. L'Etat se contenta de célébrer un monothéisme très neutre. Désormais toute l'Arabie méridionale avait le même souverain, utilisait la même langue—du moins dans les inscriptions— et partageait certaines institutions, comme le calendrier.<sup>97</sup>

Ce monothéisme correspond à la tendance qui a été appelée *rahmāniyya*, du nom de Raḥmanān, donné à la divinité unique, aussi bien par les juifs que par les chrétiens de l'époque.<sup>98</sup> Il convient de préciser que les historiens sont actuellement en discussion sur la question de savoir si, comme le pensent certains, il exista à cette époque un culte rahmanite officiel spécifique,<sup>99</sup> regroupant les fidèles de toutes les tendances religieuses et proposant des pra-

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<sup>96</sup> Christian Robin, « Himyar et Israël », *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'année...—Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 148.2 (2004) : 831–908, p. 833

<sup>97</sup> « Le Yémen entre judaïsme et christianisme », 1.

<sup>98</sup> Comme en atteste encore l'inscription, datée d'après 525, émanant d'un himyarite nommé Sumyafa' Ashwa', qui se termine par l'invocation « Au nom de Raḥmanān et de son fils Christ vainqueur ». Robin, Ch. « Du paganisme au monothéisme ». *REMMM* 61 (1991/3) : 139–55, p. 147.

<sup>99</sup> C'est l'hypothèse, entre autres, de Beeston (Beeston, A.F.L. « Himyarite Monothéism ». Dans A. Abdallah, S. Al-Sakkar abd R. Mortel, éd. ; supervision A. al-Ansary, *Studies in the history of Arabia II, pré islamic Arabia*, 149–54. Riadh, 1404 h./1984 ; « Judaism and Christianity in pre-islamic Yemen ». Dans Chelhod, Joseph, éd. *L'Arabie du Sud, histoire et civilisation*, I, *Le peuple yéménite et ses racines*, 271–78. Islam d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, 21. Paris, 1984) ; de Rippin, « *RHMNN* and the hanifs ». Dans Hallâq, Wael B., et Donald P. Little, éd. *Islamic Studies Presentend to Charles J. Adams*, 153–68. Leyde, 1991. Reprise dans Rippin 2001, III, et *The Qur'an and its Interpretative Tradition* (Variorum Collected Studies Series CS, 715. Aldershot, 2001), voir Robin, « Himyar et Israël », 868.

tiques communes issues d'une véritable unification de la lecture des Écritures, ou s'il s'agissait seulement d'une attitude du pouvoir, soucieux de rassembler dans la paix tous les monothéistes de la région en s'exprimant avec discrétion dans les édits et les écrits des fondations officielles.<sup>100</sup> Il est impossible de trancher actuellement dans un sens ou dans un autre et d'ailleurs peu importe au fond dans la mesure où les témoignages archéologiques et historiques suffisent à prouver que les juifs, bien que représentants de la tendance majoritaire de la population ainsi que de la religion des souverains, respectaient jusque dans leurs inscriptions tombales l'expression de ce monothéisme « ouvert » comme le prouve, par exemple, l'inscription en écriture sabéenne d'une tombe datant des III<sup>e</sup>-IV<sup>e</sup> s. celle de Léah, une juive d'Arabie, et sans doute du Yémen, enterrée en Palestine : « Sépulture de Léah, fille de Yawdah. Que Raḥmânân lui accorde le repos. Amen. Shalom »,<sup>101</sup> Christian Robin souligne que si l'inscription araméenne qui figure sur cette même tombe fait référence au livre de Daniel, la sabéenne, quant à elle, reste vague et mentionne Dieu sous son appellation de « Clément » en restant floue dans la prière qui lui est adressée, deux traits qui se retrouveront dans les inscriptions postérieures. Il ajoute que pour la période de 380-530, nous possédons un total de neuf inscriptions royales monothéistes ne contenant pas le moindre indice d'une orientation religieuse reconnaissable, juive, chrétienne, manichéenne ou autre : « On y relève uniquement des invocations ou des supplices au « Seigneur du ciel », à « Raḥmânân (maître du ciel et de la terre) ou à « Ilâhân, seigneur du ciel et de la terre »,<sup>102</sup>

D'un autre côté, des témoignages anciens rapportent que la première mission chrétienne au Yémen, remontant au règne de Constance II (337-361) eut lieu vers 350. Philostorge rapporte qu'un évêque arien, Théophile l'Indien, probablement originaire de l'île yéménite de Suqutra, se rendit auprès d'un roi himyarite anonyme. Malgré l'influence des juifs, nombreux dans le pays, le roi

<sup>100</sup> Voir Robin, « Himyar et Israël », 868-69.

<sup>101</sup> Robin, « Himyar et Israël », 840.

<sup>102</sup> Ceci sur un total de seize inscriptions royales, trois d'entre elles ne contenant aucune formule de nature religieuse et les quatre autres étant trop fragmentaires. Robin, « Himyar et Israël », 859.

lui fit bon accueil et ordonna de construire trois églises à ses frais à Zafar, à Aden et dans un port à l'entrée du golfe arabo-persique. Le roi se serait même converti au christianisme.<sup>103</sup> Tout concourt donc à prouver qu'il régna durant presque deux siècles une véritable convivialité entre les fidèles de tous les monothéismes de la région, les deux plus représentés ayant été sans doute le judaïsme et le christianisme, figurés dans le Coran par les deux jardins mitoyens de Sabâ'.<sup>104</sup> De plus, l'importance du nombre des chrétiens à Najrân vers 520 prouve que ceux-ci avaient pu se développer et circuler librement dans les territoires himyarites.

On pourrait soulever une objection à ce niveau en demandant pourquoi le Coran mentionne les Sabâ' et non pas Himyar, dont les souverains étaient les acteurs directs de la diffusion du monothéisme de la *rahmâniyya*.

On peut proposer à cela trois réponses.

La première est que, durant cette période, Sabâ' n'existait plus en tant qu'entité indépendante, puisqu'il faisait partie de Himyar depuis 270 ou 280, les rois himyarites portant le titre de « Rois de Sabâ', dhû Raydân, Hadramawt et Yamnat »<sup>105</sup> Son sort était donc totalement lié à celui du royaume dans son ensemble et le monothéisme neutre de la *rahmâniyya* y régnait sans doute comme partout ailleurs. La deuxième est qu'il apparaît clairement que, pour le Coran, cette *rahmaniyya* n'était autre que l'héritage de la sagesse de Salomon, le premier, comme on l'a vu, à avoir écrit le nom al-Rahmân en tête de sa missive à la reine de Sabâ', la conclusion à laquelle il invite étant que ce monothéisme, correspondant à une interprétation unifiée des Ecritures, aurait été apporté par les Sabâ' aux Himyar et non pas l'inverse. Cette hypothèse est bien entendu invérifiable pour l'instant, mais elle rend néanmoins fidèlement compte de l'intentionnalité du texte coranique. En revanche, il est certain que cette *rahmâniyya* était répandue dans toute l'Arabie du

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<sup>103</sup> Robin, Christian. « Du paganisme au monothéisme ». *REMMM* 61 (1991/3) : 144.

<sup>104</sup> La présence chrétienne est attestée à Ma'rib est solidement attestée au moins dès le début du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Voir Robin, « Du paganisme au monothéisme », 147.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

sud et que, dès l'instant où un souverain *hijyarite* sectaire, en l'occurrence Yûsuf (m. entre 525 et 527) mit fin à la situation de paix en s'attaquant au chrétiens, l'exclusivisme religieux dut se répandre comme une trainée de poudre, donc toucher également Ma'rib aux deux jardins. Ces jardins évoqués par le Coran pourraient donc figurer respectivement la Torah et l'Évangile, les livres des deux groupes religieux qui, longtemps, vécurent côte à côte dans ce pays en relatives paix et en bonne entente. Mais ils pourraient tout aussi bien représenter des entités correspondant à l'Église et à la Synagogue envisagées dans leur sens figuré de rassemblement des fidèles. En effet, selon la mystique juive des premiers temps, qui correspond aux lectures exégétiques les plus anciennes, le Temple est lui-même identifié à un jardin, contenant des arbres dont les initiés mangent les fruits.<sup>106</sup> Le phénomène de la rupture de la digue de Ma'rib aurait alors été la conséquence, selon le Coran, du fait que les Sabâ' s'étaient détournés de l'unification de l'interprétation des textes, à savoir la Torah et l'Évangile, chacun revendiquant une appartenance spécifique et excluant l'autre de la vérité.

La troisième réponse à la question posée par le Coran réside, précisément, dans cet événement de la rupture de la digue. En effet, si, selon la pensée coranique, la *rahmâniyya* avait été apportée par les Sabâ', il était logique que ce soient eux qui aient pâti les premiers de sa destruction par l'imposition d'un sectarisme religieux.

A ce niveau surgit immédiatement une deuxième question : à quelle rupture le Coran fait-il précisément allusion, sachant qu'elles furent nombreuses, les plus importantes d'entre elles ayant eu lieu au cours du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle respectivement aux alentours de 542 et 580 ? Pour tenter d'y répondre, on peut se référer à l'étude que nous avons faite de la sourate al-Kahf, dans laquelle nous avons montré que le Coran adopte une attitude générale vis-à-vis de l'histoire événementielle qui consiste, tout en évitant de commettre la moindre erreur d'ordre chronologique, à ne pas s'attacher, volontairement, aux détails chiffrés de l'histoire, afin de présenter avant tout les événements comme des exemples permettant une

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<sup>106</sup> Neher, « Le voyage mystique des quatre », 78–79.

édification religieuse d'ordre transcendant.<sup>107</sup> Comme il le dit d'ailleurs clairement au sujet des Sabâ', ceux-ci sont devenus pour tous l'objet d'un récit légendaire (Coran 34, 19).

On aurait donc tendance à penser que le Coran, comme il le fait très souvent, regroupe ici plusieurs événements de même nature, à savoir les ruptures successives de la digue, dont la répétition ne fait que renforcer la leçon qu'il entend donner.

Cette leçon peut être exposée comme suit : les Sabâ', héritiers de la sagesse de Salomon et, donc, en particulier de la *rahmāniyya*, l'ont mise en pratique à l'époque du royaume de Himyar, leur nom pouvant être utilisé pour le désigner puisque le roi de Himyar était roi de Sabâ'. Puis, la situation s'est brutalement dégradée, suite à la vassalisation des souverains himyarites par le royaume chrétien de l'Éthiopie antique : Aksûm et le sursaut politique qui amena sur le trône le prince juif nommé Joseph qui entreprit immédiatement de massacrer les populations chrétiennes de la région.<sup>108</sup> C'est ainsi que les deux religions sœurs, christianisme et judaïsme se sont rejetées mutuellement et sont entrées en état de guerre. C'est à ce moment là qu'eut lieu, en 522–523 le massacre des chrétiens de Najrân évoqué par la sourate 85, versets 4–8<sup>109</sup> et historiquement celui-ci a été suivi d'une rupture importante de la digue de Ma'rib vers 542. Même si les dégâts furent momentanément réparés (par Abraha en 549) et la digue reconstruite et encore consolidée, semble-t-il pour la dernière fois en 558 (668 himyarite) sur ordre de ce même souverain<sup>110</sup> pour finir par disparaître totalement vers 580, ce qui compte pour le Coran est le résultat final, à savoir la destruction définitive des deux jardins qui a suivi une rupture violente entre juifs et chrétiens dans la région, chaque groupe ayant recherché des alliés extérieurs en vue d'éliminer l'autre. Selon le Coran, cette attitude aurait donc eu pour résultat le déclenchement,

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<sup>107</sup> Voir notre intervention, déjà citée, au colloque de Sarrebruck de mars 2010, à paraître dans INARAH 6.

<sup>108</sup> Robin, « Himyar et Israël », 833.

<sup>109</sup> Voir à ce sujet notre article Gens d'Ukhdûd (de la Fosse), *Dictionnaire du Coran*, 589.

<sup>110</sup> Robin, « Quelques épisodes marquants de l'histoire sudarabique », 67.

avec la permission de Dieu, du phénomène physique de la rupture du barrage qui, en inondant les terres cultivées qui se trouvaient de chaque côté du fleuve, illustre le fait que les Ecritures unifiées avaient été inondées par eux sous les eaux de la fausse interprétation, celle qui divise au lieu d'unir. Ils bénéficiaient de deux jardins célestes : la Torah et l'Évangile, dont ils étaient invités à manger les fruits, tout comme ils mangeaient les fruits de leurs deux jardins terrestres. Après qu'ils eurent déviés, leurs jardins noyés ne donnèrent plus que des fruits amers, symbole des fruits de l'erreur et de l'égarement, rappelant que la vérité religieuse et spirituelle se reconnaît, précisément, à ses fruits, comme le disent les Évangiles.<sup>111</sup> C'est ainsi que, suite à cette flambée de violence et d'exclusion, les deux jardins, judaïsme et christianisme n'ont plus produit que des fruits amers « tels les tamaris et quelques jujubiers » (Coran 34, 16).

De ce fait, dans la mesure où le Coran fait allusion, à travers le symbolisme des deux jardins, dont les fruits bénéficiaient aux habitants de l'ancien Sabâ', au modèle monothéiste neutre mis en pratique par les rois de Himyar et considéré comme la meilleure interprétation de l'Écriture, à savoir celle qui maintient entre Torah et Évangile une harmonie telle qu'il n'y a pas de coupure irréductible entre juifs et chrétiens, on conçoit qu'il constitue pour lui un modèle de convivialité religieuse auxquels il invite à se conformer.

L'un des rappels les plus évidents de cette conviction est, de toute évidence, la répétition, au début de chaque sourate de l'expression *bi-smi (A)llâh ar-raḥmân ar-raḥîm*, noms qui lui étaient donnés au Yémen durant cette période de monothéisme neutre appelée, précisément, par les spécialistes, la *rahmaniyya*. Cette correspondance a été soulignée par de nombreux spécialistes, comme Christian Robin qui estime que « dans l'invocation *bi-smi (A)llâh ar-Raḥmân ar-raḥîm*, il est clair que ar-Raḥmân était à l'origine un nom propre et que le sens premier était « Au nom de Dieu ar-Raḥmân le miséricordieux. Aux arguments historiques, on peut

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<sup>111</sup> « Prenez un arbre bon, son fruit sera bon, prenez un arbre gâté, son fruit sera gâté, car c'est au fruit qu'on reconnaît l'arbre (Mt. 12, 33–34 ; Lc., 5, 43–44).

ajouter qu'en arabe, le mot *rahmân* ne se trouve que dans ce contexte ». <sup>112</sup> Ce dernier ajoute même que : « Il est possible qu'un courant monothéiste autochtone se soit progressivement organisé, renvoyant dos-à-dos juifs, chrétiens et d'autres peut-être ; il n'aurait retenu que les dogmes sur lesquels les divers compétiteurs s'accordaient. Les *hanîfs* des traditions arabes pourraient en être l'illustration ». <sup>113</sup> Néanmoins ceux-ci n'avaient jamais formulé l'idée que cette évocation récurrente d'al-Rahmân pouvait correspondre à une incitation coranique parfaitement explicite à se tourner vers le modèle de comportement constitué par cette période de l'histoire de l'Arabie du sud. Le Coran ajoute même, conformément à un modèle biblique connu, qu'il y a eu « un reste » des fidèles de cette *rahmâniyya*, laissant entendre que précisément, c'est ce reste qui, toujours fidèle à ar-Rahmân, a figuré parmi les premiers adeptes de la parole coranique. De plus, nous avons pu établir qu'il apporte sa propre interprétation relative à l'origine de cette *rahmâniyya*. Ce n'est autre que l'initiation de Salomon lui-même qui utilise dans sa lettre cette formule pour s'adresser au peuple de Sabâ' et les appeler au monothéisme (verset 27, 30). Enfin, le Coran utilise l'événement historique de la destruction définitive du barrage pour mettre en garde les croyants contre l'attitude des souverains qui, à partir de 523, avaient brisé cette paix pour tenter d'imposer tour à tour le judaïsme ou le christianisme au prix de persécutions <sup>114</sup>. L'inondation, rappel évident du déluge, mais également du recouvrement du seuil du Palais de Salomon par les eaux sombres et agitées de la fausse interprétation de la reine de Sabâ', aurait dû être pour eux un avertissement qu'ils étaient sur la voie de l'égarement par rapport au sens vrai des Ecritures, puisque leurs jardins terrestres, images des paradis de l'interprétation, étaient submergés par les eaux de la digue de Ma'rib. Le modèle de Sabâ' lui-même sert donc dans le Coran à avertir les fidèles de l'erreur consistant à se détourner de la

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<sup>112</sup> Robin, « Du paganisme au monothéisme », 146.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>114</sup> Sous le règne de Joseph (Yûsuf, appelé dans la tradition musulmane Dhû n-Nuwâs) (Voir à ce sujet Robin, « Du paganisme au monothéisme », 150–52, puis sous l'autorité d'Abraha, roi abyssin du Yémen à la suite de l'invasion qui avait mis fin au règne de Joseph.

Vérité, c'est-à-dire ici de l'harmonie qui devrait régner entre les diverses tendances religieuses monothéistes. Les Sabâ' n'ont pas tenu compte de l'avertissement qu'a constitué la première rupture de la digue. L'épreuve de l'eau à laquelle la reine de Sabâ' avait été sensible n'a provoqué chez eux aucune *catharsis*. Ils sont allés jusqu'au bout de la destruction de leur monothéisme universel, rupture qui s'est concrétisée, selon le Coran, par un changement de certaines de leurs habitudes qui a fini par entraîner la disparition complète de leur communauté.

L'évocation de cet épisode correspond à la seconde partie du récit concernant les Sabâ' dans la sourate 34 (Coran, 34, 18–19) : « Entre les Sabâ' et les cités que nous avons bénies, nous avons placé des cités à portée de regard les unes des autres et nous avons déterminé (les temps) de leur passage entre elles “passez entre elles de nuit et de jour en sécurité”. Mais ils ont dit :—Seigneur, espace nos voyages et ils se sont fait du tort à eux-mêmes. Nous avons fait d'eux un objet de légende en les mettant totalement en pièces. Il y a vraiment des signes pour tout homme patient et reconnaissant ».

Les commentateurs musulmans ont rarement proposé de solution, quelle qu'elle soit, pour la compréhension de ces versets. Muqâtil, célèbre pour ses références aux textes bibliques, a avancé l'explication suivante : « Les cités que nous avons bénies sont les villes de terre sainte de Jordanie et de Palestine. Elles sont bénies au sens où elles sont couvertes d'arbres et recèlent quantité d'eau. Ces cités étaient reliées entre elles, de sorte que lorsque les Sabâ' se rendaient du Yémen au pays de Sham (Syrie) ils rencontraient tous les miles une cité et un souk. Ils trouvaient à se loger la nuit et à se rafraîchir sur le coup de midi, de cité en cité. C'est pourquoi il est dit : « déplacez-vous entre elles, de nuit et de jour », protégés de la faim, de la soif et des bêtes sauvages. Ils n'ont pas été reconnaissants envers leur Seigneur et ils lui ont demandé que les cités et les lieux de halte soient plus éloignés les uns des autres. Ils ont dit :—Seigneur allonge nos étapes. Ils se sont porté tort à eux-mêmes et nous avons fait d'eux un objet de légende en les mettant totalement en pièces. C'est-à-dire que Dieu dit : Nous les avons dispersés dans toutes les directions. Lorsqu'ils sont sortis de la terre de Sabâ', ils s'en sont éloignés. Les Azd se sont arrêtés au Bahrayn et à 'Uman, les Khuzâ'a, à la Mekke. Quant aux Anṣars, qui sont les Aws et les Khazraj, ils se sont fixés à Médine. Quant aux Ghassân, ils sont allés jusqu'en Syrie. C'est cela que signifie leur mise en



pièces ». <sup>115</sup> Il semble que l'on doive donner raison à Muqâtil pour ce qui est du sens de *mazzraqnâbum kulla mumazzraqin*. Il ne s'agit pas ici d'une extermination de ces peuples, mais bien plutôt d'une dispersion sur le modèle de Babel. Le Coran éclaire lui-même sur ce sens en ajoutant : « Iblîs a réalisé son but les concernant et ils l'ont suivi, excepté un groupe (*farîq*) important de croyants. En effet, ce terme indique qu'il ne s'agit donc pas d'une quantité négligeable. <sup>116</sup> De plus l'expression employée peut également, et même conjointement comme c'est souvent le cas, vouloir dire qu'ils ont représenté une partie importante des croyants (et non pas des Sabâ') ce qui voudrait dire que les tribus originaires du Yémen ont constitué la part la plus importante des fidèles du Coran à venir. En effet, s'ils avaient été rayés de la surface de la terre, il n'aurait pas été question du devenir de ceux qui étaient restés croyants. Le Coran précise, de plus, que c'est de leur propre gré que les Sabâ' avaient ainsi agi, leur comportement sectaire et violent étant motivé, comme cela ressort du cas de la reine de Sabâ', d'un certain oubli de la vie future et du Jugement dernier. Contrairement à elle, les Sabâ' de l'antiquité tardive n'ont pas su tirer les conséquences de la vision de l'eau noyant leurs jardins.

Pour en revenir à la question des déplacements, un certain nombre de détails semblent avoir échappé à Muqâtil, comme à tous les exégètes qui ont repris, avec plus ou moins de détails, son explication. Le plus important d'entre eux porte sur la demande faite à Dieu. Selon la lecture qu'ils en font, les Sabâ' auraient demandé à Dieu d'espacer les villes et les caravansérails qui leur apportaient tant de facilités et d'agréments pour effectuer leurs voyages sur la route de l'encens. <sup>117</sup> Outre le fait qu'une telle

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<sup>115</sup> *Tafsîr* de Muqâtil.

<sup>116</sup> *Farîq* désigne en effet dans le Coran un groupe important, par opposition à *firqâ*, qui désigne seulement une petite partie.

<sup>117</sup> Pline l'ancien (23–79 apr. J.-C.) rapportait déjà que l'encens était transporté depuis Shabwa, capitale du Hadramawt, en direction du territoire des Gebbanites, puis de Tamna', leur capitale, jusqu'à Gaza en 65 étapes et ajoute qu'entre la frontière nabatéenne et le Yémen, se trouvaient vingt-huit villes. Ma'rib, la capitale des Sabâ' était l'une d'elles. Alessandro de Maigret précise que d'après les estimations actuelles des

demande semble très étrange de par sa teneur même du fait, d'une part, qu'il est surprenant que l'on veuille se priver d'un avantage et d'autre part, parce que nul n'est obligé de faire halte s'il ne le souhaite pas, cette signification semble devoir être définitivement rejetée pour deux raisons. La première est simplement de l'ordre du bon sens dont on sait que le Coran exclut de s'écarter. En effet, au cas où ces cités auraient vraiment constitué une gêne pour les voyageurs, ce qui semble tout à fait improbable, voire absurde, il est rationnellement inconcevable de demander à Dieu de faire quelque chose dont des hommes peuvent très aisément se charger seuls, à savoir : détruire des villages et des comptoirs. La seconde raison touche à la fois au vocabulaire et à la tournure grammaticale du passage. En effet, ce ne sont pas en réalité les étapes, c'est-à-dire les distances parcourues, que ces gens souhaitent allonger, mais ils souhaitent que de la distance soit mise entre les voyages eux-mêmes, puisque ce qu'ils demandent à Dieu est littéralement : « mets de la distance entre nos voyages » (*bâ'id bayna asfârinâ*). Or, Dieu ne peut être concerné par ces voyages que s'ils ont un but religieux ou qui touche directement à la religion et au culte. Il faut donc comprendre que par, voyages, le Coran veut désigner les pèlerinages auxquels les habitants de cette contrée avaient l'habitude de se rendre, tout en commerçant avec les villes où ils s'arrêtaient sur la route de l'encens. C'est dans ce sens qu'il convient d'entendre l'expression « villes que nous avons bénies », qui sont à rapprocher, par analogie verbale, de la désignation de Jérusalem mentionnée dans un autre verset à propos de Salomon, le souffle divin descendant vers « La terre que nous avons bénie » (21, 81). Une fois de plus, deux versets s'éclairent mutuellement. Ces cités ne sont pas bénies seulement du fait qu'elles sont riches en eau et en plantations, comme l'ont pensé la plupart des commentateurs, mais surtout parce qu'elles sont des villes dans lesquelles Dieu a placé sa *baraka*, des villes de pèlerinage. Il y a donc là semble-t-il une allusion à l'abandon d'une coutume de

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spécialistes, la distance à couvrir pour se rendre de Najrân à Gaza nécessitait entre 62 et 66 jours de marche, ce qui correspond aux 65 étapes recensées par Pline. *Chroniques Yéménites*, Histoires, 11–2003, Numéro 11 ; par(s). 8 et 18.

pèlerinages communs à plusieurs communautés dont les caravanes passaient par le *wadî al-qurâ* avant d'atteindre les villes saintes, dont la Mekke et, au-delà, Jérusalem.<sup>118</sup> Le Coran pourrait donc apporter le témoignage du fait qu'à une certaine époque les dates de ces pèlerinages concordaient et qu'ils pouvaient donc être effectués en même temps par des juifs, des chrétiens, des manichéens, des zoroastriens, et peut-être les quelques héritiers de cultes monothéistes pythagorisans, d'origine grecque ou romaine qui subsistaient encore en Arabie. En effet, ce qui est reproché ici aux Sabâ' est d'avoir demandé à Dieu de séparer les tenants de chaque culte en mettant de la distance entre les dates de leurs pèlerinages. C'est en effet sur ce point qu'il est logique qu'ils aient sollicité une intervention divine, et non pas pour détruire des lieux d'habitation ou de commerce. Al-Muqâtil a bien vu que cette notion d'éclatement et de dispersion du peuple de Sabâ' était évoquée par l'expression coranique : « Nous les mettrons totalement en pièces (*mazzaqna'uhum kulla mumazzaqin*). Cette dispersion est, comme beaucoup d'autres cas de ce genre dans le Coran, le résultat démultiplié au point de devenir une lourde punition, de la séparation qu'eux-mêmes avaient demandée que Dieu opère entre les différentes tendances religieuses qui cohabitaient au départ harmonieusement. Ces Sabâ' d'une époque au fond assez peu éloignée de celle de la genèse du Coran, semblent avoir mal interprété leurs livres en se comportant en exclusivistes, ce qui a eu pour conséquence qu'ils ont souhaité que Dieu permette qu'il existe un décalage entre les pèlerinages aux lieux saints, dont la plupart devaient être communs au moins aux juifs et aux chrétiens. Or, le seul moyen de concrétiser cet espacement était d'opérer un changement de calendrier qui décalerait les dates des fêtes de chacun. C'est ici qu'il convient de rappeler, précisément, que les souverains Himyarites avaient imposé dans tout leur royaume un calendrier unique, de type solaire,<sup>119</sup> qui cessa d'être utilisé, apparemment, après 560. Ce

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<sup>118</sup> Comme en témoignent les traces de passages des *himyarites* dans cette ville.

<sup>119</sup> Christian Robin précise que « ce calendrier n'était certainement pas strictement solaire » ce qui signifie qu'il relevait tout de même d'un comput solaire « Du paganisme au monothéisme », 151.

calendrier monothéiste avait très certainement un impact sur l'unification des dates de départ des caravanes qui, en même temps que leurs activités commerciales, se rendaient aux villes saintes pour les pèlerinages.

Le décalage dans l'interprétation des Livres est rappelé, quant à lui, grâce à l'analogie verbale qui évoque cette division entre les monothéistes, puisque *asfâr*, pluriel brisé assez rare de *sâfir* dont le pluriel *saffâr* est plus répandu, a dans le Coran un double sens, qui renvoie précisément au pluriel du mot Livres : 62, 5 (Ceux qui étaient chargés de la Torah et qui ensuite ne l'ont plus acceptée ressemblent à l'âne chargé de livres (*asfâr*, (pluriel de *sifr*) qui désigne des Livres sacrés) ». Or, ils ont rejeté la Torah en prétendant être les seuls amis de Dieu (62, 6) « mets une distance entre nos Livres sacrés », c'est-à-dire : « permet que nous désunissions l'interprétation », initiative qui va exactement à l'inverse du but proposé par le Coran. C'est ainsi qu'ils se sont porté tort à eux-mêmes : « *zalamû anfasahum* » (34, 19), comme l'avait fait autrefois la reine de Sabâ', qui avait reconnu : « *zalamtu nafsî* » (27, 44) : « Je me suis fait du tort à moi-même », et ont fini dans la dispersion. Lorsque les juifs et les chrétiens de Sabâ sont devenus exclusivistes, ils se sont rejetés mutuellement. Ils ont voulu qu'une distance soit établie entre leurs livres. Ils se sont égarés, demandant à Dieu : « Ne nous envoie plus en pèlerinage à la même date, espace nos pèlerinages respectifs (juifs, chrétiens et autres) et laisse nous mettre de la distance entre nos livres ». Ici l'analogie verbale permet de préciser que de tels actes n'ont pu se produire qu'au moment où, précisément, ces gens ont cessé d'accepter le message contenu dans leurs livres, à l'image de ces juifs qui n'ont plus accepté la Torah, c'est-à-dire, comme l'a très finement noté John Wansbrough, qui n'ont plus su en discerner le sens profond, en d'autres termes, qui n'ont plus su la « lire » et sont devenus de ce fait, comme des ânes chargés de livres.<sup>120</sup>

Nous proposons donc pour cet ensemble de versets la lecture suivante : « Entre les Sabâ' et les cités que nous avons bénies (c'est-à-dire les lieux de pèlerinage, dont faisaient partie la Mekke, Médine et, au-delà Jérusalem) nous avons placé des cités à portée

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<sup>120</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 52.

de regard les unes des autres et nous avons déterminé (les temps) de leur passage au milieu d'elles : « passez au milieu d'elles de nuit et de jour en toute sécurité. Mais ils ont dit :—Seigneur, espace nos voyages aux lieux saints (c'est à dire fais que chaque groupe religieux, détenteur d'un livre, accomplisse son pèlerinage à une date différente de celui des autres) et ils se sont fait du tort à eux-mêmes. Nous avons fait d'eux un sujet de récit édifiant (*ahâdîth*) en les dispersant totalement. Il y a vraiment des signes pour tout homme patient et reconnaissant ». C'est en cela que l'histoire des Sabâ' recèle une leçon, parallèle à celle donnée par la reine de Sabâ', relativement à l'unification de l'interprétation des Ecritures, pour les contemporains aussi bien que les futurs lecteurs du Coran.<sup>121</sup>

Ce qui est reproché en fait ici aux Sabâ' rejoint ce qui a été dit plus haut à propos de leurs deux jardins : c'est le fait qu'ils se soient divisés, détruisant ainsi l'unité de l'interprétation des textes sacrés, chaque groupe revendiquant pour lui seul la vérité et l'élection divine. Dans un premier temps, ils avaient recouvert les textes de l'eau de leur fausse interprétation, comme l'avait fait la reine de Sabâ' avant d'avoir reçu la *catharsis* par l'intermédiaire de Salomon, par la suite, ils sont allés jusqu'à demander à Dieu de briser lui-même une pratique résultant de cette recherche d'unité en « mettant de la distance » à la fois entre leurs livres respectifs et entre leurs dates de pèlerinages, c'est-à-dire en abandonnant le calendrier *himyarite* commun. Cette suppression a en effet eu lieu, semble-t-il, quelques décennies après le début des affrontements intercommunautaires qui avaient précédé la première rupture de la digue de Ma'rib.<sup>122</sup> Le Coran leur attribue la même attitude qu'aux

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<sup>121</sup> Signalons que Ibn 'Arabî, dans le titre de son ouvrage : *Le dévoilement des effets du voyage*, a rappelé le lien existant entre *asfâr* et *isfâr*.

<sup>122</sup> Il semble en effet que l'on comptait en années de *Himyar* encore en 558 (668 *himyarite*) (voir Robin, Ch. « Quelques épisodes de l'histoire sudarabique ». *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 61 (1991) : 55–70, p. 67), mais les pèlerinages communs, auxquels le Coran fait allusion et de l'existence desquels il n'y a pas de raison de douter, pourraient bien avoir été abandonnés plus tôt. En tout état de cause, l'analyse que donne le Coran de la rupture de la digue en la rattachant au fait que les Sabâ' avaient voulu se disperser en brisant l'harmonie religieuse qui les unissait

juifs auxquels il s'adresse en priorité aux versets 102 à 106 de la sourate 2, à propos de l'abrogation : ils n'ont pas voulu entendre ni obéir parce qu'ils refusaient aux autres la possibilité de recevoir quelque chose de Dieu en s'affirmant comme le seul groupe élu, ce que les croyants doivent par dessus tout éviter de faire (2, 104) : « Ô vous qui croyez, ne dites pas *râ'inâ* (fais de nous tes élus), mais dites *unzurnâ* (aies pitié de nous) et *isma'û*, un châtiment douloureux attend les incrédules ». <sup>123</sup>

## CONCLUSION

A travers deux de ses seuils herméneutiques principaux, le Coran invite son lecteur à un surprenant voyage dans le temps et dans l'espace, mais aussi dans l'univers des pensées religieuses. En évoquant le Sinaï comme seul haut lieu véritablement partagé par les juifs et les chrétiens et, de ce fait, comme seul digne d'être mentionné dans un serment, il rappelle, en synergie avec les textes pseudo clémentins, que celui qui reconnaît la loi de Moïse ne peut nier celle de Jésus et réciproquement. Il invite par là à considérer les choses sous l'angle de vue que l'on pourrait qualifier de « chrétien » du judéo christianisme. D'un autre côté, par le biais de son rappel de l'histoire des *Himyar*, tout en revendiquant lui-même de façon non équivoque l'héritage du monothéisme de la *rahmâniyya* préservé par un « petit reste » des Sabâ', il se place, symétriquement, du point de vue « juif » du judéo christianisme. On se trouve ainsi dans un premier temps devant une sorte de symétrie ou de bipolarité (binarité gauche/droite, figuier/olivier, Torah/Evangile,

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est finalement très proche des analyses historiques actuelles, Christian Robin estimant que « Les tribus proches du Yémen ont fait de la rupture de la digue un évènement considérable. Elles ont situé à ce moment le début de leur dispersion. En fait, il faut retourner la formule : la digue ne fut plus réparée parce que le Yémen n'était plus gouverné. Les tribus dans l'orbite himyarite (dont Sabâ') ont retrouvé leur autonomie et se sont lancés dans toutes sortes d'aventures militaires ». « Quelques épisodes marquants de l'histoire sudarabique », 67.

<sup>123</sup> Voir à ce sujet Gobillot, « Ibn Kammûna (m. 1284) une pensée de l'harmonie entre soi et non-soi », 76.

juifs/chrétiens) à la fois des lieux, des corpus et des options religieuses.

De surcroît, dans les deux cas, c'est le passé biblique des lieux qui configure leur situation telle que le Coran la « saisit » à la manière d'un instantané, à une période qui pourrait aller des années 570 au début du VII<sup>ème</sup> siècle, mais aussi qui l'explique et très souvent la justifie par delà le temps. Au mont Sinaï, le passé rejoint directement le présent, le figuier évoquant le séjour de Moïse et des hébreux, tandis que l'olivier renvoie à plusieurs symboles liés à Jésus, non seulement à l'ombre du monastère, symbole de paix en lui-même, mais aussi des remparts construits par Justinien pour sécuriser toute la région. En Arabie du sud, le monothéisme universel qu'une partie des Sabâ' de Ma'rib avait sans doute perdu de vue dès 522, lors de l'embrasement des querelles confessionnelles qui marquèrent la fin du royaume de Hîmyar, n'est autre que l'antique héritage de Salomon, véhiculé autrefois par l'intermédiaire de la reine de Sabâ'. De surcroît, dans ce contexte précis, le lien du Coran à la Torah se manifeste à travers une profonde interaction entre les deux textes qui, dans une abstraction totale du temps, se répondent et se font écho l'un à l'autre dans le champ de la science de l'Écriture formulée par Rabbi Aqiba.

Mais les correspondances ne s'arrêtent pas là. C'est en effet le seuil herméneutique des *Homélie pseudo clémentines* qui, à travers ses critères de correction des textes antérieurs repris par le Coran, ouvre la voie à une réécriture de l'histoire de la vie de Salomon exempte des écarts par rapport à la loi mosaïque que lui attribue le livre des Rois. En effet, pour être initiateur aux vérités transcendantes il fallait admettre que lui-même ait surmonté ses propres faiblesses humaines. De plus, à un autre niveau, c'est l'olivier du mont Sinaï qui est présenté comme ayant produit l'huile terrestre nécessaire à l'onction de ce grand roi et de son père David.

Dans cette optique, la symétrie, qui semblait dominer au premier coup d'œil laisse place, dans un second temps, à une certaine forme d'orientation conceptuelle, le judéo christianisme des textes pseudo clémentins apparaissant, en dehors de toute limitation chronologique, comme un « point de départ » vers la *rahmāniyya* des Sabâ'. Il ne s'agit pas, bien entendu, d'un voyage physique conduisant d'un lieu sacré à un autre et qui se déroulerait dans un temps linéaire, mais d'un voyage métaphysique dans la géographie du sacré, qui va de l'établissement d'une première paix

entre juifs et chrétiens (le figuier et l'olivier d'une part, les deux jardins des Sabâ' d'autre part) vers une paix et une entente beaucoup plus larges et universelles, comparables à celles de la *rahmāniyya*, qui semble avoir regroupé, comme le fait le Coran, les Juifs, les Chrétiens, les Sabéens et les Mages, catégories qui représentent elles-mêmes un grand nombre de communautés :<sup>124</sup> « Ceux qui ont cru, et ceux qui ont pratiqué le judaïsme (*alladhîma bâdû*), les Naşârâ les Şâbi'a et les Majûs -ceux qui croient en Dieu et au dernier jour et font de bonnes œuvres- ont leur salaire auprès de leur Seigneur : pas de crainte pour eux, ils ne seront pas affligés » (2, 62) ; Voir aussi à ce sujet 5,69 et 22,17).

Il s'agit donc en réalité d'un périple spirituel qui, partant du Sinaï, le « Mont des arbres », dont le nom même évoque la pluralité des communautés monothéistes, conduit à une transcendance totale par rapport à tous les lieux terrestres, à une conception religieuse qui ne soit « Ni d'Orient ni d'Occident » comme l'arbre béni, symbole de la lumière divine sortie de l'arbre du Paradis. En effet, si le Coran revendique de manière explicite à la fois la sagesse de Salomon et le reste fidèle de Sabâ', c'est précisément en raison de l'universalité de la *rahmāniyya* qui rejoint la *fitra* et la *hanfiyya* dont il a été question au début. Ainsi, le judéo-christianisme apparaît comme l'origine de ce réseau de significations, l'univers qui en

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<sup>124</sup> Ch. Robin a noté en effet que : « Malgré les succès du judaïsme, la dynastie himyarite maintint une politique religieuse prudente : aucune inscription royale, jusqu'au règne de Yûsuf, ne laisse entrevoir une préférence pour le judaïsme. Deux raisons peuvent justifier cette réserve. La première, sans doute décisive, est la pression byzantine, dans un contexte international agité. La seconde est le souci de ne pas heurter les Himyarites convertis au christianisme, nombreux dans les îles, les régions côtières et en bordure du désert ». De plus : « Cette politique himyarite rappelle l'attitude ambiguë des rois abyssins chrétiens, vers la même époque. Dans leurs inscriptions en langue grecque, que seuls les étrangers et quelques lettrés pouvaient comprendre, ils claironnent une inébranlable orthodoxie trinitaire mais, dans les textes en langue locale, d'un accès plus facile à la population, ils se montrent réservés, avec des formules monothéistes parfaitement neutres et acceptables par diverses obédiences », « Du paganisme au monothéisme », 147.



émane étant appelé à le transcender pour ouvrir l'horizon de la pensée à un monothéisme encore plus universel, très proche de celui des anciens *Himyarites*. Cette vision des choses explique à notre sens la parabole de la sourate 18 (versets 32–44) qui oppose un homme qui avait deux jardins à un autre qui n'en avait aucun, indiquant par cette image la nécessaire rupture, non seulement avec un univers limité aux lectures juives et chrétiennes des Ecritures, mais aussi avec un univers scripturaire lui-même limité aux Ecritures bibliques canoniques de ces deux communautés. La leçon finale de cette parabole est en effet que le possesseur des deux jardins, qui, en réalité, ne font qu'un de son point de vue, s'il se satisfait, comme le pharisien de l'Evangile, de sa situation et se referme sur sa richesse en excluant les autres, perdra son double jardin, en l'occurrence le judéo-christianisme.<sup>125</sup> En revanche, celui qui n'a pas de jardin du tout parce qu'il a refusé toute limitation, littéralement toute « clôture » religieuse, recevra quelque chose de meilleur c'est-à-dire à la fois les jardins du paradis et tous les jardins du monothéisme en ce monde. Les commentateurs ont pensé que cette parabole sanctionnait une faute due à l'orgueil, le propriétaire des jardins s'étant cru la véritable cause de sa richesse et de son bonheur. Ils semblent ne pas avoir vu que ce que cet homme associe à Dieu, ce n'est pas lui-même, mais, précisément, les deux jardins qu'il possède, se figurant que leur possession est une fin en soi qui, dès cette vie, le fait entrer de plein pied dans l'éternité : « Je ne pense pas que ceci périsse jamais ; et je ne pense pas que lorsque l'Heure se dressera et que je serai ramené vers mon Seigneur je trouverai en échange quelque chose qui soit préférable à ce jardin » (34, 26). En d'autres termes, le Coran invite par cette parabole à ne placer aucune religion, quelle qu'elle soit, au-dessus de l'univers divin qui englobe toutes les religions, les transcende et

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<sup>125</sup> On peut noter la différence entre la situation de ce judéo chrétien, possesseur d'un jardin « double » mais unique au fond, et celle des Sabâ', dont les jardins, bien qu'arrosés par un unique ruisseau, restaient néanmoins nettement distincts, l'un à droite et l'autre à gauche, chaque tendance religieuse conservant ses spécificités, ce qui correspond à un modèle d'unification de l'Ecriture différent du judéo christianisme illustré, par exemple, par les *Homélie*s.

les dépasse. S'arrêter à l'une d'entre elles, même si elle en englobe deux, comme le fait le judéo-chrétien de la parabole, c'est tout de même associer quelque chose à Dieu, puisque c'est substituer l'horizon religieux à l'horizon divin. Il rappelle par là qu'au lieu de s'enfermer dans un sectarisme qui écarte les autres et persuade à tort que le salut est déjà acquis, chacun doit se positionner uniquement par rapport à Dieu, en s'efforçant seulement de faire le bien. Eriger sa tendance religieuse propre en absolu, c'est au fond s'ériger soi-même en absolu et, de ce fait associer quelque chose à Dieu, qui est le seul absolu. C'est pourquoi l'unification de l'interprétation passe nécessairement par une reconnaissance de la pluralité des communautés faisant assaut de bonnes œuvres : « Si Dieu l'avait voulu, il aurait fait de vous une seule communauté, mais il a voulu vous éprouver par ce qu'il vous a donné. Surpassez-vous les uns les autres en bonnes actions. Vous retournerez tous à Dieu et il vous informera alors sur ce qui était l'objet de vos divergences » (5, 45). Dans une telle optique, les hommes ne pourront réaliser l'unité que si tous y participent et pour que cela ait lieu il faut d'abord avoir pleinement accepté, voire approuvé la pluralité telle que Dieu l'a voulue. En d'autres termes l'union dans le monde des hommes adviendra à travers une reconnaissance et une acceptation de cette pluralité ou elle ne sera pas, ce qui ne signifie pas, bien entendu, que tous ont le même accès à la vérité, mais simplement qu'ils sont tous en accord avec la condition première et essentielle du salut : la reconnaissance de l'unicité divine.

C'est ainsi que les lieux sacrés que l'on vient d'évoquer, avant d'informer sur une localisation possible du milieu d'émergence du texte coranique parlent de son projet religieux dont le Sinaï, comme le Yémen, constituent avant tout des repères d'ordre symbolique.

Il reste néanmoins deux informations précises susceptibles de guider la réflexion dans un domaine plus concret. Elles sont d'ailleurs étroitement liées entre elles. La première est la déclaration explicite selon laquelle une grande partie des premiers croyants (terme qui sous entend, croyants dans la vérité que véhicule le Coran) n'est autre que le « reste » de Sabâ' qui, historiquement parlant, correspond à un certain nombre de tribus ayant émigré vers le nord lors de la dispersion du royaume himyarite. La seconde est l'existence du rappel, en début de chaque sourate, de la formule envoyée par Salomon à la Reine de Sabâ' selon le verset 30 de la

sourate 27, qui sonne comme le rappel constant d'une référence fondamentale. Or, ces Sabâ' ne pouvaient être à l'origine que des monothéistes, et en particulier des juifs et des chrétiens, mais sans doute aussi des représentants d'autres groupes religieux ayant décidé de continuer à vivre en paix et en harmonie grâce à leur effort d'unification de l'interprétation des Ecritures. Ainsi, à défaut de lieu géographique d'émergence, le Coran nous confie tout de même quelque chose sur son milieu humain et culturel, un milieu où pouvaient parfaitement être connus aussi bien la lecture de la Torah de Rabbi 'Aqiba et la littérature des cercles de la Mer morte que de nombreux textes, rabbiniques, judéo chrétiens et même chrétiens marqués par le judéo christianisme comme les œuvres de Lactance, ainsi que toute une littérature apocryphe, chère aux manichéens et autres groupes à tendance gnostique. Il est en effet permis de supposer, dans la mesure où les combats intercommunautaires du VI<sup>ème</sup> siècle ont certainement détruit la quasi-totalité des bibliothèques, qu'ils auraient pu transporter, lors de leur émigration vers le nord, la plupart des documents ayant constitué les seuils herméneutiques du Coran que nous venons d'évoquer, ayant ainsi largement contribué à l'élaboration de son « paysage conceptuel ».<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Christian Robin, dans la conclusion de son article « Himyar et Israël », 879–80, note, à l'appui d'une hypothèse de ce genre, plusieurs arguments. Il constate tout d'abord, allant pour cela dans le même sens que Wansbrough, qu'« il n'est plus possible désormais de traiter des origines de l'islam en s'appuyant uniquement sur les sources islamiques », ajoutant qu'« il n'est pas exact que le Coran soit un « texte sans contexte » et que « l'histoire himyarite offre un élément de contextualisation essentiel pour comprendre la naissance de l'islam. Plus précisément, c'est probablement le judaïsme himyarite qui a profondément renouvelé l'univers mental et religieux des habitants de l'Arabie occidentale pendant les 250 années qui précèdent l'islam ». Il rappelle à ce propos quelques faits significatifs, à savoir, entre autres : 1) Que l'on trouve dans les inscriptions himyarites, entre autres les termes *šlt* (prière) et *zkt* (faveur contribution) empruntés à l'hébreu et au judéo-araméen, qui désignent deux des cinq piliers de l'islam. 2) Que dans le conflit qui oppose Muhammad à ses adversaires mecquois, il semble bien que tous emploient le même lexique,

Les éléments que nous possédons ne nous permettent pas d'aller pour l'instant au-delà de cette hypothèse dans la mesure où l'un des principes régissant nos travaux est de ne jamais outrepasser les limites des spéculations que le Coran lui-même autorise à formuler.

Nous nous arrêtons donc sur cette dernière considération en ajoutant toutefois une précision relative aux modes d'écriture que nous avons mis en évidence dans cette contribution.

On a pu constater en effet que, selon le domaine et les sujets abordés, les modalités de composition du texte varient. En d'autres termes, l'analogie verbale semble ne fonctionner systématiquement que lorsqu'il s'agit de thèmes bibliques et, en particulier de ceux qui touchent à la famille de David. D'autres procédés sont mis en œuvre lorsqu'il s'agit de théologie rationnelle ou encore de principes éthiques et ainsi de suite. Il semblerait donc que le Coran met en application jusque dans son écriture même l'idéal de pluralité et de diversité dont il défend le bien fondé. Ceci dit, le dernier mot est loin d'avoir été prononcé sur la question dans la mesure où il faudrait être en mesure de déterminer avec précision tous les passages reliés à tel ou tel seuil herméneutique, ainsi que la teneur précise de leurs interrelations, un travail que nous commençons seulement à aborder.

Il faut ajouter pour finir que nous avons bien conscience que l'idéal coranique d'harmonisation et de paix entre les diverses communautés se réclamant du monothéisme semble se heurter,

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emprunté aux religions monothéistes, pour décrire le monde surnaturel et que, de même, tous sont familiers avec les récits exemplaires tirés de la Bible ou de la littérature parabiblique, puisqu'il suffit de simples allusions pour en tirer argument. Selon lui, il y a tout lieu de penser que c'est également un héritage du judaïsme himyarite. Il suppose pour finir qu'il a sans doute existé au Yémen une école religieuse juive, et que les récits d'origine biblique ou parabiblique ont été transmis par ce canal à l'islam naissant. A notre sens, il serait préférable de dire qu'il existait au Yémen « des écoles » religieuses juives représentant plusieurs tendances différentes que l'on retrouve, précisément, dans les références coraniques, en ajoutant que ces milieux juifs sont loin d'avoir été les seuls à apporter leur contribution culturelle et textuelle au milieu d'émergence du Coran.

surtout si l'on tient compte des options de l'exégèse dite « traditionnelle » dans le Coran lui-même, à des points de vue contradictoires que l'on ne peut passer sous silence. Néanmoins, la quantité des passages concernés par les seuils herméneutiques que nous avons présentés ici et l'absolue convergence des enseignements qu'ils véhiculent ne laisse planer aucun doute sur le caractère fondamental de ce projet de monothéisme universel, inné, et à la fois révélé et conforme à la raison, dans le Coran. De plus, l'un des principes de lecture du texte coranique qui sont apparus au cours de nos investigations étant que, comme le préconisait Rabbi Aqiba, il ne peut y avoir d'interprétation contradictoire de l'Écriture, il nous revient donc, pour reprendre une formulation de Nicolas de Cues, d'entreprendre de « passer au crible »<sup>127</sup> de cette exigence chacun des passages qui pourraient, si peu que ce soit, s'inscrire à l'encontre de cette aspiration.

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<sup>127</sup> Une telle intention n'est d'ailleurs pas si éloignée de celle qui a présidé à la rédaction de sa *Cribratio alcorani*, ouvrage qui témoigne d'une compréhension remarquable des grandes lignes théologiques du Coran.



ON THE QUR'ĀN'S *MĀ'IDA* PASSAGE  
AND THE WANDERINGS  
OF THE ISRAELITES<sup>1</sup>

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Towards the end of the Qur'ān's fifth chapter the companions of Jesus ask him whether his Lord can send down a *mā'ida*, literally "a table," from heaven. Jesus, reluctantly, asks God for this table. God agrees to send it down to him, and threatens those who would disbelieve henceforth. This passage, which consists of only four verses (Q 5:112–15), can hardly be called a narrative. The Qur'ān does not explain where, when, or why the companions of Jesus made this request of him, why Jesus was reluctant to assent, and why the request so exasperated God.

Medieval Muslim exegetes, of course, attempt to explain these things. In order to do so, however, they seem to have extrapolated from the Qur'ānic passage itself, while adding some details from Biblical traditions.<sup>2</sup> They do not know how the Qur'ān's original

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<sup>1</sup> I am obliged to Profs. Michel Cuypers and Gerald Hawting for their insights on an earlier version of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> *Tafsir Muqātil* reports that 5000 Israelites had requested the *mā'ida*, the number of the multitude fed by Jesus' multiplication of loaves and fishes (Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:31–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:5–15). Thereafter he recounts an Islamized version of the multiplication account: "Jesus—peace be upon him—said to his companions (*aṣḥāb*) as they were sitting in a meadow, 'Does anyone of you have anything?'" Simon ap-

audience—or the Qurʾān’s Prophet—understood this passage, and accordingly they are divided over its meaning.<sup>3</sup>

The *māʿida* passage has also troubled western scholars. They have long sought to explain it with reference to Christian sources, and to the New Testament in particular, but they have hardly agreed on an explanation. Accordingly Matthias Radscheit has a hard time summarizing the “scholarly consensus” on this passage:

The broad scholarly consensus is that the Qurʾānic table episode basically refers, in one way or another, to the Lord’s Supper, although other biblical passages can be adduced as possible reference points as well, such as the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus’ discourse on “the bread of life” (John 6:22f.), Peters vision in Acts 10:10ff., or Psalms 78:19 and 23:5. But when it comes to understanding the meaning of this episode, opinions are divided.... The question of the meaning of

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proached with two small fish and five loaves. Someone else came with pottage. Jesus—peace be upon him—proceeded to cut the two [fish] into small pieces and break the thin bread by half again and again, and to serve the pottage. Then he performed *wuḍūʿ*, prayed two *rakʿas*, and called on His Lord—mighty and sublime is He. God—mighty and sublime is He—sent down a sort of sleep upon his companions. When the people opened their eyes the food had been multiplied.” Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, ed. ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad al-Shaḥāta, 1:518. Beirut: Dār al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2002 (Reprint of: Cairo: Muʿassasat al-Ḥalabī, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> Ṭabarī records five opinions on the question, “What was the *māʿida*?” The first, supported by twelve traditions, is evidently informed by the narrative of the feeding of the multitude: the *māʿida* consisted of fish and some sort of food. Five of these traditions specify that the “food” was bread. The second opinion, supported by two traditions, is that the *māʿida* consisted of dates from heaven. The third, supported by three traditions, is that the *māʿida* consisted of all foods except for meat. The fourth, supported by one tradition, is that the *māʿida* passage is only a parable, and no food at all was brought down from heaven. The fifth, supported by three traditions, is that when they heard the divine threat (v. 115), the companions rescinded their request and accordingly no food was sent down to them. Ṭabarī, *Jamīʿ al-bayān ʿan tāʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. Aḥmad Saʿīd ʿAlī, Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā et al., (part) 7:133–35. Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābi al-Ḥalabī, 1954–68.



the table motif in the Qur'ān has proved to be especially intractable.<sup>4</sup>

The difficulty with the *mā'ida* passage is that it is not obviously connected to any episode found in the New Testament or early Christian literature. While Qur'ānic passages involving Jewish or Christian protagonists generally lack narrative details, their connection to earlier traditions is usually clear enough. When the Qur'ān mentions the laughter of Abraham's wife (Q 11.71) it is evidently alluding to Genesis 18:12; when the Qur'ān mentions the miraculous provision of food to Mary (Q 4:155), it is evidently referring to the story of her upbringing in the Jerusalem temple (as found, for example, in the *Proto-Evangelium of James*); and when the Qur'ān refers to a group of young men who fled to a cave to escape unbelief (Q 18:9–26), it is evidently referring to the tradition of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Yet neither the New Testament, nor early Christian literature (to my knowledge), preserves a story in which the companions of Jesus demand that he ask God for a table from heaven. Accordingly, this passage has remained a scholarly enigma.

In the present paper I will offer a new explanation of the *mā'ida* passage. The basic structure and plot of this passage, I will argue, emerges from a topos found not in the New Testament, but in the Old. The Qur'ān inserts Jesus into this framework and thereby effectively creates a new tradition. Accordingly, we cannot speak here of the Qur'ān alluding to a well known Jewish or Christian narrative, as in the cases above. Instead we might understand the *mā'ida* passage in light of John Wansbrough's vision of the Qur'ān as a text that integrates earlier religious symbols and topoi in order to develop its particular religious message.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE *MĀ'IDA* PASSAGE

The passage at hand, according to the standard Cairo edition of the Qur'ān, is as follows (translation mine):

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<sup>4</sup> Radscheit, M. "Table." In *EQ*, vol. 5, 189.

5:112 إِذْ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ يُعِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ هَلْ يَسْتَطِيعُ رَبُّكَ  
 أَنْ يُنَزِّلَ عَلَيْنَا مَائِدَةً مِنَ السَّمَاءِ قَالَ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ  
 مُؤْمِنِينَ

When the companions (*al-ḥanwariyyūn*) said, “Jesus the Son of Mary, can your Lord send down a table from heaven to us?” he said, “Fear God, if you are believers.”

5:113 قَالُوا نُرِيدُ أَنْ نَأْكُلَ مِنْهَا وَتَطْمَئِنَّ قُلُوبُنَا وَنَعْلَمَ أَنْ قَدْ  
 صَدَقْتَنَا وَتَكُونَ عَلَيهَا مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ

They said, “We wish to eat from it, that our hearts might be set at ease, that we may know that you have told the truth, and that we may be witnesses to it.”

5:114 قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ اللَّهُمَّ رَبَّنَا أَنْزِلْ عَلَيْنَا مَائِدَةً مِنَ  
 السَّمَاءِ تَكُونُ لَنَا عِيدًا لِأَوَّلِنَا وَآخِرِنَا وَآيَةً مِنْكَ وَارْزُقْنَا وَأَنْتَ  
 خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ

Jesus the Son of Mary said, “O God, our Lord, send down to us a table from heaven, which might be a feast for the first and last of us,<sup>5</sup> and a miraculous sign from you. Provide for us, You who are the best provider.”

5:115 قَالَ اللَّهُ إِنِّي مُنزِلُهَا عَلَيْكُمْ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنِّي  
 أُعَذِّبُهُ عَذَابًا لَا أُعَذِّبُهُ أَحَدًا مِنَ الْعَالَمِينَ

God replied, “I will send it down to you. But as for those who disbelieve henceforth, I will torment them as I have never tormented anyone before.”

The *mā'ida* passage is part of a larger section (verses 110–18) at the end of this Sūra (named *al-Mā'ida*; Q 5) in which the Qurʾān is concerned with Jesus and his followers. In verse 110 the Qurʾān has God remind Jesus of the graces he has received, including the presence of the Holy Spirit, the ability to perform miracles, and divine protection from the plots of the Israelites. In verse 111 the Qurʾān reminds the audience how the companions of Jesus proclaimed

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Rudi Paret’s translation of this phrase: “für uns von jetzt an bis in alle Zukunft (?).“

their belief in God and Jesus, His messenger. The verse ends with the companions' declaration, "We believe. Bear witness that we have submitted (*ashhad bi-annanā muslimūn*)."

After the *mā'ida* passage, in verse 116, the Qur'ān presents a conversation between God and Jesus. God asks Jesus whether he taught people that he and his mother are gods and Jesus, with a pious exclamation, emphatically denies having done such a thing. In the following verse (117) Jesus explains that he taught people only to worship God, who is his Lord as He is the Lord of all people. Finally Jesus, addressing God, declares in the following verse, "They are Your servants, and You have the right to torment them. So too You have the right to forgive them. You are the Powerful, the Wise" (v. 118). Evidently Jesus is invoking the eternal fate of the people whom he taught but who misunderstood his teaching: Christians.

Thus the *mā'ida* passage is set within a frame of anti-Christian argumentation, where the focus is on the infidelity of the followers of Jesus. The Qur'ān has the companions of Jesus acknowledge his prophethood (v. 111) but then demand a sign from him (v. 112). And the Qur'ān, immediately after the *mā'ida* passage, has Jesus forswear the beliefs which his followers had apparently adopted (vv.116–7), and acknowledge that God might now rightly condemn them to hell (v. 118).

As for the *mā'ida* passage itself, it contains two terms that have been the subject of frequent scholarly discussion. The first of these is *al-ḥawwāriyyūn* (v. 112), which I translate above as, "companions." This term might seem to be a *crux interpretum*, for our understanding of the passage might be shaped according to whether it refers to the faithful disciples of Jesus, or simply to the people—faithful or unfaithful—around him. The word is difficult to understand on the basis of Arabic, both on account of its orthography and its root (ḥ-w-r, "to return," or "to be white"). It has no obvious precedent in Syriac,<sup>6</sup> and seems to be related instead to Ethiopic *ḥawāryā*, meaning "walker, or messenger."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The common term for μαθητής ("disciple") in Syriac is *talmidā* (cf. Arabic *tilmidh*); the common term for ἀπόστολος is *shliḥā*. See Payne

It seems to me, however, that the etymology of this term is less important than the Qur'ān's own use thereof. Even if the term *al-ḥanwāriyyūn* is meant as a reference to Jesus' disciples, or apostles,<sup>8</sup> (and not only "followers"), the Qur'ān could hardly be invoking this term in the way a Christian text would. Indeed a fundamental feature of the Qur'ānic material on the *al-ḥanwāriyyūn* seems to be their faltering faith. In *al 'Imrān* (3) the Qur'ān first has *al-ḥanwāriyyūn* declare their belief in God (vv. 52–53; cf. 61:14), but then remarks "But they schemed and God schemed. And God is the best schemer" (v. 54). In *al-mā'ida*, after *al-ḥanwāriyyūn* (v. 111) acknowledge their faith in God and his messenger, they immediately demand a sign from both of them (v. 112).

The second term is *mā'ida* itself, which is likewise difficult to explain on the basis of Arabic (the root m-y-d in Arabic has the meaning "to be moved, to waver"). Like *ḥanwāriyyūn*, *al-mā'ida* also has no obvious precedent in Syriac and seems instead to be related to an Ethiopic term, in this case *mā'edd*, "table." Nöldeke notes that this term is used in the Ethiopic Bible to translate Greek τράπεζα; he draws attention in particular to its use in 1 Corinthians 10:21 for the Eucharistic table.<sup>9</sup>

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Smith, R. *Thesaurus Syriacus*, t. I, Oxford: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1879; t. 2, 1901, p. 1955 and 4175, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> On this see Nöldeke, T. *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, 48. Strassburg: Trübner, 1910; Jeffery, A. *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, 116. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938 (reprint: Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> R. Dvořák proposes that Muḥammad learned of this term from the emigrants who had returned from Christian Ethiopia. See Dvořák, R. "Über die Fremdwörter im Korân." *Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften. Phil.-Hist. Classe. Sitzungsberichte* 109.1 (1885): 481–562, see 542.

<sup>9</sup> See Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge*, 54–55; Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary*, 255–56. Nöldeke (p. 55) states that the etymology of Ethiopic *mā'edd* is unclear, although he suggests that it may not be an originally Semitic term. Manfred Kropp argues that it is derived from the vulgar Greek term *mágida*. Kropp, M. "Beyond Single Words: *Ma'ida*—*Shaytan*—*jibt* and *taghut*. Mechanisms of transmission into the Ethiopic (Ge'ez) Bible and the Qur'anic text." In Reynolds, G. S., ed. *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, (204–16) 206–7. London: Routledge, 2008.

### SCHOLARLY THEORIES ON THE *MĀ'IDA* PASSAGE

Nöldeke's observation in this regard evidently helped determine the principal scholarly explanation of the *mā'ida* passage, namely that it is a reflection of the Christian Last Supper tradition. Some scholars, however, understand this passage instead in the light of the Gospel accounts of the multiplication of the fish and loaves, or the passage in Acts 10 in which God sends down "something like a great sheet bound at the four corners" (Acts 10:11) filled with animals for Peter to eat. A *status quaestionis* of research on the *mā'ida* passage can be found in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* article of Matthias Radscheit cited above,<sup>10</sup> and in recent the work of Michael Cuypers on *sīrat al-Mā'ida*.<sup>11</sup> I will therefore excuse myself from that task and introduce here only two recent contributions to the question not mentioned by Radscheit or Cuypers.

After introducing the etymology of *al-mā'ida*, and mentioning the theories of earlier scholars on this passage, Manfred Kropp asks: "Could it be that they were too focused on Biblical texts alone, or the extrabiblical Jewish and Christian traditions and texts to the exclusion of the Ethiopic heritage?"<sup>12</sup> Kropp argues that the *mā'ida* passage in the Qur'ān is related to a hagiographic Ethiopic tradition in which light shines upon a group of saints whenever they gather to eat. This tradition is preserved in the homily of the 5<sup>th</sup> century bishop John of Aksum. In telling the story of nine saints from Syria he comments: "Every time they came together at the table (*mā'ad(d)ā*), lights descend on them shining like the sun."<sup>13</sup> Kropp does not contend that this citation is the direct source of the Qur'ān's *mā'ida* passage; he does maintain, however, that the close relationship between the two texts suggests that this passages

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<sup>10</sup> Radscheit, "Table."

<sup>11</sup> Cuypers, M. *Le festin: Une lecture de la sourate al-Mā'ida*, 337–39. Paris: Lethellieux, 2007. English trans.: *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an*. Miami: Convivium Press, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Kropp, "Beyond Single Words," 210–11.

<sup>13</sup> The translation is Kropp (p. 211), from the edition in: Conti Rossini, C. "L'omelia di Yohannes, vescovo d'Aksum in onore di Garimā." In *Actes du Congrès international des Orientalistes, section sémitique*, 139–77 (excerpt p. 153). Paris, 1898.

owes more to Ethiopic Christian tradition than the single word *al-mā'ida*.

Samir Khalil Samir, in his analysis of the *mā'ida* passage in the Qur'ān, focuses on the dialogue between Jesus and God. According to Samir, the Qur'ān here uses peculiarly Christian turns of phrase. He argues that the term *'id* (v. 114), which appears nowhere else in the Qur'ān, is related to Syriac *'idā*, meaning “feast” or “liturgical festival.”<sup>14</sup> As for the phrase *li-anwalinā wa-ākhirinā* (v. 114), also found nowhere else in the Qur'ān, Samir argues that it reflects the New Testament narrative on the institution of the Eucharist. Both Matthew (26:28; *περὶ πολλῶν*) and Mark (14:24; *ὑπὲρ πολλῶν*) have Jesus describe the cup as his blood which is “shed for many” (Luke 22:20 has simply “for you.”). Samir explains that the Greek phrase here in fact means, idiomatically, “for all,” and argues that the Qur'ānic phrase *li-anwalinā wa-ākhirinā* has the same meaning (and therefore might be thought of as a sort of calque). Finally Samir suggests that God's threat in v. 115 (“But as for those who disbelieve henceforth, I will torment them as I have never tormented anyone before.”) reflects the threat in 1 Corinthians 11:29 that the one who receives the Eucharist unworthily is “eating and drinking his own condemnation.” Samir thus concludes that the *mā'ida* passage must be understood in the light of the Christian Eucharist tradition. In support of Samir's conclusion it might be noted that Ethiopic *mā'edd* appears for the Eucharistic table in 1 Corinthians 11:21, eight verses before the verse that Samir connects to v. 115 of the *mā'ida* passage.

Now neither Kropp nor Samir insists that the Qur'ān is simply borrowing from a Christian source. Instead both scholars draw our attention to the religious milieu in which the Qur'ān emerged and examine how the *mā'ida* passage might be in conversation with Christian traditions. Indeed when discussing such matters it should not be missed that the Qur'ān as a rule does not quote from Jewish or Christian texts. Instead it alludes to them as it develops its own religious message. Accordingly passages such as that on the *mā'ida*

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<sup>14</sup> Samir, S. K. “The Theological Christian Influence on the Qur'ān: A Reflection.” In Reynolds, *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, (141–62) 149.

should not be thought of as citations of heterodox or apocryphal texts,<sup>15</sup> or garbled renderings of canonical Jewish or Christian texts.<sup>16</sup> Instead they should be thought of as the Qur'ān's intentional employment of earlier religious symbols and topoi.

### THE *MĀ'IDA* PASSAGE AND THE ISRAELITES

In this light we might think again of one of the “reference points” which Radscheit mentions in the citation at the opening of this article, namely Psalm 78:19.<sup>17</sup> As a whole this Psalm recounts the history of Israel from Moses to David, emphasizing Israel's repeated acts of infidelity, and God's repeated acts of mercy. The verse in question occurs in a section of the Psalm on the fickleness and insolence of the Israelites during their wanderings in the desert after the exodus:

<sup>15</sup> He split rocks in the desert, let them drink as though from the limitless depths;

<sup>16</sup> he brought forth streams from a rock, made waters flow down in torrents.

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<sup>15</sup> Pace the conclusion of Nöldeke, “Es kann ferner keinem Zweifel unterliegen daß die hauptsächlichste Quelle, aus der Muhammed seine Kenntnisse zuflossen, weniger die Bibel als das ausserkanonische, liturgische und dogmatische Schrifttum war. Daher gleichen die alttestamentlichen Erzählungen im Qoran weit mehr den haggadischen Ausschmückungen als ihren Urbildern; die neutestamentlichen sind ganz legendenhaft und haben einige Ähnlichkeit mit den Berichten der apokryphen Evangelien.” Nöldeke, T., et al. *Geschichte des Qorans*, 1:8. Hildesheim: Olms, 1970.

<sup>16</sup> Pace the conclusion of Wilhelm Rudolph who, after refuting the idea of Nöldeke that Muḥammad was influenced by heterodox Jewish and Christian writings, comments: “Dazu mag er sich wohl auch Notizen über das Gehörte gemacht haben (s. S. 25 6); andererseits werden sich manche Verworrenheiten in seinen Erzählungen—abgesehen von der mangelhaften Übermittlung—eben daraus erklären, dass er sie aus dem Gedächtnis vortrug.” Rudolph, W. *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum*, 21. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1922.

<sup>17</sup> On the relationship between the *mā'ida* passage and Psalm 78 see also Cuypers, *Le festin*, 344–45.

- <sup>17</sup> But they only sinned against him more than ever, defying the Most High in barren country;
- <sup>18</sup> **they deliberately challenged God by demanding food to their hearts' content.**
- <sup>19</sup> **They insulted God by saying, 'Can God make a banquet in the desert?**
- <sup>20</sup> **True, when he struck the rock, waters gushed out and flowed in torrents; but what of bread? Can he give that, can he provide meat for his people?'**
- <sup>21</sup> When he heard them Yahweh vented his anger, fire blazed against Jacob, his anger mounted against Israel,
- <sup>22</sup> because they had no faith in God, no trust in his power to save.<sup>18</sup>

The moaning and groaning of the Israelites over the lack of food—or the lack of good food—is a prominent trope in the Pentateuch. The Israelites are first found complaining this way in Exodus 16, soon after their miraculous crossing of the Sea of Reeds:

Setting out from Elim, the whole community of Israelites entered the desert of Sin, lying between Elim and Sinai—on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left Egypt. \* And the whole community of Israelites began complaining about Moses and Aaron in the desert \* and said to them, 'Why did we not die at Yahweh's hand in Egypt, where we used to sit round the flesh pots and could eat to our heart's content! As it is, you have led us into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death!' \* Yahweh then said to Moses, 'Look, I shall rain down bread for you from the heavens. Each day the people must go out and collect their ration for the day; I propose to test them in this way to see whether they will follow my law or not' (Exodus 16: 1–4).

In the *ma'ida* passage the companions confront Jesus with the demand that God send down to them a table; here the Israelites confront Moses and Aaron with their complaints for food. In the

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<sup>18</sup> Unless indicated otherwise Biblical translations are from the New Jerusalem Bible.



*mā'ida* passage God agrees to send a table down to them, but also threatens them with a punishment for infidelity. Here God affirms that he will send down bread from heaven—manna—but adds that this will be a test of their fidelity.

In Exodus 17 the Israelites arrive at Rephidim—to be known later as Meribah—where they begin again to complain, now because they found no water to drink. Again the Israelites turn on Moses; again they regret that he has led them out of Egypt, heedless of the miracle wrought by their God at the Sea of Reeds:

The people took issue with Moses for this and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses replied, “Why take issue with me? Why do you put Yahweh to the test?” \* But tormented by thirst, the people complained to Moses. “Why did you bring us out of Egypt,” they said, “only to make us, our children and our livestock, die of thirst?” (Exodus 17:2–3).

In Exodus 16 Yahweh proposes to test (Heb. *nāsā*) the Israelites; now Moses accuse the Israelites of testing (again *nāsā*) Yahweh. They are guilty of a sin of presumption, making demands of God (but then they were, after all, tormented by thirst) when they should instead be concerned with God's demands of them. The sin of the companions in the *mā'ida* passage of the Qur'ān is similar. They demand a table from heaven in order to test Jesus and his God: “We wish to eat from it, that our hearts might be set at ease, that we may know that you have told the truth, and that we may be witnesses to it.” (Q 5:113).

The same tradition recounted in Exodus 16–17 is told differently in Numbers. In the account of Exodus 16 Yahweh responds to the complaints of the Israelites by sending to them manna in the morning and quails in the evening (v. 13). Numbers 11, however, recounts how the Israelites—already in the desert of Sinai—complained to God that they have nothing *but* manna to eat (vv. 4–6),<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “The rabble who had joined the people were feeling the pangs of hunger, and the Israelites began to weep again. ‘Who will give us meat to eat?’ they said. \* “Think of the fish we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic! \* But now we are withering

and God responds by sending quails (vv. 31–32). The tradition of a miracle at a site named Meribah also appears in Numbers, but only after the Israelites have arrived at Kadesh (to the Northeast of the desert of Sinai). There the Israelites complain that they have no water for their crops, their livestock, or themselves.<sup>20</sup> Moses, following Yahweh's instructions (although, unfortunately for him, not exactly) strikes a rock and water pours forth (Numbers 20:8–11). In the next chapter, however, after the death of Aaron, and after they have defeated the Canaanite king Arad, the Israelites again complain to Moses, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in the desert? For there is neither food nor water here; we are sick of this meagre diet" (Numbers 21:5). Yahweh, understandably exasperated, curses them for their insolence and sends serpents against them, serpents "whose bite brought to death many in Israel" (v. 6).

Psalm 78 seems to follow this latter sequence of complaints. The Psalmist laments how the Israelites demand food *after* they have witnessed God provide water from a rock: "True, when he struck the rock, waters gushed out and flowed in torrents; but what of bread? Can he give that, can he provide meat for his people?" (vv. 20).<sup>21</sup>

The Qur'ānic *mā'ida* passage is tellingly close to Psalm 78. As cited above, in the New Jerusalem translation, verse 19 reads: "They insulted God by saying, 'Can God make a *banquet* in the de-

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away; there is nothing wherever we look except this manna!" (Numbers 11:4–6).

<sup>20</sup> "The people laid the blame on Moses. 'We would rather have died,' they said, 'as our brothers died before Yahweh! \* Why have you brought Yahweh's community into this desert, for us and our livestock to die here? \* Why did you lead us out of Egypt, only to bring us to this wretched place? It is a place unfit for sowing, it has no figs, no vines, no pomegranates, and there is not even water to drink!'" (Numbers 20:3–5).

<sup>21</sup> The second Old Testament reference raised by Radscheit is Psalm 23:5: "You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup brims over." This latter verse, however, occurs in a Psalm of praise, and has little in common with the *mā'ida* passage, or Psalm 78, both of which are marked by the theme of humans insolently testing God.

sert?" Yet the Hebrew word here translated "banquet", *shulḥān*, is literally: "table." Accordingly the LXX translates τροπέζα, and the Ethiopic Bible translates *mā'edd*.<sup>22</sup> Thus we might compare:

Qur'ān 5:112b: "Can your Lord send down a *mā'ida* from heaven?"

(Ethiopic) Psalm 78:19b: "Can God make a *mā'edd* in the desert?"

### JESUS AND *AL-MĀ'IDA*

The problem we are left with, of course, is that Jesus, the protagonist of the *mā'ida* passage, was not yet born when the Israelites were wandering in the desert. Why, then, would the Qur'ān insert Jesus into a passage based on an Old Testament narrative?

In answering this question it might first be noted that it would not be out of character for the Qur'ān to place a Biblical protagonist in a different context. In the Biblical book of Esther Haman is the vizier of the Persian king Xerxes. In the Qur'ān, however, Haman becomes the vizier of the Egyptian Pharaoh (Q 28:6–8, 38–42; 40:24, 36–47).<sup>23</sup> In the Qur'ān, Mary the Mother of Jesus becomes also the daughter of 'Imrān (Biblical 'Amrām, father of Moses, Aaron, and Mariam; see Q 3:35ff.), the sister of Aaron (Q 19:29).<sup>24</sup> In the Bible (Judges 7:4–8), God instructs Gideon to take only those men who drink from their hands (and not those who drink straight from the river) on campaign with him against the Midianites. In the Qur'ān (2:249) this same story is told, but here Saul (Tālūt) appears in the place of Gideon.

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<sup>22</sup> Devens, V. M. *A Concordance to Psalms in the Ethiopic Version*, 105. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> On the relationship between the Biblical and Qur'ānic characters of Haman see Silverstein, A. "Haman's transition from the Jahiliyya to Islam." *JSAI* 34 (2008): 285–308; Reynolds, G. S. *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, 97–106. London: Routledge, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> On this oft-debated topic see Mourad, S. M. "Mary in the Qur'ān: A Reexamination of Her Presentation." In Reynolds, *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, 163–74.

In an earlier publication I have argued that it would be wrong to describe these contradictions as errors of the Qurʾān, or to think of them (as Orientalists were once wont to do) as Muḥammad’s confused recounting of Biblical narratives.<sup>25</sup> In analyzing these matters it is important above all to remember that the Qurʾān is invested in paranesis. The Qurʾān is a profoundly homiletic book, a book fundamentally unconcerned with a precise recounting of historical narratives. In referring to Biblical accounts, its only concern is the impact that these references will have on its audience, whom the Qurʾān seeks passionately to convert to the fear of God. In other words, the Qurʾān does not quote Biblical traditions, it employs Biblical *topoi*. To this effect Wansbrough writes on the opening page of *Qurʾānic Studies*:

Both formally and conceptually, Muslim scripture drew upon a traditional stock of monotheistic imagery, which may be described as schemata of revelation. Analysis of the Qurʾānic application of these shows that they have been adapted to the essentially paraenetic character of that document, and that, for example, originally narrative material was reduced almost invariably to a series of discrete and parabolic utterances.<sup>26</sup>

Cases such as the *māʾida* passage show that the Qurʾān’s relationship with Biblical material is creative. In this case, or in the case of Haman in Egypt, the Qurʾān creates a new tradition by integrating Biblical themes, protagonists, and settings in a way that introduces its religious message.

Nevertheless, we might expect to find a certain logic in the way that the Qurʾān does so. In order to understand the logic behind the *māʾida* passage, it should first be noted that the Qurʾān presents Jesus—like Moses—as a prophet for the Israelites, not a

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<sup>25</sup> Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and Its Biblical Context*, 239.

<sup>26</sup> Wansbrough, J. *Qurʾānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977 (reprint: Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004). Note also Wansbrough’s later (p. 19) reflection, “The so-called narrative sections of the Qurʾān are of essentially symbolic character adduced to illustrate the eschatological value of the theodicy.”

prophet for the entire world.<sup>27</sup> In one passage the Qur'ān explicitly describes Jesus (Q 3:49) as a messenger to the Israelites; elsewhere the Qur'ān has Jesus himself declare, "O Israelites, I am the messenger of God to you!" (Q 61:6). Earlier in *al-Mā'ida*, moreover, Jesus addresses the Israelites to demand that they worship God alone (Q 5:72). The *mā'ida* passage—seen as a development on the topos of the wanderings of the Israelites—would thus reflect the special connection in the Qur'ān between Jesus and the Israelites.

Yet the particular idea of creating a tradition based on the wanderings of the Israelites, but with Jesus in the place of Moses, was presumably inspired by the tradition found in John 6:29–32.<sup>28</sup> In this passage the crowd that had been fed by Jesus when he multiplied the fish and loaves has followed him to the other side of the lake. After recounting *how* they asked Jesus how one might do God's work, John relates:

Jesus gave them this answer, "This is carrying out God's work: you must believe in the one he has sent." \* So they said, "What sign will you yourself do, the sight of which will make us believe in you? What work will you do?" \* Our fathers ate manna in the desert; as scripture says: He gave them bread from

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<sup>27</sup> I am obliged to Prof. Gerald Hawting for drawing my attention to this point.

<sup>28</sup> In his description of the *mā'ida* passage Michael Cuypers similarly focuses on this passage. He notes that the passage on Peter's vision in Acts 10 is similar to the Qur'ān only as regards "l'image très matérielle de la descente du ciel d'un nourriture" (Cuypers, *Le festin*, 340); however, whereas the companions of Jesus in the Qur'ān demand that a table be brought down to him, in Acts 10 the "great sheet" is brought down to Peter against his will, and is filled with impure animals which he does not want to eat. Similarly the Gospel account of the multiplication of fish and loaves, Cuypers notes, is not prompted by a request of the companions. On the other hand the "Bread of Life" discourse is, like the *mā'ida* passage, introduced by a request of the crowd (John 6:30). Moreover, in the "Bread of Life" discourse, as in the *mā'ida* passage, food is promised—the Eucharistic feast—but not yet given (see John 6:48–57). Cuypers comments: "Les deux discours restent donc également inachevés, ouverts à un accomplissement qui est à réaliser par l'auditeur-lecteur croyant" (p. 340).

heaven to eat. \* Jesus answered them: In all truth I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread.

Here John has the companions of Jesus ask for a sign by recalling the bread that had been sent down from heaven to the companions of Moses. Jesus responds by describing himself as the bread of life, sent down from heaven, a reference to the Eucharistic feast:

I am the bread of life. \* Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead; \* but this is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that a person may eat it and not die. \* I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world (John 6:48–51).

In the verse (5:111) that introduces the *mā'ida* passage the divine voice of the Qur'ān declares: "When I revealed to the companions, 'Believe in me and my messenger,' they said, 'We believe. Bear witness that we have submitted.'" This verse appears now to reflect the introduction (John 6:29) to the "Bread of Life" discourse cited above, where Jesus tells the crowd to "believe in the one He has sent (Greek: ὃν ἀπέστειλεν ἐκεῖνος; Syriac: *d-hū shad-dar*). Now the Qur'ān shows no interest in the reference to the Eucharist in John 6. Instead, it is focused on the comparison between the companions of Jesus and Moses therein. Indeed it develops this comparison by having the companions of Jesus themselves ask for food from heaven.<sup>29</sup>

Their demand for food is also a demand for a sign that would verify the claims of Jesus: "We wish to eat from it, *that our hearts might be set at ease, that we may know that you have told the truth*, and that we may be witnesses to it" (Q 5:113). In the Gospels the demand for a sign is a trope for the hardened heart of unbelievers. When

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<sup>29</sup> Cuypers also emphasizes the Qur'ān's creative use of Biblical traditions: "La péripécopie puise en outre dans les sources scripturaires de Jean, que ce soit le livre de l'Exode ou le psaume 78, mais elle le fait de manière originale." Cuypers, *Le festin*, 345.

the scribes and Pharisees demand a sign of Jesus, he responds ominously: "It is an evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign! The only sign it will be given is the sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matthew 12:39; cf. Luke 11:29).<sup>30</sup> The Prophet of the Qur'ān is also challenged to give a sign, and similarly he refuses: "They say, 'If only signs were sent down to him from his Lord.' Say, 'The signs are only with God, and I am but a clear warner'" (Q 29:50). In this light the threat that God adds at the end of the *mā'ida* passage—which might seem curious at first—is understandable. The companions of Jesus—unlike the people who challenged the Prophet of the Qur'ān—have had a sign sent down to them. If they dare, despite this sign, to disbelieve, then God will accordingly torment them as He has "never tormented anyone before" (v. 115).<sup>31</sup>

Now it seems to me that in the *mā'ida* passage the Qur'ān is not concerned with the crowds who followed Jesus but refused to confess that he was the Messiah. Instead it is concerned with Christians, the followers of Jesus who betrayed his teaching and insulted God by deifying him (and his mother). The Qur'ān introduces its threat by declaring, *man yakfur bā'du*, "as for those who disbelieve henceforth..." (v. 115), that is, after confessing that Jesus is a mes-

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<sup>30</sup> Matthew has Jesus first explain this sign by comparing Jonah's time in the fish to his time under the earth. Jesus then continues, "On Judgment Day the men of Nineveh will appear against this generation and they will be its condemnation, because when Jonah preached they repented; and look, there is something greater than Jonah here" (Matthew 12:41). This latter explanation—that the sign of Jonah refers to the infidelity of the Israelites and the faith of the gentiles—may be the more ancient tradition, as it is the only explanation that Jesus gives in Luke (11:30). On the opponents of Jesus demanding a sign cf. Matthew 16:1–4; Mark 8:11–12; Luke 11:16; John 2:18.

<sup>31</sup> Cuypers suggests that the threat in v. 115 could reflect the conclusion of the "Bread of Life" discourse in John 6, where Jesus alludes to the betrayal of Judas: "Jesus replied to them, 'Did I not choose the Twelve of you? Yet one of you is a devil.' \* He meant Judas son of Simon Iscariot, since this was the man, one of the Twelve, who was to betray him" (John 6:70–71). See Cuypers, *Le festin*, 341.

senger (v. 111) and seeing a sign from him (the *mā'ida* sent down from heaven). And according to the Qur'ān the Christians have indeed disbelieved: *la qad kafarū alladhīna qālū inna allāha huwa al-masīhu*, “those who say, ‘God is Christ’ have disbelieved” (Q 5:17, 72); *la qad kafarū alladhīna qālū inna allāhā thalāthū thalāthatim*, “those who say, ‘God is the third of three’ have disbelieved” (Q 5:73).

For this reason the Qur'ān has Jesus, in the dialogue that follows the *mā'ida* passage, declare himself innocent from the errors of Christians (Q 5:116–7) and proclaim to God: “They are Your servants, and You have the right to torment them. So too You have the right to forgive them. You are the Powerful, the Wise” (v. 118).



# PRAYER AND THE DESERT FATHERS

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The elders said: “Prayer is the monk’s mirror.”<sup>1</sup>

John Wansbrough was born and educated in North America then spent the greater part of his working career in Britain, whereas the present writer, born and educated in Britain, has spent the rest of his life in North America. The focus of his research here (the “Byzantine” Empire) has been a little (but not far) removed from the other’s over there; in fact, where it dealt with the Desert Fathers, it may well have discovered a link with that fascinating element of Islam called Suffism. Wansbrough must have encountered the Desert Fathers at some point in his studies and no doubt he asked himself the inevitable question about those thousands of men (and some women) who retreated into the fastnesses of the Egyptian deserts in the fourth-seventh centuries of the Christian era: what did they *do* there?

“Pray without ceasing” [*adiáleiptós*, “uninterruptedly”] says Paul to the people of Thessaly<sup>2</sup> and the Desert Fathers took this injunction seriously to heart from the very beginning. Antony the Great (says Athanasius) “prayed continuously, for he learnt that

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<sup>1</sup> Nau 96 / 21.12.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thess. 5.17; for a good story of how Macarius the Great “tricked” a brother into frequent prayer see Nau 66 / 18.14.

one should pray alone *without ceasing*—the same word Paul uses.<sup>3</sup> Both the words of Paul and (even more so) the sentiment echo throughout the eremitic tradition, e.g. : “If you love the salvation of your soul, pray all the time, as it is written, with fear and trembling; with a vigilant heart, in full knowledge that you have wicked enemies seeking their opportunity to take you captive.”<sup>4</sup> If there were no more evidence than the number of times uninterrupted prayer is mentioned in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* there would be no doubt that this was one of the first things required of the monk. “Three things are of capital importance [for the monk]” says Poemen: “that he fear the Lord, that he do good to his neighbour and that he ‘pray without ceasing.’”<sup>5</sup>

The theory, then, is clear; how did it work out in practice? On the one hand there were those like the elder who “... if he found that he was reciting verses of the psalms or praying, it was well, but if he found he was thinking of any other matter whatsoever, he would upbraid himself saying: ‘Get back from there! Heart and soul, to your task!’”<sup>6</sup> On the other hand there is this caution: “If it is only when a monk stands in prayer that he prays, such a man does not pray at all.”<sup>7</sup> The blessed Epiphanius, bishop of Cyprus [*ob.* 403], when the abba of the monastery he maintained in Palestine reported: “Thanks to your prayers, we are prompt in observing the rule, for we devoutly celebrate the service at the third, the sixth and the ninth hour and at the lighting of the lamps,” complained

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<sup>3</sup> VA 3.7: “alone” [*kat’ idian*] may be a reference to Mtt. 6.6: “When thou prayest, enter into thy closet [*tameion*] and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret and thy Father which seeth thee in secret shall reward thee openly.”

<sup>4</sup> *Patericon aethiopice* 386, cited in Regnault, Lucien. *Les sentences de pères du desert, nouveau recueil*, 336. Solesmes, 21977.

<sup>5</sup> Poemen 160 / 11.61; cf “Man needs to fear the judgment of God, to hate sin and love virtue, and to intercede continuously with God”, Nau 123 / 21.42; “Hard labour, humility and ceaseless prayer [allow one to] acquire Jesus” (this is an extremely rare expression in the *Apophthegmata*) 11.129. See also Nau 323 / 15.103.

<sup>6</sup> Anon 6., *To Gerontikon tou Sina*, 70. Thessalonika, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Nau 104 / 21.23.

that they must then be refraining from prayer at the other hours of the day. The true monk must have prayer and psalm-singing in his heart ‘without ceasing’<sup>8</sup> but it is clear that not all monks were of that calibre from a rather sad story of an elder with the gift of second sight who, sitting at table in a certain monastery, seemed to see some of the brethren eating honey, some bread and some excrement.

A voice from above came to him saying: “Those who are eating honey are they who sit at table with fear and trembling and with spiritual joy. These ‘pray without ceasing’ and their prayer comes up before God like incense; that is why they are eating honey. Those who are eating bread are they who [only] give thanks on partaking of the gifts of God, while they who are eating excrement are they who mutter and complain, saying: “This is good, that is rotten.””<sup>9</sup>

These examples clearly illustrate one of the major difficulties in talking about early monasticism. The community to which Epiphanius signalled his displeasure was obviously a fairly well developed institution with some organisation and an established rule in which the offering of tierce, sext, none and vespers was an accepted practice. On the other hand, the monk who only prays when he stands to do so could be living in a hermitage, where a single person worked and prayed in almost complete isolation from his fellow men. The fourth and fifth centuries offer plentiful evidence of both those patterns of monachism, but also of many variations between them, to say nothing of more complex organisations in the case of the Pachomian monasteries of Upper Egypt. But the requirement that the monk “pray without ceasing” is common to them all; it is merely a question of how this was practiced in differing situations.

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<sup>8</sup> Epiphanius 3 / 12.6 *cf* “Flee vain glory and pray without ceasing. Sing psalms before and after sleeping and learn by heart the precepts of the Scriptures. And call to mind the deeds of the saints ...” *VA* 55.3. Antony prays psalms himself: *VA* 9.3, 25.1, 39.6.

<sup>9</sup> Nau 85 / 18.42.

The earliest monks may have “prayed without ceasing” to the extent that they made no distinction between hours of prayer and other times. Abba Isidore, a first-generation monk at Scete, said that when he was young there were no limits to the *synaxis*; “Night and day were *synaxis* for me.”<sup>10</sup> *Synaxis* is the usual word for a religious service (roughly equivalent to the French word *culte*) but it has two different aspects, public and private. Its literal meaning is “assembly” and in this sense it denotes a service for a *con-gregation*, usually at the weekend or on a major feast day and nearly always terminating with the Eucharist, then usually known as “the offering,” [*anaphora, prosphora*]). The participants could be secular persons,<sup>11</sup> monastics or both. Where monks were living in groups of cells and hermitages (and this became increasingly the normal pattern) they would congregate on Saturday to celebrate the evening and dawn *synaxes* together (possibly bridged by an all-night vigil) followed by the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist with general communion.<sup>12</sup> There would then be a common meal (*agape*)<sup>13</sup> before the monks returned to their individual dwellings with provisions for the week to come.

Any monk who refrained from attending the weekend assembly was somewhat suspect, maybe of heresy or pride. There was such a monk who was given a vision in which he saw a pillar of fire with a spark flying around it, sometimes fading out. “The pillar” he was told “is the prayer of the brethren assembled together; the

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<sup>10</sup> Isidore 4.

<sup>11</sup> e.g. Nau 31

<sup>12</sup> See Regnault, Lucien. *La Vie quotidienne des Pères du Désert*. Paris, 1990, ch. XIII, “Le week-end communautaire.” Monks were urged to spend an hour preparing themselves for the *synaxis*, Poemen 32 / 11.58. Sometimes the word *synaxis* appears to have the more general sense of their coming together: Poimen 11, Arsenius 16, Theodore of Phermê 29. It was not uncommon to observe both Saturday and Sunday as holy days in Egypt and the east: Butler, *The Lausiac History*, 2.198–99, note 36

<sup>13</sup> Dried bread and a cup of wine were given at one monastery: Isaac of Thebes 2. The meal (at The Cells a “potluck”) may have been taken in church and, on rare occasions, to have been held other than in connection with the *synaxis* HME 20.11.

spark is the prayer of members of the monastery who absent themselves from the common prayer. Do you, if you wish to be saved, offer the prescribed prayers together with your brothers. If you will and can do that, *then* you can pray in private.”<sup>14</sup> This may well indicate a growing importance of communal worship in the monastic tradition. Further evidence is an indication that a special garment was reserved for those participating in the *synaxis*: the *leviton*, meaning the dress of the Levites, *i.e.* those set apart as ministers of the sanctuary in the Old Testament.<sup>15</sup> Thus arrayed, the participants looked like angels at the assembly.

However, it is not the weekend *synaxis*, but the private acts of worship of single monks or “where two or three are gathered together” [Mtt 18.20] that is most frequently mentioned in the *Apophthegmata*. In this context it should first be observed that the monk was required to *work* as well as to pray. It is a point of cardinal importance that the monk is to earn his own keep, to “eat the labour of his hands”<sup>16</sup> also to produce something extra to be used for the entertainment of visitors and the relief of the poor. For, as Poemen says, this is a duty incumbent on the monk: “These three things are of capital importance: that you fear the Lord; that you pray to God without ceasing and that you do good to your neighbour.”<sup>17</sup> “The work of your hands and offering the act of worship will save you,” says an anonymous father.<sup>18</sup>

How then were the conflicting claims of work and continuous prayer to be reconciled? In some ways this was less of a problem for men living alone or in very small groups than it was for those in community for, while the latter engaged perforce in what today we

<sup>14</sup> Budge 1.135.

<sup>15</sup> Cronius 5. Festugière translates *leviton* (also called *kolobion*) “tunique sans manches,” *HME* 8.6, 10.9. *cf.* *HL* 32.5: “When [monks] set out for communion on Saturday and Sunday, let them loosen their girdles, set aside their sheepskins and go in [wearing] only a *koukoulion* [which was to be] a mantle like children wear marked in purple with the sign of the cross.”

<sup>16</sup> Psalm 127 / 128.2; *HL* 20.3, 45.3, 47.2 &c.

<sup>17</sup> Poimen 160 / 11.61.

<sup>18</sup> *Patericon Aethiopice* 329.

would call industrial production of various goods (agricultural and otherwise) the “loner” could (and did) embrace work which neither required him to be with other people nor made intellectual demands upon him. The most common practice was to take the raw material to be found in the desert (rushes and reeds from the marshes, leaves from the palm trees.)<sup>19</sup> These were then either braided into rope which could subsequently be coiled and stitched to form baskets or woven in such a way as to create the primitive futon which served all the poorer people (and those monks who did not sleep on the bare ground) as both sofa and bed. These products were then sold to a passing trader or exchanged for the necessities of life at the weekend assembly; this was how many of the monks living “in the desert” earned their living.<sup>20</sup>

This is certainly the way Antony the Great [*ca* 250–356] worked and also Macarius the Egyptian / the Great [*ca* 300 – *ca* 390] for there is an anecdote which tells of the two of them spending the night together in spiritual discourse, all the time braiding rope.<sup>21</sup> Another anecdote (this is the first item in the *Alphabeticon*) gives us a glimpse of Antony at work:

Once when the holy Abba Antony was residing in the desert he was overcome by *accidie* and a cloud of black thoughts. He said to God: “Lord, *I want to be saved*<sup>22</sup> but my thoughts will not

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<sup>19</sup> “From dawn to the ninth hour I pray by the hour, spinning flax [‘I spin and recite psalms’ says one ms]. The rest of the hours I call to mind the blessed patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs” says Alexandria, *HL* 5.3 (*cf* *VA* 55.3, cited above).

<sup>20</sup> Regnault, *La Vie quotidienne*, 112–15. Macarius Ægypt 33, *PG* 65:273–278 makes this clear. Theodoret of Cyr says of the monks of Syria: “Ever increasing their labours with labour, they undertook manual tasks: now fashioning what we call baskets and fans, now cultivating small patches of earth in the valleys in which they sowed and reaped what sufficed them for food,” *Histoire Philothée* 10.2 (SC, 234, 257. Paris, 1977, 1979, p. 440).

<sup>21</sup> Macarius the Great 4 / 7.14.

<sup>22</sup> See Wortley, J. “What the Desert Fathers meant by ‘being saved,’” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 12 (2008): 322–43, in which it is argued that they were referring, not to their eternal salvation, but to rescue from

leave me alone. What am I to do in my affliction? How can I be saved?” Going outside [his cell] a little way Antony saw somebody similar to himself sitting working, then standing up to pray, sitting down again to work at rope-making, then standing to pray once more. It was an angel of the Lord sent to correct Antony and to encourage him. He heard the angel saying: “Act like this and you shall be saved.” He was greatly cheered and encouraged on hearing this and, by doing [as he was told,] he was saved [from *accidie*.]<sup>23</sup>

The angel seems to be telling Antony to take frequent “prayer breaks” from the monotony of rope-making, but that is not the only way his words could be understood. There was a father living at *Enaton*, meaning the ninth mile-post to the west of Alexandria (where there was quite a significant monastic community).<sup>24</sup> One day he was visited by some Messalians (also known as Euchites), a mendicant, pietistic sect who “prayed without ceasing” to the exclusion of work.<sup>25</sup> After teasing them about how they prayed while sleeping, eating &c., he says:

Look, I am going to show you how I “pray without ceasing” while working with my hands. After steeping some reeds [*i.e.* to soften them for working] I sit down with God and, while braiding them into rope, I say: ‘Have mercy upon me O God after thy great goodness; according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences.’”<sup>26</sup> And he said to them: “Is that not praying?” “Yes” they said, and the elder continued: “When I pass the whole day working and praying, I earn more or less sixteen pence; I put two pennies by the door and eat with the rest. He who takes the two pence pray for me while

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those “wicked enemies seeking their opportunity to take you captive” (above, 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph) hence from the wreck of their monastic career.

<sup>23</sup> Antony 1 / 7.1.

<sup>24</sup> Chitty, D. J. *The Desert a City*, 74, 92, 159 &c. Oxford, 1966.

<sup>25</sup> *ODCC* p. 906; see Guilaumont, A. *DS* 10 (1980): 1074–83.

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 50.1 and see Wortley, J. “How the Desert Fathers ‘meditated.’” *GRBS* 46 (2006): 315–28.

I am eating and sleeping and in this way, by the grace of God, he fulfils for me the command to ‘pray without ceasing.’”<sup>27</sup>

His mode of prayer when waking would have won the entire approval of Macarius the Great for he says there is no need of “vain repetitions”<sup>28</sup> when one prays. “One should *frequently* stretch out one’s hands and say: ‘Lord, have mercy on me the way you want to and the way you know how,’ and if the [devil’s] assault continues: ‘Help me Lord!’ For He knows what is right for us and he will be merciful.”<sup>29</sup>

It may be possible here to see the emergence of two complementary practices: of having a prayer for ever in one’s mouth (or mind) no matter what the task in hand, and of stopping work at certain moments of the day to make a deliberate act of worship. (“Stop work promptly to perform your *synaxis*” says Arsenius.)<sup>30</sup> How many times one was to do this we cannot say; indeed, John Cassian [*ob* 435] comments on the astonishing variety of prayer-practices he observed in Egypt.<sup>31</sup> As abba Isidore said (above): “Night and day were *synaxis* for me.” We do however notice the emergence of a pattern: of an act of worship in the evening and another one in the very early morning, although one troubled brother was advised to “offer one prayer at dawn, one in the evening and one during the night.”<sup>32</sup> In a somewhat enigmatic saying Poemen warns the brethren: “Be not negligent of the times for *synaxeis* [plural of *synaxis*] nor of [the times for] secret prayers,”<sup>33</sup> meaning (presumably) that those must not replace these. Isaiah of Scete says one should spend half the night on the *synaxis* and the other half of it sleeping: “Spend two hours before going to bed praying and psalm-singing then lay yourself down to rest. When the

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<sup>27</sup> Lucius 1 / 12.10.

<sup>28</sup> *battologia*—he is quoting Mt. 6.7.

<sup>29</sup> Macarius the Egyptian 19 / 12.21

<sup>30</sup> “... and drink your water [*i.e.* break you fast] or your body will soon fall sick,” Arsenius 24.

<sup>31</sup> Cassian, *Institutes* 2.2–3

<sup>32</sup> Paphnutius 5.

<sup>33</sup> Poimen 168 / 10.93.



Lord awakens you, celebrate your [dawn] *synaxis* zealously.”<sup>34</sup> “And if you happen to sleep in until dawn” says an unnamed father, “get up, shut the windows and doors and perform your *synaxis*.”<sup>35</sup> There should be a self-examination both in the evening and at dawn<sup>36</sup> and on rising from sleep one should say: “Body, work to feed yourself; soul, be vigilant in order to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>37</sup>

“Your little *synaxis*” is the most frequent term for the monk’s (or monks’) private act of worship, presumably to distinguish it from the “great” *synaxis* of the Eucharist when an entire community gathered at the weekend for the liturgy.<sup>38</sup> It is also sometimes called “little rule” [*kanôn*] and, at least once, “little liturgy” and “my little psalms.”<sup>39</sup> The most frequent verb associated with any of those words is *ballô*, meaning to cast or throw,<sup>40</sup> indicating that there were frequent prostrations, for one normally stood to pray.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Asceticon* 4.45–46; the night *synaxis* could last until dawn: Nau 229 / 10.150. *c.f.* “They said of someone who lived at The Cells that he had this rule: Four hours of the night he slept, four hours he stood *eis tèn synaxin* and four hours he worked. In the day he worked again until the sixth hour; he read [*si*] from the sixth to the ninth while cutting palm leaves then from the ninth hour he busied himself with food. He thought of his cell as *parerigion* [a subsidiary task, meaning the housekeeping?] Thus he passed the day,” 20.14 (only.)

<sup>35</sup> Nau 230 / 10.152

<sup>36</sup> Nau 264 / 11.91

<sup>37</sup> Nau 269 / 11.99

<sup>38</sup> However, the only time I have ever encountered the term “great *synaxis*” [*megalê synaxis*] is once when one recited (or sang) twelve psalms at the night-office: Nau 229 / 10.150.

<sup>39</sup> *kanôn*: 15.118, 12.6, 18.48, Nau 523, &c; *leitourgia*: Nau 582 / 15.118; *tous mikrous psalmous* Nau 195 / 7.34.

<sup>40</sup> Antony is said to have “cast a psalm he knew,” *VA* 22.6.

<sup>41</sup> Abba Apollo lived in a little cave; “His task was to offer prayer to God all day long; he bent his knees one hundred times by night and the same number of times each day,” *HME* 8.5. However, as there are exceptional cases in which one *knelt* to pray (*e.g.* *HL* 4.3), there are others where one stood *without bending the knee*, *e.g.* *HL* 31.3 (Piamoun) and 18.5 (Macarius of Alexandria).

“When you are standing in your cell to offer your *synaxis* [...] hold yourself upright in the fear of God. Do not lean against the wall and do not relieve your feet by putting your weight on the one to rest the other like silly men ...” stipulates Isaiah of Scete.<sup>42</sup> There is a story of a monk who had fallen sick and was too weak to “cast” his *synaxis*, because he was prostrate, therefore he could not perform the prostrations required. The point of the story is that he forced himself to stand and, when the *synaxis* was over, the sickness had left him. The *synaxis* can also relieve one of evil thoughts [*logismoi*] the narrator adds,<sup>43</sup> as the following incident indicates:

A brother who was moved to anger against somebody stood in prayer, asking for the gift of long-suffering towards the brother and that he might survive the temptation [to be angry] unharmed. Straight away he saw smoke coming out of his mouth and, when that happened, his anger abated.<sup>44</sup>

It should be noted that in the *Apophthegmata* the regular prayer of monks is already referred to sometimes by the term which Benedict would use: the “work of God” [*opus Dei*]:

A brother put this question to an elder: “Why is it that when I perform my little *synaxis* I do it negligently?” The elder replied: “This is how one’s love for God shows itself: it is when you perform the work of God [*to ergon tou Theou* / *opus Dei*] with enthusiasm, compunction and undistracted thoughts.”<sup>45</sup>

Another elder said: “The bee makes honey wherever it goes; likewise the monk accomplishes the work of God [*to ergon tou Theou*] wherever he goes.”<sup>46</sup> Yet another father said:

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<sup>42</sup> Isaiah of Scete, *Asceticon* 3.58.

<sup>43</sup> Theodora 3; Antony was reduced to psalm-singing lying down on one occasion, *VA* 39.6.

<sup>44</sup> Nau 372 / 4.65.

<sup>45</sup> Nau 395 / 10.186. *to ergon tou Theou* is found occasionally elsewhere to denote the entire monastic endeavour: Antony 3, John Colobos 29, Sisoës 37 and Nau 241 / 10.168.

<sup>46</sup> Nau 399 / 11.86.

There was a hard-working monk who kept a careful watch over himself, but then slipped a little in his diligence. Acknowledging his negligence he said to himself: “My soul, how long are you going to be careless about your own salvation? Have you no fear of the judgments of God, nor of being taken by surprise in this carelessness and of being delivered into eternal punishment?” After speaking to himself like that he pulled himself together [to perform] the work of God [*to ergon tou Theou*]. As he was offering his *synaxis* demons came crowding about him, but he said to them: “How long are you going to trouble me? Are you not satisfied with my former shortcomings?” The demons said to him: “While you were negligent we left you alone; but now you have once again risen up against us, we too have risen up against you.” When he heard this he opposed them in the fear of God with even greater determination and, by the grace of God, he made progress.<sup>47</sup>

Of what then did this “little *synaxis*” consist? Apparently almost completely of psalms. John Cassian says: “The Egyptian monks recited psalms continuously and spontaneously throughout the course of the whole day, in tandem with their work [ ... ] taking up the whole day in affairs that we [in Gaul] celebrate at fixed times.”<sup>48</sup> There is little doubt that many of the desert fathers had the Psalter by heart<sup>49</sup> and that psalms made up the greater part of their *synaxis*, also known as “the rule of psalm-singing.”<sup>50</sup> “It is also clear” (writes Dom Lucien Regnault)

that the practice of praying morning and evening was in existence for a long time throughout Christendom, but it was only

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<sup>47</sup> Nau 401 / 11.121.

<sup>48</sup> Cassian, *Institutes* 3.2, SC 109, p. 92, but see Butler, *Lausiac History*, 207–208, note 53. Cassian has quite a lot to say about the way they prayed in Egypt: *Institutes* 2.5–11 and 3.2, fully discussed by Robert Taft in *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, ch. 4: “The Egyptian Monastic Office in the Fourth Century,” 57–73, noting all the main authorities.

<sup>49</sup> “We have learnt the Scriptures, we have recited the David [ic psalter] by heart ...” Nau 222 / 10.135.

<sup>50</sup> 18.48, *ho kanôn tês psalmôidias*.

in the fourth century that the practice of offering *twelve psalms, twice a day*, became more or less universal. Among the anchorites the morning *synaxis* was offered in the second part of the night, the evening service at the going down of the sun. When two or three monks were together at the time for the *synaxis* each one in turn would stand to sing a portion of the twelve psalms while the others sat, joining silently in the prayer [which followed each psalm].

It should be added that, although twelve was the number of psalms believed to have been stipulated by an angel, it is not at all clear *which* psalms were to be used. Were they specific psalms, chosen at random or read in sequence? The most that can be said with any certainty is that Psalm 62 (*Deus meus es tu*) was invariably used at the dawn office, Psalm 140 (*Domine clamavi ad te*) at Vespers.<sup>51</sup>

There were however occasions, exceptional no doubt, when the service was considerably longer:

Another elder visited one of the elders; he cooked a few lentils and said to the visitor: "Let us offer the little *synaxis*." He recited the entire Psalter then the other one repeated from memory the two greater prophets [presumably Isaiah (66 chapters) and Jeremiah (52 chapters).] The visiting elder departed when dawn broke; they forgot about the food.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Regnault, *Vie quotidienne*, 120. See Macarius 33 / 20.3 (The younger [brother] sang five psalms, five verses at a time with an Allelujah") and Nau 229 / 10.150, "When evening came they "cast" the twelve psalms, likewise during the night." An angel instructed Pachomius that his organised monks at Tabennesi were "to offer twelve prayers every day, twelve in the evening, twelve in the night-vigil and three when the common meal was about to be taken, and that a psalm be sung before each prayer" *HL* 32.6. Antony once prayed the same psalm and its prayer twelve times to test a brother: *VA* 22.6.

<sup>52</sup> Nau 150 / 4.70. A father at Kellia had fourteen books of the Bible by heart, Nau 227 / 10.149. Palladius tells of a monks who (as they travelled) recited fifteen psalms, then the great psalm (118/119), then the Epistle to the Hebrews, Isaiah, a part of Jeremiah, Luke's Gospel and

Abba Serapion, visiting a prostitute, “began the *synaxis* and, beginning the Psalter, he offered a prayer [ ... ] for her at each psalm, that she might repent and be saved. The woman fell down when he had finished the psalms. The elder began the Apostle and read a great deal of it and thus he completed the *synaxis*.”<sup>53</sup>

This may be a little excessive; we hear of twelve psalms often enough to conclude that this was the “norm” at both *synaxeis*.<sup>54</sup> Sometimes when two or more were offering the *synaxis* a mistake would be noticed. A brother said:

One day when we were offering the *synaxis* I was distracted and made a mistake in one word of the psalms. After the *synaxis* the elder said to me: ‘When I am at worship, I imagine that there is a fire burning beneath me and I am on fire; thus my thoughts cannot wander to left or to right. Where were your thoughts when we were offering our worship, that you forgot a word of the psalm? Do you not realize that you are in the presence of God and that it is to him that you are speaking when you are at worship?’<sup>55</sup>

Prayer and psalms were very closely linked in the thinking of the Desert Fathers. “If God were to hold against us our lack of attention in prayers and psalm-singing we could not be saved” said one of them.<sup>56</sup> Occasionally the psalms appear to *be* the prayers; “Why did the elder oblige me to say no prayers?” a brother asked himself, so he stood up and sang [*sic*] several psalms.<sup>57</sup> It appears that the psalms were in fact normally sung, rather than recited or

Proverbs; but then there was Serapion Sindonios who had the entire Bible by heart: *Lausiac History* 26.3, 37.1.

<sup>53</sup> Serapion 1 / 17.34.

<sup>54</sup> Nau 229 / 10.150, cf Romanus 1 / 10.110 (*bis*), Macarius Egypt. 33 / 20.3 line 64 but: “he stood up and sang *several* psalms,” Heraclides 1 / 14.30 and “I will recite a few psalms” Nau 195 / 7.34.

<sup>55</sup> Nau 146 / 20.11. A brother reciting the *kanôn* omitted a verse from a psalm, Nau 523 / PE 2.32.23.

<sup>56</sup> Theodore of Enaton 3 / 11.35.

<sup>57</sup> Heraclius 1 / 14.30; might one suspect that, for the earliest monks, the psalter sufficed, to which prayers were added in a later generation.

repeated mentally. The word commonly used, *psalmôidia*, means exactly “psalm-singing” and occasionally (as above) it is indicated explicitly that this is no mere convention, e.g. “The younger brother sang [*psalle*] five psalms”.<sup>58</sup> “When we fall sick, let us not be sorrowful because [ ... ] we are unable to stand or to sing aloud [*psallein meta phônês*]” counsels Amma Syncletica.<sup>59</sup>

There is a third element of the monks’ prayer which must be taken into consideration: what the translators often call “meditating on the Scriptures,” but this is misleading; “enunciating Biblical texts which have been memorised” is nearer the mark.<sup>60</sup> John the Dwarf would give himself to prayer, meditation [*meletê*] and psalmody after an absence from his cell “until his mind was restored to its former state,”<sup>61</sup>—*meletê* is frequently cited in this way as an essential element of the monastic life. Manual work, eating once a day, keeping silence and *meletê* is Poemen’s program of the “visible” aspects of life in the cell; manual labour, *meletê* and prayer is the prescription of Isaiah of Scetê.<sup>62</sup> A brother in trouble says: “I do a little fasting, praying, *meletê* and *hesychia*, purifying my thoughts so far as I can” while an unnamed father says the monk’s life consists of manual labour, obedience, *meletê*, not judging another and never grumbling.<sup>63</sup> “Do not be anxious about anything. Keep silent, be careful for nothing, give yourself to your *meletê*, sleeping and waking in the fear of God and you will not fear the attacks of the godless” a young monk is advised.<sup>64</sup> Another anonymous says that if a monk succumbs to temptation and repents, he has several aids at his dis-

<sup>58</sup> Macarius Egypt. 33 / 20.3 line 65.

<sup>59</sup> Syncletica 8 / 7.24. The demons, wishing to be taken for Christians, pretend to “sing the psalms with a tune [*psallein met’ôidês*] and repeat passages taken from the Scriptures,” *VA* 25.1 & 39.5.

<sup>60</sup> See Note 26 above.

<sup>61</sup> John Colobos 35 (not in Sys).

<sup>62</sup> Poemen 168 / 10.93; Isaiah, *Asceticon* 9.20; also: “Do not neglect your meditation and ceaseless prayer,” *id* 1.4. Occasionally the word *anagnôsis* (reading) replaces *meletê*, e.g. 2.35, 10.25 (Evagrius) and Silvanus 5 / 10.99.

<sup>63</sup> Joseph of Panepho 7 / 12.9; Nau 225 / 1.32.

<sup>64</sup> Nau 274 / 11.105.

posal: *meletê*, psalmody and manual labour, “which are the foundations” (presumably of the monastic life.) Yet another elder taught that “taking no thought” [Mt 6.25 *εὐχ.*], keeping silent and secret *meletê* produce purity.<sup>65</sup> The fact that prayer is only once mentioned in the above lists rather suggests that prayer is an essential element of *meletê*, and this is somewhat endorsed by the occasional mention of *meletê* together with psalms or psalmody, e.g. a young monk “wishing to pray” stands up and repeats several psalms.<sup>66</sup> “Constrain yourself to the *meletê* of the psalms for this protects you from being captured by the enemy” says Isaiah of Scete.<sup>67</sup>

*Meletê* and psalmody may have resembled each other in another important way, for *meletê* may in fact have been *singing*. “Let there be a spiritual song [Ep. 5.19] in your mouth” says abba Hyperechios, “and let *meletê* assuage the force of the temptations you encounter. A good example of this is a heavy-laden traveller who dissipates the discomfort of his journey with a song.”<sup>68</sup> Psalmody certainly means psalm-*singing*, possibly a sort of *cantilena*, the way the suras of the Koran are “recited” to this day; it is very likely that it was in a similar way that the monk usually “recited” the passages of scripture he had by heart.<sup>69</sup> This would explain the reference just made to “secret *meletê*” (that which could not be heard); also the practice of spacing out the cells so they were not within hearing

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<sup>65</sup> Nau 168 / 5.22; Nau 127 / 5.29. It is reported of Marcellus of the Thebaid (as exceptional ?) that his lips did not move when he did *meletê*. Nau 567 / 18.19.

<sup>66</sup> Heraclius 1 / 14.30. In *VA* (5.2, 55.4) the verb *meletan* means the constant repetition of a single apostolic saying (*rhêton*).

<sup>67</sup> Isaiah 9 / 5.53; cf. “Once I saw a brother doing *meletê* in his cell when a demon came and stood outside the cell. As long as the brother continued his *meletê* he was unable to enter but once the brother desisted, in he went” Nau 366 / 18.38.

<sup>68</sup> Hyperechios / 7.27.

<sup>69</sup> Regnault, *Vie quotidienne* pp. 115–118. See however *PE* 2.11.5.3 (*olim* 2.11.7) where Silvanus argues *against* singing even the psalms—see Appendix A.

distance of each other<sup>70</sup> and the rule that when a monk had visitors, he was to “recite” in silence.<sup>71</sup> It has been correctly remarked that reading is never mentioned as a regular occupation of the monks in the *apophthegmata*<sup>72</sup> and that this might well be because they had the words of Scripture always in their mouths; either detached phrases repeated over and over again, or whole passages which they knew by heart. This raises the question of *how* they learned the Scriptures. Some of them could read, that is clear, but then books were a luxury. Palladius tells of a monk he encountered at Ancyra who “had no time to devote himself to study and his almsgiving separated him from reading [*anagnōsmatōn*] for, as soon as a brother gave him a book, he sold it, saying to those who protested: ‘How could I convince my Teacher that I have learnt his trade if I did not sell that which is Himself to put that trade into practice?’”<sup>73</sup> It is quite possible that many of the early monks were illiterate, but this does not mean that they were unlearned. The case of Paphnoutios Kephala may be exceptional: he had the “charisma” of knowing (presumably “by heart”) and of being skilled in the interpretation of both the Old and the New Testaments, *mê anagnous graphas*, even though he could not read.<sup>74</sup> One concludes therefore that *meletê* was both meditation and *lectio divina* for the earliest monks.

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<sup>70</sup> HME 20.7 (referring to Kellia). “If you stop about the ninth hour [at Nitria, ca 394] you hear the psalm-singing coming from each monastic dwelling,” HL 7.2–5. *cf.* “In the mountains the monastic dwellings were like tents filled with divine choirs singing psalms, reading the Scriptures, fasting, praying ...” VA 44.2.

<sup>71</sup> Macarius the Great 33. It is noted of Macarius of Alexandria that “He stood *in silence*, prayer in his mouth, palm-leaves in his hands,” HL 18.15.

<sup>72</sup> Regnault, *La Vie quotidienne* p.117. See Sisoës 17 / 8.21 on reading Scripture and Nau 195 / 7.34 for a brother who disobeyed by reading. Taft (*art. cit.*) says that at first there were no Scripture readings at the *synaxeis* (other than the Eucharistic synaxis).

<sup>73</sup> HL 68.4.

<sup>74</sup> HL 47.3. Is it possible that Egyptian (meaning Coptic-speaking) monks had the scriptures by heart in their own language even before they had them in writing? See Nau 228 where one laments that the fathers *prac-*



In conclusion let it be said that enormous powers were attributed to prayer by those monks. There are a few cases of the dead being resuscitated by prayer<sup>75</sup> and several claims that demons are expelled by prayer,<sup>76</sup> hence the saying: “Despise not the psalms for they chase the unclean spirits out of the soul and install the Holy Spirit there.”<sup>77</sup> In short, prayer in its various forms was thought to be the panacea for all ills. Abba John the Dwarf speaks the common mind of the Desert Fathers when he says: “I am like a man sitting beneath a great tree who sees beasts and reptiles advancing on him. Since he cannot withstand them, he runs up into the tree and is saved. That is how I am; I remain in my cell and see evil thoughts coming upon me; when I am unable to resist them I take refuge in God by prayer and am saved from the enemy.”<sup>78</sup>

### APPENDIX A: SAYING AND SINGING THE PSALMS

A brother questioned Abba Silvanus: “What am I to do, abba? How am I to acquire compunction? I am severely afflicted by *accidie*, by sleep and by lethargy. When I rise from sleeping I make very heavy weather of the psalm singing. I cannot shake of my languor, nor can I recite a psalm without a tune.” The elder replied: “My child, in the first place, to recite the psalms with a tune smacks of pride, for it puts you in mind that you are singing while your brother is not. Secondly, it hardens your heart, insulating it against compunction. So if you want to acquire compunction, leave singing aside. When you are standing in prayer, let your mind study the meaning of the verse. Consider that you are standing in the presence of the God who “searcheth the very heart and reins” [Ps 7.10,

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*ticed* the Scriptures, the subsequent generation *learnt them by heart*, the present generation *copies them out*. Also Nau 385: The first generation of monks learnt OT and NT, the second generation copied them out (while the third has neglected hospitality)

<sup>75</sup> Macarius the Great 7 / 19.12 and Milesios 1 / 19.13; see Wortley, J. “Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell in Byzantine ‘Beneficial Tales’.” *DOP* 55 (2001): 53–69, esp. 57–58.

<sup>76</sup> e.g. Longinus 4 / 19.8.

<sup>77</sup> 11.33 (only).

<sup>78</sup> John Colobos 12 / 11.40.

7.11 LXX] [...] Think of the great fathers, how simple they were; they knew nothing of tunes and tropes, except for a few psalms, and they were brilliant luminaries in the world [...] They even raised the dead and performed mighty works, not with singing and troping and tunes, but in prayer, with a broken and contrite heart and with fasting. [...] As for singing, it has brought many down to the lowest most parts of the earth; not only people “in the world” but even priests have been feminised by singing and have been lured into *porneia* among other wicked desires. ...”<sup>79</sup>

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e.g.: “Poimen 24”:

1. The *Alphabetikon*. In what may be the oldest and is certainly the best known collection, about a thousand items (948 + 53 Guy) are arranged in more or less *alphabetical* order by reference to the approximately one hundred and twenty fathers who allegedly uttered the sayings or are mentioned in them. One manuscript of this tradition was edited by J.-B. Cotelier in 1647, *Monumenta Ecclesiae Graecae*, t. 1 (Paris, 1647), reprinted in *PG* 65:71–440. This text has been translated by Lucien Regnault (with Guy’s supplement), *Les Sentences des Pères du Désert: collection alphabétique*, Solesmes 1981 and by Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: the alphabetical collection* (Kalamazoo, 1984).

e.g.: “Nau XXX”

2. The *Anonymes*. The introduction to the above collection asserts that, appended to the alphabetic collection (i.e. after the names beginning with omega) there is a further collection whose characteristic is that its contents are all *anonymous* items. This Anonymous Collection is now generally thought to be represented by the (incomplete) collection of about six hundred and sixty items

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<sup>79</sup> *PE* 2.11.5.3 (*olim* 2.11.7); J726 in Regnault, Lucien, trans. *Les sentences des pères du désert, série des anonymes*, 307. Solesmes/Bellfontaine, 1985.

found in the venerable Cod. Paris. Coislin. 126. (ca 1000 AD) The first 400 items of this Greek text were published by F. Nau at the beginning of the last century in ROC 12 (1907) – 18 (1913). Since then it has been customary for the items to be denominated by his name followed by the number he assigned to them. A complete French translation of the *Anonymes* was made (using its contemporary Cod. Sinaï 448 to supplement Coislin 126) by Lucien Regnault, *Les sentences des pères du désert, série des anonymes* (Solesmes/Bellefontaine, 1985). A complete edition and translation of the *Anonymes* by the present author is about to be published by Cambridge University Press.

e.g.: “11.27”

3. The *Systematikon*. The characteristic of this third collection (which includes a considerable amount of material found in one or both of the two collections already mentioned) the items are *systematically* arranged, meaning that they are distributed under various heads (usually twenty-one in all) each pertaining to some aspect of monastic morality, e.g. section four is on temperance; section twelve on prayer while section seventeen deals with charity)—a distribution which is already evident in some manuscripts of the *Anonymes* (Nau) collection. The classification is however by no means rigid; items occur in one section which might very well have been placed under another head, or under several heads. As with the *Anonymes*, in the case of the *Systematikon* there is clear evidence of development, indicated here by a sixth-century Latin translation of the text as they knew it by Pelagius and John [edited by Rosweyde, *Vitae Patrum VI & VII* (« la pierre fondamentale des *Acta Sanctorum* »), Anvers 1615 et 1623, reprinted in *PL* 73:851–1022, English translation by Benedicta Ward, *The Desert Fathers: sayings of the early Christian monks*, Penguin 2003]. Although “Pelagius and John” draws heavily on the two collections already mentioned, it still contains significantly fewer items than the surviving Greek manuscripts of the *Systematikon* (the earliest of which is dated 970 AD) which contain about twelve hundred items. There is now an excellent critical edition and translation of the Greek text by Jean-Claude Guy et Bernard Flusin, *Les Apophtegmes des Pères : collection systématique*, SC 387 (1993), 474 (2003) et 498 (2005). Translation by Dom Lucien Regnault : *Les chemins de Dieu au désert : collection systématique des Apophtegmes des Pères* (Solesmes, 1992), the latter including some items from

the various “oriental versions” (Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic &c.) include items not found in any of the foregoing collections.

Athanasius. *Life of Anthony* [VA]. In Bartelink, G. J. M., ed. *Athanasie d’Alexandrie, Vie d’Antoine*. SC, 400. Paris, 1994.

Daniel of Scété. “Vie et récits de l’Abbé Daniel de Scété,” ed. Léon Clugnet. ROC 5 (1900): 49–73 and 370–391

Dorotheos of Gaza. *Instructions* [Διδασκαλία ψυχοφελεως], ed. L. Regnault and J. de Preville. SC, 92. Paris, 1963.

*To Gerontikon tou Sina*. Thessalonika, 2000.

*History of the Monks in Egypt* [HME]—see under Festugière.

Isaiah of Scete. *Asceticor. Abbé Isaïe, recueil ascétique*. Bellefontaine 1970, 21976.

Jerome. *Life of Paul of Thebes*. PL 33:17–28.

———. *Life of Hilarion*, PL 33:29–54

John Rufus, Bishop of Maïouma. *Plerophoriai*, ed. F. Nau. PO, 8:1–161.

*Vie de Pachôme* according to the Coptic tradition, tr. A. Veilleux. Bellefontaine 1984

Moschus, John. *The Spiritual Meadow / Pratum spirituale*. PG 87:2851–3112; tr. John Wortley, Kalamazoo, 1992.

Palladius. *Lausiac History* [HL], ed. Bartelink, G. J. M. *Palladio, La Storia Lausiaca*. Florence 1974.

Paul Evergetinos, *Synagogé* [PE] Venice 1783, various reprints {warning: numerotation varies}

Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrhus. Φιλόθεος Ἱστορία—*Historia religiosa*. In Canivet, Paul, and Alice Leroy-Molinghen, eds. *Histoire des moines de Syrie*, 2 vols. SC, 234, 257. Paris 1977, 1979.

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Chitty, D. J. *The Desert a City*. London, 1966.

Desprez, Vincent. *Le monachisme primitive des origines jusqu’au concile d’Éphèse*. Bellefontaine, 1998.

Escolan, Philippe. *Monachisme et l’église: le monachisme syrien du IV<sup>e</sup> au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle: un monachisme charismatique*. Paris, 1999.

Festugière, A.-J. *Les Moines d’Orient*, 4 vols in 5. Paris, 1961–65.

Goehring, J. A. *Ascetics, society and the desert: studies in Egyptian monasticism*. Harrisburg, PA, 1999.

- Gould, Graham. *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*. Oxford, 1993.
- Guillaumont, Antoine. *Études sur la spiritualité de l'orient Chrétien*. Belfontaine, 1996.
- . *Aux origines du monachisme Chrétien*. Bellefontaine, 1978.
- Guy, Jean-Claude. *Recherches sur la tradition grecque des apophthegmata Patrum*. Brussels, 1962, rpt. 1984 with corrections.
- Harmless, William. *Desert Christians: an introduction to the literature of early monasticism*. New York, 2004.
- Regnault, Lucien. *Les pères du desert à travers leurs apophthegmes*. Solesmes, 1987.
- Taft, Robert. *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*. Collegeville, 1985.
- Wortley, John. "Aging and the Desert Fathers; the process reversed." In Sheehan, Michael, ed. *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, 63–74. Toronto (P.I.M.S.), 1990.
- . "'Grazers' [Βοσχοί] in the Judaeon Desert." In *The Sabaitic Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the fifth century to the present*, 37–48. OLA. Leuven, 2001.
- . "How the Desert Fathers 'meditated'." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 46 (2006).
- . "The spirit of rivalry in early Christian monachism." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 33/4 (1993): 1–22.
- . "What the Desert Fathers meant by 'being saved'." *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 12 (2008): 322–43.



# FRIDAY VENERATION IN SIXTH- AND SEVENTH-CENTURY CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTIAN LEGENDS ABOUT THE CONVERSION OF NAĠRĀN

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## INTRODUCTION: A LOST *EPISTLE ON FRIDAY*

The principal focus of this study is the sixth- and seventh-century Christian hagiographical documents concerning an outstanding veneration of Friday. Some of them, however, will lead us to stories about the conversion of Naġrān to Christianity.

In the 1970s, John Wansbrough opened a new era in the study of the origins of Islam by stating that Islam emerged from some unknown Jewish-Christian sectarian milieu.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, it became clear that our lack of knowledge of the actual Jewish and Christian traditions of the sixth and seventh centuries prevented us from going further. But in the 1980s these studies received a new impetus. In particular, the special veneration of Friday in Islam was examined against its eventual Christian background.

In 1959, Shelomo Dov Goitein published an influential article in which the Muslim veneration of Friday was explained as an adaptation of the Jewish custom of the Friday fair.<sup>2</sup> Goitein and, after

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<sup>1</sup> See especially Wansbrough, J. *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*. Oxford, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Goitein, S. D. "The Origin and Nature of the Muslim Friday Worship." *The Muslim World* 49 (1959): 183–95.

him, many others did not see any problem with the derivation of a liturgical institution (Friday veneration in Islam) from a secular custom whose secular nature was in particular contrast in the context of Jewish veneration of Sabbath. Were it true, we would have here an example of the breaking of Baumstark's Law of Organic Development (of the liturgy).<sup>3</sup> This, however, is not the case in this instance. Other hypotheses put forward to explain the Muslim veneration of Friday did indeed respect Baumstark's law.

Gernot Rotter put forward a hypothesis stating that the Friday veneration in Islam was a continuation of a pagan cult of Venus called, according to Rotter, *kobar* in Mecca.<sup>4</sup> The main problem of his hypothesis, however, is that the existence of the corresponding Meccan cult, also hypothetical, is extremely unlikely. The witness of John of Damascus concerning the Meccan cult, which is the main ground of Rotter's hypothesis, must be placed in the context of the parallel witnesses of other Christian polemical sources, and thus interpreted as yet another representation of the accusation that Muslims worshipped some "Akbar" along with God. The pretext for this accusation was given by the *azan* "Allāhu akbar" ("God [is] greater"), interpreted by Christians as "God *and* Akbar."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Law of Organic (Progressive) Development presupposes that the new elements in the liturgy at first take their places alongside the more primitive elements of the liturgy (that is, not of a secular custom) but, over the course of time, cause the latter to be abbreviated and even to disappear completely; Baumstark, A. *Comparative Liturgy*. Tr. A. R. Mowbray, 23–24. London/Westminster, MD, 1958. Thus, a secular fair replacing a complicated liturgical custom (probably with paraliturgical additions such as a fair day) is not a violation of this law, but the creation of a liturgical custom on a secular tradition does represent such a violation.

<sup>4</sup> Rotter, G. "Der *veneris dies* im vorislamischen Mekka, eine neue Deutung des Namens 'Europa' und eine Erklärung für *kobar* = Venus." *Der Islam* 70 (1993): 112–32.

<sup>5</sup> Roggema, B. "Muslims as Crypto-Idolaters—A Theme in the Christian Portrayal of Islam in the Near East." In Thomas, D., ed. *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule: Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq*, 1–18, here 6–11. *The History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, 1. Leiden/Boston, 2003.



Another approach derives Islamic Friday veneration from Christian liturgical traditions. Heribert Busse in 1984 demonstrated that the earliest Islamic accounts of Friday veneration as the *Yaum al-Ġumra* (“Day of Assembly”) go back to an eight-day ceremony of ʿOmar ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb’s entrance into Jerusalem (Busse states that the date of this event should be corrected to 635, instead of 637 or 638, and that the leader of the Muslims was in fact not ʿOmar ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb but the general ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAs). The culmination of the whole ceremony took place on Friday, when the head of the Muslims held a prayer service in the assembly on the spot of the Temple of Solomon, the future site of the great mosque. Busse argues that the event took place on the Christian Great Friday, 2 April 635, and the whole ceremony was performed in connexion with the rites of the Christian Holy Week. According to Busse, these events predate the formation of the Qur’an, including its *sūrah* 32 *Al-Sağda* (“Worship,” “Adoration”) dealing with the veneration of Friday.<sup>6</sup>

Be that as it may, some knowledge of the importance of Friday must be a prerequisite of such a mode of action by the Muslim leader. Discussions about the comparative importance of different weekdays were then in vogue among the Christians. As Michel van Esbroeck showed, this was an important battlefield around the time of the Council of Chalcedon. I will summarize van Esbroeck’s findings briefly.

He published two sets of the texts ascribed to St Basil of Caesarea, both translated from the lost Greek originals. One of them, in Armenian, insists that all the main events of world history and salvation took place on either Wednesday or Friday.<sup>7</sup> Two

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<sup>6</sup> Busse, H. “ʿOmar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb in Jerusalem.” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984): 73–119.

<sup>7</sup> van Esbroeck, M. “Un court traité pseudo-basilien de mouvance aaronite conservé en arménien.” *Le Muséon* 100 (1987): 385–95 [reprint: idem. *Aux origines de la Dormition de la Vierge. Études historiques sur les traditions orientales*. Variorum Reprints. Collected Studies Series, CS, 380. Aldershot, 1995, ch. VIII].

other texts, in Arabic, insist that the main day is Sunday.<sup>8</sup> In the Arabic texts, the calendar starts on Sunday, on the very day of the creation of the world. In the Armenian text, the calendar starts on Wednesday, which is a well-known Jewish tradition based on the fact that the luminaries were created on the fourth day of creation. Moreover, the Armenian text explicitly refers to the calendar in which the year contains 364 days, known from Jewish pre-Christian and early Christian sources. In the 364-day calendar, every date is immobile within the week, being attached to its proper weekday (because 364 is a multiple of 7). This Armenian text belongs to the so-called Aaronites, a group of anti-Chalcedonians of the first half of the sixth century renown for their adherence to “Jewish” (in fact, Jewish-Christian) customs.

The two sets of the Pseudo-Basilian texts are obviously in polemic with each other. But the most important document engendered by the same polemics in the first half or the middle of the sixth century is the famous *Epistle on Sunday* (also called *Epistle of Christ*), an autograph of Jesus Christ that had been received directly from heaven. This epistle exists in dozens of recensions and in hundreds or even thousands of manuscripts in the main languages of both the Christian East and West. Of course, it insists on the predominance of Sunday over all other days of the week.<sup>9</sup>

According to van Esbroeck, all these documents are connected in some way to Jerusalem, and the tradition of Wednesday

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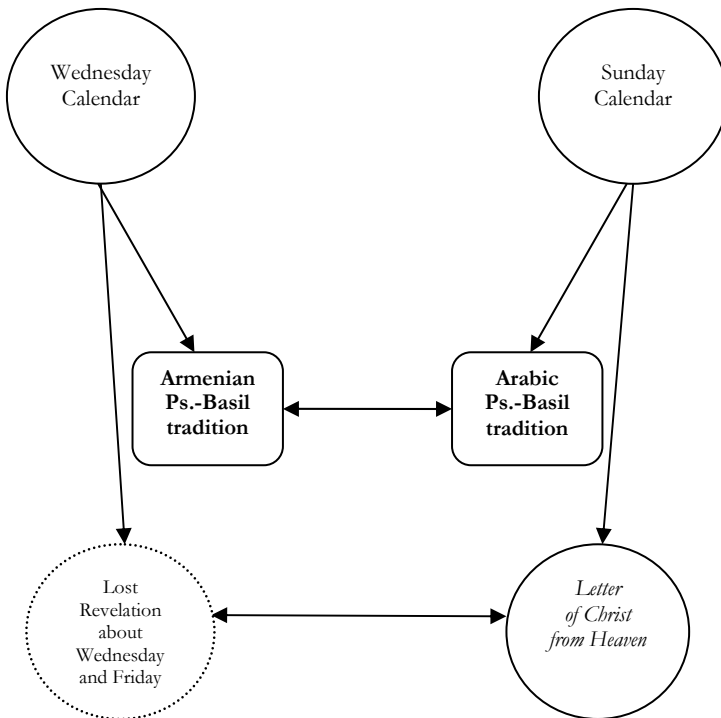
<sup>8</sup> van Esbroeck, M. “Deux homélies pseudo-basiliennes sur le Dimanche et le Vendredi.” *Parole de l’Orient* 16 (1990–1991) [= Samir, S. Kh., éd. *Actes du 3<sup>e</sup> Congrès international d’études arabes chrétiennes*]: 49–71.

<sup>9</sup> An edition of the most important versions: Bittner, M. “Der vom Himmel gefallen Brief in seinen morgenländischen Versionen und Rezensionen.” *Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien. Philosophisch-historische Klasse* 51.1 (1906): 1–240; on the origin of the document, see: van Esbroeck, M. “La lettre sur le Dimanche descendue du ciel.” *AB* 107 (1989): 267–84 [reprint: idem, *Aux origines de la Dormition...*, ch. XIII]; cf. Backus, I. “Introduction” [to the French translation of one Greek and one Latin recension]. In Geoltrain, P., Kaestli, J. D., direct. *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, II, 1101–6. La Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paris, 2006.

and Friday goes back to the twenty-month period of the mono-physite rule of the anti-Patriarch of Jerusalem Theodosius immediately after the Council of Chalcedon (451–453).

M. van Esbroeck supposed that the *Epistle of Christ* was created at the time of the establishment in Jerusalem of the Church *Nea* dedicated to the Virgin, in the 540s, as a substitute for a document of a similar nature but venerating Wednesday and Friday and created in the time of Theodosius of Jerusalem (see Stemma 1): “Rien n’élimine mieux un document que la création d’un parallèle destiné à le remplacer.”<sup>10</sup>

*Stemma 1.*  
*The Main Documents of the “Calendric War” of the Sixth Century*



<sup>10</sup> van Esbroeck, “La Lettre sur le dimanche...,” 283.

My own purpose here will be to go further and to recover traces of this lost document of the epoch of Theodosius. Indeed, we have a tradition of Friday veneration that certainly goes back to the time before Justinian and has so far been overlooked by scholars of the Christian calendar and calendrical customs.

However, some parts of this tradition are familiar to historians of mediaeval literature, although none of them has been aware of the real breadth of the dossier. One part of the tradition exists in the different texts dealing with the “twelve Fridays.” These texts are available in Greek, Latin, and Slavonic, as well as in several vernacular Romance, German, and Slavic languages. These texts exist in three different forms: (1) as separate texts; (2) attached to a story on the anti-Jewish dispute of a certain Eleutherius; and (3) within a tenth-century Jerusalem calendar composed in Georgian by John Zosimos. Both the calendar of the “twelve Fridays” and the story of Eleutherius have some connexions with pre-Islamic Arabia.

Another part of the Christian Friday veneration dossier is presented by the hagiographical legends on the personified Friday, the holy martyr Parasceve. These legends show Arabian connexions as well. Moreover, there are other Christian legends, although little known, dealing with the Friday veneration and even the personified Friday and having some connexion to pre-Islamic Arabia. Thus, our study will be divided into three major parts: (1) calendars of the “twelve Fridays”; (2) the hagiographical dossier of Eleutherius; and (3) other hagiographical legends related to Friday (St Parasceve and others).

I hope that this study will shed some additional light on the conversion of Nağrān to Christianity and the nature of the pre-Islamic Arabian Christian traditions which contributed to the emergence of Islam. As to the Islamic Friday veneration, I hope to show that it was directly borrowed from the Christian traditions available in the Arabian Peninsula.

## **PART ONE: THE CALENDARS OF THE “TWELVE FRIDAYS”**

### **1.1. The Twelve Fridays Texts: an Introduction**

The “twelve Fridays” texts outside the calendar of John Zosimos are especially popular in the Orthodox Slavic literatures. Adelina Angusheva, with the collaboration of Anissava Miltenova, is currently preparing a critical edition of the Slavonic *Skazanie o 12 pjat-*

*nicax* (“Narration on the 12 Fridays”) in its most elaborated (“Eleutherius”) recension. Various manuscripts transmitting this work have previously been published and/or described.<sup>11</sup> The most comprehensive (although not a critical) edition of one recension is that by Matvej Ivanovich Sokolov<sup>12</sup> (1855–1906), probably the most brilliant figure in the philological studies of the Slavonic apocrypha. Another brilliant figure, a precursor of the modern critical hagiography, Alexandr Nikolaevich Veselovsky (1838–1906), was the first to understand the importance of the *Skazanie* for different Christian literatures and who collected its many recensions, including those in Western European languages, some of

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<sup>11</sup> See, for the most complete (but still far from complete) list of manuscripts and editions, de Santos-Otero, A. *Die handschriftliche Überlieferung der altslavischen Apokryphen*, II, 223–232. *Patristische Texte und Studien*, 23. Berlin/New York, 1981; see also Рожественская, М. В. “Апокрифы в сборнике XVI в. из Стокгольмской Королевской библиотеки (А 797)” [Rozhdestvenskaja, M. V., “Apocrypha in the 16th-century Collection from the Royal Library of Stockholm (A 797)”]. *Труды Отдела древнерусской литературы* [*Works of the Department of Old Russian Literature* <of the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkinskij Dom)>] 55 (2004): 391–97, here 392. Cf. also a study taking into account for the first time fifty-five Slavonic manuscripts (with the publication of seven mss of the Clement recension and three mss of the Eleutherius recension): Иванов, С. В. “«Сказание о 12 пятницах» в рукописях ИРЛИ РАН (Пушкинского Дома)” [Ivanov, S. V. “The Narration on the 12 Fridays’ in Manuscripts of the Institute of Russian Language and Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences”]. *Известия РАН. Серия литературы и языка* [*Bulletin of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Series of Literature and Language*] (in press).

<sup>12</sup> Соколов, М. *Материалы и заметки по старинной славянской литературе*. Выпуск первый: I–V [Sokolov, M. *Materials and Notes on Ancient Slavic Literature*. First issue: I–V], 51–57 [Nr III]. Москва, 1888. This most important publication is not mentioned in the entry (which has little scholarly value) dedicated to our text in the standard reference book on Old Russian literature: Салмина, М. А. “Сказание о двенадцати пятницах.” In: Лихачев, Д. С., ред. *Словарь книжников и книжности Древней Руси* [*A Dictionary of the Scribes and Literature of Old Rus*] (1987; electronic publication at <http://www.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=4606>).

which are currently being published for the first time.<sup>13</sup> Some directions opened by Veselovsky remain to be explored, such as the afterlife of the Christian apocryphon in Western European folklore (its presence in Slavic folklore is much better studied). Veselovsky's work received impetus from Cardinal Pitra, who published an excerpt of the Greek text of the *Skazanie* in the notes to his huge canonical collection.<sup>14</sup> So far, this Greek manuscript (*Vaticanus gr.* 1538, fifteenth century, Calabria) is the only one of the three known sources to have been published. There are more than fifty Latin manuscripts of the short (Clement) recension, about twenty

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<sup>13</sup> Веселовский, А. “Опыты по истории развития христианской легенды. II. Берта, Анастасия и Пятница. Гл. IV: Сказание о 12 пятницах [Veselovsky, A., *Essays on the History of the Development of the Christian Legend. II: Berta, Anastasia, and Friday. Ch. IV: Narration on the 12 Fridays*].” *Журнал Министерства народного просвещения* [*The Journal of the Ministry of National Education*], 185 (1876): 326–67; idem, “гл. VI: Freiheit—Элеуфериий [Freiheit—Eleutherius].” *ibid.*, 191 (1877): 76–125 [separate pagination of the scholarly division of the journal]. For general information about the Western European versions, see Ivanov, S. V. “The legend of twelve golden Fridays in the Western manuscripts. Part I: Latin.” In Bondarko, N. A. Kazanskij, N. N., eds. *Colloquia classica et indo-germanica—V*. Acta linguistica Petropolitana. Труды ИЛИ РАН, vol. VII, part 1, 561–72. St Petersburg, 2011; Ivanov describes fifty-three Latin manuscripts, the oldest of them dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. There are innumerable manuscripts transmitting vernacular versions (S. V. Ivanov's personal communication); there are more than twenty mss in Early Modern Irish alone (see Ivanov, S. V. “The Legend of Twelve Golden Fridays in the Irish Tradition,” forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> Pitra, I. B. *Juris ecclesiastici Graecorum Historia et Monumenta*, t. I, 301. Romae, 1864 (republished in Веселовский, “Сказание о 12 пятницах,” 329). The first paper by Veselovsky on the *Twelve Fridays* is even dedicated to Pitra (after its title, the author wrote: «Посвящено Джузеппе Питре»—“Dedicated to Giuseppe Pitra”). The complete Greek text is published by Mercati, G. *Note di letteratura biblica e cristiana antica*, 238–41, esp. 240–241. Studi e testi, 5. Roma, 1901 (with no knowledge of Veselovsky's work). I owe the information about the unpublished Greek manuscripts to Sergei Valentinovich Ivanov (personal communication). The Greek manuscripts are not earlier than the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

of them being published; however, I will quote only *Vaticanus lat.* 3838.<sup>15</sup> Veselovsky saw a fourteenth-century Latin manuscript but was unable to use it in his work.<sup>16</sup> No Christian Oriental versions of the *Skazanie* are known.

There are two recensions of the *Skazanie*, which Veselovsky named the “Clement recension” and the “Eleutherius recension.”

## 1.2. The Clement Recension of the Twelve Fridays

The best-known part of our dossier is the Clement recension of the *Twelve Fridays*. It is this version that is transmitted in Greek, Slavonic, Latin, and European vernacular languages. The Greek and Latin texts are rare, but the Slavonic one is available in many variations, including the so-called *duxovnye stixi* (“spiritual poems,” a kind of Russian folk spiritual poetry), but only in relatively recent manuscripts (not earlier than the eighteenth century).<sup>17</sup> All the texts of this recension are reduced to very short enumerations of the twelve Fridays when fasting is obligatory (sometimes, against the normal order of the Church calendar, e.g. after Christmas or, on the contrary, during long fasts, when all the weekdays are already fasting days). Sometimes, brief historical motivations for keeping each of these Friday fasts are provided. These motivations are subject to change in the many different derivatives of the Clement recension.

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<sup>15</sup> Mercati, *Note*, 80–81, cf. 64–65 on the manuscript.

<sup>16</sup> He refers to this ms as *Palat.* [= Bibliotheca Palatina in Heidelberg? Veselovsky does not provide any explication] *st.* 21, *sc.* 2, cod. 218, f. 160v; *inc.*: Clemens episcopus servorum Dei Romanorum dixit quod invenerat in actibus... (Веселовский, “Сказание о 12 пятницах,” 329).

<sup>17</sup> I quote the only published manuscript among the oldest ones (cf. de Santos-Otero, *Die handschriftliche Überlieferung...*, II, 224, Anm. 8): Тихонравов, Н. *Памятники отреченной русской литературы. (Приложение к сочинению «Отреченные книги древней России»)* [Tikhonravov, N. *Monuments of the Apocryphal Russian Literature. (Supplement to the study “The Apocryphal Books of Ancient Russia”)*], II, 337–338. Москва, 1863 (the ms is now lost; Tikhonravov, p. 337, attests it as “из раскольничьей тетрадки нового письма”—“from a schismatic [*sc.*, Old Believers] tetradion of new writing”; this is to be understood as not earlier than the late eighteenth century).

The existence of the Slavonic version from Greek casts doubt on claims for the priority of the Latin version, as some earlier scholars had proposed. But even more important is the very attribution of the treatise to St Clement of Rome. The sixth century is the last point at which such an attribution might have been (and indeed really was) of interest. At that time, the anti-Chalcedonians engaged in protracted arguments, quoting extensively from the *Octateuch* of Clement (the teaching of the Apostles given through Clement of Rome, in eight books). The *Octateuch* of Clement of Rome, in different recensions, thus became one of the most authoritative canonical collections throughout the anti-Chalcedonian world,<sup>18</sup> although it was excluded from the canon of the Holy Scriptures by the Council *Quinisextum* in 692 as “corrupted by the heretics” (canon 2). However, our twelve-Friday literature is absolutely unknown outside the Chalcedonian world, and so its attribution to Clement of Rome became impossible, at least by the second half of the seventh century.

Therefore, with Clement of Rome we are in a Chalcedonian milieu of the sixth or the early seventh century. An earlier date is extremely unlikely given that our texts are absent in the anti-Chalcedonian traditions.

We are interested in the calendar data only (see Table 1). In Table 1, the column labeled “Clement SI” corresponds to the manuscript published by Tikhonravov, while the column labeled “Veselovsky” quotes Veselovsky’s summary of the data of several Russian manuscripts (including those of the *stixi duxovnye*) compared with European vernacular versions<sup>19</sup>; \*L is a reconstructed archetype

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<sup>18</sup> See, as a useful introduction, Cowley, R. W. “The Identification of the Ethiopian Octateuch of Clement, and its Relationship to the Other Christian Literature.” *Ostkirchlichen Studien* 27 (1978): 37–45.

<sup>19</sup> Веселовский, “Сказание о 12 пятницах,” 347–49; for the texts of the German (G), Provençal (P), Italian (I; two mss are used, I<sub>1</sub> and I<sub>2</sub>), English (E), and French (F) versions, see *ibid.*, 330–34; the sigla R and Eu mean “all Russian mss” and “all Western European mss,” respectively. I omit the readings of those Russian mss which are qualified by Veselovsky as severely corrupted. I hope that the selection of manuscripts in Veselovsky’s publica-



of the Latin version; \*Clement is a reconstruction of the original calendar. It is easy to see that the Slavonic version follows the Greek version, although not precisely following the existing Greek text.

*Table 1. Calendar data in the Clement recensions  
(Greek, Slavonic, Latin) of the Twelve Fridays*

Nr	Clement Gr (Gr)	Clement SI	Veselovsky	Clement L (L)	*L	*Clement
1	1 <sup>st</sup> in March	First week of Lent <sup>20</sup> = R	R = EF Gr = GPI	in the month of March	in March before Annunciation	in March
2	1 <sup>st</sup> after Annunciation [25 March]	before Annunciation [25 March] = R	Gr = R = Eu	before Annunciation [25 March]		before Annunciation [25 March]
3	Great Friday	Great Friday	Gr = R = Eu	[Great] Friday	Great Friday	Great Friday
4	1 <sup>st</sup> after Ascension	before Ascension	Gr = R = Eu	before Ascension	before Ascension	before Ascension
5	1 <sup>st</sup> after Pentecost	before Pentecost	Gr = R = Eu	before Pentecost	before Pentecost	before Pentecost
6	after John the Baptist <sup>21</sup>	before Nativity of John the Baptist Day [24 June]	some Russian mss: before Prophet Elias [20 July]; "after Pentecost" (GEF and I <sup>22</sup> ); corrupted in P <sup>23</sup>	in quattuor temporibus in June = I	after Pentecost <sup>24</sup>	before Nativity of John the Baptist

tion is representative but, of course, a new study based on all the available data (or, at least, on all the Latin mss) would be welcome.

<sup>20</sup> Roughly in March.

<sup>21</sup> It is obvious that the Nativity of John is meant, 24 (or 25) June.

<sup>22</sup> The Italian text has: "per le diggiuna quattro tempora dopo la penticosta."

Nr	Clement Gr (Gr)	Clement Sl	Veselovsky	Clement L (L)	*L	*Clement
7	1 <sup>st</sup> after Peter and Paul [29 June]	before Prophet Elias' Day [20 July]	some Russian mss: before Transfiguration; before Nativity of John the Baptist (Eu) <sup>25</sup>	before Nativity of John the Baptist <sup>26</sup>	before Nativity of John the Baptist	before second Pentecost in late June [pre-Justinianic (pre-ca 550) date of the Feast of the Apostles]
8	1 <sup>st</sup> after Dormition [15 August]	before Dormition [15 August]	some Russian mss: before Prophet Elias; some others: before Beheading of John [29 August]; before Peter and Paul [29 June] (Eu)	before Peter and Paul [29 June] <sup>27</sup>	before Peter and Paul	before Dormition

<sup>23</sup> The text of P is corrupted, repeating “devant Pendecoste,” which is either a repetition of the previous text (belonging to the fifth Friday) or, as Veselovsky supposed, an error in place of “apres”; cf. Веселовский, “Сказание о 12 пятницах,” 330. I think the original reading of P was identical to that of L but erroneously shifted to Nr 10 (see below).

<sup>24</sup> Corroborated by GIEF, without contradicting Gr and Sl. The reading of L “in quattuor temporibus in June” is corroborated by IP but the Western fasts of “the four seasons” are to be dated to the early ninth century. Thus, their mention is certainly a late adaptation.

<sup>25</sup> German “von sunwenten” means the same thing; the date of the summer solstice was considered to be near to or coinciding with the day of St John the Baptist, 24 June.

<sup>26</sup> Given that the text is translated from Greek, most probably the Greek date is meant, i.e. 24 (or 25) June.

<sup>27</sup> Too close to the preceding date, Nr 7, but the reading is corroborated by the entire Western European tradition (Eu). Obviously, the prob-

Nr	Clement Gr (Gr)	Clement SI	Veselovsky	Clement L (L)	*L	*Clement
9	1 <sup>st</sup> after Nativity of Theotokos [8 Sept.]	before Cosmas and Damian [17 October or 1 November]	some Russian mss: before Beheading of John [29 August]; after Peter and Paul (GI <sub>1</sub> ); before St Peter in Chains [1 August] (P) <sup>28</sup> ; 1 <sup>st</sup> in September (I <sub>2</sub> ); before Dormition (F <sup>29</sup> ); “first day in harvest” (E).	after James and Christopher [25 July] <sup>30</sup>	[some date in July]	1 <sup>st</sup> in September <sup>31</sup>
10	1 <sup>st</sup> after Christmas	before Michael Archangel [12 November]	some Russian mss: before Cosmas and Damian [17 October or 1 November]; in September (G); “al de-junas de las IV temporas” (P) <sup>32</sup> ; 1 <sup>st</sup> in September (I <sub>1</sub> ); 2 <sup>nd</sup> in September	1 <sup>st</sup> in the month of September	1 <sup>st</sup> in September	[unknown date in October or early November]

lem is that the Feast of the Dormition on 15 August was largely unknown in the West up to the end of the sixth century.

<sup>28</sup> Ms: “devant la festa de sant Pierre d’aoust.”

<sup>29</sup> The ms has “devant la mi aoust,” that is, “before 15 August.”

<sup>30</sup> This date shifted earlier because of the absence of the Dormition.

<sup>31</sup> The date is preserved in I<sub>2</sub> and Clement L (where it is shifted to Nr 10).

<sup>32</sup> Erroneously shifted here from Nr 6 (see above).

Nr	Clement Gr (Gr)	Clement SI	Veselovsky	Clement L (L)	*L	*Clement
			(I <sub>2</sub> ); before Dormition (E <sup>33</sup> ); before September (F).			
11	1 <sup>st</sup> after Baptism of Christ	before Christmas	in December (G); before St Andrew (PI) [30 November]; before All Saints [1 November] (EF)	1 <sup>st</sup> in the month of December	1 <sup>st</sup> in the month of December (?)	before Christmas
12	1 <sup>st</sup> after Hypopante [Candlemas] <sup>34</sup>	before Hypopante [Candlemas]	some Russian mss: before Christmas; before Christmas (Eu)	before Christmas	before Christmas	before Hypopante

The main disagreement between Clement Gr and Clement SI, on the one hand, and Clement L, on the other, is the presence in Gr and SI only (along with some other Russian manuscripts) of the Dormition in August (Nr 8) and the Hypopante (Nr 12). The references to the Dormition in some Western vernacular versions (F in Nr 9 and E in Nr 10) with no corroboration by any other Western version are certainly later local adaptations; moreover, in F, the Dormition is mentioned in an indirect way.

This fact is in perfect accord with the realities of the sixth century, when both feasts became very important in both Jerusalem and Constantinople but were still unknown in the Latin world, where these feasts appear not earlier than at the very end of the

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<sup>33</sup> The ms has “before the second Lady-day, in harvest,” which indicates the Dormition.

<sup>34</sup> 2 February since the middle of the sixth century; 14 February before this date.

sixth century.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Clement L must be considered as a sixth-century adaptation of a Greek *Vorlage* to the current Latin Church calendar. Actually, the known Latin text is even later because it contains some formulations of the second half of the first thousand years A.D. (*in quattuor temporibus*, Nr 6), but its core (\*L) is certainly earlier than the seventh century. It predates the August Dormition feast and the Hypopante in the West.

Our reconstruction of the lost *Vorlage* of the Clement recension (\*Clement) is based, first of all, on the mutual accord between the Greek text and the Slavonic version. In most cases, our choice of the original reading is evident and, in one case, we have made no choice at all (Nr 10). Two cases, Nrs 6 and 7, require commentaries. The variety of readings must emerge from the disappearance in about 550 of the older date of the Feast of the Apostles, the fiftieth day after Pentecost, that is, on the second Pentecost.<sup>36</sup> This is evident from two indications which seem to emerge from the earlier indication of the Feast of the Apostles at the second Pentecost after the first Pentecost: “after Pentecost” (in the earlier Western recensions in Nr 6) and “first [Friday] from Peter and Paul” (Gr in Nr 7). The Nativity of John the Baptist certainly belongs to the

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<sup>35</sup> It is clear, from the order of the feasts, that Gr and Sl do not presuppose the Feast of the Dormition in January, which is known in some places in the East and in the Gallican rite of the sixth century; cf., for the Western data, Capelle, B. “La Fête de l’Assomption dans l’histoire liturgique.” *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 3 (1926): 35–45, and, for the Eastern data, van Esbroeck, M. “La Dormition chez les Coptes.” In Rassart-Debergh, M., et Ries, J., eds. *Actes du IV<sup>e</sup> Congrès Copte. Louvain-la-Neuve, 5–10 septembre 1988*. II, 436–445. Publications de l’Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, 41. Louvain-la-Neuve, 1992) [repr.: idem, *Aux origines de la Dormition de la Vierge. Études historiques sur les traditions orientales*. Variorum Reprints. Collected Studies Series CS, 380. Aldershot, 1995 (ch. XI)].

<sup>36</sup> On the origin of the Byzantine feast on 29 June, see Лурье, В. *Введение в критическую агиографию* [Lourié, B. *An Introduction to the Critical Hagiography*], 141–42. Санкт-Петербург, 2009.

archetype because of its presence in all recensions (in either Nr 6 or 7).<sup>37</sup>

### 1.3. The Eleutherius Recension of the Twelve Fridays: an Introduction

The Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays* is known only in Slavonic in an early translation of South Slavic origin. The text of this translation still needs to be studied properly (a critical edition is currently being prepared by Adelina Angusheva). All published manuscripts preserve somewhat different texts of the same work. We thus retain the term “recension” for all Eleutherius texts for convenience only and following tradition going back to Veselovsky; in fact, this “recension” is, in turn, presented in several recensions. Some of them are excerpts containing the calendar part only. In its full form, the Eleutherius recension contains an introductory story about a dispute between a Christian and a Jew in which the text on the twelve Fridays is used as an argument; after this, the text itself

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<sup>37</sup> To appreciate the stability of the popular tradition of the Friday veneration, I would like to add a recent Russian document, a description of the popular custom in the province of Vladimir in the Russian Empire, near the town of Shuya (now in the region of Ivanovo, several hours by car from Moscow), made by the Ethnographical Bureau of Prince V. N. Ténicheff between 1897 and 1901. There are twelve Fridays when one has to abstain from bread and even water for twenty-four hours in order to protect oneself from diseases and disasters: 1. before Epiphany (6 January); 2. before Cheese-fare week; 3. before Candlemas; 4. before Annunciation; 5. Great Friday; 6. before Pentecost; 7. before Elias day, 20 July; 8. before the Dormition; 9. before the Beheading of John; 10. before the Nativity of the Theotokos; 11. before the Exaltation of the Holy Cross; 12. before the Nativity of Christ. See Фирсов, Б. М., Киселева, И. Г. *Быт великорусских крестьян-землепашцев. Описание материалов этнографического бюро князя В. Н. Тенишева. (На примере Владимирской губернии.)*, 150. С.-Петербург, 1993 [Firsov, B. M., Kiseleva, I. G. *The Way of Life of the Great-Russian Peasant-Ploughmen. A Description of the Materials of the Ethnographic Bureau of Prince V. N. Ténicheff. (On the Example of the Province of Vladimir)*. St Petersburg, 1993]. I am grateful for this reference to V. Zemskova.

is provided. The text on the twelve Fridays contains brief explanations of the reasons to continue to mention each of the Fridays.

Veselovsky observed that the Eleutherius recension is subdivided into two main types, A and B. Their most striking differences are in the calendric section, for the fourth to the tenth Fridays. Veselovsky argued convincingly that the calendar of type B is a later alteration of type A. One of his main arguments was the almost complete identity of the calendar in type A with that of the Clement recension.<sup>38</sup> Thus, we can skip a detailed analysis of the calendar of type B.

Types A and B differ also in the short notices provided for the fourth through the tenth Fridays. Veselovsky considered one of the sources of these notices to be the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara*,<sup>39</sup> written (according to S. P. Brock and in agreement with current scholarly consensus) between 685 and 692 in Syriac but within twenty years translated into Greek and Latin; three independent Slavonic versions of this work are now known,<sup>40</sup> the oldest

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<sup>38</sup> Веселовский, “Сказание о 12 пятницах,” esp. 333–41. Veselovsky used three mss of type A (he published one of them, a Serbian ms of the 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> century) and five mss of type B. The oldest known ms of type A is currently the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Serbian ms published by Sokolov (Соколов, *Материалы и заметки...*, 51–57) together with the variant readings of the mss used by Veselovsky and two more mss presenting type A. One of the earliest Russian mss (*T*<sup>1</sup> = Russian National Library, St Petersburg, Софийское собрание [collection of St Sophia Cathedral in Novgorod], Nr 1264, 15<sup>th</sup> century), previously published by Tikhonravov (Тихонравов, *Памятники*, II, 323–27), is republished with corrections from other mss, including the unpublished Stockholm ms, by Rozhdestvenskaja (Рождественская, М. В. “Сказание о двенадцати пятницах [Narration on the Twelve Fridays].” In Лихачев, Д. С., и др. (ред.), *Библиотека литературы Древней Руси* [Likhachev, D. S., et al. *The Library of the Literature of Old Rus*], т. 3. С.-Петербург, 1999 (quoted according to the electronic publication <http://www.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=4922>). This ms belongs to type A.

<sup>39</sup> Веселовский, “Сказание о 12 пятницах,” 345–346.

<sup>40</sup> See, for the main bibliography on the whole corpus, *CPG* and *CPG Suppl* 1830.

of them being of unknown date but belonging to the earliest layers of translated literature in Slavonic.<sup>41</sup> The parallels with Pseudo-Methodius (corresponding to V, 4-6 in Reinink's edition<sup>42</sup>) concern, naturally, the Arab invasion into the Byzantine Empire in the seventh century, which was also the main challenge answered by Pseudo-Methodius of Patara in his *Apocalypse*. Veselovsky indicated two close parallels, one of them shared by both the A and B types<sup>43</sup> and another one specific to type B<sup>44</sup>; I will add (in section 1.5) a third parallel, common to A and B. Veselovsky concludes that types A and B go back to the common archetype, where the sequence of the Fridays was the same as in type A but the borrowings from Pseudo-Methodius were the same as in type B. However, Veselovsky does not consider the possibility of a common source for our text and Pseudo-Methodius, although such a proposal is worth evaluation.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Veselovsky overlooked an important contradiction between the material proper to B and the material common to both A and B. We will address these points below (section 1.5).

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<sup>41</sup> On the Slavonic translations, see Thomson, F. J. "The Slavonic Translations of Pseudo-Methodius of Olympus' Apocalypse." *Търновска книжовна школа* 4 (1985): 143–73.

<sup>42</sup> Reinink, G. J. *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 8–9 (txt) / 11–14 (tr.). CSCO, 540–41 / Syr 220–21. Leuven, 1993.

<sup>43</sup> Our text (5<sup>th</sup> Friday) ascribes to the Agareniens the eating of the meat of camels and the drinking of the blood of goats; cf., in Pseudo-Methodius, the eating of the meat of horses and camels and the drinking of the blood and the milk of cattle. The Syriac text here (V, 3) has a different wording than the Slavonic version of Pseudo-Methodius quoted by Veselovsky. It would be interesting, although beyond my purpose in this study, to compare the wording of Eleutherius with all known recensions of Pseudo-Methodius.

<sup>44</sup> Our text (8<sup>th</sup> Friday, type B) presents the Agareniens as scampering over the sea in their boats like birds; the same in Pseudo-Methodius.

<sup>45</sup> As I have already stated in Лурье, В. М. [Rev. of:] S. P. Brock. *Studies in Syriac Christianity. History, Literature and Theology, Христианский Восток* 1 (7) (1999): 455–63, here 439–40.



Be this as it may, the Arab conquest of the middle of the seventh century is the *terminus post quem* for the Eleutherius recension.

We begin with an analysis of the calendar of the Eleutherius recension. Only after this will we turn to the introductory story of this recension.

#### 1.4. The Twelve Fridays Calendar of the Eleutherius Recension

The calendrical scheme of the Eleutherius recension is well preserved in the manuscripts along with the main ideas explaining each of the twelve Fridays. The difference between types A and B affects mostly the placement of seven of the twelve Fridays. The manuscripts differ, however, in some of the details and wording of the notices, and, moreover, contain some individual corruptions already detected by Veselovsky and Sokolov (and thus not discussed here).

The calendrical data are presented in Table 2. There is no need for reconstruction. Readings specific to type B but going back to the common archetype of A and B (in Nrs 5 and 8) are marked as "B." These parts proper to B contain not only parallels with the *Apocalypse of Methodius of Patara* but also Old Testament prototypes of the corresponding events. Thus, there is no Friday without an Old Testament prototype, including Fridays 5 and 8, where fasting is related to the Arab invasion.

Table 2.  
*Calendar data in the Eleutherius recension of the Twelve Fridays*

Nr	Eleutherius	*Clement
1	in March [Expulsion of Adam from Paradise]	in March
2	before Annunciation [Cain killed Abel]	before Annunciation
3	Great Friday	Great Friday
4	Before Ascension [Sodom and Gomorrah]	before Ascension
5	before Pentecost [Agarenians occupied many countries; B: Noah's flood]	before Pentecost
6	2 <sup>nd</sup> of June [Fall of Jerusalem in Jeremiah's time, for 63 years]	[in June]

7	before Peter's Day [29 June] [Punishment of Egypt by Moses]	before second Pentecost
8	before Dormition [Ismaelites occupied the Western land for 63 years; B<?>: redeeming through Gideon <sup>46</sup> ]	before Dormition
9	before Beheading of John the Baptist [29 August]	1 <sup>st</sup> in September
10	after Exaltation of Cross [Moses' Pass-over through the Red Sea]	[unknown date]
11	before Andrew's Day [30 November] [Jeremiah concealed the Ark]	before Christmas
12	after Christmas [Herod slew the babies]	before Hypopante

### 1.5. The Eleutherius Recension as a Seventh-Century Apocalyptic Writing

First of all, we have to point out the third parallel with Pseudo-Methodius, overlooked by Veselovsky. The duration of the Arab occupation is estimated at sixty-three years. This number is known also from Pseudo-Methodius (ch. XIII, 1–15), where it is inscribed into his general scheme of the end of the history of the world: the whole process takes ten Danielic year weeks, in sum seventy years, but the last Danielic year week, which starts when sixty-three years have passed, contains the most important events. In the beginning of the tenth year week, the Christians defeat the Ismaelites and restore the Christian kingdom.<sup>47</sup> This peculiar chronology allowed Sebastian Brock and, following him, Gerrit Reinink and other scholars to consider the *Apocalypse* as a true prophecy in one sense (it is not a *vaticinium ex eventu*) and a false prophecy in another sense (it was never fulfilled), and then to date the text near to the time

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<sup>46</sup> Gideon is mentioned in some mss of type A as well, but only B contains an elaborated account. According to Sokolov, “[это] место в списках группы А сокращено и искажено [this place in the manuscripts of group A is abridged and corrupted]” (Соколов, *Материалы и заметки...*, 56, n. 39).

<sup>47</sup> Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse...*, 35/57–40/65 (txt/tr.).

63 AH / 685 AD (supposing that Pseudo-Methodius counts his Danielic weeks from the date of the Hegira, 622 AD).<sup>48</sup>

Eleutherius shares these hopes that the Arab rule will be thrown off after sixty-three years, but his claim is grounded quite differently. There is no reference to Daniel at all but there are two references unknown to Pseudo-Methodius.

The first reference is the duration of the Exile in Jeremiah's time of sixty-three years (Nr 6). It is difficult not to see in this number a precedent for the current situation with the Arab occupation. However, this number of years is in blatant contradiction to the biblical data, seventy years, repeated in Josephus and the rabbinic tradition. There is only one remote parallel in the corpus of the known pseudepigrapha, *4 Baruch*, where the duration of the Exile seems to be sixty-six years.<sup>49</sup> This parallel, albeit remote, corroborates the view that the number sixty-three goes back to an early epoch (early Christian or Second Temple period) when such differences in the number of years of Exile appear; it is hardly a random corruption.

Now, it is important to our purpose that this so-far-unknown tradition of the sixty-three-year Exile is used, in Eleutherius, to support an estimate of the duration of the Arab dominion. Apply-

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. *ibid.* [translation vol.], 40, Anm. 2 to XIII, 2, with the main bibliography. Brock's seminal papers are the following: Brock, S. P. "Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History." *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2 (1976): 17–36; *idem*, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam." In Juynboll, G. H. A., ed. *Studies on the First Century of the Islamic Society*, 9–21, 199–203. Papers on Islamic History, 5. Carbondale/Edwardsville, 1982 [both are reprinted in: *idem*, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*. Variorum Collected Studies Series CS, 199, London, 1984; Ch. VII and VIII].

<sup>49</sup> On the problem of the "abnormal" duration of the Exile, see, most recently, Herzer, J. *4 Baruch (Paraleipomena Jeremion)*. Translated with an Introduction and Commentary, 82–83. Writings from the Greco-Roman world, 22. Atlanta, GA, 2005, which, however, does not cite a very important study by Piovanelli, P. "Les Paralipomènes de Jérémie dependent-ils de l'Histoire de la captivité babylonienne?" *Bulletin de l'AELAC* 7 (1997): 10–14; cf. also the duration of the Exile as seventy-seven years in the *Assumption of Moses* 3:14 and as seven generations in the *Epistle of Jeremiah* 1:2.

ing to our case the same reasoning as Brock applied to Pseudo-Methodius, we arrive at the conclusion that the date of Eleutherius precedes 63 AH. Alternatively, we can suppose that Eleutherius starts his counting of sixty-three years after the Arab invasion in Palestine in 635, which gives Eleutherius a slightly later *terminus ante quem*, 698 AD (76 AH).<sup>50</sup> Both possibilities mean that Eleutherius must be understood as an eschatological prophecy in the same manner as Pseudo-Methodius: a true prophecy in the sense that it is not a *vaticinium ex eventu* but a false prophecy in the sense that it has never been fulfilled.

We have to conclude as well that Eleutherius shared to a great extent the historical and eschatological views of Pseudo-Methodius, although his own theory was different. This is also seen from another of Eleutherius' biblical references, Gideon (Nr 8, type B only).

Gideon and his war against four heathen princes, Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah, and Zalmunna, is mentioned in Pseudo-Methodius (V, 6),<sup>51</sup> and this parallel to Eleutherius is already indicated by Veselovsky. However, there is a difference here, too. Pseudo-Methodius (V, 6) names the mother of these princes, a name not mentioned in the Bible; he gives the names as Mūyā in Syriac, Οὐμαία in Greek, and Umea in Latin. All these names allude to either "Umayyad" or "Mu'āwiya," the name of the first caliph of the dynasty of the Umayyads (661–680). It is clear that Pseudo-Methodius indicates here the ultimate origin of the Arabs. Eleutherius does not mention the mother of the Arabs, but, before listing the names of these four kings, he gives the names Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek (Ps 83:7 [82:8]), and then states that "in the last time they have to exit and to possess the lands for thirty and one and one-half years [*variant*

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<sup>50</sup> Pseudo-Methodius is clear when starting the Arab history from the very appearance of Islam, but Eleutherius mentions explicitly only the invasion into the Christian world. Thus, my hesitation: Eleutherius either implies the same chronology as Pseudo-Methodius or he counts from a later date. However, this difference is not particularly important.

<sup>51</sup> Reinink, *Die syrische Apokalypse...*, 9/13 (txt/tr.), cf. Anm. 2 to V, 6 (ibid., 13–14 of tr. vol.).

*reading*: forty and two years].”<sup>52</sup> Both numbers, however, have some relation to the chronologies already known to us:

(1) 30 and 1 and  $\frac{1}{2}$  = one-half of 63. This is a 63-year chronology of the Arab dominion but different from that of Pseudo-Methodius, where the middle of the 63-year period passes unmarked. This subdivision of the 63-year period is hardly compatible with the chronology of the Danielic year weeks (the number  $31\frac{1}{2}$  is not a multiple of seven nor is it divisible into half of seven).

(2)  $42 = 7 \times 6$ , that is, six weeks of years (probably a chronology implying that the final period will take seven year weeks, among which the last one is culminating; we know an example of such a chronology in Clement of Alexandria<sup>53</sup>).

On the one hand, this  $31\frac{1}{2}$ - or 42-year chronology proper to B is in contradiction to the 63-year chronology in the same Nr 8 but in the part common to A and B. On the other hand, it is in contradiction with the 63-year chronology in Pseudo-Methodius, even if it shares with Pseudo-Methodius an idea of redemption through Gideon. This fact prevents us from accepting Veselovsky’s conclusion that this part of the text proper to B belongs to the common archetype of A and B and ultimately goes back to Pseudo-Methodius; both parts of this claim are unacceptable.

It is tempting to agree with Veselovsky in a limited sense, namely, that the references to Noah in Nr 5 and to Gideon in Nr 8 belong to the common archetype of A and B. In this case, this archetype would contain an Old Testament prototype for each Friday. Be this as it may, however, the chronology of “redemption through Gideon” in Nr 8 that is proper to B is in contradiction to the common 63-year chronology of A and B in the same entry. Therefore, we have to admit that type B was edited under influence of other eschatological traditions, similar but different from these

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<sup>52</sup> See a synopsis of several mss in Веселовский, Сказание о 12 пятницах,” 343–44.

<sup>53</sup> *Stromata* 1:21:126: “And thus an anointed one became king of the Jews, reigning in Jerusalem in the fulfilment of the seven weeks”; cf. Beckwith, R. *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian: Biblical, Intertestamental and Patristic Studies*, 273. *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums*, 33. Leiden etc., 1996.

of Pseudo-Methodius (a 63-year chronology in Danielic year weeks) and Eleutherius (a 63-year chronology without Danielic year weeks but with reference to the 63-year Exile).

In spite of the fact that Eleutherius is close in some ways to Pseudo-Methodius, it nevertheless reveals a somewhat different eschatological tradition. It is different enough to invalidate Veselovsky's opinion that Pseudo-Methodius is among the sources of Eleutherius. Instead, Eleutherius offers an alternative development of the same eschatological tradition whose clearest mark is the 63-year duration of Arab rule.

Finally, we can cautiously propose to take a further step in defining the tradition of Eleutherius. After the reference to the Arab invasion in Nr 5, the text continues with the phrase "...and expelled them [*sc.*, the Ismaelites]..."; the rest of this phrase is extremely distorted and varies considerably in the different manuscripts.<sup>54</sup> However, one manuscript (B; Russian, sixteenth century) continues as follows: "... and expelled Alexander," while another one (the oldest manuscript of Eleutherius, Serbian, thirteenth century) has in the corresponding place "... and expelled Karda king"; the name "Karda" can be a distortion of "Alexander." We know that, according to Pseudo-Methodius, the Arabs will be defeated by an eschatological figure, the so-called Last Roman Emperor (unnamed in Pseudo-Methodius), but there was, in seventh-century Byzantium, a tradition seeing in this eschatological emperor Alexander the Great (considered as a Christian and almost a saint; at least, certainly a recipient of divine revelation during his ascension into heaven). This tradition became part of the official Byzantine ideology under Heraclius (610–641) after his victory over the Persians (628).<sup>55</sup> It is probably this tradition that is reflected in Eleutherius.

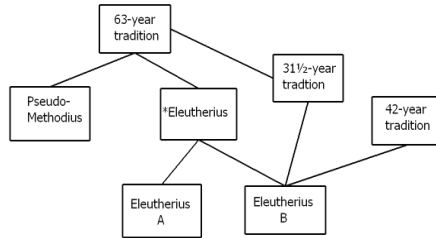
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<sup>54</sup> See a synopsis in Соколов, *Материалы и заметки...*, 55.

<sup>55</sup> See, for details, Лурье, В. "Александр Великий—«последний римский царь». К истории эсхатологических концепций в эпоху Ираклия, [Louríé, B. Alexander the Great—the Last Roman Emperor. Toward the history of eschatological concepts in the epoch of Heraclius]." *Византиноведение / Byzantinorossica* 2 (2003): 121–49.

In Stemma 2, I have sketched the mutual relationships between different eschatological traditions concerning the estimation of the duration of the Arab dominion. (In the diagram, \*Eleutherius means the common archetype of types A and B.)

*Stemma 2: Eleutherius Recension among the Traditions  
Concerning the Duration of the Arab Dominion*



### 1.6. A Jewish Tradition Shared with Early Islam

Eleutherius' calendar implies, in Nr 10, the Passover (traversing the Red Sea led by Moses) in September, which is certainly not an equivalent of Nisan. So far, the only instances where such a chronology was explicitly mentioned are several early *hadiths* on the establishment of the fast of Ashura, although these *hadiths* are disputed by many authorities in the Islamic tradition itself.<sup>56</sup> According to these *hadiths*, Muḥammad established this fast following the example of the Jews of Medina, who were fasting for their Yom Kippur, 10 Tishri. However, according to the *hadiths*, in their explanation of their practice to Muḥammad the Jews said that on this day they commemorate, among other things, Moses' salvation of the Jewish people from the Pharaoh. This argument became decisive for Muḥammad: "I have more rights to Moses and to fasting on this day!" he exclaimed. Bashear pointed to several features of fast rather than fast in early Islamic Ashura practices, especially

<sup>56</sup> See, as the most comprehensive study and review of the Islamic sources, Bashear, S. "‘Āshūrā,': An early Muslim fast." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 141 (1991): 281–316 [repr. in: idem, *Studies in Early Islamic Tradition*. Jerusalem, 2004, ch. VII], esp. 290–92.

those relating to the inauguration of the Temple (covering the Ka'ba, in Islamic interpretation),<sup>57</sup> whose position, according to the biblical account, is in the eight-day period of the Sukkoth feast (2 Chr 7:8–10). There are some parallels in rabbinic interpretations of Yom Kippur (Yom Kippur is included among the days of consecration)<sup>58</sup> but there are even more explicit parallels in *3 Baruch*, ch. 14 (Yom Kippur as the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary) and *4 Baruch*, ch. 9 (consecration of the Second Temple on Yom Kippur).

In Eleutherius, we have an independent witness of the commemoration of Moses' Passover in Tishri.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, in Eleutherius' calendar, the first month of the year is March (see Nr 1), which presumes an identification between March and Nisan, and which is further supported by the identification of Kislew (the month of Hanukkah) with November (in Nr 11). The reference to the story of Jeremiah concealing the Ark corresponds to 2 Mac 2:1–7, where it is put in the frame of the legend of Hanukkah. Thus, according to this calendrical scheme, September in Nr 10 corresponds to Tishri.

The distribution of the Old Testament events according to their dates, in Eleutherius, is somewhat self-evident (following explicit biblical accounts) but at the same time somewhat problematic; see Table 3. In the last column, "Traditional Date Meant," I try to explain the traditions underlying the calendar of Eleutherius. The traditions underlying Nrs 10 and 11 have already been commented on above; that of Nr 1 is self-evident from the Genesis account.

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<sup>57</sup> Bashear, "'Āshūrā,'" 315, cf. 282.

<sup>58</sup> Mostly known to Bashear; cf. Stoekl Ben Ezra, D. *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity. The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century*, 123–24. WUNT, 163. Tübingen, 2003.

<sup>59</sup> It is interesting to note that the commemoration of Moses on 4 September (Byzantine and Latin traditions) or 5 September (Coptic and Ethiopian), although unknown to the early mediaeval Syrian calendars, may go back to the same tradition about the Passover in Tishri.



Table 3.  
*The OT events and their dates in the Eleutherius recension*

Nr	Eleutherius' OT Prototype	Eleutherius' Date	Traditional Date Meant
1	Expulsion from Paradise	March	Nisan
2	Cain killed Abel	before 25 March	Nisan <sup>60</sup>
3	[Great Friday]	—	—
4	Sodom and Gomorrah	before Ascension	Nisan <sup>61</sup>
5	Noah's flood	before Pentecost	Iyyar <sup>62</sup>
6	Fall of Jerusalem in Jeremiah's time	2 <sup>nd</sup> Friday in June	?
7	Punishment of Egypt by Moses	before 29 June	?
8	Redeeming through Gideon	before 15 August	Wheat harvest (Jdg 6:15)
9	[Beheading of John the Baptist]	—	—
10	Moses' Passover	after 14 September	Tishri
11	Jeremiah concealed the Ark	before 30 November	Kislew
12	[Christmas]	—	—

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Glenthøj, J. B. *Cain and Abel in Syriac and Greek Writers (4th-6th centuries)*, 5 [rabbinic tradition], 130, 148, 153, 170 [Greek and Syrian fathers]. CSCO, 567 / Subs, 95. Lovanii, 1997.

<sup>61</sup> *Beresbit Rabba* 51:1–6 (16 Nisan); cf. in the Samaritan *Asatir*, VII, 28 and VIII, 29: Sodom was burned on Friday, in Nisan. See Gaster, M. *The Asatir. The Samaritan Book of the Secrets of Moses*, 243 and 262, cf. 188, n. 8 [other parallels from the Samaritan tradition]. London, 1927.

<sup>62</sup> That is, the second month; cf. Gen 7:11, 8:14, and parallels in the literature of the Second Temple period.

The traditions underlying Nrs 6 and 7 remain the most problematic. Even if we accept the shifting of the date of Exodus from Nisan to Tishri in Nr 10, the date of the punishment of Egypt must be closer to that of Exodus, because, in the biblical account, it is somewhere at the beginning of Nisan or at the end of Adar (cf. Ex 12:2). The Fall of Jerusalem in June (Nr 6) looks no less strange. It is normally placed in the fifth month (Ab) which is difficult to identify with June.<sup>63</sup> For instance, Talmud (*bTʿanit* 29b) mentions different dates of this commemoration, either 7 Ab (as in 2 Kings 25:8) or 10 Ab (as in Jer 52:12), and chooses 9 Ab as a kind of compromise.

Both of these problems probably have a single solution. There is a Second Temple tradition placing the Fall of Babylon on the Pentecost. In some of the modifications of this tradition, Babylon is identified as Egypt<sup>64</sup> or Jerusalem.<sup>65</sup> Both our Nrs 6 and 7 are

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<sup>63</sup> The equation Ab = June (instead of July) contradicts the main scheme of our calendar, although such a confusion might be possible somewhere in the Hellenistic world. Cf. Samuel, A. E. *Greek and Roman Chronology. Calendars and Years in Classical Antiquity*, 150. Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft, I, Abt., 7. Teil. München, 1972: Paone (June in Egypt) = Loios (the Macedonian name for the month); but normally Loios = Ab in Antioch (where the year starts from October = Tishri, cf. the name of this month as Teshrin in Syriac).

<sup>64</sup> Cf., on the confusion between the construction of the Tower of Babel with brick-making in Egypt in *3 Baruch*, Harlow, D. *The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch (3 Baruch) in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity*, 110–12. *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha*, 12. Leiden, 1996. On the connexion of this scene to the Pentecost, see Lourié, B. “Cosmology and Liturgical Calendar in *3 Baruch*.” In Kulik, A., Orlov, A., eds. *Harry E. Gaylor Memorial Volume* (forthcoming).

<sup>65</sup> Cf., on this tradition in the Apocalypse of John in NT, Beagley, A. J. *The “Sitz im Leben” of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church’s Enemies*. Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche, 50. Berlin/New York, 1987. The matter remains controversial but I am inclined to agree with this identification; cf. Лурье, В., [Rev. of:] Don K. Preston, Who is this Babylon? (Ardmore, 1999). *Христианский Восток* 2 (8) (2000): 497–99 (in Russian).

dated to near the Pentecost. Thus, Eleutherius' calendar may follow a tradition where the Pentecost implied commemoration of the Fall of Babylon, the punishment of Egypt, and the Fall of Jerusalem as a New Babylon.

Redeeming through Gideon "before 15 August" (Nr 8) is also somewhat problematic. The date of the biblical account is the wheat harvest (Jdg 6:15), which corresponds to the beginning of summer (cf. also Ruth, ch. 2), that is, *long* before 15 August. The Qumranic *Temple Scroll's* Festival of First-Fruits for Wheat is the Pentecost. Thus, it is natural to consider this Friday of Gideon as belonging to the Pentecost series, together with the previous three Fridays.

Thus, the Old Testament precedents for Eleutherius' Fridays are grouped as follows:

- Passover series (Nrs 1–4, where Nr 3 is the Christian Great Friday);
- Pentecost series (Nrs 5–8);
- Yom Kippur series (Nr 10; and Nr 9?);
- Hanukkah series (Nr 11; and Nr 12?).

One can conclude that Eleutherius seems to use an ancient Jewish calendric tradition even though we are unable to indentify it in its entirety. Nevertheless, it looks consistent with and rooted in the Jewish liturgical traditions of the Second Temple period. The tradition referred to in the *hadiths* on the Jewish roots of the fast of Ashura is, at least, similar (if not identical) to this one.

### 1.7. The Twelve-Friday Tradition in Palestine: John Zosimos

John Zosimos was a Georgian monk in the middle of the tenth century at the St Sabbas Laura near Jerusalem who composed, in Georgian, a calendar collecting liturgical commemorations from four sources, which he listed. Three of these sources represented Palestinian liturgical usages and one of them represented the rite of Constantinople. His work ends with a short notice on peculiar fasts before certain great feasts.<sup>66</sup> Among these feasts is the commemo-

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<sup>66</sup> Garitte, G. *Le calendrier palestinogéorgien du Sinaiticus 34 (Xe siècle)*, 119–20 [Georgian with Latin tr. on the same pages]. *Subsidia hagiolo-*

ration of St Sabbas on 5 December, which suggests strongly that, for this part of his calendar, his sole source was a document from St Sabbas (probably some kind of lectionary). Thus, for John Zosimos' notice on these strange fasts we have as the *terminus ante quem* the early tenth century.

Garitte had already observed that the number of days of fasting, 56, was the normal duration of the Quadragesima (40-day fasting) throughout the East before the late seventh century, when it was forbidden for the Chalcedonians.<sup>67</sup> Fifty-six days are equal to 8 weeks and contain 40 days of fasting on the weekdays, with no fast on Saturdays and Sundays (where only meat is prohibited). In the Byzantine rite, this manner of fasting was replaced by the 7-week Quadragesima preceded by one cheese-fare week having the same rule of fasting as previously prescribed for Saturdays and Sundays. This means that John Zosimos' 56-day fasts are a pre-eighteenth century custom.

However, 56 days contain exactly 40 days of fasting only if the fasts start on Mondays and end before the feasts falling on Sundays, that is, for the movable feasts only. In this case, the last fast day is always Friday. This is why this practice of 56-day fasts is a development emerging from the practice of specific Friday fasts.

Nevertheless, in John Zosimos there is no 56-day fast before the movable feasts. The reason is clear: all these feasts (Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, and also the movable feast of the Apostles on the fiftieth day after the Pentecost) are connected to Easter with its Lent, the first and the main 56-day fast before the late seventh century. John Zosimos' 56-day fasts are an expansion, in the Palestinian monastic milieu, of the 8-week Lenten principle onto other important feasts with, however, the inevitable loss of the correspondence with the weekdays. Two traces of this earlier connexion of the 56-day fasts with the weekdays remain: their very length of

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graphica, 30. Bruxelles, 1958. Cf., *ibid.*, 35–36, on the Sabbaitic source of John Zosimos, and 433–434, Garitte's commentary to this notice.

<sup>67</sup> It was prohibited by the *Quinisextum* Council (692), canon 56. This manner of fasting is attributed here to "the country of Armenia and other places."

56 days and the distribution of the fasts at the point at which the core of the Clement twelve-Friday scheme is clearly discernible.

In John Zosimos, the 56-days fasts are grouped into two series, one obligatory and one optional (preceded by the words “if you wish”). Below both series are compared with the data from Table 1.

The obligatory series contains:

1. Nativity of John the Baptist (25 June is meant)—cf. \*Clement Nr 6
2. Dormition (15 August)—cf. \*Clement Nr 8
3. Nativity of the Theotokos (8 September)—cf. Clement Gr, Nr 9
4. St George (10 November)<sup>68</sup>—not in Clement
5. Archangels (Palestinian date 14 November is meant)—cf. Clement Sl, Nr 10
6. St Sabbas (5 December)—not in Clement
7. Christmas (25 December)—cf. \*Clement, Nr 11

The non-obligatory series contains:

8. Annunciation (25 March)—cf. \*Clement, Nr 2
9. Transfiguration (6 August)—cf. some Russian mss in Veselovsky’s synopsis, Nr 7
10. St Chariton (28 September)<sup>69</sup>—not in Clement
11. St Conon (5 June)—not in Clement
12. Moses (4 September)—not in Clement but cf. Eleutherius, Nr 10 (Table 2)
13. Elias (3 September, an otherwise unknown commemoration)—not in Clement

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<sup>68</sup> Especially venerated not only in Georgia, the homeland of John Zosimos, but also in Palestine, where his main shrine is located (in Lydda). 10 November is the date of the consecration of St George’s church in some unidentified place named Enbiglon or Engiglon and known from the sources in Georgian only (which indicates its importance for Palestine in the eighth through the tenth centuries).

<sup>69</sup> St Chariton is especially venerated in Palestine as the founder of Palestinian monasticism.

14. Beheading of John the Baptist (reading is not completely certain)—cf. some Russian mss in Veselovsky's synopsis, Nrs 8 and 9

It is clear from this comparison that the calendar laying out the 56-day fasts follows the calendar of Clement, although excluding the movable feasts and adding some feasts especially important for Palestinian monastic circles. The recension of Clement which lies in the background of John Zosimos is close to our reconstructed \*Clement calendar with some variations closer to the Greek and Slavonic recensions (cf. especially points 3 and 5 in the list above).

John Zosimos is important to our study as a witness, certain even if indirect, of the authority of the Twelve-Friday calendar for pre-eighth-century Palestine.

### 1.8. The Twelve-Friday Calendar: a Preliminary Conclusion

The Twelve-Friday calendar was widespread throughout the Christian world but only in its Chalcedonian part. There are no Twelve-Friday documents among the non-Chalcedonian sources, whereas in the Chalcedonian traditions they are quite abundant. Their extreme popularity in the East and the West as well as the witness of John Zosimos point to Palestine as their place of origin, not earlier than 518 (the end of the rule of the monophysite emperor Anastasius who pursued a policy of suppression of the Chalcedonians). The *terminus post quem* follows from the fact that such a popular tradition is completely absent in the anti-Chalcedonian milieu. In the sixth century, Palestine was the centre at which liturgical customs of the East were available to the Western pilgrims, and so they could easily be translated to the West without any involvement on the part of the imperial government.

As seen from the Eleutherius calendar, the Twelve-Friday scheme was constructed on the matrix of some Jewish liturgical tradition highlighting several important feasts with their specific interpretation. This Jewish tradition as a whole remains obscure but it is recognisable—at least partially—in the Islamic accounts of the establishment of the fast of Ashura.

The story of Eleutherius, which is the main object of the second part of this study, sheds more light on the Twelve Fridays as a

*veritas hebraica* and on possible points of contact between the Twelve-Friday tradition and early Islam.

### 1.9. A Syriac Legend about the Secret Bishop John and the Personified Friday

We know of no Twelve-Friday document outside the Chalcedonian part of the Christian world. Nevertheless, we do know a Syrian anti-Chalcedonian legend of the veneration of each Friday throughout the year which presents the closest parallel to the Muslim practice. This legend is important to us also in several other respects, so we will deal with it here, before proceeding to the second part of our study.

Unfortunately, this legend is still unpublished. In 1910, François Nau published a detailed periphrasis<sup>70</sup> but he has never returned to it, nor, to my knowledge, has anyone else. The legend is a typical *narratio animae utilis*, although unknown in any language other than Syriac. The manuscript Paris, *Bibl. Nationale* 234 contains a cycle of the three “beneficial tales” attributed to a certain abba Meletius of Antioch; our story is the first of the series. It is a very important text which must be published and studied properly. Here I do not pay it the attention it deserves, but only sketch some especially important motives.

John was a Christian slave of a pagan master. He venerated Friday to such an extent that, from Thursday evening until Saturday, he never worked, never ate, and never even spoke. Every week on Friday he reported himself sick. This manner irritated his master, who often insulted him. Meanwhile, two daughters of the master fell into a pit on Friday. At the request of the master’s wife, John saved them (a clear allusion to Jesus’ words relating to the Sabbath, Lk 14:5) with the miraculous help of a lady that he called “Holy Friday” (ܟܕܝܫܐ ܟܕܝܫܐ). The master, without knowing these events, demands that John participate in the harvest, even though it was still Friday. John refuses, and his master tries to kill him with a sword; however,

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<sup>70</sup> Nau, F. “Hagiographie syriaque.” *ROC* 15 (1910): 53–72, 173–97, here 192–94.

his sword is stopped by the same lady, “une belle femme revêtue d’habite noire et brilliants.” She lets him know that John saved his daughters. They then go out to the workers in the field, but all of them have died: the same lady reproached them for working on Friday, the day of the Passion of our Lord. She touched each of them with a kind of fiery lance and each of them was burned, although the ears of wheat in their hands remained intact. The master asks to be baptised but John refuses, pretending that he is only a layman with no right of administering baptism. They all go to the bishop of Antioch, Meletius (Meletius was the bishop of Antioch from 360 to his death in 381; thus, this epoch had already become “epic” to the hagiographer). Meletius salutes John as a New Job and reveals that he is a bishop consecrated in Alexandria and who had left his see (unnamed) twenty-seven years previously. John, unhappy with this disclosure, reveals in turn that Meletius holds a great sum of money which was donated for the poor but which Meletius had planned to spend on church decoration; Meletius publicly repents. John baptises his master with the name Theodore together with two hundred other people. Theodore donates his slaves to John and John sets them free.

Four motives of this story will be paramount to the whole of our dossier of Friday veneration in the context of Christian influence on the Arabs. We will meet them in the legends on St Eleutherius and St Parasceve:

- (1) the veneration of Friday as a specific day (fast, abrogation of work<sup>71</sup>);
- (2) the veneration of the personified Friday as a saint;
- (3) the main character as a bishop who left his see;
- (4) freedom and slavery, true *vs* apparent.

It is difficult to say whether the present legend is a product of a separate development of the tradition within the anti-

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<sup>71</sup> On the early Muslim custom of fasting on Friday, see Goldziher, I. “Usages juifs d’après la littérature religieuse des musulmans.” *REJ* 28 (1894): 75–94, here 83–84; Vajda, G. “Jeûne musulman et jeûne juif.” *The Hebrew Union College Annual* 12–13 (1937–1938): 367–85, here 379.



Chalcedonian milieu or an earlier product of the epoch shaped by the *Henotikon* of Zeno (482), at a time when the attitude toward the Council of Chalcedon was not an insurmountable obstacle to communion. In fact, even in the 520s the Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian parts of the Christian world were united in their reaction to the murder of the Christians of Nağrān.

## **PART TWO: ST ELEUTHERIUS AND THE LEGENDS ABOUT NAĞRĀN**

### **2.1. The Text of the Slavonic Story of Eleutherius**

The text of the introductory story of the Eleutherius recension is almost unknown in languages other than Russian.<sup>72</sup> The translation that follows does not pretend to anything more than a useful outline of the text. In the text below, I have indicated my interpretations of passages whose exact meaning is far from obvious by using [square brackets]; all of these passages will be discussed below (section 2.2). The <angled brackets> mark the text where I do not propose any choice between the variant readings nor do I propose any specific reconstruction. Because no critical text is available, my translation follows the texts of Sokolov's edition (based on a Serbian manuscript of the thirteenth century, with variant readings from several other manuscripts). Rozhdestvenskaja's edition (siglum R) is taken into account for some important variant readings only; I mostly omit the rhetorical amplifications specific to the manuscript *T'* (the oldest Russian manuscript, Novgorod, fifteenth century) on which R is based. I believe, along with Sokolov, that his Serbian manuscript better preserves the general flow of the text than the later Russian manuscripts.

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<sup>72</sup> Milena Rozhdestvenskaja's edition (Рождественская, "Сказание о двенадцати пятницах") is provided with a Russian translation. There is also a French translation of the ms *Пап* (= Paris, Bibl. Nationale, Nr 10; Serbian, parchment, 13<sup>th</sup> century; it is published in Веселовский, "Freiheit—Элевферий," 124–25) in the description of the manuscript by Ivan Martynov: Martynov, [I.] *Les manuscrits slaves de la Bibliothèque Impériale de Paris*, 69–72. Paris, 1858.

In the West, there is a land [called] Laura, and in this land, a great city called [Šeptail/Dyrrachium], and a multitude of Jews lived in it. And they had quarrels with the Christians, sometimes in the market, sometimes in the streets, and sometimes in the city's gates.<sup>73</sup> And they had beaten each other. And there was a council, under <Karmian> king. The Jews said to the Christians: "Until what time do we have to bear this misery and have our children beaten by you? Let you choose one philosopher and let us choose another (and) let them dispute with each other, and let us all remain silent. If your philosopher out-argue, we all baptise ourselves. And if somebody from ours will not wish to baptise himself, he will have from you a great mischief. [R *adds*: And if our philosopher out-argue, you convert into our faith.]" They have said this relying on their wise philosopher.

And the Christians liked their speech. They had chosen for themselves a pious man whose name was Eleutherius, and the Jews had chosen one named Tarasius. They started to discuss, having gathered together in one building. [R *adds*: They discussed for many hours but, despite this, were never left without an audience.] When they were gathered for the third assembly,<sup>74</sup> the Jew took with himself his son, whose name was Malchus. Then [they went into the depths of the struggle]. The Sovereign Lord who sees everything helped Eleutherius the Christian [*instead of this sentence, R has*: O Lord who sees everything, help Eleutherius to out-argue the Jew!].

And the Jew said to the Christian with an angry heart: "I saw that you have already out-argued me, our faith is a shadow

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<sup>73</sup> The phrase "sometimes in the market, sometimes in the streets, and sometimes in the city's gates" sounds like a citation. City gates, in Eastern cities, are also places of the market, court, gatherings, etc. For "market" and "streets" in one phrase, cf. Prov 7:12 (MT and Tg but not LXX and Peshitta); among the many biblical passages featuring the function of city gates, cf. Prov 31:23.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* (CPG 7793); the text was written shortly after the summer of 634, and it records a total of nine assemblies between the Jews and the Christian Jacob.

while yours is true. Moreover, to Moses on the Mount of Sinai a shadow is revealed while to you the truth has shown itself. From the Virgin Theotokos Maria the Christ was born who was professed by our prophets and was indicated with the finger by your apostles. I see that you are a wise man but you do not know about the twelve Fridays which are profitable for your souls.” And after having said this, he departed, being incapable of staying because of affliction. But his son remained, and Eleutherius said to him: “Do you know about the twelve Fridays of which your father has spoken?” And he said: “I know that our grandfathers had taken some Christian, one of your apostles, and had found with him a scroll in which it was written about the twelve Fridays. They had put him to a terrible death after which the scroll, after having been read, was consigned to flames. And there is an oath among us, up to the present day, not to make it known to the Christians. And my soul thirsts for your faith.” And, having started, explained to him everything up to the end.

The Jew came in again and said [*some mss add:* to Eleutherius]: “I know that you are perplexed about the twelve Fridays!” But he opened his lips and explained to him everything that he has heard from his son. And the Jew said to him with great anger: “[According to the explanation delivered to me], this is not known among the Christians. My son said [this] to you.” And having taken a knife, he slaughtered his son and slaughtered himself.

But I, Eleutherius, oh brothers, after having known this from the Jew, did not hide this but wrote to all the Christians.

(There follows the text enumerating the twelve Fridays.)

## 2.2. Syriac as the Original Language

There are strong reasons to consider the original of the Eleutherius recension as written in Syriac. Most of these reasons are based on the phenomena coined by Gérard Garitte as “*les interférences accidentelles*,” in contrast to “*les interférences implantées*,” which are loanwords that have already been absorbed by the language of translation. The lower the quality of a translation is, the richer it becomes in “*interférences accidentelles*,” that is, the borrowings of the words, the meanings of the words, syntactical constructions, and spellings of proper names. The “*interférences accidentelles*”

are often a cause of mistranslation (when the word is translated in its primary meaning although it had been used to convey another meaning, one absent from the language of translation), in addition to the mistranslations due to outright mistakes. Thus, for the study of the history of texts, as Garitte formulated, the worst translators are the best ones: "...vus de notre point de vue particulier, ce sont les moins bons qui sont les meilleurs."<sup>75</sup> The Slavic translator of Eleutherius was rather good, but only "vu de notre point de vue particulier."

In this section, we will discuss three cases of mistranslation and one case of a corrupted spelling of a toponym. In all these cases our demonstration will pertain to the original text written by the author but not the immediate original of the Slavonic version, which might be, of course, in languages other than Syriac (*e.g.*, in Greek).

### **2.2.1. A Friday which is временная ("temporary")**

In the calendar part of the Eleutherius recension, some Fridays are called "temporary" (*пятница временная*). These are the Fridays Nrs 6, 10, and 12, but in some manuscripts there are fewer than three "temporary" Fridays. So far, there has been no explanation of this epithet, although the term "temporary" certainly goes back to the original of Eleutherius.

One can recognize here confusion between two homographs in consonant writing, the Syriac roots *zbn* "time" and "to buy." The translator read something like ܙܒܢܐ "temporary," while in the original the meaning was something like ܙܒܢܐ "merchant, trading," which gives the sense "market Friday." These words are scarcely discernible in consonant writing when the vowel signs are omitted.

In Islamic society, Friday is the day of the weekly market, which is considered to be a part of the festal pastime on the *Yaum al-Ġumʿa*. Eleutherius provides only three market Fridays: in the

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<sup>75</sup> Garitte, G. "Traduttore traditore di se stesso." *Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres de l'Académie Royale de Belgique*. 5<sup>e</sup> sér. 57 (1971): 39–80 [reprinted in idem, *Scripta disiecta. 1941–1977*, II, 676–717, here 691. Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, 22. Lovanii, 1980].

middle of the summer (Nr 6), in the middle of the winter (Nr 12), and in the autumn, at the end of the harvest (Nr 10). This practice is not the same as in the Muslim world but it is quite reasonable *per se* and already highlights the feature of Friday as being *the* market day.

S. V. Ivanov is now preparing a publication of five Slavonic manuscripts in which the number of such Fridays is reduced to four and they are called *четвертовременная* “four-temporary.” They correspond to the Latin fasts of the “four seasons,” even in the calendrical dates. However, as we have seen above (section 1.2), the four seasons motive is a later addition to the Latin version; moreover, two of Ivanov’s five manuscripts are Glagolitic Croatian, that is, Roman Catholic. Therefore, I think that we have in these manuscripts a later Western rationalisation of the incomprehensible term. At any rate, a full discussion of these particular readings must be postponed until Ivanov publishes his study.

### 2.2.2. ВНИДОСТА ВЪ ГЛУБОКОЮ ПОВѢСТЬ

The phrase rendered in our translation as “Then [they went into the depths of the struggle]” is flawed in the manuscripts. Some of them give the strange phrase “they went into the depths of the books (*въ глубокія книги*)”; some others, including the Serbian manuscript of the thirteenth century used by Sokolov as the basis of his edition, contain the smoothed-out phrase “they went into the depth(s) of books (*въ гльбину кнѣжскую / въ книжнѣя глубинѣя*; the noun “depth” is in either singular or plural).” But the ms *T*<sup>1</sup> used as the basis of Rozhdestvenskaja’s edition (Novgorod, fifteenth century), contains a *lectio difficilior*: *внидоста въ глубокою повѣсть*. Literally it means “they went into (a) deep narration.” Scholars, including Rozhdestvenskaja, have naturally dismissed this reading as corrupt. However, if the clearly understandable reading “they went into the depth(s) of books” is genuine, the appearance of a quite widespread but meaningless reading “they went into the deep books” is inexplicable: it is hardly possible as a replacement for “the depth(s) of books” but easily possible instead of the genuine “deep narration.” The reasons for dismissing this *lectio difficilior* emerge from scholars’ understanding of the text rather than from purely textological considerations.

The word *повѣст’* means “narration,” a standard rendering of Greek διήγησις. I think this is a mark of a confusion common in

Syriac texts and their translations between two root stems of the verb ܠܥܠ: as ethpeel, “to play” or “to compete” (e.g., in sport) or as ethpaal, “to narrate.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, the meaning of the Syriac original was something like “they went into the depths of the struggle” (a confusion took place between derivatives such as, e.g., ܠܥܠܐ “δύ-γησις” and ܠܥܠܐ “play, competition”).

### 2.2.3. Како ми ся дана сила

The phrase rendered in our translation as “[According to the explanation delivered to me], this is not known among the Christians” is also a reconstruction based on a peculiar reading of the ms T<sup>1</sup>. This reading was correctly published only in Rozhdestvenskaja’s edition: *Како ми ся дана сила, яко нѣсть се въ хрѣстианехъ вѣдомо*. It is difficult to translate the first part of this sentence, even if all the words in it seem to be clear. An attempt at a literal translation would result in something like the following: “As (or according to, in the same manner, etc.) a/the power/force is given to me, that this is not known among the Christians.” In other manuscripts, the readings are as follows: *Тако ми великаго б(о)га Атанаила/Аданаила...* (Sokolov’s ms/ms T<sup>2</sup>) “I swore by the great God Atanail/Adanail [Adonael<sup>77</sup>]...” or the same but with the insertion of another name of God, “Adonai”<sup>78</sup> (ms N).<sup>79</sup> The whole sentence

<sup>76</sup> Payne Smith, R. *Thesaurus Syriacus*, cols. 4248–50. Oxonii, 1879–1901.

<sup>77</sup> Adonael (“Lord God”) is the name of one of the seven greatest angels in the *Testament of Solomon*, 81, 84, 102, and also an angelic name in some rabbinic and cabbalistic traditions (Schwab, M. *Vocabulaire de l’angéologie, d’après les manuscrits hébreux de la Bibliothèque nationale*, 41 [153]. Extrait des *Mémoires présentés par divers savants à l’Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, 1<sup>re</sup> série, tome X, 2<sup>e</sup> partie. Paris, 1897).

<sup>78</sup> Cf. LXX Αδωναι: 1 Sam 1:11; throughout Ez, ch. 11, but only in some of the mss.

<sup>79</sup> Sokolov incorrectly states, in his critical apparatus, that the ms T<sup>1</sup> has *Аданаила* (“of Adanael”) (Соколов, *Материалы и заметки...*, 54, n. 17). In fact, this is not a reading of the manuscript but only a reconstruction that his editor, Tikhonravov, printed within the text; Tikhonravov explains in a footnote that the ms has *ся дана сила* (Тихонравов,



verb ܘܨܘܘܩ “to give” in ܘܨܘܘܩܘܢ “to be given” (ethpeel) also has the meanings “to be granted,” “to be delivered,” etc.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the obscure part of the Slavonic sentence can be approximately reconstructed in Syriac as ܘܨܘܘܩܘܢ ܠܘܨܘܘܩܘܢ ܘܨܘܘܩܘܢ “According to the explanation delivered to me,” where the initial ܘܨܘܘܩܘܢ has an exact equivalent in the Slavonic *како*.

This construction is also interesting because it is specific to Syriac, and thus is hardly possible in a Syriac translation from Greek (because such translations generally follow Greek syntax). Therefore, this is an argument for Syriac as the original language of the Eleutherius recension itself (that is, it was not translated into Syriac from another language, and, specifically, not from Greek).

Another important, although indirect, argument for Syriac as the original language is the similarity of Eleutherius’ eschatological conception to that of Pseudo-Methodius (see above, 1.5). Both works are nearly contemporary and both are independent from each other but have some common roots. Pseudo-Methodius, however, was written in Syriac.

#### 2.2.4. “Laura” means “Illyria”

After having been prepared to meet, in the Eleutherius recension, some undigested remnants of its Syriac original, we are in a position to take a fresh look at the toponym “Laura” (*Лаурпа*).<sup>82</sup> If this

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(Sokoloff, M. *A Syriac Lexicon. A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann’s Lexicon Syriacum*, 447. Winona Lake, IN/Piscataway, NJ, 2009).

<sup>81</sup> Payne Smith, J. *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith, D. D.*, 189. Oxford, 1903.

<sup>82</sup> This reading is present in the earliest manuscripts (Sokolov’s ms as well as *T*<sup>1</sup>, *T*<sup>2</sup>, and *Пап*; the ms *Унд* contains a corruption of the same reading, *оурпа*). In ms *N* (Serbian parchment ms of the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century), the word is rendered as *оурвьениа* (“(which is) made plain”). This reading, according to Sokolov, is “вероятно, искажено из собственного имени [probably corrupted from a proper name]” (Сokolov, *Материалы и заметки...*, 53, n. 1). This reading or its derivatives are present in some unpublished late manuscripts from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (whose readings were communicated to me by Anissava Miltenova). I am espe-



is a transliteration of a Syriac word, it can be understood as “Illyricum” or, more exactly, “Illyria” (another form of the same toponym in Greek). Indeed, in the Peshitta, Ἰλλυρικόν in Rom 15:19 is rendered as ܘܨܝܪܝܐ (*ʿhwrqwn*). For another form of this toponym, Ἰλλυρία, the transliteration must be ܘܨܝܪܝܐ (*ʿhwr̄y*). This is not exactly what we might expect as an ideal transliteration of “Laura”: ܘܨܝܪܐ (*ʿhwr̄*). Nevertheless, it is certainly meant to refer to Illyria. In addition, there are two extra-linguistic arguments that support this assumption, although the linguistic correspondence discussed above is sufficiently precise to corroborate it.

The first argument is the name of the town where the discussion with the Jew took place. The manuscript tradition has basically two options for this (setting aside the third option, which is to skip the name entirely): either *Septail* (or derivatives of this name which will be discussed later; see Note 1 below) or Драчъ (*Drač*).<sup>83</sup> Drač is the Slavic name of Dyrrachium, a coastal town in the southern part of the Roman province Illyricum, the modern Durrës in Albania.<sup>84</sup>

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cially grateful to Anissava Miltenova, who shared with me her data on the unpublished manuscripts.

<sup>83</sup> In *N* and *M* among the published mss, and in Beljakovski 309 (16<sup>th</sup> century) and Dujchev 17 (18<sup>th</sup> century) among the unpublished.

<sup>84</sup> Without knowing the reading “Drach,” the first student of the Eleutherius recension, Ivan Martynov, provided the name Laura in his translation with a note: “Ne serait-ce pas Illyrie?” (Martynov, *Les manuscrits slaves*, 70, n. 2). Veselovsky, although already knowing this reading and, moreover, knowing the existence of the martyr Eleutherius of Illyria and considering these facts as arguments in favour of Martynov’s intuition, nevertheless rejects it. Veselovsky’s own choice of locale is Tarsus (Веселовский, “Freiheit—Элевферий,” 82, cf. 82–85). Veselovsky derived “Tarsus” from the name of Eleutherius’ protagonist Tarasius (this procedure hardly fits modern criteria of critical hagiography, but Veselovsky was a pioneer and even a precursor of this discipline). Veselovsky’s argument is based on the Passion of Eleutherius the Cubicularius (*BHG* 572, 572c; 4 August), where the martyrdom takes place in Tarsus. The existence of one of the martyrs named Eleutherius in Tarsus is not sufficient reason to derive “Tarasius” from “Tarsus” and to ignore

The second argument is the name of Eleutherius himself. Eleutherius is a twenty-year-old bishop martyr of Illyricum whose hagiographical dossier, including its Syriac part, will be discussed below.<sup>85</sup>

There is no doubt that our Eleutherius of Laura is none other than an avatar of Eleutherius of Illyria, so the hagiographical dossier of the latter is thus the hagiographical substrate of the story of Eleutherius and Fridays. This identification is, in turn, an additional confirmation of our previous conclusion that the Eleutherius recension was translated from Syriac.

The land of Laura, or Illyria, is certainly “in the West,” as it is localized at the beginning of our story. Unfortunately, the province of Illyricum is located in the extreme west of the eastern part of the Roman Empire, in such a way that, from our perspective, it is “in the West” from everywhere. Thus, such geographic precision is of almost no help in specifying the locale of the place where Eleutherius narrated his story.

***Note 1: “Šeptail” and the Possibility  
of a Slavonic Translation from Syriac***

For the present study, it is irrelevant whether the Slavonic text of the Eleutherius recension is translated from a lost Greek intermediary or directly from the Syriac original. I mention this problem here only because of the reading “Šeptail” (and other similar readings) as the name of the town in which the dispute with the Jews took place. If this reading belongs to the original, the existence of a Greek intermediary is unlikely. It is hardly possible that the phoneme /š/ would be preserved after having

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all the toponyms given by the manuscripts. Unfortunately, Veselovsky did not know that the “Laura” of our text could be read as “Illyria.”

<sup>85</sup> Veselovsky’s knowledge of this *Life* was based on the texts (Latin and metaphrastic Greek) published in the *Acta Sanctorum* on 18 April (commemoration date according to the Roman calendar). Oddly enough, he mentions 15 December as a commemoration day of Eleutherius in the Byzantine rite but says that this is an erroneous (“по ошибке”) repetition of the commemoration of the Cubicularius from 4 August (Веселовский, “Freiheit—Элевферий,” 82). In fact, it is Veselovsky who is in error here.

passed through Greek transliteration. Normally in such cases, we have, in the Slavonic translations, the phoneme /s/. Given that the Eleutherius recension is a Syrian work written in Syriac, one has to conclude—on the assumption that a reading similar to “Šeptail” is the genuine one—that the Slavonic version is translated from Syriac. A detailed discussion of this issue would involve the problem of Syrian influence on the earliest Slavonic literature in general and especially the *Sitz im Leben* of another Slavonic document translated from Syriac, the so-called “Legend of Thessalonica.”<sup>86</sup> Such a discussion should be avoided here. Our only interest at present is the reading “Šeptail.”

The manuscripts give, for the corresponding toponym, three main possibilities (the following manuscript readings have been provided to me by Anissava Miltenova): the omission of the city’s name entirely (or a lacuna, as in *Пап*); the name “Drach”; and a group of readings which I consider to be similar to “Šeptail.” These readings are the following: ШЕПЪТАИЛЪ (*Šep’tail’*; *T1*); ШИПЪЛЪ (*Šipel’*; Sokolov’s ms and the unpublished ms Nr 53 of Miltenova’s list, no date available); ШИНЪТАЛЪ (*Šin’tal’*; Vienna 149, 16th century, and Adzharski 326, 17th century, both unpublished); and ШЦПАЛЪ (*Ščpal’*; *V10*). Moreover, I add to the same group the reading ВІИПІТАН (*Vipitan*) of *T2*: confusion between *ša* and *vēdi* is quite possible in the Croatian angular Glagolitic where the corresponding letters are written as **Ш** and **Ш**. *T2* is a Russian manuscript of the sixteenth century but it goes back to the South Slavic manuscript tradition.

The reading ШЦПАЛЪ obviously results from confusion between Ш and Ш. All the readings of this group except ШИНЪТАЛЪ have as the second consonant /p/, not /n/; one can take it almost for granted that /n/ appeared in ШИНЪТАЛЪ as a result of confusion (quite common) between Cyrillic *pokoj* (n) and *nyne* (n); it is /p/ that is genuine here. Finally, the readings differ in either the presence or absence of the third consonant, /t/, given that the fourth consonant, /l/, is present everywhere. However, the third consonant is mostly present (exceptions are ШИПЪЛЪ and ШЦПАЛЪ; both of them sound similar to some Slavic words, and so were probably created by medieval editors). Thus, the original consonantism of

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Лурье, В. “Около Солунской легенды. Из истории миссионерства в период монофелитской унии” [Lourić, В., “On the Context of the Legend of Thessalonica. From the history of the missionary activity in the period of the monothelite union”]. *Славяне и их соседи [The Slavs and Their Neighbours]*, вып. 6 (1996): 23–52.

the toponym can be recovered as /š/-/p/-/t/-/l/ (less likely, without /t/).

It is tempting to read these four consonants in Syriac as *šabtāyē* (ܫܒܬܝܝܐ) in the sense of σαββατιανοί (“Sabbatarians”).<sup>87</sup> The alternation of /b/ and /p/ is known in Syriac.<sup>88</sup> The ending *-il*, in this case, is an adaptation of an unusual, to the Slavic ear, ending *-ie* within the Slavonic tradition (where the proper names of Semitic origin with ending *-il* are numerous). If this hypothesis is correct, *Šeptail* was originally not the name of the city but rather its predicate: “the great city of the Sabbatarians.” It is probable, although not absolutely certain, that the city in question is Dyr-rachium; the Slavs had been settling near Dyr-rachium since at least the middle of the sixth century, even before the composition of our text, and so the toponym Drač in its Slavonic version may be the correct translation of the original city’s name.

Another question is, who are these “Sabbatarians”? In the context of Friday veneration, there is no need to see them as a separate sect; the ordinary Jewish population would represent a sufficiently distinct population. In fact, Jewish presence in Illyricum was rather strong and conflicts did occur.<sup>89</sup>

Finally, I would like to mention a possibility pointed out to me by S. A. Ivanov, namely, that the toponym is influenced by the South Slavic name for the Albanians, *шиптар* (*šiptar*, which now has a derogatory sense) derived from the Albanian *shqipe* “Albanian” through an archaic form *шшиптар* (*ššipetar*). The word *shqipe* goes back to the late proto-

<sup>87</sup> Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, col. 4049.

<sup>88</sup> In Syriac, as well as in other spoken Semitic languages, “...voiced consonants may become voiceless in contact with other consonants and in final position in the syllable” (Lipiński, E. *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar*, 104. OLA, 80. Leuven, 1997). Cf., in a Melkite ms, a case when an etymological /b/ is represented by /p/, also in the name of a day of the week: ܠܫܒܘܝܢ instead of ܠܫܒܘܝܢ “Friday” (Sachau, E. *Verzeichnis der syrischen Handschriften*. 2. Abt., 856 (Nr 310); *Die Handschriften-Verzeichnisse der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*, 23; Berlin, 1899). I owe this reference to N. Seleznyov.

<sup>89</sup> The laws concerning the Jews issued by Arcadius (397) and Theodosius II (ca 420) in the *Codex Theodosianus* (16.8.1 and 21) are both addressed to the Prefects in Illyricum; cf., for general context, Katz, T. S., ed. *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 4, 1043. Cambridge etc., 2006.

Albanian period (6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century) and is, in turn, a calque of the Slavic word *slověne* “Slavs,” both having the meaning “those who speak clearly.”<sup>90</sup> The history of the South Slavic *шлугар* is not clear enough to permit any further evaluation of Ivanov’s hypothesis.

### 2.3. The Hagiographical Dossier of Eleutherius of Illyricum: an Introduction

We have recognised the presence of St Eleutherius, bishop of Illyricum, in our “Slavic” Eleutherius; now we must look at the hagiographical dossier of the latter and then study both Eleutherii in parallel. This will lead us more closely to the Arabs and the Arabian Peninsula.

So far, not all the known texts about Eleutherius have been published and, most probably, not all have even been found. Judging from the published texts and manuscript descriptions, four of the recensions are the most important: one Greek, one Latin, one Syriac, and one Slavonic. These will be reviewed below. Some important data are also preserved in Syriac liturgical calendars and in the Ethiopian Synaxarium; they will be mentioned below as required. Our Eleutherius seems to be absolutely unknown to the Coptic tradition. His Armenian short *Life* is derived from the known Greek recensions<sup>91</sup> and is of no particular interest for us. The Georgian texts on Eleutherius are unexplored. The same is true for the Arabic tradition despite the fact that it might turn out to be of special importance.<sup>92</sup> Finally, there is a tradition of the

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<sup>90</sup> Orel, V. *Albanian Etymological Dictionary*, 434. Leiden/Boston/Köln, 1998.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. its text, translation, and notes in Bayan, G. *Le Synaxaire arménien de Ter Israel. V. Mois de Kalotz*, 48[734]–51[737]. PO 18, 1; N 86. Paris, 1924 [repr. Turnhout, 1974] (under 7 Kaloc’ = 15 December).

<sup>92</sup> Cf., in the ms *Sinaiticus arab.* 398 (Melkite), the title of the *Life* where the proper names are severely garbled: *وتاريوس* for “Eleutherius” (the first syllable is dropped, probably because of confusion with the article *al-*) and *انحاوس* for Anthia: Gibson, M. D. *Catalogue of the Arabic Mss. in the Convent of S. Catharine on Mount Sinai*, 66–68, here 67. *Studia Sinaitica*, III. London, 1894 (I am grateful to N. Seleznyov for this reference). This ms will soon be available on line.

eneration of St Eleutherius' relics in Constantinople. It turns out to be at odds with the data of his Greek *Life*, and so will be considered in comparison with the latter.

### **2.3.1. The Byzantine Tradition and Constantinople**

The Byzantine tradition is represented by the *Lives* (long and short) in Greek, Latin, Slavonic, and also Syriac.<sup>93</sup> The Greek recensions are BHG 568–571b, of which two are published: BHG 570 (pre-metaphrastic, seemingly the oldest one) and BHG 571 (one of the two metaphrastic recensions). It is BHG 570 which is of primary interest for us. There is a critical edition by Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri with an important study, "Il testo originale della leggenda di S. Eleuterio."<sup>94</sup> There are, in addition, short notices on Eleutherius in various recensions of the Synaxarium of Constantinople which are of interest because of their various spellings of the proper names.

The Latin recensions are BHL 2450–2452 (four recensions, among which one is unpublished, BHL 2451a). There are, moreover, several documents concerning the later Eleutherius cult in the Roman Church (cf. BHL 2453–2453c). According to Franchi de' Cavalieri, the three published recensions go back to two Latin translations from Greek. The location of Eleutherius' diocese in Illyricum is preserved only in a part of the Latin manuscript tradition. Two other variants are names of the Italian towns Rieti and Etana; these adaptations are certainly insertions by later Italian editors.

The Syriac recension BHO 266<sup>95</sup> is similar to BHG 570, especially in the variants proper to the codex *Barberinianus* III 37,<sup>96</sup> which means that the Syriac text is based on a Greek text that is

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<sup>93</sup> And also by an Armenian short *Life* (see above) and, presumably, by a number of texts in Georgian.

<sup>94</sup> Franchi de' Cavalieri, P. *I martiri di S. Teodoro e S. Ariadne, con un' Appendice sul testo originale del Martirio di S. Eleuterio*, 149–161. Studi e testi, 6. Roma, 1901. Cf. *ibid.*, 137–46.

<sup>95</sup> Published in Bedjan, P., *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, VI, 417–30. Parisii/Lipsiae, 1896.

<sup>96</sup> Franchi de' Cavalieri, *I martiri*, 142, n. 1.

somewhat later than the earliest Greek text available to us. It is a witness of the Byzantine cult of Eleutherius rather than an independent Syriac hagiographical work.

Among the variant readings common to the *Barberinianns* and the Syriac version, the most interesting to us is the indication of the city in Illyricum where Eleutherius was the bishop (all other recensions are silent on this). It is Sirmium, the most important city of the entire province and one of the locations of the imperial court in the fourth century. No wonder that such a reading is proper to a later manuscript tradition and is not genuine. Appointing a twenty-year-old bishop unmentioned in any other source to such a city was apparently something of a stretch even for hagiographers.

There are three Slavonic recensions of the long *Life*<sup>97</sup> although only one of them is published.<sup>98</sup> There are also short (Synaxarium) recensions,<sup>99</sup> seemingly of no particular interest. The unpublished recensions described by Klementina Ivanova preserve the location in Illyricum. However, the published recension contains a quite different location, which will be discussed below.

In Constantinople, there was a martyrion (a church on the tomb) of St Eleutherius in Xerolophos, allegedly (according to the legends collected in the *Patria Constantinopolitana*) constructed by the emperor Arcadius (395–408). The first historical witness to its exist-

<sup>97</sup> Иванова, К. *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Balcano-Slavica*, 360. София, 2008 (in Bulgarian). There are no additional recensions in the Russian tradition: Творогов, О. В. *Переводные жития русской книжности XI–XV веков. Каталог* [Tvorogov, O. V. *The Translated Lives of the Russian Manuscript Tradition of the Eleventh-Fifteenth Centuries. A Catalogue*], 55. Москва/С.-Петербург, 2008.

<sup>98</sup> By S. O. Dolgov in: *Великие Минеи Четии, собранные Всероссийским митрополитом Макарием. Декабрь, дни 6–17* [*The Great Menologion Collected by the Metropolitan of All Russia Makarij. December, Days 6–17*], cols. 1030–40. Москва, 1904. The editor did not know Franchi de' Cavalieri's edition, and so considered the premetaphrastic Greek original of this *Life* as unpublished; he compared his text with the Latin version BHL 2450.

<sup>99</sup> In the Russian *Prolog* book (a kind of Synaxarium) under 15 December, cf. Dolgov's edition, *ibid.*, cols. 1040–41; there are also many editions, from the seventeenth century on, of the whole *Prolog* book.

tence is a story preserved as ch. 145 of the *Pratum Spirituale* of John Moschus.<sup>100</sup> The story, written down in the early seventh century, goes back to the time of patriarch of Constantinople Gennadius (458–471). The patriarch complained to the saint about one of his clerics, who was serving in this church of St Eleutherius but whose behaviour was not just bad but even criminal. Through a messenger, the patriarch asked the saint about the choice of either improving this cleric's behaviour or dismissing him entirely. The clergyman in question then miraculously died.<sup>101</sup> What is most important to us is the fact that the messenger of the patriarch speaks to the martyr "addressing his sepulchre" (προσέχων εἰς τὴν κόγχην). Thus, the church was actually a matryrium preserving relics of the saint. This fact is in blatant contradiction to the *Life* of Eleutherius—there is no account of the provenance of these relics in Constantinople.

According to all the recensions of the *Life*, the martyrdom of Eleutherius and his mother, Anthia, took place in Rome, but the relics were immediately taken away by members of the martyr bishop's flock and translated to his diocese. The latter is, in most of the recensions, somewhere in Illyricum (apart from the Italian alternatives mentioned above, there is another alternative which will be discussed in the next section). Thus, according to the existing *Lives*, the relics of the saint cannot remain in Constantinople (even if we suppose that "Rome" in his Passion is a substitute for "New Rome"). One might propose that the martyr of Xerolophos is some other Eleutherius, but Eleutherius of Illyricum is celebrated, in the Byzantine rite, on 15 December and a *synaxis* in Xerolophos is on the same day, together with another *synaxis* on 20 or 21 July. Thus, according to the tradition preserved by the Synaxarium of Constantinople and also by the *Typicon of the Great Church* (both are dated to the tenth century in their earliest available recensions), St Eleutherius of Xerolophos is indeed Eleutherius of Illyricum.

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<sup>100</sup> See, for general information on the church, Janin, R. *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire Byzantin. Première partie: Le siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat Œcuménique, t. III, Les églises et les monastères*, 110. Publications de l'Institut français d'études byzantines. Paris, 1969.

<sup>101</sup> PG 87/3, 3009 A. The story was often quoted by later Byzantine writers; see references in Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique*.



Janin suggests that the July date is probably the commemoration of the consecration of the church. I would prefer another explanation. Our witnesses of the identification between Eleutherius of Illyricum and the martyr of Xerolophos are very late, not earlier than the tenth century. There are absolutely no data on Constantinople in the texts of Eleutherius' dossier, where, on the contrary, a different location for his relics is specified. It is reasonable to assume that the celebration of St Eleutherius in Xerolophos on 15 December is a late development whereas the July dates go back to the authentic commemoration day of the martyr whose relics were placed here. In other words, Eleutherius of Xerolophos is a different Eleutherius who was identified with the martyr of Illyricum at a later date.

### 2.3.2. *Hierapolis*

The only published Slavonic recension of the long *Life* is distinguished by a peculiar geography. Illyricum is mentioned nowhere. Instead, after having been consecrated bishop, Eleutherius was appointed in a "monastery." When the martyr died, his relics were taken away by the people from this "monastery." However, at the end of the episode with the relics, there appears the following sentence in which the syntax is severely damaged: *Се же преданъ бысть Римъ во Ераполи, при цари Андрѣанъ*.<sup>102</sup> This sentence has a remote equivalent in BHG 570: ἐπράχθη δὲ ταῦτα ἐν Ῥωμῆ μὴνὶ δεκεμβρίῳ πεντεκαδεκάτῃ.<sup>103</sup> One can tentatively reconstruct the initial words of the original of the corrupted phrase in Slavonic as ταῦτα δὲ παρεδόθη... Then there follows the word "Rome" in Nominative or Accusative, which does not make any sense; the following words are "...in Hierapolis, under Emperor Hadrian." The whole sentence is untranslatable due to corruption, but the mention of Hierapolis in the context of the deposition of the relics is, at any rate, clear.

In all the recensions, the relics were deposited in the place of the bishopric ministry of Eleutherius which is, in this particular Slavonic recension, some "monastery" (evidently, a substitute for a

<sup>102</sup> Dolgov's edition (see n. 98), col. 1040.

<sup>103</sup> Franchi de' Cavalieri, *I martiri*, 161.10.

toponym). Our corrupted sentence causes us to wonder if the original toponym is Hierapolis. It is *a priori* the most likely that such a strange word represents an undigested remnant of a previous recension in which each reference to “Hierapolis” was replaced with the word “monastery” by a later editor. Theoretically, this supposition can be verified, given that we are dealing with a typical *Passion épique* where the hagiographer is working within a matrix (coined by Michel van Esbroeck as the “hagiographical substrate”<sup>104</sup>) imprinted with the hagiographer’s place and time. The “epic” hagiographer is much less free in his choice of episodes and motives than the writer of a *Passion historique*, in the same manner as the fairy tale is not as rich in motives and images as the historical novel.

Indeed there is, in the *Life* of Eleutherius, an episode shared by all recensions which must be read as a hallmark of the place of origin. Felix, the officer sent to arrest Eleutherius, was converted. When both were on their way to Rome, in a place where water was available, Felix asked to be baptised by Eleutherius. The hagiographer states (according to all recensions although in somewhat varying wording) that this scene repeats the baptism of the eunuch of the queen of the Ethiopians by Apostle Philip (Acts 8:36–38).<sup>105</sup> In the language of the “epic” hagiography, this scene is to be read as presenting Eleutherius as a second Apostle Philip, which, in turn, would make sense only in a local tradition in which Apostle Philip is considered as the founder of the corresponding Church. Several different locations would theoretically be possible here but Illyricum is certainly not one of them (no legend about Apostle Philip as the founder of the Church of Illyricum is known).

However, the main place of the cult of Apostle Philip was Hierapolis in Phrygia, near modern Pamukkale in Turkey. From the early fifth century, there was, in Hierapolis in Phrygia, a great martyrdom of Apostle Philip, who was reputedly buried in the middle of this building. The ruins of this martyrdom are present to this day. The tradition about the grave of Apostle Philip in Hierapolis is not the only tradition about his place of burial, but it is traceable to the

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<sup>104</sup> van Esbroeck, M. “Le substrat hagiographique de la mission khazare de Constantin-Cyrille.” *AB* 104 (1986): 337–48.

<sup>105</sup> Franchi de’ Cavalieri, *I martiri*, 151.4–8.

very early accounts of the Apostle.<sup>106</sup> What is most important for our purpose is that Hierapolis is the place of the martyr death and burial of Apostle Philip according to the greatest document of his hagiographical dossier, the fifteen *Acta Philippi* (*CANT* 250),<sup>107</sup> cf. especially Act XV, Martyrium (*CANT* 250.II). In addition to the texts, this tradition is commemorated by the great martyrdom of Philip in Hierapolis of Phrygia. This tradition of Hierapolis<sup>108</sup> is the mainstream tradition available in Byzantium which is preserved in the documents in Greek, Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic (in the documents closely related to the *Acta Philippi*, see *CANT* 250), Latin (*CANT* 254), and even “Old” (Early Modern) Irish (*CANT* 255). It is not, however, part of the mainstream tradition of the anti-Chalcedonian milieu (the Copto-Arabo-Ethiopic tradition of *CANT* 252 and the Syriac tradition of *CANT* 253<sup>109</sup>), where Apostle Philip was put to death in Africa (sometimes, with precision, “in

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<sup>106</sup> Kreitzer, L. J. “Epaphras and Philip: the Undercover Evangelists of Hierapolis.” In Wooden, R. G., T. R. Ashley, and R. S. Wilson, eds. *You Will Be My Witnesses. A Festschrift in Honor of the Reverend Dr. Allison A. Trites on the Occasion of His Retirement*, 127–43. Macon, GA, 2003. It is more natural to consider the early Christian traditions about Philip as pertaining to a unique person; cf. Matthews, Ch. R. *Philip: Apostle and Evangelist: Configurations of a Tradition*. Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, 105; Leiden/Boston/Köln, 2002.

<sup>107</sup> See, first of all, Bovon, F., B. Bouvier, and F. Amsler, eds. *Acta Philippi. Textus*. Corpus Christianorum, Series apocryphorum, 11. Turnhout, 1999.

<sup>108</sup> Sometimes explicitly located in Phrygia but very often not; some texts contain only the name of Hierapolis, some others add “in Asia.”

<sup>109</sup> To add to the bibliography on *CANT* 253, see van Esbroeck, M. “Les Actes syriaques de Philippe à Carthagène en version arabe.” *Oriens christianus* 79 (1995): 120–45. There is another Syrian and Armenian (anti-Chalcedonian) tradition, according to which he died and was buried in Pisidia. Cf. van Esbroeck, M. “Neuf listes d’apôtres orientales.” *Augustinianum* 34 (1994): 109–99, here list V (Armenian), p. 182/136 (txt/tr.); list VIII (Syriac; this 8<sup>th</sup>-century list contains the Ephesian tradition about the tomb of the Theotokos near Ephesus), p. 188/142 (txt/tr.); list IX (Syriac), p. 193/154 (txt/tr.).

Carthage”) but his corpse was miraculously translated to Jerusalem. Frédéric Amsler argues that the latter tradition, too, has its point of departure in the *Acta Philippi*, namely, Act III, where Philip is said to go to “the country of the Candaces,” that is, to Nubia (an allusion to Acts 8:27 *sqq* is implied), but “Candaces” was subsequently corrupted into “Carthages” which then resulted in “Africa.”<sup>110</sup>

The *Life* of Eleutherius is also patterned after the *Acta Philippi* in another episode, when Eleutherius is preaching to the wild beasts and the beasts are praising God.<sup>111</sup> Compare, in the *Acta Philippi*, Acts VIII and XII where the kid of a wild goat and the leopard in the wilderness become believers (leopards are also enumerated in Eleutherius’ list of the wild beasts touched by his preaching). There is a parallel episode also in the Syriac *Historia Philippi* (CANT 253) with an ox. However, all the converted beasts in the Philip tradition are able to speak (and even to argue with the apostle, to be transformed into a human-like image, and to take communion, as in *Acta Philippi* XII), whereas the beasts in the *Life* of Eleutherius are, naturally, unable to speak; instead, they raise their right paws as a sign of praising the Lord. This, apparently, is an indication that Eleutherius is similar to Philip, but not as great as the apostle.

There are also, in the *Life* of Eleutherius, several marks of his “secondary rank” with respect to Apostle Philip. First of all is the attribution of his death to Emperor Hadrian. The *Passions épiques* are dated, in their texts, to one or another emperor depending on the rank of the martyr (the “epic” hagiography does not show interest in the absolute chronology in any historical sense but it does show a great deal of interest in its own symbolic way). The first-rank apostles must die under Nero or, at least, Vespasian. Hadrian is precisely the appropriate emperor for apostles of secondary rank, in contrast to the emperors Decius and Diocletian, who are appropriate for the ordinary heroes of the *Passions épiques*.<sup>112</sup> To be mar-

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<sup>110</sup> Amsler, F. *Acta Philippi. Commentarius*, 149. Corpus Christianorum, Series apocryphorum, 12. Turnhout, 1999.

<sup>111</sup> Franchi de’ Cavalieri, *I martiri*, 157.

<sup>112</sup> See van Esbroeck, M. “Le saint comme symbole.” In Hackel, S., ed. *The Byzantine Saint. University of Birmingham XIV Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, 128–40. Studies Supplementary to *Sobornost*, 5. London,

tyred by Emperor Hadrian in Rome indicates a very high rank for a local saint but is, nevertheless, not equal to that of the apostles. Another detail with the same meaning is the reference to Eleutherius' mother, Anthia, as a companion of Apostle Paul.<sup>113</sup>

At any rate, some traditions associated with Philip are reworked in the *Life* of Eleutherius, the toponym Hierapolis certainly among them. Thus, it must be a genuine reading of the *Life*.

We have reached this conclusion mostly in a philological way but, from the historical point of view, it is rather difficult. One can easily imagine Eleutherius as an apostolic figure patterned after Apostle Philip and presented as the apostle of some locality. One cannot imagine, however, that it was to Hierapolis that Eleutherius' relics were translated by his flock (as stated in his *Life*); Hierapolis already had apostolic relics of her own, and there was no room for Eleutherius'. The name of Hierapolis appears in the *Life* of Eleutherius in the context of its Philip-related background; because, according to the same tradition, Philip himself was the apostle in Hierapolis, this necessarily precludes the possibility of Eleutherius' apostolate there. This, in turn, should exclude the deposition of Eleutherius' relics in Hierapolis, given that the relics were deposited in the place of his apostolate. Thus, before explaining this difficulty, we have to note that:

- (1) The *Life* of Eleutherius was composed with no relation to the real relics of Eleutherius (even if he was a somewhat historical person and not a purely hagiographical symbol);
- (2) The hagiographer and his audience were not aware of nor were they interested in the real ecclesiastical history and the real sanctuaries of Hierapolis mentioned in the *Life* (regardless of the identification of this city with Hierapolis in Phrygia or any other homonymic city).

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1981. Generally, on the role of absolute dating in the "epic" hagiography, see Delehayé, H. *Les Passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*, 173–177; *Subsidia hagiographica*, 13 B. Bruxelles, 1966.

<sup>113</sup> Franchi de' Cavalieri, *I martiri*, 149.

In meeting these two conditions, the hagiographer was avoiding the choice between Eleutherius and Philip as the apostle of Hierapolis who is present through the deposition of his relics here. He was able, in some way, to reuse the Philip-Hierapolis tradition by replacing Philip with Eleutherius. Of course, such a substitution was impossible in any milieu which was in contact with Hierapolis in Phrygia, but was quite possible in any milieu satisfying condition (2) above.

It is important to note that location of Eleutherius' ministry in "Hierapolis," despite its inadmissibility as a historical fact, cannot be void of historical value. The author of a *Passion épique* is much less free in the choice of the details of its narrative than the "historical" hagiographer. The "epic" hagiography is working according to laws similar to those of the fairy tale or the dream, and so its historical value can be discovered in the historical circumstances of the hagiographer himself. Thus, if a hagiographer places his completely or mostly fictional character in Hierapolis, it is certainly meaningful for him and, therefore, for us. And, therefore, we have to find this Hierapolis, wherever it may be.

#### 2.4. The "Wolf of Arabia" and Arabian Connexions of Eleutherius

One hint is provided by the text of the *Life* of Eleutherius: addressing his torturer, Emperor Hadrian, Eleutherius uses a series of epithets including the phrase "Wolf of Arabia (λύκε τῆς Ἀραβίας)."<sup>114</sup> The expression itself is a biblical one (Hab 1:8 and Zeph 3:3), proper to the Septuagint due to a mistranslation of זאבי ערב ("evening wolves"); the words *ereb* "evening" and *arab* "Arabia" are complete homographs in consonant writing. The original sense of the expression is explained in Zeph 3:3 ("they gnaw not the bones till the morrow"), and it is translated correctly in the Targums on the corresponding books, the Peshitta and the Vulgate.

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<sup>114</sup> Franchi de' Cavalieri, *I martiri*, 153.4. The same epithet appears in the Slavonic (*Великие Мучени Четии... Декабрь, дни 6–17*, col. 1033: волче аравитьскіи) and Syriac (Bedjan, *Acta...*, VI, 422.2: ܠܘܟܝܢܐ ܕܐܪܒܝܐ) versions.

Despite its biblical provenance, the expression “wolf of Arabia” was not commonplace in Christian hagiography. The usual expression, “rapacious wolf” (λύκος ἄρπαξ), was also biblical (Gen 49:29; Mt 7:15; cf. Ez 22:27 and Jn 10:12) and was common to all versions of the Bible; it was also used in the Latin version of the *Life* of Eleutherius (*lupus rapax*).<sup>115</sup> The reading “wolf of Arabia” is considered by Franchi de’ Cavalieri as genuine on textological grounds (as the reading shared by most of the witnesses and, I would add, as the *lectio difficilior*), whereas the reading “rapacious wolf” is a result of standardisation.

The “wolves of Arabia” are rare in the literature of the Byzantine commonwealth with the exception of the exegetical context and quotation from Hab 1:8 or Zeph 3:3. “Wolf of Arabia” as a pejorative marker is almost exclusively connected with the Arabs or the Muslims.<sup>116</sup> Thus, in the middle of the sixth century, Cyril of Scythopolis wrote in his *Life of Euthymius*, ch. 24, on newly baptised Saracens: “those who were formerly wolves of Arabia are becoming (members) of the spiritual flock of Christ.”<sup>117</sup>

Apart from the *Life* of Eleutherius, the phrase “wolf of Arabia” as an epithet describing a torturer is known to me in the *Martyrium of Parasceve* (and this occurrence, also connected to Arabia, will be dealt with below, 3.1.2), and in the Armenian *Martyrium of Chosrow of Ganjak* († 1167, written by a contemporary author),

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<sup>115</sup> Cf., on this reading in the Latin recensions, Franchi de’ Cavalieri, *I martiri*, 143, where he argues that this reading was already in the (lost) Greek original of the Latin versions.

<sup>116</sup> The only exception I have found in the on-line database of *TLG* is an epigram of John Mauropodes, 11<sup>th</sup> century, where a man tearing up his own manuscript is compared with an Arabian wolf (οὗτος δ’ ὁ δεινὸς τῆς Ἀραβίας λύκος): *Epigram* 51.4 (de Lagarde, P. *Joannis Euchaitorum Metropolitae quae in codice Vaticano Graeco 676 supersunt; Abhandlungen der Historisch-Philologische Classe der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, 28. Göttingen, 1882 [repr. Amsterdam, 1979] (quoted according to *CPG* 2709.004).

<sup>117</sup> Schwartz, E. *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, 24.20-22. *Texte und Untersuchungen...*, 49.2. Leipzig, 1939: οἱ ποτὲ λύκοι τῆς Ἀραβίας, ἔπειτα τῆς λογικῆς ποιμνῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ γενόμενοι.

where the hagiographer labels as an “Arabian wolf (ϩⲱⲓⲓⲗⲱⲣⲱⲣⲱⲥⲓⲛ)” a Persian muezzin who saw at night a brilliant light on the grave of the martyr.<sup>118</sup>

Taken together with the mention of Arabia, another detail of the *Life* of Eleutherius reveals Arabian connexions in the very name of Ἐλευθέριος, which means “free.” The possible historical meaning of this name will be discussed below (2.9.3) but at this point, we are in a position to discuss its symbolic meaning. The existence of such meaning is explicit in the *Life* itself (in all recensions).

At the beginning of the interrogation, Hadrian asks Eleutherius (here in a literal translation): “Eleutherius, how you who have such a liberty have committed yourself to the craziest religion and venerate a god who was nailed down by the mortal humans? (Ἐλευθέριε, πῶς τοιαύτης ἐλευθερίας τυγχάνων ἐξέδωκας ἑαυτὸν μανιωδεστάτῃ θρησκείᾳ καὶ σέβῃ θεόν, ὅστις ὑπὸ θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀνηλώθη;)” Eleutherius remains silent but Hadrian insists. Then, “...Eleutherius, after having looked upwards to heaven and made the seal of Christ [= sign of the cross], started to say: ‘The very liberty is to know the creator of heaven and earth who has produced everything’ (ὁ δὲ Ἐλευθέριος ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ποιήσας τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ σφραγίδα, ἤρξατο λέγειν· Ἐλευθερία ἐστὶν αὕτη, τὸ γινώσκειν τὸν ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ τε καὶ γῆς, τὸν πάντα δεδημιουργηκότα.)”<sup>119</sup>

This entire passage is not common to hagiographical writing in general; in fact, it is rather unusual. However, it has a parallel in the *Life of Euthymius* of Cyril of Scythopolis, ch. 18, dealing with the Arabs baptised together with their phylarchs Aspebetos (Peter in

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<sup>118</sup> Մանանդեան, Յ., Աճառեան, Հ., *Հայոց նոր Վիպաները (1155–1843)* [Manandean, Y., and H. Ačaṙean. *The Armenian New Martyrs (1155–1843)*], 29.27. Վալարշապատ [Valaršapat], 1903; cf. Тер-Давтян, К. С. *Армянские жития и мученичества V–XVII в.в.* [Ter-Davtyan, K. S. *The Armenian Lives and Martyriums of the fifth—sixteenth centuries*], 318–25. Ереван [Yerevan], 1994.

<sup>119</sup> Franchi de’ Cavalieri, *I martiri*, 151.15–152.3.



baptism) and his son Terebon.<sup>120</sup> Euthymius baptised Terebon and the others and “...dismissed them not as the Agarenes and the Ismaelites but as the descendants of Sarah and the inheritors of the Promise [cf. Gal 4:22–31], transferred by baptism from slavery to liberty (...ἀπέλυσεν οὐκέτι Ἀγαρηνοὺς καὶ Ἰσμαηλίτας, ἀλλὰ τῆς Σάρρας ἀπογόνους καὶ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας κληρονόμους γεγονότας διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος ἀπὸ δουλείας εἰς ἐλευθερίαν μετενεχθέντας).”<sup>121</sup> This text shows that, at least in the time of Cyril of Scythopolis, there was a tradition of interpreting the baptism of the Arab tribes as giving them liberty: they become free-born from Sarah instead of being born into slavery from Hagar.

The two “Arabian connexions” detected here are not enough to state definitively that the *Passion épique* on Eleutherius relates to some processes of conversion among the Arab tribes but, at least, they are enough to cause one to consider such a possibility seriously. Conclusive proof, however, would be indicated by finding a link between the three areas: Eleutherius’ dossier, the Arabs, and Hierapolis.

It is also necessary to add that the motives of freedom *vs* slavery, together with a motive of a bishop confessing and preaching Christianity outside of his see are also found in the Syriac legend of the personified Friday and Bishop John (see above, 1.9). The roots of these two legends of the veneration of Friday must be common.

## 2.5. Hierapolis and Arabia in a Peculiar Tradition about Apostle Philip

Students of the traditions related to Apostle Philip have not paid sufficient attention to an Armenian source published in 1994 by Michel van Esbroeck. This is an Armenian list of the apostles<sup>122</sup> in

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<sup>120</sup> On the historical analysis of these facts, see Shahîd, I. *Byzantium and the Arabs in the fifth century*, 40–49. Washington, D.C., 1989 [repr. 2006].

<sup>121</sup> Schwartz, *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, 21.8–10. It is interesting that this kind of biblical interpretation seems not to be shared by the Arabs themselves, who were proud to be descendants of Ishmael; cf. Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the fifth century*, 209, n. 10.

<sup>122</sup> List III in van Esbroeck, “Neuf listes,” 120–25, 166–69. No reference to this list is known to me in later scholarly publications.

which the role of Philip is especially prominent: he is the first apostle after James. The prominence of James instead of Peter is not especially unusual in the Orient, but Philip in the second place immediately after James has no analogues except the tradition of the miraculous burial of Philip in Jerusalem, the city of James (*CANT* 252 and 253), which implies a specific and close relationship between Philip and James. This list is preserved in the manuscript *Matenadaran* 2678 (dated to 1426–1476) and is attributed to patriarch of Antioch Michael the Syrian, a renowned historian, although the genuine list of the apostles in Michael the Syrian, even in the Armenian version, is quite different. In its present form, the Armenian list contains several details proper to the Armenian tradition, but its core, as shown by van Esbroeck, is a Syriac list of apostles of the late sixth century; its Syriac tradition was anti-Chalcedonian and shared some Julianist features.<sup>123</sup> Below, I continue van Esbroeck's analysis.

The account of the apostles begins with the event of the Pentecost in the High Chamber of Sion where James, the bishop of Jerusalem, performed the Eucharist for the very first time. Then it continues (ch. 1): “Et le début de cette Église matérielle fut la sainte chambre haute, et le début de l'intégration des païens la même première année, celle de l'Eunuque Couchite (քուշացի), auquel Philippe donna le nom de Ροτ᾽αμϞος (Փոթասփոս), et qui lui aussi commença à prêcher aux Couchites (քուշացոցն) de croire à l'évangile.”<sup>124</sup> About the destinations of Philip, the text says

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<sup>123</sup> See van Esbroeck, “Neuf listes,” 124. Julianism (called “aphthartodocetism” by its adversaries) was one of the two main anti-Chalcedonian movements beginning in the 520s, especially strong in Armenia, where it was officially accepted by the Second Council of Dwin in 555 at the insistence of a Syrian bishop, ʿAbd-Isho. See, most recently, Louré, B. “Julianism,” in: Uhlig, S., ed. *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 3: He–N, 308–10. Wiesbaden, 2007.

<sup>124</sup> van Esbroeck, “Neuf listes,” 166/121(txt/tr.); van Esbroeck transliterates the name of the eunuch as “Photaphos,” where the missing “m” is a typo. The name Փոթասփոս is known elsewhere in the Armenian tradition. In the Byzantine and Coptic traditions this eunuch is also among the apostles but—unique case!—with no name at all.

the following (ch. 7): “Et saint Philippe circulant sur ces rivages de la mer fut achevé aux frontières d’Antioche à Mambidž qui est Hierapolis.”<sup>125</sup>

Apostle Philip died, according to this document, in another Hierapolis, that of Syria, called Mabbug in Syriac and Manbeğ (Menbiğ) in Arabic. The whole geography of this passage is not as absurd as it seems at first glance. Mabbug was certainly a metropolitan city belonging to the patriarchate of Antioch. However, it is very distant from the sea (about 200 km or more, depending on one’s route). What is even more important, Apostle Philip has never been considered as either apostle of Mabbug or even as a saint especially venerated in the city.<sup>126</sup> Thus, this tradition hardly goes back to Mabbug itself.

The words used in the Armenian text for “Cushites” are not Armenian but transliterations of Syriac ܡܘܨܝܘܬܝܢ going back to the Syriac text of Acts 8:27 (in Armenian, the normal term for “Ethiopian” is Էթովպացի and for “Ethiopia,” Եթովպացիք). The Syriac word covered the whole area allotted to the Cushites in the Bible (Nubia, Ethiopia, South Arabia), so the eunuch’s destination in our Syro-Armenian text does not contradict the “common knowledge” of the epoch, according to which this

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<sup>125</sup> van Esbroeck, “Neuf listes,” 168/122 (txt/tr.); van Esbroeck, quite naturally, notes: “L’auteur de la liste ne connaît plus très bien la géographie de l’ouest: il confond l’Hierapolis de Phrygie où Philippe est souvent envoyé, avec Mabboug, et considère l’endroit comme proche de la mer par rapport à Antioche” (ibid., 123–24).

<sup>126</sup> The patrons of the city were Apostles Peter and Paul; near the city’s walls there was a tomb of Apostle Matthew. See Goossens, G. *Hiérapolis de Syrie. Essai de monographie historique*, 175. Recueil de travaux publiés par les membres de Conf. d’histoire et philologie de l’Université de Louvain, III, 12. Louvain, 1943 (cf. de Halleux, A. *Philoxène de Mabbog. Sa vie, ses écrits, sa théologie*, 34; Universitas Catholica Lovaniensis. Dissertationes ad gradum magistri in Facultate Theologica vel in Facultate Iuris Canonici consequendum conscriptae, III, 8. Louvain, 1963); on post-Chalcedonian Hierapolis, see Goossens, *Hiérapolis de Syrie*, 174–80.

knowledge” of the epoch, according to which this eunuch became apostle of South Arabia and Ceylon (Taprobana).<sup>127</sup>

For the sixth century, we are able to point out a diocese of the metropolis of Mabbug of the patriarchate of Antioch, which was located in a coastal area, namely, the diocese of Nağrān in Ḥimyar (Nağrān was in fact a group of oases traditionally referred to as a city). It was established by Philoxenus, bishop of Mabbug, near 500 when he consecrated its first Bishop Paul. After the martyr death of this bishop in Zafār, the capital of the Ḥimyarites, shortly before 518, Philoxenus consecrated the second bishop of Nağrān, also Paul, martyred together with most of his flock in 523.<sup>128</sup> The establishment of a diocese in Nağrān around the year 500 is corroborated by the historian John Diakrinomenos, who was writing in the time of Emperor Anastasius (491–518); he stated that, under Anastasius, the Ḥimyarites, “...after having become Christians, asked and

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<sup>127</sup> See an article based primarily on Coptic and Byzantine sources: Störck, L. “Der Eunuch der Kandake als Missionar Südarabiens und Ceylons.” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 26 (1998): 239–50 (I am grateful to A. Muraviev for this reference).

<sup>128</sup> I follow the chronology as established in Marrassini, P. “Note di storia etiopica. 3. Problemi cronologici relativi ai fatti di Nağrān.” *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 2 (1979): 179–86, 190–96; de Blois, F. “The date of the ‘martyrs of Nağrān’.” *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 1 (1990): 110–28; and Beaucamp, J., F. Briquel-Chatonnet, et Ch. Robin. “La persécution des chrétiens de Nağrān et la chronologie Ḥimyarite.” *Aram* 11–12 (1999–2000): 15–83 (thus, I do not accept the earlier chronology proposed by Irfan Shahīd and supported by Paul Devos and Michel van Esbroeck). For a review of the sources and scholarship, see Bausi, A. “Introduzione.” In Bausi, A., Gori, A. *Tradizioni orientali del “Martirio di Areta.” La Prima recensione araba e la versione etiopica. Edizione critica e traduzione*, 1–18; Quaderni di semitistica, 27. Firenze, 2006. I was unable to take into account the most recent publication of the 2008 colloquium on the martyrs of Nağrān: Beaucamp, J., F. Briquel-Chatonnet, et Ch. J. Robin, eds. *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux V<sup>e</sup> et VI<sup>e</sup> siècles: regards croisés sur les sources*. Monographies (Centre de recherche d’histoire et civilisation de Byzance), 32; Le massacre de Najrān, 2. Paris, 2010.

received a bishop (ἐπὶ Ἀναστασίου δὲ χριστιανίσαντες ἐπίσκοπον αἰτήσαντες ἔλαβον).<sup>129</sup>

Neither Naḡrān nor Zafār were coastal cities, but Ḥimyar as a whole was a coastal country; it was connected to the external world, first of all, via coastal (through Ḥiḡāz) and maritime routes. The latter was especially true for the contacts with Ethiopia (Aksum), whose garrison in Zafar, also martyred in 523, constituted the main part of the local Christian community.

The hagiographical interests of the Syrian missionaries working in South Arabia were not the same as those of the residents of Mabbug. They had to establish a connexion between South Arabia and Mabbug-Hierapolis, and, for this purpose, the figure of Apostle Philip was especially attractive: on the one side, he was the apostle of the apostle of South Arabia, the Ethiopian (“Cushite”) eunuch; on the other side, he was, indeed, the apostle of Hierapolis. Therefore, the “confusion” between two Hierapoleis in our text is a deliberate replacement reinforced by a symbolic geography in which a different coastal area is inscribed onto the metropolis of Mabbug. It was the Syrian missionaries in Ḥimyar who were interested in seeing Apostle Philip in another Hierapolis.

From this point, the next stage of our inquiry suggests itself. These Syrian missionaries were certainly interested in producing hagiographical legends of their own; without such legends, no mission was possible. Given that the *Life* of Eleutherius presents its hero as a new Philip in Hierapolis and, moreover, has some Arabian connexions, we have to recognise in this hagiographic legend the same authorship, that is, the same *Sitz im Leben*. This conclusion is, however, too imprecise and needs to be clarified further.

## 2.6. The Legends about the Conversion of Naḡrān: an Introduction

The mass murder of the Christians in Naḡrān in 523, followed by a military operation by the king of Aksum, produced a true tempest

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<sup>129</sup> Hansen, G. C., ed. Theodoros Anagnostes, *Kirchengeschichte*, 157.13–16. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte. N. F., 3. Berlin, 1995<sup>2</sup>.

in the hagiography on both sides of the border marked by Chalcedon. Inevitably, it overshadowed earlier legends about the origin of Christianity in Naḡrān and the martyrdom of the earlier Naḡranite martyrs (*e. g.*, the first bishop of Naḡrān, Paul I). The available data have not been properly collected or published.<sup>130</sup>

Setting aside the data relating to the fourth-century missionary Theophilus of India<sup>131</sup> and the *Gādlā Azqir* (see below, 2.8), the other legends about the establishment of Christianity in Naḡrān can be classified depending on either their West Syrian or East Syrian connexions.

### ***2.6.1. A Legend with an East Syrian Background***

A natural centre of Christian influence on Arabia was the Lakhmid capital Ḥīra in southern Iraq, a Christian city since the early fourth century. The Nestorian historiography preserves a story about the Naḡranite merchant Ḥayyān<sup>132</sup> (or Ḥannān; in Arabic, the spelling

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<sup>130</sup> As the most complete, although not exhaustive, bibliographical introduction, one can suggest Hainthaler, Th. *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam. Verbreitung und konfessionelle Zugehörigkeit. Eine Hinführung*, 121–24. Eastern Christian Studies, 7; Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA, 2007. The Syriac legends we have to deal with below are not mentioned in Briquel Chatonnet, F. “L’expansion du christianisme en Arabie: l’apport des sources syriaques.” *Semitica et classica* 3 (2010): 177–87.

<sup>131</sup> See Fiaccadori, G. *Teofilo Indiano*. Biblioteca di “Felix Ravenna,” 7. Ravenna, 1992. So far, no trace of Theophilus is recognised in the hagiographical legends related to Arabia; Philostorgius (an Arian fourth-century historian) is the only available source. However, the first church in Zaḡār was allegedly built by him, and so the existence of some legends recounting his activity is to be expected.

<sup>132</sup> Scher, A. *Histoire nestorienne (Chronique de Séert)*. Première partie (II), 330[218]–331[219]. PO, 5, 2. Paris, 1910 (ch. 73). The ultimate source is the lost chronicle of Bar Saḡdē from Karka de Beth Selok, early 7<sup>th</sup> century. In the late Nestorian encyclopaedia *Kitāb al-Miḡdal (Book of the Tower)* of Mārī b. Sulaymān (late 11<sup>th</sup> or the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century) as well as in its epitomised recension by ʿAmr b. Matta, the introduction of Christianity in Naḡrān is dated to the time of Catholicos Maʿna (deposed in 420); see Gismondi, H. *Maris, Amri, et Slibae de patriarchis Nestorianorum*

of both names is the same with the exception of the dots, which are in different places<sup>133</sup>), who was converted to Christianity in Ḥīra in the time of shahanshah Yezdigerd, most probably Yezdigerd II (438–457) rather than Yezdigerd I (399–420).<sup>134</sup> This story is historical and not a remnant of some “epic” hagiographical text because it is corroborated by the testimony of the *Book of Ḥimyarites*. This book shows that the descendants of Ḥayyān (not Ḥannān) “by whom God first sowed Christianity in our land” were, in 523, part of the flock of a bishop of the West Syrian metropolis Mabbug.<sup>135</sup> No confrontation between the two Syrian traditions, eastern and western (that of Mabbug), is implied, which is to be expected if the eastern tradition was not Nestorian.<sup>136</sup>

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*commentaria*. Pars prior. *Maris textus arabicus*, 33. Roma, 1899; *ibid.*, *Maris versio latina*, 29. Roma, 1899; *ibid.*, Pars secunda. *Amri et Slibae textus*, 28. Roma, 1896; *ibid.*, *Amri et Slibae textus versio latina*, 16. Roma, 1897.

<sup>133</sup> This ambiguity in the spelling was first noticed by Eduard Sachau without knowing the *Book of Ḥimyarites*: Sachau, E. *Zur Ausbreitung des Christentums in Asien*, 68, n. 2; *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Philos.-hist. Kl., Jg. 1919, Nr. 1. Berlin, 1919.

<sup>134</sup> See the bibliography in Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber*, 121, n. 42.

<sup>135</sup> Cf., on this episode, Axel Moberg’s introduction in Moberg, A. *The Book of the Himyarites. Fragments of a hitherto Unknown Syriac Work*, xlix–l. Skrifter utgivna av Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapsamfundet i Lund, 7. Lund, 1924 (cf. p. 32b, Syriac text; cf. also another similar phrase about Ḥayyān, p. 31a).

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Tardy, R. *Najran. Chrétiens d’Arabie avant l’Islam*, 102–9. Recherches publiées sous la direction de l’Institut de lettres orientales de Beyrouth, Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, Université Saint-Joseph. Nouvelle série: B. Orient Chrétien, 8. Beyrouth, 1999. Hainthaler’s note (*Christliche Araber*, 122) that the Church of the East in the fifth century was still not “Nestorian” because its famous teaching of “two hypostases” in Christ was proclaimed much later seems to me to be true but not especially relevant. To be separated from other Syrian Churches and from Constantinople, it was enough, to the Church of the East, not to anathematize Nestorius, even if its Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia was shared by some of the followers of Chalcedon.

It is no wonder that among the legends about the conversion of Nağran, there is at least one patterned after the East Syrian martyrdoms. It is the second of the legends about the conversion of Nağran preserved by Ibn Ishāq (eighth century, quoted in later Muslim authors) and in some other Muslim sources (with important variants) in which the principal actor is an anonymous anchorite who settled down near Nağran. This anchorite converted one young man who had to pass near his place when going to his teacher. Unfortunately, no trace of this legend in the Christian literature has been found so far. Axel Moberg examined this legend in great detail, revealing an East Syrian Christian background for at least part of it.<sup>137</sup> We see from this analysis that the legend seems to have no point of contact with either the Eleutherius tradition or the other legends of West Syrian origin which will be dealt with in the next section.

### ***2.6.2. Two Legends with a West Syrian Background and Their Common Source***

The Christian (West Syrian) parallel for the first legend reported by Ibn Ishāq<sup>138</sup> was noticed by some scholars.<sup>139</sup> Now that the corre-

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<sup>137</sup> Moberg, A. *Über einige christliche Legenden in der islamischen Tradition*. Lund, 1930 (with further bibliography). As for another part of this legend, which Moberg considered to be Arab and not Christian (*ibid.*, p. 9), we have to be more cautious. It deals with the choice of the “greatest” name of God among a huge number of other names of God. In addition to its Muslim theological associations, we have to recall the lists of the names of God which are quite widespread in different Christian (somewhat apocryphal) literatures, from Ethiopia to Russia. The study of the present legend is certainly to be continued.

<sup>138</sup> Wüstenfeld, F. *Das Leben Muhammed's nach Muhammed Ibn Ishāk bearbeitet von Abd el-Malik Ibn Hischām*, Bd. I., Theil 1., 20–22. Göttingen, 1858; English translation in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. V, *The Sasanids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*. Transl. by C. E. Bosworth, 196–99. Albany, 1999 (this translation will be quoted below). Moreover, there is an English translation of both legends and of the *Gādlā Azgīr*. Jeffery, A. “Christianity in South Arabia.” *Anglican Theological Review* 27 (1945): 193–216.

<sup>139</sup> Especially by Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber*, 123. The parallel with St Alexis Man of God [proposed in Tubach, J., “Das Anfänge des Christen-



sponding Syriac legend has been published in full, a more detailed comparison has been completed by Kyle Smith.<sup>140</sup> The Syriac legend is a hagiographical novel on Bishop Paul and Priest John preserved in three manuscripts of the sixth century (and in at least two later manuscripts); one of them is dated to 569.<sup>141</sup> It is also known in Greek (*BHG* 1476), in one manuscript from the tenth century, where, due to a large lacuna, the entire section of the novel related to Arabia is missing.<sup>142</sup> Sebastian Brock supposes that the Greek might be a translation from Syriac.<sup>143</sup> For our purposes, it is important that, in any case, the novel is of West Syrian origin (from a source originally written in either Syriac or Greek) and is ascribed, through its text, to the “epic” time of Bishop Rabbula of Edessa (411–435); the latter fact means that it is substantially later.

The Christian novel contains almost all of the episodes reported in its Muslim Arabic summary, in such a way that we have to conclude that the Arabic text is an epitome of the same legend (see Table 4). Previous scholars, including Kyle Smith, did not formulate such a conclusion due, I think, primarily to the important differences between the two legends in personal names. In

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tums in Südarabien. Eine christliche Legende syrischer Herkunft in Ibn Hišām,” *Parole de l’Orient* 18 (1993): 101–111] is, in my opinion, rather remote and properly belongs to another “cluster” of wandering saints.

<sup>140</sup> Smith, K. “Dendrites and Other Standers in the *History of the Exploits of Bishop Paul of Qanetos and Priest John of Edessa*.” *Hygoie: Journal of Syriac Studies*, 12.1 (2009): 117–34.

<sup>141</sup> Arneson, H., E. Fiano, C. Luckritz Marquis, K. Smith, eds. *The History of the Great Deeds of Bishop Paul of Qenṭos and Priest John of Edessa*. Texts from Christian Late Antiquity Series, 29. Piscataway, NJ, 2010 [this edition will be quoted below for both text and translation]. Cf. Smith, K. “Introduction.” In *ibid.*, 1–26 (an expanded version of the article Smith, “Dendrites...”). The first description of the novel was given by Nau, “Hagiographie syriaque,” 56–60.

<sup>142</sup> Παπαδόπουλος-Κεραμεύς, Α. *Ανάλεκτα Τεροσολυμικῆς Σταχυολογίας*, V, 368–83. Αγ. Πετρούπολις, 1898.

<sup>143</sup> Brock, S. “Syriac on the Sinai: The Main Connections.” In Ruggieri, V., L. Pieralli, eds. *Eukosmia: Studi Miscellanei per il 75. di Vincenzo Poggi, S.J.*, 103–17, here 104–5. Soveria Mannelli, 2003.

Arabic, Paul and John became, respectively, *Fymywn* (فيميون) and Šaliḥ. However, the personal names are not invariants of the “epic” legends and are of far less importance than the toponyms.

Nöldeke, who authorised the reading of *Fymywn* as Femion, has noted that it is a corruption of some Greek name, such as Ποιμήν (through a Syriac spelling such as ܦܘܡܝܘܢ) or Εὐφήμιος (from Accusative Εὐφήμιον, as proposed by Zotenberg).<sup>144</sup> The name Šaliḥ has no exact equivalent in Greek or Syriac Christian names but might correspond, *e. g.*, to “Eusebius” or “Sebastos.” At any rate, the personal names in the two legends are quite different but, in the “epic” hagiography, this by no means precludes a shared identity of the name bearers.

*Table 4. The Plot of the Fymywn Legend with Parallels from the Paul and John Legend*

Episode Nr	<i>Fymywn</i> Legend	Parallels from the Paul and John Legend
1	A pious man named <i>Fymywn</i> was wandering from one village to another working as a brick mason.	In some town [as is clear from the continuation, it is Edessa or at least a town in the diocese of Edessa], Priest John happened to meet a certain Paul when looking for a mason; he hired him to work in his home, hoping to hold him there for a common ascetic life.
2	“He used to keep Sunday (يوم الأحد) holy, and when this day came round would do no work but would go out into a desert place and pray and worship there until it was evening.”	“He [Paul] kept this money [his wage] until the holy day of Friday (يوم الجمعة) when he bought bread and other alimts “for the needy people who live in the desert land in

<sup>144</sup> Nöldeke, Th. *Geschichte der Perser und Araber bis zur Zeit der Sasaniden. Aus der arabischen Chronik des Tabari übersetzt und mit ausführlichen Erläuterungen und Ergänzungen versehen*, 177, n. 3. Leyden, 1879.

Episode Nr	<i>Fymywn</i> Legend	Parallels from the Paul and John Legend
		the mountains” (evidently, anchorites). “On the holy day of Sunday ( <i>שבת</i> ), he again acted in this way” but for those in the <i>xenodocheion</i> , that is, the poor and strangers (lay people).
3	“In one of the villages of Syria” a certain Şalih noticed his behaviour “and felt a love for him such as he had never felt for anything previously.”	John’s extraordinary love for Paul is the paramount motive of the whole Paul and John legend and the <i>Leitmotiv</i> of the whole novel. <sup>145</sup>
4	Şalih started to follow him secretly and, on Sunday, saw him praying in a desert place. A seven-headed serpent appeared but <i>Fymywn</i> cursed him and he died. Şalih, without understanding this, cries out about the danger, and so reveals himself. Then he explains to <i>Fymywn</i> his love for him and obtains his permission to become his companion.	The same scene as in the <i>Fymywn</i> legend with two details that are different: the serpent is not seven-headed and John saw lightning that killed the serpent.
5	<i>Fymywn</i> becomes known to the people because of a healing. He decides to continue his wandering.	Paul and John left John’s home and promised each other to remain together forever. For the six summer months they live as wandering workers and for the six winter months they live near the cave of the twelve recluses.

<sup>145</sup> See, for a detailed study, Smith, “Dendrites...”

Episode Nr	<i>Fymywn</i> Legend	Parallels from the Paul and John Legend
6	A meeting with an old ascetic who lived on the branches of a tree [a dendrite]. He asks <i>Fymywn</i> and Šaliḥ to wait for his death. He dies immediately and they bury him. Then they continue on their route.	The scene with a dendrite is much more elaborated but placed <i>after</i> the episodes connected to Nağrān (Paul and John met the dendrite on their way back to Edessa). The dendrite died on the third day.
7	When wandering in certain territory of the Arabs, they were captured by Arabs who eventually sold them in Nağrān.	Together with one of the twelve recluses (named <i>Zmbys</i> “Zenobius”), Paul and John travelled to Sinai. Here, they were captured by Arabs and sold to the Ḥimyarites.
8	The citizens of Nağrān were worshipers of a date palm, with a very solemn annual festival.	The citizens are worshipers of a date palm (see below, Nrs 11–12).
9	A nobleman to whom <i>Fymywn</i> was sold happens to see him praying during the night until the morning within a light so bright that there was no need for a lamp. He asks him about his religion. <i>Fymywn</i> explains to him that the Nağrānites’ religion is erroneous and that their palm tree does not have any power.	Paul and John healed a girl and baptised her together with her parents.
10	The nobleman promised, on behalf of the citizens, to accept <i>Fymywn</i> ’s religion if he, with the help of his God, destroys the palm tree.	The citizens took them and led them to a palm grove so that they might pierce them against the bark of the trees.

Episode Nr	<i>Fymywn</i> Legend	Parallels from the Paul and John Legend
11	<i>Fymywn</i> purifies himself and prays, making two <i>rak'abs</i> (bows) and asking God to curse the palm tree.	They destroy with a prayer the most beautiful palm tree, called "the god of the camp," which was pulled up by its roots by the wind and destroyed as if by fire. The Arabs convert to Christianity.
12	God sends a wind that tears the palm from its roots and casts it down. The people of Naḡrān accept Christianity.	
13	"He ( <i>Fymywn</i> ) instructed them in the law ( <i>šar'ab</i> ) of the faith of ʿĪsā b. Maryam."	Paul is a bishop who left his see for ascetic reasons and keeps his dignity secret.

One can see that most of the episodes are either identical or differ in rather small details. Even episode Nr 13 has a parallel, although in the Arabic legend it is never stated that *Fymywn* is a bishop. However, no other bishop is mentioned as assisting in the conversion of the Naḡrānites and, most important, the functions described in episode Nr 13 are certainly the duties of the bishop. Therefore, a rank of bishop for *Fymywn* is implied, although in the Arabic text this reference is dropped.

An important difference is the Syrian novel's lack of attention to liturgical details, which resulted in reducing episode Nr 11 to a simple mention of prayer (whereas the Arabic legend mentions purification and specifies exactly two bows).

The episode of the meeting of *Fymywn* and Ṣaliḥ (alias Paul and John) with a dendrite (an ascetic who was living in a tree) is quite important for the plot of the Syrian legend and for its historical background,<sup>146</sup> but does not make any sense in the Muslim epitome. It is, however, a mark testifying that it is our Syrian legend (or its *Vorlage*) that is summarised in the Muslim account.

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<sup>146</sup> Cf. Smith, "Dendrites..." and, on the dendrites in general, Charlampidis, C. P. *The Dendrites in Pre-Christian and Christian Historical-Literary Tradition and Iconography*, 67–76. *Studia Archaeologica*, 73. Roma, 1995.

It is the parallel episode Nr 2 that is especially interesting to us. The Sunday almsgiving in the Paul and John legend is a doublet of the Friday almsgiving, and thus it is clearly a later addition. In fact, the text presumes that Paul was spending the whole of his wages for almsgiving, and it is not very likely that he was working on Saturday to obtain enough money for those in the *xenodocheion*. Moreover, the text implies that Paul did not work on Friday because this day was dedicated to almsgiving to the people dwelling in remote places. Thus, Paul was venerating Friday not only by almsgiving but also by abstention from work, in the same manner as that of another secret bishop, John, from another Syrian legend (see above, 1.9). We have to conclude that, in the available recension of the legend about Paul and John, the Friday veneration motive is reduced and overshadowed by that of the Sunday veneration, although it was important in an earlier recension of the novel and/or the source of the corresponding episode. The Arabic legend of *Fymynn* reflects only the Sunday veneration motive, which is a later addition to the Paul and John legend intended to substitute for the original Friday veneration motive.

The novel about Paul and John, despite its early date (569 as *terminus ante quem*), is hardly the original form of the encompassed legends. Normally, such novels containing long series of mutually independent episodes (for instance, the scene with the dendrite is not connected to a specific moment of the plot) are of a composite nature.

One must therefore conclude that the source of the Arabic legend was not the novel on Paul and John that is known to us but rather an earlier legend, the *Vorlage* of some sections of the future Syrian novel. In this novel (let us call it \**Fymynn*), specific attention was paid to the liturgical institutions (especially to the Friday veneration), and the episode with the dendrite was placed before the captivity of its principal heroes; it is also very probable that the personal names in this legend were the Greek or Syriac prototypes of those preserved in the Arabic legend. For this legend, the *terminus ante quem* is the early sixth century.

## 2.7. The \**Fymywn* Legend, Eleutherius' Dossier, and the Legend about John and Friday

Four motives of the \**Fymywn* legend are shared with the two main texts on Eleutherius, his *Life*, and the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays*:

1. The main character is a bishop acting outside his diocese (the same in the *Life* of Eleutherius);
2. A motive of slavery and freedom (the captivity and slavery of Paul and John/*Fymywn* and Şalih; cf. the very name of Eleutherius and the discussion of Eleutherius with Hadrian about the meaning of true freedom);
3. Praying with wild beasts (in the novel on Paul and John, there is a scene when they become encircled by reptiles and lions when they are praying; then Paul dissipates the reptiles with his prayer and John does the same with the lions; cf. the scene of the common prayer with wild animals in the *Life* of Eleutherius);
4. Friday veneration in \**Fymywn* and in Eleutherius of the *Twelve Fridays*.

There is, however, another legend that provides a missing link between \**Fymywn* and Eleutherius, namely, the legend of Bishop John and the personified Friday which is available only in Syriac and is, most probably, of Syrian origin (see above, 1.9).

This legend is especially close to \**Fymywn* in the main component of its plot, the story of a secret bishop working as a slave. As to his name, John, matching that of Paul's companion in the Syrian novel, it is such a widespread name that its appearance is probably due to mere coincidence. This is also a legend about the conversion from paganism of a large number of people, although most of the geographical markers seem to be lost. However, two geographical markers are preserved: the patriarchate of Antioch as the supreme bishopric see of the relevant Church area and Alexandria as the name of the patriarchate to which the former see of Bishop John belonged. We know that such a geographical situation corresponds to early sixth-century Nağrān. It belonged to the patriarchate of Antioch through the metropolis of Mabbug, although it was adjacent to the patriarchate of Alexandria (to which Egypt and Aksum belonged in the early sixth century). The main feature of Bishop

John's Friday veneration is abstinence from work; the same theme is implied in the legend of Paul and John and can be recovered for the \**Fymywn* legend.

Given that the \**Fymywn* legend deals with Naḡrān, we have to conclude, taking into account the Syrian origin and the geography of the John and Friday legend, that the latter, too, deals with Naḡrān. One would like to be more precise about the relationship between the legend about John and Friday and the \**Fymywn* legend but it would be premature at this point. Let us wait at least for the publication of the text of the legend about John and Friday. So far, we can cautiously propose a date within the period between the very late fifth century and the early sixth century for both legends.

It is unknown whether the legend about John and Friday is related to Mabbug, although this is, of course, quite possible. Another West Syrian legend, \**Fymywn*, was probably connected to Edessa (at least its later avatar, the novel on Paul and John, was firmly rooted in Edessian soil).

The Friday veneration tradition represented in the John and Friday legend and in the \**Fymywn* legend found its continuation in the legends of Eleutherius and the personified Friday, St Parasceve of Iconium.

## 2.8. Eleutherius and the *Gädlä Azqir*

The *Gädlä Azqir* ("Acts [*lit.*, Struggle] of Azqir") is a martyrrium preserved in an Arabic-based Ethiopic version and its epitome in the Ethiopian Synaxarium on 24 Ḥädār (30 November).<sup>147</sup> Accord-

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<sup>147</sup> For the main bibliography, see Witakowski, W. "Azqir: Gädlä Azqir." In Uhlig, S., ed. *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I, 421–22, with additions in Bausi, A. "Naḡrān." In *ibid.*, III, 1114–16, here 1114. Wiesbaden, 2007. A new English translation with commentaries was prepared by the late Zeev Rubin (d. 2009) and was scheduled to be published in 2010 [in: Rubin, Z. *Religious and Economic Struggles in the Red Sea Basin in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries*. Translated Texts for Historians. Liverpool] but did not appear until the spring of 2011. The full text of the *Gädlä* is published in Conti-Rossini, A. "Un documento sul cristianesimo nello Iemen ai tempi del re Šarāḥbīl Yakkuḥ." *Rendiconti della Accademia dei Lincei*, Ser. V, 19 (1910): 705–50; the Synaxarium entry is published in: Colin, G. *L*



ing to Carlo Conti-Rossini,<sup>148</sup> the lost Arabic original of the Ethiopic version was, in turn, translated from Syriac. However, he provided no linguistic basis for this supposition. In light of modern knowledge of the linguistic situation in Nağrān<sup>149</sup> and taking into account Conti-Rossini's own conclusion that the author was a Ḥimyarite clergyman, it seems to me more likely that the martyrrium was originally composed in (North) Arabic.

The name Azqir (ⲀⲛⲪⲚ) was interpreted by Conti-Rossini as a transliteration of the Arabic ازقير which was, in turn, a corruption of اوفير < اوفير < اوفيمون "Euphemion," who is the "Femion" of the Arabic legend.<sup>150</sup> However, there is no particular affinity between the legends of Azqir and Femion/*Fymynn*, and there is no need to invent such a complicated scheme to connect one name with the other. Recently, Sergei Frantsuzoff proposed a much more plausible interpretation of the name Azqir as a nickname, a slight corrup-

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*Synaxaire éthiopien. Mois de Hedar*, 354/355[122/123]–356/357[124/125]. PO, 44, 3; N° 199. Turnhout, 1988.

<sup>148</sup> Conti-Rossini, C. "Azqir." In *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastiques*, vol. 5, 1377–78. Paris, 1931, quoted by Witakowski, "Azqir: Gädlä Azqir," 421.

<sup>149</sup> Ḥimyar was a country with Arabic–Sabaeen (that is, North Arabic–South Arabic) bilingualism. The inhabitants of Nağrān were mostly—although not exclusively—North Arabic-speaking. In Conti-Rossini's time, the early and middle twentieth century, it was taken for granted that the local people were Sabaeen-speaking even in Nağrān; thus, Arabic as a possible original language of a work composed by a Ḥimyarite clergyman was, in Conti-Rossini's view, excluded *a priori*. Irfan Shahīd's studies revealed (and even somewhat exaggerated) the predominance of North Arabic in Nağrān (see esp. Shahīd, I. *The Martyrs of Najrān. New Documents*, 242–50. *Subsidia hagiographica*, 49. Bruxelles, 1971). For a modern balanced viewpoint, see, e.g., Beaucamp, J., Ch. Robin. "Le christianisme dans la péninsule Arabique d'après l'épigraphie et l'archéologie." *Travaux et mémoires* 8 (1981): 45–61, here 56, n. 58, containing also a reference to W. W. Müller's review of Shahīd, *The Martyrs of Najrān*, in *Oriens christianus* 58 (1974): 182–85.

<sup>150</sup> Conti-Rossini, "Un documento," 726.

tion of the Syriac “weaver” > الزقور > اُقْعُ > አዝቂር > አዝቂር.<sup>151</sup> A secular occupation of this sort for the priest Azqir is not so very far from that of a brick mason, the occupation specified for Bishop Paul and Priest John of the Syriac legend.

The pagan king who delivered Azqir to the torturers is named Sārabəḥīl Dankəf, which corresponds to the Šarahbi’il Yakkuf of Sabaic inscriptions.<sup>152</sup> His reign is dated to ca 455–ca 475. Scholars normally consider these dates as the time of the activity of the historical prototype of Azqir. On this basis, they conclude that the difficult relations between the Nağrānite Christians and the local “Jews” (that is, those who adopted Judaism, not ethnic Jews, of course) go back, at least, to the third quarter of the fifth century.<sup>153</sup>

To take such absolute dating (according to the name of the reigning king) at its face value is not the best way to interpret a typical *Passion épique*, however. No matter how tempting it may be,

<sup>151</sup> Французов, С. А. “Житие св. Азкира» как источник по истории Южной Аравии [The *Life of St Azqir* as a Source for the History of South Arabia.]” In *Ежегодная богословская конференция Православного Свято-Тихоновского богословского института: Материалы 2003 г.* [The *Annual Theological Conference of the Orthodox St Tikhon Theological Institute: Proceedings, 2003*], 139–46. Москва, 2003. Frantsouzoff seems to be less convincing when supposing that the form Aşkir (አሻቂር), the variant reading of the name in most of the manuscripts of the Synaxarium, could result from a confusion between ܐ and ܥ in Syriac (which look very similar, according to Frantsouzoff, in some kinds of Syriac script).

<sup>152</sup> For a thorough linguistic analysis of this correspondence (more detailed than in Conti-Rossini, “Un documento,” 739, n. 4), see Французов, “Житие св. Азкира,” Without knowing Frantsouzoff’s article, Bausi expressed some doubts (Bausi, “Nağrān,” 1114).

<sup>153</sup> Cf., among the most recent studies, Rubin, Z. “Judaism and Raḥmanite Monotheism in the Ḥimyarite Kingdom in the Fifth Century.” In Parfitt, T., ed. *Israel and Ishmael. Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations*, 32–51, here 41–43, 50–51. New York, 2000 (contains a brilliant analysis of certain difficult places in the legend); Frantsouzoff, “Житие св. Азкира”; Bowersock, G. W. “The Ḥaḍramawt between Persia and Byzantium.” In *La Persia e Bisanzio. Atti del convegno internazionale (Roma, 14–18 ottobre 2002)*, 263–73, here 270. Atti dei convegni Lincei, 201. Rome, 2004.

in the study of the *Passions épiques*, we must keep in mind that such an association with a specific reigning king represented an “epic” period which was certainly remote from the hagiographer and the real events he has in mind.<sup>154</sup> The reign of Šarahbi’il Yakkuf roughly corresponds to that of Yezdigerd II, that is, the time of the establishment of Christianity in Nağrān. This is an appropriate time to place a legend about the local apostolic figure. However, setting aside the mention of Šarahbi’il Yakkuf, there is absolutely no reference in the *Gädlä Aẓqir* to any other detail which could be dated precisely to the 450s–470s and not just as readily to *ca* 500. The need for an appropriate locally coloured legend about conversion arises when the local Church organization is established, which, for Nağrān, is *ca* 500. Before this, some legends might be produced in the missionary milieu, but such legends, as we have seen in the Syrian legends reviewed above, were not “localized” enough and, instead, bore many hallmarks of the missionaries’ lands of origin. It is at least worth noting that these early Syrian legends are silent about the Jews, presenting their heroes as struggling against the local pagan cult only. It is an important argument for a relatively later dating of the “hot phase” in the competition between Judaism and Christianity in Himyar. Unless we are able to recognize some other datable features of the *Gädlä Aẓqir*, it seems safer to consider this source as a witness of the situation *ca* 500 rather than earlier.

Be that as it may, for our study of the Eleutherius tradition only one fact is important, namely, that at least since *ca* 500, the anti-Jewish polemics are a major component of the hagiographic legends related to Nağrān. This is not traceable in the *Life* of Eleutherius, but the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays* is an anti-Jewish work *ex professo* combining one *topos* of the Nağrān-related legends, Friday veneration (cf. the legend about Bishop John and the personified Friday and Sunday veneration as its counterweight in the *Fymynn* legend), with another one, the quarrels with the “Jews.”

However, the precise motives representing the anti-Jewish polemics in Eleutherius’ dossier show no trace of the influence of the *Gädlä Aẓqir*, and for this reason their source will be dealt with be-

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<sup>154</sup> See above, n. 112.

low (see below, 2.8). Nevertheless, the *Gädlä Azqir* is recognisable within the hagiographic substrate of the *Life* of Eleutherius.

Two episodes in the *Gädlä Azqir* have direct parallels in the *Life* of Eleutherius:

- (1) Azqir baptises two men when he is arrested and led under escort to the king;
- (2) Azqir enters into a confrontation with a Jew who has a little son; both die, and the child becomes an innocent victim of his father's anti-Christian hostility.

The first episode is similar to the baptism of Felix by Eleutherius, also performed *en route* to the king under escort. There is, however, an important difference. Eleutherius is acting in imitation of Apostle Philip's action with the eunuch of the queen of Ethiopia, thus he performs the baptism when water becomes available. Azqir, on the contrary, baptises in an arid place after having caused water to flow from the rock; no parallel with Apostle Philip is intended. Indeed, Apostle Philip appears in the *Life* of Eleutherius as a hallmark of a Syrian missionary tradition related to the metropolis of Mabbug. For the local Christian community of Ḥimyar, Philip was hardly of particular interest. The corresponding episode in the *Life* of Eleutherius reveals both Syrian and Ḥimyarite hagiographic substrates.

The second episode is the second (unsuccessful) attempt of the "Jews" to kill Azqir. It runs as follows (translated by A. Jeffery): "There was a Jew there with his wife and his sons. Having put on festal attire they had come out to take part in the death of the holy martyr Azqir. He and his wife were the first of all to hurl stones at the holy Azqir. The stone did not reach the holy Azqir, but the little son died before his father's eyes, even though his father was protecting him. His stomach split and he died [an allusion to Judas' death according to Acts 1:18]. Also his wife, while still alive, was devoured by worms." In the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays* there is no Jew's wife and the roles of the father and the son are somewhat different. Nevertheless, the basic features are the same: the Azqir persecutor died the same sort of death as did Judas, a kind of suicide along the lines of Mt 27:5; also the Jew's child is not acting as a helper of Azqir but he, too, is killed by his father.

The third important link between Azqir and Eleutherius is probably Cyriacus, Azqir's companion. We will discuss this character in the next section.

## 2.9. The Personal Names in Eleutherius' Dossier

In this section, we will discuss the names of the three main characters of the *Life* of Eleutherius. The name of Tarasius (Eleutherius' antagonist in the *Twelve Fridays*) will be discussed in section 3.2, together with other elements of the anti-Jewish polemics.

The sense of the name Felix (the officer baptised by Eleutherius) is transparent: (true) liberty gives (true) happiness. The name Malchus (Tarasius' son in the *Twelve Fridays*) is Greek (Μάλχος), although of Semitic origin, from the root *mlk*, here in the sense "counsellor," which is in perfect accord with the role of this character in the story.

### 2.9.1. Eleutherius' Companion

The name of Eleutherius' companion in his *Life*, an eparch who was first sent to him by Hadrian as a torturer but who converted and suffered martyrdom, varies significantly; this fact itself is a demonstration that his name was somewhat difficult for the Greek-speaking milieu. At the same time, this name has some affinities with the name of the king in the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays* and even with the name Cyriacus, the companion of Azqir.

In the *Life* of Eleutherius this name appears variously as Κορέβων (corroborated by Latin *Corribon*), Κορέβωρ (corroborated by Syriac *Qwrbr*<sup>155</sup> and Slavonic *Koribor*), and Κορέμων in the metaphrastic recension BHG 571. Moreover, the short *Life* of Eleutherius available in the Synaxarium of Constantinople on 15 December has a different set of variants: Κορέβορος, Κορέμ-βωρος, Κορέβωρ, Κορέμβων, Κορέμμος, Κορέμων.<sup>156</sup> This testimony is important because the epitomiser (who was working not

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<sup>155</sup> Thus in the Syriac version of the *Life*. In the Syriac calendars, normally *Qrbnr* (see below, n. 191).

<sup>156</sup> Delehaye, H. *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae e codice Sirmondiano nunc Berolinensi adiectis synaxariis selectis*, cols. 309–13. Acta Sanctorum, Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris. Bruxellis, 1902.

later than in the tenth century, maybe even in the ninth century<sup>157</sup>) had access to earlier manuscripts of the *Life* of Eleutherius. One can see that all Greek variant readings differ in the third consonant position, which is /b/ or /m/ or the group /mb/. Thus, these possibilities correspond to the three variants of the original reading: /m/ (K-r-m), /mb/ (K-r-mb), and /b/ (K-r-b).

Let us turn to the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays*. Here, a similar name is given to the king during whose reign the dispute takes place. This king is not a companion of Eleutherius but he is, nevertheless, the person whose authority made the dispute—and the following victory of Eleutherius—possible.

The king's name is spelled as Карьмянь, Карьминь, Каринь, Каринь,<sup>158</sup> Карьмиль (the latter variant certainly resulted from confusion with a well-known toponym, Carmel). Although the spelling *Karmian* is probably genuine for the Eleutherius recension, it also corroborates the reading K-r-m as the name of the historical prototype of both fictive characters, that of the eparch of the *Life* and that of the king of the *Twelve Fridays*.

Indeed, there is a very popular Arabic name, كريم (*Karim*), whose meanings “generous, honourable, noble, high-born” (cf. also as one of the names of Allah, in Qur'an 27:40 and 82:6) resonate with the paramount motive of the Himyar-related hagiography: liberty *vs* slavery and the noble origins of the martyrs (cf. especially in the *Book of Himyarites*). The most important point of contact, however, is that the name of the last Himyarite Christian king before the great persecution of 523 was Karīm—at least, in Syriac. The king whose name in the inscriptions is Muḥdi Karab Yaḥfir is called ܡܘܚܕܝܟܪܝܡ (*M<sup>h</sup>dykerm* = Muḥdi-Karim) in the *Book of Himyarites*.<sup>159</sup> The king's second name, Karab, is spelled as Karim in

<sup>157</sup> For the date of the Synaxarium of Constantinople, see Luzzi, A. *Studi sul Sinassario di Costantinopoli*, 5–6, n. 3. Testi e studi bizantino-neoellenici, 8. Rome, 1995.

<sup>158</sup> This reading gave Veselovsky (Веселовский, “Freiheit—Элевферий,” 84) a pretext to interpret this name as Carinus, the name of a Roman emperor (283–285). He took for granted that the legend is limited to the realm of the Roman/Byzantine Empire.

<sup>159</sup> Moberg, *The Book of the Himyarites*, 43b.

Syriac, and both variants, Karab and Karim, seem to pass into the hagiographical dossier of Eleutherius.

Cyriacus (ܚܘܪܝܩܘܨ *Kiryāq*) in the *Gädlä Azqir* is a character whose participation in the story is certainly damaged in the available recension. He appears before Azqir when he was in prison, saying (in Jeffery's translation): "I am come to give you good news, because the king of Hamer [= Himyar] has sent a message regarding you, for which reason they will take you to him for martyrdom." Nothing is said about Cyriacus' source of information. Then, "the inhabitants of the city came and spoke to the holy Azqir, brought him out of the prison, and bound him with that man who had held discourse with the holy Azqir." One can guess that Cyriacus, too, suffered martyrdom but nothing else is said about him. The episodes related to Cyriacus are shortened somewhat mechanically, although presumably they were present in a more explicated way in an earlier recension. Such severe damage to the entire Cyriacus line of the plot seems to have involved a "familiarisation" of his name. If his name was the same as that of the companion of Eleutherius, it would have sounded unfamiliar to the Ethiopian ear, unlike the well-known name Cyriacus. Thus, I think that it is most likely that the name of Cyriacus in the lost genuine recension of the *Gädlä Azqir* was either *Krym* (Karim) or *Krb* (Karab).

### 2.9.2. *Eleutherius' Mother*

The mother of Eleutherius in his *Life* bears the name Ἀνθία, which is not a common Christian or Greek name even if it is similar to the name of one of the Graces, Ἀνθεῖα, the goddess of flowers. The only St Anthia known to the calendars is the mother of Eleutherius. Even in Eleutherius' dossier her name is not stable: in the metaphrastic recension *BHG* 571 it is replaced by an ordinary Greek name, Evanthia.<sup>160</sup> Now, taking into account the Arabic

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<sup>160</sup> The same perplexity when confronting a strange name is probably also reflected in some Syriac calendars in which the mother of Eleutherius became Nonna: see below, note 191.

background of Eleutherius' dossier, we can recognise in Anthia a woman's name very popular among the Arab nobility, Hind (هند).

The name Hind is represented in the *Book of Himyarites* as Hint; Shahîd explains this form as reflecting an Arabic dialect of Yemen in which /d/ is pronounced as /t/.<sup>161</sup> The expected form of this name in Syriac would be either Hind or Hint; the latter is possible due to a common phenomenon, the devocalizing of the consonant at the end of the word.<sup>162</sup> Thus the Syriac Hint (ܗܝܢܬ), clothed in Greek dress and provided with a Greek feminine ending, becomes Anthia.

This reconstruction is corroborated by the facts of Arabic onomastics. The name of the mother was often used by the Arabian nobility instead of the name of father, e.g., ʿAmr III ibn al-Mundîr, the king of the Lakhmid Arabs (554–569), was often called ibn Hind after his mother, Hind bint al-Harîṭ. Eleutherius, as a saint accompanied by his mother (which is not a very usual situation), was another ibn Hind.

### 2.9.3. *Eleutherius*

The Arab hagiographic substrate of Eleutherius' dossier authorises us to look for an Arabic prototype of the Greek name "Eleutherius." Of course, it is possible that this name reflects the hagiographer's main agenda, that of creating a personification of the "liberty in Christ." But this purpose does not exclude the possibility that there was a real prototype for the name Eleutherius, although, at first glance, we see no such prototype in the Arabian pre-Islamic milieu.

However, let us examine the Nağrānite onomasticon without paying attention to the modern scholarly etymologies of the names but, instead, trying to look at them through the eyes of a contemporary Syrian armed with the lens of popular etymology. Harîṭ is one of the most popular Nağrānite names; in addition to St Arethas

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<sup>161</sup> Shahîd, I. "The Martyresses of Najrān." In Zanetti, U., et E. Lucchesi, eds. *Aegyptus Christiana. Mélanges d'hagiographie égyptienne et orientale dédiés à la mémoire du P. Paul Devos bollandiste*, 123–33, here 129. Cahiers d'orientalisme, 25. Genève, 2004.

<sup>162</sup> See above, note 88.



of Nağrān, the best known bearer of this name, the *Book of Himyarites* alone enumerates eight other Nağrānite martyrs with this name.<sup>163</sup> The name Ḥarīt can be comprised as a derivate of the root *ḥr* “to be free” (in both North and South Arabic). In Syriac, it becomes ܚܪܝܬ “Ḥarīt” (and “Arethas” in Greek) due to the lack of the phoneme *ṯ* in Syriac, where /*ṯ*/ is the post-vocal allophone of /*t*/. Let us recall that Nağrān was a zone of coexistence of both North and South Arabic languages. The Syriac form of this name can then be “etymologised” (with a violation of modern scholarly principles, of course) as a South Arabic proper name composed from the root *ḥr* and the suffix of proper names *-t* specific to South Arabic,<sup>164</sup> which results in an interpretation of “Ḥarīt” as “a free one” (substantivated as a proper name).

Although I am not necessarily completely convinced of this proposed explanation, it is tempting to interpret the name Eleutherius, the son of Anthia, as Ḥarīt ibn Hind. At any rate, this interpretation does not affect the possibility of identification of the historical prototype of Eleutherius. It is very probable that Eleutherius is merely a generalised character and a symbolic figure.

## PART THREE: ELEUTHERIUS AND FRIDAY

### 3.1. Friday Veneration in Bostra: St Parasceve and Baḥīrā

#### 3.1.1. *St Parasceve’s Dossier: Introduction*

The hagiographical dossier of St Parasceve of Iconium has not been studied properly to date, although this saint was extremely popular in certain countries during the mediaeval period (especially in the Slavic world).<sup>165</sup> The critical edition of the mediaeval recensions of her *Martyrium* (nine recensions in the Greek original and several in Latin, Slavonic, and Romanian from Slavonic versions)

<sup>163</sup> See the references in Moberg, *The Book of the Himyarites*, xci.

<sup>164</sup> Beeston, A. F. L. *A Descriptive Grammar of Epigraphic South Arabian*, 30. London, 1962 (§ 25:1).

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Scharpé’s thesis (see next note), vol. I, p. 14–21.

was prepared by J. L. Scharpé in his 1971 thesis<sup>166</sup> but was never published. A critical analysis of these materials remains a desideratum. For the present, I will limit myself to pointing out some features demonstrating that the *Martyrium* of Parasceve has something to do with the Arabs and then to describing an anti-Jewish polemical tradition that influenced some of the later recensions of the *Martyrium* of Parasceve as well as the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays*.

There is absolutely no trace of a St Parasceve cult in the anti-Chalcedonian traditions.<sup>167</sup> The *terminus ante quem* could be the eighth century, the date of the panegyric *BHG* 1420p by John of Euboea (whose activity is not dated more precisely),<sup>168</sup> although the popularity of the St Parasceve cult in the Latin world and the symbolic nature of the figure of Parasceve (a personified weekday) are arguments for a relatively early dating of the *Martyrium*, most likely to the sixth century.

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<sup>166</sup> Scharpé, J. L. *Parasceve—Venera—Petka—Vineri. Passionum graece, latine, slavice, romanice manipulus*. Academisch Proefschrift. Faculteit der Letteren en Wijsbegeerte, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, 1971. The manuscript is in 4 vols. with no consecutive pagination; the details of the *Martyrium* shared by at least several recensions will be quoted without specific references; other details will be quoted with reference to the recension(s) only. I am grateful to A. Yu. Vinogradov for a copy of this work. For the Slavonic tradition, one should add Петрова, М. “Към въпроса за южнославянските преводи на житието на мъченица Параскева/Петка Римлянка” [Petrova, M. “On the Question of the South-Slavic Translations of the *Life* of the martyr Parasceve/Petka of Rome”]. *Palaeobulgarica* 20 (1996): Nr 2, 83–109.

<sup>167</sup> The only exception is the Armenian version of the recension f (= *BHG* 1420f–g) *BHO* 841. It is an 11th-century translation from Greek commissioned by a great bibliophile, Catholicos Grigor II Vcakaser [Martyrophilos] (1065–1105).

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Halkin, F. “La passion de sainte Parascève par Jean d’Eubée.” In: Wirth, P., hrsg. *Polychronion. Festschrift Franz Dölger zum 75. Geburtstag*, 226–37. Heidelberg, 1966.

The plot can be roughly divided into five parts: (1) birth and earliest years; (2 to 4) preaching in three cities and interrogations by three kings; and (5) death and burial.

No place of birth is indicated in the early recensions (thus, Iconium is a later identification, probably influenced by the parallel with St Thecla). The parents are named Ἀγάθων and Πολίτεια, recalling a popular expression ἀγαθός πολίτης “good citizen” (e.g., Aristophanes, *Knights* 944 Hall, Geldart). Parasceve received her name after the weekday on which she was born. As a teenager, she took up an apostolic mission and even performed a baptism of a multitude of people with the water from heaven. The first king she encounters is called Antoninus (in some recensions, Antonius; other Roman emperors’ names in recension Y<sup>169</sup> only); the city is Rome. So far, the main hagiographical substrate is certainly the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (CANT 211.III; the parallels are sometimes noted by Scharpé) or their derivatives. Antoninus Pius (138–161) is an emperor of almost the same rank of antiquity as Hadrian (cf. the *Life* of Eleutherius), that is, ancient enough for a “secondary” apostolic figure (not for Thecla herself but for a “second Thecla”). Parasceve continues preaching in the second city (unnamed) and is interrogated by the second king. His name varies considerably, probably revealing a difficulty with an unfamiliar non-Greek name.<sup>170</sup> This part of the *Martyrium* is very detailed and requires much further study. Parasceve then preaches in the third city (unnamed) and is interrogated by a king named Asclepius (but in BHG 1420j and 1420f, the third city is Rome and its king is named Tarasius, which is the same as the third king’s name in the work of John of Euboea). Finally, after having pronounced a long prayer about the world (the items of this prayer obviously correspond to a suppli-

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<sup>169</sup> Unique ms Cod. Mosq. Synod. 410, 15<sup>th</sup> century, not in *BHG*.

<sup>170</sup> The variants are as follows: in recension a (*BHG* 1420d–e) as Ἀθέμενος, Ἀθέμιος, Ἀρτέμιος, Θέμιος, Θέσμιος, Θεότιμος, Θέμης, Ἄνθιμος, and Θέμος; in its Latin version (*BHL* 8530, 8531) as Themus and Theotimus; in its Slavonic version as Темѡсь, Θεωμисъ, and Θεμѡсь; and in its Romanian version as Atizma. Other recensions mostly repeat the same variants but add Arthemius (Lat. of rec. b = *BHL* 8529) and Ἀνθέσβιος (rec. c = *BHG* 1420a).

cant's needs when praying to St Parasceve), she is beheaded with a sword and buried by a pious Christian.

The episode with King Asclepius reveals, as its hagiographical substrate, the *Martyrium* of Leontius of Tripoli (in Syria, modern Lebanon, and not in Africa), the martyr who vanquished the false god Asclepius in Tripoli, the main city of his cult.<sup>171</sup> Unlike Leontius, Parasceve does not perform any healing in the third city, but her prayer is primarily about the health of Christians.

The Passion, in which three consecutive places are connected within a unique plot, is a legend representing the mutual connexions between the corresponding Church centres.<sup>172</sup> It is clear that the first centre, Rome, represents, in the realities of the sixth century, New Rome, that is, Constantinople. The *Martyrium* of Parasceve is about a development within the Church structure of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (and this is why this legend did not pass to the anti-Chalcedonian traditions). This development is the establishment of a new Church centre, represented in the legend by Parasceve's second destination. At this point, the narration becomes especially detailed; this is the core of the whole plot. The third city is the final destination of St Parasceve, the place of her deposition; probably but not necessarily the place where her relics were deposited. At any rate, the third destination represents, in the legend, the main place of the cult of St Parasceve. The whole legend is to be read as dealing with a Church organisation established in the second city under the omophorion of the patriarch of Constantinople by missionaries from the third city. It is a delicate mat-

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<sup>171</sup> For a convenient summary of his dossier, see van Esbroeck, M. "Leontius of Tripoli, Saint." In Atiya, A. S. *The Coptic Encyclopaedia*, V, 1442–44. New York, 1991.

<sup>172</sup> This kind of "hagiographical network" was first studied by Paul Peeters in his "La légende de S. Orentius et de ses six frères martyrs." *AB* 56 (1938): 241–64 (the complete text is preserved in the Georgian version only; cf. *BHG* 2326n for a Greek Synaxarium entry); cf. also *BHG* 646–646c (*Martyrium* of Eustratius and those with him). Both *Martyria* describe the routes connecting Byzantium with the Caucasus and the corresponding Church organisation in the seventh century, the maritime route, via Trebizond (St Orentius), and by land, via Satala (St Eustratius).

ter to identify the second and third cities. Their names must have been present in the original recension of the legend going back to the pre-Islamic time but they were lost when the Church geography changed after the establishment of the Caliphate. An exhaustive analysis of the *Martyrium* of Parasceve is beyond the scope of the present study but some considerations will be discussed below.

### ***3.1.2. St Parasceve's Dossier: Arabian Connexions***

There is only one explicit mention of Arabia in the *Martyrium* of Parasceve, and it is shared by most of the recensions. Parasceve addresses the second king as, among other epithets, “wolf of Arabia—λύκε τῆς Ἀραβίας.” The mise-en-scène is basically the same as in the *Life* of Eleutherius.

The *Martyrium* of Leontius of Tripoli that is present in the hagiographical substrate of the legend of Parasceve suggests that the mention of Arabia is not incidental. According to one of the traditions, Leontius of Tripoli was an Arab. Although all other traditions of the *Martyrium* describe Leontius as a Greek, the Coptic traditions label him as an “Arab,” even in the titles of the Passions.<sup>173</sup> This tradition is explained by a “contamination” of Leontius of Tripoli with Leontius the Arab, also martyred in Tripoli, a companion of the martyr Theodore the Eastern (Anatolius).<sup>174</sup> It seems better to say, along with Delehaye, that these Leontii are identical<sup>175</sup>; thus, Leontius of Tripoli was deliberately represented as an Arab. Although this tradition is now preserved only in Coptic documents, its origin is certainly outside of Egypt and, most

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<sup>173</sup> For the Coptic *Martyrium*: Garitte, G. “Textes hagiographiques orientaux relatifs à Saint Léonce de Tripoli. I. La Passion copte sahidique.” *Le Muséon* 78 (1965): 313–48, here 319/334 (txt/tr.); for the Coptic version of the panegyric by Severus of Antioch: idem. “Textes hagiographiques orientaux relatifs à Saint Léonce de Tripoli. II. L’homélie copte de Sévère d’Antioche.” *Le Muséon* 79 (1966): 335–86, here 355/372 (txt/tr.).

<sup>174</sup> Garitte, “Textes hagiographiques,” I, 334, n. 1.

<sup>175</sup> Delehaye wrote about this possibility as “n’est pas improbable”: Delehaye, H. “Les martyrs d’Égypte.” *AB* 40 (1922): 5–154, 299–364, here 99.

probably, within the patriarchate of Antioch (at least, the cult of Theodore the Eastern is of Syrian origin<sup>176</sup>). Tripoli belonged to the patriarchate of Antioch but the local cult of Leontius was certainly not connected to the Arabs. However, the cult of Leontius of Tripoli was popular in Hawran, which was inhabited by the Ghassanid Arabs,<sup>177</sup> also within the patriarchate of Antioch,<sup>178</sup> and especially in a major Ghassanid (formerly Nabatean) city, Bostra. The cathedral (bishop's church) of Bostra was constructed between September 512 and March 513 under Bishop Julian with an unfamiliar dedication to three saints, to Sergius and Bacchus and to Leontius.<sup>179</sup> As early as 1991, van Esbroeck proposed that this cathe-

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<sup>176</sup> The two main documents of his hagiographical dossier, the anonymous *Martyrium* and the *Encomium* to both Theodore the General and Theodore the Eastern, attributed to some (maybe fictitious) Archbishop of Antioch Theodore (both in Coptic) have as their main *locus in quo* the seat of war between the Roman Empire and Persia. See, for both texts with translations, Balestri, I., and H. Hyvernat. *Acta Martyrum*, I, 34–62/30–46 (txt/tr., *Martyrium*) and 90–156/62–107 (txt/tr., *Encomium*). CSCO, 43–44; Copt, 3–4 [= Copt. III, 1]. Parisii/Leipzig, 1907, 1908 [reprint: Louvain]; *Encomium* also in: Winstedt, E. O. *Coptic Texts on Saint Theodore the General, St. Theodore the Eastern, Chamoul and Justus*, 1–166. Text and Translation Society. Publications. Oxford/London, 1910. Leontius the Arab was, before his conversion, a Persian warrior. His death is described only in the *Martyrium* (*ibid.*, 59/44, txt/tr.), the *Encomium* being mutilated in the corresponding section.

<sup>177</sup> On Christianity among the Ghassanids, see, most recently, Hoyland, R. “Late Roman Provincia Arabia, Monophysite Monks and Arab Tribes: A Problem of Centre and Periphery.” *Semitica et Classica* 2 (2009): 117–39 (I am grateful to G. Benevich for this reference).

<sup>178</sup> Churches were dedicated to Leontius in 483 at Dur and in 565 at Sur; Fowden, E. K. *The Barbarian Plain. Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran*, 111. The transformation of the classical heritage, 28; Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1999.

<sup>179</sup> Fowden, *ibid.* It was an epochal building in the history of Christian architecture which became a template for several later churches constructed by Justinian.

dral with its cult of St Leontius of Tripoli was responsible for Leontius of Tripoli becoming an Arab.<sup>180</sup>

Given the decisive role of the Ghassanid ruler Al-Ḥārīṭ ibn Ḡabalāh (528–569/570), a Roman patrician, in the reestablishment of the anti-Chalcedonian (Jacobite) hierarchy in 542/543, it is no wonder that the identification of Leontius of Tripoli with Leontius the Arab is preserved in an anti-Chalcedonian tradition, although limited to Egypt; the authentic tradition in which Leontius was a Greek was already strong enough, however, to prevent this identification from being accepted in Tripoli and Syria.<sup>181</sup> For Hawran, however, this identification must be common to the partisans and adversaries of Chalcedon going back, at least, to the epoch of their Church union under the *Henotikon* of Zeno (482). Bishop Julian of Bostra, who constructed the cathedral dedicated to Sergius and Bacchus and to Leontius, was a Chalcedonian, although in communion with the anti-Chalcedonians in the context of the policy of the *Henotikon*. He was deposed in 513, however, for his opposition to Severus' election to the See of Antioch, but he returned to his see in 518 after the deposition of Severus and remained bishop of Bostra until his death (before 539 or even before 530).<sup>182</sup> It would not be at all strange, therefore, if a Chalcedonian legend of Parasceve was produced in Bostra implying that Leontius of Tripoli was an Arab.

If the third destination of Parasceve, where she is presented as a second Leontius of Tripoli, is Bostra, and if Leontius of Tripoli is considered to be the same as Leontius the Arab, Bostra must be the place of origin of the cult of Parasceve. Is there any way to verify such a rather strong claim? Fortunately, there is.

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<sup>180</sup> van Esbroeck, "Leontius of Tripoli," 1443: "Probably there is some connection with the sanctuary of Leontius in the Hauran."

<sup>181</sup> Leontius of Tripoli was the personal patron of Severus of Antioch, and was thus especially venerated in the Syrian Jacobite tradition. Cf., for details, Allen, P., and C. T. R. Hayward. *Severus of Antioch*, 6–7. London/New York, 2004.

<sup>182</sup> Sartre, M. *Bostra. Dès origines à l'Islam*, 109–10. Bibliothèque archéologique et historique, 117; Paris, 1985.

### 3.1.3. *Bostra, the Teaching of Baḥīrā, and the Lost Revelation on Friday*

The region of Bostra is pointed out almost unanimously by different sources as the location of the monastery of the monk Baḥīrā, the main character of the eighth-century Baḥīrā legend.<sup>183</sup> This legend itself is heavily dependent on the Syrian traditions about the conversion of Naḡrān (see below, Note 2). Therefore, the appearance of the Friday motive in the Baḥīrā legend is a continuation of the line of such legends as the unpublished Syriac legend about Bishop John and the personified Friday and the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays*. Taking into account the author's polemical attitude toward Baḥīrā's teaching on the Friday veneration, one can say more accurately that the Baḥīrā legend continues the line of the \*Fymym legend.

The Friday motive is one of the themes especially stressed in the main recensions<sup>184</sup> of the Baḥīrā legend. According to both the two Syriac and the two Arabic recensions, Baḥīrā commands the young Muḥammad to establish Friday as the most honoured day of the week, when a great congregation is made for a common prayer (§ 16.13, the same numeration of chapters and paragraphs for the four recensions). He formulates the reasons for doing so with the words "...because [on that day] you [will] have received the Law." Baḥīrā then explains his plan to Muḥammad: he will write a book

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<sup>183</sup> Roggema, B. *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā. Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, 45–46. History of the Christian-Muslim Relations, 9. Leiden/Boston, 2009. There is no exact location for Baḥīrā's dwelling in the available recensions of the legend but there are several other (Islamic) written sources and the local oral tradition of present-day Bosra in Syria which indicate as the monastery of Baḥīrā some ruins in the city. The latter tradition is hardly true in the literal sense but it is, nevertheless, an important witness of a connexion between the region of Bostra and Baḥīrā.

<sup>184</sup> With the exception of the Latin recension, which is limited to the apocalypse of Baḥīrā. It is now known in two manuscripts (Roggema, *The Legend*, 215–18), one of them published: Bignami-Odier, J., et G. Levi Della Vida. "Une version latine de l'apocalypse syro-arabe de Serge-Bahira." *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 62 (1950): 125–48.



for him and will put it on the horn of a cow (a clear allusion to the *sūrah* 2 of the Qur'an, "The Cow"), and Muḥammad will find it and present it to his people on Friday as a revelation descended from heaven (§ 16.14).<sup>185</sup> Here we see that Friday becomes the day of the revelation of the Qur'an, and that this appears in a polemical context. Scholars have generally considered this context as limited to that of Islamo-Christian polemics. However, Friday as the day of the revelation of the Qur'an is never mentioned in the Islamic sources. Our previous review of the pre-Islamic hagiographical legends demonstrates that this controversy goes back to inter-Christian conflicts.

According to the legend about Baḥīrā, his teaching delivered to Muḥammad was a perversion of the Christian doctrine. Thus, the veneration of Friday is a part of this perversion or, perhaps more accurately, its main liturgical expression. And, indeed, we do know that a competition between Sunday and Friday was a hot polemical topic among the Christians involved in the mission to the Arabs in Arabia.

One of the legends reviewed above, namely, the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays*, presumes the existence of a document containing a revelation about Friday. This document is reputed to be of apostolic origin, and nothing is said about the circumstances of its revelation to the apostles. However, Michel van Esbroeck, in his study of the *Epistle on the Sunday*, already postulated that there was an analogous earlier document based on the Wednesday calendar and which insisted on the veneration of Wednesday and Friday (see above, Introduction and Fig. 1). Our observations on the Baḥīrā legend lead to the conclusion that such a document did actually exist, written in the same genre of "letter from heaven."<sup>186</sup> The Baḥīrā legend takes a polemical attitude to-

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<sup>185</sup> I quote according to the East Syrian recension (Roggema, *The Legend*, 282/283 txt/tr.), but the wording of the West Syrian recension is very similar (*ibid.*, 352/353); both Arabic recensions convey the same sense (*ibid.*, 406, 407/408, 409 and 484/485, 494/495).

<sup>186</sup> I have a strong feeling that van Esbroeck had already come to the same conclusion himself, although he never formulated it in print. In the late 1990s, he told me that he considered the very idea of a *tanẓīl* from

ward it. In some way, this conclusion is corroborated by the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays* because the apostolic writing on Friday mentioned here might well be either the same document (if it was allegedly received from heaven by the apostles) or a related one.

### **3.1.4. Sitz im Leben of the Parasceve Legend**

We must also retain from the discussion above that Bostra did have a reputation of being a centre of Friday veneration, and this especially in Christian circles involved in the mission to the Arabs. This fact confirms our supposition that the third destination of St Parasceve, which is the main location of her cult, is Bostra. It is Bostra that must be the place of origin of the legend.

We still have not identified the second destination of Parasceve but we do know at least that it must be a Chalcedonian mission to the Arabs. The Christian missions became specifically Chalcedonian or anti-Chalcedonian only after the policy of the *Henotikon* failed. For Bostra, this is in 512 (the opposition of Bishop Julian to Severus of Antioch). This date is the *terminus post quem* for the legend.

The mediaeval historians seem to be silent about the sixth- or early seventh-century Chalcedonian missions to the Arabs, but Byzantine hagiography preserves at least one legend of a series of such (unsuccessful) missions under the auspices of Constantinople. These missions allegedly ended with the creation of the Islamic doctrine and the inauguration of Muḥammad as the prophet by a certain Sinaitic monk Gerasimos surnamed Πουχμπάν Βαρκάς (“Raḥman Barka” or “Baraka”?). This Gerasimos is the complete opposite of Baḥīrā, although the *Life* of Muḥammad which preserves his story contaminates it with the Baḥīrā legend (making Baḥīrā the first teacher of Muḥammad but Gerasimos his succes-

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heaven as going back to some Christian traditions of the sixth century, akin to those reflected in the *Epistle on Sunday*. He must certainly have had in mind the Baḥīrā legend with its version of revelation “from heaven,” but I am unable to say whether he knew the Christian Friday veneration tradition. However, the general direction of the present study was indicated to me by Michel van Esbroeck (1934–2003).

sor, found by Muḥammad five years after Bahīrā's death; Gerasimos becomes both the author of the Qur'an and the author of the fraudulent dispatch "from heaven"). The legend about Gerasimos can be dated to the seventh or the early eighth century, although further studies are needed for more certitude.<sup>187</sup> At any rate, this legend is a witness that Parasceve's *Martyrium* is not an isolated case of the legend of the mission to the Arabs being influenced by the Chalcedonian policy of Constantinople.

In establishing a date for the Parasceve legend, the crucial consideration is its image of a personified Friday. This is hardly compatible with the age of Justinian, and certainly less so for later times. Instead, since the middle of the fifth century, we see a policy of suppression of the Friday veneration in the Christian milieu, both Chalcedonite and anti-Chalcedonite. The emphasis on Parasceve's loyalty toward Constantinople (symbolised by her first destination, Rome) points to an earlier epoch, when discussion about Friday was still not officially closed, nearer to the date of the legend about Bishop John and the personified Friday, that is, *ca* 500. In this epoch, the circle of Bishop Julian of Bostra is the best (if not the only possible) milieu of origin of such a legend. Julian's staunch Chalcedonism at such an early period was rare among the episcopate. However, the leader of this kind of Chalcedonism, which was in complete loyalty to the *Henotikon* (and thus still not in communion with Rome), was the contemporary patriarch of Constantinople, Macedonius, who was deposed and exiled in 511 (partially for his opposition to Severus of Antioch); he died in 517.

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<sup>187</sup> See the anonymous Ἱστορία τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ ἀναθοροφῆς τοῦ Μοάμεθ (*The History of the Birth and Breeding of Muhammad*; unique ms of the 17<sup>th</sup> century), published incompletely in Delatte, A. *Anecdota Atheniensia. Textes grecs inédits relatifs à l'histoire des religions*, I, 333–57, esp. 339–45. Bibliothèque de la Faculté de philosophie et lettres de l'Université de Liège, 36. Liège/Paris, 1927. For the 7<sup>th</sup>-century dating of the Gerasimos legend, see Lourié, B. "India 'far beyond Egypt': Barlaam and Ioasaph and Nubia in the 6<sup>th</sup> century." In Bumazhnov, D., E. Grypeou, T. B. Sailors, and A. Toepel, eds. *Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient. Festschrift für Stephen Gerö zum 65. Geburtstag*, 135–80, here 143–44, n. 26; OLA, 187. Leuven/Paris/Walpole, MA, 2011.

Thus, it is reasonable to date the Parascève legend to the episcopate of Julian of Bostra (that is, from the period before 512 to the period before 530 or 539), with exception of the short period between 511 and 518, when loyalty to Constantinople was impossible for a staunch Chalcedonian.

The second destination of Parascève is obviously some Arabian city (or oasis) but, for its identification, we have to wait for a detailed study of the rich data provided by her *Martyrium*. This does not exclude the possibility that the second destination is Nağrān; according to one of several Islamic traditions concerning the identification of Baḥīrā's monastery in Bostra, this monastery was called Dayr Nağrān.<sup>188</sup> One can ask whether the Parascève legend was created for some polemical needs in the competition between different Christian circles related to Nağrān or for Christianisation of a different region inhabited by Arabian tribes.

***Note 2: The Baḥīrā Legend, Its Sources,  
and the Hagiographical Substrate***

A detailed analysis of the Baḥīrā legend is rather difficult because, in its present recensions, its image of Baḥīrā is ambiguous. On the one hand, Baḥīrā is the author of the false doctrine delivered to Muḥammad. On the other hand, he has a rather high spiritual authority as the recipient of the apocalypse on Sinai (a piece of *Reichseschatologie* after Ps.-Methodius' heart). Such ambiguity probably results from a contamination of different legends, one about the recipient of the revelation on Sinai and a different one about the teacher of Muḥammad.

An additional argument for a compilative nature of the common archetype of the present recensions of the Baḥīrā legend is provided by its eschatology. In the apocalypse of Baḥīrā, the eschatological period opened by the rise of Islam is rather long-lasting, although in another part of the legend, Baḥīrā prophesies to the Ismaelites only ten weeks of years, that is, 70 years of reigning (§ 6.5). Commenting on this, Roggema writes that “[i]t must have been taken from the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in which the time span of seventy years for the Sons of Ishmael plays a central role.”<sup>189</sup> In fact, as we have seen above (section 1.5), this seventy-year

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<sup>188</sup> Yāqūt quoted in Roggema, *The Legend*, 45.

<sup>189</sup> Roggema, *The Legend*, 93.

eschatology is not specific to Pseudo-Methodius and, in particular, is shared by the Eleutherius *Twelve Fridays* legend. So far, any particular influence of Pseudo-Methodius on the Baḥīrā legend remains unproven, although it is certain that the apocalypse of Baḥīrā is composed in the same vein of Syrian *Reichseschatologie* as Pseudo-Methodius (and as the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays* as well).

Be this as it may, we are interested only in the part of the Baḥīrā legend related to the teacher of Muḥammad. It is in this section in which a hagiographical substrate of the Naḡrān-related legends is seen. It shares at least four important motives with the legends about the conversion of Naḡrān (without taking into account the motive of visiting Sinai, cf. the legend about Bishop Paul and Priest John, which may be explained by the overwhelming influence of the Sinai monastery):

- (1) Baḥīrā is living in a neighbourhood with the Arabs but separately; among those who visit him are children, including young Muḥammad: cf. the legend with an East Syrian background about an anchorite who converted a young man (see above, 2.6.1);
- (2) Friday veneration: cf. the legend about Bishop John and the personified Friday and Eleutherius' dossier;
- (3) Anti-Jewish polemics (according to the Baḥīrā legend, ch. 9, Baḥīrā's teaching was subsequently corrupted by a Jew, Ka'b al-Aḥbār<sup>190</sup>): cf. the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays* and Parasceve's dossier (see below, 3.2) as well as the Naḡrānite hagiography that emerged from the massacres of 523;
- (4) The narrator of the Baḥīrā legend meets Baḥīrā shortly before his death and remains with him until then: cf. the scene with the dendrite in the Bishop Paul and Priest John legend and especially the same scene in the *Fymynn* legend (although in the available recensions of the latter legends the nature of the connexion between the dendrite and Naḡrān is already damaged irreparably).

In its non-apocalyptic section, the Baḥīrā legend is based on the hagiography related to the conversion to Christianity of the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula.

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<sup>190</sup> Cf. also Roggema, *The Legend*, 159–160, on this Jew in the Arabic Islamic tradition.

### 3.2. The Anti-Jewish Polemics in Parasceve's Dossier and in Eleutherius

Several recensions of the *Martyrium* of Parasceve contain anti-Jewish motives. The earliest recensions a (*BHG* 1420d-e) and b (only in *BHG* 1420b-c, not in *BHG* 1420i, k, and r, which also represent the same recension) present the Jews as acting together with the "Hellenes" in delivering Parasceve to the first king. In recension b this motive is even reinforced: Parasceve is to go to "the villages of Jews" (εἰς τὰς κώμας τῶν Ἰουδαίων) to proclaim herself Christian (thus in *BHG* 1420b; in *BHG* 1420c, the corrupted reading πρὸς τὰς τυναγωγὰς [sic!] τῶν Ἰουδαίων evidently corresponds to "the synagogues of the Jews").

In recension Hi (*BHG* 1420b), the Jews form an important group of the spectators of Parasceve's exploits and especially those who converted and were baptised after her preaching and miracles.

In recension f (*BHG* 1420j, f) and in John of Euboea (*BHG* 1420p), the third king is named Tarasius. Only in *BHG* 1420f is the king's command to place Parasceve into a deep pit with poisonous reptiles addressed to the Jews. The same *BHG* 1420f contains the following dialogue which explains as well the name Tarasius in the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays*:

And again the saint said to him [*sc.*, the king]: 'Oh king, announce to me your name.' The king says: 'Why do you want to know my name? I am called Tarasius.' And the saint said: 'Justly you are named Tarasius, oh Tarasius! Your father is Satan, and you have an idol's and dumb [*lit.* speechless] name (Δικαίως ἐκλήθης Ταράσιος, Ταράσιε, ὁ πατήρ σου ὁ Σατανᾶς, εἰδωλικοῦ καὶ ἀλάλον ὄνομα ἔχεις).'

It is implied that Ταράσιος is derived from ταράσσω "to trouble."

One can see traces of anti-Jewish polemics in the earliest recension and in some other parts of the dossier; we must thus conclude that the cult of Parasceve was, to a certain extent, anti-Jewish. The wordplay with the name "Tarasius" is present in one sub-recension represented by only a single manuscript; it is thus obviously not genuine for Parasceve's dossier, but is presented together with another anti-Jewish motive specific to the same sub-recension (Jews as those who put Parasceve into the pit). The name "Tarasius" used in the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays* for the

Jewish adversary of Eleutherius is a weighty argument for the conclusion that *BHG* 1420f (and, tangentially, *BHG* 1420p) intersects with an anti-Jewish legend where Tarasius is the name of the main anti-hero. This same legend forms part of the background of the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays*.

### 3.3. Concluding Remarks on the Cult of Eleutherius

#### 3.3.1. Commemoration Dates of Eleutherius

Eleutherius and Anthia are commemorated on 15 December (Byzantine rite), 18 April (Latin rite), and 26 March (West Syrian rite<sup>191</sup>). The latter date is interesting because of its proximity to the traditional date of the spring equinox in the Roman calendar, 25 March.

There were different traditions in the Christian world concerning the relationship of the Easter triduum dates to the spring equinox. In at least some of them, 26 March was the “historical” date of Great Friday.<sup>192</sup> We know nothing about the Easter

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<sup>191</sup> In some Syriac menologia, the Byzantine commemoration is also represented, although in corrupted form. Thus, in the two Greek-influenced calendars published in section VI of Nau’s collection, 13 December is headed either “Martyrium of Eustathius and Nonna, his mother (ܡܬܪܟ ܨܘܠܝܢ ܘܡܬܠܦܘܟܐܪ ܨܘܠܘܢ),” or simply “Crowning of Eustathius, martyr”; 15 December is, in these calendars, occupied by the commemoration of John the Theologian: Nau, F. *Un martyrologe et douze ménologies syriaques, édités et traduits*, 68, cf. note 23. PO, 10, 1, Nr 46. Paris, 1912 [reprint: Turnhout, 2003]. For the commemoration of Eleutherius, Anthia, and “*Qrbwr* eparch” on 26 March, see *ibid.*, 73 (the same calendars) and 120 and 9, note 1 (other calendars). The commemoration on 26 March is also sometimes distorted; thus, in a martyrologium of the late 13th or the 14th century, Eleutherius is commemorated on 27 March and “*Qrbwr* eparch” on 28 March: Peeters, P. “Le martyrologe de Rabban Sliba.” *AB* 27 (1908): 129–200, here 150 (txt)/178 (tr.).

<sup>192</sup> An explicit statement that Jesus was crucified on 26 March is contained in a Western computus, that of Victorius of Aquitania, 457 AD (Mosshammer, A. A. *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era*, 240. The Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford, 2008), but Victorius might be following some earlier traditions concerning this point.

computus in the Christian tradition(s) presupposing the Friday veneration but, at any rate, the date 26 March is worth noting for future studies.

### 3.3.2. *Illyricum*

In Eleutherius' dossier, the genuine location in Hierapolis was replaced by Illyricum (see above, 2.3). The corresponding change of ecclesiastical geography took place after 525, that is, after the recovery of Nağrān's church organisation under the Ethiopian domination in Ḥimyar and the deposition of Philoxenus of Mabbug under Justin I. But why was it Illyricum that was chosen instead?

Some light is shed by John of Ephesus in his *Life* of Simeon of Bet-Arsham (an anti-Chalcedonian Syrian bishop, the author of several epistles on the murders of Christians in Nağrān in 523, and an extremely active preacher who visited a multitude of lands and mastered no less a multitude of languages). John describes the geography of Simeon's preaching, comparing him with Apostle Paul as follows: "...he [Simeon] had travelled not only from Jerusalem and as far as Illyricum [cf. Rom 15:19], but also in all countries in which the preaching of Christ had travelled, except only the territories of Rome."<sup>193</sup>

Of course, this is not necessarily a witness of any particular interest to the sixth-century Syrian anti-Chalcedonians in Illyricum, although such a possibility is not to be excluded. However, this is at least testimony of a symbolic importance of Illyricum, in this milieu, as a mark of extreme missionary zeal. Thus, Illyricum was chosen in this milieu for the up-to-date recension of the *Life* of Eleutherius and subsequently in the seventh-century Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays*.

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<sup>193</sup> Brooks, E. W. John of Ephesus, *The Lives of the Eastern Saints. Syriac texts edited and translated*. I, 138. PO, 17, 1, Nr 82. Paris, 1923 [reprint: Turnhout, 2003].



### CONCLUSION: A LOST *EPISTLE ON FRIDAY*?

The epistle from heaven on Wednesday and Friday (see Stemma 1 in the Introduction), probably discovered in Jerusalem under the brief patriarchate of the anti-Chalcedonian Theodosius (451–453), has eluded discovery despite our best efforts to trace it. No wonder. It was to be extinguished like a meteorite in the dense atmosphere of the confessional polemics of the sixth century with its exceptional multiplication of various religious factions, especially among the anti-Chalcedonians. However, the meteorite's trajectory can be traced. By good fortune, there are two legends that mention it rather directly: the Bahīrā legend (composed by “anti-Friday” Christians) and the Slavonic Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays* (composed by “pro-Friday” Christians). Both legends are nearly contemporary (their dates are the early eighth century for the Bahīrā legend and the late seventh century for Eleutherius' *Twelve Fridays*). There are, moreover, several earlier Christian legends dealing with the Friday veneration. In these legends, Friday is *the* holy weekday, when one has to abstain from work and to fast (fasting on Friday was common in early Islam, too). In some of these legends, Friday as the market weekday (the Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays*) and the day of almsgiving (the Syrian legend of Paul and John) is also mentioned.

All these legends are connected with the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula, and some of them certainly with the conversion of Naḡrān to Christianity. All these legends are of Syrian origin (regardless of the original language, either Syriac or Greek), with the possible exception of the Parasceve legend (which originated in Bostra in southern Syria but in a milieu closely connected to the Ghassanid Arabs, possibly among the Ghassanids themselves).

Among the legends related to Naḡrān, those that show no interest in the topic of Friday are the East Syrian legend transmitted by the Muslim authors and the *Gādlā Aḡqir*, which is very close to our West Syrian legends in other respects but whose origin is autochthonic (Himyarite).

The Eleutherius recension of the *Twelve Fridays* is of special interest to our quest. Its reference to an early Christian document of apostolic origin burned by Jews is in accordance with the documented practice of Jews to burn Christian books. For instance, in the *Tosefta*, we have such a prescription on behalf of R. Tarfon (in the late first–early second century), *ṯShabbat* 13(14):5, who said that

*ba-gilyonim* (gospels) and other books of *minim* (heretics) should be burnt.

It would be an attractive hypothesis to see behind this legendary apostolic writing a real document “discovered” in Theodosian anti-Chalcedonian Jerusalem as allegedly having descended from heaven to the apostles. In any case, regardless of such hypotheses, the hagiography produced by the conversion of Nağrān was common to both Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian traditions in the period from 482 (*Henotikon* of Zeno) to the 520s. This is why we see remnants of the Friday veneration in both Christian camps, although initially the idea to venerate Friday must belong to the anti-Chalcedonians.

The overwhelming presence of the Friday veneration motive in the Christian legends related to the conversion of the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula and even the conversion of Muḥammad himself (the Baḥīrā legend) is sufficient reason to identify this Christian tradition as the source of the Friday veneration in Islam.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> I am especially grateful to Anissava Miltenova, Sergei Valentinovich Ivanov, Nikolai Seleznyov, Sergei Arkadievich Ivanov, and Sergei Frant-souzzoff for their advice and to Elena Bormotova, Pavel Vorobjev, and Eugen Shteyn for their continuous help. My special gratitude goes to Claudia R. Jensen, the best editor of my publications in English.

**THEMATIC AND STRUCTURAL AFFINITIES  
BETWEEN 1 ENOCH AND THE QUR'ĀN:  
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY  
OF THE JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN APOCALYPTIC  
SETTING OF THE EARLY ISLAMIC FAITH**

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**APOCALYPTIC TRENDS IN LATE ANTIQUITY:  
A NECESSARY BRIDGE BETWEEN MODERN JEWISH,  
CHRISTIAN, AND ISLAMIC STUDIES**

The Jewish apocalyptic legacy within early Christianity is pretty well documented, as also is the prominent role played in the latter by 1 Enoch, at least up to the 5th century CE.<sup>1</sup> In addition, a careful reading of certain rabbinic texts (e.g. Gen R. 25:1) suggests that Christian Jews made extensive use of the Enochic tradition to support their Christological claims. Now, if as it is widely agreed, both Jewish and Christian theologies influenced formative Islam,<sup>2</sup> or if,

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<sup>1</sup> See VanderKam, J. C., and Adler, W., eds. *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*. CRINT, 3/4. Assen/Minneapolis, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> On the Christian influence upon emerging Islam see e.g. Andrae, T. *Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum*. Upsala, 1926; Bell, R. *The Origin of Islam on Its Christian Environment*. London, 1926; Ahrens, K. "Christliches im Quran." *ZDMG* 48 (1930): 15–68, 148–90. Griffith, S. H. "The Gospel, the Qur'ān, and the Presentation of Jesus in al-Ya'qūbī's *Ta'rikh*." In Reeves, J. C., ed. *Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, 133–160. SBLSS, 24. Atlanta, 2003; Luxenberg, Ch. *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of*

to put it in more forceful terms, the Islamic religion arose *from within* a Judaeo-Christian milieu,<sup>3</sup> should one not investigate to what measure did apocalyptic literature influence the composition of the Muslim scriptures and, thereby, to what extent may 1 Enoch have influenced the composition of the Qur'ān itself?

No other is the topic explored in this paper, in which the composite expression “Judaeo-Christian” is used in a twofold sense to denote both a non-sectarian phenomenon—or, better, several non-sectarian phenomena, e.g. the common religious tradition of Judaism and Christianity and the unity of these two “religions”<sup>4</sup> up to the 4th century CE—and a series of interrelated sectarian phenomena as, for instance, the Christology of certain, by no means

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*the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran.* Berlin, 2007. On the Jewish influence upon early Islam see below the works by A. Geiger, I. Goldziher, M. Gaster, B. Heller, J. Finkel, H. Speyer, D. Sidersky, Ch. C. Torrey, S. D. Goiten, Ch. Rabin, A. I. Katsch, S. M. Wasserstrom, R. Firestone, M. Sfar, J. C. Reeves, H. Bar-Zeev, and A. Neuwirth, listed in nn. 15–33. See also Firestone, R. *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis.* Albany, NY, 1990; Adang, C. *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm.* Leiden, 1996; Busse, H. *Islam, Judaism, and Christianity: Theological and Historical Affiliations.* PSME. Princeton, 1998; Hary, B. H., Hayes, J. L., and Astren, F., eds. *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction: Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner.* Leiden: Brill, 2000; Lowin, Sh. L. *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives.* IHC, 65. Leiden, 2006; Saleh, W. A. Saleh. *In Defense of the Bible: A Critical Edition and Introduction to al-Biqā'ī's Bible Treatise.* IHC, 73. Leiden, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> See Wansbrough, J. *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History.* Amherst, NY, 2006; Crone, P., and Cook, M. A. *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World.* Cambridge, 1977; Hawting, G. R. *The Idea of Idolatry and the Rise of Islam: From Polemic to History.* Cambridge, 1999; Nevo, Y. D., and Koren, J. *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State.* Amherst, NY, 2003; as well as the works of A. von Harkack, W. Schlatter, H.-J. Schoeps, and Sch. Pines referred to in nn. 79, 86. The recent study by Gallez, É.-M., *Le messie et son prophète.* 2 vols. Versailles, 2005, seems to me much less convincing.

<sup>4</sup> See Boyarin, D. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity.* DRLAR. Philadelphia, 2004.

all, Christian Jews<sup>5</sup> who did not envisaged Christ as God,<sup>6</sup> and their specific sectarian milieu(s). Hence its meaning varies within each particular context. The many problems surrounding both the Judaeo-Christian phenomenon as such and the terms used to describe it in past and present scholarship make it difficult to avoid a minimum of ambiguity.<sup>7</sup> Yet the adjective “sectarian” will be supplemented in a few cases to help avoid any confusion.

Another point should be also made at the outset. As William Adler writes, “[t]heorizing about the social setting and function of the Jewish apocalypses must at some point acknowledge the fact that the context in which these apocalypses survive is a Christian one.”<sup>8</sup> One must therefore ask: “How did Christians perceive and classify this literary legacy? What function and status did these documents have in the Christian communities that preserved them? How were they expanded upon and adapted for Christian use?”<sup>9</sup> In sum one should regard them partly as Christian works and thus speak of “Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic”—not simply of Jewish apocalyptic—when facing the literary genre of such *hybrid* documents.

This said let us now go back to the programmatic questions addressed above. How can one contribute to the study of the Judaeo-Christian milieu out of which Islam developed when asking

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<sup>5</sup> See Mimouni, S.-C. *Le judéo-christianisme ancien: essais historiques*, 73–90. Paris, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Such is also, of course, the Islamic view. Cf. e.g. the first part of the *shabada*, i.e. the first well-known sentence of the Muslim profession of faith (“There is no God but God”), and the likewise polemical, anti-Trinitarian statement made in PseudClemHom 16:7, 9 (“God is One. There is no other God but him”).

<sup>7</sup> See Jackson-McCabe, M. “What’s in a Name? The Problem of ‘Jewish Christianity’.” In Jackson-McCabe, M., ed. *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts*, 7–38. Minneapolis, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Adler, W. “Introduction.” In VanderKam, J. C., and Adler, W., eds. *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, 1–31, quotation on p. 1. See also Davila, J. R. *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other?* JSJSup, 105. Leiden, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Adler, “Introduction,” 8.

to what degree did apocalyptic literature, and more precisely 1 Enoch, influence, both in its contents and form, the composition of the Quranic text? One may contribute to such study, first, by encapsulating some of the ideological and literary *elements* inherent to that religious milieu; and, second, by examining how they were *transferred* to and *adapted* within a new scriptural corpus. As I will try to show, certain religious ideas which are also well documented in various other, non-apocalyptic types of Jewish and Christian literature, and—what is doubtless most remarkable—their specific narrative frame within a particular apocalyptic writing such as 1 Enoch, must be counted amongst these transferred and reinterpreted elements, or, to use John Wansbrough's own wording, amongst these adopted *topoi*.

Two methodological devices put forth by Wansbrough in his *Quranic Studies*<sup>10</sup> and *The Sectarian Milieu*<sup>11</sup> shall also be assumed in the following pages. The first is that “[i]dentification of the earliest Islamic community,” and likewise identification of the earliest Islamic faith, “may be ... regarded as the investigation of process rather than of structure. The process in question may be envisaged as twofold: (1) linguistic transfer/adaptation of *topos*/theologoumenon/symbol to produce an instrument of communication and dispute (*lingua franca*); (2) distribution of these elements as confessional insignia (*sectarian syndrome*).”<sup>12</sup> The second is that the style of the Qur’ān is basically “referential” due to “its allusive and its elliptical character: allusion to an oral/literary tradition already familiar, and ellipsis in the intermittent and occasionally distorted treatment of that tradition.”<sup>13</sup> They constitute, respectively, the diachronic (dynamic) and synchronic (stratigraphic) *premises* of this paper.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wansbrough, J. *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*. Amherst, NY, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> See n. 3 above.

<sup>12</sup> Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 128.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 24. See also Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 1, 40–43, 47–48, 51–52, 57–58.

<sup>14</sup> These two premises—the fact that the earliest Islamic faith derived from something else and the idea that this can be observed within the

**THE QUR'ĀN AS A PALIMPSEST; OR, THE QURANIC CORPUS  
FROM AN INTERTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE**

After Abraham Geiger's well-known essay on Muḥammad and the Jews, published in 1833,<sup>15</sup> the presence of Jewish religious motifs in the Quranic text and in the Ḥadīth corpus has been extensively examined by several scholars (e.g. Ignaz Goldziher,<sup>16</sup> Moses Gaster,<sup>17</sup> Josef Horovitz,<sup>18</sup> Bernhard Heller,<sup>19</sup> Joshua Finkel,<sup>20</sup>

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Qur'ān—are hinted at in the Quranic text itself. See in this respect the dichotomy between Revelation/Book and Recitation (i.e. between *tan-zīl/kitāb*, on the one hand, and *qur'an*, on the other) in Q 10:37; 41:2–3; 43:2–4; as well as the difference made between collect (*jama'a*) and recite in 75:17–18; between reveal, recite, and (divide/) detail (/adapt?/redistribute?) (*tafsīl*) in 10:37; 41:3; the references to the matrix of the book (*umm al-kitāb/lawḥ mahfūz*) in 3:7; 10:39; 43:4; 85:21–22; to its signs/exempla (*āyāt*) in 3:7; 41:3; and to the earlier scriptures in 25:5–6. In short: (a) it is the “book” that has been “revealed” (41:2–3), but the “book” itself seems to be different from the Arabic “recitation” that contains its “exempla” (41:3), of which only those susceptible of being described as clear in their meaning are, however, apparently contained in turn in the “matrix” of the book (3:7); (b) such “recitation” confirms all prior “revelations” (10:37), but should also be regarded as an “adaptation” of the “book”, though not necessarily of its “matrix” (cf. 10:37; 41:2–3), and thus seemingly differs once more from the “book” itself; (c) only some of the contents of the latter seem to be contained in that “matrix” (3:7); (d) yet the “recitation” is said to be fully contained within such “matrix” (43:4; 85:22); (e) and all this is somehow linked to certain previous revelations, warnings, legends, and maybe also writings (10:37; 25:5–6; 53:56).

<sup>15</sup> Geiger, A. *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* Bonn, 1833.

<sup>16</sup> Goldziher, I. “Isrāʿīliyyāt” *REJ* 46 (1902): 63–65.

<sup>17</sup> Gaster, M. “Samaritans.” *EI* (1924) 4:124–29.

<sup>18</sup> Horovitz, J. *Koranische Untersuchungen*. Berlin, 1926.

<sup>19</sup> Heller, B. “Recits et personnages bibliques dans la légende mahométane.” *REJ* 85 (1928): 113–36.

<sup>20</sup> Finkel, J. “Old Israelitish Tradition in the Koran.” *PAAJR* 2 (1930–1931): 7–21.

Heinrich Speyer,<sup>21</sup> David Sidersky,<sup>22</sup> Charles Torrey,<sup>23</sup> Salomon Goiten,<sup>24</sup> Chaim Rabin,<sup>25</sup> Abraham Katsch,<sup>26</sup> Steven Wasserstrom,<sup>27</sup> Reuven Firestone,<sup>28</sup> Mondher Sfar,<sup>29</sup> Alfred-Louis de Prémare,<sup>30</sup> John C. Reeves,<sup>31</sup> Hai Bar-Zeev,<sup>32</sup> and Angelika Neuwirth<sup>33</sup>). In addition, both Saïd Amir Arjomand<sup>34</sup> and Geneviève

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<sup>21</sup> Speyer, H. *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Quran*. Hildesheim, 1961.

<sup>22</sup> Sidersky, D. *Les Origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran et dans les vies des prophètes*. Paris, 1933.

<sup>23</sup> Torrey, Ch. C. *The Jewish Foundations of Islam*. New York, 1933.

<sup>24</sup> Goiten, S. D. *Jews and Arabs: Their Contact through the Ages*. New York, 1964.

<sup>25</sup> Rabin, Ch. *Qumran Studies*. New York, 1957.

<sup>26</sup> Katsch, A. I. *Judaism and the Koran: Biblical and Talmudic Backgrounds of the Koran and Its Commentaries*. New York, 1962.

<sup>27</sup> Wasserstrom, S. M. *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis in Early Islam*. Princeton, 1995.

<sup>28</sup> Firestone, R. "Comparative Studies in Bible and Qur'ān: A Fresh Look at Genesis 22 in Light of Sura 37." In Hary, B. H., Hayes, J. L., and Astren, F., eds. *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction: Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner*, 169–78.

<sup>29</sup> Sfar, M. *Le Coran, la Bible et l'Orient ancien*. Paris, 1998.

<sup>30</sup> Prémare, A.-L. de. "Les textes musulmans dans leur environnement." *Arabica* 47 (2000): 391–408.

<sup>31</sup> Reeves, J. C., ed. *Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, with studies by R. Firestone, V. K. Robbins and G. Newby, B. M. Wheeler, B. M. Hauglid, J. Dammen McAuliffe, K. Kueny, and F. Astren.

<sup>32</sup> Bar-Zeev, H. *Une lecture juive du Coran: Essai*. Paris, 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Neuwirth, N. "Qur'anic Readings of the Psalms." In Neuwirth, A., Sinai, N., and Marx, M., eds. *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, 733–78. Leiden, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Arjomand, A. A. "Messianism, Millennialism and Revolution in Early Islamic History." In Amanat, A., and Bernhardsson, M. T., eds. *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America*, 106–25. London, 2002; idem. "Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classical Period." In McGinn, B., Collins, J. J., and Stein, S. J., eds. *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, 380–413. New York, 2003.



Gobillot<sup>35</sup> have recently drawn our attention on the influence exerted by the Old Testament pseudepigrapha upon the composition of the Qur'ān, an influence that was nonetheless already pointed out, amidst others, by Denise Masson in the 1950s<sup>36</sup> and later on by de Prémare.<sup>37</sup>

“Le Coran ... tire explicitement argument ... de certaines d'entre elles [[= the pseudepigrapha]] pour étayer son propre enseignement,” writes Gobillot.<sup>38</sup> Doubtless, Islam was not the first religious milieu in which some of their contents were largely adopted after the 1st/2nd century CE. Gobillot rightly remind us of the decisive role they also played, for example, in the development of Manicheism.<sup>39</sup> The Qur'ān does not go so far as Manichean literature goes when the latter dismisses the canonical Scriptures; it simply tries to place the pseudepigrapha at the very same level from a *canonical* viewpoint. Nevertheless several Quranic verses criticise the way in which both Jews and Christians have read and used the canonical Scriptures (e.g. Q 2:79, 85, 174), and by doing so the Quranic text appeals in different occasions to the authority of the pseudoepigrapha, which somehow *prevails*, therefore, upon the authority of the canonical books. “Dans cette perspective,” states Gobillot, “il propose une ‘refonte’ de la Révélation.”<sup>40</sup>

As this French scholar notes, the Quranic borrowing from the pseudepigrapha is twofold. At times the Qur'ān quotes more or less explicitly the pseudepigrapha, whereas it merely refers to them tacitly in other cases. An example of the former method is given in Q 20:133; 53:33–41; 87:16–19, where successive allusions are made to the “first pages” (*subḥf*) presumably revealed to Abraham and Moses. The eschatological contents of such verses draw upon the Testaments of Moses (TMos 10:3–10) and Abraham (TAb 1:6–7 A;

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<sup>35</sup> Gobillot, G. “Apocryphes de l’Ancien et du Nouveau Testament.” In Amir-Moezzi, M. A., ed. *Dictionnaire du Coran*, 57–63. Paris, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Masson, D. *Le Coran et la révélation judéo-chrétienne: Études comparées*. 2 vols. Paris, 1958.

<sup>37</sup> Prémare, “Les textes musulmans dans leur environnement.”

<sup>38</sup> Gobillot, “Apocryphes de l’Ancien et du Nouveau Testament,” 57.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

20:13–14 A).<sup>41</sup> Likewise, a most striking example of the second method is found by Gobillot in Q 17:1, a verse that deals with the “nocturnal voyage” (*isrāʾ*) of the servant of God and, according to the prophetic Sunna, with the “celestial ascension” (*miʾrāj*) of Mukammad alluded too in 53:1–18. Basing their arguments on the latter, Muslim authors have generally identified the servant of God with the Prophet of Islam. Gobillot rightly suggests in the light of Q 6:35 and 17:93, however, that this view cannot lay claim to any measure of finality.<sup>42</sup> Most likely, this passage was modelled after Abraham’s ascension as outlined in the Apocalypse of Abraham (cf. ApAb 15–18).<sup>43</sup>

The Quranic text may be thus depicted as a *palimpsest* with regard to the Old Testament seudepigrapha.<sup>44</sup> Now, beyond the

<sup>41</sup> Rather than to TMos 19:12 and TAb 1:7; 20:14, as supposed by Gobillot (“Apocryphes de l’Ancien et du Nouveau Testament,” 58)! On the plausible date of both Testaments see Nickelsburg, G. W. E. *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction*, 73, 327. Minneapolis, 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Gobillot, “Apocryphes de l’Ancien et du Nouveau Testament,” 58.

<sup>43</sup> On the date on which ApAb was presumably written see also Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 288.

<sup>44</sup> Needless to say, the pseudepigrapha of the New Testament and various other early Christian writings can be also traced behind many of the verses of the Qurʾān. Christoph Luxenberg has recently devoted a highly controversial work to this latter subject, suggesting that the Arabic term *qurʾān* corresponds originally to the Syriac term *qryānā* (lectionary), i.e. “the liturgical book containing excerpts from scripture to be read during the [religious] service” (Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 70), and that a good number of the obscure passages found in the Qurʾān should be read and interpreted according to their Syro-Aramaic equivalents. On the import and limits of Luxenberg’s ground-breaking essay—which nevertheless redevelops (see *ibid.*, 13–19) those of Geiger (*Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*) Th. Nöldeke (*Geschichte des Qorāns*. Göttingen, 1860; *idem*, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*. Strassburg, 1910), S. Fraenkel (*De vocabulis in antiquis Arabum carminibus et in Corano peregrinis*. Leiden, 1880), K. Vollers (*Volksprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien*. Strassburg, 1906; repr. Amsterdam, 1981), J. Barth (“Studien zur Kritik und Exegese des Qorāns.” *Der Islam* 6 (1916):

many parallels that one could enumerate a propos this issue, 1 Enoch provides us some of the most significant yet to my knowledge hitherto underrated ones.<sup>45</sup>

### THEMATIC AND STRUCTURAL AFFINITIES

#### BETWEEN 1 ENOCH 2:1–5:4 AND QUR'ĀN 7:36; 10:6; 16:81; 24:41, 44, 46

As is well known, Gabriel's words in the Qur'ān—which defines itself as “a warner of the warners of old” (53:56)—proclaim the coming judgment of God:

42:7 And so We have revealed to thee an Arabic Koran, that thou mayest warn the Mother of Cities and those who dwell about it, and that thou mayest warn of the Day of Gathering, wherein is no doubt—a party in Paradise, and a party in the Blaze<sup>46</sup>

36:6 ... that thou mayest warn a people whose fathers were never warned, so they are heedless.

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113–48), I. Goldziher (*Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranlegung*, Leiden, 1920), J. Horowitz (*Koranische Untersuchungen*), Speyer (*Die biblischen Erzählungen im Quran*), A. Jeffery (*The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, Baroda, 1938), and especially those of A. Mingana (“Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kur'ān.” *BJRL* 11 (1927): 77–98) and G. Lüling (*Über den Urkoran: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Koran*, Erlangen, 1974); and whose first German edition was published in 2000—see Rippin, A. “Syriac in the Qur'ān: classical Muslim theories.” In Reynolds, G. S., ed. *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, 249–61. London, 2008. A symptomatic reading of Q 10:37; 25:5–6; 41:2–3; 43:2–4; 75:17–18 (see n. 14 above) may well support Luxenburg's theory, which draws partly upon a similar, non-conventional interpretation of these very same passages (see Luxenburg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 120–22).

<sup>45</sup> See however Prémare, A.-L. de. *Les fondations de l'Islam: Entre écriture et histoire*, 305, n. 9. Paris, 2002; idem, *Aux origines du Coran: Questions d'hier, approches d'aujourd'hui*, 113 n. 111. Paris, 2004.

<sup>46</sup> Hereinafter all Quranic citations follow A. J. Arberry's translation (*The Koran Interpreted: A Translation*. 2 vols. London/New York, 1955).

Hence the Qurʾān, and more precisely its so-called Meccan chapters, which are almost entirely devoted to such an announcement,<sup>47</sup> develop in a peculiar way and in a much more discontinuous style<sup>48</sup> the basic *apocalyptic* message of 1 Enoch, which, on the other hand, partakes of both *Heilsankündigung* and *Gerichtsan-kündigung*.<sup>49</sup> The announcement of the forthcoming divine judgment functions indeed as the leitmotif of the whole Quranic message.<sup>50</sup> Men must firmly believe in it (see e.g. Q. 2:2–10; 3:9–10; 4:136), and the contents of all former revelations, to which the Qurʾān refers constantly and from which it derives its religious legitimacy (see e.g. Q. 3:3–4; 5:48; 10:37; 35:31) are strictly identified with this belief (see e.g. Q. 53:56–58; 87:16–19).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> On the Meccan chapters of the Qurʾān, their structure, contents, style, and chronology, see Bell, R. *The Qurʾān, Translated, With a Critical Rearrangement of the Surahs*. 2 vols. Edinburgh, 1939; Blachère, R. *Le Coran. Traduction selon un essai de reclassement des sourates*. 3 vols. Paris, 1949; Neuwirth, A. *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Sureen: die literarische Form des Korans—ein Zeugnis seiner Historizität?* SSGKIO, 10. Berlin, 2007.

<sup>48</sup> See Arnaldez, R. *Three Messengers for One God*. Notre Dame, IN, 1994.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Nickelsburg, G. W. E. *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108*, 37. Hermencia. Minneapolis, 2001; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> To which, in consequence, the widely adopted definition of the apocalyptic genre offered by Collins, J. J., “Introduction: Toward the Morphology of a Genre.” In Collins, J. J., ed. *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, 1–20. Semeia 14; Missoula, MT, 1979, could be legitimately applied: “Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an other-worldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world”. Besides, it should be noted here that the Arabic term *dīn* denotes in the Qurʾān God’s “judgement” as well as human “religion.”

<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the frequent Quranic diatribes against those who in their days of riches fail to remember God are reminiscent of 1 Enoch 94–97. Cf. e.g. Q 18:32–43; 68:17–33; 1 En 94:6–95:2; 96:4–8; 97:7–10.

Certainly, there is no trace in the Qur'ān of a primordial fault committed on earth by God's angels in order to explain the cause of evil (cf. however 1 En. 8; Q. 2:102). In contrast with the Enochic tradition, man—and man solely—seems by means of his arrogance to be responsible for his wicked acts (see e.g. Q. 10:12; 27:73; 96:6–7). Yet his soul reveals a twofold and contradictory attitude upon which Iblīs'—i.e., Satan's, and thus a fallen angel's—influence is not denied (see e.g. Q. 38:71–75). And the divine promise of renewing creation in the end time is also admitted by the Qur'ān (cf. Q. 10:4; 30:27).

Furthermore, some narrative patterns, sentences, phrases, terms, and ideas in 1 Enoch have a more or less strict parallel in the text of the Qur'ān, which, as I shall try to show, refers to the former in a *découpage*-like manner. This seems quite clear, for instance, if we compare several verses found in Qur'ān 7, 10, 16, 24, and others contained in 1 Enoch 2–5.

I will first mention a few verses of the hypothetical Aramaic *Urtext* of 1 Enoch as reconstructed by George Nickelsburg in 2001;<sup>52</sup> and then, their respective equivalents in the Ethiopic text edited by Michael Knibb in 1978.<sup>53</sup> The contrast between the two versions is worthy of note, though limited to very few elements. Besides, the phrase in 5:1 which the Ethiopic version omits is preserved in one of the Greek manuscripts known to us.<sup>54</sup> One should bear in mind, however, that all the extant Ethiopic witnesses to 1 Enoch postdate the 13th century CE; hence earlier Gə'əz manuscripts could have preserved a different text, closer to the Aramaic *Urtext* as reconstructed by Nickelsburg. As is widely agreed, 1 Enoch was translated into classical Ethiopic, in all probability, between the 4th and 6th centuries CE together with the other Scrip-

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<sup>52</sup> Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 150–51.

<sup>53</sup> Knibb, M. A. *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: A New Edition in the Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments in Consultation with Edward Ullendorff*, 2 vols. Oxford, 1978.

<sup>54</sup> See furthermore, concerning the reconstruction of the Aramaic *Grundschrift* of 1 En 5:1, Nickelsburg's commentary on 4Q201 i 2:9–11; 4Q204 i 1:28–30; and Codex Panopolitanus 5:1, in *1 Enoch 1*, 151, nn. 5: 1b–d.

tural and parascriptural writings included in the canon of the Abyssinian church.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, if one accepts that its translation was partly made after an Aramaic *Vorlage*,<sup>56</sup> and if, moreover, one were to regard the Ethiopic version of 1 Enoch 2–5 as the source of the aforementioned Quranic verses, it would be legitimate to conclude that the knowledge of the Enochic corpus that is to be attributed, ex hypothesis, to the editors of the Qurʾān, could have depended on a text similar to the one restored by Nickelsburg. Now, the same would hold true if their source was Greek. The Akhmim fragments of 1 Enoch, which date from the 6th century CE and do contain the text of 1 Enoch 1–32 (hence also chs. 2–5), prove substantial for the reconstruction of its Aramaic *Grundschrift*.<sup>57</sup> Besides, their date and contents make them a source plausibly known, either as such<sup>58</sup> or through a Syriac (i.e. late Aramaic) translation—as is often the case with the Greek literature translated into Arabic<sup>59</sup>—, to the editors of the Qurʾān.<sup>60</sup> Whether they based their knowledge

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<sup>55</sup> Ullendorff, E. *Ethiopia and the Bible*, 31–62. SL; Oxford, 1968.

<sup>56</sup> Ullendorff, E. “An Aramaic ‘Vorlage’ of the Ethiopic text of Enoch?” In *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi Etiopici*, 259–67. PASC, 48. Rome, 1960.

<sup>57</sup> See n. 54 above.

<sup>58</sup> Possible direct translations from Greek into Arabic have been studied by Griffith, S. H. “Greek into Arabic: Life and Letters in the Monasteries of Palestine in the Ninth Century.” *Byzantion* 56 (1986): 117–38; idem, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*. VCSS, 380. Aldershot, 1992); and Lourié, B. “India ‘Far Beyond Egypt’: Barlaam and Ioasaph and Nubia in the 6th Century.” In Bumazhnov, D., Grypeou, E., Sailors, T. B., and Toepel, A., eds. *Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient: Festschrift für Stephen Gerö zum 65. Geburtstag*, 135–80. OLA, 187. Leuven, 2010, to whom I am indebted for calling my attention to this matter.

<sup>59</sup> See Steinschneider, M. *Die arabischen Übersetzungen aus dem Griechischen*. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1889–1893; repr. Graz, 1960; Gutas, D. *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation*. New Haven, CT, 1975; Rosenthal, R. *The Classical Heritage in Islam*. London, 1992.

<sup>60</sup> I am once more grateful to Basile Lourié for pointing out this very important fact to me in a private communication of 10 October 2009.

of the Enochic corpus on the extant Aramaic, Ethiopic, Greek, Syriac, or Coptic versions is yet something we ignore.

The verses in question read as follows:

**1 Enoch 2:1–5:4, in Nickelsburg's translation:**

2:1 Contemplate all (his) works, and observe the works of heaven, how they do not alter their paths; and the luminaries <of> heaven, that they all rise and set, each one ordered in its appointed time; and they appear on their feasts and do not transgress their own appointed order. 2:2 Observe the earth, and contemplate the works that come to pass on it from the beginning until the consummation, that nothing on earth changes, but all the works of God are manifest to you. 2:3 Observe <the signs of summer and winter. Contemplate the signs of> winter, that all the earth is filled with water, and clouds and dew and rain rest upon it. 3:1 Contemplate and observe how all the trees appear withered and (how) all their leaves are stripped, except fourteen trees that are not stripped, which remain with the old until the new comes after two or three years. 4:1 Observe the signs of summer, whereby the sun burns and scorches, and you seek shelter and shade from its presence, and the earth burns with scorching heat, and you are unable to tread on the dust or the rock because of the burning. 5:1 Contemplate all the trees; their leaves blossom green on them, and they cover the trees. And all their fruit is for glorious honor. Contemplate all these works, and understand that he who lives for all the ages made all these works. 5:2 And his works come to pass from year to year, and they all carry out their works for him, and their works do not alter, but they all carry out his word. 5:3 Observe how, in like manner, the sea and the rivers carry out and do not alter their works from his words. 5:4 But you have not stood firm nor acted according to his commandments; but you have turned aside, you have spoken proud and hard words with your unclean mouth against his majesty. Hard of heart! There will be no peace for you!<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. also 1 En 101:1–9.

**1 Enoch 2:1–5:4, in Knibb's translation:**

2. 1 <Contemplate> all the events in heaven, how the lights in heaven do not change their courses, how each rises and sets in order, each at its proper time, and they do not transgress their law. 2. 2 Consider the earth, and understand from the work which is done upon it, from the beginning to the end, that no work of God changes as it becomes manifest. 2. 3 Consider the summer and the winter, how the whole earth is full of water, and cloud and dew and rain rest upon it. 3. 1 *Contemplate and see* how all the trees appear withered, and (how) all their leaves are stripped, with the exception of fourteen trees which are not stripped, which remain with the old (foliage) until the new comes after two or three years. 4. 1 And again, *contemplate* the days of summer, how *at its beginning* the sun is above (the earth). You seek shelter and shade because of the heat of the sun, and you cannot tread upon the earth, or upon a rock, because of its heat. 5. 1 *Contemplate* how the trees are covered with green leaves, and bear fruit. And understand in respect of everything and perceive how He who lives for ever made all these things for you; 5. 2 and (how) his works (are) before him in each succeeding year, and all his works serve him and do not change, but as God has decreed, so everything is done. 5. 3 And consider how the seas and rivers together complete their tasks. 5. 4 But you have not persevered, not observed the law of the Lord. But you have transgressed, and have spoken proud and hard words with your unclean mouth against his majesty. You hard of heart! You will not have peace!

Some brief considerations about the style of these verses and the Quranic use of natural order as a rhetorical frame will be perhaps suitable before confronting 1 Enoch 2:1–5:4 with the Quranic text.



Michael Stone<sup>62</sup> and George Nickelsburg<sup>63</sup> have analysed with some detail the *parabolic* use of natural order—as opposed to human disobedience—in prophetic, apocalyptic, and wisdom literature from the Second Temple period (cf. e.g. 1 En 2:1–5:4; 1QS iii, 15–iv, 26; 1Q34bis 3 ii 1–4; TNaph 3:2–4:1). “A number of Israelite texts contrast nature’s steadfast obedience to God’s commands with humanity’s divergence from the divine statutes,” writes Nickelsburg.<sup>64</sup> “The language personifies nature’s activity in a way that remythologizes the material creation; the natural elements are given personalities reminiscent of the polytheistic worldview that placed gods and demi-gods in charge of the various parts of the cosmos. As a result, the human and nonhuman worlds are spoken of in the same terms.”<sup>65</sup> In the Qur’ān nature plays a no less relevant role either within the context of different metaphors which are set forth to increase the rhetorical effect of a certain description (see e.g. Q 24:39–40) or as a means to indicate in a lyrical way<sup>66</sup> the undeniable presence of God’s signs in the world, his favour towards mankind, and his sovereignty over creation (see e.g. Q 56: 68–74). Here again several verses belonging to this latter category depict the natural order as implicitly opposed to human disobedience. I will now cite those which seem to me most significant in the light of the previously referred Enochic passage (1 En 2:1–5:4):

24:41 Hast thou not seen how that whatsoever is in the heavens and in the earth extols God, and the birds spreading their wings? Each—He knows its prayer and its extolling; and God knows the things they do. 24:42 To God belongs the Kingdom

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<sup>62</sup> Stone, M. E. “The Parabolic Use of Natural Order in Judaism of the Second Temple Age.” In Shaked, Sh., Shulman, D. D., and Stroumsa, G. G., eds. *Gilgul: Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions Dedicated to R. J. Zwi Werblowsky*, 298–308. SHR, 50. Leiden, 1987.

<sup>63</sup> Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 152–55.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 152–53.

<sup>66</sup> Berque, J. *Relire le Coran*, 23. Paris, 1993.

of the heavens and the earth, and to Him is the homecoming. 24:43 Hast thou not seen how God drives the clouds, then composes them, then converts them into a mass, then thou seest the rain issuing out of the midst of them? And He sends down out of heaven mountains, wherein is hail, so that He smites whom He will with it, and turns it aside from whom He will; wellnigh the gleam of His lightning snatches away the sight. 24:44 God turns about the day and the night; surely in that is a lesson for those who have eyes. 24:45 God has created every beast of water, and some of them go upon their bellies, and some of them go upon two feet, and some of them go upon four; God creates whatever He will; God is powerful over everything. (24:46) Now We have sent down signs making all clear; God guides whomsoever He will to a straight path.

10:5 It is He who made the sun a radiance, and the moon a light, and determined it by stations, that you might know the number of the years and the reckoning. God created that not save with the truth, distinguishing the signs to a people who know. 10:6 In the alternation of night and day, and what God has created in the heavens and the earth—surely there are signs for a godfearing people.

16:81 And it is God who has appointed for you coverings of the things He created, and He has appointed for you of the mountains refuges, and He has appointed for you shirts to protect you from the heat, and shirts to protect you from your own violence. Even so He perfects His blessing upon you, that haply you will surrender.

7:36 And those that cry lies to Our signs, and wax proud against them—those shall be inhabitants of the Fire, therein dwelling forever.

In my opinion, the following correspondences—which include both interfragmentary conceptual correspondences and structural concordances between the two corpora—should be highlighted:

*Table 1. Intertextual correspondences between 1 Enoch 2–5 and the Qur'ān concerning the parabolic use of natural order as opposed to human disobedience*

	1 Enoch	Qur'ān
A/A'	2:1–2 + 5:1	24:41
B/B'	2:2 + 4:1	24:46
C/C'	2:4 + 5:1 + 5:2	24:44 + 10:6
D/D'	4:1	16:81
E/E'	5:4	7:36

If we put side by side these passages we may obtain the following conceptual, i.e. non-literal, schemes:

*Table 2. Conceptual correspondences between 1 En 2:1–2 + 5:1 and Q 24:41*

A	Contemplate			the trees	
A+A'		the heavens	the earth		—they extol God.
A'	Hast thou not seen			the birds?	

*Table 3. Conceptual correspondences between 1 En 2:2 + 4:1 and Q 24:46*

B	... manifest to you	—(God's) signs
B'	God's signs	are manifest (to you).

*Table 4. Conceptual correspondences between 1 En 2:4 + 5:1 + 5:2 and Q 24:44 + 10:6*

C	...the signs	of winter	and summer	come to pass from year to year.
C'	In the succession	of the night	and the day	—there are signs for a godfearing people.
C'				for those who have eyes.

Table 5. Conceptual correspondences between 1 En 4:1 and Q 16:81

D	...you seek	shelter	shade		yourselves	from the sun...
D+D'				to protect		
D'	God has appointed for you	shade	shelter		you	from the heat...

Table 6. Conceptual correspondences between 1 En 5:4 and Q 7:36

E	But you have transgressed		spoken		words		God's majesty.		you!
E+E'		and		proud		against		There shall be no peace for	
E'	But those that deny God's signs		wax				them.—		them.

In at least one of the two cases in which two entire verses reflect each other (1 En 5:4; Q 7:36) one finds their structure (i.e., the formal distribution of the parts of the discourse) to be quasi-coincident (cf. I.i/i'/i''; II.i.a/b; II.ii.a/b; c/c'; d/d'; f/f'); in addition, a rigorous conceptual agreement between several segments should also be noted (cf. b/c'ζ; c/c'αβδε; c'/de; d/d'γδεη; e/fβ; f/fδεζ, g'ζ; and especially c/c'α; d/d'γeη; f/fδ):<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Table 8 below is partly inspired in the work done by Meynet, R., Pouzet, L., Farouki, N., and Sinno, A. *Rhétorique sémitique. Textes de la Bible et de la Tradition musulmane*. Paris, 1998; and Cuypers, M. "L'analyse rhétorique: une nouvelle méthode d'interprétation du Coran." *MScRel* 59 (2002): 31–57.

Tables 7–8. General and detailed structural concordances between 1 En 5:4 and Q 7:36

I.i	But you have not persevered	I.ii	nor observed the law of the Lord.
I.i'	But you have transgressed	I.ii'	and have spoken proud and hard words with your unclean mouth against his majesty.
I.i.a	You hard of heart!	II.ii.a	There will be no peace for you!
I.i''	But those that cry lies to our signs	I.ii''	and wax proud against them
II.i.b	—those shall be inhabitants of the Fire,	II.ii.b	therein dwelling for ever.

	A	B	Γ	Δ	E	Z	H
a	But	you		have not persevered			
a'	—	—		—			
b			nor	observed	the law	<i>of the Lord</i>	
b'	<i>BUT</i>		—	—	—	—	
c	<i>BUT</i>	<i>you</i>		<i>have transgressed</i>	—	—	
c'	<i>BUT</i>	<i>those that</i>		<i>cry</i>	<i>lies</i>	<i>to our signs</i>	
d			<i>AND</i>	<i>have spoken</i>	<i>PROUD and hard words</i>	with your unclean mouth	<i>AGAINST his majesty</i>
d'			<i>AND</i>	<i>wax</i>	<i>PROUD</i>	<i>AGAINST them</i>	

	Α	Β	Γ	Δ	Ε	Ζ	Η
e		<i>you hard of heart</i>					
e'		—					
f	there	—		<i>WILL BE</i>	<i>no peace</i>	<i>for you</i>	
f'	—	<i>Those</i>		<i>SHALL BE</i>	<i>inhabi- tants</i>	<i>of the fire</i>	
g	—			—		—	
g'	therein			dwelling		<i>for ever</i>	

As I have already suggested in Chapter 2, the fact that these lexical, syntactical, and rhetorical coincidences bear upon a *single* text, namely 1 Enoch 1–5, proves them to be non-accidental. Besides, there is nowadays general agreement amongst Second Temple scholars that the style and contents of the Enochic corpus influenced, amongst others, the authors of such Jewish and Christian apocalypses as Daniel 7–12, Jubilees, the Testament of Moses, the writings about the New Jerusalem from Qumran, the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, the Apocalypse of Abraham, Didache 16, the Apocalypse of Peter, and the book of Revelation. Hence, it would have been quite strange if the Qur’ān—which is to be considered in my opinion, despite its many concerns and its inner stylistic variety—, as a late classical apocalypse, did not allude to 1 Enoch in one way or another.

Even if the influence of 1 Enoch upon the Qur’ān deserves a larger study, it follows from the above said that such an influence goes far beyond the non-conclusive, yet symptomatic assimilation of the Biblical Enoch and Idrīs, the Quranic prophet “raised” by God “high in heaven” (Q 19:56–57).<sup>68</sup> Finally, a possible indirect

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<sup>68</sup> On the origins and meaning of the Quranic legend about Idrīs cf. Erder, Y. “The Origin of the Name Idrīs in the Qur’ān: A Study of the Influence of Qumran Literature on Early Islam.” *JNES* 49.4 (1990): 339–50; Arjomand, “Messianism, Millennialism and Revolution in Early Is-

influence of 1 Enoch upon certain Quranic passages, and motifs, ought not be disregarded. As said above, Muḥammad's ascent to the heavens in Qur'ān 17:1 and 53:1–18 seems to be dependent, via ApAb 15–18, on 1 Enoch 13:8–16:4. Likewise, the Quranic “well-preserved tablet” (*lawḥ mahfūz*) or “mother of Scripture” (*umm al-kitāb*) after which all revelations are modelled (cf. Q 3:7; 13:38–39; 43:2–4; 85:21–22) is reminiscent, via Jub 3:31; 6:17, 35; 16:18–29; 18:19; 23:32; 30:19; 31:32; 32:15—where heavenly books are said to contain the celestial halakah communicated by God's angels to Moses—of 1 Enoch 14:1; 47:3; 81:2; 89:61–64, 68–71, 76–77; 90:14, 17, 20; 93:2; 97:6; 98:6–8; 99:3; 103:1–4; 104:7–8; 106:19–107:1; 108:3, 7, 15—where they are said to contain, instead, the records of all human sins and righteous deeds (cf. too Isa 4:3; Dan 7:10; 10:21; 12:1–3; Jub 36:10; ApZeph 3:6–9; 9:3; 4 Ezra 6:20; 2 Baruch 24:1; TAB 12–13 A; TJud 20:1–5; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 20:12–13; 21:11–12; Heb 12:23; Q 54:52–53). Cf. also Qur'ān 3:46; 19:29–30—where Jesus is said to speak from the cradle—and 1 Enoch 106:3—where a similar story is narrated about Noah.<sup>69</sup>

### THE RECEPTION OF 1 ENOCH WITHIN FORMATIVE ISLAM: A FEW CONTRASTING HYPOTHESES

It is difficult to ascertain when and how Enochic materials were incorporated into the Qur'ān, whose editorial process is, moreover, far from being clear.<sup>70</sup> Leaving aside the problem of its various col-

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lamic History”; Reeves, “Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qur'ān.” In Reeves, J. C., ed. *Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, 43–60, here 44–52.

<sup>69</sup> Most probably, the Arabic (originally Syriac!) Gospel of the Infancy 1:2 provided the adaptation of the Noah story to the redactors of the Qur'ān. See Segovia, C. A. “Noah as Eschatological Mediator Transposed: From 2 Enoch 71-72 to the Christological Echoes of 1 Enoch 106:3 in the Qur'an.” *Henoah* 33 (1/2011): 130–45.

<sup>70</sup> See Motzki, H. “The Collection of the Qur'ān: A Reconsideration of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Developments.” *Der Islam* 78 (2001): 1–34; Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran*; Kropp, M., ed. *Results of Contemporary Research on the Qur'an: The Question of a Historio-Critical*

lections (i.e., those of Salīm b. Māqīl, al-‘Abbās, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī, ‘Ubayy b. Ka‘b, and Ibn Mas‘ūd),<sup>71</sup> several alternative dates have been suggested for the final composition of the so-called Uthmanic codex: ca. 653, i.e. during ‘Uthmān’s caliphate;<sup>72</sup> between 685–705, i.e. under ‘Abd al-Malik’s rule;<sup>73</sup> and the late 8th or the early 9th century.<sup>74</sup> Considering the extant textual evidence, and on the basis of palaeographic analysis, the more we can say is that no complete Qur’ān prior to this latter date has been discovered, and that the results of the efforts made to prove the antiquity of certain fragmentary scrolls and papyri<sup>75</sup> are not fully convincing with regard to the alleged antiquity of the entire Uthmanic text.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, it is not possible to give a reliable date for the inclusion of the aforementioned Enochic materials in the Qur’ān; nor is there inner evidence in the Qur’ān itself or in the Hadīth corpus as to when this happened.

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*Text of the Qur’an.* BTS, 100. Beirut, 2007; Böwering, B. “Recent research on the construction of the Qur’ān.” In Reynolds, G. S., ed. *The Qur’an in Its Historical Context*, 70–87; Gilliot, C. “Reconsidering the authorship of the Qur’ān: is the Qur’ān partly the fruit of a progressive and collective work?” in the same volume, 88–108.

<sup>71</sup> On which see Deroche, F. “Recensions coraniques.” In Amir-Moezzi, M. A., ed. *Dictionnaire du Coran*, 733–35.

<sup>72</sup> Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, 61.510. This widespread traditional view is still shared by most scholars, who in general accept the point that the Uthmanic recension drew on a previous oral-written tradition. See e.g. Burton, J. *The Collection of the Qur’an*. Cambridge, 1977); Donner, F. M. *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*. SLAEI, 14. Princeton, 1998.

<sup>73</sup> Mingana, A. “The Transmission of the Kur’ān.” *JMEOS* 5 (1915–1916): 25–47; Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*.

<sup>74</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*; Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*.

<sup>75</sup> E.g. Puin, G.-R. “Observations on Early Qur’ān Manuscripts in Ṣan‘ā’.” In Wild, S., ed. *The Qur’an as Text*, 107–11. Leiden, 1996.

<sup>76</sup> See for discussion Amir-Moezzi, M. A., and Kohlberg, E. “Révélation et falsification: Introduction à l’édition du *Kitāb al-qirā’at* d’al-Sayyārī.” *JA* 293.2 (2005): 663–722, here 672–73, n. 36.



A different issue is how formative Islam gained knowledge of the Enochic corpus. As Gerhard Böwering states, “[i]t is generally believed that Muḥammad gathered his biblical knowledge principally, if not exclusively, from oral sources. This oral lore was communicated to Muḥammad in his mother tongue, but its original forms were in Syriac, Aramaic, Ethiopian and Hebrew materials, as evidenced by the vocabulary of foreign origin to be found in the Arabic Qur’ān.”<sup>77</sup> Now, judging from what has been said so far, it seems natural to conclude that several parabiblical writings, most of which had been written in Aramaic and then translated into other Semitic and non-Semitic languages, were also known to early Muslims in written form. To begin with, then, one must consider whether certain contents of 1 Enoch were orally communicated, textually transmitted to, or, perhaps more likely, *collected* and *re-worked* by them. But here again no definitive conclusion can be reached due to the lack of any source information on the subject. Likewise, one cannot a priori decide whether they were thus transmitted after the original Aramaic version of 1 Enoch or after its Ethiopic, Greek, Syriac, or Coptic translations.

Possible interactions between Muḥammad and sectarian Judaeo-Christian groups in Syria-Mesopotamia were suggested by Hans-Joachim Schoeps in the final pages of his 1964 essay on the factional disputes within the early church,<sup>78</sup> where he further developed Adolf von Harnack’s and Wilhelm Schlatter’s theories on the Christian-Jewish roots of Islam.<sup>79</sup> Whereas, moving a step further, different authors have recently endorsed the idea, as said above, that Judaeo-Christianity did not only influence Islam, but that it was undistinguishable from it until a very late date indeed. The interest of

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<sup>77</sup> Böwering, “Recent research on the construction of the Qur’ān,” 70.

<sup>78</sup> Schoeps, H.-J. *Das Judenchristentum: Untersuchungen über Gruppenbildungen und Parteikämpfe in der frühen Christenheit*. Bern, 1964; idem, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, 342. Tübingen, 1949.

<sup>79</sup> See Harnack, A. von. *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 2:537. 3 vols Tübingen, 41909; Schlatter, W. “Die Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums zum Islam.” *EM* 64 (1918): 251–64. See also Pines, Sch. “Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity.” *JSAI* 4 (1984): 135–52.

sectarian Christ-believing Jews in the Enochic booklets is, in fact, sufficiently attested in their own writings, which do quite often reuse a significant though limited number of Enochic motifs.<sup>80</sup> Yet we can only speculate as to whether this was the way through which early Muslims gained knowledge of the Enochic corpus. In any case, we need not go back to Muḥammad. As earlier suggested, in the mid-7th century something that would later become the Islamic religion was beginning to emerge, though not yet as an independent *entity*. The *parting of the ways* between Islam and its original “sectarian milieu” took place, in all probability, between the late 7th and the mid-8th century.<sup>81</sup> I propose to label this as the *early formative period* of the Islamic religion in contrast, on the one hand, to its twofold pre-formative period (if we take the events that took place from the mid- to the late 7th century, of which we do know something, to be different from those we can only presume to have taken place earlier in that very same century), and in contrast, on the other hand, to its late, i.e. final, formative period (mid-8th to 10th century); and thus to divide those two major periods of early Muslim history into two different sub-periods: pre-formative periods A and B and formative periods A and B (A meaning early and B meaning late). The following scheme summarizes my proposal and provides roughly both a *terminus post quem* and a *terminus ante quem* for the collection of the Qurʾān, whose text I take to have been progressively established between ‘Abd al-Malik’s rule (late 7th century) and Ibn Mujāhid’s scriptural reform in the 10th century:

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<sup>80</sup> See VanderKam, J. C. “1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs, and Enoch in Early Christian Literature.” In VanderKam, J. C., and Adler, W., eds. *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, 33–101; Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch* 1, 87, 97–103.

<sup>81</sup> See Nevo and Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 169–354.

Table 9. Pre-formative and formative Islamic periods

	EVENTS <sup>82</sup>			
	<i>Historical</i>		<i>Scriptural</i>	
PERIODS	According to the Muslim tradition	Alternative chronology	According to the Muslim tradition	Alternative chronology
Early pre-formative period (early to mid-7th century)	Hegira Muḥammad's death Beginning of the Arab take over	Uncertain events =	'Uthmān's codex	
Late pre-formative period (mid- to late 7th century)	Mu'āwiya	= Development of a somewhat indeterminate monotheism with strong Judaeo-Christian components by the Arabs		
Early formative period (late 7th to mid-8th century)	'Abd al-Malik's coins with Muḥammad's name	= The parting of the ways between the new Arab religion and its sectarian milieu begins	'Abd al-Malik scriptural reform	The collection of the Qur'ān begins Development of the Quranic corpus
Late formative period (mid-8th to 10th century)	The Abbasids	= The aforementioned parting of the ways is achieved	Ibn Mujāhid's reform	= The development of the Quranic corpus is likewise achieved

Hence four *different* possibilities arise regarding the time on which the aforementioned Enochic materials were presumably known and incorporated into the Quranic text, since it all depends on which period we opt for, both regarding this particular issue and

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<sup>82</sup> Only a brief sketch of those meaningful to the present study is given below.

the collection of the Qurʾān itself. To be sure, contextual problems are similar in all the four cases. Who was responsible for the selection and the adaptation of such materials, and from where were they taken? Once more we cannot know. Regarding the former point there are however, if we opt for pre-formative periods A/B, two names worthy of mentioning, namely those of Zayd b. Tābit and Ubayy b. Kaʿb.<sup>83</sup> Whilst if we opt for the early formative period we likewise need to consider the names of Yazīd b. Hurmuz, Hammām and Wahb b. Munnabih, and Mālik b. Dīnār.<sup>84</sup> This seems to me a safer option, for it relies on better grounds. Yet a later date is equally possible, although I consider the early formative period as the most plausible one we should look at, at least regarding the selection of the above referred materials, due to the many efforts made between ʿAbd al-Malik’s times and the beginnings of the Abbasid caliphate to update and enrich the religious knowledge of the early Muslim community on the basis of a careful reading of the Jewish and Christian scriptures—whereas the study of the late formative period may shed light upon the textual and formal development of the Qurʾān as such, and therefore upon the adaptation of those very same materials.<sup>85</sup> As to our second problem, i.e. the textual source, Eastern Syriac (dyophysite) Christianity, on the one hand, and both Western Syriac and Egyptian (miaphysite) Christianity, on the other hand, could have also functioned as transmitters of different apocalyptic materials, given the role played by Jewish apocalyptic writings in them.<sup>86</sup> The poverty

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<sup>83</sup> See Gilliot, C. “Les ‘informateurs’ juives et chrétiens de Muḥammad: Réprise d’un problème traité par Alois Sprenger et Theodor Nöldeke.” *JSAI* 22 (1998): 84–126.

<sup>84</sup> See Prémare, *Les fondations de l’Islam*, 324–39.

<sup>85</sup> On which see Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran*.

<sup>86</sup> See Rubens Duval, *La littérature syriaque*, 79–86. Paris, <sup>3</sup>1907; repr. Amsterdam, 1970; Bergren, Th. A. “Christian Influence on the Transmission History of 4, 5, and 6 Ezra.” In VanderKam, J. C., and Adler, W., eds. *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, 102–27, here 108; Frankfurter, D. “The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories,” in the same volume, 129–200. It should be noted, moreover, that in the late 5th century some sectarian Judaeo-Christians

of the data at our disposal makes it again difficult to reach any conclusion on this subject, but the quantity and variety of Syriac materials reworked by early Muslim authors turns nonetheless Syriac Christianity into a quite plausible candidate. Rabbinic Judaism should be instead disregarded in reason of its anti-apocalyptic claims.<sup>87</sup>

An alternative approach would be to trace back Muslim knowledge of 1 Enoch to 615 CE, i.e. to the times of the so-called Muslim migration to Abyssinia.<sup>88</sup> Inasmuch as Ibn Ishāq provides two separate lists with the names of those who departed from Mecca,<sup>89</sup> the question of whether he had in mind two consecutive migrations has been many times disputed. It is, however, doubtful whether his two lists do not simply denote “a succession of small groups rather than two emigrations of large parties.”<sup>90</sup> Interestingly enough, the names of Ja‘far b. Abī Ṭālib, ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān, ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Mas‘ūd and Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī are mentioned amongst the Muslim migrants to Abyssinia by Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām, al-Wāqidī, and al-Ṭabarī. Besides, if it had place, the contact between the Arabs and the Ethiopian (miaphysite) Christians must have been quite intense and fruitful. Ibn Ishāq goes as far as to report that the Negus finally abandoned his Christian faith and embraced the Muslim creed.<sup>91</sup> The episode gave birth to much Ḥadīth litera-

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might have taken shelter under Eastern dyophysite Christianity, on which see Pines, Sch. “The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source.” *PLASH* 2.13 (1966): 1–73, here 43.

<sup>87</sup> See Boyarin, *Border Lines*.

<sup>88</sup> It must be observed here that 1 Enoch was already included by that time in the Old Testament canon of the Ethiopian church.

<sup>89</sup> Ibn Ishāq, *Sira* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 208–15; see also Ṭabarī, *Annales*, 1181–84.

<sup>90</sup> Watt, W. M., and McDonald, M. V. “Translator’s Foreword.” In *The History of al-Ṭabarī: An Annotated Translation*, 6: *Muḥammad at Mecca*, xliii. Edited by W. M. Watt and M. V. McDonald. SSNES/BP. Albany, NY, 1988.

<sup>91</sup> Ibn Ishāq, *Sira*, 223–24.

ture,<sup>92</sup> and Ibn Ishāq declares that Muḥammad himself prayed over the Negus when he died.<sup>93</sup> An influence in the opposite direction should, however, not be dismissed in spite of these very emphatic and eulogistic assessments, for Ethiopian Christianity, which doubtless had to be attractive to the eyes of Judaeo-Christian sympathizers by reason of its Jewish beliefs and usages, was by then better established than the incipient Islamic religion. We are thus informed that the Negus bestowed gifts upon Muḥammad, though no books are mentioned amidst these.<sup>94</sup> Muslim sources present, of course, the inconvenient of being late composed and not always reliable.<sup>95</sup> Yet the presence of Ethiopic loanwords in the Qurʾān is most remarkable at this point.<sup>96</sup> As Manfred Kropp puts it, “[c]ommentary on possible theological influence from the Ethiopic side on Muḥammad’s views and teachings [has] remained vague and casual, perhaps due to the rather marginal importance and relevance of Ethiopian Christianity in the framework of scientific research on Christian Oriental churches and theologies. Now it is evident that the loan words are the best and clearest indicators of influence. But even these have not been studied exhaustively; many questions have been left open, even in the magisterial study of Nöldeke and those of his followers, up to the recent compilation of those studies in Leslau’s *Comparative Dictionary* of 1987.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> See Raven, W. “Some Early Islamic Texts on the Negus of Abyssinia.” *JSS* 33.2 (1988): 197–218.

<sup>93</sup> Ibn Ishāq, *Sira*, 224.

<sup>94</sup> Raven, “Some Early Islamic Texts on the Negus of Abyssinia,” 214–18.

<sup>95</sup> On the uncertain historical value of Ibn Ishāq’s aforementioned report see Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies*, 38–43.

<sup>96</sup> See Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*; Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān*; Leslau, W. *Comparative Dictionary of Gəʿəz: Classical Ethiopic*. Wiesbaden, 1987; Kropp, M. “Beyond single words: *Māʾida–Shayṭān–jibt* and *ṭaghūt*. Mechanisms of transmission into the Ethiopic (Gəʿəz) Bible and the Qurʾān.” In Reynolds, G. S., ed. *The Qurʾān in Its Historical Context*, 204–16.

<sup>97</sup> Kropp, “Beyond single words,” 204.

### SOME FINAL REMARKS

1 Enoch 2–5 provided the editors of the Qur'ān a series of narrative patterns, themes, and motifs, that helped them reflect, or at least express in a well-known and thus effective literary form, their own reflections upon the contraposition between human rebellion and the order of nature—and thereby upon the moral difference that had to be observed, in their view, between mankind and the rest of God's creatures—as a means to articulate a consequent admonitory, parenetic discourse addressed to its readers. The Enochic corpus provided formative Islam, hence, some relevant theological and anthropological notions as well as some literary advices common to Second Temple prophetic, apocalyptic, and wisdom literature which had been already reworked by Christian authors either in their own writings or through their adaptation, translation, and reuse, of several Jewish texts, 1 Enoch included. The early Islamic faith self-defined itself against this common religious and scriptural background by adopting some of its ideological premises and narrative strategies, some of which were incorporated in a *décompage*-like manner into the Quranic text, which functions therefore as a palimpsest with regard to those scriptural and para-scriptural writings of Jewish and Christian provenance previously known to, and used in, the “sectarian milieu” from within which the Islamic religion gradually emerged. We neither know who decided to include them in the Qur'ān nor when this happened. Likewise, we do not know from where—i.e. from which of the many existing versions of 1 Enoch and from which concrete religious context—they were extracted. Hopefully, further research will help to clarify this point and to shed new light upon other possible parallels between 1 Enoch and the Qur'ān. But it seems well within the evidence to conclude that the “sectarian milieu” out of which Islam arose was either an apocalyptic-oriented one or else closely familiarized with both apocalyptic writings and apocalyptic ideas, which pervade, as shown above, the entire Quranic corpus. Had early Muslims not been equally familiarized with them—i.e. had they not belonged to that “sectarian milieu” in one way or another—they would have failed to understand, *a fortiori*, the message of the Qur'ān. Should it be recalled here that

in the 8th century Ibn Ishāq still seemed to regard Muḥammad as the Paraclete announced in John 15:26<sup>98</sup> and that this not so intriguing a viewpoint made its way into Muslim historiography in the following century, for it is mainly through the latter that we know of Ibn Ishāq's work?

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<sup>98</sup> Ibn Ishāq, *Sira*, 149.



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**PART TWO:**  
**REVISITING SOME EARLY ISLAMIC**  
**SOURCES, FACTS,**  
**AND INTERPRETATIVE ISSUES**



# THE NEEDLE IN THE HAYSTACK: ISLAMIC ORIGINS AND THE NATURE OF THE EARLY SOURCES

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of Islamic origins focuses on three core topics: the provenance of quranic materials and their canonization in the Qurʾān, the biography of Muḥammad and his successors, and the normative example of Muḥammad preserved in thousands of independent reports: that is, to say, the Qurʾān, the *sīra*, and the Sunna. Thus we are dependent for our historical reconstructions almost exclusively on texts. Not just any texts, but texts produced within the community and for which the earliest extant manuscripts are a century or so after the events they purport to describe. Ignaz Goldziher and others had earlier noted this out about *hadīths* of the Sunna, but starting in the mid 1970s, a group of scholars, who having pointed out that this fairly obvious fact applied to the Qurʾān, its *tafsīr*, and Islam's early history, and then acted accordingly, were described, often derogatorily, as revisionists and sceptics. Prominent among these scholars stood John Wansbrough, and his students Patricia Crone and Michael Cook. Since then many other scholars have challenged both their conclusions and assumptions, some by simply negating their scepticism and a few somewhat more fruitfully by attempting to reconstruct earlier texts from later extant ones.

Despite what some contemporary sceptics claim—or perhaps more accurately what the strawman sceptics are said to claim—these efforts by the challengers have made a significant impact on the study of Islamic origins. Although much has been accomplished with the Qurʾān, the *sīra*, and the Sunna since the work of Wansbrough et al, many of the problems to which he alerted scholars still remain inherent in the sources—whether extant or reconstructed. As a result, those scholars who seek to extract historical information about Islamic origins from these sources are constructing figures which the sources may not describe. The sources describe largely theological entities, not historical ones. And, despite how the impressive work of scholars to narrow the gap between texts and origins, they have not freed us from the most important claim made by Wansbrough.

### WANSBROUGH AND LITERARY ANALYSIS

Negative reactions to John Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies* and *The Sectarian Milieu* focus on three major concerns (1) is on the late dating of the canonization of the Qurʾān; (2) placing the origin of Islam within a Judeo-Christian sectarian milieu outside of the Hijaz; and (3) the redescription of the *sīra* as narrative exegesis instead of history. All of these concerns might be dismissed as conclusions that Wansbrough himself described as “provisional,” “conjectural,” and “tentative and emphatically provisional.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, for the first concern, Wansbrough noted that “it is of course neither possible, nor necessary, to maintain that the material of the canon did not, in some form, exist prior to that period of intensive literary activity”, though his claim that the *ne varietur* text only occurred “towards the end of the second century”<sup>2</sup> needs to be modified.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wansbrough, John. *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, ix and xi. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; idem. *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, x. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 44.

<sup>3</sup> Several scholars have suggested a “Marwānid” instead of an ‘Uthmānic canonization of the Qurʾān. That is to say, the text was standardized during the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik. See de Prémare, Alfred-Louis.

With 25 out of the 28 prophetic figures in the Qurʾān bearing a strong resemblance to figures within the Judeo-Christian traditions, and with direct quranic addresses and references to Jews, Christians, and People of the Book, disputing the second concern seems to be mere catering to Muslim sensitivities<sup>4</sup> or fearing being accused of robbing Islam of its originality.<sup>5</sup> Scholars such as Suliman

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*Les fondations de l'islam: entre écriture et histoire*, 278–306. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002; and Robinson, Chase F. *ʿAbd al-Malik*, 100–4. Oxford: One-world, 2005. See also Cook, Michael. *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction*, 119–22. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; and Powers, David S. *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet*, 155–96 and 227–33. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2009. I thank Stephen J. Shoemaker for making available to me his paper “Canonization and Criticism: The Collection of the Qurʾān and the Resistance to Methods from Biblical Studies in the Qurʾānic Studies,” presented at the *Society of Biblical Literature* Annual Meeting, Atlanta, November 20, 2010. For an argument against the Marwānid hypothesis, see Sadeghi, Behnam, and Uwe Bergmann. “The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qurʾān of the Prophet.” *Arabica* 57 (2010): 343–435.

<sup>4</sup> Berg, Herbert. “Failures (of Nerve?) in the Study of Islamic Origins.” In Arnal, William E., Willi Braun, and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds. *Failure and Nerve in the Study of Religion: Working with Donald Wiebe* (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> Failure to preserve the originality of Islam was a charge leveled at Wansbrough: “I am always annoyed by those who do not dare to ascribe any originality to the Arabs and constantly look for Jewish and Christian models which the community of Muḥammad might have borrowed.” Juynboll, G. H. A. “Review of *Qurānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* by John Wansbrough,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 24 (1979): 294. R. B. Serjeant likewise criticized Wansbrough’s *Qurānic Studies* as having “a thoroughly reactionary stand in reverting to the over-emphasis of the Hebrew element in Islam. ... one has the sense of a disguised polemic seeking to strip Islam and the Prophet of all but the minimum of originality.” Serjeant, R. B. “Review of *Qurānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* by John Wansbrough and *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1978): 76–78. The need to make religions unique and “original”, that is, not a product of its socio-cultural context, is essentially a crypto-theological position. The question should not be, “is the origin of

Bashear and Fred Donner, who could hardly be called radical, both admit something similar.<sup>6</sup> Granted, Wansbrough's construction of that milieu is problematic. As for the third concern, much of the *sīra* clearly is commentary<sup>7</sup> despite recent attempts to show that at least some of it has an early provenance (see discussion of Görke and Schoeler's reconstruction below). What is most surprising, is how little can be shown to be early.

Donner, in his book *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, believes he has decisively undermined the aforementioned historical concerns raised by Wansbrough's approach. The existence of early "multiple orthodoxies" which nevertheless agree "on most central features of the traditional origins story;" the non-existence of authorities who could have redacted this story; and the improbability of no dissenting view surviving somewhere in the vast Muslim empire; all belie the conclusions of the argument of the sceptical approach.<sup>8</sup> Of course, one could argue that given that the competing orthodoxies agree on the main features of Islamic origins (such as the Qur'ān), they are but different movements within one orthodoxy, which in turn explains why redacting authorities are unnecessary and dissent

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Islam a product of its context?" but "what was the context that gave rise to Islam?"

<sup>6</sup> Bashear, Suliman. *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*. Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997; and Donner, Fred M. *Muhammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> See for example, the analysis of Qur'ān 15:89–92. Wansbrough, *Secularian Milieu*, 10–11; Berg, "Competing Paradigms in the Study of Islamic Origins: Qur'ān 15:89–91 and the Value of *Isnāds*." In Berg, Herbert, ed. *Methods and Theories in the Study of Islamic Origins*, 259–90. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003; Motzki, Harald, Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, and Sean W. Anthony. *Analysing Muslim Tradition: Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghāzī Ḥadīth*, 231–303. Leiden, Brill, 2010; and Berg, H. "The 'School' of Ibn 'Abbās." In Burge, Stephen, ed. *The Meaning of the Word: Lexicology and Tafsīr* (forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> Donner, Fred M. *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, 26–27. Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997.

need not have been suppressed. To focus on these three concerns, however, is to miss Wansbrough's most important contribution.

Wansbrough's real contribution was his call for literary analysis. He admits that he was not the first to acknowledge historiography as literature.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, he notes that this fact "must cause some unease among historians who had staked a claim on their special ability to tell us 'what really happened' (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*)."<sup>10</sup> Wansbrough elaborates:

the sources for that historical event are exclusively literary, predominantly exegetical, and incarcerated in a grammar designed to stress the immediate equivalence of word and world. ... all we know is what we have been told. With neither artifact nor archive, the student of Islamic origins could quite easily become victim of a literary and linguistic conspiracy. He is, of course, mostly convinced that he is not. Reason for that must be confidence in his ability to extrapolate from literary version(s) what is likely to have happened. The confidence is certainly manifest; the methodological premises that ought to suspect the existence somewhere of a tacitly shared paradigm, that is, an assumption that the literature in question has documentary value.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, Wansbrough argues that, "If ... what we know of the seventh-century Hijaz is the product of intense literary activity, then that record has got to be interpreted in accordance with what we know of literary criticism."<sup>12</sup> Nothing, nothing at all, he suggests, should be considered obvious or self-evident.<sup>13</sup>

A very brief comparison with Christian origins is apt. Accepting the basic narrative of the four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles as a description of early Christianity (that is, in a manner

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<sup>9</sup> Wansbrough, J. *Res Ipsa Loquitur: History and Mimesis*, 6. Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1987.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

that the *sīra* and historical *ḥadīth* or *akbār*<sup>14</sup> often are) would be considered incredibly naïve. That is not to say it is not done, but it is clear that these scholars are operating within a theological framework. In addition to this theoretical problem, there is a methodological one. When Burton Mack constructs communities of Jesus followers out of various texts within the Gospel of Mark, he is called to task.<sup>15</sup> Scholars of Islam are not similarly challenged in their reifications.

What was needed, according to Wansbrough, was evidence, what he called artifact and archive. Scholars have made efforts in this regard using two techniques: finding new artifacts and archives outside the extant literary collection, and creating them from within it. Of the former, success has been limited and subject to differing interpretations. Though hardly new, the evidence of variations in the Quranic passages on the Dome of the Rock have been interpreted in various ways. For some, it is evidence that the Qurʾān was not canonized as a *ne varietur* text prior to the building's construction.<sup>16</sup> Donner, on the other hand, explains away the differences and so the texts on Dome of the Rock do indicate a canonized scripture well prior to the date of its construction.<sup>17</sup> A more recent

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<sup>14</sup> Juynboll, G. H. A. "Some Thoughts on Early Muslim Historiography." *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 49 (1992): 685–691.

<sup>15</sup> Mack, B. *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins*, 83–102. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988. For a critique, see Berg, H., and S. E. Rollens. "The Historical Muhammad and the Historical Jesus: A Comparison of Scholarly Reinventions and Reinterpretations." *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses*, 32.2 (2008): 274.

<sup>16</sup> Crone, Patricia. "Two Legal Problems Bearing on the Early History of the Qurʾān." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18 (1994): 17–18, n. 48; and more importantly, Crone P., and Michael Cook. *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, 18. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. See also Nevo, Yehuda. "Towards a Prehistory of Islam." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994): 108–141.

<sup>17</sup> Whelan, Estelle. "Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the early Codification of the Qurʾān." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118 (1998): 3–8; and Donner, Fred M. *Muhammad and the Believers at the Origins of Islam*, 208. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010.



and perhaps still more fruitful archive are the fragments of the Qurʾān of the Ṣanʿāʾ manuscripts. Once again we see disagreement. For some scholars the Ṣanʿāʾ manuscripts show that the Qurʾān was canonized very early, that is in a timeframe that accords with the tradition of the ʿUthmānic recension, whereas for others they reveal a far more complex and unorthodox origin.<sup>18</sup> Until more scholars have thoroughly examined these fragments, little more can be said. And so, we are left with our extant sources and the historical reconstructions of earlier texts from them. Of course, when reconstructions of texts take place, we are still left with *literary sources*.

## THE RECONSTRUCTIONS:

### THE HISTORICAL CRITICAL METHOD

#### V. LITERARY ANALYSIS

Long gone are the days when scholars simply trusted in the information in *isnāds* and other later references and so postulated the existence of texts in the manner of Faut Sezgin or of exegetical corpora in the manner of Heribert Horst.<sup>19</sup> Far more sophisticated methods are employed by Harald Motzki for individual *ḥadīths* of

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<sup>18</sup> Because of these manuscripts, Gerd-Rüdiger Puin states “My idea is that the Koran is a kind of cocktail of texts that were not all understood even at the time of Muhammad. . . . Many of them may even be a hundred years older than Islam itself. Even within the Islamic traditions there is a huge body of contradictory information, including a significant Christian substrate; one can derive a whole Islamic *anti-history* from them if one wants.” Lester, Toby. “What is the Koran?” *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 1999): 46. See also von Bothmer, Hans-Casper Graf, Karl-Heinz Ohlig, and Gerd-Rüdiger Puin. “Neue Wege der Koranforschung.” *Magazin Forschung* (1999): 33–46.

<sup>19</sup> Sezgin writes that “almost all of the earliest quranic commentary together with the transmission changes are preserved unaltered in later works.” Sezgin, Faut. *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums, Band I: Qurʾanwissenschaften, Hadīth, Geschichte, Fiqh, Dogmatik, Mystik bis ca. 430 H.*, 17–18. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967. Thus he is comfortable cataloguing all the texts that (in his view) must have been extant at one time. Horst, Heribert. *Die Gewährsmänner im Korankommentar at-Ṭabarī. Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der exegetischen Überlieferung im Islam*, Ph.D. dissertation. Bonn 1951.

the Sunna and by Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler for *ḥadīths* from the *sīra*.<sup>20</sup> Their reconstructions assume that *isnāds* may, at least in part, reflect the actual transmission history. Also, variations in the *matns* may, at least in part, be a product of that transmission history. Careful analysis, therefore, of both the *isnāds* and *matns* of all the extant versions of particular *ḥadīth* often permits one not only to determine the origin of the tradition, but even sometimes to reconstruct the original form of the report and who adapted it along the way. Motzki refers to this as the *isnād-cum-matn* method. It is not a method that can be used on isolated *ḥadīths*, but for many *ḥadīths* of the Sunna, *sīra*, and *tafsīr* the requisite number of closely related *ḥadīths* exist.

Harald Motzki suggests that the differences between the historical critical approach particularly as represented by his *isnād-cum-matn* method and the literary approach advocated by Wansbrough are not as different as I have suggested elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> His arguments focus on the epistemological value of texts, the value of *isnāds*, and the dating of the sources—though these three issues are inextricably intertwined in the case of Islamic origins.

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<sup>20</sup> Many other scholars engage in much the same activity. Miklos Muranyi attempts to discover the transmission history of texts while Kees Versteegh attempts to restrict reconstruct pre-Sibawayah Arabic grammar using *tafsīr*. Muranyi, M. "A Unique Manuscript from Kairouan in the British Library: The *Samā'*-work of Ibn al-Qāsim al-Utaqī and Issues of Methodology." In Berg, Herbert, ed. *Methods and Theories in the Study of Islamic Origins*, 325–68. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003; and Versteegh, Kees. *Arabic Grammar and Qur'anic Exegesis in Early Islam*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993. For a critique of this approach, particularly as employed by Versteegh, see Rippin, Andrew. "Studying Early *tafsīr* Texts." *Der Islam* 72 (1996): 310–23. Another interesting variation of this method is employed by Behnam Sadeghi. He refers to his method as "traveling tradition test," which compares the content of the *matns* with the cities represented within the *isnāds*. Like Motzki, Sadeghi finds evidence for an early provenance for several *ḥadīths*. Sadeghi, Behnam. "The Traveling Tradition Test: A Method for Dating Traditions." *Der Islam* 85 (2008): 203–42.

<sup>21</sup> Motzki does so in response to my "Competing Paradigms," 259–90. See Motzki, *Analyzing Muslim Tradition*, 231–303, particularly p. 285.

Although Wansbrough characterizes the sources as being predominantly exegetical in character and thus not a record of “what really happened,” ultimately he does make at least conjectural suggestions about what really happened—as evidence in the aforementioned three concerns. He suggests that much of this material first developed in the middle of the second/eighth century, that is, in the early ‘Abbāsīd period. In the course of his analysis of the Qur’ān, Wansbrough postulates that the *logia* originated in a Judeo-Christian sectarian milieu. Motzki rightly asserts that both his method and Wansbrough’s methods similarly focus primarily on analysis of the sources and what that analysis can tell us about their origins.<sup>22</sup> In both cases, it is not so much Islamic origins as the origins of particular Islamic texts that matters. Epistemologically, therefore, they agree. These text can provide some insight into what really happened.

Motzki then notes the “crucial difference”: he is willing to admit that with very early sources:

it may be possible and sensible to ask whether parts of the events that the sources depict really happened. The reason is the closeness of the source to the reported events. Yet the chance is greater that, to give an extreme example, an eyewitness report of an event transmitted some decades later is less affected by later developments than a description of the same event given two centuries later by someone who, although perhaps basing himself on traditions about the event, tries to make sense of it for his time.<sup>23</sup>

The assumption is that chronological proximity increases the likelihood of historical accuracy. And in many cases, most historians would agree with Motzki’s argument. It is here, however, that I disagree, but for a very specific reason. Were the texts ever historical? Motzki himself is very careful to avoid making specific claims. However, not all scholars who share his methodology are. For an example, see the discussion of the work of Görke and Schoeler below. I will defer my critique of this position until then.

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<sup>22</sup> Motzki, *Analyzing Muslim Tradition*, 287.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

A second difference between Motzki and Wansbrough concerns the value of *isnāds*, Wansbrough sees them as a literary device, a fairly late innovation.<sup>24</sup> The only historical value of the *isnād*, therefore, is as an indicator that the text took its extant form quite late.<sup>25</sup> Motzki dismisses that claim based on the “close correlation that has been observed between textual variants and *asānid*.”<sup>26</sup> I have searched for just such a correlation using the exegetical *ḥadīths* of Ibn ‘Abbās as recorded in al-Ṭabarī. By examining the distribution of various exegetical techniques along various lines of transmission, I hoped to see if any correlation existed. There was none.<sup>27</sup> Motzki would of course argue that the sort of correlation

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<sup>24</sup> “The supplying of *isnāds*, whether traced to the prophet, to his companions, or to their successors, may be understood as an exclusively formal innovation and cannot be dated much before 200/815.” Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 179. “The *ḥadīth* literature reflects both form and substance not only of juridical concern with the actions and utterances of the prophet of Islam and with the contents of the Quranic revelation, but also of its haggadic (narrative and historical) expression in *sira*, *maghazī*, and *ayyam*. The presence of *isnāds* as halakhic embellishment is, from the point of view of literary criticism, a superfluity.” Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 183.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Rippin (“*Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās* and Criteria for Dating Early *Tafsīr* Texts.” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18 (1995): 61) makes this point most forcefully:

The single most important element here is to recognize that the *isnād*, as a mechanism, came to be required at a certain point in Islamic history as the element that provided authenticity and validity to reports supposedly stemming from earlier authorities. The presence of *isnāds* automatically dates a report to the second century or later, at least in its final recension: it would always have been possible, after all, for a later editor to add an *isnād* to an earlier text in order to give it validity.

<sup>26</sup> Motzki, *Analyzing Muslim Tradition*, 288.

<sup>27</sup> Berg, Herbert. *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Debate over the Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*. Richmond: Curzon, 2000.

he is speaking of can only be seen in individual traditions using the *isnād-cum-matn* method.<sup>28</sup>

Motzki's argument, however, is valid. If revisionists see no value whatsoever in the contents of the *isnāds*, then the observed correlations between the texts and those *isnāds* requires some alternative explanation. Organic growth and mass fabrication would likely favor randomness, not correlations. Wansbrough obviously never proffered any explanation, nor have scholars who share his perspective. Short of doing so, and especially if one is willing to admit that only the last name is an *isnād* may reflect actual transmission history—that is to say, that al-Ṭabarī or al-Bukhārī did not invent all of the thousands of *ḥadīths* they record—then Motzki's *isnād-cum-matn* method can be employed. The only debate remains about how far one can extend this method, and what one may conclude as a result. The latter, however, forces us to return us to the epistemological issue discussed above.

The third issue Motzki raises derives from the previous two: dating the sources. The *isnād-cum-matn* method most often dates texts significantly earlier than Wansbrough's dating using exegetical typology (i.e., haggadic, halakhic, masoretic, and rhetorical, and allegorical, which emerged chronologically in this order).<sup>29</sup> Despite what Motzki claims, he and I are not so far apart—Wansbrough's typology is “an *a priori* premise.”<sup>30</sup> Thus the real difference between Motzki and myself rests not on his method, the value of *isnāds* or even the dating of texts, but on the historical conclusions—the epistemological issue to use his terminology—drawn from the method using traditional *isnāds* and the dates they produce.

Wansbrough would likely not have been convinced by such Motzkian reconstructions, but there is no doubt that it takes his earlier call for more archives seriously and does not rely simply on

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<sup>28</sup> For an extended critique of my method and conclusions, see Motzki, Harald. “The Questions of the Authenticity of Muslim Traditions Reconsidered: A Review Article.” In Berg, Herbert, ed. *Methods and Theories in the Study of Islamic Origins*, 211–57. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 119.

<sup>30</sup> Motzki, *Analysing Muslim Tradition*, 294.

ascription and *isnād* analysis. Of course these new, purportedly earlier, archives are still literary. That this situation remains problematic becomes evident when one examines some examples of historical claims made on the basis of this method.

### CONSEQUENCES: THE *SĪRA*<sup>31</sup>

The study of Christian origins encompasses such nuanced and overlapping discussions as the synoptic problem, the redaction history of Q, reconstructions of the various Jesus movements, Jewish Christianity, Markan Literary sources, formation of Luke-Acts, Pauline epistles, and, of course, the quest for the historical Jesus. And if one focuses on the just the latter, the quest for the historical Jesus, one discovers various competing theories: Jesus the myth (heavenly Christ and the man of the indefinite past), Jesus the Hellenistic hero, Jesus the revolutionary, Jesus the wisdom sage, Jesus the man of spirit, Jesus the prophet of social change, Jesus the apocalyptic prophet, and Jesus the saviour.<sup>32</sup> In contrast to this bewildering array of scholarship, as noted above, Islamic origins remains largely seems fixated on the Qurʾān, the *sīra*, and the Sunna. The historical Muḥammad may be a statesman, or even a reformer and mystic relevant to today,<sup>33</sup> but he is also *always* Muḥammad the Prophet—a very epithet produced by Muslim tradition itself. Of course, like most of the epithets of Jesus, it is a religious designation.

In Donner's recent book, *Muhammad and the Believers*, he makes a claim that might seem reminiscent of those revisionists who also suggested that *mubājirūn* was one of the earliest self-designations

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<sup>31</sup> The two examples in this section appear in Berg, "Failures (of Nerve?)"

<sup>32</sup> Kirby, Peter. "Historical Jesus Theories." <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/theories.html>. To this list could be added many more: Jesus the feminist, Jesus the homosexual, Jesus the humanist, and even Jesus the atheist. See Berg and Rollens, "The Historical Muḥammad and the Historical Jesus," 278.

<sup>33</sup> Watt, W. Montgomery. *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961; and Armstrong, Karen. *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2006.

employed by the movement that would develop into Islam and that Jews played an early significant role in that movement.<sup>34</sup> But the similarity ends there. Despite describing all the “well-founded concerns” about the biography of Muḥammad, from “many contradictions” to the efforts “to make biography conform” to prophetic paradigms, Donner refuses to conclude that it is not a historical record: “This, however, is surely going too far and in its way is just as uncritical approach as unquestioning acceptance of everything in the traditional accounts. The truth *must* lie somewhere in between.”<sup>35</sup> Donner also asserts that it is better to speak of the Believers and Believers’ movement instead of Muslims and Islam. The former are for him earlier and a “strongly monotheistic, intensely pietistic, and ecumenical or confessionally open religious movement that enjoined people who were not already monotheists to recognize God’s oneness and enjoined all monotheists to live in strict observance of the law that God had repeatedly revealed to mankind—whether in the form of the Torah, the Gospels, or the Qur’an.”<sup>36</sup> Yet, when it comes to describing the beliefs and practices of this proto-Islamic movement, it becomes evident that there is no revisionism inherent in his neologisms. Donner presents something very akin to the traditional five pillars and five principles of Islam. His chronology of events and of revelations in the Qur’an (into Meccan and Medinan suras) is also traditional.<sup>37</sup> The sources remain an archeological site though a bit of sifting is required. In

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<sup>34</sup> See Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 3–20.

<sup>35</sup> Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 52. Emphasis added.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>37</sup> Donner argues that the late origins hypothesis of Wansbrough fails to explain many features of the Qur’an. Had the Qur’an crystallized over a period of 200 years, mostly outside of Arabia, perhaps mainly in Iraq, Donner expects to see anachronistic references to later important events. He sees none, and he states that “some of the Qur’an’s vocabulary suggests that the text, or a significant parts of it, hailed from western Arabia. So we seem, after all, to be dealing with a Qur’an that is a product of the earliest states in the life of the community in western Arabia.” Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 56.

that regard, the difference between him and W. Montgomery Watt is negligible.<sup>38</sup>

Religious/theological texts see the movements of which they are a part, unsurprisingly, as not a product (and certainly not *merely* as a product) of their cultural, social, political, and economic contexts. They want to see themselves as a product of a unique (albeit sometimes indirect) encounter with a supreme being (at least in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim contexts). In other words, they do not seek to present history, that is give temporal, material, contextual, or more bluntly, human explanations. Rather, they present a very particular theology or salvation history (to use Wansbrough's expression). And, if one then mistakes these texts for historical texts, all manner of peculiar things occur. Donner, by accepting the historicity of essentially theological texts, describes the movement in essentially theological terms.

Donner argues "that Islam began as a religious movement—not as a social, economic, or 'national' one; in particular, it embodied an intense concern for attaining personal salvation through religious behavior." Elsewhere he reiterates that the Believers were "a movement rooted in religious faith" and driven by a "religious motivation—the desire to extend the recognition of God's word."<sup>39</sup> Donner admits that "the social dimensions of the message are undeniable and significant, but they are *incidental* to the central notions of the Qur'an, which are religious: Belief in the one God and right-

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<sup>38</sup> W. Montgomery Watt argued that historical materials were reliable: "In the legal sphere there may be some sheer invention of traditions ... but in the historical sphere, in so far as the two may be separated, and apart from some exceptional cases, the nearest to such invention in the best early historians appears to be 'tendential shaping' of material." Watt, W. Montgomery. *Muhammad at Mecca*, xiii. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953. Similarly, after stating how difficult it is to determine who was at fault for the first *fitna*, Donner states "We can discern quite clearly, however, the basic course of events, the individuals and groups involved, and the main issues at stake because most sources regardless of tendency agree." Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 155.

<sup>39</sup> Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, xii, 219, and 197, respectively.



eous behavior as proof of obedience to God's will."<sup>40</sup> Ironically, Donner dismisses early expansion of the Believers out of Arabia as an "Arab" movement. Arab identity is an effect, not a cause of the movement. He writes, "It usually represents the facile interpolation back into the seventh century C.E. of modern concepts of Arab nationalism that only came into existence in the late nineteenth century."<sup>41</sup> He is no doubt correct, but were one to substitute "religion" for "Arab nationalism" in the quotation, he would be critiquing his own goal to highlight the *religious* causes of the movement. Talal Asad has pointed out that "religion" is a modern category that cannot be treated as abstract and universalized with an autonomous essence.<sup>42</sup> This depiction of Islamic origins is a product of employing the *sīra* and the Qur'ān as historical records, instead of theological ones.

Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler are far more explicit in their use of the historical critical method described above. They also recognize that 150 years between the extant literary sources for the life of Muḥammad and the events they purport to describe force research on the historical Muḥammad "to be restricted to the study of the Islamic self-image."<sup>43</sup> They seek, therefore, to recon-

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<sup>40</sup> Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 89. Emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>42</sup> Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. Moreover, Donner's use of the word "religious" emphasizes faith, which reflects a fairly narrow definition of religion, one in which the essence of religion is the private, interior experience—a notion of religion that can be traced back to Schleiermacher's "essential feeling" and beyond him to the Reformation's *sole fide*. Donner also repeatedly emphasizes that early believers were (monotheistically) ecumenical. One cannot help but notice that Donner's description of Muhammad and his Believers' movement (in other words, *original* Islam or ideal Islam) as an ecumenical, not anti-Jewish nor anti-Christian, and "not fanatical" faith is remarkably compatible with our modern theology of religious pluralism.

<sup>43</sup> Görke, Andreas, and Gregor Schoeler. *Die Ältesten Berichte über Muhammads: Das Korpus 'Urwa ibn az-Zubair*, 282. Princeton: The Darwin Press, 2008.

struct the original corpus of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 713), out of the many thousands of traditions preserved or ascribed to him in these later, extant works. They are not reconstructing the origin of Islam but the origin of its historical traditions. However, this reconstructed Urtext of ‘Urwa—as the first collector and transmitter of such biographical material about Muḥammad—allows Görke and Schoeler to assert that “the material that can be securely ascribed to ‘Urwa was collected some 30 to 60 years after Muḥammad’s death. It would therefore go back to eye-witnesses and to persons in very close contact to Muḥammad. It may therefore assumed that these reports reflect the general outline of the events correctly.”<sup>44</sup>

Thus, the first problem with their assertion is to assume that chronological proximity has some bearing on historical accuracy. Here, Christian origins tells a cautionary tale: just two decades separates the historical Jesus from Paul’s Christ, and Jesus the miracle worker in the Gospel of Mark from the Cosmic Lord in the Gospel of John. Speaking of the Gospel of Mark which was written approximately four decades after Jesus, William Arnal states:

The nature of the sources for Jesus exacerbates the situation. While the object of our supposedly ‘historical’ inquiry keeps transforming into a theological entity in front of our very eyes, the main sources on which we base our reconstructions present him as a theological entity in the first place. Whether Jesus himself existed as a historical figure or not, the gospels that tell of him are unquestionably mythic texts. The Gospel of Mark, for example, is a narrative that includes a cast of characters comprising, *inter alia*, God, a son of God, angels, the devil, demons, holy spirits, evil spirits, and what seem to be the ghosts of Moses and Elijah. It is a story that features miraculous healings and exorcisms, as well as walking on water, feeding thousands of people with a handful of loaves and fishes (twice!), face-to-face conversations between people who lived centuries apart, spooky prognostications, trees withering at Jesus’ simple command, a sun darkening in the middle of the day, and a temple curtain miraculously tearing itself in half. ... In seeking

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<sup>44</sup> Görke and Schoeler, *Die Ältesten Berichte über Muḥammads*, 294.

to find the real, historical person behind these narratives, we are using these texts as sources for a figure that they themselves show no interest in at all. Just as myths and legends about Herakles are simply not *about* a historical person, so also the gospels are not *about* the historical Jesus.<sup>45</sup>

The study of Islamic origins and the study of the historical Muhammad, if based on the extant *sira* or Görke and Schoeler's reconstructed Urtext, are forced to rely on similarly mythic material that would have been produced with a confessional theological perspective. In claiming their reconstruction as a historical text, they are reproducing, in a scholarly voice, the basic theological claims of the Muslim tradition's presentation of its origins. What they have produced, that is if one accepts the possibility of reconstructing earlier Urtexts out of the later extant sources, is merely an earlier "self-image" (to use their terminology).

That such is the case, one need only look at their conclusions. Görke and Schoeler determine that "Urwa's accounts include Muhammad's first revelations, they reflect the reactions of the Meccans, they tell the story of the harassment of the Muslims and their flight to Abyssinia and Medina, and they describe the military conflict with the Meccans and with other Arab tribes up to the eventual success of Muhammad's mission [i.e., the conquest of Mecca]."<sup>46</sup> The more fantastic elements, such as Muhammad's night journey and ascension to heaven, the more problematic ones, such as the reference to the "Satanic verses" and the many conflicts with the Jews seem to be absent from the reconstructed corpus.<sup>47</sup> In an earlier work, Schoeler examined the reports about Muhammad's very first revelation and traced their transmission from the (probable) first reporter to their final redaction in extant works. He concluded that that story was very early, but the various motifs were likely combined in the first century A.H. and emerged

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<sup>45</sup> Arnal, William E. *The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism and the Construction of Contemporary Identity*, 75–76. London: Equinox, 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Görke and Schoeler, *Die Ältesten Berichte über Muhammads*, 290.

<sup>47</sup> As with Donner, a much more pleasant and reasonable early Islam results.

within the Zubayrid family of which 'Urwa was a part and which had a rival caliphate from 681 to 691. 'Urwa cleansed the report of its storyteller (*qāṣṣ*) elements, reworking it into *ḥadīth*-format. Schoeler further suggested that the original report is that of the storyteller 'Ubayd b. 'Umayr who built the story out of various components while with the Zubayrid court. Significant changes were still introduced afterward: it was paraphrased, shortened, adorned, and rearranged.<sup>48</sup> This conclusion about such a critical story is clearly at odds with how Muslims would present themselves, belying any conscious theological bias in Schoeler. However, this story's presence in the Urtext signals that (1) 'Urwa was not first and foremost an historian: he was a believer; (2) his corpus was not interested in some Abū l-Qāsim al-Hāshimī, but in Muḥammad, the *Prophet* of Islam—a decidedly theological figure. There is no reason, therefore, to assume that these reports reflect the general outline correctly (i.e., historically).

At first glance, the problem with Görke and Schoeler appears to be the opposite of that of Donner. Crudely put, he overemphasizes religion and they neglect it. In fact, what they do is quite similar. He creates an artificial and mystifying boundary between the internal experiences of the Believers and the social, historical, economic, and political context in which they appeared. They create a boundary between a later such context and the material ascribed to 'Urwa in which it was produced. For Donner, Görke and Schoeler "religion" is somehow independent of the social and cultural contexts that produced these literary archives.

## THE CONSPIRACY

Having acted as an exegete for Wansbrough's theories in the past,<sup>49</sup> my defense, or rather my experimental application of them has been take for my position. I hope that I have shown that my posi-

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<sup>48</sup> Schoeler, Gregor. *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Muhammads*, 59–117. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996.

<sup>49</sup> Berg, Herbert. "The Implications of, and Opposition to, the Methods and Theories of John Wansbrough." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 9.1 (1997): 3–22; and Berg, "Competing Paradigms," 259–90.

tion may not be that far from Motzki et al, but there is still an epistemological gulf between my position and those of scholars of the historical critical method who feel that they can see the historical needle within the theological haystack. In opposition to that, I remain firmly in the Wansbroughian camp. This epistemological divide is particularly evident in the discussion of the “conspiracy theory”-critique of Wansbrough. Because the critique is both ubiquitous and sustained, and likely to be leveled at my reformulations of Wansbrough’s call for a recognition of the literary nature of the sources, it deserves some attention.

This critique was made first in several reviews of Wansbrough’s *Quranic Studies*.<sup>50</sup> However the strongest advocates of this critique are Versteegh, Donner, and Motzki. Versteegh states that “one needs a conspiratorial view of the Islamic tradition, in which all scholars are assumed to have taken part in the same conspiracy to suppress the real sequence of events ... there are bound to be some dissenters and in important issues ... it is inconceivable that tradition could manage to suppress all dissenting views.”<sup>51</sup> Donner’s argument invoking the existence of multiple orthodoxies and that dissenting views must therefore have existed has already been noted above. He concludes therefore, that “a conspiracy so widespread and, above all, so totally successful, is highly implausible.”<sup>52</sup> For Motzki, the “deliberate forgery , though possible, does not

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<sup>50</sup> “Indeed, one needs practically a conspiratorial theory of history to argue that the massive 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century written sources are not substantially compendia of earlier written as well as oral tradition”. Graham, William A. Review of *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* by John Wansbrough. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 100 (1980): 140. “If the Qur’ān was the result of a conspiracy which Wansbrough now claims to have unearthed, then at the very least he should clarify why these four themes—so prominent in his analysis—did not gain prominence in Islam.” Rahman, Fazlur. “Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies: Review Essay.” In Martin, R. C., ed. *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, 200–1. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985.

<sup>51</sup> Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar*, 48.

<sup>52</sup> Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 283.

seem likely. It presupposes a high measure of ‘criminal energy’.<sup>53</sup> Motzki has toned down the rhetoric of late, avoiding the terms “criminal energy” and “conspiracy,” but the sentiment is the same: “It is completely unrealistic to assume that a process of *recording and redaction* brought about by an orthodox *scholarly movement* could have occurred without *opponents’ reactions* being preserved in Muslim literature.”<sup>54</sup>

To this charge I have responded before.<sup>55</sup> A common theme in the conspiracy argument is the diverse, competing orthodoxies of early Islam, particularly that represented by proto-Sunnis and proto-Shīʿīs. Surely, the argument runs, if such dissension is preserved, something on the scale that Wansbrough envisioned must have left a discernible trace. However, when the texts of Islam began to be recorded (towards the end of the first century, according to Motzki and Schoeler), that consensus was already formed, or was solidified in the act of recording it. The reports that were preserved were simply those the community “knew” to be genuine. Nothing needed to be suppressed. As Rippin so eloquently put it, “we do *not* know and probably never can know what really happened; all we can know is what later people *believed* happened, as has been recorded in the salvation history.”<sup>56</sup> The consensus or what later people believed had happened was recorded (or, perhaps supplied with *isnāds* and hence authority). A much vaster body of material may simply not have been preserved. What I am willing to

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<sup>53</sup> He adds that only should not one assume such activity without evidence, but also that an alternative explanation exists: similarities and differences are due to their transmission from a common source. “The Prophet and the Cat: On Dating Mālik’s *Muwattaʾ* and Legal Traditions.” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 22 (1998): 63.

<sup>54</sup> Motzki, *Analysing Muslim Tradition*, 295. Emphasis added. Motzki’s arguments, obviously, are a reiteration of those by Donner. See Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 26–28 and above.

<sup>55</sup> Berg, “Competing Paradigms,” 283.

<sup>56</sup> Rippin, Andrew. “Literary Analysis of *Qurʾān*, *tafsīr*, and *sīra*: the Methodologies of John Wansbrough.” In Martin, Richard C., ed. *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, 157. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1985.

concede, based on the work of the reconstructionists, is that this process began earlier and that the historical parts of some *isnāds* are earlier than Wansbrough originally suggested.

To be convinced, Motzki wants to see evidence for large scale fabrication, systematic redaction, and/or organic growth. However, Motzki's view of how revisionists envision this organic growth is mistaken. He believes the process results in "only one dogma." Viewed in this light, he is correct. Early Islam is characterized by several discrete and competing orthodoxies. However, the manufacture of one hegemonic perspective does not negate the possibility of competing orthodoxies. Protestants and Catholics of the 16<sup>th</sup> century certainly represented competing orthodoxies, but shared the same hegemonic perspective of Christendom. They more or less used the same scripture, rituals, post-Chalcedonian Christology, and so forth. No conspiracy is needed to explain the broad consensus they shared despite their differences, and the same can be said of Sunni and Shī'īs—though we are a little less clear on how that consensus emerged.

However, despite my concession above that recognizes that instead of 200 years without texts (as posited by Wansbrough) we seem to be closer to 100 years, the basic nature of the sources has not changed. Looking again at Christian origins, one can see dramatic changes in just half that time. The Jesus of Q1 can be seen as an itinerant, cynic-like Galilean preacher or, far more convincingly, as a folk hero or mouthpiece used by Galilean village scribes to voice their frustration at their perceived powerlessness. In any case, that Jesus of the year 50, was later re-envisioned (according to some scholars) by other people as an apocalyptic prophet in Q2 and then as a proto-rabbi by the time the Q3 layer was added. The important thing to note is, however, that these Jesuses and the movements that produced them were more or less lost along with Q when the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and Matthew were written. It is only the editorial choices of the authors of these texts that allowed Q to be reconstructed.<sup>57</sup> Yet no one (outside of authors of

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<sup>57</sup> Arnal, William E. *Jesus and the Village Scribes: Galilean Conflicts and the Setting of Q*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001; and Mack, Burton. *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*. San Francisco: HarperSanFran-

fiction) suggests that this process required a conspiracy, forgery, or systematic redaction. We are fortunate to have evidence of organic growth, but that need not have been the case.

But one need not look to traditions other than Islam to see similar non-conspiratorial processes at work. If Donner is correct, originally the Believers' movement was ecumenical, open to all monotheists, including Christians and Jews. Some time later it became Islam, a tradition that explicitly rejected and criticized Christians and Jews. Moreover, that transition seems to have been largely erased from the tradition.<sup>58</sup> And, if Görke and Schoeler are correct, a vast body of anti-Jewish "history" was invented and inserted into the *sīra* after 'Urwa.

Likewise an example is to be found with Jonathan A. C. Brown, whose position on authenticity of *ḥadīths* is very close to

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cisco, 1993. Coincidentally, Jonathan Brown critiques Ignaz Goldziher who argued that the *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth* "When you see the black banners approaching from Khurasan, go to them, for indeed the Messiah (*mahdī*) is among them," was a product of 'Abbāsīd propaganda. Instead he suggests that 'Abbāsīds may have taken advantage of an existing *ḥadīth*. He then cites Zachariah 9:9 which tells of a king entering Jerusalem on a donkey. Mark 11:1–11 and Matthew 21:1–4 describe Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey, and so Brown quite rightly points out that Christians did not write Zachariah, but used the language of a pre-existing text to make it appear as a prophecy, asking, "did Jesus really enter Jerusalem (not unlikely) riding the transport of his day—a donkey (not unlikely)?" Brown, *Hadīth*, 234. But his questions miss the point. It is far more likely that the story in Mark (and later copied in Matthew) was constructed specifically around the pre-existing text, "not unlikelihoods" notwithstanding.

<sup>58</sup> Donner does, of course, find some evidence for this transition, for instance in the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock. In fact, it is the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik who "seems to have encouraged the Arabian Believers to redefine themselves, and the Believers movement, in a manner that was less ecumenical ... than it had been originally. ... A boundary began to be drawn between Qur'anic Believers and those righteous Christians and Jews who had formerly belonged to the Believers' movement". Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 203.



that of Motzki.<sup>59</sup> Brown recognizes that *ḥadīth* forgery was a significant and early problem even in the first generation of Muslims, but even more so and more consistently so once the Companions had died off. “The heyday of hadith forgery was the first four hundred years of Islamic history, when major hadith collections were still being compiled.”<sup>60</sup> The political, theological, and sectarian divisions as well as Sunni-Shīʿī schism and even pious concerns “yielded countless forgeries.”<sup>61</sup> *Isnāds* too were forged for existing *ḥadīths*. Brown then describes the three-step process by which these forgeries were eliminated in early Sunni Islam. The first step was to demand an *isnād* for any report. The second and far more important step was to evaluate the transmitters found in the *isnād* and the contiguity of the *isnād*. Thus, “ultimately, it was the analysis of the body of their transmissions for *corroboration* that determine their accuracy.”<sup>62</sup> As the great compiler of *ḥadīths* Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj

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<sup>59</sup> Although Brown outlines the history of the Western debate on the authenticity of *ḥadīths*, he subjects only the assumptions of the revisionists and the orientalist to analysis. “The Western Revaluation” of Motzki’s position is clearly favored. See Brown, Jonathan A. C. *Hadīth: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, 224–35. Oxford: Oneworld, 2009. This is particularly evident when he suggests that “It seems more likely that the Prophet actually said that God descends at night to answer men’s prayers.” Brown, *Hadīth*, 232.

<sup>60</sup> Brown, *Hadīth*, 71.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 81, emphasis added. Later Brown demonstrates what was at stake, when the Muʿtazila or the *ahl al-raʾy* questioned the value of *ḥadīths* and their *isnāds*:

The whole purpose of the *isnād* was to guarantee that the Prophet said something without relying on man’s flawed reason. If hadith critics admitted that a hadith could have an authentic *isnād* but still be a forgery because its meaning was unacceptable, then they would be admitting that their rationalist opponents were correct! If you could not have a strong *isnād* with a forged report, then any problem in the meaning of a hadith *must* mean that there was a problem in the *isnād*. . . . Ibn ʿAdī often states that the questionable hadiths that a certain transmitter narrates “demonstrate that he is unreliable.” (Brown, *Hadīth*, 98).

states, one who narrates unfamiliar *ḥadīths* must be compared to those of others who are known, that is, accepted. If the former's narrations do not concur with their narrations often enough, then he is rejected and his narrations are rejected.<sup>63</sup> Here then we have an example of how a consensus or a hegemonic perspective is created. If a body of *ḥadīths* do not agree with the accepted opinion or if they are not in the accepted form (having not only an *isnād*, but a contiguous one), they are rejected. The third step is clearly does the same thing, looking (again) for corroboration. Thus what seems to be a methodology focused on the *isnād* does implicitly examine the content. In this way, narrations that do not match existing beliefs die out.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, these beliefs need not conform to “only one dogma” but at least to one of the competing dogmas. (The differences between the competing orthodoxies is not so great—at least not any greater than the differences between the christologies of the four canonical gospels).

Were one to ask for a specific example of a theologically driven consensus, one need only look at the belief in the collective and individual uprightness (*ʿadl*) of the Companions—or at least the belief in their inability to lie about Muḥammad. As anyone familiar with the “history” of this period as preserved by later Muslims knows and as later scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) were well aware, this was certainly not the case. As Brown points out, “That the collective impunity of the Companions was a later construct of the Sunni worldview is evident when one finds occasional minor Companions listed in early books of weak *ḥadīth* transmitters.”<sup>65</sup> All the competing orthodoxies remain, but this

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<sup>63</sup> Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī. *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. by Muḥammad Fuʿād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, v. 1, 7. Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, n.d.

<sup>64</sup> Brown mentions that some early Muslims rejected the use of *ḥadīths* in Islamic law. “This extreme skepticism towards *ḥadīths*, however, died out in classical Sunni and Shiʿite Islam”. Brown, *Ḥadīth*, 152. That is to say, opposing views need not be preserved.

<sup>65</sup> Brown, *Ḥadīth*, 88. Although Brown recognized this purported infallibility as a later construct, elsewhere he suggests within a rhetorical question within the first 150 years the scholars “exerted a great deal of effort to prevent material from being forged wholesale about the

hegemonic perspective exists without the need for some conspiracy. Of course other such examples exist. Fatima Mernissi has claimed that the scholars of *ḥadīth* have obscured the original message of female empowerment in Islam by introducing patriarchal and even misogynistic statements into the mouth of Muḥammad. Although I find this kind of attempt at making an important religious figure into a feminist to be problematic on several levels, no one doubts that the Sunna is patriarchal and one would not really require a “conspiracy” in order to understand how such a Sunna would come about. Yet another example of a consensus with much diversity is the way non-*mutawātir* *ḥadīths* about the Mahdī became an article of faith, “so that it was impossible to imagine that all these separate hadiths could be forged with one common theme if that theme were not really representative of the Prophet’s words.”<sup>66</sup> The point of these many examples is to demonstrate that a process of mythmaking and social formation,<sup>67</sup> which produced the extant theological literary sources does not require a conspiracy. Donner,

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Prophet”. Brown, *Hadith*, 232. Why could not their effort also be a later construct (to save the authenticity of the Sunna), for much the same reason that the Companions were considered collectively trustworthy?

<sup>66</sup> Brown, *Hadith*, 180.

<sup>67</sup> I am using the word “myth” in the following sense:

(1) that myths are not special (or “sacred”) but ordinary human means of fashioning and authorizing their lived-in and believed-in “worlds,” (2) that myth as an ordinary rhetorical device in social construction and maintenance makes *this* rather than *that* social identity possible in the first place, and (3) that a people’s use of the label “myth” reflects, expresses, explores and legitimizes their own self-image. (McCutcheon, Russell T. “Myth.” In Braun, Willi, and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds. *Guide to the Study of Religion*, 200. London: Continuum, 2000).

Myths deal with the critical human issue of self-identity. These rhetorical acts that construct and maintain identity are called mythmaking. Simply put, mythmaking is a social activity in which the group forms and maintains itself by authorizing its identity and the role it sees for itself in the larger scheme of things. Mack, Burton. *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth*, 11. New York: Harper Collins, 1995. See also Idem, “Social Formation.” In *Guide to the Study of Religion*, 283–96.

of course, recognized this possibility of seeing the consensus of the sources about the origins of Islam as arising from:

... a process of myth-making in the Islamic community ... as a way of explaining both the communal identity of Muslims and their internal divisions; the real events lying at the origins of Islam, whatever they may have been, were either completely forgotten, or have been completely suppressed and obscured by later myth, and can never be satisfactorily recovered from the evidence available today. But ... there is no evidence to support the idea that such a pervasive and effective conspiracy ever existed, and much that seems to contradict it.<sup>68</sup>

The problem from my perspective is seeing this kind of process as unusual and as a conspiracy. It was neither. Mythmaking and social formation are intertwined and ordinary activities of construction, maintenance, and legitimation of a self-identity.

## CONCLUSIONS

Donner critiques the position of sceptics such as Wansbrough as follows: “it asks us to accept on faith—since there is no surviving evidence—that the true origins of Islam are different than what is portrayed by Islamic tradition—perhaps radically different.”<sup>69</sup> However, to accept the Muslim tradition’s (or even traditions’) descriptions of its own origins—even if we can reconstruct texts to within 100 years (though I would still question them were they merely within twenty-five years) is to accept the salvation history of those earlier Muslims has history. This is, therefore, also asking us to accept their own understanding of their origins on faith; or put more bluntly, it asks us to accept their faith. The reconstructions simply do not get us close enough. And, we must recognize that the extant texts reflect the interests of the literary elite and more importantly that the texts are theological (or “salvation history” or

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<sup>68</sup> Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 287.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

*Heilsgeschichte* to use the terms employed by Wansbrough).<sup>70</sup> As Rippin points out:

All such works start from the proposition that the literary record of salvation history, although presenting themselves as being contemporary with the events they describe, actually belong to a period well after such events, which suggests that they have been written according to later points of view in order to fit purposes of that later time. The actual "history" in the sense of "what really happened" has become totally subsumed within later interpretation and is virtually, if not totally, inextricable from it. The question of whether or not there is an underlying "grain of historical truth" may be thought to be of some concern here, namely, whether or not there must have been some sort of historical event or impetus out of which traditions grew and which, therefore, forms the kernel of the narrative. But the real problem here is that even if one admits the existence of such a "kernel" of history, it is ever possible to identify and extract that information? Wansbrough implies in his work that he feels that it is not, at least for the most part. The records we have are the existential records of the thought and faith of later generations.<sup>71</sup>

Wansbrough may have been too sceptical about how we might use the extant sources to glimpse further into the past. However, those efforts of reconstructionists have not changed the most important insight for the study of Islamic origins made by Wansbrough: our evidence is almost exclusively literary and salvation history, mythic, or "theological," as I prefer to describe it. Donner, though I agree with much of his analysis, and Görke and Schoeler highlight how tempting it is to start treating early sources as history, when what we have is the product of mythmaking and social formation. Whenever a scholar begins to see the origin of a movement in the

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<sup>70</sup> Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 1–2.

<sup>71</sup> Rippin, "Literary Analysis," 155–56.

single individual, he has more or less already adopted the viewpoint of the tradition.<sup>72</sup>

This is not some orientalist, anti-Islamic, pro-Christian, or pro-Jewish position. It is the same stance that would question if Moses and Elijah really appeared before Jesus, if Allah really appeared in the person of Wali Fard Muhammad in early 1930s Detroit, if Joseph Smith really spoke with God and Jesus and translated some ancient gold plates using magical stones, if the Buddha really descended in the form of an elephant from the heavens to his mother's womb, if Xenu really dropped frozen beings into terran volcanoes 75 million years ago, etc. If one felt obliged to make a crude characterization about this historical critical stance, it could be that it is secular, or even atheistic.<sup>73</sup> In each case above, Christians, Muslims of the Nation of Islam, Mormon Christians, Buddhists, and Scientologists might be offended by such a critical stance. But just as the Gospel of Mark is full of angels, spirits, demons, etc, so the Urtext of 'Urwa as reconstructed by Görke and Schoeler has its god, prophet, angels and miracles. The *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīths* of the Sunna (not to mention the Qur'ān) are rife with such supernatural beings and events. That fact alone should alert us that we are not working with historical texts, but theological literature.

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<sup>72</sup> Max Weber's description of religions starting with founder figures whose charisma is later institutionalized or "routinized" seems to have legitimized this essentially (Western) religious viewpoint within the academy.

<sup>73</sup> It is not atheistic in the sense that anyone doubting these stories is an atheist. Most people outside a particular tradition deny the history, more accurately the salvation history, of other traditions, particularly the miraculous parts. Stephen Roberts famously said, "I contend that we are both atheists. I just believe in one fewer god than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours." Thus, a Buddhist can be an atheist with respect to the Nation of Islam, and a Muslim with respect to the claims about Jesus in the Christian Gospels.

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**“ALL WE KNOW IS WHAT  
WE HAVE BEEN TOLD”:  
REFLECTIONS ON EMIGRATION  
AND LAND AS DIVINE HERITAGE  
IN THE QUR’ĀN<sup>1</sup>**

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“All we know is what we have been told”—writes John Wansbrough in one of the first pages of *Res Ipsa Loquitur* to warn the students of early Islamic history from becoming the victims of a literary and linguistic conspiracy. His concerns for the constraints of language and the literary forms of historical writing seems to be projected into his own intense and concentrated style which necessitates from his readers a high threshold of literary and linguistic awareness. Still, through the penetrating and challenging nature of his arguments and the complexity of his own style, John Wans-

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brough has secured for himself, together with the necessity for his work to be explained and clarified, a well deserved posterity.

In the course of this paper, I would like to present some reflections on a theme which is prominent in the Qur'ān and central in the tradition, that of emigration, and which could be of religious and historical significance if read in conjunction with the motif of "land". A number of preliminary points are in order. Methodologically speaking, I will consider the Qur'ānic verses on the subject on its own, that means free of their traditional exegetical "apparatus" (*sīra*, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*). This is an approach that has lately yielded some interesting results, I am thinking in particular of some studies which stem from the conviction that the Qur'ān should be understood against the background of the world of Late Antiquity and that *tafsīr* materials generally tend to express a retrospective, later, and doctrinally laden view that is not always helpful in order to progress our knowledge on the early meaning of the text.<sup>2</sup> In the first part of this article, I will describe the Qur'ānic verses on emigration and land as divine heritage to in order to explore which kind of ideas they convey. In the second, I will examine how non-Islamic sources and the relevant secondary literature understood the Arabs arrival in the Fertile Crescent. For a more thorough pic-

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<sup>2</sup> See, Hawting, Gerald. *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam. From Polemic to History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. In the last decade, scholars on early Islam have increased their interest in the study of the world of Late Antiquity. As for the relationship between the Qur'ān and Late Antiquity, see the introduction of the book edited by Reynolds, Gabriel Said. *The Qur'an in its Historical Context*, 1–25. London: Routledge, 2010, in particular, pp. 17–19, and idem. *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*. London: Routledge, 2011. This also seems the direction undertaken by Angelika Neuwirth in her latest research on the Qur'ān. Cf. Neuwirth, Angelika, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, eds. *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2010, and eadem. *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike ein Europäischer Zugang*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011 but I did not have the chance to vision this latest volume. However, Neuwirth's research on the Qur'ān accepts the general framework of Meccan and Medinan suras associated with the traditional accounts of the life of Muḥammad.

ture on ideas on promised land and emigration in the world of Late Antiquity, one may benefit from taking into consideration texts dealing with similar themes produced into that context, such as *De Migratione Abrahami* by Philo of Alexandria, as already suggested by Arent Jan Wenisnck long time ago.<sup>3</sup> But I did not extend my research to this point.

Two main assumptions underlie this essay. First, that despite the many unresolved issues revolving around the history of the Qur’ānic text,<sup>4</sup> the sacred book of Islam can be considered as a key religious document for the life of the early “community”. Hence, and second assumption, that the Qur’ān can be looked at as a “historical” source, although poor of events, facts and details.<sup>5</sup> Yet, a source that may not necessarily tell us the same story about the nature of the early community that the one it is found in the tradition.

In what follows I will address the following questions: what does the Qur’ān have to say about emigration? Do the Qur’ānic verses concerning the divine command of emigrating necessarily allude to the classical *hiğra*, namely the Prophet’s emigration (flight) from Mecca to Medina? If not, which other interpretation may be suggested? And finally, could this interpretation eventually reveal us something about the religious nature of the early community?

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<sup>3</sup> See, Philon d’Alexandre, *De Migratione Abrahami*, introduction, traduction et notes par Jacques Cazeaux. Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1965, and Wensinck, Arent Jan. “Muḥammad and the Prophets” (English translation of “Muhammed und die Propheten” first appeared in: *Acta Orientalia* 2 [1924]: 1–40). In Rubin, Uri, ed. *The Life of Muḥammad*, 336–37. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Where and when did it originate? Which religious and geographic *milieu* does it reflect? When did it reach its classical form? For a list of many other, not yet answered, questions about the history of the Qur’ān and for some recent scholarship on the topic, see Donner, Fred M. “The Qur’ān in Recent Scholarship. Challenges and Desiderata.” In Reynolds, *The Qur’ān in its Historical Context*, 29–50.

<sup>5</sup> In this regard, see the contribution by Crone, Patricia. “How did the quranic pagans make a living?” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 68/3 (2005): 387–99.

The present paper will show that the Quranic verses on *hiğra* (a word which does not occur in the text) have little to do with Muḥammad's "flight" from Mecca to Medina and that "the land" is a relevant theme in connection with the idea of divine heritage and emigration. "The land" being a form of divine retribution for those who struggle on God's name and emigrate towards Him, and emigration coming strongly across, in the Qur'ān, as a form of militant devotion. A third point will be proposed: namely that the Arab conquests towards the Fertile Crescent may be understood as an act of religious emigration towards a land the Arabs claimed a share of by virtue of their common descent from Abraham. This is a view that emerges in some VIIth century non-Islamic sources and which seems to find some corroboration in the Qur'ān. This last point is highly conjectural. Its acceptance presumes that parts of what will become the canonical text of the Qur'ān must have been in circulation as early as the first Arab conquests, a view that not every scholar would be willing to accept. It also touches on another controversial issue, that is the use contemporary historians of the origins of Islam can make of early non-Islamic materials. John Wansbrough was highly pessimistic in this regard. This paper is less negative. It follows, in fact, the perspectives opened up by the work of Robert Hoyland in relation to how Islamicists of the early period may benefit from non-Islamic materials. On the whole, the present article aims at adding a contribution to some aspects of early Islamic history which have been hotly debated for some time.

### THE PROPHET'S FLIGHT

The classical notion of *hiğra* is usually identified with that momentous event when the Prophet fled from Mecca to Medina where he founded a new community of which he became the leader. This kind of emigration was a duty upon the believers, but a duty that ceased to exist once monotheism was restored in Mecca.<sup>6</sup> Nor-

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<sup>6</sup> Believers (*mu'minun/mu'minat*) is the most common appellative to describe the followers of the Messenger addressed to in the Qur'ān. In a very early layer of the Prophet's biography, the so called *Constitution of Medina*, the term *muslimun* appears only 3 times in contrast to *mu'minun*

mally, Western scholars and “classical” Muslims alike project upon the Qurʾān this idea of *hiğra*. For instance, verses such as Q. 8:30 and 9:40 are taken to refer respectively to the attempt of the Quraysh to kill the Prophet just before he left Mecca and to his three days stay in the Cave of Thawr, with Abū Bakr, after leaving Mecca.<sup>7</sup> Whereas Q. 8:72,74 are presumed to relate to the special bond existing between Meccan emigrants and Medinan helpers who offered shelter and assistance.<sup>8</sup> This view of the *hiğra* is also reflected in a great number of traditions where the Prophet expressly states that “There is no emigration after the conquest, but *ğibād* and intention”.<sup>9</sup> Another tradition on the end of the *hiğra* re-

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(32 times). Throughout this article I use the term believers rather than Muslims, assuming it to possibly reflect an earlier stage of confessional identity. Cf. Donner, Fred M. “From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community.” *Al-Abhath* 51–52 (2002–2003): 9–53. And see now his *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*. Cambridge: Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010. In the present article, I will refer to the Italian translation of the book: Donner, Fred M. *Maometto e le origini dell’Islam*. Torino: Einaudi, 2001, especially 59–92. It was only after the completion of this article that I thoroughly read Donner’s book. To some extent, his thoughts on activism and land as divine inheritance in the Qurʾān as the ideological driving force behind the conquests are not distant to those expressed in his paper. Cf. in particular, pp. 84–85, 88, 100.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ğamiʾ al-bayanʾ an taʾwīl ay al-qurʾan*, 30 vols., ed. Muṣṭafā al-Şaqā et alii. Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, [1954–1968], vol. ix, 226ss (ad Q. 8:30) and x, 135–37 (ad Q. 9:40).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ğamiʾ al-bayan*, vol. x, 51ss (ad Q. 8:72) and vol. x, 56–57 (ad Q. 8:74). For an analysis of the many classical *hiğra* traditions and their relationship with the Qurʾān, see Rubin, Uri. “The life of Muḥammad and the Qurʾān: the case of Muḥammad’s *hiğra*.” *JSAl* 28 (2003): 40–64.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, al-Buḥārī (d. 256/870), *Şaḥīḥ*, K. *ğazʾ al-şayd* (28), bāb 10 (*Lā yaḥillu al-qital bi-makka*); K. *al-ğibād waʾl-sayr* (56), bāb 1 (*Faḍl al-ğibād waʾl-sayr*), bāb 27 (*Wuğūb al-nağir wa-mā yağibu min al-ğibād waʾl-niyya wa-qanlīhi: anğirū ...*), bāb 194 (*Lā hiğra baʾd al-fath*); K. *manağib al-anşar* (63), bāb 45 (*Hiğrat al-nabī wa-aşḥabīhi ilā ʾl-madīna*); K. *al-mağazī* (64), bāb 53

lates of somebody going to visit the Prophet and telling him: “I came to pledge allegiance to you for the *hiğra* (*ubāy’uka ‘alā l-hiğra*) and I left my parents crying. The prophet replied: “Go back to them and make them laugh as you made them cry”.<sup>10</sup>

Talking about a classical notion of *hiğra* implies a non-classical one. The latter has traditionally been understood by Western scholars and “classical” Muslims as the emigration of the community towards garrison cities in the conquered lands after the death of the Prophet. Again, this idea is reflected in a variety of traditions where the Prophet is reported to have said that: “The *hiğra* will not come to an end as long as the infidels are fought”;<sup>11</sup> or that: “the *hiğra* will not come to an end until repentance will come to an end, and repentance will not come to an end until the sun shall rise from its place of setting”<sup>12</sup> or, even more directly, that: “... there will be *hiğra* after *hiğra* to your father Abraham’s place of emigration (*ilā muhāğar abīkum Ibrāhim*)”.<sup>13</sup> In this case, *hiğra* was meant as an open-ended virtuous act of emigration from Arabia towards outside. “Verily, Syria is the land of *hiğra*, the land of the final gathering (*maḥṣar*) and the land of the Prophets”, Ibn Ḥanbal collected in his *Musnad*.<sup>14</sup> 9th and 10th centuries traditionists were aware of these conflicting traditions to the point that both Abū Dāwūd al-Siğistānī

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(...*ma kāna al-nabī qad masaḥa wağhabu ‘am al-fath*). Edition consulted: al-Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*. In *al-Kutub al-sitta*, vols 1–3. Istanbul: Çağrı Yangları, 1981.

<sup>10</sup> Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 240/855), *Musnad imām al-muḥaddīṡim wa’l-quḍwā fi’l-ṣubḥ wa’l-warā’*, 6 vols. Cairo: Maṭba’at al-Maynaniyya, vol. ii, 198, ll. 5–6 (from the bottom) reprint in *al-Kutub al-sitta*, vols. 21–23, Istanbul: Çağrı Yangları, 1982. Al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan*, K. *al-bā’ya* (39), bāb 10 (*al-Bay’a ‘alā al-hiğra*). Edition consulted: Al-Nasā’ī, *al-Sunan*. In *al-Kutub al-sitta*, vols. 15–16, Istanbul: Çağrı Yangları, 1981.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-bay’a* (39), bāb 15 (*Diğer al-ihtilāf fi inqitā’ al-hiğra*).

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-ğihād* (9), bāb 2 (*Fī’l-hiğra, hal in-qaṭā’a?*). Edition consulted: Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*. In *al-Kutub al-sitta*, vols. 7–11. Istanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 1981, and Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. iv, 99.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. ii, 84, l. 10, and vol. ii, 199, ll. 2–3, and 209, ll. 16–17.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. vi, 457, ll. 5–6 (from the bottom).



(d. 275/889) and al-Nasāʿī (d. 303/915) included separate chapters in their *hadīṭ* collections respectively devoted to “Whether the *hijra* has ended” and to the “Mention of disagreement regarding the coming to an end of the *hijra*”.<sup>15</sup> Patricia Crone argued against Wilferd Madelung that, with time, the classical notion of *hiġra* superseded the non-classical which was, thus, the initial one.<sup>16</sup> In any case, in both set of traditions as well as in the Qurʾān those who emigrate are called *muhāġirūn* and, again in both cases, *hiġra* is the word used to point out the act of emigration, although this specific term does not occur in the Qurʾān.

The traditional narratives on the *hiġra* of Muḥammad and his followers involve certain key ideas. First of all, the motif of emigration is closely related to a common feature of prophetic lives, namely the idea that a prophet is opposed in his own land by his own people.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Muḥammad is harassed by his Meccan fellows, especially from within his own tribe, who rejected his new religious message. After having found substantial support within a group of Medinan converts, and opposition having become un-

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<sup>15</sup> Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan, Kitāb al-ġibād* (9), bāb 2 (*Fī l-ḥiġra, hal inqatāʿa?*) and al-Nasāʿī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-bayʿa* (39), bāb 15 (*Diġer al-ibṭilāf fī inqitāʿ al-ḥiġra*). See also Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. iv, 99, ll. 6–7: ... *kunnā ʿinda Muʿawiya ... fa-tadākarnā al-ḥiġra waʿl-qāʿil minnā yaqul qad inqatāʿat waʿl-qāʿil minnā yaqul lam tanqatī ...*

<sup>16</sup> Both scholars have investigated the classical and non-classical concepts of *hiġra* and tried to make sense of the apparent contradiction between these two opposite ideas of emigration. See Crone, P. “The First Century Concept of Hiġra.” *Arabica* 41/3 (1994): 352–87, and Madelung, Wilferd F. “Has the *Hijra* come to an end?” *Revue des Études Islamiques* 54 (1986): 225–37. Crone’s article contains a list and synopsis of the available alternative (i.e non classical) traditions about the *hiġra* (pp. 356–63). The analysis of this material goes beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Jesus’ saying in the Gospels: “Prophets are not without honor except in their own country and in their own houses” (Mt, 13:57 and Mk, 6:4, Lk, 4:24; Jn, 4:44). Here and elsewhere translations are from: *Holy Bible. The New Revised Standard Version*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. See Wensinck, “Muḥammad and the Prophets,” 334–335.

bearable, the Prophet ordered the believers to emigrate. On this occasion, God gave Muḥammad permission to fight his own people. The *sirā* establishes in this way that close connection between striving on God's path and emigration that is typical of the Qur'ān. The Prophet's emigration is represented as an out and out flight. It occurs, by God's command, in the most critical moment when the Quraysh plotted to kill the Messenger. The whole episode is dotted by supernatural and miraculous events: the devil disguised as an old man advised the Quraysh on the best way to get rid of Muḥammad; God got the Quraysh blind so that Muḥammad could safely leave his house; the horse of one of his pursuers repeatedly stumbled, until he forcedly admitted that Muḥammad was protected. In sum, Muḥammad arrives safely in Medina.<sup>18</sup>

Although the *hiğra* does not mark the end of the opposition (that will happen only with the definite conquest of Mecca), one can rather safely say that the moment of moving away from idolatry and oppression by means of settling into a new territory came to represent a watershed in the Islamic self-narratives of its own origins. In fact, it is in Medina that the tradition equips the religion with its essential normative and ritual elements: a collective temple/mosque (when the Prophet arrives, he immediately takes action so that his place of prostration—*masğid*—would be build), Friday as the praying day, alms, pilgrimage, relationships with non-Muslims, a new computation of time. In fact, according to the tradition, the Prophet's companions will decide to set the beginning of the Islamic era (i.e. a new calendar) from the year of the Prophet's flight:

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<sup>18</sup> I have referred here to the events as described in: Ibn Hišām (d. 218/833 or 213/828), *Sirat rasul allāh*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqā et al., 413–430. Damascus/Beirut: Dār Ibn Kaṭīr, 2005 = *The Life of the Prophet*, trans. Alfred Guillaume, 221–31. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955. But see also Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845), *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, [editor not mentioned], Beirut: Dār al-Šādīr–Dār Beirut, vol. i, 225–38, and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Ta'riḥ al-rusul wa'l-mulūk (Annales)*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al., 15 vols. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879–1901, vol. i, 1228–45 = *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, an annotated translation, *Muḥammad at Mecca*, translated and annotated by William Montgomery Watt and M. V. Mac Donald, vol. vi, 139–152. Albany: State Univeristy of New York Press, 1988.

“From when shall we start recording dating (*matà naktubu al-ta’rīḥ*)? ‘Alī responded to ‘Umar: from the time when the Messenger of God left the land of idolatry (*ard al-širk*), namely the day he emigrated”.<sup>19</sup> This report highlights the symbolic and foundational value that the tradition attributed to the Prophet’s emigration: the beginning of the time of Islām could begin only with the (physical) separation from the territory of idolatry.

The doctrinal value of such accounts is evident: the whole episode is a clear expression of God’s intervention in history. Its paradigmatic meaning is obvious. It is only with a great departure that Islamic religious identity could really start off and this great departure was willed and guided by God. The *hiğra* is a magnificent example of that divinely oriented course of history that is usually referred to as “salvation history”.

### MOVEMENT AT THE BEHEST OF GOD

John Wansbrough identifies in the theme of exile one of the four topics (retribution, sign, and covenant being the other three) around which the Qur’ānic message revolves to express its theodicy. It is to the lexical range, literary and rhetorical techniques used in the Qur’ān to deliver these themes that Wansbrough devotes his first chapter of *Qur’anic Studies*. In what follows I shall look at how the Qur’ān employs the roots *HĠR*, at what are the ideas these roots express, and finally at whether there can be established a clear connection between the Qur’ānic verses on emigration and the flight of Muḥammad from Mecca to Medina. In the course of this paper, it will become clear that, once we investigate the Qur’ān, things do not look conceptually so different from the basic ideas conveyed by the *sīra* accounts of Muḥammad’s emigration, that is emigration as moving away from idolatry and oppres-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibn Šabba (d. 262/878), *Ta’rīḥ al-madīna al-munawwara*, ed. Fahīm Muḥammad Šaltūt, 4 vols. Mecca: Ḥabīb Muḥammad Aḥmad, [1979], *Ta’rīḥ*, vol. ii, 258. The following tradition reported by Ibn Šabba records a variety of opinion in regard to the issue of when starting the new computation of time. The beginning of the prophet’s mission, his death and the *hiğra* being the options.

sion. Yet, the Medinan-Meccan framework is missing from the text. In addition, some significant element stands out in the Qurʾān, that of retribution and salvation, and that of a movement in God's name as a virtuous form of militant religiosity.

### Separation as foundation

The roots *HĠR* are used in the Qurʾān to describe the physical and metaphorical imagery of separation. There is some semantic difference according to whether the roots are used in the first or in the third form. When employed in the first form (*haġara: yahġuru*), they generally indicate the act of moving away from something inappropriate.<sup>20</sup> The necessity of taking distance from something morally or religiously improper often takes the form of an imperative. Mostly it is a divine order which occurs as part of instructions imparted by God to his Messenger. The style is paraenetic: the one folded in garments (*al-muḡammil*) is urged to pray at night, remember the name of His Lord, recite *al-qurʾān*, endure “what they say” and disassociate from “them” in an appropriate manner (*faʾhġurhum haġran ġamilan*) (73:10). “They” are described in the following verses (73:10–18) as those who tell lies and are well off, those who do not believe, for whom there will be a painful chastisement. The one wrapped up (in a mantle, *al-mudattir*, 74:1) is exhorted to raise and warn, magnify his Lord, purify his garment, and shun abomination (*al-ruġḡ faʾhġur*, 74:5). What this abomination exactly consists in is not specified.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, he is recommended to be patient and not to give in order to receive more. Elsewhere, men are instructed to banish in beds apart the women from whom they fear disobedi-

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<sup>20</sup> Casewit, Daoud S. “Hijra as history and metaphor: a survey of Qurʾanic and Ḥadīth sources.” *The Muslim World* 88/2 (1998): 105–28, in particular 107–10, is the only study I came across where an analysis of the *HaĠaRa* verses is carried out. Yet, the author makes no explicit distinction between *HaGaRa* and *HaĠaRa*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ruġḡ* is an hapax. In the form *riġḡ* it occurs once connected to the devil (*riġḡ al-šayṭān*, 8: 11), therefore conveying a similar sense of impurity, whereas in the other occurrences *riġḡ* indicates God's punishment, mostly from the sky (2:59; 7:134,135; 7:162; 29:34; 34:5; 45:11).

ence (*fa'hğūrūbunna fi 'l-madāğī*, 4:34). Physical distance is here a form of punishment.

But the act of separation can also be a human resolution. Thus, Abraham's father, as an idolater, exhorts his son to go away from him: “leave me!” (*fa'hğūrnī*, 19:46) and Abraham, after having asked his Lord to forgive his father, replies that he will withdraw from him and from those that he invokes beside God (*wa-tazīlukum wa-man tad'ūna min duni 'llāh*, 19:48). The verb *tazāla* here seems to have the same meaning as *hağara* and the separation is mutual: the idolater cannot stand living close to the monotheist and the monotheist is not prepared to live in propinquity with the idolater. Similarly: “The Messenger said: My Lord, my people has taken this recitation as something to be disassociated from” (*innā hādā al-qur'ān mahğūran*, 25:30).<sup>22</sup> In the story of the Cave (Sura 18:9–26), the same idea and the same lexicon return: seclusion in the Cave is presented as a radical act of physical separation from idolatry, as an act recommended by God: “and when you withdraw from them and that which they worship other than God, then seek refuge in the Cave; your Lord will spread for you of His mercy...” (18:16). As for Abraham's retreat, the verb is *tazāla* and the object to move away from is worship of more than the One God (*wa-id'ū tazālumūhum wa-mā ya'budūna illā 'llāh*).<sup>23</sup> Similarly, when Moses' people refuse to follow him in the promised Land for fear of the giants, Moses pleads with God: “O my Lord! I have power only over myself and my brother: so separate us from this rebellious people!” (Yusuf Ali, 5:26: ... *fa'frūq baynanā wa-bayna al-qawm al-fāsiqīm*).

In sum, separation is from: false doctrines (“what they say”), abomination, idolatry, improper behavior and fear. It is expressed by *HĞR* in the first form, but also by equivalent roots (*FRQ*—*ZL*). The lexical range to express this idea of separation is rather limited. Except for the case of disobedient women, it clearly has something to do with confessional identity making: praying and

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<sup>22</sup> Translation from the Qur'ān in the course of this paper are my own adaptations from Yusuf Ali and Arberry, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>23</sup> See also 44:21: “If you don't believe me, then withdraw from me!” (*wa-in lam tu'minu li fa-ī tazāluni*).

preaching, devoting oneself to the one God, necessitates a break (i.e. moving away) from what is “different” (be it idolatry, impurity or else). Or it has something to do with identity keeping: the Messenger’s opponents disassociate from the recitation (*qur’ān*) and Abraham’s father asks his son to depart. Idolatry and monotheism are mutually exclusive.<sup>24</sup> More, each threatens the other.

These verses do not display a descriptive character, they do not convey any specifically historical information, nor they do appear in any way associated with the life of Prophet. They rather have a hortatory and polemic nature. Movement along a divinely guided path (the concept of guidance, *hudā*, which Wansbrough defines as “the original Islamic kerygma”)<sup>25</sup> finds its paradigmatic start through an act of displacement whose purpose is that of publicly marking the boundaries of a new faith. One may well say that separation figures as a self-assertive foundational act. More, it is a necessary condition for acquiring confessional self-awareness. The pattern seems to be that of Abraham (Gen 12, 1–7 and 13, 14–18).

### **Emigration as bearing witness, struggle and salvation**

On the whole, it is when used in the third form that the roots *HĠR* (*haġara*) acquire a more complex character and a much stronger religious connotation than in the instances considered above: from an assertive, but still generic, act of separation from what is morally and religiously inappropriate, the verb gains the meaning of abandoning an unpleasant situation to emigrate towards God. Those who emigrate (*man haġara*, *al-muhāġirūn/muhāġirāt*) appear as a distinct group of people (cf. 33:6; 59:8–9; 60:10). The roots in the third form are strictly associated with belief, with the struggle on God’s path, and with reward and redemption.

Let us consider more closely the various Qur’ānic occurrences of the roots *HĠR* in the third form. The allusive character of the Qur’ān does not make it an easy task to build up a coherent pic-

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<sup>24</sup> See also 14:13 and 7:88 (expulsion of the messengers if they don’t return to their original religion).

<sup>25</sup> *SM*, 101.

ture. However, several recurrent themes appear in verses where the third form of *HGR* is used. These themes tend to overlap.

BELIEF: the main point is that true belief is made of emigration and emigration implies striving on God’s path (2:218; 8: 72,74–75; 9:20). There is a certain concern in the Qur’an to sketch out different groupings of people who are characterized by their diverse attitudes towards emigration. Among believers there seems to be various ranks, and these ranks actually depend on their willingness to emigrate. So, believers who emigrated and strove on God’s path are kept together by a very strong bond of mutual protection from which those who believed, but did not emigrate, are excluded (8:72). It follows that there can be belief without emigration, but it is of a lower quality. Sometimes the believers who refuse to move are indicated as those who sit at home (*al-qā’idūna min al-mu’minīn*, 4:95 where they are opposed to those who strive on God’s path with their property and persons), and no protection will be granted to the hypocrites (*al-munāfiqīn*) until they emigrate (4:89). We are not told where these people head to, but we are told that they move towards those who believe like them and who are ready to offer support. In fact, those who help the emigrants by giving them a refuge are also true believers (8: 72,74). We are not told whether those who emigrate move towards something they claim a right of, nor towards something they already know. Twice we are told that they emigrate towards God and His Messenger (4:100; 29:26). In Qur’an 29:26 it is Lot who goes forth to God. He believed in Abraham and said: “I shall emigrate to my Lord” (*innī muhāğīr ilà rabbi*). That is the beginning of the story of the destruction of Lot’s people and of Lot’s reaction to Abraham’s speech (vv. 29:16–25) where he invites his people to leave their idols (*al-tān*) and reminds them of God’s punishment. Thus, Lot’s emigration looks here like an act of imitation of Abraham’s own emigration, even if the latter is not explicitly mentioned. Elsewhere, it is God who expelled the unfaithful of the *abl al-kītab* because they separated from Him (59:2, *huma alladī aḡraḡa alladīna kaḡarū min abl al-kītab min diyārihim*). It is He who decreed the exile for them (*kataba ‘alayhim al-ḡalā’*) as a punishment. Displacement, as a conse-

quence of divine decree, appears here as a form of prophetic threat. On the whole, it is something different from the emigration of the *muhāğirūn*.<sup>26</sup>

REWARD AND REDEMPTION: the two motifs are closely connected. Those who believe, emigrate and struggle on God's path with their person and property, and those who gave them refuge and support, are promised God's reward, his mercy and forgiveness, hence salvation (2:218; 4:94; 16:41,110). The reward consists also in goodly provisions, proximity to God, gardens with water and shadow, good dwellings in this world as well as many refuges (*marāğim kağiran*) and a vast land (*wa-sa'atan*) (3:195; 8:74; 9:20–22,100). The context is clearly eschatological: "On that day, the kingdom will be of God who will judge between them: those who believed and performed righteous deeds will stay in the Gardens of delight, those who were unfaithful (*kafarū*) and considered God's signs a lie, for them is a humiliating punishment, and those who emigrated on God's path then were killed and died, they will be provided with goodly provisions. Verily God is the best of providers" (22:56–58). Because emigration can be followed by hardship and death (see also, 3:195; 4:100), because of this very hardship, emigration is a particularly meritorious act of witness to God. An act that deserves a special reward. Yet, it is particularly worth noting that the retribution for those who emigrate is not only celestial, but also terrestrial: it is made of good dwellings, refuges and spacious land (4:100 in particular). It is also interesting to note that, at least in a couple of instances, lexical expressions commonly used in the Qur'ān to refer to the eschatological reward, e.g. "gardens with rivers flowing underneath" (*ğannāt tağrı min tağtibā anhar*) are used to describe the land of Egypt (43:51 and 26:57).<sup>27</sup> In regard to Q. 5:12, which mentions the gardens and rivers as the reward for the Children of Israel's observance of God's covenant, Vivienne Comerro de Prémare has perceptively wondered whether this image of di-

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<sup>26</sup> QS, 8.

<sup>27</sup> In the Qur'ān, gardens with water are the common retribution for emigrants and for good, truthful, believers of previous communities as well.



vine retribution is a metaphor of Paradise, or whether it should rather represent (at least in that specific context) the land promised to the Children of Israel.<sup>28</sup> One perceives a degree of ambiguity and overlap between celestial and terrestrial place of reward.

Finally, it also follows that those who said no to emigration will end up badly. They will be reproached by the Angels: “Was not the land broad enough so that you could emigrate?” (4:97). Their abode (*ma’wāhum*) will be the Gehenna. There will be no divine mercy for them. These people were weak and oppressed (*mustaḍ’afūn*), but they did not separate from oppression. In this case, separating from injustice is not only a necessity, but also a duty. Only those oppressed who did not have the means to emigrate will not be punished (9:91–92).

PERSECUTION AND OPPRESSION: hence, emigration is not always a voluntary act or a divinely ordained one. In some instances, it is presented as the necessary consequence of persecution and oppression (3:195; 16:41,110). Again the emphasis is on striving and retribution.

REFUSAL TO EMIGRATE: in many verses the theme of emigration/struggling on God’s path is mentioned within a highly polemical context where it is sharply put in contrast with those who refuse to emigrate and strive (4:89,95). These verses are, again, highly paraenetic and serve a mobilizing purpose: urging believers to take part in the struggle on God’s name.

As seen above, the Emigrates, enjoy God’s special favour. In one of the most militant suras of the Qur’ān (Sura 9) two occurrences of *al-muhāğirūn* (9:100 and 117) appear within a very long and complex set of polemical verses describing various groups of reluctant people. Their reluctance concerns mainly their refusal to take part in the struggle on God’s path. In this respect, two main groups can be identified. The first are the hypocrites (vv. 9:73–89) (*al-munāfiqūn*). The hypocrites are charged with uttering unfaithful words (*kalimat al-kufr*) after having submitted (*ba’da islāmihim*). They broke a pact they had taken with God (*‘ābada ‘llāha*). Namely, they

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<sup>28</sup> Comerro de Prémare, Vivienne. “La nouvelle alliance dans sourate ‘al-Mā’ida’.” *Arabica* 48/3 (2001): 285–312, especially 301.

refused to give alms despite having being made wealthy by means of God's *fadl*; they mocked those who donate alms or those who could find only their effort as a contribution to God's path. Principally, the hypocrites mock the devotees and the poor. Furthermore, they are among those who stay at home, who dislike striving with their person and properties, and who discourage those who do want to go out. These hypocrites will not be forgiven, they will not be allowed to go forth and fight in the future since they preferred staying at home. It is not to be prayed for them nor their tomb is to be visited; they were unfaithful and will die as sinners (*fāsiqūn*). The central issue of dispute seems to be an economical one: the *munāfiqūn* are wealthy (it is God who made them wealthy because he gave them his *fadl*), but they refuse to return this *fadl* to God by way of giving alms and contributing to fighting: "When a passage (*sūra*) comes down [instructing]: 'Believe in God and strive with his Messenger' the wealthy and powerful (*ulū al-ṭawṭ*) among them will ask permission from you and will say: 'Let us be among those who stay at home'" (9:86). Needless to say, God's reward is only for those who strive with their person and property (9:88). The theme of spending, giving something on God's path is here most significant. It is a way of giving away what God has given to man: donation (*ṣadaqa*), expense (*nafaqa*), going out to struggle on God's path, emigration, are all ways of imitating God's generosity and of complying with (and enacting) His command.<sup>29</sup>

The second group are the nomadic people (*al-a'rāb*):<sup>30</sup> their attitude to striving is diverse (9:90ff.). Some of them apologize and

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<sup>29</sup> See the work of Michael Bonner in this regard: Bonner, M. "The *Kitāb al-kaṣb* Attributed to al-Shaybānī: Poverty, Surplus and the Circulation of Wealth." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 121/3 (2001): 410–27; idem. "Poverty and Charity in the Rise of Islam." In Bonner, Michael, Mine Ener, and Amy Singer, eds. *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts*, 13–30. Albany: State University of New York, Press, 2003; "Poverty and Economy in the Qur'an." *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 35 (2005): 391–406; *Le Jibad, origines, interprétations et combat*, traduit de l'anglais par Alix Barreau, 35–42. L'Islam en débats. Paris: Téraèdre, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> As opposed to the *ahl al-madina* in 9:101 and 120. Literally, "the people of the city"; traditionally interpreted as the people of Madina.

ask for permission (not to go out and strive). Those who accused God and his Messenger of lying, stayed at home (without asking permission, it seems implied). Those who reject faith will be stricken by a painful punishment (9:90). Again the theme is that of taking part in the struggle on God’s path with one’s person and properties. Some categories of people (the ill, the weak and the poor) are forgiven and exempted (9:81–92), as it has been already shown. But some are definitively not, especially the rich. He, in particular, is not entitled to ask for exemption (9:93–96). Some *‘arāb* are most stubborn in unfaithfulness and hypocrisy, and despise the idea of giving alms. Some, instead, consider alms as a way towards God’s proximity, these believe in the Last Day. God will be merciful with them. It is at this point that the Emigrants pop up. The first among the emigrants and the (their) helpers will enjoy a special reward made of Gardens with rivers and shadow, the Qur’an says (9:100).

God’s favor towards the emigrants and their helpers is restated shortly afterwards (9:117). Here the reference to the *mu-hāğirīn* is followed by a cluster of verses which offer an evocative imagery of movement at the behest of God. This movement is powerfully described: nomadic and settled people (*abl al-madīna wa-man ḥawlabum min al-‘arāb*) will not stay behind the Messenger, they will not prefer his life to theirs, they will not suffer thirst nor fatigue or hunger; every trodden step (on God’s path) will be ascribed in their favour. Every big or small donation (expense), every cut across valley on God’s path, will be ascribed in their favour. This image of a moving people (*abl al-madīna wa-man ḥawlabum min al-‘arāb*) described as spending for God, enduring hardship for God, stepping forth and walking through valleys for Him is tremendously effective and expresses, in a masterful way, the determination of the true believers. We are not told where they head to (are they heading somewhere?), but most interestingly we are told that it is better for them to go out in groups so that they can assiduously devote themselves to religion (*li-yatafaqqabū fi’l-dīn*) and then warn their people when they come back. The imagery of movement and territorial advancement is here a physical metaphor of belief and proselytism, a practice through which faith is consolidated. It is not a systematic emigration one finds in these passages, but a dynamic and physical response to God’s call depicted as a

highly devotional act, one which also assumes the character of a religious and spiritual practice.<sup>31</sup>

If we had to tidy up the allusive suggestions coming from the Qur'anic occurrences of *HĠR* in the third form, we may summarize it as follows: emigration implies leaving one's house (so also to be poor), struggling in God's name, killing and perhaps being killed. In brief, emigration is an ordeal. No specific destination is mentioned to where the *muhāġirūn* should head to, if not to God and his Messenger and to those who will offer refuge and help. Emigrants remove themselves from injustice, oppression, idolatry. Emigrating then is not only a duty, but also a necessity. And finally, why do people emigrate? To flee from oppression, to witness God's faith, to save themselves. As Wansbrough concisely and effectively put it: the Qur'anic concept of displacement is at service of worship, redemption and bearing witness.<sup>32</sup>

Out of this picture two specific elements emerge. First, nowhere the connection of these verses to Muḥammad's *hiġra* from Mecca to Medina appears obvious nor the third form *hāġara* in the Qur'ān is associated to the most spectacular mass emigration in the history of Semitic monotheism, namely the exodus of Moses and his people. To my knowledge, Patricia Crone is the only scholar who seriously took into consideration the fact that the classical concept of *hiġra* is not apparent in the Qur'ān.<sup>33</sup> The word *hiġra*

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<sup>31</sup> Generally speaking men are often described as moving, travelling, in the Qur'ān (*daraba fi'l arḍ* is one of the common expressions to express this idea), cf. Q. 2:273; 3:156; 4:94; 4:101; 5:106; 73:20. The first and the third instances contain the formula *fi sabil allah*.

<sup>32</sup> *QS*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> See Crone, "The First Century Concept of *Hijra*," 353–55. To a certain extent, but from a completely different perspective, also Rubin in: "The life of Muḥammad and the Qur'ān", argues for the independence of the *ṣira* materials from the Qur'ān. Apart from Crone, I could not find a single recent article on the subject which questioned the traditional link between Qur'ān and *hiġra* of Muḥammad and his followers. See, for instance, Mendel, Miloš. "Rethinking the Islamic Hijra: A Religious Paradigm or an Ideological Instrument of Political Action." *Archiv Orientalní*:

never occurs in the book. In sura 9 the expression *abl al-madīna* is mentioned twice but, again, there is nothing that compels us to read it as the people of the Madīna to where, the tradition tells us, the Prophet fled after having endured severe persecution from his compatriots in idolater Mecca. In fact, the locution *abl al-madīna* is here used in opposition to the *ʿarab*. The contrast is between nomadic and settled people (perhaps of a specific settlement). Actually, the word *al-madīna* occurs several times in the Qurʾān (14) out of which a half appears within the context of biblical or extra-biblical stories.<sup>34</sup> For some reason, to indicate the momentous event which marked the foundation of the Prophet’s new community, the tradition adopted a non-Qurʾānic substantive (*hiğra*). Grammatically, the noun *hiğra* is closer to *bağara*. Conceptually, the symbolic idea of a Prophetic *hiğra* from idolatry to monotheism is also very close to the Qurʾānic uses of *HĠR* in the first form. In fact, we have seen that the *bağara* instances point to an act of self-assertion by leaving what is morally and religiously inappropriate, idolatry in particular, as according to the Abrahamic pattern. The roots in the third form describe, rather, a type of strongly militant movement which represents an act of liberation from oppression, but also, and mostly, a form of devotional hardship through which the believer testifies his faith, and, in so doing, reaches salvation. The traditional narratives of Muḥammad’s flight combine the two Quranic ideas carried by *HĠR* respectively in the first and third form. That means that the basic Abrahamic idea of departure from idolatry as foundational act (*bağara/hiğra*) is supplemented by the themes of oppression and struggle on God’s path which so patently stand out in the Qurʾān. In this way, a close connection be-

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*Quarterly Journal of African and Asian Studies* 7/1 (2009): 1–26 or the articles “Emigration” and “Emigrants” in the *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾan*.

<sup>34</sup> Q. 7:123 (Moses); 12:30 (Joseph); 15:67 (Lot); 18:19 (story of the Cave); 18:77 (Moses); 27:48 (the story of Šālih); 28: 15,18,20 (Moses); 36:20 (“Then there came running, from the farthest part of the city, a man, ...”). In 9:101,120 (Ṭabarī, *Ġamīʿ al-bayan*, vol. xi, 9–11 and 64); 33:60 (Ibid., xxii, 48); 63:8 (Ibid., xxviii, 112ss) *al-madīna* is interpreted as the Medina of the Prophet.

tween the Qur'ānic imagery of emigration (*hāğara*) and the life of Muḥammad was secured.

Second, and most importantly, it has been highlighted how the imperative of moving at the command of God is most often associated with the imagery of reward.<sup>35</sup> The stress is on retribution. While in many instances the reward is celestial (gardens with water and shadow), in a number of verses it is also literally terrestrial. It is a promise of good home, refuges and spacious land. It is to this last idea that I would like to resort.

### LAND AS DIVINE HERITAGE

In the Qur'ān divine heritage figures prominently and it is expressed by the verb *wariṭa* (to inherit) and *anraṭa* (to make somebody inherit something). It is God that makes his people inherit since, in the end, it is He who will inherit everything. God is, in fact, the best of inheritors (*wa-anta ḥayr al-wāriṭīna*, 21:89) (and see 3:180; 15:23; 28:58; 57:10), but what in particular do people inherit from Him?

GARDENS: the believers will inherit gardens were they will dwell eternally (7:43; 19:63; 26:85; 43:72); they will inherit Paradise (*firdaws*, 23:11). It is the children of Israel who were made, at first, God's inheritors (26:59; 28:5–6).

AL-KITĀB (Scripture, writing, divine decree ...):<sup>36</sup> “And we made the Children of Israel inherit *al-kitāb*” (40:53); “Then we have given *al-kitāb* as inheritance to those We have chosen from among

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<sup>35</sup> See *QS*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> The word *al-kitāb* in the Qur'ān is problematic and does not always cover the meaning of book as Scripture. Daniel Madigan has pointed out that, in the Qur'ān, this term broadly indicates one of the ways in which God interacts with men. Reducing the semantically multi-layered *kitāb* to the meaning of “canon of scripture” implies a reduction of the word potentials. I will therefore leave it as *kitāb* and avoid translation. See Madigan, Daniel. *The Qur'an Self-Image: Writing ad Authority in Islam's Scripture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, and idem. “The Limits of Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān.” In Wild, Stefan, ed. *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an*, 59–69. Wiesbaden: Harassowitz Verlag, 2006.

our servants” (35:32); “And there succeeded after them a succession who inherited *al-kitāb*, taking the chance goods of this lower world, and saying, ‘It will be forgiven us’” (Arberry, 7:169); “But those to whom *al-kitāb* has been given as an inheritance after them, [Abraham, Moses and Jesus as mentioned in the previous verse] behold, they are in doubt of it disquieting” (Arberry, 42:14). It is God who chooses his heirs, it is He who chooses the recipients of his decree, although these people are not always up to the divine election.

LAND: the land is God’s and He will give it as inheritance to whomever he wishes among his servants (19:40). In this regard, Moses’ address to his people is eloquent: “Ask for God’s help and be patient. Verily, the earth is of God and He will give it as heritage to whomever He wishes among His servants (7:128)”. Chapter 7 of the Qur’ān (*Sūrat al-‘arāf*) is a long and composite section which hosts a number of prophetic stories. The theme of land pops up here and again. Generation after generation, people inherit the land, but will also inherit the same unhappy fate of its previous inhabitants, if they will persevere in idolatry: “To those who inherit the land after their (previous) possessors (*li-‘lladīna yarithūna al-arḍ min ba’d ahlihā*), is it not a guiding (lesson) that, if We so willed, We could punish them for their sins ” (Yusuf Ali, 7:100). The verse is parenetic and it occurs as a threat after a series of stories of divine punishment. We are not told where this inherited land is located, but we are told that those who inherited the land from the people who previously possessed it, may undergo the same tragic end. These are the people of towns (*abl al-qurā*) to whom God sent neglected Prophets (7:94,101), they are the people of Noah, Hūd, Šālīh and Šu‘ayb. Noah and the Arab messengers, then, all seem to live in the same land, a land with towns (*qurā*), a land inherited by future unbelieving generations. Then the story of Moses follows (7:103–159). Towards its end, just before mentioning the crossing of the sea (7:138), the Qur’ān says: “And We gave as inheritance to the people who were oppressed the East and West of the land upon which We sent down Our blessing. And the most beautiful word of your Lord was accomplished for the Children of Israel because they were patient” (7:137). The land is here the biblical promised land of Exodus. The weak and oppressed people of Moses (*al-qawm alladīna kānū yustaḍ‘afūn*) who embark upon exile

(emigration) remind of those weak and oppressed believers (*mustaḍʿafūn*) who did not envision a land vast enough to emigrate (4:97). The latter did not separate from oppression so their final abode will be the Gehenna, as it has been shown above. But also the people of Moses refrained from advancing into the land for fear of the giants and they were punished too (5:26). This motif is presented in *Sūrat al-Māʾida* (sura 5). There, Moses disputes with his people when they refuse to enter the Holy Land (*al-arḍ al-muqaddasa*, 5:21).<sup>37</sup> They are afraid of the giants and reply to his exhortation: “O my people, enter the Holy Land which God has prescribed for you” (5:21, *udhulū al-arḍ al-muqaddasa allatī kataba ʾllah la-kum*)—“Moses! We shall never enter it as long as they are there. You go with your Lord and you two fight them (*fa-qātīlā*), we will be sitting here (*innā hābunā qāʾidūn*)” (5:24). By refusing to fight (see also 2:246) and enter the Holy land the Children of Israel betray the Covenant (*miʿāq*) God took with them. Their betrayal is mentioned a couple of times in the course of the sura (5:12–13, but also 5:70). Further down in the same chapter, it is the believers who are implicitly presented as the people with whom the Covenant will be renewed, “men who struggle in the path of God, not fearing the reproach of any reproacher” (Arberry, 5:54).<sup>38</sup> After all, elsewhere the Qurʾān clearly states that it is God who causes the unfaithful to lose his land: “and We will surely make you to dwell in the land after them” (Arberry, 14:14)<sup>39</sup> and gives it as inheritance to the believers. In this regard, Q. 33:27 sounds particularly interesting: “And He made you heirs of their land, their houses and their properties, [and] a land you have not trodden (before)” (33:27). The

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<sup>37</sup> Q. 5:21–26.

<sup>38</sup> For a very interesting discussion of these verses, see de Prémare, Alfred-Louis. *Les Fondations de l’Islam*, 133–14. Paris: Seuil, 2002; Comerro de Prémare, “La nouvelle alliance dans sourate ‘al-Māʾida’,” 285–314, especially 301–304; Rubin, Uri. “The life of Muhammad and the Islamic Self-Image.” In Motzki, Harald, ed. *The Biography of Muhammad: the Issue of the Sources*, 3–17, in particular 7–8. Leiden, 2000.

<sup>39</sup> Q. 14:13–14: *wa-qala ʾllāhina kafarū li-rusulihim: la-nabruḡannakum min arḍinā aw la-taʾūduna fī millatīnā fa-awhā ilayhim rabbuhum ... la-naskunnakum al-arḍ min bāʾadibim...*



context is here one of tense conflict between the believers, on the hand, and “the parties” (*al-abḡāb*, 33:22) on the other. Hypocrites (33:12), unbelievers (*allaḡīna kafarū*, 33:25) and *ahl al-kiṭāb* (33:26) are all mentioned as being among the parties. Qur’ān 33: 26–27 clearly utters that God made the believers inherit the land and the possessions of the *ahl al-kiṭāb*. The exegetical tradition tends to project upon these verses the story of the battle of the ditch when various parties among the Prophet’s opponents (the Medinan Jews the Banū Qurayḡa, Qurayš and the Arab tribe of the Ġaṡafān) besieged Medina in 5/627.<sup>40</sup> In this case, an examination of a classical *tafsīr* like that of al-Ṭabarī is useful since it reveals that exegetes as well were puzzled by the land promise formulated in this verse. At the beginning of his commentary to 33:27, al-Ṭabarī has no doubts that the *ahl al-kiṭāb* of 33:26–27 are the People of the Torah, the Jews, whom he identifies with the Banū Qurayḡa.<sup>41</sup> But when it comes to geographically define the “land not yet trodden” that God will give the believers as inheritance, al-Ṭabarī records a split among the interpreters: “The people of interpretation disagreed about it: which land was it? Some said it was the land of the Romans (*al-Rīm*) and Persia and the countries that God opened for the Muslims after that”, while others identify it with Mecca and Ḥaybar. The split recorded by Ṭabarī witnesses a debate around the geographical location of the promised land within the community. More, it reveals a tension which reminds that between closed (Mecca to Medina) and opened (outside Arabia) concepts of *hiġra*. Namely, between the traditional geography of the life of Muḡammad and the traditional sacred geography of Semitic monotheisms. The problematic nature of the verses is further highlighted by the way al-Ṭabarī closes the dispute. In fact, he finds a way out by disassociating the two “lands” occurrences at beginning and end of the verse (“He made you heirs of their land ... and a land you have not trodden”). With the first one, God meant the land, homes

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ibn Hišām, *Sīrat rasūl allah*, 776–91 for an account of the battle and 801–802 on Qur’ānic verses revealed about the ditch and Banū Qurayḡa (33:9–14) = Guillaume, 450–60 and 466–67.

<sup>41</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi’ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl ay al-qur’an*, vol. xxi, 150 (ad Q. 33:27).

and possessions of the Banū Qurayṣa. With the expression “a land you have not trodden before”, God did not mean any specific place (neither Ḥaybar or Mecca, nor Rūm, Fāris or Yemen), but all of them, because “God’s word would not specify one without the other”.<sup>42</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, then, takes the divine promise as an obvious reflection of the spectacular fulfillment of God’s will which took place in the conquests (all the conquered land had already been promised as heritage in the Qur’ān). Yet, by eluding the interpretative problem, he indirectly reveals to us the thorny nature of the issue.

Elsewhere, the promise of territorial heritage appears in the Qur’ān as formulated in the Psalms: “We wrote in *al-Zabūr*, after reminding (*dhikr*), My righteous servants will inherit the land.<sup>43</sup> Verily in this is a message for a people of [true] worshipers” (21:105–106—cf. Psalm 37:29)<sup>44</sup>. In this case, the beneficiaries of this promise are an unspecified people of devote worshipers (*ibādī al-ṣāliḥūn/qawm ‘ābidīn*). On the basis of the above examined verses, it would be natural to identify them with the Children of Israel (especially Q. 7:137 mentioned above), but nothing in the text that precedes and follows these words directs the reader towards this association. The verse is set within an eschatological and apocalyptic context consisting in the description of reward and punishment as a sign to show that God will keep up his own promises and as a way of distinguishing those who believed from those who were unfaithful.

In sum, free of their traditional exegetical support, what emerges from these verses is the following: it is God who decides

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<sup>42</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Ġamī‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-qur’ān*, vol. xxi, 155 (ad Q. 33:27).

<sup>43</sup> The preceding verses of Psalm 37, of which Q. 21:105 is here almost a quotation, consist of reminding the righteous to bear patience with the wicked and impious.

<sup>44</sup> But, also in the same Psalm, 37:9: “but those who wait upon their Lord shall inherit the earth”, 11: “The meek shall inherit the earth” [cf. Mt. 5:5]; 22: “Those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land”, 34: “Wait for the Lord, and keep to his way and he will exalt you to inherit the land”.

who is to inherit his possessions. Gardens, *al-ḵitāb* and land are the most frequently quoted “items” of inheritance. So, one may as well say that divine heritage is made primarily of revelation and territory, the latter being both celestial and earthly. In fact, sometimes the distinction between the two bears a degree of ambiguity. As previously indicated, all righteous believers will inherit the Gardens of Paradise. Other than that, the Children of Israel are God’s first choice in terms of heritage. They inherited *al-ḵitāb* and God’s land (*ard*) as a retribution for their patience and devotion. Yet, this heritage is not exclusive. It is passed on, and in this way, it becomes a claim of the believers too. More precisely, the Children of Israel broke their Covenant to God and this Covenant was renewed by the believers. To put it in other words, the theme of the promised land in the Qur’ān is linked to the Children of Israel of whom the believers appear as heirs.

At this point, a basic question arises: given the prominence of the duty and necessity to emigrate and to struggle on God’s path in the Qur’ān, given the hegemony of the retribution theme as the main driving force behind the emigration ordeal, given that terrestrial retribution figures significantly as a promise for the believers, and, finally, given the spectacular Arab invasions which began in the first half of the vii century AD, should we read the Qur’ānic verses on emigration and struggling only as a form of militant proselytism meant at spreading and consolidating a new faith, or could not one attempt to read it as a piously motivated call for emigration towards a “promised land” whose right to inherit the believers shared with the Children of Israel? A call that eventually the Arabs took up seriously and successfully? It is s to some more evidence as well as to a brief review of the relevant secondary literature that we must now turn.

## NON-ISLAMIC SOURCES

In the last decade, the study of the literary sources composed by the inhabitants of the Fertile Crescent who eye witnessed the Arab invasions at the beginning of the VIIth century has yielded some

interesting results.<sup>45</sup> Together with documentary evidence, non-Islamic sources have now gained a status of full respectability within the range of sources for the study of the very early years of Islam. In his *Sectarian Milieu* John Wansbrough dismissed the usefulness of these materials in terms of historical reconstruction. He viewed them as a polemical literary stereotyped response to political change and gauged them as the product of a “minority historiography” drenched with symbolic and formulaic character and conveying “virtually nothing of the confessional community eventually called Islam”.<sup>46</sup> That these sources should exhibit the same qualitative variety of problems of the religious literature of the period, it seems normal. That they should be examined with a high degree of literary competence, that their dating, bias, purpose, public and confessional affiliation should be carefully taken into consideration, also this seems only normal. That they should reflect, as any literary product, the conceptual and religious categories as well as the linguistic conventions of the people who produced them, this is too to be taken for granted. In this respect, these materials share a number of features with the Islamic tradition. They are written and they are an expression of that divinely preordained historical path which is otherwise called salvation history. Yet, these materials have something that the Islamic tradition has not. They are contemporary to the events and, as such, they deserve some attention.<sup>47</sup> To the purpose of this paper, it will be interesting to see what some of them have to say in terms of the great Arabs’ emigration (the conquests) and the land the Arabs headed to.

The earliest account of the origins of Islam that we possess is attributed to the Armenian bishop Sebeos. Sebeos stands for the

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<sup>45</sup> See in particular Hoyland, Robert. *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*. Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam. Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1997.

<sup>46</sup> *SM*, 117–119, quotation is from p. 118. On this specific matter, see Michael Cook’s review of John Wansbrough *SM* in: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 112 (1980): 180–82.

<sup>47</sup> For how these sources could be used in the study of early Islam, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 545–98.

name given to the anonymous compiler of a history describing the events beginning in 572 AD up to the end of the Arab civil war in 661 AD.<sup>48</sup> The compiler has been judged to be contemporary to the events he relates, writing probably in the middle of the VIIth century.<sup>49</sup> His brief account about the origins of Islam is fascinating and for this reason, it has attracted the attention of several scholars in the last decades.<sup>50</sup> Sebeos sets his narrative within the context of the Sasanian-Byzantine conflict. He describes a Jewish uprising in Edessa and the subsequent flight of the Jews after the city had been recaptured by the emperor Heraclius. The compiler probably (con)fuses two different episodes having taken place respectively in 628 and 632.<sup>51</sup> The Jews left the city and headed to the land of the Arabs where they asked them for help by informing the sons of Ishmael “of their blood relationship through the testament of Scripture”. At this point, the compiler takes the chance to describe the religion of the sons of Ishmael:

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<sup>48</sup> For a presentation and assessment of the history attributed to Sebeos as well as for a complete bibliography on this work, see Greenwood, Tim. *s.v.* “The History of Sebeos.” In Thomas, David, and Barbara Roggema, eds. *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1 (600–900), I, 139–44. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009. The article by Greenwood, Tim. “Sasanian Echoes and Apocalyptic Expectations: A Re-Evaluation of the Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos.” *Le Muséon* 115/3–4 (2002): 323–97, is a very thorough presentation of the work attributed to the Armenian bishop. Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 124–32 considers in particular the relevance of Sebeos’ history with regard to the study of Islamic origins.

<sup>49</sup> Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 125.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Crone, Patricia, and Michael Cook, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World*, 8–6. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; Arat, Kristin M. “Bischof Sebeos und die erste Aussagen der Armenier zum Islam.” *al-Masaq* 6 (1993): 107–29; Hoyland, Robert. “Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam.” In Nettle, Ronald L., ed. *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Jewish-Muslim Relations*, 89–102. Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, in cooperation with the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1995; and idem, *Seeing Islam*, 128–32.

<sup>51</sup> See Hoyland, “Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam,” 90.

“At that time a certain man from among those same sons of Ishmael whose name was Mahmet, a merchant, as if by God’s command appeared to them as a preacher [and] the path of truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was learned and informed in the history of Moses. Now because the command was from on high, at a single order they all came together in unity of religion. Abandoning their vane cults, they turned to the living God who had appeared to their father Abraham. So Mahmet legislated for them: not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsely, not to engage in fornication. He said: ‘With an oath God promised this land to Abraham and his seed after him forever. And he brought about as he promised during that time while he loved Israel. But now you are the sons of Abraham, and God is accomplishing his promise to Abraham and his seed for you. Love sincerely only the God of Abraham, and go and seize your land which God gave to your father Abraham. Not one will be able to resist you in battle, because God is with you’.<sup>52</sup>

In what follows Mahmet’s charismatic speech in the name of Abraham and the promised land galvanizes the hearts of Arabs and Jews alike who are then described as taking massively part in the spectacular conquests.<sup>53</sup> This account could be investigated in many respects. The historian may look for images concerning Muḥammad in Sebeos’ *milieu* and for how the VIIth century Christian Armenian context to which the compiler presumably belonged perceived the Arabs and the message of their prophet; for the role of Jewish participation in the Arab invasions; for an appraisal of messianic Jewish expectations at the eve of the conquests, and so forth. Yet, what we are focusing on here is the theme of land. Land is prominent in this account and it is spoken of in terms of divine

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<sup>52</sup> *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, translation by Robert Thomson, commentary by James Howard-Johnston with assistance by Tim Greenwood. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999, vol. i, 95–96 (translation)— vol. ii, 233–40 (commentary).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i, 96ff.

heritage. Sebeos is basically picturing the conquests as the result of a massive religious movement aimed at the re-appropriation of the promised land by virtue of the “sons of Ishmael’s” common descent from Abraham. A few lines below he writes:

“All the remnants of the people of the sons of Israel gathered and united together; they formed a large army. Following that they sent a message to the Greek king, saying: ‘God gave that land to our father Abraham as a hereditary possession and to his seed after him.<sup>54</sup> We are the sons of Abraham. You have now occupied our land long enough. Abandon it peacefully and we shall now come into your territory. Otherwise, we shall demand that possession from you with interest.’”

Here, the Jews are portrayed as the major agents of the conquering movement. In the first passage, they are described as reminding the old claim for the Abrahamic land to the sons of Ishmael and their Mahmet, in the second one they remind it to the Byzantine Emperor. To this, Heraclius firmly replies:

“The land is mine, your lot of inheritance is the desert. Go in peace to your land”

Sebeos’ explanation for the success of the Arabs power reflects his own effort to make sense of the events of those years. In his eyes, the Arabs invasions were the result of an alliance with the Children of Israel, an alliance motivated by common descent which, in turn, generated a claim to common rights. The Jewish active participation in the conquests clearly mirrors the compiler’s projection of Jewish messianic expectations unto the disrupting events of the time. This projection must also be an echo of the messianic moods that, at least in part, characterized some of the Jewish reactions to the invading Arabs.<sup>55</sup> This may account for some cases of Jewish participation in the Arabs’ armies.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Sebeos’ messianic vision is fixed within an apocalyptic perspective; an interpretative scheme typical of VIIth century Christian

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Gen. 12: 1–7 and 17:8.

<sup>55</sup> Hoyland, “Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam,” 91–92.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–91.

and Jewish responses to the upheaval caused by the coming of the Arabs when historical and eschatological reality seemed to be very close.<sup>57</sup> In fact, towards the end of the work, the compiler of the history attributed to Sebeos describes the kingdom of the sons of Ishmael as the fourth beast of Daniel's vision (Daniel, 7:23).<sup>58</sup> One will need carefully consider these features when using this and similar sources. What is intriguing, though, is that, to a certain extent, Sebeos' reading of the events is similar to what we found in the Qur'ān. There believers and Children of Israel are common heirs to an earthly divine heritage. More precisely, believers are successors in heritage of the Children of Israel because of the latter's defectiveness towards the Covenant. Believers are exhorted to struggle and emigrate to witness belief, to save their souls and to gain a beautiful reward. Here, sons of Ishmael and Jews are depicted on action in the name of a common descent and a shared promise. It is the defective behavior of the Israelites which is missing in Sebeos' account. Unsurprisingly, Muslim tradition and Islamic historiography usually depicted the successful conquests (*futuḥ*) as the result of God's will.<sup>59</sup> But as it has being perceptively noted by

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Lewis, Bernard. "An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13 (1950): 308–38, and "On That Day: a Jewish Apocalyptic Poem on the Arab Conquests." In Salmon, Pierre, ed. *Mélanges d'Islamologie: volume dédié à la mémoire de Arman Abel*, 197–200. Leiden: Brill, 1974; Hoyland, "Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam," 90–91; idem, *Seeing Islam*, 25–31; Greenwood, "Sasanian Echoes and Apocalyptic Expectations," 375–88. According to Greenwood, the history attributed to Sebeos represents the earliest attempt to understand the Arab invasions in apocalyptic and eschatological terms (see, *Ibid.*, 388).

<sup>58</sup> *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, I, 105–6: "The fourth beast was fearful and amazing, and its teeth were of iron, and its claws of bronze. It ate and broke in pieces, and crushed the remnants under foot. This fourth, arising from the south, is the kingdom of Ishmael, just as the archangel explained", then he goes on to quote Daniel 7:23

<sup>59</sup> See, for instance, Donner, Fred M. *Narratives of Islam Origins. The beginning of Islamic Historiographical Writing*, 174–82. Princeton: The Darwin



Robert Hoyland: “It is easy to see how the Muslims might portray their conquests as the taking of what was rightfully theirs, but it is less obvious why Christian sources would do so”.<sup>60</sup> In Sebeos’ text there is no attempt to refute the idea of land as divine heritage, except for Heraclius’ expected rejection of the Arab/Jew jointed request of land submission, a rejection not openly argued in religious terms: “This land is mine!”, apart from the Biblical allusion to the desert as the dwelling place of the sons of Ishmael: “your lot of inheritance is the desert”.<sup>61</sup> The text attributed to Sebeos does not display any distinct anti-Jewish tone. As a consequence, the genealogical and doctrinal intimacy he depicts between Arab and Jews need not necessarily be understood as an easy way to denigrate Islam.<sup>62</sup> Finally, one may want to point to the fact the Arabs’ Abrahamic genealogy mentioned by Sebeos is not a novelty. In fact, the idea that the Arabs descended from Abraham is well rooted both in Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions. In the world of world of Late Antiquity, the Arabs were known as Ishmaelites, Saracens or Hagarens.<sup>63</sup> On the basis of these remarks and of a brief reference

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Press, 1998, on the theme of *futuḥ* in Islamic historiography, especially 177–78 on the divinely supported nature of the conquests.

<sup>60</sup> Hoyland, “Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam,” 97, and *Seeing Islam*, 131.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Gen. 21:20–21—Ishmael lived in the wilderness.

<sup>62</sup> This is the main argument which was adduced by some scholars against the reliability of Sebeos’ account. See, Hoyland, “Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam,” 89 and 98, fn. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Starting from Genesis 21:9–21 (the story of Hagar’s expulsion from Abraham) and Genesis 25: 12–18 (Ishmael’s descent and place of living), the classical reference is the Vth century ecclesiastical historian Sozomen (d. ca. 450) from Gaza. Like the compiler of the history attributed to Sebeos, Sozomen describes the Arabs idolatry as a deviation from their initial monotheism as well as their common descent from Abraham via Hagar and Ishmael. According to Sozomen, the Ishmaelites named themselves Saracens in order to conceal the opprobrium of their slavish origins. See Sozomenus, *Historia Ecclesiastica—Kirchengeschichte*, übersetzt und eingeleitet von Günther Christian Hansen. Turnhout: Brepols, III, 827–31 (book 6, chapter 38, paragraphs 10–16). As for the Islamic tradition, one

to some Muslim sources, Robert Hoyland argued in favor of Sebeos. Hoyland's conclusions invite the historian not to dismiss this source as a whole. In this and in his later work, Hoyland encourages scholars of early Islam to reflect especially on the meaning of those elements of non-Islamic sources which correspond to the data of Muslim tradition.<sup>64</sup> In the case of the witness at issue, these are: the Arabs and Jews common descent from Abraham; sparse evidence of Jewish presence in the Arab armies; the Jews and believers as forming one community (*ummah*) in one of the earliest layer of the *Sira* of the Prophet, the so called "Constitution of Medina";<sup>65</sup> the connection religion/conquest in the Qur'an,<sup>66</sup> a connection that Hoyland mentions, but does not really explore.

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needs only to recall that the earliest *sira* of the Prophet, that attributed to Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767) in the recension of Ibn Hišām, opens by listing the Arabs genealogy of Muḥammad from Adam via Ishmael and a list of Ishmael's 12 sons. It then proceeds to state that Ishmael's burying place is in the precincts of the Ka'ba with his mother Hagar and that Hagar, from Miṣr, is the mother of the Arabs. Ibn Hišām is reported saying about the origins of the Arabs: "All the Arabs descended from Ismā'īl and and Qaḥṭān. Some of the people of Yaman claim that Qaḥṭān was a son of Ismā'īl and so according to them Ismā'īl is the father of all the Arabs". From of Ibn Hišām, *Sirat rasul allah*, 26–28, quotation from page 28 = Guillaume, 3 and 691. The identification of Islam with the religion of Abraham, hence the persistent presence of Abrahamic elements in the narratives of pre-Islamic and Islamic early years, is a crucial feature of the tradition. For a discussion and more bibliographical references, see Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam*, 36–41.

<sup>64</sup> On the specific case of Sebeos' passage, Hoyland, "Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam," 97–98 and more generally in form of methodological musings: *Seeing Islam*, 591–98.

<sup>65</sup> Hoyland, "Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam," 93–95. Already in Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 7. See Ibn Hišām, *Sirat rasul allah*, 430–33, especially 432 = Guillaume, 231–33, especially 233. Abū 'Ubayd (d. 224/838), *Kitāb al-amwāl*, ed. Muḥammad Khalīl Ḥarrās. [Cairo]: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyyah, 290–294, especially, 293.

<sup>66</sup> Hoyland, "Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam," 97.

Sebeos' passage has been also at the heart of *Hagarism*, a provocatively written and much disputed book by Patricia Crone and Michael Cook published in 1977. In order to avoid the *impasse* posed by the problematic nature of the Islamic tradition, the authors attempted a historical narrative of the origins of Islam by stepping out of the tradition and relying exclusively on early non-Islamic sources.<sup>67</sup> What emerged was a much contested representation of the conquests as an Arabic messianic movement of Jewish origins facing the political (and doctrinal) problem—once the land had been taken—of having to quickly and sharply disassociate from their initial messianic impetus: the restoration of the Temple not being a priority envisaged by the successful Ishmaelites.<sup>68</sup> The Qur'ān was dismissed by the authors as part of the late and problematic Islamic literary lore,<sup>69</sup> but had they considered it, they would have discovered that the very break they strive to illustrate is already alluded to in the text (the Children of Israel broke their Covenant with God, but the believers who are willing to struggle and emigrate on God's path will be the new signers of the Covenant as well as the recipients of its reward—Sura 5). The publication of *Hagarism* was met with a plethora of sharp criticism, but Crone and Cook's initial intuition about an alternative reading of the classical Islamic *hijra* not as the exodus of the Prophets and his converts from Mecca to Medina, but as “the emigration of Ishmaelites from Arabia to the Promised Land” may still be plausible, especially when read in conjunction with the Islamic sources, the Qur'ān first of all.

Robert Hoyland and, after him, Vivienne and Alfred-Louis de Prémare noted that a similar vision of the conquests is reported by a later Syriac source identified with Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785) by some scholars.<sup>70</sup> In a passage preserved by Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) and in the *Chronicle of 1234* (both drawing, according to

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<sup>67</sup> Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–15.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 17–18 for a historical assessment of the Islamic sacred book.

<sup>70</sup> Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 129–30; Comerro de Prémare, “La Nouvelle Alliance”, 304; de Prémare, *Les Fondations de l'Islam*, 133–35.

Hoyland, on Dionysius of Tellmahre d. 845),<sup>71</sup> this common Syriac source describes the rationale behind the conquests. Muhammad is said to be familiar with Palestine because of his commercial activities there. It is in that land that he becomes acquainted with the creed in one God, which pleased him. He started preaching it to his people to whom he described the bountifulness of the Palestinian land: “Because of the belief in one God, the like of this good and fertile land was given to them”. And he would add: “If you listen to me, abandon these vain gods and confess the one God, then to you too will God give a land flowing with milk and honey”. Following these words his people, initially guided by him, then on their own, started going up towards Palestine which they plundered and pillaged. The success of their campaigns encouraged them, expeditions went on without damage, and they gained a lot of booty.<sup>72</sup> Also in the Syriac common source’s eyes, then, the *rationale* behind the conquests is religious: belief in one God and terrestrial promise go hand in hand. In fact, it is precisely because of this belief that Muḥammad promises a bountiful land to his people. His promise was eventually fulfilled and Muḥammad came back from Palestine

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<sup>71</sup> See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 129, fn. 48 and 401–2, fn. 52. For an updated presentation of Theophilus and his work, plus bibliography, see Wolf, *s.v.* “Theophilus of Edessa,” 302–8, and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 400–409.

<sup>72</sup> English translation by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 130 and, longer, in: “The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: an Appraisal.” In Motzki, H., ed. *The Biography of Muḥammad. The Issue of the Sources*, 280–81. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001. For a French translation of the passage, cf. de Prémare, *Les Fondations*, 133 and 403–4. The original Syriac text with Latin translation by Jean-Baptiste Chabot is to be found in: *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, 177–70 (transl.) and 227–28 (Syr.). CSCO, *Scriptores Syri*, Series Tertia, XIV. Louvain, 1937 (Latin translation) and Paris: 1920 (Syriac text). Also in Michel le Syrien, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, éditée par la première fois et traduite en français par Jean-Baptiste Chabod, 4 vols. Paris: E. Leroux, 1899–1910, vol. ii, 403–5 (trans.) and iv, 405–7 (Syr.)

laden with boot, the so-called Theophilus writes at the end of his passage.<sup>73</sup>

If this was the case, a Palestinian orientation as a priority of the invasions would have to be demonstrated. This was already a concern of Patricia Crone and Michael Cook in *Hagarism*.<sup>74</sup> Alfred-Louis de Prémare in his last book, *Les Fondations de l'Islam*, examines the Islamic sources reporting the first expeditions to, or towards, Palestine. These expeditions were described either as personally led by Muḥammad or as ordered by him.<sup>75</sup> The late French scholar takes into account also early non Muslim sources relating the same events. The earliest non Islamic materials that talk about a Prophet of the Arabs present him as involved in the expeditions towards Palestine. In particular, two early VIIIth century texts, Thomas the Presbyter and the *Doctrina Jacobi (Diaskalia Yakobou)* mention his presence in the battle for the takeover of Gaza in 634. Thomas the Presbyter, who resided in Northern Mesopotamia and wrote his chronicle in Syriac around 640, mentions “a battle between the Romans and the Arabs of Muḥammad” in the whereabouts of Gaza (precisely, 12 miles east of Gaza). In the battle, the leader of the Byzantine troop is said to have lost his life.<sup>76</sup> The representation of Muḥammad here is that of a military leader, more accurately the initiator of the conquests.<sup>77</sup> The *Doctrina Jacobi nupter Baptizati* is an apologetic anti-Jewish treatise written in Greek between presumably between 634 and 640.<sup>78</sup> While hinting at the killing of a Byzantine official by the Saracens, the *Doctrina Jacobi* talks about a

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<sup>73</sup> Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 130: “He returned laden [with booty] and unharmed, and thus he had not fallen short of his promise to them”.

<sup>74</sup> Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 8.

<sup>75</sup> de Prémare, *Les Fondations de l'Islam*, 135–50.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas the Presbyter, *Chronicum miscellanum ad annum dominum 724 pertinens*. In *Chronica Minora*, vol. ii, ed. E. W. Brooks; Latin translation Jean-Baptiste Chabot, 147–48 (Syr.)—114 (transl.). CSCO 4, Scriptores Syri, Series 3, IV.

<sup>77</sup> On this, see Hoyland, “The Earliest Christian Writings on Muḥammad: an Appraisal,” 277–81.

<sup>78</sup> See Pahlitzsch, Johannes. *s.v.* “Doctrina Jacobi Nupter Baptizati.” In *Christian Muslim Relations. A Bibliography*, vol. 1, 117–19.

false Prophet that appeared among the Saracens. Presumably it refers to same episode in Gaza mentioned by Thomas the Presbyter.<sup>79</sup>

Both witnesses seem to confirm the involvement of Muḥammad into the takeover of Gaza and, more in general, his initial presence into the campaigns for the conquest of Palestine. This poses an unresolved chronological problem already noted by Crone and Cook, namely that according to the tradition Muḥammad died in 632 AD and was not personally involved in the invasions,<sup>80</sup> while in the sources mentioned above the Prophet is represented alive at the time of the conquests.

De Prémare's conclusions are the following: 1) Muḥammad would have himself lead the first military expeditions towards Palestine before his death;<sup>81</sup> 2) Palestine would have been the promised land of the "new" believers; 3) hence, Palestine was the first target of the conquests.

A last important point concerns the name that the non-Muslims observers adopted to describe the coming Arabs. These people were called in Syriac and Greek sources respectively as *Mhgrayyé* and *Magaritai*. It has been noted how both names reflect the Arabic *muhāğīrūn* ("the emigrants"), a self designation from the Arabs part. We have seen that *al-muhāğīrūn* in the Qur'ān relates to a group, and that the emigration they are urged to perform is of a religious nature: a virtuous and demanding act beautifully rewarded by God. It would seem, then, that the Arabs were perceived, described, and presented themselves as those who performed a (religious) emigration. It would follow that the invasions were understood as a form of emigration both on the Arabs and on the inhabitants of the conquered lands part.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> For a discussion of the passage, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 55–61, a translation of the passage is found at page 57.

<sup>80</sup> See, Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 4 and fn. 7, 152–53 where the authors produce a list of other Christian sources presenting Muḥammad as alive at the time of the conquests.

<sup>81</sup> Crone, "The First Century Concept of *Hijra*," 383.

<sup>82</sup> See for exact references to primary sources and discussion, Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 9; Crone, "The First Century Concept of *Hijra*," 359,

## CONCLUSIONS

“To convert was to leave one’s home in order to fight for the cause; salvation lay in going forth for heroic ventures and a new world ahead, not in patiently staying by one’s field or camels. *Hiğra* as originally understood was nothing if not a concept of mobilization”.<sup>83</sup> With these words Patricia Crone described the first century concept of *hiğra*, namely the open-ended idea of emigration from Arabia to garrisons in the conquered lands, which was destined to be relegated as “non-classical”. According to her, in time, this idea was superseded by the concept of *hiğra* as the emigration of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina. The latter was destined to become the “classical” idea of *hiğra*. The non classical, open-ended concept, reflects the fluidity of the formative years of Islamic identity, the history of an Arab monotheist community which, as a matter of fact, early in the VIIth emigrated to Syria and Palestine. On the contrary, the classical concept of *hiğra* mirrors the closed and strictly Arabian full-fledged identity of a religious experience centered on its Prophet and its idolatric Arabian setting: Mecca, the place of the original Abrahamic sanctuary, and Medina, the first abode of Islam. What is stunning, though, is that the words used by Crone to portray the non-classical concept of *hiğra*, may be perfectly applied to how the Qur’ān refers to emigration and emigrants.<sup>84</sup>

This article started by asking four questions: What does the Qur’ān have to say about emigration? Do the Qur’ānic verses concerning the divine command of emigrating inevitably allude to the

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360, 361, 362, 363 (only references) and Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 547–48. Cf. also Saadi, Abdul-Massih. “Nascent Islam in the Seventh Century Syriac Sources.” In *The Qur’an in its Historical Context*, 217–22. Sebastian Brock, considers the term *Mḡrayyē* as etymologically connected to the Arabic *mubāğirun*, but pejoratively used by Syriac writers as a reflection of the Arabs’ Hagarine descent Brock, S. “Syriac Views of Emergent Islam.” In Juynboll, Goetje H. A., ed. *Studies in the First Century of Islamic History*, 15. Carbondale/Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982).

<sup>83</sup> Crone, “The First Century Concept of *Hiğra*,” 383.

<sup>84</sup> A point Crone makes without really developing it. Crone, “The First Century Concept of *Hiğra*,” 355.

classical *hiğra*, namely the Prophet's emigration (flight) from Mecca to Medina? If not, which other interpretation may be suggested? And finally, could this interpretation eventually reveal us something about the religious nature of the early community?

As for questions one to three what emerged is the following: the Qur'ān relates two major types of movement at the behest of God. While the text is characterized by a certain lexical flexibility to express this idea, one may say that the roots *HĠR* in the first form (*hağara*) are most commonly used to illustrate an act of self-assertion by way of taking a physical distance from what is morally and religiously inappropriate. The pattern is the emigration of Abraham to the land of Canaan. It is the exclusivity of monotheism discourse which is paradigmatically affirmed here. The same *HĠR* roots in the third form (*hağara*) express a militant form of movement tightly associated with the struggle on God's path, salvation, escape from oppression, true belief and reward. The theme of retribution for those who emigrates is crucial and it is elaborated not only through eschatological imagery, but also through the motif of land. In the Qur'ān, land is part of divine heritage; a promise from God and a compensation for the endured trials. In this regard, the story of the believers is that of a new election: the Children of Israel failed to comply with the Covenant, so the believers stepped in, ready to bravely struggle on God's path and move towards that land the people of Moses once refused to enter for fear. The classical notion of Muḥammad's flight/emigration (*hiğra*) from the territory of idolatry to the abode of Islam out of severe persecution combines both concepts of movement at God's command. In fact, Muḥammad leaves Mecca well equipped by the divine permission to fight his idolatric fellows. Yet, in both cases, the Qur'ānic text does not display any obvious connection to the life of the Prophet. This connection appears in the tradition.

Now, the main question is: are we here merely in front of a strategy of self-legitimization? Does the imagery related to emigration and land in the Qur'ān only reflect a series of *topoi* shared by the Islamic Scripture with the other monotheistic faiths: displacement as a foundational act, escape from prosecution as a result of God's will, movement at God's behest as an expression of guidance, and retribution as a form of divine justice? Are this language and imagery only paraenetic and didactic in character or may they also may reflect the religious nature of the early community? This



was the fourth question and the most difficult to answer, especially when we deal with the Qur’ān alone.

The following tentative musings can be put forth. In the years 30s of the viith century the Arabs effectively emigrated, i.e. invaded, the Fertile Crescent, starting from Palestine. The crucial events of those years are witnessed and often recorded by the inhabitants of the conquered lands. Islamic historiography, which appeared later than the invasions, understood the conquests as a great manifestation of God’s will. The people who experienced the conquests too, but from a different angle. The Christian sources considered in this article established an intimate relationships between Arabs and Jews, by virtue of which the Arabs claimed the conquered lands as their right. They perceived the Arabs as Emigrants and Hagarens; they called them *Mhgrayye* or *Magaritai*, a name reflecting the term the Arabs adopted for themselves: *muhāğīrūn*. As we have seen, the Qur’ān presents the *muhāğīrūn* as a group of true believers striving on God’s path. A certain correspondence between the way the Qur’ān articulates ideas relating to emigration and land, and the way the external observers, contemporary to the events, understood the Arab’s arrival in their territories has been noted throughout this paper.

What do we, then, make of these sources that speak a similar language and use a similar imagery? John Wansbrough’s answer was a negative one. “It might, however, be thought that in the Middle East of late antiquity the only available medium of historical description was the language of salvation history. Every history of *histoire événementielle* was reported as the expression of a theodicy. Historical reconstruction based upon these reports is probably fruitless”, he writes in *The Sectarian Milieu*.<sup>85</sup> Wansbrough’s main idea behind his statement is that that a common stock of images, religious concepts and language between the Qur’ān and the non-Muslims inhabitants of the Fertile Crescent unveil a shared way of conceiving the world, but do not lead to any progress in terms of historical reconstruction. Yet, one may as well reply that shared worldviews are also a form of history. This paper wonders whether ideas regarding the religious laden concept of emigration and of

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<sup>85</sup> *SM*, 118.

land as divine heritage as they find their expression in the Qurʾān may be in some way related to the VIIth century Arabs invasions. It does it in a very hypothetical way. The idea of the conquests as a religiously oriented movement was initially put forth in *Hagarism*. Yet, the authors of that book disregarded the Qurʾān because they embraced Wansbrough's hypothesis for a late canonization of the text (around IIIrd century AH). While today many scholars usually agree that the process of canonization was spatially and temporally a broad one, few take it to be as late as Wansbrough proposed.<sup>86</sup> Be it as it may, this does not exclude that parts of Qurʾānic material, which then converged into the book as we know it today, may have been in circulation already earlier.<sup>87</sup> Theoretically, it could be that the Qurʾānic texts concerning land, emigration and violence were brought in to explain the conquests following the conquests themselves, as well as that it could be that the form of religious mobilization and proselytism that these texts suggest could have been in circulation already at the time of the conquests. At this stage, we simply do not know. It seems to me that understanding the conquests as a religious exodus of the Arabs towards a land they claimed a right for has the advantage of making sense of those astonishing events by fully appreciating how powerful religious ideology can be. But it also, and overall, has the advantage of highlighting that the common monotheistic legacy that the Qurʾān so patently shares with the texts of Christianity and Judaism, does not necessarily have to be thought of in terms of borrowing from the previous monotheistic traditions, an idea which was to central to John Wansbrough intellectual production.

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<sup>86</sup> For an excellent overview of the problems and materials, see de Prémare, *Aux Origines du Coran. Questions d'hier, approches d'aujourd'hui*. Paris: Téraèdre, 2004, chap. 4.

<sup>87</sup> See, for instance, the Qurʾānic inscriptions of the dome of the Rock, safely dated in 71/691 or the Arabian early VIIth century inscriptions (the earliest being dated at 31AH) displaying a religious lexicon common to that of the Qurʾān, cf. Hoyland, Robert. "New Documentary Evidence and the Early Islamic State." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 69/3 (2006): 406–9.

**L'ANALYSE RHETORIQUE  
FACE A LA CRITIQUE HISTORIQUE  
DE J. WANSBROUGH  
ET DE G. LÜLING.  
L'exemple de la sourate 96**

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LE CAIRE

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Les critiques adressées à John Wansbrough ont porté davantage sur les conséquences historiques de sa recherche que sur la méthodologie qu'il a mise en œuvre dans sa critique du texte coranique. C'est pourquoi nous nous proposons, par la présente étude, de la comparer avec une autre méthodologie que nous pratiquons nous-même depuis quelques années, à savoir l'analyse rhétorique. Une critique méthodologique poussée a cependant été faite à l'égard de Wansbrough par un autre tenant de la critique historique, Günter Lüling. Nous envisagerons donc à la fois, mais sans les confondre, la méthodologie de Wansbrough et celle de Lüling, face à l'analyse rhétorique. Après un rappel de leurs méthodologies respectives, nous présenterons l'analyse rhétorique de la sourate 96, également étudiée très à fond par Lüling, et nous nous interrogerons sur les conséquences des unes et des autres sur l'idée que l'on peut se faire quant aux conditions historiques de l'origine du Coran. Nous concluons avec quelques considérations comparatives entre critique historique et analyse rhétorique.

## 1. APERÇU DES METHODOLOGIES DE J. WANSBROUGH ET DE G. LÜLING

On connaît la fameuse déclaration de Wansbrough, dans sa préface aux *Quranic Studies* : « As a document susceptible of analysis by the instruments and techniques of Biblical criticism it [= the Qurʾān] is virtually unknown ».<sup>1</sup> En écrivant cela, Wansbrough n'ignorait certes pas que la critique historique, telle qu'elle se pratiquait dans les études bibliques, avait largement dominé la recherche des orientalistes sur le Coran depuis ses débuts, vers le milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, jusqu'à nos jours. Mais ces orientalistes 'classiques' ne remettaient pas en question le cadre historique général de la révélation coranique, tel que la tradition islamique l'a transmis. Alors que Wansbrough, en s'inspirant de la manière dont Bultmann l'avait fait pour la Bible et l'histoire des débuts du christianisme, a poussé la critique du texte coranique à l'extrême, avec des conséquences révolutionnaires pour l'histoire du Coran et des origines de l'Islam. Il va jusqu'à dissocier le Coran de la personne de Muhammad, considérant le Coran et les autres premiers écrits de la tradition islamique (hadiths, *Sīra*) comme des reconstructions mythiques élaborées dans et par un milieu sectaire anti-trinitaire, étranger à l'Arabie, et vraisemblablement situé en Mésopotamie. Pour lui, le Coran est le résultat d'un long développement organique de collections de *logia* prophétiques, à l'origine indépendants, prenant finalement une forme canonique dans laquelle ces *logia* sont juxtaposés et reliés par certains procédés typiques, tels que les formules introductrices (*qul*, *ayuhā*) ou conclusives (clausules théologiques). Son point de départ est la constatation d'un texte comportant de nombreuses répétitions, de brusques sauts sémantiques, des ellipses et des incohérences. De cette constatation, Wansbrough, comme toute la critique historique avant et après lui, tire la conclusion que ce sont là autant d'indices de l'origine éclatée du texte, un texte que la critique a précisément pour rôle de déconstruire en ses fragments originaux. Pour Wansbrough, le Coran n'est pas une oeuvre rédigée d'emblée sous sa forme canonique :

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<sup>1</sup> Wansbrough, John. *Quranic Studies. Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, IX. Oxford University Press, 1977.

« The structure itself of Muslim Scripture lends little support to the theory of a deliberate edition ». <sup>2</sup> Les balancements symétriques qui caractérisent les péricopes coraniques ainsi que leur style répétitif, trahissent, selon lui, une origine et une longue transmission orales. <sup>3</sup> Pour autant, il admet que « emergence of the canon itself, however, represented application of *considerable literary technique*. Not the least of the problems provoked by its final form is the *erratic distribution of obviously related pericopes* ». <sup>4</sup> Nous retiendrons ce paradoxe : tout en admettant le caractère désordonné du texte et son « absence de structure logique », <sup>5</sup> Wansbrough n'en admet pas moins des relations évidentes entre les péricopes. Par ailleurs, comme ces péricopes, ainsi que les procédés de liaison entre elles, ont des traits communs avec ceux de la Bible—formes, *topoi*, procédés de composition, débuts et fins des péricopes signalés par des procédés typiques de composition—il conclut à une origine sectaire judéo-chrétienne de ces *logia*, dont le développement a dû prendre du temps, d'où sa conception d'un texte canonique (*muṣḥaf*) très tardif, datant de la fin du II<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'hégire.

Tout cet édifice repose donc sur trois constatations : le texte est fragmenté, il comporte de nombreuses traces de la tradition biblique et des procédés caractéristiques de l'oralité (répétitions, parallélismes et autres symétries).

Wansbrough a travaillé à une époque où la critique radicale et la démythologisation de Bultmann jouissaient d'un grand retentissement dans l'exégèse biblique. Or celle-ci a depuis lors continué à évoluer et à multiplier ses approches du texte, dans une direction plus synchronique que diachronique, avec notamment les analyses rhétorique, narrative et sémiotique. Pour nous en tenir ici à l'analyse rhétorique, celle-ci part du même constat décrit plus haut (fragmentation du texte, son apparent désordre, etc.), mais plutôt que d'en conclure à l'existence de péricopes ou de fragments originellement indépendants, rassemblés de manière plus ou moins maladroite dans la forme finale du Livre, elle pose une hypothèse

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<sup>2</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 46–47.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 49. Les soulignements sont de nous.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

inverse : sous cet apparent désordre, ne faut-il pas discerner un certain ordre, une logique, une *composition délibérée* (« *a deliberate edition* »)? Mais lesquels ? Et comment les repérer ? À ces questions, l'exégèse biblique, affrontée au même problème dans certains textes de la Bible, a répondu par la découverte progressive, à partir du milieu du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, des règles de la rhétorique sémitique, très différente de la rhétorique gréco-latine dont nous avons hérité<sup>6</sup>. L'analyse rhétorique consiste précisément à analyser le texte selon ces règles de la rhétorique sémitique, toute fondée sur le principe de symétrie. Dans cette rhétorique, c'est à travers le jeu complexe des correspondances formelles entre éléments textuels symétriques (mots ou phrases) que le sens émerge, et non au terme d'un développement linéaire continu, comme dans la rhétorique grecque. Notons que ce que nous désignons ici par rhétorique (à savoir les techniques de composition du discours ou du texte) ne recoupe que très partiellement ce que Wansbrough comprend par 'exégèse rhétorique' (rhetorical exegesis) par laquelle il entend l'étude des conventions littéraires et formules répétitives qui « confirm the impression of a composition made up of originally unrelated pericopes ».<sup>7</sup>

L'important document publié en 1994 par la Commission biblique pontificale, *L'Interprétation de la Bible dans l'Église*, décrit l'analyse rhétorique comme suit :

Enracinée dans la culture sémitique [la tradition littéraire biblique] manifeste un goût prononcé pour les compositions symétriques, grâce auxquelles des rapports sont établis entre les divers éléments du texte. L'étude des multiples formes de parallélisme et d'autres procédés sémitiques de composition doit permettre de mieux discerner la structure littéraire des

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<sup>6</sup> Ces règles ont maintenant été clairement théorisées et systématisées par Roland Meynet, dans son *Traité de rhétorique biblique*. Paris : Lethielleux, 2007. Pour leur application au Coran, nous renvoyons principalement à notre ouvrage *Le Festin. Une lecture de la sourate al-Mâ'ida*. Paris : Lethielleux, 2007 ; traduction anglaise *The Banquet. A Reading of the fifth Sura of the Qur'an*. Miami : Convivium Press, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 12.

textes et d'aboutir ainsi à une meilleure compréhension de leur message.<sup>8</sup>

Nous nous proposons d'analyser ici une sourate selon ce type de méthodologie, pour en comparer ensuite les résultats avec ceux obtenus par la méthode de Wansbrough. Malheureusement, ce dernier n'a jamais fait l'exégèse d'une sourate complète. Il ne nous est donc pas possible de comparer directement l'analyse rhétorique avec ce qu'aurait été une telle exégèse. Günter Lüling, autre tenant de la critique historique du Coran, a d'ailleurs vivement reproché à Wansbrough, ainsi qu'à ses disciples « révisionnistes », de ne jamais s'être donné la peine d'une exégèse approfondie d'une sourate entière.<sup>9</sup> Relevant ce défi, Lüling a notamment publié une exégèse critique très fouillée (69 pages !) de la sourate 96.<sup>10</sup> Le point commun le plus clair de sa méthode avec celle de Wansbrough est que tous deux admettent, au départ, le caractère fragmenté et logiquement incohérent du texte coranique. Lüling estime que la sourate 96 rassemble trois fragments, sans liens entre eux : les v. 1–5, qui correspondent au récit-cadre traditionnel (*sabab al-nuzūl*) de la vocation prophétique de Muhammad, interpellé par l'ange Gabriel ; la partie centrale (v. 6–7), sans relation évidente avec celles qui l'encadrent ; les v. 9–19 qui correspondent au second récit-cadre traditionnel d'un païen qui veut empêcher le Prophète d'accomplir sa prière rituelle. En critiquant l'interprétation traditionnelle de certains termes (*iqrā'*, *'alaq*, *kallā*, *ruj'ā...*), en modifiant la vocalisation et même les consonnes de certains autres, et en

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<sup>8</sup> Commission biblique pontificale, *L'Interprétation de la Bible dans l'Église*, 36. Paris : Cerf, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> Lüling, Günter. *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation. The Rediscovery and reliable Reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal hidden in the Koran under earliest Islamic Reinterpretations*, XXXVII. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2003. Trad. anglaise de *Über den Urkoran. Ansätze zu Rekonstruktion der vorislamisch-christlichen Strophenlieder im Koran*. 3<sup>e</sup> éd. corrigée, éd. G. Lüling, 2004 (1<sup>ère</sup> éd. 1974). Nous nous limitons ici strictement à une comparaison avec la méthodologie exégétique de Lüling, sans discuter la christologie angélique qu'il croit pouvoir déceler derrière le texte-source de la sourate.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–97.

omettant ce qu'il considère comme une glose (v. 16 : « un toupet menteur, pécheur »), Lüling aboutit à un texte unifié qui serait la version originelle, l'*Urtext* de la sourate canonique, et ne serait autre qu'une hymne strophique chrétienne pré-islamique, centrée sur le thème de la prière. Il voit dans le dernier membre de l'hymne son résumé ou son titre : « Prosterne-toi (pour la prière) et approche ! » Par ailleurs, il souligne l'extraordinaire travail de composition du poème, tissé de nombreuses correspondances de termes.

Pour Lüling, la sourate 96 ne consisterait donc pas à l'origine en trois *logia* indépendants, mais en un texte homogène autour du thème de la prière, lequel « a été réinterprété par le travail éditorial islamique orthodoxe pour devenir des pièces incohérentes ». <sup>11</sup> Et c'est pour donner sens à ces pièces que les deux récits-cadres auraient ensuite été liés à la sourate par la tradition exégétique des commentateurs. Ne voulant sans doute pas retarder la rédaction canonique du Coran autant que l'a fait Wansbrough et les « révisionnistes », Lüling situe l'origine de l'hymne-source de la sourate d'au moins un siècle avant l'activité prophétique de Muhammad, <sup>12</sup> en sorte que l'évolution de la transmission de l'hymne puisse être rejetée en amont de l'avènement de l'islam. Et d'autre part, il n'est pas besoin, selon lui, de situer les débuts de l'islam en Mésopotamie, car il y avait des chrétiens arabes en Arabie centrale. <sup>13</sup>

## 2. L'ANALYSE RHETORIQUE DE LA SOURATE 96

### Le Texte, dans sa lecture traditionnelle

<sup>1</sup> Proclame/lis au nom de ton Seigneur qui créa, <sup>2</sup> créa l'homme d'une adhérence. <sup>3</sup> Proclame/lis, car ton Seigneur est le Très-Généreux <sup>4</sup> qui enseigne par la plume, <sup>5</sup> enseigna à l'homme ce qu'il ne savait pas.

<sup>6</sup> Non-non ! Certes l'homme se rebelle <sup>7</sup> dès qu'il se voit dans l'aisance. <sup>8</sup> Certes, vers ton Seigneur est le retour. <sup>9</sup> As-tu vu celui qui interdit <sup>10</sup> à un serviteur [de Dieu] quand il prie ?

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<sup>11</sup> Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



<sup>11</sup> As-tu vu qu'il soit dans la direction <sup>12</sup> ou qu'il ordonne la piété ? <sup>13</sup> As-tu vu qu'il crie au mensonge et tourne le dos ? <sup>14</sup> Ne sait-il pas que, certes, Dieu voit ? <sup>15</sup> Non-non ! S'il ne cesse pas, vraiment, Nous le saisirons par le toupet, <sup>16</sup> un toupet menteur, pécheur. <sup>17</sup> Qu'il appelle donc son clan ! <sup>18</sup> Nous appellerons les Archanges. <sup>19</sup> Non-non ! Ne lui obéis pas, mais prosterne-toi et approche-toi.

Les commentateurs musulmans considèrent unanimement que cette sourate est composée de deux fragments différents : le premier (1–5) serait la toute première révélation du Coran, contenant l'appel prophétique de Dieu adressé à Muhammad par la médiation de l'ange Gabriel ; le second (6–19) serait plus tardif et refléterait une vexation subie par le Prophète qui, voulant accomplir sa prière rituelle près de la Kaaba, en aurait été empêché par un païen, généralement identifié à son ennemi Abū Jahl. Telles sont les deux 'occasions de la révélation' (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) rapportées par la tradition au sujet de cette sourate. On a donc ici un cas où c'est la tradition exégétique musulmane elle-même qui considère le texte comme composite, fait de deux fragments originellement indépendants—mais réunis plus tard en une seule sourate, par décision divine. La plupart des savants occidentaux<sup>14</sup> accepteront cette bipartition composite de la sourate.

Richard Bell, lui, divise la sourate en trois parties (1–5/6–8/9–19).<sup>15</sup> Tout en considérant les v. 6–8 comme plus tardifs, il estime qu'ils ne sont pas sans rapport sémantique avec la première partie : ils dénoncent en effet l'ingratitude de l'homme qui, se voyant dans l'aisance, aurait dû rendre grâce à Dieu pour ses dons (spécifiés en 1–5 : création, révélation). Nous retiendrons cette remarque. Angelika Neuwirth reprend la même division, en distinguant « une hymne » [1–5], « une réprimande » [6–8], « une polémique » [9–18],

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<sup>14</sup> Voir, par exemple Blachère, R. *Le Coran*, II, 91. Paris : Maisonneuve, 1947.

<sup>15</sup> Bell, R. *The Qur'an. Translation, with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs*, 667. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950.

tout en ajoutant « un appel final » [19].<sup>16</sup> Lüling reprend la tripartition de Bell, mais pour lui, la partie centrale (6–8) n’a pas de relation claire avec les parties qui l’encadrent.<sup>17</sup> L’analyse rhétorique confirme cette tripartition.<sup>18</sup> Nous allons donc étudier la composition rhétorique de chacune de ces parties, avant d’examiner comment elles forment un tout cohérent. Nous analyserons d’abord les parties extrêmes qui se répondent, puis la partie centrale qui les relie.

### *La première partie (1–5)*

A— <sup>1a</sup> INVOQUE le nom de	TON SEIGNEUR		
B = <sup>b</sup> <i>QUI créa,</i>			<i>kbALAg</i>
C + <sup>2</sup> <i>créa</i>	L’HOMME	d’une adhérence.	<i>’ALAg</i>
A’— <sup>3</sup> INVOQUE, car	TON SEIGNEUR	est le Très-Généreux	
B’= <sup>4</sup> <i>QUI enseigne</i>		par la plume,	<i>qALAm</i>
C+ <sup>5</sup> <i>enseigne à</i>	L’HOMME	ce qu’il ne savait pas.	<i>yALAm</i>

Les deux segments trimembres (ou tristiques) qui composent cette partie se répondent membres à membres, en un parfait parallélisme ABC//A’B’C’. Les répétitions à l’intérieur de chaque segment sont rendues par des minuscules italiques (« créa » / « enseigne »), les répétitions entre les deux segments par des petites capitales droites, italiques ou grasses.

Chaque segment est construit sur l’opposition entre « ton Seigneur »/« l’homme » dans ses membres extrêmes (A/C ; A’/C’). En contraste avec la seigneurie divine, l’humilité de la condition

<sup>16</sup> Neuwirth, A. *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Sureen*, 231. Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients, 10. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981.

<sup>17</sup> Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, 92.

<sup>18</sup> Dans une première étude (« Structures rhétoriques des sourates 92 à 98 ». *Annales Islamologiques* 34 (Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale—Le Caire) (2000) : 116–22), nous avons suivi la bipartition classique, par respect spontané de la tradition. À la réflexion, il apparaît nécessaire de l’abandonner en faveur d’une tripartition, comme nous le montrerons dans les pages qui suivent.

humaine est soulignée : l'homme est créé d'une adhérence, ignorant la révélation.

Les deuxièmes et troisièmes membres de chaque segment (B/C ; B'/C') sont reliés par la répétition d'un terme médian ou « mot crochet » (« créa » / « enseigne »). Ils se terminent par des rimes différentes (*laq/lam*), mais appartenant à des termes assonancés, comportant tous les phonèmes /A/L/A/. Pour les membres B et B', il s'y ajoute le phonème /Q/ : *khALAQ* / *QALAm*. Les termes extrêmes des membres C et C' forment en plus une paronomase : *khALAQ* / 'ALAQ ; 'ALLAM / yA'LAM » :

2 créa (*khALAQ<sup>a</sup>*) l'homme d'une adhérence ('ALAQ).

5 enseigne ('ALLAM<sup>a</sup>) à l'homme ce qu'il ne savait pas (*yA'LAM*).

On notera que la numérotation des versets, introduite tardivement, n'est pas une indication fiable pour le découpage du texte (le v. 1 doit ici être découpé en deux membres, correspondant à une proposition principale et une subordonnée relative). Il en va de même pour la rime : la fin du premier membre ne rime pas avec les deux membres suivants. Ces remarques valent aussi pour la suite de notre analyse : les v. 9, 13, 15, 19 doivent aussi être découpés en deux, sans considération de la rime qui, curieusement, brouille la structure du texte tout en le rythmant.

Le premier terme de la sourate est habituellement traduit par l'impératif « lis », ou « proclame », en conformité avec le récit traditionnel qui explique ce morceau. On remarque cependant que rien dans le texte n'appuie ce récit, hormis ce verbe ainsi compris. Ni le locuteur ni la personne à qui il s'adresse ne sont spécifiés, ni non plus le contenu de la lecture ou de la proclamation. Or, toute une lignée de savants occidentaux<sup>19</sup> estime que le verbe *iqra'* doit

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<sup>19</sup> Gustav Weil (1808–1889), Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930), Hartwig Hirschfeld (1854–1934), Günter Lüling (né en 1928), Alfred-Louis de Prémare (1930–2006), Uri Rubin, Jacqueline Chabbi, etc. (voir Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, 31 ss). Christoph Luxenberg met le verbe en relation avec une formule syriaque d'introduction à la prière (*Die*

être compris comme « invoque », « appelle ». *Iqrā' bi-smi Rabbika* serait un calque de l'expression hébraïque, fréquente dans la Bible : *qāra' be-shem Yhwh*, « invoquer le nom du Seigneur ». <sup>20</sup> La particule *bi*, dans ce dernier cas serait supplétive, n'ajoutant rien au sens. C'est ainsi que la comprenait déjà le grammairien Abū 'Ubayda (m. 824). <sup>21</sup> Pris dans son sens traditionnel, le verbe *iqra'* reste dépourvu de complément direct, ce qui plaide également en faveur de l'autre lecture, où « le nom (du Seigneur) » devient complément. L'impératif *iqra'* serait dès lors une invitation à la prière plutôt qu'un envoi en mission. Ce sens convient mieux aussi au v. 3 « car ton Seigneur est le Très-Généreux » : tu peux l'invoquer en toute sécurité, car il te répondra, dans sa générosité, lui qui est ton créateur (v. 1b et 2) et t'enseigne par révélation ce que l'homme ne savait pas (v. 4–5). L'expression coranique serait voisine d'une autre : *sabbih isma Rabbika* (87,1) qui prend aussi la forme avec la particule *bi* : *sabbih bi-smi Rabbika* (56,74 et 96 ; 69,52), « loue le nom de ton Seigneur ». <sup>22</sup> Lüling fait remarquer que le sens ici proposé suppose un auditoire familiarisé avec la tournure hébraïque (ou araméenne) et donc la présence de juifs, de judéo-chrétiens ou de chrétiens sémitiques. <sup>23</sup>

Si l'on comprend *iqra'* de cette manière, toute la sourate s'unifie d'un seul coup autour du thème de la prière, clairement présent dans les versets 9–19. <sup>24</sup> Et les versets 1–5 apparaissent comme un petit psaume invitatif, analogue à la première partie du psaume 95 (94), 1–7.

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*syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran. Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, 279. Das arabische Buch. Berlin, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> On la trouve dans les Psaumes (79, 6 ; 80, 19 ; 99, 6 ; 116, 4), dans les livres prophétiques (Isaïe 12, 4 ; Jérémie 10, 25 ; Joël 3, 5 ; Sophonie 3, 9 ; Zacharie 13, 9), etc.

<sup>21</sup> 'Ubayda, Abū. *Majāz al-Qur'an*, éd. M.-F. Sazkīn, II, 304. Le Caire, 1988.

<sup>22</sup> Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, 33–34.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 32–33.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 39.

Sourate 96,1–5)
<p><sup>1</sup> <b>Invoque le nom de ton Seigneur</b></p> <p>qui <i>créa</i>,</p> <p><sup>2</sup> <b>créa l'homme</b> d'une adhérence.</p> <p><sup>3</sup> Invoque, <i>car ton Seigneur est le Très-Généreux</i> <sup>4</sup> qui enseigna par la plume, <sup>5</sup> enseigna à l'homme ce qu'il ne savait pas.</p>

Psaume 95 (94),1–7
<p><sup>1</sup> <b>Venez, crions de joie pour le Seigneur</b>, acclamons le rocher de notre salut ; <sup>2</sup> approchons de sa face en rendant grâces, <sup>3</sup> au son des musiques, acclamons-le. Car c'est un Dieu grand que le Seigneur, un Roi grand par-dessus tous les dieux ; <sup>4</sup> en sa main sont les creux de la terre et les hauts des montagnes sont à lui ; <sup>5</sup> <b>à lui la mer, c'est lui qui l'a faite, la terre ferme, ses mains l'ont façonnée.</b></p> <p><sup>6</sup> Entrez, courbons-nous, prosternons-nous ; à genoux devant le Seigneur <b>qui nous a faits !</b></p> <p><sup>7</sup> <b>Car c'est lui notre Dieu</b>, et nous le peuple de son bercail, le troupeau de sa main.</p>

Après l'impératif initial invitant à la prière, la sourate évoque la création en général, puis celle de l'homme en particulier. Or, le psaume 95 présente une même séquence : appel à la louange, à l'impératif (« Venez, crions de joie pour le Seigneur », v. 1) ; Dieu créateur (« à lui la mer, *c'est lui qui l'a faite*, la terre ferme, ses mains *l'ont façonnée* », v. 5) ; et créateur de l'homme (« à genoux devant le Seigneur *qui nous a faits* », v. 6).

Dans les deux textes, cet ensemble est encore suivi par une formule de justification similaire : « Car ton Seigneur est le Très-Généreux... » (S 96,3) / « Car c'est lui notre Dieu » (Ps 95,7). Nous verrons encore d'autres rapprochements entre les deux textes plus loin.

Selon Lüling, le terme *'alaq*, que nous avons traduit par « adhérence » et d'autres par « caillot de sang », « embryon », pourrait signifier ici « argile », la « glaise » qui colle.<sup>25</sup> Cela ajouterait au texte une trace du récit biblique de la création de l'homme, mais

<sup>25</sup> Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, 36–38.

ne changerait pas le sens général de la partie qui insiste sur la grandeur de Dieu et l'humilité de l'homme, dans son origine et dans son ignorance. Toutefois, le sens d'« embryon » pour *'alaqa* est attesté ailleurs dans le Coran (5,22 ; 14,23 ; 67,40 ; 38,75).

### ***La troisième partie (9–19)***

Cette partie est composée de trois morceaux (9–13/14/15–19), disposés en concentricité.

#### *Le premier morceau (9–13)*

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–<sup>9</sup> AS-TU VU celui qui interdit <sup>10</sup> à un serviteur [de Dieu]  
= quand il prie ?

–<sup>11</sup> AS-TU VU qu'il soit dans la direction  
= <sup>12</sup>ou qu'il ordonne la piété ?

–<sup>13a</sup> AS-TU VU qu'il crie-au-mensonge  
= <sup>b</sup> et tourne-le-dos ?

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Les trois segments bimembres (ou distiques) qui composent ce morceau commencent par le même verbe interrogatif « as-tu vu ? ». Un intrus qui cherche à empêcher un serviteur de Dieu d'accomplir sa prière rituelle est pris à partie indirectement dans une sorte de réquisitoire. L'orant n'est pas autrement désigné dans toute la sourate que par le terme *'abd* qui peut signifier aussi bien l'esclave que l'adorateur (de Dieu). La tradition y a vu le prophète Muhammad, mais rien dans le texte n'induit directement une telle interprétation.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Le troisième morceau (15–19)*

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–<sup>15a</sup> NON-NON ! *En vérité*, s'il ne cesse pas,  
–<sup>b</sup> *en vérité*, Nous le saisirons par le *toupet*,  
–<sup>16</sup> un *toupet* menteur, pécheur.

=<sup>17</sup> Qu'il *appelle* donc **son clan** !

=<sup>18</sup> Nous *appellerons* **les Archanges**.

+<sup>19a</sup> NON-NON ! Ne lui obéis pas,

+<sup>b</sup> mais prosterne-toi et approche-toi.

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<sup>26</sup> L'orientaliste Alois Sprenger (1813–1893) en avait déjà fait la remarque : cf. *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad*, 2 ed. II, p. 115, cité par Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation*, 39.

Le morceau comporte également trois segments, le premier de trois membres, les deux autres de deux. L'invective du premier morceau continue, mais sous forme positive, et non plus interrogative, et prenant l'allure d'une menace de châtement. Les segments extrêmes commencent par la négation redoublée *kallā* (« non-non »). Comme dans les membres 1b–2 et 4–5, des termes médians (ou mots crochets) sont répétés dans deux membres successifs : la particule d'insistance « en vérité » (*lā*), 15a et b ; « toupet », 15b et 16 ; « appelle »/« appellerons », 17 et 18. Dans le segment central « son clan » (17) s'oppose aux « Archanges » (18). Le dernier segment bimembre (19a et b) est également un parallèle antithétique : « ne lui obéis pas » (= ne te laisse pas détourner de ta prière) (19a) mais prie (b). Notre découpage, ici encore, ne suit pas la numérotation des versets, ni la rime, mais la binarité sémantique de deux membres antithétiques (19a et b). On notera cependant que le dernier verset ne rime avec aucun autre verset de la sourate : nous verrons plus loin pourquoi.

Les Archanges (*al-ṣabāniya*), terme d'origine étrangère (araméen, pahlavi, syriaque ?<sup>27</sup>) que l'on ne trouve qu'ici dans le Coran, désigneraient les Archanges chargés de garder l'Enfer.

*Le morceau central (14)*

<sup>14</sup> Ne sait-il pas que, certes, Dieu voit ?

Ce morceau ne compte qu'un seul membre. Il est remarquable que ce soit une question : le centre, en rhétorique sémitique, est souvent occupé par une question qui porte à réfléchir et à prendre position.<sup>28</sup> Ainsi, au centre du discours prophétique adressé par Joseph à ses co-prisonniers (12,37–40) figure la question centrale du message coranique : « Des maîtres épars sont-ils mieux que le Dieu unique, dominateur ? »<sup>29</sup> Et très souvent, dans le Coran, les

<sup>27</sup> Voir Jeffery, A. *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, 148. 1938.

<sup>28</sup> Voir Meynet, *Traité de rhétorique biblique*, 417–35.

<sup>29</sup> Voir notre article « Structures rhétoriques dans le Coran. Une analyse structurelle de la sourate “Joseph” et de quelques sourates brèves », *MIDEO* 22 (1995) : 179. Deux autres exemples de ‘la question au centre’ figurent dans la même sourate, v. 46 et 109 (Ibid., 185, 189).

centres ont une portée eschatologique,<sup>30</sup> comme c'est le cas ici : Dieu voit l'agissement du pécheur, pour le juger.

On pourra objecter que les trois segments antécédents, dans la première partie, sont aussi des questions. Le membre 14 s'en distingue cependant en ce qu'il est exprimé à la troisième personne de l'inaccompli, alors que dans les segments précédents les questions sont à la deuxième personne de l'accompli. Et, du point de vue du sens, le premier morceau est une sorte de réquisitoire, alors que le centre annonce déjà le jugement de Dieu. Le membre 14 ne peut donc être assimilé ni au premier morceau ni au troisième, qui ont chacun leur cohérence interne, différente de celle du membre 14.

### *L'ensemble de la troisième partie*

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–<sup>9</sup> AS-TU VU *CELUI QUI INTERDIT A UN SERVITEUR* [de Dieu]

=<sup>10</sup> quand *IL PRIE* ?

–<sup>11</sup> AS-TU VU qu'il soit dans la direction

=<sup>12</sup> ou qu'il ordonne la piété ?

–<sup>13a</sup> AS-TU VU qu'il crie-au-mensonge

=<sup>b</sup> et tourne-le-dos ?

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<sup>14</sup> Ne sait-il pas que, certes, *DIEU VOIT* ?  
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–<sup>15a</sup> NON-NON ! En vérité, s'il ne cesse pas,

–<sup>b</sup> en vérité, Nous le saisirons par le toupet,

–<sup>16</sup> un toupet menteur, pécheur.

=<sup>17</sup> Qu'il appelle donc son clan !

=<sup>18</sup> Nous appellerons les Archanges.

+<sup>19a</sup> NON-NON ! *NE LUI OBEIS PAS*,

+<sup>b</sup> mais *PROSTERNE-TOI* et *APPROCHE-TOI*.

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<sup>30</sup> Parmi de nombreux exemples, citons 5,9–10, au centre du passage 5,7–11 : « Dieu a promis à ceux qui croient et accomplissent les bonnes œuvres : à eux un pardon et une rétribution immense ; et à ceux qui sont incrédules et traitent de mensonge nos signes : ceux-là sont compagnons de l'enfer ». Cf. Cuypers, *Le Festin*, 74.



La partie est délimitée par deux segments dont les premiers membres sont antithétiques (« celui qui interdit à un serviteur », 9 ↔ « ne lui obéis pas », 19a), et les deuxièmes synonymiques : « il prie » (10) ↔ « prosterne-toi et approche-toi » (19b). Comme on le verra mieux plus loin, le dernier segment (19a–b) conclut aussi toute la sourate. Le morceau central, comme c'est habituellement le cas des centres dans les constructions concentriques, joue le rôle de pivot :<sup>31</sup> il est relié au premier morceau par la forme interrogative introduite par la particule *a*, mais aussi par le verbe « voir » ; en même temps il fait transition avec la suite, en rappelant le jugement de Dieu qui se traduira par un châtement (troisième morceau). Il faut noter la place de l'unique mention de Dieu, exactement au centre de toute la partie, et là seulement. Dans les psaumes, le nom de Dieu se situe de préférence aux extrémités et au centre.<sup>32</sup>

Les trois morceaux correspondent aux trois temps du procès : le réquisitoire (premier morceau) / l'annonce du jugement (morceau central) / la menace de châtement (les deux premiers segments du troisième morceau).

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<sup>31</sup> Un parfait exemple en est donné dans la structure de la *Fatiha* : le premier membre du segment bimembre central (« C'est toi que nous adorons », v. 5a) renvoie à ce qui précède (1–4), qui est tout entier une prière d'adoration de Dieu dans quelques-uns de ses plus beaux noms, alors que le second membre (« C'est toi que nous sollicitons », v. 5b) annonce la suite (6–7), qui est une prière de demande. Voir notre article « Une analyse rhétorique du début et de la fin du Coran », dans *Al-Kitâb. La sacralité du texte dans le monde de l'Islam. Actes du Symposium International Al-Kitâb, 29 mai – 1 juin 2002*, 236–37. Acta Orientalia Belgica. Louvain-la-Neuve/Leuven, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Voir la cinquième loi de Lund, dans Meynet, *Traité de rhétorique biblique*, 98 et Lund, Nils Wilhelm. *Chiasmus in the New Testament. A Study in Formgeschichte*, 40–41. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1942 (réimpression : *Chiasmus in the New Testament. A Study in the Form and Function of Chiasmic Structures*. Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1992).

### La partie centrale (6–8)

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–<sup>6</sup> Non-non ! *Certes* l'homme se rebelle

–<sup>7</sup> dès qu'il se voit dans l'aisance.

–<sup>8</sup> *Certes*, vers ton Seigneur est le retour.

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La partie centrale de la sourate ne compte qu'un seul segment trimembre, de forme AA'B (les deux premiers membres étant davantage liés entre eux qu'avec le dernier). Les membres extrêmes commencent par la particule d'insistance *innā* « certes », soulignant l'opposition entre l'homme riche qui se rebelle contre Dieu, et le destin universel du retour vers Dieu.

Les deux premiers membres ont l'allure d'une sentence de sagesse morale, le dernier d'une sentence eschatologique. Nous avons vu plus haut que le centre de constructions concentriques est souvent occupé par une question. Il l'est aussi souvent par une sentence morale ou eschatologique, comme c'est le cas ici. Et très souvent aussi, dans le Coran, le centre oppose le bien et le mal, le salut et la perte, comme ici.<sup>33</sup>

La négation redoublée inaugurale « Non-non » (*kallā*, 6) qui sépare cette partie de la précédente, pose un problème d'interprétation et de traduction.<sup>34</sup> On ne saurait y voir une pure négation de ce qui précède, ni de ce qui suit, qui sont des propositions fortement affirmatives. Mais comme elles sont antithétiques (générosité de Dieu/ rébellion du riche), la négation serait mieux rendue

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<sup>33</sup> Voir l'exemple 5,9–10, à la note 30, ci-dessus. Au centre de la sourate 85 (v. 10–11), on lit : « En vérité, ceux qui éprouvent les croyants et les croyantes, puis ne se repentent, alors à eux le châtimeut de la Géhenne, et à eux le châtimeut de la calcination. En vérité, ceux qui croient et font œuvres bonnes, à eux des jardins sous lesquels coulent les ruisseaux : voilà le grand succès. »

<sup>34</sup> Lüling la discute longuement, pp. 40 ss., pour conclure qu'il faut comprendre la négation de manière affirmative, comme un équivalent de *ḥaqqan*, « en vérité ». Mais pour lui, elle introduit une phrase qu'il modifie considérablement par rapport au texte reçu.

par des formules comme : « Et cependant », « pourtant », « et malgré cela » ou simplement « mais ». <sup>35</sup>

### L'ensemble de la sourate

- <sup>1a</sup> Invoque le nom (**IQRA' BI**) de **TON SEIGNEUR**
- = <sup>b</sup> qui créa,
- + <sup>2</sup> créa **L'HOMME** d'une adhérence.
- <sup>3</sup> Invoque, car **TON SEIGNEUR** est le Très-Généreux
- = <sup>4</sup> qui enseigna par la plume,
- + <sup>5</sup> enseigna à **L'HOMME** ce qu'**IL NE SAVAIT PAS (LAM YA'LAM)**

- <sup>6</sup> **NON-NON !** Certes **L'HOMME** se rebelle
- <sup>7</sup> dès qu'il **SE VOIT** dans l'aisance.
- <sup>8</sup> Certes, vers **TON SEIGNEUR** est **le retour**.

- <sup>9</sup> AS-TU VU celui qui interdit à un serviteur [de Dieu]
- = <sup>10</sup> quand il prie ?
- <sup>11</sup> AS-TU VU qu'il soit dans la direction
- = <sup>12</sup> ou qu'il ordonne la piété ?
- <sup>13a</sup> AS-TU VU qu'il crie-au-mensonge
- = <sup>b</sup> et tourne-le-dos ?
- 
- <sup>14</sup> **NE SAIT-IL PAS (LAM YA'LAM)** que, certes, **DIEU VOIT ?**
- 
- <sup>15a</sup> **NON-NON !** S'il ne cesse pas, vraiment,
- <sup>b</sup> Nous le saisirons par le toupet,
- <sup>16</sup> un toupet menteur, pécheur.
- = <sup>17</sup> Qu'il appelle donc son clan !
- = <sup>18</sup> Nous appellerons les Archanges.
- + <sup>19a</sup> **NON-NON !** Ne lui obéis pas,
- + <sup>b</sup> mais prosterne-toi et **approche-toi (IQ'ARIB)**.

De nombreuses correspondances de termes soulignent ici le rôle de pivot du centre (6–8), les unes renvoyant à ce qui précède, d'autres à ce qui suit. Ainsi les termes « l'homme » et « ton Seigneur »

<sup>35</sup> Dans sa traduction anglaise, M. A. S. Abdel Haleem traduit par « but », *The Qur'an. A New Translation*, 428. Oxford University Press, 2005.

encadrent le trimembre central (6/8), comme ils encadraient les deux trimembres de la première partie (1a/2; 3/5), quoiqu'en ordre inverse. Le verbe « voir » figure au centre (7) et dans la dernière partie (9.11.13.14). Particulièrement remarquable est sa présence dans les deux centres (6–8 et 14) : en 7, le rebelle « se voit » dans l'aisance, mais en 14, c'est Dieu qui « voit » son agissement mauvais. La double négation « Non-non », au début du centre (6), est reprise deux fois dans la troisième partie (15a et 19a). Au v. 6 elle introduit une antithèse : comme l'avait déjà vu R. Bell, le centre (6–7) met la rébellion du riche auto-satisfait en opposition avec la générosité de Dieu créateur et révélateur, dans la première partie. Ce sens se prolonge dans la dernière partie, avec les deux « Non-non » (15a et 19a) qui encadrent une particularisation de la condamnation du riche, dans l'intrus qui empêche le serviteur de Dieu de prier. Enfin, le dernier membre du centre met peut-être en correspondance le « retour » eschatologique vers Dieu (8) avec le priant qui « s'approche » de Dieu (19b) : on peut y voir une application de la troisième loi de Lund (le bibliste qui l'a théorisée pour la première fois, dans les années 1940), selon laquelle il y a souvent un rapport entre le centre et les extrémités d'un même système.<sup>36</sup>

Les parties extrêmes sont reliées par un procédé étrange, mais très caractéristique de la rhétorique sémitique : la fin de la première partie « ce qu'il ne savait pas », correspond en effet au centre de la troisième partie « ne sait-il pas ? » (même forme, en arabe : *lam ja'lam*). C'est la 'loi du déplacement du centre vers les extrémités', selon laquelle il y a souvent une correspondance entre le centre d'un système rhétorique et les extrémités d'un autre système, indiquant ainsi que les deux systèmes font partie d'un même ensemble, à un niveau supérieur (ici, l'ensemble de la sourate) : c'est la 'quatrième loi de Lund',<sup>37</sup> d'une application très fréquente dans le Coran. Cette correspondance explique aussi le sens de l'énigmatique v. 5 : « enseigna à l'homme ce qu'il ne savait pas ». Qu'est-ce que l'homme ne savait pas ? Le v. 14 répond : « que Dieu voit ». Dieu voit l'arrogance de l'impie et ne la laissera pas impunie.

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<sup>36</sup> Voir Meynet, *Traité de rhétorique biblique*, 98 et Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, 41.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Autrement dit, Dieu est juge et jugera tout homme. Cela rejoint aussi le sens du segment central : « vers ton Seigneur est le retour ».

Enfin, un trait tout à fait remarquable relie le début et la fin de la sourate : le premier terme et le dernier non seulement sont des impératifs invitant à la prière, mais ils forment en plus une paronomase : « invoque » (*iqra' bi...*) / « approche-toi » (*iqtarib*). Cette correspondance rhétorique et phonétique, qui ne peut qu'être intentionnelle, ne laisse plus aucun doute sur le sens à donner à *iqra'* : il s'agit bien d'un appel à la prière, et non d'un envoi en mission prophétique, comme toute la tradition l'a interprété.

Ainsi, encadré par une invitation à la prière et à la persévérance dans la prière (1a, 2 / 19a-b), la sourate rappelle d'abord la générosité divine (première partie) qui s'exprime dans la création (1b-2) et la révélation (4-5), pour dénoncer ensuite (troisième partie), dans une perspective eschatologique, l'ingratitude d'un impie qui s'oppose à l'a prière du serviteur de Dieu. Le centre (6-8) relie les deux autres parties par une double sentence morale et eschatologique. Il s'oppose en antithèse à ce qui précède (la générosité divine) et annonce la suite qui en donnera une illustration particulière dans l'homme impie et rebelle.

La structure de la sourate ainsi mise en évidence permet de revenir une seconde fois à l'intertextualité. Car si la première partie de la sourate peut être mise en regard avec les sept premiers versets du psaume 95 (l'invitation à la louange, citée plus haut), la suite de la sourate peut également être comparée à la deuxième partie du même psaume. Les deux textes sont en effet des réquisitoires, même si la nature du réquisitoire diffère dans les deux cas : réquisitoire divin sur la rupture de l'Alliance par le peuple de Dieu (8-11), réquisitoire contre les riches et contre un individu impie, dans la sourate (6-18).

Aujourd'hui puissiez-vous écouter sa voix :

<sup>8</sup> « N'endurcissez pas vos cœurs comme à Meriba  
comme au jour de Massa dans le désert,  
<sup>9</sup> quand vos pères m'ont éprouvé et tenté,  
et *pourtant ils voyaient mes actions.*

<sup>10</sup> Quarante ans cette génération m'a dégoûté  
et je dis : Peuple égaré de cœur,  
*ces gens-là n'ont pas connu mes voies.*

<sup>11</sup> Alors j'ai juré en ma colère :  
jamais ils n'entreront dans mon repos. »

On notera d'abord la similitude des versets cités précédemment dans la première partie du psaume : <sup>6</sup>« Entrez, courbons-nous, prosternons-nous » (Ps 95,6) et <sup>2</sup>« *approchons* de sa face en rendant grâces » (Ps 95,2) avec « Prosterne-toi et approche-toi » (S 96,19),<sup>38</sup> et l'insistance sur l'ignorance du rebelle : « Ces gens-là n'ont pas connu mes voies » (Ps 95,10) / « Ne sait-il pas que Dieu voit ? » (S 96,14). Au Ps 95,9 la rébellion du peuple est mise en opposition avec les actions de Dieu : l'opposition est la même que celle qui existe entre la première partie et le centre de la sourate (générosité de Dieu, ingratitude de l'homme). Mais on peut aussi mettre en regard la sourate 96 avec certains psaumes de sagesse condamnant la richesse, comme le psaume 49, avec même perspective eschatologique : « eux se fient à leur fortune, se prévalent du surcroît de leur richesse » (7), « l'homme dans son luxe ne comprend pas » (13 et 21), « troupeau que l'on parque au shéol, la Mort les mène paître » (15).

L'accumulation des données de l'enquête lexicologique d'une part, de l'intertextualité et de l'analyse rhétorique d'autre part, met clairement en relief le caractère psalmique de la sourate 96. Pour Lüling, le texte-source de cette sourate est une hymne chrétienne sur la prière. Sa reconstruction gomme les allusions eschatologiques. Ainsi, il propose de comprendre *al-ruj'ā* au v. 8, « En Dieu est *le recours* [dans la prière] » au lieu de la lecture traditionnelle : « Vers lui est *le retour* [eschatologique] ». Or, le sens traditionnel—nous pensons l'avoir montré—donne un sens parfaitement satisfaisant et cohérent avec le reste de la sourate. Elle est certes une invitation à la prière et à la persévérance dans la prière, mais aussi une condamnation de celui qui s'y oppose, avec menace eschatologique.

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<sup>38</sup> La *Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible* signale que « s'avancer » (la *Bible de Jérusalem* dit « s'approcher ») fait partie du vocabulaire du culte (en note à Jér. 30,21, qui renvoie à Lv 9,5–9 [« Approche-toi de l'autel »] et Nb 8,19 [« Ainsi les fils d'Israël ne seront plus frappés par un fléau pour s'être approchés du lieu saint »]).

### 3. LA SOURATE 96 ET L'HISTOIRE DU CORAN ET DES DÉBUTS DE L'ISLAM

Peut-on conclure quelque chose de l'analyse rhétorique et intertextuelle de la sourate 96, concernant l'histoire du Coran et des débuts de l'islam ?

La composition de la sourate 96, selon les règles de la rhétorique sémitique, situe ce texte dans la grande tradition littéraire des textes sacrés du monde sémitique ancien, antérieurs à la domination de la culture grecque. Nous avons montré ailleurs qu'il en va de même pour les autres sourates du Coran.<sup>39</sup> Sans doute, le Coran a-t-il son style caractéristique, marqué notamment par les brusques transitions entre unités textuelles. Mais c'est là simplement une manière propre de réaliser la rhétorique sémitique, et non sa négation : un même système de composition peut en effet donner lieu à des réalisations stylistiques différentes. Quoiqu'il en soit, la grande élaboration rhétorique de cette sourate la situe dans un environnement lettré sémitique.<sup>40</sup>

Faut-il voir dans cette composition rhétorique le fruit d'une tradition orale ? Loin de là, les parallélismes s'originent certainement dans l'oralité, tout le monde l'accordera. Mais un système aussi sophistiqué que celui que nous avons analysé ci-dessus relève probablement plus de l'écriture savante que de la spontanéité orale. L'anthropologue anglaise Mary Douglas, s'interrogeant sur la raison de formes d'écriture aussi complexes, avance l'idée que les scribes de l'Antiquité voulaient ainsi montrer leur savoir-faire littéraire, en rivalisant de subtilité dans l'art de composer un texte.<sup>41</sup> C'est aussi une manière de distinguer le langage de style élevé, réservé à des

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<sup>39</sup> Voir notre bibliographie dans Cuypers, M. *Le Festin. Une lecture de la sourate al-Mâ'ida*, 419. Paris : Lethielleux, 2007.

<sup>40</sup> On trouvera des exemples de 'rhétorique sémitique' dans des textes pharaoniques, dans Laëticia Coilliot, Michel Cuypers, Yvan Koenig, « La composition rhétorique de trois textes pharaoniques », *BIFAO* 109 (2009) : 23–59 ; Cuypers, M. « Plainte de Ramsès II à Amon, et réponse d'Amon » à paraître dans Meynet, R., et J. Oniszcuk, éd. *Retorica Biblica e Semitica 2*. Bologna : Centro editoriale dehoniano, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Douglas, Mary. *Thinking in Circles. An Essay on Ring Composition*, 29. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2007.

sujets nobles (textes religieux, mythiques, patriotiques...), du langage quotidien.<sup>42</sup> Mais rien, dans la composition de la sourate 96, n'oblige à concevoir une longue histoire du texte, antérieure à sa forme finale. Certes, on ne peut généraliser le cas de cette sourate à l'ensemble du Coran : il se peut que certaines sourates, surtout les plus longues, aient connu une histoire (pas forcément longue) au terme de laquelle des fragments originellement indépendants ont été assemblés pour former un tout cohérent.

Quant à l'analyse intertextuelle, les rapprochements que nous avons proposés entre la sourate et les psaumes, ne doivent pas être interprétés comme si nous voyions dans les psaumes 95 et 49 les sources directes de la sourate, le rédacteur du texte coranique ayant emprunté tel ou tel verset au psautier, tout en l'adaptant. Il nous paraît plus exact de concevoir la genèse du texte comme baignant dans un environnement de forte culture biblique, laquelle portait à adopter spontanément des formes littéraires bibliques, telles que les psaumes, avec leur style formulaire caractéristique.<sup>43</sup> Ceci suppose donc bien, pour l'avènement du Coran, un milieu social à forte présence juive et/ou chrétienne, comme l'estimaient à la fois Wansbrough et Lüling. Un milieu monastique chrétien nous paraît même hautement vraisemblable : on sait qu'à partir du III<sup>e</sup> siècle, le Psautier a été adopté définitivement par les chrétiens comme leur prière liturgique<sup>44</sup> et qu'il a constitué l'essentiel de la prière des heures monastiques, avec l'avènement du monachisme, au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle : selon la Règle de saint Benoît (m. 547), l'office monastique quotidien commence par le Psaume invitoire 95.

Quels liens la sourate 96 manifeste-t-elle avec le personnage historique de Muhammad ? Selon notre lecture : aucun. Les liens

<sup>42</sup> Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, 27.

<sup>43</sup> Nous avons montré ailleurs le caractère psalmique de la sourate 1, la *Fātiha*, en la comparant avec le Psaume 1, dans M. Cuypers, 'Une analyse rhétorique du début et de la fin du Coran', *op. cit.*, pp. 238–42. Pour une comparaison de la sourate 112 avec des textes bibliques, et notamment certains psaumes, voir 'Une lecture rhétorique et intertextuelle de la sourate *al-Ikhlās*', *MIDEO* 25–26 (2004) : 160–70.

<sup>44</sup> Saint-Arnaud, I. « Psaumes ». *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, t. 9, col. 212, Paris : Letouzey et Ané, 1979.



ont été projetés par la tradition sur le texte grâce à des 'occasions de la révélation' (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) dont le texte ne porte aucune trace claire, ni en ce qui concerne la vocation de Muhammad, ni en ce qui concerne les vexations qu'il aurait subies en voulant accomplir sa prière rituelle. Le texte se suffit à lui-même, et, à l'instar des psaumes, porte un sens universel, invitant tout croyant à la louange et à ne pas se laisser détourner de la prière par quelque moqueur malveillant. Le texte a bien pu naître à partir d'un événement précis, une persécution subie par le psalmiste ou quelqu'un d'autre au moment de la prière, mais rien n'indique que ce personnage soit Muhammad.

Une question se pose alors inéluctablement : que faire de l'interprétation traditionnelle, surtout du verset 1, si fortement ancrée dans la tradition et la conscience des musulmans ? Le recours à la doctrine des quatre sens de l'Écriture (sens littéral, allégorique, tropologique, anagogique), connue aussi bien de la tradition exégétique juive que chrétienne, peut éventuellement nous aider, d'autant plus qu'elle a pénétré l'exégèse coranique classique (*ẓāhir, bātin, ḥadd, maṭṭala*).<sup>45</sup> Tout en admettant que le sens littéral ou premier de ce verset (« ce qu'il veut dire ») est bien celui proposé par notre lecture critique, on accordera à la foi et à la tradition islamiques le droit d'en faire une interprétation selon le sens allégorique, dans lequel la lettre du texte est utilisée pour signifier une réalité de foi qu'elle n'indique pas directement par elle-même, en l'occurrence, la vocation du Prophète. On peut comparer ce procédé à l'utilisation que fait, par exemple, l'évangile de Matthieu (Mt 1,23) d'un verset du prophète Isaïe (Is 7,14) pour attester la naissance virginale de Jésus, alors que le sens premier, littéral du verset (en hébreu) vise la naissance du fils du roi Achaz : « Voici, la jeune femme est enceinte, elle va enfanter un fils et elle lui donnera le nom d'Emmanuel ». L'interprétation de Matthieu n'est compréhensible que parce qu'elle s'appuie non pas sur le texte hébreu, mais sur la traduction des Septante, qui traduit « la jeune femme » par « la vierge ». La lecture recourt ici aussi, comme dans le verset 1 de la sourate 96, à une variante d'interprétation du vocabulaire.

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<sup>45</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 242–43.

L'interprétation traditionnelle de ce verset ne pourrait relever du sens littéral que si l'on admettait l'hypothèse, invérifiable mais admise par la tradition islamique aussi bien que par l'orientalisme 'classique', d'une origine indépendante des cinq premiers versets. Les orientalistes ont appuyé cette interprétation en mettant le verset 1 en rapport avec l'envoi en mission du deutéro-Isaïe : « Crie ! » (Is 40,6). Outre la fragilité de cette mise en rapport par ce seul impératif, il n'en reste pas moins que, dans le texte canonique, vu la cohérence de toute la sourate, clairement construite selon les principes de la rhétorique sémitique, cette interprétation ne trouve aucun appui. Il faut plutôt la considérer, encore une fois, comme une projection sur le texte d'une interprétation (allégorique) qui s'est imposée lorsque ont eu cours les hadiths (relativement tardifs, selon Uri Rubin<sup>46</sup>) relatant la vocation de Muhammad. Nous rejoignons ici la conception de Wansbrough selon laquelle les hadiths et *tafsirs* nous disent avant tout une histoire sacrée, l'histoire telle que la foi musulmane se la représente. Sans doute, nous ne pouvons pas, à partir de la seule sourate 96 extrapoler cette conception démythisante sur l'ensemble du Coran, comme le fait Wansbrough, mais il est certain qu'elle ne vaut pas que pour cette unique sourate.

**CONCLUSION : LA CRITIQUE HISTORIQUE  
ET L'ANALYSE RHETORIQUE APPLIQUEES  
A L'ETUDE DU TEXTE CORANIQUE**

Peut-on, à partir du cas particulier de la sourate 96 étudiée ici, mais aussi de nos autres travaux, tirer quelques conclusions générales sur les rapports entre critique historique et analyse rhétorique, dans l'étude du Coran ?

Il y a d'abord une étape incontournable pour toute étude sérieuse du texte, que ce soit l'exégèse classique islamique ou celle de l'orientalisme scientifique moderne, toutes écoles confondues : celle de l'enquête lexicologique-philologique et grammaticale. Il faut avant tout comprendre, dans toute la mesure du possible, les

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<sup>46</sup> Rubin, U. *The Eye of the Beholder. The Life of Muhammad as viewed by early Muslims*, 103–8, 230. Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1995.

mots et les phrases, dans le cadre de l'époque et de la langue du Coran.<sup>47</sup>

Critique historique et analyse rhétorique s'accordent ensuite pour déboucher sur une lecture intertextuelle,<sup>48</sup> mettant en valeur les liens du texte coranique avec des écrits antérieurs, principalement la Bible (Ancien et Nouveau Testament), bien qu'elles ne le fassent pas exactement dans le même esprit.

Le désaccord entre les deux écoles tient essentiellement à leur point de départ divergeant : la discontinuité du texte est-elle réelle ou n'est-elle qu'une apparence ? La critique historique, partant de la première hypothèse, déconstruit le texte pour remonter à ses sources (les *logia* prophétiques de Wansbrough), supposant une évolution plus ou moins longue de ces sources, avant qu'elles n'aboutissent au texte canonique, dans lequel les interventions rédactionnelles finales sont facilement repérables (croit-on). L'analyse rhétorique part de l'hypothèse inverse : sous ce qui nous apparaît comme un désordre du texte, se cache en réalité une structure déterminée, obéissant aux règles de la rhétorique sémitique. Aussi étrange que cela paraisse, ces règles ont été ignorées autant de la tradition islamique que de l'orientalisme moderne, ainsi que des études bibliques jusqu'à une date récente. Or, ces règles sont des données objectives, inscrites dans la structure du texte lui-même, sans qu'on ait quoique ce soit à en modifier.<sup>49</sup> L'analyse rhétorique est donc une méthode réellement scientifique, critique,

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<sup>47</sup> Sur ces questions, qui sont les mêmes pour la Bible, voir Meynet, R. *Lire la Bible*, 25–40. Paris : Champs-Flammarion, 2003, chap. 2 « Quel texte au juste ? ».

<sup>48</sup> L'intertextualité ne fait pas directement partie de l'analyse rhétorique, mais comme cette dernière étudie le texte dans son contexte littéraire immédiat (c'est-à-dire dans la structure rhétorique dont il fait partie), elle entraîne aussi *de facto* une attention donnée au contexte littéraire externe.

<sup>49</sup> Voir Meynet, *Lire la Bible*, 145–62, chap. 8, « Les présupposés de l'analyse rhétorique ».

pour l'étude du texte coranique, en même temps que parfaitement respectueuse de ce dernier.<sup>50</sup>

S'il ressort de l'analyse rhétorique que le texte est réellement construit, et bien construit, malgré l'impression contraire qu'en donne le caractère heurté du style coranique, c'est tout l'édifice de l'histoire du texte qui se trouve non pas ruiné, mais remis en question. Les unités textuelles qui composent l'ensemble d'une sourate ne sont plus considérées *a priori* comme des fragments originellement indépendants, mais comme des parties d'un tout cohérent, fruit d'une composition littéraire délibérée. Seules des incohérences patentes, échappant aux lois de la rhétorique sémitique, devraient donner lieu à des interrogations.

À propos de la critique des sources, le document déjà cité sur *L'Interprétation de la Bible dans l'Église* fait la remarque suivante :

Dans le désir d'établir la chronologie des textes bibliques, ce genre de critique littéraire se limitait à un travail de découpage et de décomposition pour distinguer les diverses sources et n'accordait pas une attention suffisante à la structure finale du texte biblique et au message qu'il exprime dans son état actuel (on montrait peu d'estime pour l'œuvre des rédacteurs). De ce fait, l'exégèse historico-critique pouvait apparaître comme dissolvante et destructrice.<sup>51</sup>

S'il en est ainsi, on peut estimer que l'analyse rhétorique ne devrait pas être considérée seulement comme une « nouvelle méthode

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<sup>50</sup> Rappelons toutefois que ce type d'analyse a été précédé par les recherches pionnières d'Angelika Neuwirth sur la structure des sourates mecquoises, suivies de celles de Neal Robinson et de A. H. Mathias Zahniser, sur quelques sourates longues. Voir Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*; Robinson, N. *Discovering the Qur'an. A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, 201–23. London: SCM-Press, 2003; Zahniser, A. H. M. « Major Transitions and thematic Borders in two long Sūras: *al-Baqara* and *al-Nisā'* ». Dans Boullata, I. J., ed. *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, 26–55. London/Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000.

<sup>51</sup> Commission biblique pontificale, 29.

d'analyse littéraire », <sup>52</sup> à côté de la critique historique, mais devrait au contraire constituer une première étape indispensable dans l'étude critique du texte, pouvant rendre souvent sans objet une recherche des sources. Si celle-ci s'impose, certes, pour nombre de livres bibliques dont l'histoire s'étend sur des siècles (citons simplement le livre d'Isaïe) ou des décennies (les évangiles), il n'est pas sûr que le texte coranique doive être soumis à un même traitement. En revanche, la lecture scrupuleuse du texte, dans le respect de sa structure, pourra révéler, non pas les « sources » proprement dites du texte, mais son *background*, son environnement littéraire sacré. En multipliant les observations intertextuelles, il sera alors possible de cerner progressivement le profil du milieu dans lequel a surgi le Coran, qu'il soit juif, judéo-chrétien, chrétien sémitique, ou même 'sectaire'.

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<sup>52</sup> Commission biblique pontificale, 34.



# MOHAMMED'S EXEGETICAL ACTIVITY IN THE MECCAN ARABIC LECTONARY

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of *lingua sacra* in relation with the constitution of the Koran and with the exegetical literature is one of the main concerns of John Wansbrough in this Quranic studies. However we are not sure that the originally meaning of the expression *bādhā lisānun ‘arabiyyun mubinun* (Q 16: 103) was: “this is plain Arabic speech.” In order to try to clarify this issue, we should wish to begin with some remarks on what the Koran says on its own prehistory.

## I. THE KORAN ON ITS “PREHISTORY”

With prehistory we do not mean here the Koranic words, passages or themes borrowed from Judaism, Christianity, Jewish-Christianity, Manicheism, gnosticism, etc.,<sup>1</sup> but Koranic words,

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<sup>1</sup> *V. the status quaestionis* of Gilliot, “Rétrospectives et perspectives. De quelques sources possibles du Coran. I. (first part) “Les sources du Coran et les emprunts aux traditions religieuses antérieures dans la recherche (XIX<sup>e</sup> et début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècles),” to be published in *Mélanges Emilio Platti*, 2010, above all studies written in German, from Abraham Geiger (1810–1874), etc., to Tor Andrae (1885–1947) and Wilhelm Rudolph (1891–1987), etc. The second part of this study: II. “Le Coran, production

expressions or passages which seem to hint to a “text” or to an oral “source” on which the Koran could have been dependent.

We shall examine here what Günter Lüling<sup>2</sup> has called: “The Islamic scholarly terminology for the different layers of the Koran text.” Without necessarily accepting his general thesis on the Koran originating in pre-Islamic Arabic Christian hymns, and particularly his argument that the adversaries of Mohammed should have been Hellenistic Christians,<sup>3</sup> we consider that his ideas on “The Islamic scholarly terminology for the different layers of the Koran text”<sup>4</sup> has unrightly not been taken into consideration by the orientalisks before Jan Van Reeth, as it will be seen below. Another stimulating point of departure for this study has been thesis of Ch. Luxenberg, according whom: “If *Koran*, however, really means *lectionary*, then one can assume that the Koran intended itself first of all to be understood as nothing more than a liturgical book with selected texts from the scriptures (The Old and New Testament, apocryphal literature and traditions, etc.) and not at all as a substi-

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littéraire de l’antiquité tardive.” In *Mélanges à la mémoire d’Alfred-Louis de Prémare*, REMMM 129 (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Lüling, Günter. *Über den Ur-Qur’an. Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Qur’an*. Erlangen, 1974 [review by Maxime Rodinson in *Der Islam* 54 (1977): 321–25] / (*Über den Urkoran...*, 1993<sup>2</sup>) / English translation and revised ed.: *A Challenge to Islam for reformation. The rediscovery and reliable reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian hymnal hidden in the Koran under earliest Islamic reinterpretations*. Delhi, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Lüling, G. *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad. Eine Kritik am “christlichen Abendland”*, 94–95. Erlangen, 1981 [review of Gilliot, Cl. “Deux études sur le Coran.” *Arabica* XXX (1983): 16–37 (1–37)]; cf. against this idea Van Reeth, Jan M. F. “Le Coran et les scribes.” In Cannuyer, C., ed. *Les scribes et la transmission du savoir*, 73 (66–81). Bruxelles, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Lüling, *Challenge*, 12–3, 69, 111 (*mubkam* vs. *mutashabih*, and *mufaṣṣal*) / *Ur-Qur’an*, 5, 62–3, 206–7, 209 (*mubkam* vs. *mutashabih*, (*mufaṣṣal*, *ibid.* and p. 111, 427) / *Urkoran*, same pagination (in both German editions less developed than in *Challenge*).



tute for the Scriptures themselves, i.e. an independant *Scripture*.”<sup>5</sup> It should be clear for the reader that it is not necessary to follow Lüling (pre-Islamic Arabic Christian hymns), on the one hand, or Luxenberg (entire passages of the Meccan Koran being mere palimpsests of Syriac primitive text) in their systematic, sometimes probably too automatic ways of proceeding, if we consider that a part of their point of departure and some of their ideas have some *fundamentum in re*, or let us say a certain basis in the Koranic text itself, in the Islamic tradition, and in the cultural environment in which the Koran was born. Speaking of “cultural environment” means that we shall concentrate on the “Meccan Koran.”

### 1. This “lectionary” is in Arabic commenting a non-Arabic “lectionary”?

We shall begin with Q 16 (*Nahl*): 103: “And we know very well that they say: “Only a mortal is teaching him.” The speech (tongue) of him at whom they hint is barbarous; and this is speech (tongue) Arabic, manifest (*lisānu l-ladhī yulhidūna ilayhi a‘ġamiyyun wa hādihā lisānun ‘arabiyyun mubīn*)” (trans. Arberry modified by us). *Lisān* should be better translated in both cases by “tongue” than by “speech” (in Arberry’s translation)

Most of the ancient Muslim scholars consider this sura a Meccan one (al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, ‘Ikrima, etc.),<sup>6</sup> with some Medinan in-

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<sup>5</sup> Luxenberg, Christoph. *Die Syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran. Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*. Berlin, 2000, p. 79 / 2004, p. 111 / *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran. A Contribution to the decoding of the language of the Koran*, 104. Berlin, 2007. Cf. the three positive review articles of Nabielek, Rainer. “Weintrauben statt Jungfrauen: Zu einer neuen Lesart des Korans,” *INAMO* (Berlin) (Herbst/Winter 2000): 66–72; Gilliot, Cl. “Langue et Coran: une lecture syro-araméenne du Coran.” *Arabica* L (2003/3): 381–9; Van Reeth, J. M. F. “Le vignoble du paradis et le chemin qui y mène. La thèse de C. Luxenberg et les sources du Coran.” *Arabica* LIII/4 (2006): 511–24; the following negative reviews: Blois, François de, in *Journal of Quranic Studies* V/1 (2003): 92–7; Hopkins, Simon, in *JSAI* 28 (2003): 377–80.

<sup>6</sup> Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr = al-Jamī‘ li-ahkām al-Qur‘ān*, ed. A. ‘Abd al-‘Alīm al-Bardūnī *et al.* 20 vols. Cairo, 1952–67. X, p. 65.

terpolations, for instance Ibn ‘Abbās: verses 126–9 were revealed between Mecca and Medina when Mohammed returned from Uḥud.<sup>7</sup> Or according to the same, verses 95–97 are Medinan.<sup>8</sup> Some of them have said that this sura is Medinan from the beginning to verse 40 (*ḵun fa-yakūn*). The contrary is reported from Qatāda b. Dī‘āma: it is Meccan from the beginning to verse 40, but Medinan for the rest.<sup>9</sup> For the Mu‘tazilī Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm it is entirely Medinan.<sup>10</sup> As for the chronological order, it is the 70th sura in the codex attributed to Ja‘far al-Šādiq<sup>11</sup> which has been taken up by the “Cairo’s edition” of the Koran. The orders in the chronological classifications proposed by the orientalist are the

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<sup>7</sup> Makkī b. a. Ṭālib al-Qaysī (d. 437/1045), *al-Hidāya ilā bulugh al-nihāya* [*Tafsīr* Makkī b. a. Ṭālib], 13 vols., ed. under the direction of al-Šāhid al-Būshihī, Sharjah (al-Šhāriqa), 1429/2008, 9112 p., VI, p. 3943; Qurtubī, *Tafsīr*, X, 201. Father Ludovico Marracci, o.m.d. (that is: Congregatio clericorum regulorum Matris Dei, 1612–1700), who have done an excellent work in his edition, translation and annotation of the Koran, already knew through *Tafsīr al-Jalalayn* that some people considered the three last verses of this sura Medinan; *Akorani Textus Universus* [...], Patavii: ex typographia Seminarii, 1698, p. 399, *Notae*, col. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Qurtubī, *Tafsīr*, X, 65.

<sup>9</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr=Mafātih al-ghayb*, ed. M. Muḥyī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, ‘A. I. al-Šāwī *et al.* 32 vols. Cairo, 1933–62. XIX, p. 117. *Le Coran*, traduction selon un essai de reclassement, des sourates par Régis Blachère, I–III, Paris, G. P. Maisonneuve, 1947–51 [vol. I, 1947 being: *Introduction au Coran*], II, p. 396: the formulation of Blachère is ambiguous, because in writing: “v. Qatāda chez Rāzī,” he seems to suggest that Qatāda had the opposite position to the one given here. He writes also that this sura is considered Meccan unto verse 29 (*leg.* 39), with a reference to Abū al-Qāsim Hibat Allāh Ibn Salāma al-Baghdādī (d. 410/1109), *al-Nāsikh wa al-mansūkh*, in the margin of al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, Cairo, 1316/1895, p. 207, but Ibn Salāma writes: *naẓalat min aw-walibā ilā ra’s arba’in aya bi-Makka*, which means to verse 39, and for the rest it is Medinan.

<sup>10</sup> Rāzī, *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Jeffery, Arthur. *Materials for the history of the text of the Qur’an*, 330–31. Leiden, 1937.

following:<sup>12</sup> Muir (88th, first Medinan period);<sup>13</sup> Nöldeke (73th with some Medinan interpolations);<sup>14</sup> Grimme (83th, last Meccan period, save verses 110–124 or 110–128, Medinan);<sup>15</sup> Hirschfeld (Meccan of the 5th type: descriptive revelations, verse 1–114, *leg.* 113; 114–128 [with? of Hirschfeld], Medinan);<sup>16</sup> Blachère (75th, verse 110, interpolation).<sup>17</sup> We can conclude that according to the great majority of the Muslim and orientalist scholars the verse quoted above is classified in the last Meccan period.

This verse requires some remarks.

***a. First of all it is within a group of verses (101–3), which constitutes “a passage packed with self-referentiality.”***<sup>18</sup>

The word *lisān* is used in numerous other instances with the un-metaphorical sense of the vocal organ “tongue.” Some of these uses do not refer to the Arabic language, but rather, to the task of

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<sup>12</sup> Watt, William Montgomery. *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an*, 207. Edinburgh, 1970. Watt has numbered himself the chronological classifications of Muir, Nöldeke and Grimme, in front of the “Egyptian,” i.e. Cairo's edition; p. 110 he has listed Q 16 in the third Meccan period. Watt, W. M. *Companion to the Qur'an*, 130. London, 1967: “Seems to be partly Meccan, partly Medinan.”

<sup>13</sup> Muir, Sir William. *The Coran. Its composition and teaching and the testimony it bears to the Holy Scriptures*, Londres, 1878<sup>3</sup>, reprint Kessinger Publishing's, n.d. (ca. 2000), p. 44. When necessary the numeration of the verses in the Flügel edition of the Koran has been replaced by that of the Cairo's edition.

<sup>14</sup> *GdQ*, I, 145–9. Third Meccan period with some (possible) Medinan interpolations.

<sup>15</sup> Grimme, Hubert. *Mohammed, I, Das Leben nach den Quellen*, II, *Einleitung in den Koran. System der koranischen Theologie*. Münster, 1892–95. II, p. 26, l. 8, p. 27, l. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Hirschfeld, Hartwig. *New researches on the composition and exegesis of the Quran*, 144. London, 1902.

<sup>17</sup> Blachère, *op. cit.*, II, p. XV.

<sup>18</sup> Wild, Stefan. “An Arabic recitation. The meta-linguistics of Qur'anic recitation.” In Idem, ed. *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an*, 148 (135–57). Wiesbaden, 2006.

prophetic communication<sup>19</sup> (Q 28: 34; 19: 97; 44: 58, this last example has to be put into relation to 54: 17 and 22: 40). In Q 20: 27: where Moses says: “And loose a knot from my tongue” and also Q 28: 34: “My bother Aaron is more eloquent than me in speech (*aḥṣabu minnī lisānan*),” we find a reversal of Ex 4: 14–15: “Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well [...]. And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth.”

Concerning the expression *lisān ‘arabi* it occurs three times in the Koran (16: 103; 26: 195; 46: 12), all during the Meccan period, with the metaphorical sense of *lisān* (tongue), that is speech. As the Koran is a very self-referential text, it is “somewhat self-conscious with respect to its language.”<sup>20</sup> It says non only that it is in Arabic or Arabic tongue/speech/language (*lisān*), but it seems also to declare that it is in a plain/clear (*mubīn*) tongue/speech/language: “We have revealed it, a lecture [or lectionary] (*qur’ānan*) in Arabic” (Q 12: 2; 20: 113); “We revealed it, a decisive utterance (*ḥukman*) in Arabic” (Q 13: 37); “a Lecture [or lectionary] in Arabic” (Q39: 28; 41: 3; 42: 7; 43: 3); “this is a confirming Scripture in the Arabic language (*lisānan ‘arabiyyan*)” (Q46: 12); “in plain Arabic speech (*bi-lisānin ‘arabiyyin mubīn*)” (Q 16: 103; 26: 195).<sup>21</sup> The reasons why the Koran insists on the quality and value of its own language seem to be polemical and apologetic. The argument for its Arabic character, first of all, has to be put into relation to Q 14: 4: “We never sent a messenger save with the language/tongue of his folk (*bi-lisāni qawmihī*), that he might make [the message] clear for them.” This declaration, by stressing the language of this messenger (Mohammed) and this folk (the Arabs) can be understood as a declaration of the ethnocentric nature of this prophetic mission, but also as a divine

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<sup>19</sup> Wansbrough, John. *Qurānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, 99. Oxford, 1977; cf. Robinson, Neal. *Discovering the Qur’an. A contemporary approach to a veiled text*, 158–59. London, 1996.

<sup>20</sup> Jenssen, Herbjørn. “Arabic language.” In *EQ*, vol. I, 132a, l. 5–6 (127–35).

<sup>21</sup> Gilliot, Cl., and Pierre Larcher. “Language and style of the Qur’an.” In *EQ*, vol. III, 113a (109–35).

proof of its universality,<sup>22</sup> challenging another sacred language, Hebrew,<sup>23</sup> perhaps also Syriac, or more generally Aramaic.<sup>24</sup>

But in stressing that it is in Arabic, the Koran answers also to accusations which were addressed to Mohammed during the Meccan period: "And we know very well that they say: "Only a mortal is teaching him." The speech (tongue) of him at whom they hint is barbarous; and this is speech (tongue) Arabic, manifest (*lisānu l-ladhi yulḥidūna ilayhi a'ḡamiyyun wa hadhā lisānun 'arabiyyun mubīn*)" (Q 16: 103). The commentators explain *yulḥidūna* (Kūfian reading: *yalḥadūna*)<sup>25</sup> by "to incline to, to become fond of," which is the meaning of Arabic *lahada*.<sup>26</sup> It is the reason why, following most of the commentators, Marracci had translated: "*Lingua ad quam inclinant (id est, qua loquuntur homines illi, a quibus dicunt Mahumetum doceri) est barbarā.*"<sup>27</sup> George Sale (1697?–1736) who is often very dependent on Marracci has: "the tongue of the person unto whom they incline is a foreign tongue."<sup>28</sup> But this interpretation à *yulḥidūna* by "to incline to" seems not to be convincing. Indeed it has been shown else-

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<sup>22</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 52–3, 98.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>24</sup> Gilliot, Cl. "Informants." In *EQ*, vol. II, 513 (p. 512–8); *Idem*. "Zur Herkunft der Gewährsmänner des Propheten." In Ohlig, Hans-Heinz, und Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, hrsg. *Die dunklen Anfänge. Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, 151–56, 167–69 (148–69). Berlin, 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. A. Sa'īd 'Alī, Muṣṭ. al-Saqqā *et al.* 30 vols. Cairo, 1954. XIV, p. 180; *Mu'jam al-Qirā'at al-qur'āniyya*, collected by A. Mukhtār 'Umar and 'Abd al-'Āl Sālīm Makram. 6 vols., vol. III, 34–5. Cairo, <sup>3</sup>1997 (8 vols., Kuwait, 1402–5/1982–5<sup>1</sup>); *Mu'jam al-Qirā'at al-qur'āniyya*, collected by al-Khaṭīb ('Abd al-Laṭīf). 11 vols., vol. IV, 689–90. Damascus, 1422/2002.

<sup>26</sup> Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, ed. 'Al. Maḥmūd Shiḥāta. 6 vols., vol. II, 487. Cairo, 1980–9; Farrā', *Ma'āni l-Qur'an*, ed. M. 'Alī al-Najjār *et al.* 3 vols., vol. II, 113. Cairo, 1955–73.

<sup>27</sup> Marracci, *Alcorani Textus Universus*, 398.

<sup>28</sup> *The Koran*; commonly called the Alcoran of Mohammed [...] by George Sale, A new edition, in one vol., 207. London: Orlando Hodgson, n.d. (ca. 1840) (2 vols., <sup>1</sup>1734).

here that the linguistic and social context to which this verse refers could be a Syriac one: the Arabic root *l-h-d*, being probably an adaptation of the Syriac *l'eṣ*, “to speak enigmatically,” “to allude to,” like the Arabic root *l-gb-ḡ*.<sup>29</sup>

The contrast *ʿajami*, often understood as barbarous or outlandish, with *ʿarabi*/Arabic, becomes very significant, if we consider Q 41 (*Fuṣṣilat*): 44: “And if we had appointed it a lecture in a foreign tongue (*qurʿānan ʿajamiyyan*) they would assuredly have said: If only its verses were expounded (*fuṣṣilat*) [so that we might understand]? What! A foreign tongue and an Arab (*ʿajami wa ʿarabi*).” *Fuṣṣilat* was understood by an ancient exegete, al-Suddī (128/745), as “clarified” (*buyyinat*).<sup>30</sup> The exegete al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035), not quoting al-Suddī, writes: “whose verses are clear; they reach us so that we understand it. We are a people of Arabs, we have nothing to do with non-Arabs (*ʿajamiyya*).”<sup>31</sup> Long before him Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) commented: “Why are they (i.e. the verses) not expounded clearly in Arabic in order that we understand it (i.e. the Koran) and we know what Mohammed says? (*hallā buyyinat bi-al-ʿarabiyyati ḥattā naḥqaba wa naʿlama mā yaqūlu Muḥammad*).”<sup>32</sup>

According to these passages of the self-referential Meccan Koran, it seems that it is a kind of commentary or exegesis in Arabic of a non-Arabic book, or of non-Arabic collections of “texts” or *logia*, or of portions of a non-Arabic lectionary. The Koran does not deny that Mohammed could have information from informants, but it insists on the fact that what Mohammed delivers is in a language that Arabs can understand.

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<sup>29</sup> Luxenberg, *Syro-aramäische Lesart*, 87–91/2004<sup>2</sup>, 116–19 / *Syro-Aramaic reading*, 112–5; cf. Gilliot, Cl. “Le Coran, fruit d’un travail collectif?” In De Smet, Daniel, G. de Callatay et J. M. F. Van Reeth, eds. *al-Kitāb. La sacralité du texte dans le monde de l’Islam*, 190–91. Leuven/Louvain, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, XXIV, 127.

<sup>31</sup> Thaʿlabī, [*Tafsīr*] *al-Kaṣḥf wa l-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qurʿān*, ed. Abū M. ʿAlī ʿĀshūr. 10 vol., vol. VIII, 298. Beirut, 2002 (a bad edition!).

<sup>32</sup> Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, III, 746.

**b. Our second remark has to do with the expression** “In plain/clear Arabic speech/tongue (*bi-lisānin ‘arabiyyin mubīn*) (Q 16: 103; 26: 195) which still needs more reflection, because the translation given here is—like most translations of the phrase—misleading from the point of view of morphology, and consequently of semantics. *Mubīn* is the active participle of the causative-factitive *abāna*, which can be understood as: “making [things] clear” (so understood by al-Suddī and others, as seen above). Such an understanding of that expression is suggested by Q 14: 4 which utilizes the causative factitive *bayyana*: “And we never sent a messenger save with the language/tongue of his folk, that he might make [the message] clear for them (*li-yubayyina labum*).”

But the adjectival opposition found in Q 16: 103 between *a‘jamī* on the one hand, and *‘arabī* and *mubīn*, on the other hand, was understood by the exegetes as “barbarous,” i.e. non-Arabic (*‘ajamī*) and indistinct (*a‘jamī*) in contradistinction with clear/pure Arabic.<sup>33</sup> “Muḥammad’s quite conscious effort to create an Arabic holy book, a *Qur‘ān*, corresponding to the Christian Syriac *Ḳeryāna*” has been pointed out by G. Widengren (1907–96).<sup>34</sup>

The consequence according to the theologians is that the Koran must be in a “smooth, soft, and plain/distinct speech (*sabl, layyin, wādīl*)»: «In the Koran there is no unusual/obscure (*gharīb*) sound-complex (*ḥarf*, or articulation, as the linguists now say) from the manner of speaking (*luḡba*) of Quraysh, save three, because the speech (*kalām*) of Quraysh is smooth, soft, and plain/distinct, and the speech of the [other] Arabs is uncivilized (*waḥshī*) unusual/obscure.”<sup>35</sup> We shall not deal more here on the alleged supe-

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<sup>33</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 98–9; Larcher, Pierre. “Language, Concept of.” In *EQ*, vol. III, 108–9; Gilliot and Larcher, “Language and style,” 114–5.

<sup>34</sup> Widengren, Geo. *Muhammad, the apostle of God, and his ascension*, 152. Uppsala, 1955.

<sup>35</sup> Abū al-‘Izz al-Wāsiṭī (d. 521/1127), *al-Irshād fi al-qirā‘at al-‘asbr*, quoted by Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, chap. 37, *al-Itqān fi ‘ulūm al-Qur‘ān*, ed. M. Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, revised ed. 4 vols. in 2, vol. II, 124. Beirut, 1974–5 (Cairo, 1967); the three articulations quoted are: 17: 51 (*fa-sa-yunghidūna*), 4: 85 (*muqitan*), and 8: 57 (*fa-sharrid bi-him*).

riority of the Qurayshī manner of speaking and the so-called Qurayshī character of the language of the Koran, it has been done elsewhere.<sup>36</sup>

The adjectival *mubīn* occurs also in another latter Meccan or early Medinian passage Q 12 (Yūsuf): 1–2 (chronology: 77th for Muir, Nöldeke; 85 for Grimme; 53th for Cairo’s edition, save verses 1–3,7 Medinan):<sup>37</sup> “These are the signs of the manifest [or rather: making things clear] book (*tilka āyātu al-Kitābi al-mubīn*). We have sent it down as an Arabic lectionary (*innā anzalnāhu Qur’ānan ‘arabiyyan*); haply you will understand (*la’allakum taqilūn*)” (trans. Arberry modified by us). Here again *mubīn* means “making things clear” in opposition to a lectionary in a foreign language, (perhaps) that this Arabic lectionary explains or comments in Arabic! For this verse, Ch. Luxenberg proposes the following translation according to the Syro-Aramaic understanding (but it could be also understood in this way without having recourse to Syriac): “These are the (*scriptural*) signs (i.e. the *letters* = the *written copy, script*) of the elucidated

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<sup>36</sup> Gilliot and Larcher, “Language and style,” 115–21, *et passim*. V. the following seminal studies of Larcher, P. “Neuf traditions sur la langue coranique rapportées par al-Farrā’ *et alii*.” In Michalak-Pikulska, B., and A. Pikulski, eds. *Authority, Privacy and Public Order in Islam 2004*, 469–84. OLA. Leuven, 2004; Idem. “D’Ibn Fāris à al-Farrā’. ou un retour aux sources sur la *luġa al-fuṣṣā*.” *Asiatische Studien. Etudes Asiatiques* LIX/3 (2005): 797–804; Idem. “Un texte d’al-Fārābī sur la ‘langue arabe’ ré-écrit?” In Edzard, Lutz, and Janet Watson, eds. *Grammar as a Window onto Arabic Humanism. A Collection of Articles in Honour of Michael G. Carter*, 108–129. Wiesbaden, 2006; Idem. “Qu’est-ce que l’arabe du Coran? Réflexions d’un linguiste.” In Ayoub, Georgine, et Jérôme Lentin, eds. *Cahiers de linguistique de l’INALCO* 5 (2003–2005) [années de tomaisson], *Linguistique arabe*, 2008, p. 27–47.

<sup>37</sup> Watt, *Bell’s Introduction*, 207; [Aldeeb] *Le Coran*, texte arabe et traduction française par ordre chronologique selon l’Azhar avec renvoi aux variantes, aux abrogations et aux écrits juifs et chrétiens, par Sami Awad Aldeeb Abu-Sahliĥ (1949–), Vevey (Suisse), 2008, p. 15.



Scripture. We have sent them down as an Arabic *lectionary* (= koran) (or as an Arabic *reading*) *so that you may understand (it).*"<sup>38</sup>

The idea that the Koran "translates", or rather transposes (French: *transposer*; German: *übertragen*) into Arabic or comments passages from a foreign lectionary seems to be more clearly expressed in other passages.

## 2. What do *fuṣṣilat* and *mufaṣṣal* "really" mean?

### a. Q 41: 44 and *fuṣṣilat*

In a certain way, the Meccan Arabic lectionary makes a distinction between a "lectionary in a foreign language" (*qur'ānan a'jamiyyan*), and the commentary, explanation, translation or transposition (German: *Übertragung*), i.e. *al-mufaṣṣal*, which is delivered by Mohammed. The Koran itself seems to suggest that some of its passages are commentaries of a lectionary recited or read in a foreign language (Syriac or Aramaic? We shall examine this below): "If we had made it a barbarous lectionary (*qur'ānan a'jamiyyan*), they would have say: 'Why are its signs not distinguished (*law lā fuṣṣilat āyātuhū*)? What, barbarous and Arabic? (*a'jamiyyun wa 'arabiyyun*). Say: "To the believers it is a guidance, and a healing'" (41, 44).<sup>39</sup>

In the context, *fuṣṣilat* does not mean "to be distinguished or separated," but "rendered clear," that is to be explained, *buyyināt*, in the already seen interpretation of al-Suddī, and also in the choice of Ṭabarī himself,<sup>40</sup> who, of course do not mean, as we do, that Mohammed was explaining parts of previous non-Arabic Scriptures. In some languages till now to "interpret" means both to explain and to translate (Fr *interpréter*, *interprète*; German *übertragen*: to translate, to transpose, which is a form of explanation or free translation: Arabic *tarjama*: to translate, but *turjumān/tarjumān* has the meaning of translator, but also of exegete. Ibn 'Abbās is said to have been called by his cousin Mohammed *turjumān/tarjumān al-Qur'ān*. *Tarjama* comme from the Syro-Aramaic *targemr*: to interpret,

<sup>38</sup> Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic reading*, 105–6 / *Syro-aramäische Lesart*, 12000, 80–1 / 22004, 112; confirmed by Van Reeth, "Scribes," 77.

<sup>39</sup> Van Reeth, "Le Coran et les scribes," 77.

<sup>40</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, XXIV, 90, ad Q 41: 1–2.

to explain). In the synagogues, the rabbis used to read *targum*-s in Aramaic after the reading Hebrew Torah, which uneducated people could not understand.<sup>41</sup> So *faṣṣala* has the meaning of the Syro-Aramaic *prāsh/parresh*, to interpret, to explain, and it is a synonym of *bayyana*.<sup>42</sup>

*Fuṣṣilat* is understood by the exegetes in contradistinction with *uhkīmat*, in Q 11 (*Hūd*): 1: “A book whose verses are set clear, and then distinguished from One All-wise, All-aware (*kitābun uhkīmat āyātuhu, thumma fuṣṣilat min ladun ḥakīmin khabīr*)” (trans. Aberry), which J. Horovitz comments: “seine Verse sind fest zusammengefügt und dabei jeder einzelne wohl durchgearbeitet.”<sup>43</sup>

### ***b. ‘Ā’isha on al-mufaṣṣal and “the Prophet of the world’s end”***

But this understanding of *uhkīmat/muhkam* versus *fuṣṣilat/mufaṣṣal*, corresponding to the interpretation of the exegetes does not seem to fit with the context of the Meccan predication. According to a tradition transmitted by Yūsuf b. Māhak al-Fārisī al-Makkī (d. 103/721, 110, perhaps even 114)<sup>44</sup> from ‘Ā’isha (quoted by Tor Andrae,<sup>45</sup> then by Günther Lüling):<sup>46</sup> “The first [revelation] of it which

<sup>41</sup> Van Reeth, “Scribes,” 76.

<sup>42</sup> Luxenberg, *Syro-aramäische Lesart*, 85 / <sup>2</sup>2004, 117 / *Syro-Aramaic reading*, 110. See the excellent study of Stetkevych, Jaroslav. “Arabic hermeneutical terminology. Paradox and the production of meaning.” *JNES* 48 (1989): 81–96, on *fassara, faṣṣala, bayan, mubin, tabyin*, etc. (88–91).

<sup>43</sup> Horovitz, Josef. *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin and Leipzig, 92+6, p. 75, n. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Mizzī *Tabdhīb al-kamāl fī asmā’ al-rijāl*, eds. ‘Abīd, A. ‘A., and Āghā, Ḥ. A., revised by S. Zakkār. 23 vols., vol. XX, pp. 501–3, no. 7744. Beirut, 1414/1994.

<sup>45</sup> Andrae, Tor. “Die Legenden von der Berufung Mohammeds.” *Le Monde Oriental* 6 (1912): 18 (5–18).

<sup>46</sup> Lüling, Günter. *Über den Ur-Qur’an. Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Qur’an*, p. 62 and n. 56 (p. 427). Erlangen 1974 [c.r. Rodinson, Maxime, in *Der Islam* 54 (1977): 321–25] / (*Über den Urkoran...*, <sup>2</sup>1993) / English translation and revised ed.: *A Challenge to Islam for reformation. The rediscovery and reliable reconstruction of a comprehensive pre-Islamic Christian hymnal hidden in the Koran under earliest Islamic reinterpretation*.

descended was a sura of *al-mufaṣṣal* in which Paradise and Hell were mentioned (*innamā naẓala anwalu mā naẓala minbu suratun min al-mufaṣṣali fibā dhikri al-jannati wa al-nār*)<sup>47</sup> This tradition poses a problem to the commentators for whom the first revealed sura is sura 96 (*‘Alaq/Iqra’*), in which there is no mention of Paradise and Hell. It is the reason why Ibn Hajar proposes to understand *anwalu mā naẓala*: “Among the first...” and expresses the hypothesis that it could be Q 74 (*Muddathbir*), in which Paradise and Hell are mentioned at the end, adding that this part of the sura was revealed “before the rest of sura *Iqra’* (Q 96, that is after verses 1–5 or more)”<sup>48</sup>

Already in 1912 Tor Andrae had called attention upon the fact that the suras 96 and 74, with their scenes of prophetic call were not the first suras, but that the first revelations according to an old well-established tradition were commentaries of previous Scriptures or traditions.<sup>49</sup>

The great divergences of the exegetes on what *al-mufaṣṣal* could refer to are well known.<sup>50</sup> But the tradition of ‘Ā’isha gives a hint to an interpretation of *al-mufaṣṣal* and *fuṣṣilat* which the exegetes could absolutely not have. It reminds first of all to the fact that the first predication of Mohammed dealt with the judgement and here-

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*tions*, 69 and n. 69. Delhi, 2003; Gilliot, “Les traditions sur la composition/coordination du Coran,” 20–1.

<sup>47</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 46, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*, 6, ed. Krehl, III, p. 395 / Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-barī bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 13 vols. + *Muqaddima*, ed. ‘A. ‘A. Bāz, numeration of the chapters and *ḥadīth*-s by M. Fu’ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī, under the la direction of Muḥibb al-Dīn Khaṭīb. Cairo, 1390/1970 (reprint Beirut, n.d.), vol. IX, 38–9, n° 4993 / Trad. Houdas (el-Bokhārī, *Les Traditions islamiques*. 4 vols., translation O. Houdas and W. Marçais. Paris, 1903–14), vol. III, 526.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Hajar, *Fath*, IX, 40, l. 18–21.

<sup>49</sup> Andrae, “Die Legenden von der Berufung Mohammeds;” Lüling, *Wiederentdeckung*, 98.

<sup>50</sup> See our excursus, in Gilliot, “Collecte ou mémorisation,” 104–6, with bibliography.

after world.<sup>51</sup> Paul Casanova (1861–1926) has shown that Mohammed considered himself at the beginning of his message (and probably also latter) as *nabī al-malḥama*<sup>52</sup> (*rasūl al-malḥama*<sup>53</sup> or *nabī al-malāḥim*),<sup>54</sup> that is “the prophet of the world’s end.”<sup>55</sup> To these qualifications could be added the Gatherer (*al-ḥāshir*) with the explanation of Jubayr b. Muḥ‘im al-Nawfalī (d. 58/677)<sup>56</sup> given to ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān: Mohammed has been called *al-ḥāshir* “Because he was sent with the Hour, a warner to you (*nadhīrun lakum*) in front of a great torment (*bayna yaday ‘adhābin shadīd*).”<sup>57</sup> This thesis corresponds to the tradition attributed to ‘Ā’isha.

Passages of the “first Koran” seem to be commentaries of a previous Lectionary (in Syriac?). Mohammed (or/and others?) acts

<sup>51</sup> Bell, Richard. *The Origin of Islam in its Christian environment*, 69–70. Edinburgh University, 1925; London, 1926, on the contrary, writes: “Too exclusive attention has of late been paid to his proclamation of the approaching judgement” (p. 69). He insists more “the idea of gratitude to God,” the power and bounty the Creator, in the first predications; p. 74 sqq.

<sup>52</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*. 9 vols., vol. I, 105, l. 2–3. Beirut, 1957–1959, according to Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī; cf. Maqrīzī, *Imtā‘ al-asma‘ bi-mā li-rasūl Allāh min al-abnā’ wa l-amwāl wa l-ḥafada wa l-matā’*, ed. M. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Namīsī. 15 vols. Beirut, 1420/1999. Vol. II, p. 143 (from Jubayr b. Muḥ‘im), p. 143–44 (from Abū Mūsā). P. 144, al-Ḥākim al-Nīsāburī and others understand this name as a that of a prophet sent to kill the unbelievers; or the one sent with the sword; Ibn al-Athīr (Majd al-Dīn), *al-Nibāya fī gharīb al-ḥadīth*, ed. Ṭ. A. al-Zāwī and M. al-Ṭīnāhī. 5 vols., vol. IV, 240. Le Caire, 1963–66.

<sup>53</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, I, 105, l. 6, according to Mujāhid b. Jabr.

<sup>54</sup> Maqrīzī, *Imtā‘*, I, 5, l. 4; II, 146, l. 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Mohammed et la fin du monde. Étude critique sur l’islam primitif I–II/1–2*, 46–53. Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1911, 1913, 1924; cf. Van Reeth, “Le Coran et les scribes,” 71.

<sup>56</sup> Mizzī, *Tabdhīb*, III, 332–34, no. 888.

<sup>57</sup> Maqrīzī, *Imtā‘*, II, 144, l. 1–8. It should be added that *al-ḥāshir* is also a collector of spoils. In a latter sense *al-ḥushshār* signify collectors of the tithes and poll-taxes (*ummāl al-‘usūr wa al-jizya*); Zabīdī, *Tāj al-‘arūs*, ed. ‘Abd al-Sattār A. Farāj *et al.* 40 vols., vol. XI, 23b. Kuwayt, 1385–1422/1965–2001; Lane, Edward William. *An Arabic-English lexicon*, 2 vols., vol. I, 575a. Cambridge, 1984 (London, 1877–93).

in the way of the Syriac *māpashqānā* (commentator, interpreter, translator); the equivalent of *mufaṣṣal* is the Syriac *mashlāmānūtā*.<sup>58</sup> *Faṣṣala* in this context, the *kitāb mubīn* (Q 5: 15; 41: 1) or the *qur'ān mubīn* (Q 15: 1) by which the Arabic lectionary is qualified is a book which *translates* and *explains*.<sup>59</sup>

### c. al-mufaṣṣal called “the Arabic”!

Again Islamic tradition seems to support this hypothesis (i.e. according which passages of the “first Koran” seem to be commentaries of a previous Lectionary), besides the narrative attributed to ‘Ā’isha quoted above. In a loose (*mursal*) tradition found only, till now, in the Koranic Commentary of Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) there is an important remark of one of the transmitters about *al-mufaṣṣal*:<sup>60</sup> Ya‘qūb b. Ibrāhīm<sup>61</sup>/Ibn ‘Ulayya<sup>62</sup>/(‘an) Khālīd al-Ḥadhhdhā’ (d. 141/758)<sup>63</sup>/(‘an) Abū Qilāba (d. 107/725 or 106):<sup>64</sup> The Apostle of God said: “I have been given the seven long (suras) in the place of the Torah, the duplicated in the place of the Psalms, the hundreds in the place of the Gospel, and I have been given preference with the discret<sup>65</sup> (suras or book).” Khālīd al-Ḥadhhdhā’ has made a short, but to us important, remark on *al-mufaṣṣal*: “They used to call

<sup>58</sup> Van Reeth, “Scribes,” 80.

<sup>59</sup> Van Reeth, “Le Coran et les scribes,” 80; cf. Lüling, *Challenge*, 13, 69, 111, already understood *mufaṣṣal* as a commentary or a gloss.

<sup>60</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 16 vols. (unachieved), ed. Shākir, vol. I, 100, no. 127. Cairo, 1954–68 (1969<sup>2</sup>, for some vols.).

<sup>61</sup> Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb b. Ibrāhīm b. Kathīr al-‘Abdī al-Qaysī al-Dawraqī al-Baghdādī, d. 252/866; Gilliot, [El] *Exégèse, langue et théologie en islam. L’exégèse coranique de Tabarī*, 28. Paris, 1990.

<sup>62</sup> Abū Bīshr Ismā‘īl b. Ibrāhīm b. Miqṣam al-Asadī al-Baṣrī al-Kūfī, d. 193/809; Gilliot, *El*, *ibid*.

<sup>63</sup> Abū al-Munāzil (and not Abū al-Manāzil) Khālīd b. Mihrān al-Baṣrī al-Ḥadhhdhā’; Dhahabī, *Sīyar a’lam al-nubalā’*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt, *et al.* 25 vols. Beirut, 1981–8. VI, 190–2; Id., *Miṣān al-‘itidāl fi naqd al-rījal*, ed. ‘A. M. al-Bijāwī. 4 vols., vol. I, 642–43, no. 2466. Cairo, 1963.

<sup>64</sup> Abū Qilāba ‘Abd Allāh b. Zayd al-Jarmī; Dhahabī, *Sīyar*, IV, 468–75.

<sup>65</sup> “Discret,” here in the mathematic, medical, and linguistic meaning: composed of separated elements.

*al-mufaṣṣal*: the Arabic. One of them has said: there is no prostration in the Arabic (*kānū yusammūna al-mufaṣṣala: al-‘arabiyya. Qālā ba‘dubum: laysa fī al-‘arabiyyi saǧda.*)”

This tradition and the short commentary of Khālid al-Ḥadhhdhā’ on *al-mufaṣṣal* require some explanations:

(1) The seven long (suras), the duplicated, the hundreds, *al-mufaṣṣal* in the traditional Islamic understanding.<sup>66</sup>

The seven long (suras) (*al-sab‘ al-ṭūwal*, or *al-ṭūwāl* in other traditions) are suras: 2 (*Baqara*), 3 (*Al ‘Imrān*), 4 (*Nisā*), 5 (*Mā’ida*), 6 (*An‘ām*), 7 (*A‘rāf*), 10 (*Yūnus*).<sup>67</sup> But in other versions, 10 is replaced by 9 (*Barā‘a/Tawba*), because ‘Uthmān has considered 8 (*An-fāl*) and 9 (*Barā‘a*), being not separated by the basmala (they are called *al-qarīnatān*), a single sura.<sup>68</sup>

The hundreds (*al-mi‘ūn*) are the suras whose verses numbers are one hundred, more or less.<sup>69</sup> Or they are the suras which follow the seven long suras, and whose verses numbers are one hundred, more or less.<sup>70</sup>

The “duplicated” (or “repeated,” *al-mathānī*)<sup>71</sup> sūras (or verses) are the ones which duplicate the hundreds and follow them: the hundreds have the first (formulations), and the duplicated have repetitions (of the previous). It has been said that they have been called so because they repeat the parables, statements and warnings

<sup>66</sup> For more references to sources, above all on *al-mufaṣṣal*, see the excursus of Gilliot, “Collecte ou mémorisation,” 104–6.

<sup>67</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Shākir, I, 101–2, according to Sa‘īb b. Jubayr; cf. Sakhāwī (‘Alam al-Dīn), *Jamāl al-qurrā’ wa kamāl al-iqrā’*, ed. ‘A. Ḥ. al-Bawwāb. 2 vols., vol. I, 34. Mecca, 1408/1987; cf. Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, cap. 18, I, 220.

<sup>68</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Shākir, I, 102, no. 131, according to Ibn ‘Abbās. The qualification *al-qarīnatān* is taken up from Sakhāwī, *Jamāl al-qurrā’*, I, *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Shākir, I, 103; Sakhāwī, *Jamāl al-qurrā’*, I, 35.

<sup>70</sup> Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, I, 220.

<sup>71</sup> On the meaning of *mathānī* is Q 15 (*Hijr*): 87, and applicated to the first sura, v. *GdQ*, I, 114–6.

(*al-amthāl wa al-khabar wa al-ibar*), etc.<sup>72</sup> These whimsical explanations show only one thing: the exegetes did not know what the Koranic word *al-mathānī* means (probably a term borrowed from the Aramaic or Jewish-Aramaic language, as proposed by Nöldeke).<sup>73</sup> But we cannot enter here in details, our main interest being *al-mufaṣṣal*.

As for *al-mufaṣṣal*, considered as a part of the Koran, all the Muslim scholars agree that it finishes at the end of the Koran, but they disagree on its beginning, which can be: 1. *al-Ṣaffāt* (37); 2. *al-Jāthiya* (45); 3. *al-Qitāl* (i.e. *Muḥammad*, 47); 4. *al-Faṭḥ* (48); 5. *al-Ḥujurāt* (49); 6. *Qāf* (50); 7. *al-Ṣaff* (61); 8. *Tabāraka* (i.e. *al-Mulke*, 67); 9. *Sabbih* (87);<sup>74</sup> 10. *al-Duḥā* (93).<sup>75</sup> Ibn a. al-Ṣayf al-Yamanī<sup>76</sup> comes out in favour of 1, 7 and 8; al-Dizmārī,<sup>77</sup> in his commentary of (Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī's) *al-Tanbih*, for 1 and 8; al-Marwazī,<sup>78</sup> in his commentary, for no. 9; al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998) and al-Māwardī

<sup>72</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Shākir, I, 103; Fīrūzābādī (Abū al-Ṭāhir Muḥyi al-Dīn M. b. Ya'qūb), *Baṣā'ir dhawī al-tamyiz fī laṭā'if al-Kitāb al-'aẓīz*, ed. M. 'A. al-Najjār and 'Abd al-'Alīm al-Ṭahāwī. 6 vols., vol. II, 345–6. Cairo, 1963–73, gives a list of the suras allegedly pertaining to *al-mathānī*.

<sup>73</sup> V. also Jeffery, Arthur. *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, 257–58. Baroda, 1938.

<sup>74</sup> Which has the favour of Ibn al-Firkāh, according to Sakhāwī, *Jamal al-qurra'*, I, 195, l. 1. He is probably Burhān al-Dīn Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ibr. al-Fazārī al-Miṣrī al-Dimashqī, d. 7th Jumāda I 628/13th March 1231; Kaḥḥāla, *Mu'jam*, I, 43–4.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Faṭḥ*, II, 249, l. 24–5 (on Bukhārī, 10, *Adhan*, 99, *ḥadīth* no. 765, p. 247 of Ibn Ḥajar, *Faṭḥ*; Bukhārī, ed. Krehl, I, 197, l. 6–8); cf. Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, I, 121.

<sup>76</sup> Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Zabīdī al-Makkī, d. 609/1212; Kaḥḥāla, 'Umar Riḍā. *Mu'jam al-mu'allifīn*, 15 vols., vol. IX, 57. Damascus, 1957–61.

<sup>77</sup> Kamāl al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Kashāsib b. 'Alī al-Dizmārī al-Shāfi'ī al-Ṣūfi, d. 17 rabī II 643 / 11th September 1245; Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn. *Ṭabaqāt al-shafī'iyya al-kubrā*, ed. M. M. al-Ṭināhī and 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Ḥulw. 10 vols. Cairo, 1964–76. VIII, 30, n° 1054; Kaḥḥāla, *Mu'jam*, II, 53a.

<sup>78</sup> Perhaps Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Aḥmad (d. 340/901), in his commentary *al-Muzanī's Mukhtasar*; Kaḥḥāla, *Mu'jam*, I, 3–4.

(d. 450/1058) for no. 10. Nawawī (d. 676/1277) gives only no. 3, 5 and 6. For Ibn Ḥajar, no. 5 (49, *Hujurat*) is the preferable (*al-rājiḥ*).<sup>79</sup> Some, like Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī (d. 694/1295), consider that *al-mufaṣṣal* is the whole Koran, an opinion which is anomalous (*shādh*) to Ibn Ḥajar.

The explanations given on the meaning of *al-mufaṣṣal* are as fanciful as those on the sense of *al-mathānī*: “It is so called because of the great numbers of sections (*fuṣūl*) into which its suras are divided by the *basmala* (*li-kaṭbrati al-fuṣūli allatī bayna suwaribā bi-‘bi-smi Llāhi l-Raḥmāni al-raḥīm*)”,<sup>80</sup> or by the *takbīr*,<sup>81</sup> or “Because of the shortness of its suras,”<sup>82</sup> or “Because of the small numbers of verses contained in its suras (*li-qīṣari a‘dādi suwaribi min al-āy*);”<sup>83</sup> or it has been so called: “Because of the small number of abrogated (verses) it contains, and it is the reason why it is (also) called “the one firmly established” (*al-muḥkam*).”<sup>84</sup> To understand this equivalence between *mufaṣṣal* and *muḥkam* in relation with the abrogation, it should be reminded that *mufaṣṣal* can mean “to be made to measure,” so without abrogation or rather with few abrogations.

(2) The remark of Khālid al-Ḥadhdhā: “They used to call *al-mufaṣṣal*: the Arabic. One of them has said: there is no prostration in the Arabic (*ka‘nū yusammūna al-mufaṣṣala: al-‘arabiyya* (with no *tā marbūta*) *Qāla ba‘ḍuhum: laysa fī al-‘arabiyyi sajdā*).”

First of all, the Arabs, at the beginning of Islam, were already well acquainted with the prostration (*sujūd*). They knew this practice which was diffused in the regions surrounding Arabia, and among

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<sup>79</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath*, II, 249 (on Bukhārī, 10, *Aḍbān*, 99, *ḥadīth* no. 765); cf. Zabīdī, *Tāj*, XXX, 167–68, for the whole, taken up from Ibn Ḥajar and Suyūṭī, with some additions.

<sup>80</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Shākir, I, 101; cf. Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, I, 121.

<sup>81</sup> Sakhāwī, *Jamāl al-qurrā’*, I, 35.

<sup>82</sup> Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 18 vols. in 9., vol. VI, 106–7. Cairo, 1349/1929, reprint Beirut, n.d.

<sup>83</sup> Zabīdī, *Tāj*, XXX, 168.

<sup>84</sup> Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, *ibid.*; Fīrūzābādī, *Baṣā’ir*, IV, 195, l. 1–2.



Christians and Jews.<sup>85</sup> When Islam came, of all the Muslim rites, it was the ritual prayer that met with the greatest opposition,<sup>86</sup> and the reason for this reluctance was the opposition to prostration itself, considered an alien practice and humiliating for their honour.<sup>87</sup>

The number of ritual prostrations in the Koran ranges between four and fifteen in *ḥadīth* literature; these figures exclude all the prostrations from the *mufaṣṣal*. But there are also traditions prescribing prostration for verses from the *mufaṣṣal* (twelve or fourteen, or even sixteen prostrations).<sup>88</sup> An attempt to harmonize the different statements on prostration in the *mufaṣṣal* is found, among others, in the following tradition: [...] Abū Qilāba/'an Maṭar al-Warrāq<sup>89</sup>/Ikrima/Ibn 'Abbās: "The Prophet never prostrated himself at the recitation of the *mufaṣṣal* since he moved to Medina (*lam yaṣjud fī shay'in min al-mufaṣṣali mundbu taḥawwala ilā al-Madīna*)." <sup>90</sup> Those who consider this tradition reliable think that it abrogates

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<sup>85</sup> Tottoli, Roberto. "Muslim attitudes towards prostration (*sujūd*). I Arabs and prostration at the beginning of Islam and in the Qur'an." *Stud. Isl.* 88 (1998): 5–17 (5–34)

<sup>86</sup> Goldziher, Ignaz. *Mubammedanische Studien*, 2 vols. Halle, 1889–90. I, 33: "[...] unter allen Ceremonien und Riten des Dīn hat aber keine mehr Widerstand erfahren, vor keiner religiösen Uebung haben sie entschiedenern Widerwillen bekundet, als vor dem Ritus des Gebetes," and p. 33–9.

<sup>87</sup> Tottoli, "Muslim attitudes towards prostration," 17; Kister, Meir J. "Some reports concerning al-Ṭā'if," *JSAI* 1 (1979): 3–6 (1–18).

<sup>88</sup> Tottoli, Roberto. "Traditions and controversies concerning the *suḡūd al-Qur'an* in *ḥadīth* literature." *ZDMG* 147 (1997): 376–78 (371–93).

<sup>89</sup> Maṭar b. Ṭahmān al-Warrāq Abū Rajā' al-Khurāsānī al-Baṣrī, d. 129/ inc. 29 September 746; Mizzī, *Tabdhib*, XVIII, 136–37, no. 6586; Ibn 'Adī, *al-Kamil li-l-dū'afā'*, ed. 'Ā. A. 'Abd al-Mawjūd and 'A. M. Mu'awwad. 9 vols., vol. VIII, 134, no. 1882. Beirut, 1418/1997.

<sup>90</sup> Ibn Shāhīn, a. Ḥafṣ 'Umar b. Aḥmad (d. 385/995). *al-Nasikh wa al-mansukh fī al-ḥadīth*, ed. M. Ibn al-Ḥifnāwī, 240, no. 238. Mansoura, 1416/1995; Ibn Khuzayma, Abū Bakr Muḥammad. *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. M. Muṣṭ. al-A'zamī, 4 vols., vol. I, 280–81, no. 559–60. Beirut, 1390–9/1970–79; Nawawī, *Sharḥ*, V, 76–7: ad Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 8 (*Masajid*), 20 (*Sujūd al-tilawa*), I, 405–7).

traditions in which Mohammed appears as prostrating himself at the recitation of a sura or of verses from the *mufaṣṣal*, like this one, according to Ibn Maʿūd: “The first sura in which prostration (*sajda*) was sent down is *wa al-najm* (*Najm*, 53): the Prophet recited it in Mecca and he prostrated himself (*fa-sajada*).”<sup>91</sup>

We can say that the “One of them has said: there is no prostration in the Arabic” quoted by the Baṣrian Khālid al-Ḥadhdhāʾ followed the “Baṣrian” tradition of Ibn ‘Abbās.

(3) We can return at last to the core of our subject, after these long but necessary explanations, with the commentary of Khālid al-Ḥadhdhāʾ: “They used to call *al-mufaṣṣal*: the Arabic. One of them has said: there is no prostration in the Arabic (*kānū yusammūna al-mufaṣṣala: al-‘arabiyya* (with no *ṭā’ marbūṭa*) *Qālā ba’ ḍubum: laysa fī al-‘arabiyyi sajda*).” In the Prophetic tradition transmitted by Abū Qilāba, the three previous Scriptures which figure in the Koran (*al-Tawrāt, al-Zabūr, al-Injīl*) are mentioned, but the great specificity of Muhammed, by which he has been favoured, is *al-mufaṣṣal*. This *mufaṣṣal* is qualified by Khālid al-Ḥadhdhāʾ of “the Arabic,” so that it becomes a kind of “name,” in the following declaration “there is no prostration in the Arabic”!

None of these three Scriptures were “Arabic.” The Torah and the Psalms were in Hebrew, but explained/translated (*mufaṣṣar/mufaṣṣal*) in Amaraic in targums; the Gospel (in singular) was in Syriac (the *Diatessaron*) but Mohammed and those who have helped him translated/explained logia from these Scriptures, in Mecca, in his language (Arabic)

According to the Koran itself, it is not only comparable, but essentially similar to the previous Scriptures, confirming them: “This Koran could not have been forged apart from God; but it is a confirmation of (*taṣḍīqa alladhi*) what is before it, and a distinguishing of the Book (*tafṣīla al-kitābi*), wherein is no doubt, from the Lord of all Being” (Q 10: 37, trans. Arberry). *Tafṣīla al-kitābi* should be put in relation with *mufaṣṣal* (same root and same grammatical pattern, second form, as *tafṣīl*) and be translated by explana-

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<sup>91</sup> Ibn Shāhīn, *Nāsikh*, 239, no. 236, or no. 237, according to Abū Hurayra.

tion (in Arabic) of a Book which is not in Arabic. It corresponds to *al-mufaṣṣal: al-ʿarabī* or *al-ʿarabī*, in the declaration of Khālid al-Ḥadhdhāʾ.

### 3. Collections and interpretation in Arabic

That the Koran himself refers to collections of texts or traditions being the basis of the early predications is not a new idea: "The frequent phrase 'this Qurʾān' must often mean not a single passage but a collection of passages, and thus seems to imply the existence of other Qurʾāns. Similarly the phrase 'an Arabic Qurʾān' seems to imply that there may be Qurʾāns in other languages. (The phrases occur in proximity in 39.27/8f.).<sup>92</sup> When it is further remembered that the verb *qaraʾa* is probably not an original Arabic root, and that the noun *qurʾān* almost certainly came into Arabic to represent the Syriac *qeryānā*, meaning the scriptural reading or lesson in church, the way is opened to the solution of the problem. The purpose of an Arabic Qurʾān was to give the Arabs a body of lessons comparable to those of the Christians and Jews. It is known, too, not only from Tradition and continuing practice, but also from the Qurʾān itself that it was thus used liturgically [17.78/80; 73.20]<sup>93</sup>."<sup>94</sup>

That the Koran is a liturgical book is commonly accepted; this feature has been stressed especially for the Meccan suras in several

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<sup>92</sup> Q 39 (*Zumar*): 27–8: "Indeed we have sruck for the people in this Koran (*fī ḥādihā al-qurʾāni*) every manner of similitude (*min kulli mathalin*); haply thye will remember; an Arabic Koran, wherein there is no crookedness (*qurʾānan ʿarabiyyan ḡayra dhi ʿiwajin*); hapley they will be goodfearing."

<sup>93</sup> Q 73 (*Muzammil*): 20: "Thy Lord knows that thou keepest vigil nearly two-thirds of the night (*annaka taqumu adnā thuluthayī al-laylī*), or a half of it, or a third of it, and a party of those with thee."

<sup>94</sup> Watt, William Montgomery. *Bell's Introduction to the Qurʾān*, completely revised and enlarged, 136–37. Edinburgh, 1970; cf. Bowman, John (1916–2006). "Holy Scriptures, lectionaries and the Qurʾān." In Johns, Anthony Hearle, ed. *International Congress for the study of the Qurʾān, Canberra, Australian National University, 8–13 May 1980*, 32–4 (29–37). Canberra: ANU, <sup>2</sup>1983.

studies of Angelika Neuwirth.<sup>95</sup> But besides that several scholars have called the attention upon a special form of its dependance from previous traditions and practices: “[...] this suggests that liturgy, specially liturgical poetry,<sup>96</sup> the Christian liturgy, which includes the Jewish has decisively stimulated and influenced Mohammed.”<sup>97</sup>

That idea of compiling a lectionary from extracts of the previous Scriptures seems to appear in the following passage Q 75 (*Qiyāma*): 16–19: “Move not thy tongue with it to haste it; ours is to gather it, and to recite it. So, when we recite it, follow its recitation. Then ours is to explain it (*Inna ‘alaynā jamī‘ahu wa qur’ānahu, fa-idā qarā nāhu fa-’tbā qur’ānahu, tumma inna ‘alaynā bayānahu*).”

*Bayānahu*, like *mubin*, *fuṣṣilat*, *mufaṣṣal*, *buyyināt*, etc., may refer to the process of interpretation-translation-explanation of Mohammed and of those who helped him in his task of commentator. The logia or extracts from a liturgical lectionary, of from several lectionaries, are interpreted in Arabic.

This seems suggested also in Q 19: 97: “Now we have made it easy in thy tongue that thou mayest bear good tidings thereby to

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<sup>95</sup> V. several articles or contributions of Angelika Neuwirth, e.g. recently: “Psalmen—im Koran neu gelesen (Ps 104 und 136).” In Hartwig, Dirk, et al., ed. *Im vollen Licht der Geschichte.* *Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der Koranforschung*, 160–2 “liturgische Beleuchtung” (157–189). Würzburg, 2008. She considers that the word *sura* (probably borrowed from Syriac *shūrāya*, “beginning,” in the introduction to a psalm’s recitation) “a liturgical concept” (Der liturgische Begriff *sura*), p. 160; Id., “Vom Rezitationstext über die Liturgie zum Kanon. Zu Entstehung und Wiederauflösung der Surenkomposition im Verlauf der Entwicklung eines islamischen Kultus.” In Wild, Stefan, ed. *The Qur’an as Text*, Leiden. Brill, 1996, summary, p. 100–3 (69–105) / French trans. “Du texte de récitation au canon en passant par la liturgie. A propos de la genèse de la composition des sourates et de sa redissolution au cours du développement du culte islamique.” *Arabica* XLVII, 2 (2000): 224–7 (194–229).

<sup>96</sup> V. Lüling, *Ur-Qur’an/Challenge*.

<sup>97</sup> Gräff, Erwin. “Zu den christlichen Einflüssen im Koran.” *ZDMG* 111 (1962): 396–9, reprint in Paret, Rudi, ed. *Der Koran*, 188 (188–91). Darmstadt, 1975.

the godfearing, and warn a people stubborn.” In Syro-Aramaic *pashsheq* means: to facilitate, to make easy, but also to explain, to annotate, and also to transfer, to translate<sup>98</sup>. But it can be also understood without recourse of Syriac. Mohammed, the warner (*nadbir*) (of the last judgement) is the “interpreter” or selections of a foreign lectionary in his tongue/language, Arabic, to a people who understands only (or for some of them: almost only) Arabic.

In the context the ambiguous verb *jama'a* (to collect, to bring together, to know by heart, etc.) is put in relation with the lectionary (Syriac *qaryāna*) “which designates a church book with excerpts (readings) from the Scriptures for liturgical use.”<sup>99</sup> It corresponds to the Syro-Aramaic *kannesh* (to collect). “It has to do with the collecting of these excerpts from the Scriptures, and indeed specifically in the meaning of ‘*compilavit librum*’.”<sup>100</sup> It could be the basis of the above-mentioned verse (Q 16: 103);<sup>101</sup> that it was a human who taught Mohammed. Already before Luxenberg, R. Bell had noticed upon Q 25: 4–5): “It is not certain whether the verse quoted above means that he had books<sup>102</sup> transcribed for him, or whether there is any truth in the charge. He may have thus got copies of some Apocryphal books, but if so he was dependent on getting some one, who perhaps happened to be in Mecca, to read them and tell him what was in them.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic reading*, 123–24 / *Syro-aramäische Lesart*, 2000, p. 98–9 / <sup>2</sup>2004, p. 130–31.

<sup>99</sup> Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic reading*, 121 / *Syro-aramäische Lesart*, 2000, p. 97 / <sup>2</sup>2004, p. 129.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> V. Gilliot, Cl. “Les ‘informateurs’ juifs et chrétiens de Muḥammad. Reprise d’un problème traité par Aloys Sprenger et Theodor Nöldeke.” *JSAI* 22 (1998): 84–126; Id., “Informants”; Id., “Zur Herkunft der Gewährsmänner des Propheten.”

<sup>102</sup> A. Sprenger’s point of view was that Momammed had a book on *asaṭir al-awwalin* (fairy-tales of the ancients) which could mean also “books of the ancients,” from *saṭara*, to trace, to write. See our three articles on the informants mentioned abàove.

<sup>103</sup> Bell, *Origin*, 112.

## II. READING OF SCRIPTURES IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES AND THEIR LECTIONARIES

The Christian Churches followed the Jewish custom of reading publicly the Scriptures, but they did it according to the lectionary principle.<sup>104</sup> So the whole of the Scripture, Old and New Testament, were never read to the congregation. Among the Syriac Churches what was usual was a lectionary (*kitaba d-qaryānā*) containing selections from the Law (*uraitba*), the Prophets and the Acts of the Apostles<sup>105</sup>. Likewise the *Evangelion* consisting in selections from the four Gospels. “For the hearer this was the Gospel”<sup>106</sup> (*al-injil* in the Koran!). Another volume called the *Shliba* containedlections from the Pauline Epistles; then another volume with the *Davida* or the *Psalter*. A last volume called *Turgyuma* could contained metrical homilies (*mémrā*), read after the *qaryānā* and the *Shliba*.<sup>107</sup> For instance, the *mémrā* attributed to Jacob of Serug (d. 521) on the “Seven Sleepers” or “Youths (*tlāyê*) of Ephesus” in Syriac,<sup>108</sup> or his

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<sup>104</sup> This principle exists till nowadays in both the Eastern and Western Churches (especially, but not only, in monasteries and convents), even if changings occurred through the time.

<sup>105</sup> Sometimes there were independant volumes for each of the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms; and the Gospels, Acts and Paul’s Epistle in still another volume. But very few Syriac churches possessed this.

<sup>106</sup> Bowman, “Holy Scriptures,” 31. Till now, we have in our personal library a book of our maternal aunt, Simone Lescieux, which she received at her “communion solennelle,” in the church of our village, Guemps, near to Calais in Northern France: *Le Saint Évangile*, Concordance et annotations par M. L’Abbé Vandenabeele, prêtre du diocèse de Lille, Limoges, Paul Meellittée, Éditeur, 1928, 305 p., with illustrations. It follows the “chronological” life of Christ, through selections from the four Gospels! Our first personal knowledge of the gospels was through this book at the age of four years (one year before through the illustrations).

<sup>107</sup> Bowman, “Holy Scriptures,” 31–2.

<sup>108</sup> Jourdan, Fr. *La tradition des sept dormants*, 59–65. Paris, 1983, trans. of the short version; Griffith, S. H. “Christian lore and the Arabic Qur’an. The ‘Companions of the Cave’ in Surat al-kahf and the Syriac tradition.” In Reynolds, G. S., ed. *Qur’an in Its Historical Context*, 116–30 (109–37). London, 2007; Cf Q 18: 9–26.

discourse upon Alexander, the believing King, and upon the gate which he made against Gog and Magog,<sup>109</sup> were expected to be read in church, presumably as a *turgama*. J. Bowman has seen a very old manuscript of the Syriac New Testament belonging to the village of Khoyyi, on the coast of Lake Urmi. "The Gospels had in the margin sections marked off as *qeryane*, and subdivided into *Su-rata*."<sup>110</sup>

Having said that, it is not easy to know which Gospel text Muhammad could have been familiar with. However, there are a few rare direct references in the Qur'an to the Gospels. Thus Q 48:29: "Such is their likeness in the Torah and their likeness in the Gospel—like as sown corn that sendeth forth its shoot and strengtheneth it and riseth firm upon its stalk, delighting the sowers—that He may enrage the disbelievers with (the sight of) them. God hath promised, unto such of them as believe and do good works, forgiveness and immense reward" This text combines two Gospel pericopes—Mark 4:26–7 and Matthew 12:23—the same amalgam that the *Diatessaron* makes, seen for example in the Middle-Dutch translation thereof, done in the thirteenth century from a lost Latin translation, and in the Arabic translation thereof.<sup>111</sup>

Van Reeth applies the same treatment to the passages of the Qur'an which pertain to the infancy of Mary (Q 3:35–48), John (Q 19:3), and Jesus (Q 3:37; 19:22–6), showing again that "the Koran gives evidence (French: *témoigner de*) to the tradition of the *Diatessaron*."<sup>112</sup> He does the same again with the Docetist version of

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<sup>109</sup> *The History of Alexander the Great* (Pseudo-Callisthenes), trans. E. A. W. Budge, 1889, 182–4; Cf. Q 18: 83–98.

<sup>110</sup> Bowman, "Holy Scriptures," 31.

<sup>111</sup> De Bruin, C. C. *Diatessaron Leodiense*, 92, §93 sq. Leiden, 1970 (English trans., 93); Marmardji, A. S. *Diatessaron de Tatien, texte arabe...*, 159f. Beirut, 1935.

<sup>112</sup> Van Reeth, J. M. F. "L'Évangile du Prophète." In De Smet *et al.*, *al-Kitāb*, 163 (155–74). On the possible influence of the *Diatessaron* and the Apocryphal Gospels on the Koran, v. Gnllka, J. *Die Nazarener und der Koran. Eine Spurensuche*, 96–104. Freiburg: Herder, 2007 / *Qui sont les chrétiens du Coran?*, trans. Ch. Ehlinger, 101–9. Paris, 2008; on the influence

the Crucifixion of Jesus (Q 4:157), but in this case he refers to Angel-Christology<sup>113</sup> (cf. G. Lüling), notably that of the Elkesaites, declaring: "Rather than a likeness which God should have shaped and substituted to be crucified instead of him, it would have been originally the human form which God has made for Jesus at the time of the incarnation, and in which his transcendent and angelic person could go down."<sup>114</sup> For this docetic view of Jesus and the denial of crucifixion, M. Gil refers to Basilides and his followers, and then to the Manichaeans, who are said to have believed that there was two Jesuses. The "false" is sometimes called "the devil," or the "son of the widow," used by God to replace him.<sup>115</sup>

Even if the *Diatessaron* does not explain all of the Qur'anic particularities on the life of Jesus (the Apocrypha also), van Reeth makes the following conclusion: "In referring to the *Diatessaron* as Mani had done it before him, the Prophet Muhammad could emphasize the unicity of the Gospel. Moreover he came within the scope of the posterity of Marcion, Tatian and Mani. All of them wanted to establish or re-establish the true Gospel, in order to size its original meaning. They thought themselves authorized to do this work of textual harmonization because they considered themselves the Paraclete that Jesus had announced."<sup>116</sup> The followers of Mon-

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of the *Diatessaron* on the Koran, see also Bowman, John. "The Debt of Islam to Monophysite Syrian Christianity," first published in *Nederlands Teologisch Tijdschrift*, 19 (1964–65): 177–201, then in MacLaurin, E. C. B., ed. *Essays in Honour of Griffithes Wheeler Thatcher (1863–1950)*, 191–216, passim. Sydney, 1967.

<sup>113</sup> Lüling, *Challenge*, 21, speaks of the "ur-Christian angel-Christological doctrine... contained in the ground layer of the Koran"; Sfar, Mondher. *Le Coran, la Bible et l'Orient ancien*, 185–86, has shown that the prophet/Prophet has an "angelic status."

<sup>114</sup> Van Reeth, "L'Évangile du Prophète," 166.

<sup>115</sup> Gil, Moshe. "The creed of Abū 'Āmir." *IOS* 12 (1992): 41 (9–57), referring to Polotsky, H. J. "Manichäismus." In Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Suppl. VI, 269 (239–71)

<sup>116</sup> Van Reeth, "L'Évangile du Prophète," 174; cf. Simon, Robert. "Māni and Muḥammad." *JS:AI* 21 (1997): 134 (118–41): "Both Manichaeism and Islam assert the seriality of prophets"; Andrae, Tor Julius Efraim.



tanus (end II<sup>nd</sup> century) also believed to the coming of the Paraclete, inaugurated by the activity of Montan himself, and it's a short step from Montan to Tatian, whose *Diatessaron* was in vogue for the followers of Mani.<sup>117</sup>

The Gospel's pericopes in the Koran have their origin in the *Diatessaron* of the Syrian Tatian, the founder of the encratite movement in the II<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>118</sup> Tatian was born in Assyria of pagan parents. He travelled widely, and in Rome became a student of Justin Martyr, and a member of the Church. Tatian later broke away from the Roman church and returned to Mesopotamia, where he exerted considerable influence around Syria and Antioch.<sup>119</sup> Muhammad probably belonged "to a sectarian community which was near to radical monophycism and to manicheism, and which was waiting for the Parousia in an imminent future."<sup>120</sup>

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*Les origines de l'islam et le christianisme*, trad. J. Roche, 209. Paris, 1955 (German ed. 1926, and before in articles, 1923–5); Ahrens, Karl. *Muhammed als Religionsstifter*, 130–32. Leipzig, 1935. Mani's prophetic understanding of himself as an equal partner of the Paraclete, as promised by Jesus, even perhaps as the Paraclete himself (cf. Werner Sundermann, 1988, p. 102–3, with earlier bibliography), was also eschatological. Islamic authors ascribed to Mani the claim to be the Seal of the Prophets (Puech, Henri-Charles, *Le Manichéisme. Son fondateur, sa doctrine*, 146 n. 248. Paris, 1949; Tardieu, Michel. *Le Manichéisme*, 21. Paris, 1981). Ries, Julien. "Les Kephalaia. La catéchèse de l'Église de Mani." In De Smet et al., *al-Kitāb*, 143–48 (143–53).

<sup>117</sup> Schepelern, W. *Der Montanismus und die phrygischen Kulte. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, trans. from Danish by W. Baur, 28–30. Tübingen, 1929; Van Reeth, J. M. F. "La zandaqa et le prophète de l'Islam." In Cannuyer, Christian, and Jacques Grand'Henry, eds. *Incroyance et dissidences religieuses dans les civilisations orientales*, 73, 75, 79 (67–79). Bruxelles, 2007.

<sup>118</sup> Van Reeth, "L'Évangile du Prophète, 162–66.

<sup>119</sup> Head, P. M. "Tatian's christology and its influence on the composition of the *Diatessaron*." *Tyndale Bulletin* 43 (1992): 121–23 (121–37).

<sup>120</sup> Van Reeth, "Le Coran et les scribes," 73.

### III. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was not to enter into the details of the various influences which contributed to the constitution of the Koran,<sup>121</sup> especially the Meccan Koran, nor to deal with the intertextuality,<sup>122</sup> or with the “common traditions” in the Bible and the Koran.<sup>123</sup>

Our own aim was to show that many passages of the Meccan self-referential Arabic lectionary (Koran) contain allusions to its “prehistory,” to “a Koran uphill” (i.e. a *qurʿān* before the Koran): its insistence on its Arabicity, on its explanatory character, its aspect of a book of pericopes (*Perikopenbuch*),<sup>124</sup> its liturgical feature which did not “descend from Heaven,” but testifies that Mohammed and his community around him, who helped him (Waraqqa b. Nawfal and Khadija, Christian or Jewish-Christian slaves in Mecca, for instance) knew more on Jewish-Christianity, Manicheism, gnosticism, etc., than often accepted. They appear partly as interpreters of collections of logia, oral traditions, possibly taken up from liturgical lectionaries, directly or indirectly, and explained in Arabic during “liturgical assemblies.”

As seen the lectionary principle was a common practice in the Syriac churches. It is probable that Muhammad and his group have been influenced by such a practice.

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<sup>121</sup> V. *the status quaestionis* of Gilliot, “Rétrospectives et perspectives. De quelques sources possibles du Coran. I. (first part) “Les sources du Coran et les emprunts aux traditions religieuses antérieures dans la recherche (XIX<sup>e</sup> et début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècles).”

<sup>122</sup> Reeves, John C., ed. *Bible and Qurʿān. Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, Atlanta, 2003. See in this volume Reeves, “Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qurʿān,” p. 43–60.

<sup>123</sup> V. the following very useful book: Thyen, Johan-Dietrich (d. 1994), *Bibel und Koran. Eine Synopse gemeinsamer Überlieferungen*, Cologne: Böhlau, 2005 (21993, 32000). See also: Gnilka, Joachim. *Bibel und Koran. Was sie verbindet, was sie trennt*, Freiburg, Herder, 2007 (12004); Tröger, Karl-Wolfgang. *Bibel und Koran. Was sie verbindet und unterscheidet. Mit einer Einführung in Mohammeds Wirken und in die Entstehung des Islam*. Überarbeitete Neuauflage. Stuttgart, 2008 (Berlin, 12004).

<sup>124</sup> Neuwirth, “Rezitationstext,” 102 / “Texte de récitation,” 227.

# THE SEARCH FOR ṬUWĀ: EXEGETICAL METHOD, PAST AND PRESENT<sup>1</sup>

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## AN EXEGETICAL PROBLEM

The word *ṭuwā* (or *ṭuwan* if understood to have *tammīn* as it sometimes is, although it is never pronounced that way in recitation) is found only twice in the Qurʾān, in *sūrat Ṭāhā* (20), verse 12, and *sūrat al-nāẓiʿāt* (79), verse 16. Both instances occur in the context of Moses and the removal of his sandals in the holy valley. The first citation of the word *ṭuwā* (following the canonical ordering of the text) is in *sūra* 20.

20:9 Has the story of Moses come to you?

20:10 When he saw the fire, he said to his family, “Wait; indeed, I perceive a fire! Perhaps I will bring you a firebrand from it, or I may find guidance by the fire.”

20:11 And when he came to it, he was called to. “O Moses!

20:12 Indeed, I am your Lord! So take off thy sandals; indeed you are in the holy *wadī*, Ṭuwā.

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<sup>1</sup> Versions of this paper have been discussed at several gatherings (in Berlin, Copenhagen and Toronto) and I have benefitted greatly from that input.

20:13 I have chosen you. So listen to what is inspired  
(in you);

20:14 Verily, I am God, there is no god but Me! So serve  
Me, and be steadfast in prayer in my remembrance.”<sup>2</sup>

The second instance of the citation of the word is in *sūra* 79.

79:15 Has the story of Moses come to you?

79:16 when his Lord addressed him in the holy *wādī*, Ṭuwā,

79:17 “Go unto Pharaoh; indeed, he is outrageous.”

Some clarification of the context of this incident with Moses is provided in *sūra* 28 without actually using the word *ṭuwā*:

28:29 And when Moses had fulfilled the appointed time, and was journeying with his people, he perceived a fire on the side of the mountain; he said to his people, “Wait here; I perceive a fire. Perhaps I will bring you good news from it, or a brand of fire. Perhaps you will be warmed.”

28:30 And when he came to it he was called to, from the right side of the *wādī*, in the blessed valley, out of the tree, “O Moses! I am God the Lord of the worlds.”

The word *ṭuwā* has posed a problem of minor proportions for both traditional and scholarly treatments of the Qurʾān. Precisely because this is *not* a passage of crucial importance, the treatment of this word by exegetes and scholars allows a direct view into the mechanisms of interpretation and an understanding of the presuppositions and ideologies with which interpretational enterprises are undertaken. It is possible to make observations in a case such as this without there being an excessive amount of interference from dogmatic issues and the like which serve to complicate the interpretational processes. That said, it is worth remarking at the outset that appearances can be deceiving and that the issue of why Moses

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<sup>2</sup> The translation of the Qurʾān used in this essay are from Arberry, A. J. *The Koran Interpreted*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964; this translation is used here for convenience even though, in its presentation, it does already suggest a specific resolution of the exegetical issue that will be raised.

had to remove his sandals when treading on holy ground was quite significant to Muslims since it could be seen to have practical implications for everyone and not just for Moses. However, for the most part, the word *ʾtuwā* itself is not one which appears to demand an exegetical solution for any reason other than curiosity and, on the surface, it does not appear to raise significant issues of particular practical and/or religious significance.

Traditional Muslim exegesis has approached the word *ʾtuwā* in a number of different ways. The following summary of those approaches does not pretend to be complete. The citations are intended simply to demonstrate tendencies and to document the variety and scope of the material available to us; much more could be added but such would only serve an aim of being comprehensive which is hardly necessary for the aims of this essay.

### PROPER NAMES

First, the word *ʾtuwā* has been asserted to be simply a proper name. Al-Qurṭubī<sup>3</sup> and al-Ṭabarī,<sup>4</sup> for example, cite Ibn ʿAbbās and Mujāhid as holding that *ʾtuwā* is the name of the valley. Some refinement of that position is also attributed to al-Jawharī by al-Qurṭubī when he states *ʾtuwā* is specifically a place in al-Shām; al-Ṭabarī cites Ibn Zayd as suggesting it is near Mount Sinai. While it does not get connected to the specific exegesis of these passages but, rather, is related in passages dealing with the building of the Kaʿba in *sūra* 2, verse 125, the association of *ʾtuwā* with the place in which Abraham and Ishmael found the black stone for the Kaʿba is cited in al-Qummī,<sup>5</sup> for example. This type of geographical variation is, of course, a motif of Muslim historiography, and we should not be surprised at it, nor should we look for any isolatable meaning in this divergence in the setting between the Hijaz of the Kaʿba and

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<sup>3</sup> Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jamīʿ li-ahkām al-Qurʾān*, ad Q. 20:12. Except where indicated otherwise, all citations of Arabic exegetical works are taken from the online texts available at [altafsir.com](http://altafsir.com) as of November 20, 2010; all are cited simply by their *sūra* and *āya* referent.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jamīʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, ad Q. 20:12.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, ad Q. 20:12.

the biblical world of Sinai and Syria in this particular case; the meaning of it, rather, is to be found within the generalized impulse of “biblicization” versus “hijazification” that characterizes the emergence of Muslim identity in the first few centuries of Islam.

### DESCRIPTIVE MEANINGS

Other exegetical sources take the word *ṭuwā* simply to be a descriptive word of the valley in which Moses found himself. Frequently this is seen to relate to a root sense of the word for which it is given the meaning “doubled” or “to do something twice.” That then is taken to be an explanation of something about the nature of the valley. This, says al-Ṭabarī, was the meaning transmitted by Qatāda and al-Ḥasan. The word could mean “doubled” because, according to Abū Ḥayyān,<sup>6</sup> al-Ḥasan said that it was full of *baraka* and sanctity. In this meaning, the word should be understood as a complement of *muqaddas*, “sacred,” according to the clarification of al-Shawkānī.<sup>7</sup> This latter meaning, it should be remarked, may well be dictated or emphasized due to legal concerns related to establishing the nature of the holiness connected with the valley such that it would require the removal of sandals. In his explanation of this, al-Jaṣṣāṣ<sup>8</sup> first asserts that there is a causal relationship between removing sandals and being in the holy valley: that is, he glosses “indeed,” *inna*, in the phrase “indeed, you are in the holy *wādi ṭuwā*,” as *li-anna*, “because,” as the first necessary exegetical step. Then, the interpretation is given that Moses’s sandals were made from the skin of a donkey and were deemed unclean and thus subject to removal due to the holiness of the place. The extension of this as a generalized requirement for removing one’s sandals during prayer and pilgrimage is rejected by al-Jaṣṣāṣ, however.

A second tendency is also to be seen in the understanding of *ṭuwā* as a word rather than a name. It could also be, according to al-Māwardī<sup>9</sup> on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, that *ṭuwā* means “dou-

<sup>6</sup> Abu Ḥayyān, *Tafsīr baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, ad Q. 20:12.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Shawkānī, *Fath al-Qadīr*, ad Q. 20:12.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, ad Q. 20:12.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa l’-uyūn fī l-tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, ad Q. 20:12.

bled”; however, that is not to be taken as a description of the valley as such, but as something which happened to Moses while he was in the valley. It was in the valley that Moses was called twice by God, saying, “Moses, Moses.” The word is then understood as an adverb of the verb “He was called to” (in Qurʾān 20:11) and “He called” (in Qurʾān 79:16).

### ETYMOLOGY

The distinction between the two fundamental approaches to *ʾuwā*, one as a simple proper name and the other as a descriptive meaning either of the valley or of Moses, becomes blurred, however, with the key element of etymology providing the bridge. There is a definite tendency to want proper names to have a meaning; this might be thought to be a continuation of the drive to “identify the unknown,” *taʾyīn al-mubham*, which pervades exegetical works and which is based on a conviction that every element of scripture is meaningful. The drive does lead to several etymological suggestions which seem to allow for *ʾuwā* to be a proper name and to have a meaning at the same time. For example, al-Qurṭubī reports that al-Ḍaḥḥāk said that *ʾuwā* was a deep, round valley that was called this because *al-tamī* is a lean, lanky man, or because it is a bundle of cloth. So, the shape of the valley or its description has given it its name.

### NARRATIVE ELABORATION

Etymology is not the only element which plays into the explication of meaning. Narrative elaboration is clearly crucial as well. The vehicle for an explanation of the word is frequently a story, and the story itself often provides the key to some of the meanings put forth. What transpires in such cases, it would appear, is that a narrative, which exists independently of the specifics of the word in question, provides a vehicle for a meaning which is demanded by the narrative logic. This is certainly true of the meaning just mentioned which relates *ʾuwā* to the sense of “twice,” because, it is reported, Moses was called upon twice by God in the valley. More elaborate, however, are all the meanings which spin off from the journey of Moses itself. To complicate things further, several proposed meanings may be observed to mix the narrative motif of travel with the exegetical process of etymology. This may be seen

in a group of meanings which relates once again to the physical nature of the valley itself. The meanings of *ṭuwā* related to “folded” stem from an etymological sense of “doubled” and perhaps the sense of “rolled up” (and from there meaning “secretly,” “hidden”); this is also usually understood as the meaning of the word in Qurʾān 39:67 with its apocalyptic use of “the heavens folded up” which employs the same root as *ṭuwā*. These meanings relate to a physical description of the valley: the valley is deep and very high on both sides, providing an appropriate link to a narrative sense of going up towards God, as in an ascension. Going even further, this leads to some metaphoric and/or mystically-inspired interpretations found in both classical and modern sources giving a meaning to *ṭuwā* of “proximity to God,” that being in mystical terms, “self-annihilation,” *fanāʾ*. Thus we are told that the valley achieved its name *ṭuwā* because Moses was in proximity to God within the valley; *ṭuwā* was not its name otherwise. All this seems to derive from a metaphorical sense of “doubled” being extended to physical elevation, then seen in a spiritual sense. One popular contemporary web site provides the following gloss to *ṭuwā*: “Moses should cover a long distance to be prepared to receive the inspiration, but *Allah* rolled up the way and made it near for Moses to reach the goal.”<sup>10</sup> The Ṣūfī exegete al-Kāshānī<sup>11</sup> says *ṭuwā* is “the world of the spirit, free of actions of linking (through the soul and the body) characteristic of transient things and the material bonds. This world is called *ṭuwā* because the stages of the kingdom of God are concealed [or “rolled up” or “doubled”] (*ṭawā*) in it, while the heavenly and earthy bodies stand under it.” All of these meanings relate to a sense of “doubled” or “folded up” which become elaborated in narratives about Moses and his journey in this valley which is described as *ṭuwā*, “folded up.”

Closely related in narrative elaboration as the basis for this exegetical approach, it would seem, is a range of meanings which become associated with the sense of “traverse” in the word *ṭuwā*,

<sup>10</sup> See [www.al-islam.org/enlightening/25.htm](http://www.al-islam.org/enlightening/25.htm) (November 20, 2010)

<sup>11</sup> Al-Kāshānī, *Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān [Tafsīr Ibn ʿArabī]*, ad Q. 20:12, as cited in Gätje, H. *The Qurʾān and its Exegesis*, 235. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.



thus relating the word once again not to the valley itself but to Moses's activity in it. Etymologically this is said to stem from the root meaning of *ṭawā* in the sense of "to traverse from one side to the other," clearly a semantic extension of the sense of "doubled up" but with a different narrative focus. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī<sup>12</sup> among others, explains this, as he so often does, in a straightforward manner. Ibn 'Abbās, he reports, said that Moses passed through the valley at night and he traversed it. So, the meaning is the sacred valley which you traverse, that is, you pass through it until you reach its heights.

In a curious twist, a meaning arises which seems unrelated to etymology: *ṭuwā* is also said to mean "at night." In the story of Moses traversing the valley, Ibn 'Abbās is given to assert that this happened "at night." It is possible to see how this might have occurred by examining the narrative provided by al-Tha'labī, which is very much in the style of an aetiological narrative. Each element of al-Tha'labī's story seems to bring in every element proposed for producing meaning for the word *ṭuwā*. Narrative logic calls for the story to happen at night: how else would Moses have seen the fire? Why was he looking around for a fire to begin with? Why did he want to go to get an ember? The following extensive quotation provides a flavour of the technique of narrative glossing of meanings.

Moses was traveling in the desert, not knowing its paths, when the journey brought him to the western, right-hand side of Mount (Sinai) on a very cold, rainy evening. The night became dark, and the sky began to thunder and flash with lightning and it rained, and birth-pangs took hold of his wife. Moses took up his flintstone and striking-iron, but no fire came. He was at a loss and alarmed, for he had never witnessed the like of this with a flint. He began to look out near and far, confused and troubled. Then he listened for a long time in order to hear a sound or movement. Suddenly he saw a light from the direction of the mountain and thought it was a fire—"He said to his folk, *Wait here, I have seen a fire afar off. Perhaps I may bring you news*

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<sup>12</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥsīn al-kabīr* [*Mafāṭiḥ al-ghayb*], ad Q. 20:12.

*of it, or an ember from the fire.*" (28:29)—meaning someone who would lead me to the path, for he had lost his way. When he reached it he saw a mighty light extending from the horizon to a large tree there. There is disagreement about the kind of tree it was; some say it was a box-thorn, and some say a jujube. Moses was baffled, and his whole body shook with fear when he saw a very big fire which had no smoke, but was flaring up and blazing from the inside of a green tree: as the fire grew more intense, the tree became greener. When Moses drew near the fire, it drew away; seeing this, he retreated, for he was afraid. Then he remembered that he needed fire and returned to it, and it too drew near him. Then a voice called out from the right side of the valley, in the sacred hollow, coming from the tree, "O Moses." He looked, but saw no one, and again a voice called out, "*I am God, the Lord of all Being.*" (28:30) When he heard these words, he knew that this was his Lord. [He was overcome gazing at the Lord and when] he recovered his senses, he was called, "*Take off your shoes for you are in the holy valley of tuwā.*"(20:12)<sup>13</sup>

The particular accomplishment of this narrative is seen in the way in which that it incorporates a number of proposed meanings which are inherent in the stories isolated by various exegetes: at night, traversing, and the physical description of the valley. It may also be remarked that such narratives may well have evolved in a context of Jewish and/or Christian polemic with Muslims relating to the status of Moses in relationship to Muḥammad; while it is not possible to point to specific historical evidence of this, as a social situation for the production of exegetical meaning this should certainly be taken into account.

Etymology is not a simple tool for the medieval exegetes or for modern scholars, especially when dealing with a word such as *tuwā* which is doubly-weak in its root. Most of the etymologies

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<sup>13</sup> Al-Tha'labī, *'Arā'is al-majālis fī qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, translation by Brinner, William M. *'Arā'is al-majālis fī qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* or *Lives of the Prophets as recounted by Abū Ishāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha'labī*, 296–97. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

mentioned thus far depend upon a root of  $\dot{T}ā$ — $Wāw$  or  $Yā$ — $Yā$ . However, some authorities suggest a root of  $Wāw$ — $\dot{T}ā$ — $Yā$  or  $Wāw$ — $\dot{T}ā$ —*Hamza* and equate that to a meaning of “set foot on” or “walk in.” Al-Ṭabarī cites this approach as coming on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Ikrima and Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr. The exegetical process remain the same as sketched previously: narrative associations with characters demand certain meanings as a consequence of the logic of the narrative; once again, in this case, the word is not a name but simply a description of the valley or of Moses’s activities in the valley. Clearly etymology is not a simple, objective tool.

As can already be seen, there are a number of tools that are used to establish meaning in the Qur’ān. Grammar, broadly understood, is the main tool with which the exegetes adjudicate between meanings. However, whether grammar truly adjudicates or gives support after the fact is difficult to say. For example, the notion that *ṭuwā* is a description of the valley is justified in a number of sources by arguing for a grammatical relationship between elements of the sentence (the status of the word as a *ḥāl*, for example). But such an observation, precisely because it can be employed in exactly the same manner to justify two different meanings related to the valley itself or to Moses’s activities (admittedly not radically different meanings, but ones which have different analyses underlying them), indicates that grammar in this instance plays a role to justify and not to analyze.

### VARIANT READINGS

Grammar comes into play even more prominently when variant readings to the text are adduced as well. The basic method here is clear: grammar provides rules and those rules dictate usage and agreement within the parts of a sentence. Some readings can be eliminated, and some can be restricted to certain meanings as a result. The use of variant readings to resolve the differences between interpretation and to respect the niceties of grammar is the most notable outcome of all the exegetes’ work; however, once again, determining which came first—the perception of the problem or the existence of the variants—is, I think it must be admitted, difficult to ascertain. That differences in meaning, generated through narrative exegesis and the like, stimulated the production of variant readings in the first place in order to justify, clarify and separate out different meanings is certainly a tempting explanation. But this is

difficult to prove fully. In some cases it is certainly possible to come close to a demonstration that it is likely that exegesis has generated variants, if only because it seems that each possible alternative meaning is covered by a different variant. Additionally, some meanings that are demanded by narrative logic, for example, seem so “odd” that variants become the only way to provide them with support; the other method of resolving such divergent meanings by actually changing the text of scripture was not, after all, a solution that was possible.

There are five or six (depending on whether one includes subtleties of pronunciation) variant ways of reading the word *ṭuwā* cited in the *qirāʾāt* literature and found scattered throughout the major works of *tafsīr*. The first two readings relate to the pronunciation of *ṭuwā* with nunation (*ṭuwan*) and the differentiation between them does not enter into the grammarians discussions: *ṭuwan* can be read with *imāla* and or *taqlīl*. Both of these are the common, standard readings of the word *ṭuwan* and both provide the necessary and rhyming pronunciation ending in a long “a” with the dropping of the *nūn* of the *tanwīn*; for the grammarians, of course, it was the *tanwīn* that mattered and not the pronunciation as such, for the *tanwīn* indicated something about grammar. The third reading is with *tanwīn* but is *ṭīwan* rather than *ṭuwan*. Two further readings suggest that the word can be read without *tanwīn*, *ṭuwā* and *ṭīwā*. The final reading, an isolated or non-canonical one, puts a long “a” in the middle of the word, *ṭāwā*.

Al-Rāzī summarizes the matter as follows:

[*ṭuwā*] can be read either with a *ḍamma* or a *kasra* and can be treated as a (virtual) triptote with *tanwīn* or not. Those who provide it with a *tanwīn* say it is the name of the valley, while those who do not give it *tanwīn* do not inflect it because it is derived from the root *ṭawā* (meaning “traverse”) although it is admitted that it is still possible that it could be the name of a place even if it is without the *tanwīn*.

Here, of course, the role of grammar is clear, as may be seen in the invocation of rules regarding the treatment of proper names of which it is said that they must have *tanwīn*. Likewise, when the

word does not have a *tanwīn*, explicit rules of grammar are invoked to restrict the meanings. Al-Ṭabarī,<sup>14</sup> for example, following al-Farrā',<sup>15</sup> says that without a *tanwīn*, the word must be the name of the country that the valley was in and he cites a line of poetry to prove the case; without *tanwīn*, it is declared, this cannot be the name of the valley itself. Such rules are extended by the citation of other Qur'ānic passages to make the same point. A parallel is seen to exist in Q. 9:35 where *tanwīn* is used at the end of Ḥunayn indicating that Ḥunayn is the name of the actual valley in which the battle took place. This also gets compared to a poetical citation where a reading Ḥunayna—that is, as a diptote without *tanwīn*—is explained as occurring because the reference is to the land in which the place is located and not the specific name of *mādī*.

### THE RULES OF GRAMMAR

It is not necessary to resolve here whether these rules are *ad hoc* or not. Rather, the important point is that this invocation of rules is, of course, the mark of the grammarian and the means by which the authority of the grammarian is asserted. It is not only a matter of authority, surely, but a legitimate assertion of knowledge as well; yet the nature of grammatical rules is certainly different than the methods of adducing other types of evidence based on scholarly knowledge, since the aura of rules tends to be absolute. Of course, rules of Arabic grammar exist: yet, on occasions such as this, their invocation seems rhetorical, not absolute, precisely because other rules can be adduced to prove a different point and thus a different meaning. And other kinds of knowledge abound in the grammarians' treatments as well. Grammatical rules are not the only way of justifying meanings and readings for a grammarian, clearly. Note must be taken, for example, of the use of poetry which here provides grammatical parallels, *shawāhid*. But poetry retains its status as a comparative tool for the grammarians, underpinning claims about the relationship of the Qur'ān to Bedouin language. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, cites a line of poetry from the pre-Islamic poet 'Adī ibn

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<sup>14</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, ad Q. 20:12.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Farrā', *Ma'āni 'l-Qur'an*, ad Q. 20:12.

Zayd to support the meaning of *tumā* as “doubled.” Poetry is also adduced to demonstrate grammatical points related to *tumā* as a proper name. Here, it is the procedure which counts, not the singularity of the evidence. Poetry is no more definitive or absolute in its application than is the application of grammatical rules. But, for the exegete, it is a tool, a mark of knowledge, and an assertion of the mastery of the subject.

The other clear attribute of the exegetical treatments and the mark of the grammarian is the invocation of the authority of people of the past. It is notable, of course, that while meanings are attributed to trusted members of the early community and that these names serve to distinguish the meanings and give them authority, the use of those names tends to duplicate and proliferate in ways which provide no consistent pattern in thought for any given individual who is considered an authority. Herbert Berg has already demonstrated this phenomenon extensively in his book *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam*, and it hardly needs further demonstration here. The basic point is worthy of note, however: the invocation of a name of an authority does not lend support to a particular tendency in interpretation or its tools. No historical personality emerges of whom we can speak: the invocation of the name is symbolic of authority, not procedure.

There is a mass of greater detail and precision which could be given to this presentation and what has been provided thus far is a simple overview; however, a summary of what has been noted thus far may now be profitable. We have the situation of a word, the meaning of which seems to have been perceived as difficult. Exegetes then either declare the word to be a proper name and avoid some of the problem, or declare it to be a word with a meaning, either a meaning which explains its proper name or a meaning only, not a proper name. The devices used to determine the meaning involve grammar and its rules, the retelling of narrative, metaphor, the citation of traditional authorities, adducing poetry and inter-Quranic parallels, and the invocation of variant readings; all of these tools are adduced to a variety of intertwined ends.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> These are points that have raised by Wansbrough, John. *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford Uni-

## SYSTEMATIZATION

Now, in this attempt to isolate procedures, we should not lose sight of one very important and overall, high-level procedural issue within the exegetical works: that is their tendency to systematize. One can very easily see attempts, especially in people such as al-Rāzī, to systematize the cumulative tradition of exegesis with which they are confronted. Indeed, this systematization is such that it poses a real danger for those of us studying the *tafsīr* tradition today; the medieval exegetes potentially hide the processes by which the multitude of meanings, approaches and variants were produced in earlier times.

The work of al-Ṭabarī provides an illustrative case of systematization. In it, the author structures the treatment of the word *ṭuwā* in Q. 20:12 as follows. First he announces there is a difference of opinion regarding the word. Some say, on the grounds of grammar, that it means “to traverse”; others say it means “two times,” also on the grounds of grammar. Yet others says that it is the name of the *wādī*, with that name having a meaning according to some other people. Further people say it means “set foot in.” In total, five meaning groups are isolated. Then, differences in readings are adduced, once again under a general heading of “there are differences among the readers.” Each reading is set out, some with poetical justifications and some with attempts to connect grammar and readings with meaning. Thus al-Ṭabarī separates out meaning as related to grammar and variants as related to grammar in his attempt to systematize.

This attempt to systematize the information cited does not always work rigorously and efficiently, as is evidenced by the occasional duplication of reports under different categories. In a case

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versity Press, 1977, second edition with notes by Andrew Rippin, Amherst NY: Prometheus Press, 2004. They are elaborated in the context of the exegetes who are mainly under consideration here in Calder, Norman. “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr. Problems in the Description of a Genre Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham.” In Hawting, G. R., and A.-K. A. Shareef, *Approaches to the Qur’an*, 101–40. London: Routledge, 1993, reprinted in his *Interpretation and Jurisprudence in Medieval Islam*, Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2006, chapter IV.

such as this, the divisions that al-Ṭabarī puts forth are difficult to keep straight especially because of the shifting role that variant readings play. The instance of al-Rāzī is similar, even though the organization of his systemization is different; he, too, is clearly using his own particular sense of the way things “must be” to guide him. Underlying all this is, of course, the fundamental attitude of the multivalency of the text of scripture and the accumulative nature of the exegetical tradition. However, the active, intellectual editorial role of the exegete is evident throughout, as is the privileging of approaches. For both al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī, the approach taken is one which privileges grammar and ties that in with meaning.

This is notable. Systematization does not take place on the level of the authorities cited, the background material (foreknowledge of the biblical text, for example), narrative development, or anything else. Further, this systematization must be contrasted with the earliest written records of exegesis which do not appear to contain this systematization; those texts tend to be what we might even see as snippets of the conversations within the early Muslim community talking about their scripture. It is also worthy of remark in this regard that there do exist medieval *tafsīrs* which might be said to *not* be of a systematizing nature when it comes to sorting through the history of the exegesis of a passage. Works such as al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wajīz fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, and al-Suyūṭī and al-Maḥallī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, provide illustrations. As I have observed elsewhere, we cannot treat the genre of *tafsīr* as an undifferentiated mass; in my summary of the genre of works devoted to *al-nāsikh waʾl-mansūkh*,<sup>17</sup> I pointed out that we must take into account the audience of a work in considering the place and role of a book which claims a status within the genre of *tafsīr* or any of its sub-disciplines. Systematization was the mark of the scholastics. Epitomes of the works of the scholastics existed for more popular, yet learned, use; there, the tendency to systematization might be said to reach its

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<sup>17</sup> Rippin, Andrew. “The Exegetical Literature of Abrogation: Form and Content.” In Hawting, G., J. Modaddedi, and A. Samely, eds. *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Tradition in Memory of Norman Calder*, 213–31. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.



logical conclusion in reducing the choices which confront the reader.

This tendency of the medieval exegetes towards systematization can, of course, be profitably compared to what modern studies of *tafsīr* such as this one attempt to do. In this essay thus far, there has been a certain privileging of meaning and the organization of the material reflects that final goal, such that history is reconstructed through the interplay of tendencies in meaning-extraction. Clearly, our own place as scholars of the discipline in the history of *tafsīr* itself should not be underestimated.

### WHY IS THERE A PROBLEM WITH ṬUWĀ?

Underneath all of this discussion of the word *ṭuwā* and its meaning is one nagging question, especially for those of us who reflect upon all this activity which focuses on this one very minor point in the Qurʾān: how did this perception of a “problem” with this word emerge to begin with? Why did the exegetes not declare the word a proper noun and leave it at that? This really is the obvious reading of the text, it seems to me, given the grammar, vocabulary and style of the Qurʾān. One answer might be that the variant readings stimulated the divergences in meaning through the process of applying grammatical rules. That solution presumes the existence of the variants being prior to the perception of a difficulty with the text. That is possible, of course, but, as was suggested above, tangible evidence for this, or in fact for the inverse postulation, is not readily to be found. Another answer may be more productive.

Although I have not run across any statement that acknowledges this, it does seem that the exegetes knew that *ṭuwā* was not a name associated with this valley in the biblical tradition of Moses and the burning bush. The association of the area of Sinai—sometimes simply cited as Ṭūr, “mountain”—with the burning bush incident and thus this valley is apparent.<sup>18</sup> It is this piece of fore-knowledge on the part of the exegetes—that the Bible does

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<sup>18</sup> It should be remembered here that even though the biblical text speaks of this place as Horeb (Exodus 3:1), the biblical canon itself already provides the gloss of Horeb as Mt. Sinai (explicitly in Sirach 48:7).

not call this place *tuvā*—which seems to be crucial in pushing the exegetical tradition towards either not seeing the word as a proper name, or seeing it as a proper name with a specific meaning that could be related to an exegetical narrative. One notable fact which supports this observation is the relative absence of considering *tuvā* to be a foreign word. Abū Ḥayyān does suggest that some people hold that *tuvā* is a foreign word if it is not read with *tanwīn*, but that resolution indicates the strength of the grammatical tradition and the generalization that indeclinable words are frequently foreign rather than any necessary consciousness of the biblical context of the passage. That said, the flurry of activity which surrounds this word does indicate to me the strength of the biblical tradition as an exegetical tool, something which has, of course, been extensively documented, notably in the case of Moses in the recent book by Brannon Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis*, whose conclusion is worth citing:

The Muslim exegetical use of the Torah, Gospel, and other non-Quranic sources does not appear to be a confused or haphazard ‘borrowing’ of Jewish and Christian ideas. On the contrary, Muslim exegesis of Q 18:60–62 [with which Wheeler is dealing] and related passages evinces an informed and intentional attempt to appropriate certain ideas to a well-defined and coherent interpretational agenda. Muslim exegesis is familiar not only with the Torah and Gospel but also with what Jewish and Christian exegetes singled out and highlighted in support of their own positions and on polemics.<sup>19</sup>

To this I would add that such knowledge also produced situations, as such we find in the case of *tuvā*, in which the differences between the Qurʾān and the Torah needed to be recognized, confronted and explained away.

Still, even in light of this unstated but nagging problem of pre-knowledge and its role, I would argue, with Wheeler, that the methods of the medieval exegetes are not arbitrary in their approach to the Qurʾān. There always seems to be a rationale underlying

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<sup>19</sup> Wheeler, Brannon M. *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis*, 123. London: Routledge, 2002.

ing why a particular interpretation is put forth. It must be admitted, at the same time, that it can sometimes be difficult to ascertain those rationales but such is the task of the modern student of *tafsīr* to do his or her best to try to find those links. The academic study of *tafsīr* needs to delve further into the social and political factors which determined meaning. Do some of these meanings stem from an anti-biblical bias? Or do they come from the social role of the grammarians—as has been explored by Michael Carter?<sup>20</sup> Or might they be stimulated by notions related to the supremacy of Arabic as has been explored by Paul Heck?<sup>21</sup> The one puzzle which remains within all of this is the variant readings. Their function is obscure and their place within the logic of the exegetes is uncertain. This is a puzzle which has fascinated scholars for several generations now but a generalized answer has yet to emerge.

Overall, I would emphasize the ingenuity of the medieval exegetes, and the awe and the respect that the exegetes have for the text of scripture, which comes through in their every attempt to tangle with the text. This is not wilful “pettifogging” or an abuse of the text to be dismissed as “mere exegesis”: it is an intellectual challenge within the context of a devoted faith.

### MODERN APPROACHES

All of these exegetical outcomes may be compared with the tradition of scholarship which we refer to, by convenience, as “western” or “orientalist” scholarship. It seems clear that virtually all modern scholars have presumed that *tūwā* is, in fact, a proper name. I have only come across one incidental reference to the meaning of “multiple” in a translation of the Qur’ānic passage.<sup>22</sup> Modern scholars, like their classical Muslim counterparts, are certain that the place is unknown in the biblical tradition related to Moses. From this initial

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<sup>20</sup> Carter, M. G. “Language Control as People Control in Medieval Islam: The Aims of the Grammarians in their Cultural Context.” *Al-Abhāth* 31 (1983): 65–84.

<sup>21</sup> Heck, Paul. “The Hierarchy of Knowledge in Islamic Civilization.” *Arabica*, 49 (2002): 27–54.

<sup>22</sup> Rubin, Uri. “Sacred Precincts.” In *EQ*, vol. 4, 513; this rendering is also reflected in Rubin’s Hebrew translation of the Qur’ān.

observation one can see an entirely different range of interpretational strategies emerge.

There are those who simply say that *tumā* is the name of the valley and provide no particular additional comment, as if it were “obvious.” Youakim Moubarac,<sup>23</sup> for example, simply notes that the use of this name allows for an ambivalence within the Qurʾān as to whether the valley or the mountain (that is, Ṭūr) is the central location in the Moses narrative. Some writers have argued that the word displays the Islamicization of the Moses traditions; thus the word is termed a “coinage.” This coinage may have emerged for reasons of ideology in order to make Moses more a part of the Muslim tradition and to assert the scripture which the Jews had in their possession was not a true rendition of the true Torah; or this coinage may have emerged because of the constraints of the rhyme scheme of the text. Josef Horowitz,<sup>24</sup> for example, sees *tumā* as being formed as a coinage to be a rhyme word, while he admits that the meaning of the word is unknown.<sup>25</sup>

Other scholars, however, postulate that the word *tumā* results from a misreading of the biblical (likely Syriac) text. Richard Bell<sup>26</sup> thinks that the Syriac *ṭurā* meaning “mountain” has been misread.

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<sup>23</sup> Moubarac, Youakim. “Moïse dans le Coran.” In his *Pentalogie Islamo-Chrétienne Tome II: Le Coran et la critique occidentale*, 147. Beirut: Editions du Cénacle Libanais, 1972–73.

<sup>24</sup> Horowitz, Josef. *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 125. Berlin/Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1926.

<sup>25</sup> In a variant on this approach to the matter, Angelika Neuwirth has suggested to me that inner-Qurʾānic exegesis may have played its role in the development of the series of Moses narratives in the text. She suggested that Qurʾān 79:16 would have been the earliest of the Moses sequence and the word *tumā* may have dropped out of later passages as a result of a general tendency in the Qurʾān which displays an increasing interest in the Bible as time goes on, manifesting itself in this case in an awareness of the absence of the name from the Bible.

<sup>26</sup> Bell, Richard. *The Qurʾān, Translated, with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surabs*, Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1937–39, footnote ad Q. 20:12; idem. *A Commentary on the Qurʾān*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991, ad Q. 20:12.

Involved here are all the questions of literacy, Muḥammad's informants and so forth that characterise Bell's approach. I would imagine that, if pushed, Bell would have had to say the word *wādī* was a later addition in order to make sense of the passage once it had this meaningless and/or corrupted *ṭuvā* in place.<sup>27</sup> A. Ben-Shemesh suggests that the name must "refer to the place mentioned in Ex. 3:5 and may be an Arabic form of 'Valley of Shaveh' mentioned in Gen. 14:17–20 as a holy place."<sup>28</sup> How such a transformation would have occurred and the linguistic basis upon which it is grounded is not explicated; that this section of Genesis 14 speaks of Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek and that the Valley of Shaveh is glossed in the Bible itself as "The King's Valley" makes this a highly speculative suggestion.

Yet other scholars suggest that some confusion arose in the understanding of the Bible at the time of the Qur'ān's composition. James Bellamy,<sup>29</sup> in the most imaginative instance of recent scholarship, suggests that the reference of *ṭuvā* is, in fact, to Joshua 5:15 where Joshua is ordered to remove his shoes by the commander of the Lord's army because, "where you stand is holy." The place this happened was Gilgal which, according to Bellamy, is a word-play related to the root Gimel—Lamed—Lamed, meaning "to roll." Thus, he suggests, the word *ṭuvā* is a calque or a literal translation of "the exegetical definition of Gilgāl." Says Bellamy, "The prophet may well have asked his informant what the name of the sacred valley was and was told 'ṭavā.' The discrepancy between Mt. Horeb and Gilgāl and between Moses and Joshua should not give us pause," says Bellamy, "[t]he Koran, in retelling the biblical stories,

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<sup>27</sup> In a variant on this, reflecting more contemporary approaches to the problem of the textual history of the Qur'ān, G.-R. Puin has suggested to me that the misreading might have occurred in the movement of the text into the *ḥijazī* script (resulting from the inadequacies of that script) or from the movement of the text from *ḥijazī* into Kufic.

<sup>28</sup> Ben-Shemesh, A. *The Noble Quran*, 256, note 1. Tel Aviv: Massada Press, 1979.

<sup>29</sup> Bellamy, James A. "Textual Criticism of the Koran." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121 (2001): 2–3; also in his entry "Textual Criticism." In *EQ*, vol. 5, 248.

often modifies them....” Thus the suggestion includes a proposed situation within the life of Muḥammad, admitted to be speculative by the historian’s key phrase “may well have,” and it promotes a psycho-history of Muḥammad that sees him as cavalier with the “facts” (“this discrepancy compared to some of the others is quite trivial,” says Bellamy) or as a simpleton who did not know the difference between Horeb and Gilgal and thus, “the prophet may have chosen to conflate slightly the two accounts.” Bellamy also speculates that “this may have taken place earlier in the Old Testament lore in the Arabic language,” ultimately putting the entire scenario into the unknown past, but strictly within Arabic, since, it goes unstated, there is no proof of this having happened within any Jewish midrashic sources available to us.

Overall, then, the core assumptions here are obviously different from those of the Muslim exegetes although, notably, they do start from the same observations. This is especially so regarding the fact that the use of a name *ṭuwā* is not a part of the biblical tradition. The critical difference is clearly in the attitude towards the text and its creation. The strategies involved in solving the problem are psychological or historical; all involve differing conceptions regarding the nature of Islam and its relationship to its intellectual and religious environment during its development, a direction of inquiry which is absent in the classical Muslim exegetes. This is hardly a surprising conclusion, but one which is always worthy of reiteration.

### THE UNENDING PROCESS OF INTERPRETATION

An investigation such as the foregoing does not help “solve” the “problem” of *ṭuwā*; rather, it demonstrates the collection of cultural forces by which meaning is produced and constrained. This, it seems to me, is the more interesting task of scholarly research by which we will learn of the triumph of grammar and history in differing eras of human history. What is more, this is an investigation which is never-ending. The forces that affect meaning production are, even now, developing in some previously unknown and unanticipated ways.

This essay has pointed to how exegesis and its procedures raise issues of scholarly authority and knowledge. Among the pre-suppositions of the entire method of classical Muslim exegesis were the emphasis on the cumulative nature of the enterprise and the

need for the person involved within the process to be immersed not just in the Qurʾān itself but in the world of *tafsīr* literature, in grammar, in lexicography, and so forth. The authority of one's pronouncements on meaning was intimately tied to one's ability to be able to cite cross-references, authorities, information, rules and opinion. Such abilities demanded training, dedication, intelligence, and acumen.

We face a changed situation today. The availability of searchable electronic texts allows a much fuller and faster determination of relevant citations in dealing with any given exegetical problem.<sup>30</sup> As a result of this ability to search texts digitally, we are witnessing a wholesale change in access to knowledge which alters fundamental aspects of traditional exegetical procedures. Still, this must not be exaggerated. Just because the material is available electronically and because one does not need to have all the material memorized do not make exegetical works easier to understand, or immediately accessible in an intellectual manner, or even appealing to many people. It does, however, have the potential to result in a radical transformation of the notion of exegesis, one comparable to, and perhaps, one might even suggest, parallel to, the tendency which commenced with Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to construct the authority of exegetical processes on an entirely different basis. For Ibn Kathīr, this was basing *tafsīr* not on grammar but on the authority of the prophet.<sup>31</sup> Today, exegesis is being transformed by taking the materials out of the hands of an élite and providing immediate access to the information. Exegesis still requires learning, of course, but a social transformation is possible within the group of people in charge of the task, just as in the case of Ibn Kathīr and his time.

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<sup>30</sup> See my somewhat-dated reflections on this in Rippin, A. "The Study of *tafsīr* in the 21st Century: Etexts and their Scholarly Use." *MELA Notes* 69–70 (1999–2000): 1–13.

<sup>31</sup> See Saleh, Walid A. "Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An Analysis of *An Introduction to the Foundations of Qurānic Exegesis*." In Rapoport, Yossef, and Shahab Ahmed, eds. *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, 123–62. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

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# WHO IS THE ‘OTHER’ PARACLETE?

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## THE QURANIC PARACLETE: AḤMAD

In *Sura* 61:6, we read this well-known announcement: *And when Jesus the son of Mary said: “Children of Israel, verily I am the messenger of Allah to you in order to confirm what was before me from the Torah and to announce the message that shall bring the messenger who is to come after me and whose name is Aḥmad”*. As Wansbrough noticed, this Aḥmad can be compared to a similar prophecy that we find in S 33: 40, but in this case referring to the name Muḥammad.<sup>1</sup> In the following lines, dedicated to the scholar who marked and reoriented the Quranic studies of the last decades so profoundly, we will try to further explore the meaning of this striking variation of names.

It has long been remarked that the verse of *Sura* 61 is a free citation from the Gospel of John (14:16), where we read: *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter (παράκλητος), that he may abide with you for ever*, or, rather, from chapter 15, verse 26: *But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me*. Indeed, the preceding verse 25 might contain the reference to

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<sup>1</sup> Wansbrough, J. *Quranic Studies. Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, 64. London Oriental Series, 31. Oxford, 1977; Urvoy, M.-T. “Annonce de Mahomet.” In Amir-Moezzi, M. A., ed. *Dictionnaire du Coran*, 55. Paris, 2007.

the Torah<sup>2</sup> that is also appearing in the Quran: *But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their Law: They hated me without a cause.*

In the Quranic verse, the Prophet Muḥammad seems to identify himself with this Spirit of God, called the Paraclete. It has also been remarked that the name *Aḥmad* could be the result of a misinterpretation of the Gospel text, by way of itacism: thus ‘παράκλητος’, transcribed into a Semitic language as *prqlyt*, could be read as ‘περίκλυτος’, resulting in *Aḥmad* as its literal translation.<sup>3</sup> In this context, the citation of a Syriac version of the Gospel by Ibn Hišām containing the name *mānahemānā*, seems to confirm this.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the Gospel would have predicted the coming of Muḥammad.

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<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, as a prophetic Biblical announcement, *Deut.* 18: 15 is also referred to in this context: “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken”, cf. Urvoy, “Annonce de Mahomet,” 55.

<sup>3</sup> Guthrie, A., E. F. F. Bishop, “The Paraclete, Almunhamanna and Aḥmad.” *The Muslim World* 41.4 (1951): 252–54; Nöldeke, Th. *Geschichte des Qurāns*, vol. 1, 9–10. Leipzig, 1909; Sfar, M. *Le Coran, la Bible et l’Orient ancien*, 413. Paris, 1998; Urvoy, “Annonce de Mahomet,” 56, and my art.: “Le Prophète musulman en tant que Nāṣir Allāh et ses antécédents: le « Nazōraios » évangélique et le Livre des Jubilés.” *OLP* 23 (1992): 254 n. 7; “Die Vereinigung des Propheten mit seinem Gott.” In Groß, M., and K.-H. Ohlig, eds. *Schlaglichter. Die beiden ersten islamischen Jahrhunderte*, 377–378. Inārah, 3. Berlin, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Muṣṭafā as-Saqā, Ibn. Al-Ibyārī, ‘Abd al-Ḥafīz Šalabī, *Ibn Hišām, Sirat an-Nabi*, 1, 233. Kairo; Guillaume, A. *The Life of Muhammad. A Translation of Ibn Ishaq’s Sirat Rasul Allah*, 104. Oxford, 1955, 1987; Dalman, G. V. *Aramäisch-neuhebräisches Handwörterbuch zu Targum, Talmud und Midrasch*, 267. Göttingen, 1938: “trösten”; Idem. *Die Worte Jesu*, 1, 71–72. Leipzig, 1898; Baumstark, A. “Eine altarabische Evangelienübersetzung aus dem Christlich-Palästinensischen.” *Zeitschrift für Semitistik*, 8 (1932): 205; Sfar, *Le Coran, la Bible et l’Orient ancien*, 414 n. 1; Urvoy, “Annonce de Mahomet,” 56, and my art.: “Le Prophète musulman,” 254 n. 7; “L’Évangile du Prophète.” In De Smet, D., G. de Callataÿ, and J. M. F. Van Reeth, eds. *Al-Kitāb. La sacralité du texte dans le monde de l’Islam. Actes du Symposium International tenu à Lewen et Louvain-la-Neuve du 29 mai au 1 juin 2002*, 173.

At the other hand, we know that religious reformers preceding the Prophet Muhammad, like Montanus and Mani,<sup>5</sup> already identified themselves with the same Paraclete and it therefore appears that Muhammad only followed a well-established prophetic tradition. Consequently, the announcement of the Paraclete had already been interpreted in such a sense, independently from the name *Muhammad* or *Ahmad*.

### THE BASIC EXEGETICAL PROBLEM:

#### THE IDENTITY OF THE JOHANNINE PARACLETE

The question should therefore be reformulated. First we have to investigate the original function of the Biblical Paraclete. As this is highly controversial and in order to orient ourselves in this complicated matter, we propose to follow a trace that has the advantage to be clear and neat: the identity of the 'other' Paraclete. Indeed, in Jn. 14:16, Jesus announces that there will come 'another Paraclete' after his Ascension: ἐρωτήσω τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἄλλον παράκλητον δώσει ὑμῖν. This suggests that there would exist two Paracletes: one being the H. Ghost who is to come after the disappearance of Christ and another one, who is preceding the venue of this latest Paraclete. The question we have to solve in the first place is therefore: who might be this 'other', first Paraclete, is he distinct from the second one? The equivocalness has been further developed into a differentiation between a celestial *Intercessor* with God, or a "friend at court" on the one hand, and a "friend from court" on the other: an angel whom God is sending to comfort men on earth in His absence.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, in many a commen-

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Acta Orientalia Belgica, Subsidia, III. Leuven/Bruxelles/Louvain-la-Neuve, 2004; "La zandaqa et le Prophète de l'Islam." *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 20 (2007): 69.

<sup>5</sup> *Kephalaia* 15:19 sqq.; Evodius, *De Fide* 24; Widengren, G. *Mani und der Manichäismus*, 33. Stuttgart, 1961; Tardieu, M. *Le Manichéisme*, 13. Que sais-je?, 1940. Paris, 1981, <sup>21</sup>1997.

<sup>6</sup> Bacon, B. W. "The 'Other' Comforter." *Expositor* 2 (1917): 274–82; Sasse, H. "Der Paraklet im Johannesevangelium." *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 24 (1925): 271–72; Windisch, H. "Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche." In *Festgabe für A. Jülicher*, 110, 129–30. Tübingen,

tary, the problem about the two Paracletes is argued away;<sup>7</sup> nonetheless, there are only two possible solutions. Either one has to consider Jesus as the first ‘aid’ or *Paraclete*,<sup>8</sup> who was interceding for his disciples as long as He was among them on earth: in that case Jesus would be the first and the Holy Ghost the second Paraclete. Or both are distinct from Christ; in that case the Paraclete has to be distinguished from the Spirit, in the sense that there are two divine ‘Spirits’: one the Paraclete and the other the Holy Ghost. In other words: it is sometimes believed that there would have occurred a ‘Johannine Pentecost’, a *donum superadditum*, different from the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost itself.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, in only one passage from the Gospel of John, *Paraclete* and *Spirit* are explicitly

1927; Mowinckel, “Die Vorstellungen,” 128. For a similar dual aspect of the divine Spirit in Rabbinic literature: Mowinckel, 100.

<sup>7</sup> Thus for ex. Lagrange, M.-J. *Évangile selon Saint-Jean*, 381–82. *Études Bibliques*. Paris, 1936; Stählin, G. *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 202. Göttingen, 1936 (1968); Wikenhauser, A. *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 269. Regensburg, 1961.

<sup>8</sup> Windisch, “Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche,” 114; Betz, O. *Der Paraklet, Fürsprecher im häretischen Spätjudentum, im Johannes-Evangelium und in neu gefunden gnostischen Schriften*, 163. *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Spätjudentums und Urchristentums*, 2. Leiden, 1963; Brown, R. E. “The Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel.” *New Testament Studies* 13 (1966–67): 128; Idem. *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI*, 1140. The Anchor Bible. New York, 1970; Turner, M. M. B. “The Concept of Receiving The Spirit in John’s Gospel.” *Vox Evangelica* 10 (1977): 26; Casarella, A. *The Johannine Paraclete in the Church Fathers. A Study in the History of Exegesis*, 184. *Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese*. Tübingen, 1983; de la Potterie, I. *La Vérité dans Saint Jean*, vol. 1, 342. *Analecta Biblica*, 73. Rome, 1999; Bucur, B. G. “Revisiting Christian Oeyen: ‘The Other Clement’ on Father, Son, and the Angelomorphic Spirit.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 61 (2007): 388, 404.

<sup>9</sup> Windisch, “Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche,” 111; Betz, *Der Paraklet*, 147; Turner, “The Concept of Receiving The Spirit,” 25; Ben-nema, C. “The Giving of the Spirit in John’s Gospel—A New Proposal?” *EQ* 74 (2002): 195.

identified, but many scholars consider this as a secondary scribal clarification.<sup>10</sup>

The question gets even more complicated, as nowhere else in the Greek Bible (LXX), the expression Παράκλητος occurs<sup>11</sup>; only Philo occasionally used the word, in the sense of *intercessor*, *advocate*.<sup>12</sup> According to Philo, the High Priest should have at his side the divine order of the created world (possibly to be identified with the cosmic Intellect—νοῦς), whom he calls the “Son”, to be his advocate while he is praying and standing in front of God the “Father”: τῷ τοῦ κόσμου πατρὶ παρακλήτῳ χρῆσθαι τελειοτάτῳ τὴν ἀρετὴν υἱῷ.<sup>13</sup> In the New Testament, the word *παρακλητος* only appears in the *Corpus Johanneum*; in the First Letter (2:1) it is clearly referring to Jesus, as the *intercessor* with his Father in heaven.<sup>14</sup>

One could wonder therefore if the name might be the product of a misunderstanding, as it is stated nowhere else that Jesus would be a ‘Paraclete’. Is it possible that Jesus’ role as Saviour originally applied to the Spirit also? ‘Saviour’ in Aramaic is called *ḫarūqā*, a word that looks very similar to the term *paraclete*. It has already been suggested that *paraclete* could be Aramaic and not

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<sup>10</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 650.

<sup>11</sup> Behm, J. *παρακλητος*, In Kittel, G., and G. Friedrich, eds. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 5, 800. Stuttgart, 1954.

<sup>12</sup> Behm, *παρακλητος*, 800–1: “*Führsprecher*, im eigtl, rechtlichen Sinn Personen, die vor dem Machthaber für Beschuldigte das Wort führen”; Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint-Jean*, 381; Wolfson, H. W. *Philo. Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, vol. 2, 412–13. Cambridge-Massachusetts, 1947, 41968; Sasse, “Der Paraklet im Johannes-evangelium,” 271; Windisch, “Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche,” 136; Betz, *Der Paraklet*, 158.

<sup>13</sup> Philo, *De Vita Mosis* 2: 134; Mowinckel, “Die Vorstellungen,” 108–9. Nevertheless according to Mowinckel, 120, Philo’s understanding of this Paraclete could hardly have influenced the Johannine concept.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Jn. 2:1, *Vulg.*: *advocatus*, Sasse, “Der Paraklet,” 261; Windisch, “Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche,” 124–25, 134; Braun, F. M. *Évangile selon Saint Jean*, 429. Paris, 1946; Brown, “The Paraclete,” 116–117; Idem. *The Gospel according to John*, 1135.

Greek: a (slightly miswritten) participle of *prq*, referring to *someone who is saving*.<sup>15</sup> In that case, Jesus would simply have referred to his own spirit, transmitted to his apostles at his death, as a relic from his presence on earth. I will return to this matter further on.

### THE INTRODUCTION OF ANGELIC HYPOSTASES

According to a number of scholars, such as Windisch and Bultmann, there would have been originally a Paraclete, distinct from the Holy Ghost, only to be confused with Him in later tradition.<sup>16</sup> His functions were very similar to those of Jesus: “Der Paraklet ist eine Parallelgestalt zu Jesus selbst.”<sup>17</sup> He could therefore be called ‘another Paraclete’ or perhaps ‘another Saviour’ (*ἄλλοῦ σωτῆρος*). This conception of the work of the Spirit implies the idea of the succession of the revelations as well as the function of the prophets charged with these divine messages—“eine selbständige Person, einen Propheten, in dem sich der Geist manifestiert (...) in jedem Fall (...) eine Analogie zu dem in Jesus inkarnierten Logos oder (...) eine Art zweiten Messias.”<sup>18</sup> Such a doctrine about the succession of divine messengers is very familiar to the islamologist, as it clearly recalls the doctrine concerning prophets and imams and more precisely the function of the *wasīy*, so typical for Muslim (shī‘ite) theology:<sup>19</sup> “Zugrunde [i.e. of Jn. 16: 5–15] liegt die Idee

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<sup>15</sup> Lamsa, G. M. *Die Evangelien in aramäischer Sicht*, 418–19. Gossau/St. Gallen. 1963.

<sup>16</sup> Windisch, “Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche,” 134–35; Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1135.

<sup>17</sup> Bultmann, R. *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 437. Meyers Kommentar, II. Göttingen, 101941; Windisch, “Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche,” 121; Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 1140.

<sup>18</sup> Windisch, “Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche,” 118.

<sup>19</sup> Rubin, U. “Prophets and progenitors in the early Shi‘a tradition.” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 45–46; Kister, M. J. “Ādam. A study of some legends in Tafsīr and ḥadīth-Literature.” *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993): 115–17; Lüling, G. *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad. Eine Kritik am christlichen Abendland*, 109. Erlangen, 1981, and my art. “Les formes du paganisme préislamique selon les interprétations musulmanes,” to be published in the *Proceedings of the 23rd UEAI Congress* (OLA).



von einer Kette von Offenbarungszeugen, die einander ablösen müssen".<sup>20</sup> The last Gospel could have derived such an idea from an already existing gnostic tradition,<sup>21</sup> but henceforth concentrated into one historical event:<sup>22</sup> namely the incarnation of Christ. The function of the Paraclete would in that case indicate the transmission of this principle: it has even been suggested that the succession of Jesus by the Paraclete could indicate the mission that the author of the fourth Gospel was claiming for himself.<sup>23</sup> If this would be the case, the original function of the Paraclete resembles the one that Marcion, Montanus—and eventually Mani and Muḥammad—have claimed for themselves,<sup>24</sup> even if it is improbable that such an identification was the purpose of the Evangelist himself (who was most certainly thinking about a divine Spirit<sup>25</sup>). The model for such a figure should be looked for in gnostic litera-

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<sup>20</sup> Windisch, "Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche," 119. According to Spitta, F. *Das Johannes-Evangelium*, 318–19. 1910, John would have followed for his definition of the role of the Paraclete, an already existing interpretation about the returning of the Prophet Elias. We discuss this role of Elias in the establishment of Islamic prophetology in another contribution ("Qui es-tu? Es-tu Élie? Es-tu le Prophète?" (Jean 1:19–21). "Transposition intertextuelle d'une prophétologie, de la Bible au Coran." In *Oralité et Ecriture dans la Bible et le Coran*. Aix-en-Provence, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> It has been suggested that John would have followed an already existing proto-Gnostic document, a thesis that has been—convincingly—refuted, Brown, "The Paraclete," 119. However, even if a direct borrowing from a precise written source is improbable, the criticism does not exclude that the function of a hypostatic Paraclete was somewhat in the air at the time of the redaction of the Gospel, cf. *ibid.*, 124; Mowinckel, "Die Vorstellungen," 130; Betz, *Der Paraklet*, 158, 174.

<sup>22</sup> Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes...*, 437.

<sup>23</sup> Sasse, "Der Paraklet..." 272–75, 277.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 275; Windisch, "Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche," 110.

<sup>25</sup> Windisch, "Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche," 131–32.

ture. Some specialists have referred to the ‘assistant’ or *Yawar* of the Mandaean tradition.<sup>26</sup>

According to many exegetes, this latest proposition is too far-fetched. In any case, such a gnostic, hypostatic figure can only be understood in the context of what has been called the ‘Angel Christology’, a doctrine that is often said to have influenced Islamic prophetology greatly.<sup>27</sup> For instance, in the *Pastor Hermas*, the ποιμὴν τιμωρητῆς (*Sim.* 7:1) or the *Son of God* is presented as the first of the Seven most elevated Angels—ἄγγελοι πρωτόκτιστοι or πρωτόγονοι.<sup>28</sup> They are most evidently behind the *malā’ika al-muqarrribūn* of the Quran (4: 172; 56: 11, 88; 83: 21, 28),<sup>29</sup> as well as behind the cosmic seven *amlāk ḥunafā’* who figured in the Syriac inscription that happened to be found in the foundations of the *Ka’ba*.<sup>30</sup> In two cases, S 3: 45 and 4: 172, Jesus is included among

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<sup>26</sup> Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 439–40; Windisch, “Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche,” 136; Brown, “The Paraclete,” 119; Idem, *The Gospel according to John*, 1137. See however the critical remarks of Betz, *Der Paraklet*, 231.

<sup>27</sup> Werner, M. *Die Entstehung des christlichen Dogmas problemgeschichtlich dargestellt*, 371 sqq. Bern/Tübingen, 21953; Corbin, H. *Le paradoxe du monothéisme*, 114–19. Paris, 1981; Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten*, 55–56, 60–61, 236; Stuckenbruck, L. T. *Angel Veneration and Christology*. WUNT, 2/70. Tübingen, 1995; Hurtado, L. W. “Monotheism, Principal Angels, and the Background of Christology,” on-line pre-publication to appear in Lim, T. H., and J. J. Collins, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*; Sfar, *Le Coran, la Bible et l’Orient ancien*, 186–87.

<sup>28</sup> Windisch, “Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche,” 128; Barbel, J. *Christos Angelos*, 193, 202–3, 207. Theophaneia, 3. Bonn, 1941; Bucur, “Revisiting Christian Oeyen,” 384, 394–95, 398, and my art. “Âges ou anges? L’arbre cosmique et les esprits qui gouvernent les champs de l’univers.” *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 23 (2010): 215–16.

<sup>29</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 31; Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten*, 70, 82, 234.

<sup>30</sup> Gil, M. “The Creed of Abū ‘Āmir.” *Israel Oriental Studies* 12 (1992): 13, 21, 39.

them, as Wansbrough noticed.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the *rabbānīyūn* of S 3: 80 should probably be explained in a similar way.<sup>32</sup> These Seven are the result of a Persian transposition (the *amāša spānta*, rendered into Greek as ἀγγέλοι) of the Old Babylonian 'Seven', who are presiding over days, weeks, planets and astrological decans.<sup>33</sup> In gnosticism they are a sevenfold extrapolation of the function of the Demiurge, like angels acting in the manner of the seven ἄρχοντες κοσμοποιοί.<sup>34</sup> The Manichaean cosmology may have been a go-between from older Persian and Hellenistic speculations about seven ἀγγέλοι to the Arabian, Islamic ones about prophets, imams and their celestial counterparts.<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere I already argued that it was such a gigantic cosmic Angel who appeared as a kind of divine hypostasis to the Prophet Muḥammad in *Sūra* 53.<sup>36</sup>

The exact nature of these angelic representations of the prophetic or messianic function has been much debated, as it might contradict orthodox Christology. According to Daniélou, they are not so much ordinary angels or archangels; rather their real significance has to be derived from the historical theological context of early Christian writings, at a time when the ontological position of the divine hypostasis—Jesus Christ—had still to be defined, along with the development of the classical Trinitarian formulas. From this viewpoint, the expression 'angel' could indicate a supernatural, spiritual substance in general,<sup>37</sup> any spiritual or divine being in a manifest form, as appearing in our world; the archangel Michaël as the representative of God ("who is as God") is a striking example

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<sup>31</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 30, cf. Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten*, 68–71.

<sup>32</sup> Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten*, 63–66: "Herrschaftsengel".

<sup>33</sup> Barbel, *Christos Angelos*, 221–23, and my art. "Âges ou anges," 217–218.

<sup>34</sup> Jonas, H. *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, vol. 1, 168 n. 1, 208. Göttingen, 1964.

<sup>35</sup> Gil, "The Creed of Abū 'Āmir," 39.

<sup>36</sup> "Die Vereinigung des Propheten," 372–74; "Âges ou anges," 220–221.

<sup>37</sup> Betz, *Der Paraklet*, 157, cf. Mowinckel, "Die Vorstellungen," 115–116.

for such a doctrine.<sup>38</sup> However, one could inverse the argument by saying that Daniélou imposes Trinitarian Christology on texts that ignored such ideas, not yet existing in those pre-Nicaean times. Proposals to understand this kind of primitive Christology as ‘Spirit’ or ‘angelomorphic’ Christology or Pneumatology<sup>39</sup> do not entirely solve the problem.

In any case, the doctrine about a divine spirit that descends in order to come and reside in each prophet and that is further transmitted from teacher to disciple, thus guaranteeing the succession of revelation, is a concept that has its antecedents in the Qumranic tradition<sup>40</sup> and, more in general, in the later Jewish tradition immediately preceding Christianity, as the result of Persian and perhaps also Hellenic influences, as is most apparent from Philo<sup>41</sup> and other Jewish Greek sources.

### THE COMFORTER IN GNOSTIC TEXTS AND THE DIATESSARON

If Jesus would be already a ‘Paraclete’—the first one—preceding the other who is the Spirit, both would be a kind of such angelomorphic entities. In that case, the Paraclete is a form of a hypostasis, an angel of God, in the sense of a gnostic spiritual principle.<sup>42</sup>

As already mentioned, the Paraclete is called the *mānahemānā* by Ibn Hišām in his *Sirat an-Nabi*. In the common Pəšittā-version of the Syriac New Testament, the Johannine term is only transcribed as *paraqlitā* (*prqlt*’ without *y* in the Old Syrian<sup>43</sup>). Only one

<sup>38</sup> Daniélou, J. *Théologie du Judéo-Christianisme*, 168–69. Bibliothèque de Théologie. Histoire des doctrines avant Nicée, 1. Tournai, 1958; Betz, *Der Paraklet*, 150, 154–55; Hurtado, “Monotheism,” 5–6.

<sup>39</sup> Bucur, “Revisiting Christian Oeyen,” 383.

<sup>40</sup> Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran*, 112; Brown, “The Paraclete,” 120–21.

<sup>41</sup> Wolfson, *Philo* 2: 30–31.

<sup>42</sup> Brown, “The Paraclete,” 122.

<sup>43</sup> Smith Lewis, A. *The Old Syriac Gospels or Evangelion Da-Mepharreshê*, 252–56. London, 1910 (New Jersey, 2005); Burkitt, F. C. *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshê: the Curetonian Version of the Four Gospels with the Readings of the Sinai Palimpsest and the Early Syriac Patristic Evidence*, 293. Cambridge, 1894.

very rare witness of the Gospel-text renders the name as *mānah-hemān* (*ḥwrn mnḥymn*): the old Melkite, Syro-Palestinian translation (Syr<sup>pal</sup>, discovered and edited by Agnes Smith Lewis).<sup>44</sup> Although this version generally follows the usual Greek form of the text, many details display striking similarities with the Gospel-text of the *Diatessaron*.<sup>45</sup> Could it therefore be that *mānah-hemānā* is also such a *Diatessaron* reading? This would confirm once more my hypothesis, that the only Gospel-text the Prophet Muḥammad knew about and to which he is always referring as *al-Inḡīl* in the singular, is precisely the *Diatessaron*.<sup>46</sup> Our suggestion is at least not contradicted by the rendering of the term in the Liège *Diatessaron* as “*enen andren troestre*”<sup>47</sup>. The Syro-Palestinian version and possibly also the *Diatessaron* may render an original Hebrew and/or Palestinian Aramaic form of the name, with the specific meaning of “someone, who

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<sup>44</sup> Smith Lewis, A., and M. Dunlop Gibson. *The Palestinian Syriac Lectionaria of the Gospels*, 51. London, 1899 (1971); Baumstark, “Altarabische Evangelienübersetzung,” 202–5; Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 104, n. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Black, M. “The Palestinian Syriac Gospels and the Diatessaron.” *Oriens Christianus* 36 (1941): 101 (unfortunately, the continuation of this article was never published, so that the study about the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel is missing); Idem. “The Syriac Versional Tradition.” In Aland, K., ed. *Die alten Übersetzungen des neuen Testaments*, 142. Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung, 5. Berlin, 1972: “...ultimately based on a pre-Peshitta or an ‘Old Syriac’ version. The influence of the Diatessaron on the Lectionary is unmistakable”; Aland, B. “Bibelübersetzungen I.” *TRE* 6 (1980): 194–95; Pierre, M.-J. *Aphraate le Sage Persan, Les Exposés*, vol. 1, 142. SC, 349. Paris, 1988; Shedinger, R. F. *Tatian and the Jewish Scriptures: a Textual and Philological Analysis of the Old Testament Citations in Tatian’s Diatessaron*, 22. CSCO, 591, subs 109. Louvain, 2001.

<sup>46</sup> See my art. “L’Évangile du Prophète,” 158. Similarly, Aphrahat is always citing ‘the Gospel’ in the singular, by which he is also indicating the *Diatessaron*, cf. Pierre, *Aphraate*, 140–41.

<sup>47</sup> De Bruin, C. C. *Diatessaron Leodiense*, 236. Corpus Sacrae Scripturae Neerlandicae Medii Aevi, Series Miror, 1.1. Leiden, 1970.

*makes to breathe again*, who *resuscitates* and *revivifies*?<sup>48</sup> As a matter of fact, a *mənāḥem* already occurs in the literature of Qumran.<sup>49</sup>

A corresponding salving figure exists in the gnostic tradition. References have been made to the Mandaean literature, where on many occasions a *Messenger* is appearing, an *Assistant*, also often called a *Redeemer* (*p'rwq'* or *mp'rq'n*), pointing to a salvation that is only to come at the end of times.<sup>50</sup> Gnostic literature bears witness to still another, for our case more appropriate saviour: the so-called *parwānqīn*<sup>51</sup> who is appearing as early as the Syriac *Song of the Pearl*. This *parwānqīn* is a Syriac word that only apparently seems to be linked to the stem *prq*, 'to save'; the Greek translations of the *Song of the Pearl* render it as ὀδηγός or ἡγεμών, meaning 'guide'. The passage reads as follows: "I was leaving the Orient and I went down, while two *parwānqīn* accompanied me, the road being terrible and difficult"<sup>52</sup>.

In fact the term *parwānqā* has nothing to do with the Semitic *prq*, for the simple reason that it is a loan-word from the Persian, meaning 'guide'. At the Iranian, especially Parthian court, this guide appears as someone who is 'preceding' the king as his herald or messenger and who has to transmit the orders of the king. This function, fitting originally in the context of a feudal society, was transposed metaphorically into that of Manichaean soteriology, to indicate someone who, as a kind of angel or divine hypostasis, is assisting like a vassal does, his divine monarch, the Most High God. This angel or Archont, called *parwānqā*, has to guide the souls of the faithful, by learning them why they need to prefer the eternal

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<sup>48</sup> See my art. "Le Prophète musulman," 254; "La zandaqa," 69.

<sup>49</sup> Brown, "The Paraclete," 115 n. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Windisch, "Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche," 136; W. Foerster, "σφζω." In Kittel and Friedrich, *Theologisches Wörterbuch*, 1002; Betz, *Der Paraklet*, 230.

<sup>51</sup> In fact, this is a correction by Bevan and Nöldeke, based on the Greek translations, followed by all the editors since (Lipsius and Hoffmann); the manuscript reads *prwqyn*, cf. Poirier, P. H. *L'Hymne de la Perle des Actes de Thomas. Introduction, texte, commentaire*, 337. Louvain-la-Neuve, 1981. *Homo Religiosus*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Poirier, *L'Hymne de la Perle*, 233, 330, 344.

and unhampered righteousness.<sup>53</sup> As such, he is frequently appearing in Mandaean texts too, where his name often is confused with that of the *parûqa* or 'Saviour'.<sup>54</sup>

It is quite imaginable that a so-called *parwânqâ* indicating a hypostatic, angelomorphic principle, already existed at the time of the redaction of the fourth Gospel.<sup>55</sup> It might therefore have been his original name, subsequently misunderstood and read as *Paraclete*—possibly by way of a secondary, supplementary confusion with the existing adjective *pûrqânâyâ*—thus producing a word that is understandable in Greek. In that case Jesus' prophecy simply meant that there would be two salving 'persons' or *parânqê*: the first 'Saviour' being Jesus himself and the second one his Spirit, whom He would send or leave behind after his resurrection, to remain eternally on earth among his disciples, until the consummation of times.

I am still more inclined however, to suppose that this adaptation of the *parwânqâ* to become a Paraclete was not so much the result of a misunderstanding, but has been deliberate. It could very well have been the work of the author of the Gospel himself, intended to render a good sense to an otherwise ununderstandable foreign word (*parwânqâ*) in Greek, in order to clarify what the exact mission would be of the Ghost who is about to come. As such a proposition has considerable theological implications, surpassing the framework of this investigation, I intend to return to the subject in a forthcoming publication.

The dualistic and gnostic interpretation linked to the announcement of the Paraclete in the tradition of the *Diatessaron* is clearly appearing in St. Ephrem's commentary. Ephrem is indeed constantly refuting such a dualistic concept of the deity, professed by the Bardaysanites and Manicheans, by arguing that the Ghost is just as divine as Jesus Christ, at the same level, not greater nor

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<sup>53</sup> Widengren, G. *Die Religionen Irans*, 296–97. *Die Religionen der Menschheit*, 14. Stuttgart, 1963; Poirier, *L'Hymne de la Perle*, 235–36.

<sup>54</sup> Poirier, *L'Hymne de la Perle*, 235.

<sup>55</sup> Betz, *Der Paraklet*, 117–20; Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 699 also argues in favour for such a dualistic origin.

lesser,<sup>56</sup> rather, He is of the same nature: therefore He (i.e. Jesus Christ), has sent the Spirit or Paraclete “from his own nature” (*mēn kəyānā dīleh*), that is to say from his essence or substance.<sup>57</sup> Therefore it is impossible for Ephrem that someone, be it Mani or any other prophet or humane religious authority, might be the incarnation of the Paraclete, as a representative of the divine, good principle of Light.<sup>58</sup> Yet, this was precisely what Mani was claiming for himself: to be the Paraclete whom Jesus had foretold.

### ANALYSIS OF THE QURANIC TEXT AND THE TESTIMONY OF IBN HIŠĀM

Although Ibn Hišām, while discussing in his *Sīrat an-Nabī* Jesus’ announcement of the Paraclete, does not make any direct reference to the text of the Quran, he must have remarked that the prophecy was fulfilled by *Sura* 61:6. The best analysis of Ibn Hišām’s presentation is still the one by Alfred Guillaume.<sup>59</sup> However, at the time of its publication, some sources that could elucidate meaning and background of the text were not available yet. This is why we deem it necessary to have a closer look at this important testimony once more.<sup>60</sup>

قال ابن إسحاق : وقد كان فيما بلغني عما كان وضع عيسى بن مريم فيما جاءه من الله في الإنجيل لأهل الإنجيل من صفة رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ، مما أثبت يُحْتَسَسُ الحواريُّ لهم حين نسخ لهم الإنجيل عن عهد عيسى بن مريم عليه السلام

<sup>56</sup> Lange, Chr., ed. *Ephraem der Syrer. Kommentar zum Diatessaron*, vol. 2, 533. Fontes Christiani, 54/2. Turnhout, 2008.

<sup>57</sup> This is how I understand his Commentary 22,1, Lange, *Kommentar zum Diatessaron*, vol. 2, 616, a passage that is, I think, not at all “unklar ... zu verstehen”.

<sup>58</sup> Lange, *Kommentar zum Diatessaron*, vol. 1, 24.

<sup>59</sup> Guillaume, A. “The Version of the Gospels Used in Medina.” *Al-Andalus* 15.2 (1950): 288–96.

<sup>60</sup> We reproduce the text of Muṣṭafā as-Saqā (e.a., edd.), *Sīrat an-Nabī* 1, 232–33.



في رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم إليهم أنه قال من أبغضني فقد أبغض الرب  
 ولولا أني صنعت بحضرتهم صنائع لم يصنعها أحد قبلي ، ما كانت لهم خطيئة  
 ولكن من الآن بطرؤوا وظننوا أنهم يعزوني وأيضا للرب ولكن لا بد من  
 أن تم الكلمة التي في الناموس أنهم أبغضوني مجانا أي باطلا فلو قد جاء  
 المنحمننا هذا الذي يرسله الله إليكم من عند الرب ، و روح القدس ،  
 هذا الذي من عند الرب خرج فهو شهيد على وأنتم أيضا لأنكم قديما كنتم معي  
 في هذا قلت لكم : لكيما لا تشكوا .  
 والمنحمننا بالسريانية محمد وهو بالرومية البرقليطس

The text could be rendered as follows (some modifications and interpretations of the text are accounted for further):

Ibn Ishāq said: And there was in what I heard about Jesus the Son of Mary from what God revealed in the Gospel to the adherents of the Gospel, as Johannes the Apostle set it down for them about the Messenger of God, when writing for them the Gospel about the Testament of Jesus the son of Mary, concerning the Messenger of God:

«He that hateth me hateth the Lord. And if I had not wrought in their presence works that no one has wrought before me, they had not had sin. But now that they have observed and do believe, they are comforted in me and thus also in the Lord. However, no doubt the word that concerns the Nāmūs must be fulfilled: *They hated me without a cause*, meaning *without reason*. And when the *munaḥamanā* shall come, whom God will send to you from the Lord, the Spirit of Rightness, who is going forth from the Lord and who will testify of me, and ye also, because ye have been with me from the beginning. About these I have spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.»

And the *munaḥamanā* is in Syriac *Muḥammad* and in Greek he is the *Baraqlītis*.

As Baumstark and Guillaume already remarked, the form of the name of the Evangelist *Yuhannis* is from the outset a clear indication for its origin, as this is how he is appearing in the Syro-Palestinian tradition; elsewhere in Syria we would expect the spell-

ing *Yuhan(n)a(n)*.<sup>61</sup> The presence of this form does not necessarily contradict an origin from the Diatessaron: it seems that the Gospel of St. John is the only one to be referred to by Aphrahat in his *Demonstrations*, who is regularly citing from the *Diatessaron*.<sup>62</sup>

In the phrase: “He that hateth me hateth my Father also” (Jn. 15: 23—τὸν πατέρα), *al-ab* is changed into *ar-rabb*. Of course this appears to be an adaptation to Islam,<sup>63</sup> but it is not necessarily to be imputed to the author of the citation, Ibn Hišām, himself; it might be a (even unintentional) modification by an ulterior copyist too, as the Arabic form of the two words is very similar. We should therefore remain prudent in this case and not too easily formulate any hazardous conclusions.

Somewhat further ἐωράκασιν = *baṭirū* seems corrupt. Baumstark, followed by Guillaume, emendated into *naẓarū*.<sup>64</sup> However, there is a much more evident correction into *baṣirū*: this is even the reading of the Arabic *Diatessaron*!<sup>65</sup> The use of this verb gives to the Gospel-text a more ‘gnostic’ purport. It is indeed part of a Judeo-Christian prophetic terminology that I have analysed many years ago: *nṣr* and *ḥṣr* are also appearing in *Sura* 19: 42/43 and in a passage where Ibn Hišām endeavours to define the prophetic mission. Closely linked to the Mandaean ‘observants’, it is designating a ‘*nāṣir*’: someone who is applying himself to protect the integrity of the divine mysteries.<sup>66</sup> Visibly, the second, added, verb *waẓannū* (‘they believed’) is only reinforcing this meaning, probably as a kind of a gloss.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Baumstark, “Eine altarabische Evangelienübersetzung,” 204; Guillaume, “The Version of the Gospels,” 292.

<sup>62</sup> Pierre, *Aphraate*, 140–141; Bruns, P. *Aphrahat. Unterweisungen 1, aus dem syrischen übersetzt und eingeleitet*, 48. *Fontes Christiani*, 5/1. Freiburg.

<sup>63</sup> Guillaume, “The Version of the Gospels,” 294.

<sup>64</sup> Baumstark, “Eine altarabische Evangelienübersetzung,” 205; Guillaume, “The Version of the Gospels,” 294.

<sup>65</sup> Marmardji, A.-S. *Diatessaron de Tatien*, 442. Beyrouth, 1935.

<sup>66</sup> See my art. “Le Prophète musulman,” 258, 265.

<sup>67</sup> Similarly Guillaume, “The Version of the Gospels,” 294: “looks like another shot at the meaning”.

For the word *ya'izzūnani*, there is some hesitation in the tradition, a number of manuscripts reading it as: *ya'uzzūnani*.<sup>68</sup> Ostensibly the copyists felt uneasy here. We are therefore inclined to give a totally different meaning to the text. Guillaume still tried to translate the text of the manuscript tradition literally: “but from now they are puffed up with pride and think that they will overcome me and also the Lord”, only to subsequently remark that the reading has no sense and must therefore be mistaken or corrupt.<sup>69</sup> However, if we would read the verb without *tašdid*, it could be derived, not from *ʿazza*, but from the verb *ʿzw/ʿzy*,<sup>70</sup> with the meaning: “to link up someone to someone else” and even (in the second form, with *tašdid*): “to comfort”, and we would translate accordingly, giving the phrase a positive sense: “but now that they have seen and do believe (fully understand), they belong to me (they are comforted in me) and thus also to the Lord”. If our interpretation is correct, the text is giving a clear justification for the Islamic interpretation of the apostolic, prophetic mission, by transmitting the divine, angelic spirit from Jesus to his followers the apostles, who are about to receive the Paraclete.

Even more interesting is the translation of “their Law” (ὁ λόγος ὁ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ αὐτῶν γεγραμμένος) into “the word that concerns the *Nāmūs*”. As Guillaume already rightly observed, the phrase “that has been written” is omitted in the Arab version, an alteration that suggests that we are here in the presence of “a mysterious prophecy about the *Nāmūs* which early Muslim commentators identified with Gabriel or Holy Spirit.”<sup>71</sup> Strangely enough it seems to have escaped to the attention of Guillaume that such an interpretation is indeed attested by part of the manuscript tradition,

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<sup>68</sup> Wüstenfeld, F. *Das Leben Muhammed's nach Muhammed Ibn Ishāk bearbeitet von Abd el-Malik Ibn Hischām, aus den Handschriften zu Berlin, Leipzig, Gotha und Leyden herausgegeben*, vol. 2, 48. Göttingen, 1859–60.

<sup>69</sup> Guillaume, “The Version of the Gospels,” 291, 294.

<sup>70</sup> The Old Syriac text is reading *šnanu*, Smith Lewis, *The Old Syriac Gospels*, 256; Marmardji, *Diatessaron*, 443. Could it have been misread as if it were derived from *ʿzr*, ‘to link, bind’?

<sup>71</sup> Guillaume, “The Version of the Gospels,” 294.

as the codex *Berlin Wetzstein* 15 actually reads: *an-Nāmūs Ġibril*.<sup>72</sup> In this case the archangel is to be compared to the νόμος or εἰμαρμένη who is the cosmological principle or 'Weltgott' of Marcionism.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, it has to be remarked that *nāmūs* is the usual term by which the Manichaeans indicate their doctrine.<sup>74</sup> Also, a few lines further in the text of Ibn Hišām, when the appearing of the angel Gabriel is reported to Waraqa, the uncle of Ḥadīga, he exclaims: "there hath come unto him the greatest Nāmūs,"<sup>75</sup> who was correctly identified by Ṭabarī as Gabriel.<sup>76</sup> This is in complete agreement with a well-known Jewish and Jewish-Christian tradition,<sup>77</sup> that identifies Gabriel with the Law or the Torah. As God's messenger, he has to transmit his Revelation to mankind. As such, he must be equalled to the Manichaean angel at-Tawm, the 'companion' of the Divine Spirit or Paraclete, who, in the form of Gabriel, is speaking to the prophets.<sup>78</sup> In all those cases, Gabriel is a form or appearance of the Lord himself,<sup>79</sup> that is to say a kind of Archont. As a matter of fact, according to the Montanists in the presentation of the Syriac author Marūta of Mayerkat (4<sup>th</sup>/early 5<sup>th</sup> C.), it was such a divine Archont who united himself to the 'goddess' Mary in order to conceive the Son of God, a representation of the conception of Jesus also to be found in later Islamic

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<sup>72</sup> Wüstenfeld, *Das Leben Mubammed's*, 2:48.

<sup>73</sup> Jonas, *Gnosis*, 168 n. 1, 208 n. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Gil, The Creed of Abū 'Āmir, 38, referring to Henrichs, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973): 47–48.

<sup>75</sup> Tr. Guillaume, *The Life of Mubammad*, 107.

<sup>76</sup> Gilliot, "Le Coran, fruit d'un travail collectif?" 190.

<sup>77</sup> Windisch, "Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche," 136; de la Potterie, I. "Le Paraclet." In Idem, ed. *La Vie selon l'Esprit. Condition du chrétien*, 95–96. Paris, 1965; Idem, *La Vérité*, 331; Betz, *Der Paraklet*, 175; Brown, "The Paraclete," 121.

<sup>78</sup> Widengren, *Mani*, 32–33; Tardieu, *Manichéisme*, 13, 18; Sfar, *Le Coran, la Bible et l'Orient ancien*, 414; Gilliot, "Le Coran, fruit d'un travail collectif," 190 + n. 26. Cf. also Barbel, *Christos Angelos*, 232.

<sup>79</sup> Barbel, *Christos Angelos*, 237.

tradition.<sup>80</sup> Such 'Philomarianite' and Montanite doctrines seem to have greatly influenced the beginnings of Islam,<sup>81</sup> possibly by way of a Manichaeian intermediate, where we encounter a trinity, consisting of a Father, a Mother of Life / the Living Spirit and the Original Man, corresponding to the ancient Syrian divine triad.<sup>82</sup> This has also much to do with the fact that in Syriac the word for 'spirit', *riḥā*, is a feminine noun. This is always the case in the works of the older authors—Aphrahat<sup>83</sup> and Saint Ephrem; only later this gender was sometimes altered into masculine when indicating the Holy Ghost and this precisely for religious reasons (just as happened with the Arabic word *riḥ*). This theologically inspired grammatical correction is most certainly a reaction against gnostic tendencies, where such a female Spirit, often as part of a dualistic Syzygy, plays a central role in the creation myth, as for instance in the works of Bardayṣan.<sup>84</sup>

In the following sentence of Ibn Hišām, the subject of the verb is changed. Guillaume remarks: "By altering 'whom I will send to you from the Father' to 'whom God will send to you from the Lord' an impossible sentence results."<sup>85</sup> In the Pəšittā-version of

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<sup>80</sup> Rahmani, I. E. *Studia Syriaca*, 79, 102. Scharfe, 1909, cited by Barbel, *Christos Angelos*, 260; Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 12.

<sup>81</sup> See my art. "Les Collyridiennes. Le culte de la femme dans la tradition arabe ancienne." *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 15 (2001): 147–54, and Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten*, 173–74.

<sup>82</sup> Jonas, *Gnosis*, 121 n. 1, 302, 305–6, 310; Widengren, *Mani*, 53–54; Drijvers, H. J. W. *Bardaiṣan of Edessa*, 221. *Studia Semitica Neerlandica*, 6. Assen, 1966. (Important for the development of such gnostic ideas about Christ and Trinity may have been the image of the *pearl*, cf. Usener, H. "Die Perle, aus der Geschichte eines Bildes." In Harnack, A., e.a., edd. *Theologische Abhandlungen Carl von Weisäcker gewidmet*, 209–12. Freiburg, 1892; Poirier, *L'Hymne de la Perle*, 243.

<sup>83</sup> Pierre, *Aphraate*, 762 n. 35.

<sup>84</sup> Bousset, W. *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis*, 71, 96, 330. *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des alten und neuen Testaments*, 10. Göttingen, 1907; Drijvers, *Bardaiṣan*, 145–46. See already the *Hymn of the Pearl*, Poirier, *L'Hymne de la Perle*, 320.

<sup>85</sup> Guillaume, "The Version of the Gospels," 294.

the New Testament, we have *haw de'nā mašaddar 'nā ləkūn men ləwât âbi*. The Old Syriac however reads: *damsaddarnâ ləkūn men ləwât âbi*, which could easily have been misread and misinterpreted as: “send to you from my Father”, the more so as it could have been contaminated with Jn. 14: 26, where it is said: “the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name”.<sup>86</sup> What Ibn Hišām’s version is aiming at is once more as clear as it can be: the Spirit mysteriously comes from the Lord and after having inspired Jesus, it is now transmitted to the apostles, in order to inhabit them and to inspire their words.

That the role of the Spirit is different from the common, ‘received’ interpretation of the function of the Paraclete according to orthodox Christianity, is proven beyond any doubt by the rendering of the title “the Spirit of Truth” (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας), not as *Rūh al-quds*, as in the printed edition that we have reproduced, but as *Rūh al-qist*, which is the form of the text according to the majority of the manuscripts and the reading that has been retained by Wüstenfeld in his classical edition.<sup>87</sup> The meaning of the name would therefore be according to Ibn Hišām: “the Spirit of rightness, of justice”.<sup>88</sup> This is once more in accordance to the Syro-Palestinian version; the text of Jn. 15: 26 is missing in the lectionary, but in Jn. 14: 17 we read: *Rūhâ daqūstâ*.<sup>89</sup> The Paraclete is therefore interpreted in order to become a Spirit of Truth, appearing in the Qumranic texts as the *Prince of the good Forces of Light*, who has to combat with the righteous against the Forces of Evil.<sup>90</sup> A similar dualistic couple of spirits of Truth and Falsehood is, under Persian influence, already present in *Test. Juda* 20, as Mowinckel has indicated many years ago.<sup>91</sup> In the Qumranic presentation, this principle of Light and Truth should equally penetrate the worship-

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<sup>86</sup> Sasse, “Der Paraklet,” 265. Another, equally possible explanation is given by Baumstark, “Eine altarabische Evangelienübersetzung,” 207. The result is the same.

<sup>87</sup> Wüstenfeld, *Das Leben Mubammed's*, 1: 150, 2: 48.

<sup>88</sup> Guillaume, “The Version of the Gospels,” 293.

<sup>89</sup> Smith Lewis, *The Palestinian Syriac Lectionaria*, 51.

<sup>90</sup> Betz, *Der Paraklet*, 148, 151, 221–22; Hurtado, “Monotheism,” 7.

<sup>91</sup> Mowinckel, “Die Vorstellungen,” 98, 116–17.

pers and inhabit their hearts.<sup>92</sup> Therefore it becomes more and more clear that the Islamic concept of the Spirit, identified with the Prophetic principle, ultimately stems from late pre-Christian Judaism, where the angelic Spirit of Truth was already getting combined with the spirit that God is implanting in each of his prophets successively.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, according to Betz, the double nature of the Paraclete would be a clear indication for the fact that “der johanneische Paraklet sei nach dem Bilde des spätjüdischen Fürbitters Michael geschaffen und dann mit dem «Geist der Wahrheit» gleichgesetzt worden.”<sup>94</sup>

Let us now turn once again to the Quranic text, cited at the outset of our inquiry. It appears, as is so often the case in the Quran,<sup>95</sup> to be a kind of a commentary, in the manner of a Jewish *midrash*, of the Gospel-text from Jn. 15: 25–26. Thus the phrase: “*in order to confirm what was before me from the Torah!*” (*muṣaddiq<sup>m</sup> limā bayna yadayya mina t-Tawrāt<sup>m</sup>*), can only be a paraphrase of the words of Jesus according to the Gospel: “*the word might be fulfilled that is written in their Law*”—according to the Arabic *Diatessaron*: *litutamma l-kalimatu l-maktūbatu fī Namusihi* (Gr.: ἵνα πληρωθῆ ὁ λόγος ὁ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ αὐτῶν γεγραμμένος).

The Quran continues: “*and to announce the message that shall bring the messenger who is to come after me and whose name is Ahmad*”—a proposition that seems to paraphrase: “*the Comforter (...) the Spirit of truth (...) he shall testify of me.*” This role of the *muṣaddiq* that Jesus is playing in the Quranic prophecy, is most similar to the status of the Prophet Muḥammad<sup>96</sup> as the ‘Seal of the Prophets’, the σφραγίς

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<sup>92</sup> 1QS 3; 1QM 13 and 17; Cross, *Ancient Library*, 112, 114; Brown, “The Paraclete,” 121–22; Idem., *The Gospel according to John*, 699, 1138–39.

<sup>93</sup> Betz, *Der Paraklet*, 146; Brown, “The Paraclete,” 123.

<sup>94</sup> Betz, *Der Paraklet*, 159.

<sup>95</sup> See my art. “Le Coran et ses scribes.” *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 19 (2006): 76–77, 80, and “La zandaqa,” 70–71.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten*, 84: “...daß dieses Selbstverständnis des Propheten Muhammad lit dem Selbstverständnis Jesu Christi wesensgleich ist”.

or τέλος νόμου that was equally appearing already in Manichaeism,<sup>97</sup> referring to his role at the end of time.<sup>98</sup>

### SYRIAC DEVELOPMENTS: THE SPIRITUAL ASCENDANCE OF THE SOUL OF THE *ELECTI*

From the preceding analysis, we would like to conclude that it would be too easy to state that the Quranic and Islamic presentation of the Paraclete is simply a heretical one, derived from some dualistic, Marcionite, Manichaean or Montanite tradition. Rather there was a tendency, represented not only by these heterodox movements, but equally well attested among a great number of Syriac authors, of whom many are generally listed as orthodox. They all displayed a kind of angelology and prophetology close to a form of ‘Angel Christology’, linked to a transmigrant principle of prophecy—the Paraclete—that eventually came to inhabit the Prophet Muḥammad.

We now intend to follow the trace of this kind of theology within the Syriac tradition, in order to show how it could almost inconspicuously influence Islamic doctrine.

One of the earliest representatives hereof, inaugurating the Syriac ascetic tradition, is James, more commonly known as Aphrahat ‘the Persian Sage’ who probably wrote at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>99</sup> Aphrahat describes a spiritual palace that somehow remind us about the bridal chamber of Light as appearing in the teachings of Bardaysan,<sup>100</sup> but this time without its he-

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<sup>97</sup> Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 64–65; Gil, “The Creed of Abū ‘Āmir,” 38; Sfar, *Le Coran, la Bible et l’Orient ancien*, 412; Tardieu, *Manichéisme*, 20. Cf. the notion of the τέλειοι in the Gospel of John: Windisch, “Die fünf johanneischen Parakletsprüche,” 120.

<sup>98</sup> See my art. “La zandaqa,” 70.

<sup>99</sup> Pierre, *Aphraate*, 33–35; Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 41; Van Vossel, V. “L’amour de Dieu chez Aphraate et dans le *Livre des Degrés*.” In *Dieu Miséricorde, Dieu Amour. Actes du colloque VIII, Patrimoine Syriaque*, vol. 1, 123–24. Antélias: CERO, 2003.

<sup>100</sup> Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, 151.



retical characteristics. It is this temple that the Spirit of Christ would come to inhabit.<sup>101</sup>

According to Aphrahat, the divine Spirit is to be equalled to the 'Spirit of Christ',<sup>102</sup> who is the paroxysm of the spirit of prophecy that was inspiring all the Biblical messengers of God.<sup>103</sup> Christ is therefore to be identified to this Old Testament prophetic principle ("mit dem in der alttestamentlichen Geschichte latent wirksamen Segenserbe"): a parcel of the divine Spirit that is living within Him, just as it does in each prophet<sup>104</sup> and acting as a mediator of this Spirit to mankind. What is more, such a spiritual component from divine origin, called *ruhā*, is animating every human being. It is precisely this spiritual part of man that has to be delivered, revived through baptism and, even more importantly, through ascetism and penitence, and consequently through the bestowal of pardon to the souls of the faithful by the divine Mediator, Jesus Christ.<sup>105</sup> Remarkably Aphrahat calls Christ a 'stone' or 'rock' (*so'a* and *kepa*)<sup>106</sup>, a title that in the Gospel is only applied by Jesus to St. Peter. This would suggest that the divine prophetic principle that lived in Jesus went over subsequently into Peter—Islamic tradition would add: who is acting afterwards as his *wasī*. Basing ourselves on this specific pneumatology of Aphrahat, we would argue that the old Iranian Syriac concept about the Spirit,<sup>107</sup> still close to the teachings of Tatian,<sup>108</sup> has set the basic presuppositions for what later will become Muslim prophetology, linked to the concept of the *wasī*, the divine principle that is transmitted from one prophet to another and that is to be identified with the Paraclete who eventually came to inhabit the Prophet Muḥammad, at the end

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<sup>101</sup> Aphrahat, *Demonstr.* 1: 2–3, Pierre, *Aphraate*, 208–10; Van Vossel, "L'amour de Dieu," 125.

<sup>102</sup> Aphrahat, *Demonstr.* 1:3; 6:1, 13–14, 18; Pierre, *Aphraate*, 166.

<sup>103</sup> Pierre, *Aphraate*, 165; Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 58.

<sup>104</sup> Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 58, 68.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 67–69.

<sup>106</sup> Aphrahat, *Demonstr.* 1: 2–7, Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 81–84.

<sup>107</sup> Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 59: "Die 'Inkarnationsvorstellungen' Aphrahats sind ganz vom frühsyrisch-iranischen Bekleideschema geprägt".

<sup>108</sup> Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 59, 67.

of time.<sup>109</sup> It seems that Aphrahat's presentation of this concept of prophetology is also indebted to the gnostic tradition of the aforementioned Song of the Pearl.<sup>110</sup>

Aphrahat's most clear exposition about the role of the Spirit is to be found in his sixth treatise, about (and addressed to) the "steady members of the community" (*bənaḡ qəyāmā*). The name is impossible to render in English<sup>111</sup>; it seems to indicate a group of men who behave entirely according to the prescriptions of purity, as living solitary or in community. In any case they were celibatarians, without necessarily having been ordained as a priest.<sup>112</sup> This community of pure living men is therefore very similar to that of the Essenes or to the *electi* of certain gnostic sects. Literally, they are those who are standing 'upright',<sup>113</sup> who are so to speak resurrected in advance: saved because of their ascetic way of life, purified and perfect before the Lord. The concept is certainly to be linked to some extreme kinds of ascetism, such as that of the stylites, where the idea of the *στάσις* or *qəyāmā* also played a central role.<sup>114</sup>

Of this purity, Christ is offering the most perfect example.<sup>115</sup> Citing from an apocryphal Letter to the Corinthians, Aphrahat states that, even if God has given part of the Spirit of Christ to every Prophet, He gave it to Christ himself without any measure.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten*, 109; Gil, "The Creed of Abū 'Āmir," 38.

<sup>110</sup> Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 58, cf. Poirier, *L'Hymne de la Perle*, 320, 427.

<sup>111</sup> K. Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat, Demonstrations*, 121. Mōrān 'Eth'ō, 23—SEERI. Kottayam, 2005, translates: "The Sons of the Covenant".

<sup>112</sup> Vööbus, A. *History of Ascetism in the Syriac Orient. A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East*, vol 1. *The Origin of Ascetism. Early Monasticism in Persia*, 184–86. CSCO, 184, Subs. 14. Louvain, 1958; Pierre, *Aphraate*, 99–101.

<sup>113</sup> Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat*, 12.

<sup>114</sup> See my art. "Syméon stylite l'ancien. Le Saint qui s'est fait colonne." *Acta Orientalia Belgica* 10 (1995): 118 (+ n. 94), 126–27.

<sup>115</sup> Aphrahat, *Demonstr.*, 6: 9.

<sup>116</sup> Aphrahat, *Demonstr.*, 6: 12, referring to 3 Cor. 3:10 and Jn. 3:34, Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat*, 149–50 + n. 105; Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 202.

This same Spirit of Christ, that has inspired every prophet of the Bible, is still bestowed on all the members of his pious community, all having a share in His grace, while they are prophesying in the church of every time.<sup>117</sup> Aphrahat is clearly developing here a form of prophetology which is similar, not only to that of the Montanist movement, but to that of Islam too; apparently it must have been a widespread doctrine in the Syriac church.

Thus the Spirit comes to dwell in the faithful, following baptism, so that they become a living temple for Him.<sup>118</sup> Yet, this Spirit is a wandering spirit, wandering about from prophet to prophet and from century to century during all ages—an idea that seems to go back to Philo of Alexandria.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, the Spirit is standing before the face of God the Father, just as do the angels according to what is said in the Gospel: “in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven”.<sup>120</sup> Aphrahat interprets this in such a way, that the Spirit who is inspiring the prophets, is reflecting the divine presence (His face) to the world, thus revealing his message to his people.

Aphrahat's soteriology is clearly displaying some similar gnostic, dualistic aspects. The final goal of Deliverance is the liberation and recovery of the Spirit from its earthly bindings. Human beings should free themselves of the attachment of their souls to the body. In order to achieve this reestablishment of the original perfect man preceding the fall of Adam, the pious has to become totally spiritual again, by the infusion of the holy Spirit who has been animating Christ from his baptism onwards.<sup>121</sup> Thus the ultimate salvation is the result of a struggle of the forces of evil in our material world with the Spirit of God, who is coming to live in every spiritual, holy man. After death, the divine principle, the *ruhā*

<sup>117</sup> Aphrahat, *Demonstr.*, 6: 12; Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 396; Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat*, 150.

<sup>118</sup> Aphrahat, *Demonstr.*, 6: 14 (referring to Lev. 21:12 and Ezech. 36:12); Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 399; Valavanolickal, *Aphrahat*, 152.

<sup>119</sup> Aphrahat, *Demonstr.*, 6: 15; Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 403, referring to Philo Alex., *De gigant.* 47–48, cf. Wolfson, *Philo* 2: 33–34.

<sup>120</sup> Mt. 18: 10, Aphrahat, *Demonstr.*, 6: 15.

<sup>121</sup> Pierre, *Aphraate*, 175–76, 184–85; Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 59, 68.

*napšânâytâ*, that is animating every human being has to free itself from its corporeal bindings and to rejoin its origin in heaven.<sup>122</sup>

Aphrahat's concept about the role of the Spirit of Christ has been further expanded by a series of texts following his footsteps. One of those is the *Liber Graduum*, an ascetic work, dating probably from the 4<sup>th</sup> C.<sup>123</sup> In the mind of its learned editor Kmosko, it would have had a Messalian background,<sup>124</sup> a thesis that has been refuted since. Even if many typical Messalian positions are largely absent from the *Liber Graduum* (that is therefore generally considered 'orthodox'<sup>125</sup>), it nevertheless contains a number of concepts that do not need to be necessarily Messalian, but at least recall some of its basic characteristics. It has therefore been ascribed to a more 'refined' form of Messalianism and to a kind of dualism that is equally close to Manichaeism.<sup>126</sup> To be sure, gnostic, dualist and Judaeo-Christian tendencies must have been widely spread in Syria at the time of its redaction.<sup>127</sup>

The *Liber Graduum* shows the path one has to follow in order to imitate Christ. Here, the Paraclete comes into the picture: only Christ is totally fulfilled with the Paraclete. He was holy, just as the angels and the celestial beings are.<sup>128</sup> In consequence, man has to acquire this state of fulfilment too.<sup>129</sup>

Now the *Liber Graduum* distinguishes two phases in the acquisition of the Paraclete, as has been perspicaciously demonstrated by Guillaumont. They correspond, so it seems, to the distinction between *Spirit* and *Paraclete*, as a *donum superadditum*, according to the Syriac interpretation. The first phase is derived from the Pauline

<sup>122</sup> Pierre, *Aphraate*, 191–97; Bruns, *Aphrahat*, 68–69.

<sup>123</sup> Van Vossel, "L'amour de Dieu," 131.

<sup>124</sup> Kmosko, M. *Liber Graduum*, CXLIV. *Patrologia Syriaca* 1.3. Paris, 1926.

<sup>125</sup> Vööbus, *History of Ascetism*, 180–82.

<sup>126</sup> Rahner, H. "Messalianismus." In *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 7, 319. Freiburg, 1962.

<sup>127</sup> Van Vossel, "L'amour de Dieu," 132.

<sup>128</sup> Kmosko, *Liber Graduum* 15:2, p. 337; Van Vossel, "L'amour de Dieu," 134.

<sup>129</sup> Kmosko, *Liber Graduum* 3:12, p. 69.

concept of the *earnest of the Spirit* (ἄρραβὼν τοῦ πνεύματος—Pəṣ.: *rahbūnā dərūḥel*).<sup>130</sup> When receiving this earnest of the Spirit, man is attaining a first step in his purification. There are indeed, so the *Liber Graduum* explicitly states, two kinds of believers: to the first, divine grace is only partially imparted, as a minor portion of benediction (*mānātā zə'ūrā*), whereas the second kind has been given the fulness of grace (*mambhātā rahā*). Only this second phase is called the 'Spirit Paraclete' (*rūḥā paraqlītā*) in the proper sense:<sup>131</sup> only then the Lord Jesus Christ comes to inhabit his devoted servant.<sup>132</sup> Obviously the *Liber Graduum* distinguishes between the ordinary members of the community, who merely possess the *earnest of the Spirit*, and the perfect ones, who like the *electi* of Manichaeism are respecting all divine commandments and are disposing of the plentitude of the revelation and grace.<sup>133</sup>

Behind all this—just as there are also many Platonic elements, for example, in the related cosmology of Bardaysan, and much more than one would think at first sight, as I have demonstrated elsewhere<sup>134</sup>—are some Platonic and neo-Platonic speculations, of which Clement of Alexandria offers the most clear and complete exposition.<sup>135</sup> According to Clement the (seven) Angels or Archangels are forming a group of subaltern Hypostases, a hierarchy through whom Revelation is gradually descended, reflected and transmitted to mankind. The Paraclete is in the mind of Clement another entity by whom and through whom the Logos is acting,<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> 2 Cor. 1:22 and 5:5; Guillaumont, A. "Les « Arrhes de l'Esprit » dans le Livre des Degrés." In Graffin, F., ed. *Mémorial Mgr Gabriel Kbouri-Sarkis*, 108–9. Louvain, 1969. For the word *earnest*, the *Liber Graduum* uses *'urbānā* (Guillaumont, *ibid.*, 108: "Le terme paraît donc se trouver [...] uniquement dans le *Livre des Degrés*."

<sup>131</sup> Kmosko, *Liber Graduum* 3:12, p. 72.

<sup>132</sup> Van Vossel, "L'amour de Dieu," 137.

<sup>133</sup> Guillaumont, "Les « Arrhes de l'Esprit »," 110–12.

<sup>134</sup> "La cosmologie de Bardaysan." *Actes du 9e Symposium Syriacum, Parole de l'Orient* 31 (2006): 133–44.

<sup>135</sup> Bucur, "Revisiting Christian Oeyen," 391, 395, is referring to Numenius and to Plotinus.

<sup>136</sup> Barbel, *Christos Angelos*, 202, cf. Wolfson, *Philo* 2:32.

He is therefore described as a kind of δύναμις, who is transforming the souls of the faithful in order to become perfect before God.<sup>137</sup> This Paraclete is like the sum of all these Angels or Hypostases, each time appearing in the form of one of them; He is “the dynamic aspect of the Logos” that “manifests itself in the work of the angelic spirits”<sup>138</sup>, who are the working agents of God.<sup>139</sup> Revelation is operated by these angelic spirits, who are communicating its content to each other, until it reaches the angel that is most close to the prophet he is to inspire.

One should remark that Revelation is presented here in a typical Middle or Neo-Platonic form, already present in the prophatology of Philo of Alexandria<sup>140</sup> and further developed here by Clement in the sense of an impulse that is moving each level of the celestial world, animated by his particular angel, thus communicating the divine δύναμις or ἐνέργεια from one level to the other, until the prophet receives his part of the divine energy form the angel that has been immediately assigned to him.<sup>141</sup> The Paraclete is in the mind of Clement the agent who is bringing about the theophany, who can become apparent in different forms, as a “plural entity”,<sup>142</sup> but of whom Jesus Christ, the Logos of God, has been the most clear and full manifestation.

Again and again we have the same canvas of ideas: a divine, angelic spirit, called Paraclete of Logos, who is descending to inhabit and inspire ever and ever again the prophet of his generation. He is the prophet’s spirit, who is using the humane aspect of every singular prophet as his instrument, in order to transmit the word of God. In that sense, the prophet is to be understood as a theophanic figure, as an embodiment of a divine spirit or angel.

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<sup>137</sup> Clem., *Strom.* 7: 2, 9; Bucur, “Revisiting Christian Oeyen,” 388–89.

<sup>138</sup> Bucur, “Revisiting Christian Oeyen,” 390, 404–5.

<sup>139</sup> Barbel, *Christos Angelos*, 203.

<sup>140</sup> Wolfson, *Philo* 2:32.

<sup>141</sup> Bucur, “Revisiting Christian Oeyen,” 400–2.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 412.

«YOU HAVE BEEN ELECTED!»

According to tradition, the Prophet Muḥammad died, lying on 'Ā'īša's bosom. His last words to her, when she became more and more worried about his worsening condition, but nevertheless still hoping for a recovery, were denying her last hope: "No, rather the higher company of Paradise!"—*bal, ar-rafiq al-'alā mina l-ḡanna*.<sup>143</sup> As has been shown by Hans Wehr, this is most evidently an allusion to the *al-malā' al-'alā* of S 37: 8 and 38: 69. We would therefore agree with Lüling's conclusion: "Des Propheten urchristlich empfundenen Wunsch bestand also darin, in den hohen Rat der Erzengel und Propheten und also auch in die Gesellschaft des Christus Angelus abberufen zu werden."<sup>144</sup> It was only to be followed by a final acquiescent answer of 'Ā'īša: "You have been an elected one (*ḥuyyirta*)<sup>145</sup> and you are chosen by the One that sent you with the Truth!" In other words: Muḥammad has been in the strict sense (according to Gil's understanding of the term) a *ḥanīf*, that is to say one of the *electi*<sup>146</sup> and so he has been entrusted with the fullness of the divine message, as possessing the entire prophetic Spirit, the 'Spirit Paraclete' as Aphrahat would have said. For such a most high angel, incarnated in a particular prophet living on earth and called *Muḥammad*, the name of «*Aḥmads*» (as an elative form, referring to his supernatural, celestial status<sup>147</sup>) could only be an ominous title of honour.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Muṣṭafā as-saqā (e.a., edd.), *Sirat an-Nabi* 2, 655.

<sup>144</sup> Wehr, H. "Muhammed's letzte Worte." *WZKM* 51 (1952): 283–86; Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten*, 80.

<sup>145</sup> For this concept of *ḥyr*, compare Luxenberg, C. *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran. Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, 286. Berlin, 2004: *electus!*

<sup>146</sup> Gil, "The Creed of Abū 'Āmir," 43.

<sup>147</sup> Urvoy, "Annonce de Mahomet," 55.

<sup>148</sup> Thus far I would agree with Luxenberg, C. "Neudeutung der arabischen Inschrift im Felsendom zu Jerusalem." In Ohlig, K.-H., and G.-R. Puin, eds. *Die dunkle Anfänge. Neue Forschungen zur Entstehung und frühen Geschichte des Islam*, 129–30. Berlin, 2005: the name *Muḥammad* may very well be a title, given to the Prophet by his already *ḥanafī* family, pointing to a prophetic function, similar to that of the 'first' Paraclete Jesus,

Indeed, this title already existed. It is but an altered form of the Persian *Manūhmēd* / *Manvabmēd*, a Manichaean variant of the old Zoroastrian *Vahman* or *Vohu Manah*:<sup>149</sup> the *Intellect* or *Living Spirit* who is incarnating himself in an everlasting prophetic succession.<sup>150</sup> The *Manūhmēd* is the soul of the Paraclete. With a certain reserve, so far as the concepts of the *electi* and the Paraclete are not particular to Manichaeism only, but were widespread categories in Syriac, gnosticizing (Judaeo-Christian, Montanite, Messalian, Bardaysanite) Christianity in general, we may eagerly subscribe to Gil's thesis "that Islam's first appearance was a non-conformist off-shoot of Manichaeism".<sup>151</sup>

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without saying however that the Prophet Muḥammad would be an entirely fictitious, invented personality. There is no doubt in my mind, indeed, that he has been an actual living, historical person. All the elaborations in that sense, such as those of Ohlig, K.-H. "Vom muhammad Jesus zum Propheten der Araber. Die Historisierung eines christologischen Prädikats." In Idem, ed. *Der frühe Islam. Eine historisch-kritische Rekonstruktion anhand zeitgenössischer Quellen*, 327–76. Berlin, 2007, are to be totally rejected: they are not a "historisch-kritische Rekonstruktion", but unfortunately only a mere *construction* of historical phantasy. It is to be deplored that Luxenberg has been led astray by all this.

<sup>149</sup> Widengren, G. *The great Vohu Manah and the Apostle of God: Studies in Iranian and Manichaean Religion*, Uppsala, 1945; Idem, *Die Religionen Irans*, 12, 79–80.

<sup>150</sup> Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, 306; Havenith, A. *Les Arabes chrétiens nomades au temps de Mohammed*, 95. Collection Cerfaux-Lefort. Louvain-la-Neuve, 1988; Simon, R. "Mānī and Muḥammad." *JSAI* 21 (1997): 134; Sfar, *Le Coran, la Bible et l'Orient ancien*, 413–14; Tardieu, *Manichéisme*, 20; De Blois, F. "Elchasaï—Manes—Muḥammad. Manichäismus und Islam in religionshistorischem Vergleich." *Der Islam* 81 (2004): 45–46 and my art. "La zandaqa," 69.

<sup>151</sup> Gil, "The Creed of Abū 'Āmir," 22.