



The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity

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Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins

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Abstract and Keywords

Traditionally, the early Jewish-Christians are believed to have disappeared, for all practical purposes, around the fourth century. This chapter argues that it stands to reason that they survived much longer, as some of their main religious beliefs seem to have had a serious impact on the origins of Islam. The argumentation does not amount to full proof, but rather to a cumulative amount of circumstantial evidence. The claim is that postulating the impact of Jewish-Christians upon Muhammad sheds light on the formation of some essential Qur'anic conceptions. Such conclusions, which are not quite new, but strengthen some hypotheses since Harnack, highlight the deep grounding of Qur'anic conceptions in traditional Jewish and Christian (heretical) beliefs. Reference is made in particular to the Docetic conception of Jesus in the Qur'an.

Keywords: Jewish-Christian, Islam, Harnack, Qur'an, Muhammad, Docetic, Jesus

Part III of this book dealt with the interactions between competing monotheistic communities, and ended with the ambivalence of Christianity toward the political dimensions of religion. As is well known, Islam would develop, from the start, a much simpler and more direct attitude toward political power. In Part IV, we shall discuss some of the roots of Islam in the milieu of late ancient monotheistic communities. One of the more puzzling dimensions of these roots is reflected in some striking similarities between a few essential traits of early Islam and Jewish-Christian theological concepts and attitudes. It is to these similarities that the present chapter is devoted.

I

It is to the Irish freethinker John Toland (1668–1722) that we owe the concept of Jewish-(or Judaeo-)Christianity. In 1718, Toland published, in London, *Nazarenus, or Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*. This text further developed ideas first presented in his French manuscript written in 1710, *Christianisme judaïque et mahométan*, which sought to offer a historical argument, recognizing the Jewish roots of Christianity in order to promote the toleration of Jews in modern European societies.¹

Toland based his argument upon the *Gospel of Barnabas*, an apocryphal writing of unknown date, the full text of which we only possess in an Italian version of a lost Spanish one. This text announces the coming of Muhammad and makes reference to the *shahāda*, the Muslim profession of faith. According to the *Gospel of Barnabas*, Jesus is a prophet, not the Son of God, and does not (p. 140) die on the cross. In his stead, it is Judas Iscariot who is crucified.² A human, rather than a divine Jesus, and a Docetist conception of the Passion: these traits are typical of the figure of Jesus both for Jewish-Christians and in the Qur'an. For Toland, some of the fundamental doctrines of Islam are rooted in the "most ancient monuments of the Christian religion," and not in the views of the Nestorian monk Sergius.³ It is to Toland's refutation by the Lutheran orthodox theologian Lorenz von Mosheim (1693–1755), *Vindiciae antiquae christianiorum disciplinae*, published in 1720, that Toland's book owed its fame and the concept of Jewish-Christianity its survival. Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), the founder of the Tübingen school of New Testament studies, made *Judenchristentum* a cornerstone of his conception of Christian origins. For the Hegelian that he was, second-century Christianity represented the synthesis or sublimation (*Aufhebung*) of Petrine Christianity and Paulinian ("gentile") Christianity. For most historians of early Christianity, it is Baur, rather than Toland, who is at the origin of the concept of Jewish-Christianity, a phenomenon that would be studied, from Baur on, only in the first Christian centuries. Toland's intuition, according to which one of the earliest manifestations of Christianity, having survived late antiquity, had a major impact upon the earliest stages of Islam, and hence on the world history of religions, practically disappeared from the horizon of research. The patristic sources do not speak, of course, of "Jewish-Christianity." From the second to the fourth centuries, the patristic heresiographers usually mention the Ebionites (*ebionitai*), whose name was thought to have come from their imaginary founder, a certain Ebion. In fact, it comes from their insistence upon the spiritual value of poverty: they call themselves *evvyonim* ("poor" in Hebrew), a biblical term they borrowed from Psalms. The Christian heresiographers also mention other names of sects, in particular those of the Nazoreans (*nazoraioi*), who share, at least partly, Ebionite ideas. For the Nazoreans, Jesus was, rather than God's Son, a prophet, the last of a long chain of true prophets, starting with Adam, in which each true prophet is preceded by a false prophet. Moreover, Jesus had not died on the cross; the

heresiographers often associate this Docetism with other doctrines of Jewish-Christian groups.⁴

(p.141) Historiographic revisionism is fashionable today. One often questions the usefulness of some of our concepts, such as Gnosticism, for a better understanding of historical realities. Thus, for example, Daniel Boyarin has expressed serious doubts concerning the possibility of speaking of “Judaism” (*Ioudaismos*) before the fourth century CE. For him, Jewish beliefs and practices are defined as such by patristic theologians. In consequence, rather than reflecting historical reality, they reveal more about those using them.⁵ And since Boyarin believes that the concept of “Judaism” is not valid in this period, he also proposes to abandon the concept of Jewish-Christianity, without suggesting a clear alternative. But a historical phenomenon needs to be named if one is to study it.

Methodological remarks are always necessary and often useful. In the present case, however, I fail to see what one gains by replacing one concept with another. This is not the place for examining or refuting Boyarin’s approach. Suffice it here to say that, in any domain, research demands an intellectual effort to identify common denominators of various phenomena (for instance, multiple religious sects and groups). Such common denominators allow us to retrace central trends underlying the complexity of observable reality. One cannot fulfill this task without creating categories, the primary justification of which is their heuristic usefulness. Gnosticism and Jewish-Christianity are examples of such categories, which cannot be abandoned, although they must be used with care, without forgetting what they are not: a truthful representation of historical reality. In particular, these categories do not reflect clearly identifiable groups. Thus, it is often among Jewish-Christians (or in Jewish-Christian texts or traditions) that we can find some easily identifiable Gnostic theologoumena, such as Docetism.⁶

By Jewish-Christianity, I mean the faith of Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah announced by the prophets, but did not give up traditional Jewish religious practice. For Origen, in the first half of the third century, these Jewish-Christians, who wished to be at once Jews and Christians, succeeded in being neither Jews nor Christians. One should note that the Jewish sources are singularly less prolix than the Christian ones: for the rabbis, the best way of dealing with their enemies was to “kill them by silence.” Contemporary scholars thus rely on the perception of the patristic **(p.142)** sources, for which these archaic heretics had practically disappeared before the end of the fourth century. Consequently, most contemporary scholars treat the existence of Jewish-Christian communities beyond the first centuries with deep skepticism.⁷

And yet, the Jewish-Christians of antiquity (who are unrelated to the contemporary “Jews for Jesus,” whose theology is that of evangelical Christianity) do not seem to have disappeared from the late antique scene. The sources (or at least the reliable ones) are quite scarce and hard to interpret. Another method, then, is needed in order to detect the presence of Jewish-Christians. In particular, one should at once use common sense and offer a careful interpretation of indirect sources. To be sure, late antique Jewish-Christian communities must have been small, marginal groups, often living in a protected isolation. As far as I know, there is no clear-cut and irrefutable proof of their existence in the seventh century. But the traces they left provide enough circumstantial evidence to let us assume their continued existence long after the end of the fourth century (when Epiphanius and Jerome testify unambiguously to their presence) and their *Fortleben*. John of Damascus mentions, in the early eighth century, the existence “to this day” of a Jewish-Christian Elchasaite group, the Sampseans, on the shores of the Dead Sea.⁸ His testimony is usually rejected by scholars, as he repeats what Epiphanius of Salamis had written in the fourth century. And yet, one must remember that John writes from the monastery of Mar Saba, in the Judean wilderness, a place very close to the Dead Sea (a few kilometers as the crow flies). It is improbable that John’s mention of heretics living on the shores of the Dead Sea does not refer to a concrete reality. The very late existence of such groups, however, is less striking than the impact they may have had far beyond their own boundaries.

Among the various theories on the origins of Islam, those involving the Jewish-Christians seem fashionable today. This may be a bit puzzling since Toland’s *Nazarenus* was for all practical purposes forgotten long ago. It is the liberal theologian and great historian of early Christianity Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) who seems to be at the origin of the present trend of thought. In a few pages of his *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, he had proposed identifying in some Jewish-Christian theologoumena some of the most important sources **(p. 143)** of earliest Islam.⁹ Harnack, who had no particular interest in Islam, concurred with Toland through his intuition on the similarity between prophecy and Docetism in the Qur’an (Q. 4.157) and among the Ebionites. To these remarks of Harnack one should add those of Ernest Renan and Daniel Chwolson, in two studies published in the mid-nineteenth century, to which we shall return below.¹⁰ Thus, a number of Baptist and Jewish-Christian sects from the first centuries were brought to bear upon the study of Islamic origins.

Over the years, Harnack’s intuition regarding Jewish-Christian origins was picked up and developed by a number of scholars—first by the New Testament scholar Adolf Schlatter and then, in particular, by Hans-Joachim Schoeps, the great specialist in Jewish-Christianity in the early centuries.¹¹ The most serious difficulty of this thesis on the Jewish-Christian impact on the Qur’an, however, remained the fact that our documentation on Jewish-Christian communities rarely goes beyond the fourth century. With no chronological and geographical

proximity, the structural similarities between Jewish-Christian theology and some Qur'anic verses remained parallelisms, certainly interesting from a phenomenological viewpoint, but useless for explaining the transmission of these theologoumena to the Qur'an. Thanks to a series of discoveries and studies, our knowledge of the early Jewish-Christians has now become more precise. We now know that some Jewish-Christian communities may have survived, at least in Palestine, until the Muslim conquests.¹² It is certainly not far-fetched to imagine a possible Jewish-Christian presence in late antique Hijaz.

Rather than offering a new theory, I should like to offer here a *status quaestionis*, adding some methodological and epistemological reflections on the way in which the question is framed today for the historian of late antique religion. Obviously, I make no claims here on the redaction of the Qur'an or **(p. 144)** the formation of Islam, but deal only with aspects of the religious background of the Qur'an. As in the case of Christianity or Manichaeism, Islam permits us to observe how a religion is born, although we know infinitely more about the birth of Christianity than about that of Islam.

II

For almost two centuries now research on Islamic origins seems to oscillate between two main options. In 1833, the young Abraham Geiger published his monograph on Muhammad's Jewish sources, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* Geiger insisted on Midrashic traditions, the traces of which can be discovered in various sūras. Geiger's central idea, the deep impact of some Jewish traditions on the Qur'an, was generally accepted by Orientalists. This acceptance stands in stark contradistinction to his perception of Jesus as having been close to the Pharisees, an idea which all Christian theologians rejected with deep horror (one of them, the Hebraist Franz Delitzsch, wrote that calling Jesus a Pharisee was "ten times worse" than the crucifixion). A long list of (usually Jewish) scholars familiar with rabbinic literature has pursued research following in Geiger's footsteps. It is mainly thanks to the great Orientalist Theodor Nöldeke (who was very impressed by Geiger's book) that research looked for the Christian sources of Islam. For Nöldeke, Islam actually represented the Arabic form of Christianity. The learned Swedish bishop Tor Andræ would pursue Nöldeke's research, insisting on the fact that the Christian orthodox traditions are not the only sources reflecting the Qur'an's background and that one should not forget Jewish-Christianity (or Manichaeism, for that matter) as possible roots of Qur'anic doctrines. Such an approach is still favored today by scholars such as Günter Lüling or Christoph Luxenberg, for whom the source of the Qur'an (the *Ur-Koran*) is to be found in Syriac Christian hymns (Arian for Lüling).¹³ Research still does not seem to have areally rephrased the problem and continues to oscillate between Judaism and Christianity in order to understand the birth of Islam better.¹⁴

(p.145) In 614 the Byzantine Empire had suffered a humiliating defeat by the Sasanians. Yet, this was only the foretaste of the amputation of much of its territory a few decades later with the Islamic conquests. Tensions ran high and the heightened expectation of the *Endzeit* encouraged a renewal of an apocalyptic mode of thought.¹⁵ Eschatological *furore* was as alive among the Jewish communities as among the Christian populations. For the Jews, however, the interpretation of coming events was strictly the opposite of that of the Christians: the Antichrist, with the violent tribulations expected by the Christians (before Christ's return in glory), was the Jews' Messiah.¹⁶ For both Jews and Christians, the eschatological expectations were anchored in a long tradition, but this tradition had become blurred or neutralized in the course of the centuries (for Christians, mainly since the Constantinian revolution). And yet, eschatological expectations had never quite disappeared. Rather, they had become an underground stream, ready to reappear in times of dramatic events.

The conquest of Jerusalem and the capture of the Holy Cross in 614, which represented for the Byzantines a true military, political, and religious catastrophe, were perceived by Jews as a messianic promise.¹⁷ We have learned to recognize the centrality of Jerusalem for the earliest stages of Islam. Some indications suggest that the military defeat of the Byzantines and the Muslim conquest of the Holy City were perceived by the Jews as signs that the messiah and the end of times were near. For the Jews, the Muslim conquerors could have appeared as announcing the Messiah. Indeed, it seems that the early architectural activity of the new masters of the Temple Mount—for them, *al-Haram al-Sharif*—was interpreted by Jews as announcing the coming of the *Endzeit*. It might even have been perceived in that way by the Muslims themselves, as suggested by Andreas Kaplony, in his detailed study of the Islamic sources.¹⁸

(p.146) In the last generation, and in particular since the publication of Peter Brown's *The World of Late Antiquity* in 1971, late antiquity is no longer defined only by the joint presence of pagans and Christians in the Roman world. In a number of aspects, the Islamic conquests retained the cultural traditions of the Roman Empire. In addition, Greek remained the administrative language under the early Umayyads. Hence, historians now commonly agree that late antiquity continues at least until the end of the Umayyad period.

In parallel to the extension of the chronological limits of late antiquity, we can witness today the extension of its geographical boundaries. In particular, we have learned to recognize that the Arabian Peninsula, considered earlier to have been located on the margins of the *oikoumenē* and to have played a rather limited historical and cultural role, must now be seen as an integral part of the world of late antiquity. This is particularly true, in our present context, in the realm of religious ideas and practices. Robert Hoyland, who has significantly contributed to a better knowledge of the complex religious milieu of earliest

Islam, has referred to late antique Arabia as a “laboratory” for observing the transformation of religious traditions, the end of paganism, and the birth of Islam.¹⁹

In order to understand in what sense Arabia can be called a laboratory for religious change, one can refer to Max Weber. For Weber, it was not by chance that the prophets of Israel belonged to a marginal society, outside the main political, economic, and cultural centers of the ancient Near East. For him, it was precisely the relative distance from those centers that made possible fruitful exchanges between periphery and center, as well as the birth of new forms of cultural and religious expression. According to Weber, the creative tension permitting the birth of such new forms demands some distance between two societies, one of which is to an extent dependent upon the other. This distance, however, should not be too great, lest it prevent cultural communication.²⁰ *Mutatis mutandis*, late antique Arabia is like ancient Israel: in permanent contact with the great political centers of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, as well as with the religious trends throughout the region.²¹ From the 570s and the Sasanian conquest of Yemen, Arabia was practically surrounded by the Persians. Under such conditions, the slow but clear religious evolution at work since Hellenistic times, from polytheism to monotheism, had a powerful impact upon the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula.

(p.147) We now know that at the end of the sixth century Arabia had become, as it were, a major meeting place in the Near East, between the Sasanian and the Byzantine empires as well as Axum’s Christian kingdom.²² In Arabia, monks, dissidents, missionaries, soldiers, refugees, and merchants, all facilitated, inter alia, the free circulation of religious ideas.²³ From the last years of the sixth century, Arabia absorbed the repercussions of the conflict between the two empires.²⁴ It is probably in the context of the eschatological tensions mentioned on p. 145 above that one should understand what Christian Robin has called the “prophetic movement” in early seventh-century Arabia. As Robin has also noted, new epigraphic discoveries reflect the religious crisis long undermining traditional beliefs in Arabia.²⁵ Many opted for a form of monotheism, but the precise nature of this monotheism escapes us, although it seems to have followed “Jewish” patterns. Iwona Gadja has been able to show how a similar kind of monotheism developed in Ḥimyar, in the cracks as it were, between Judaism and Christianity as their believers vied for power.²⁶

Our knowledge of the presence of Jewish and Christian communities in Hijaz, in Western Arabia, is very limited. There are no remaining imprints of Christian communities north of Yemen. François Villeneuve writes that in Arabia Christianity never succeeded in getting a foothold south of Aqaba.²⁷ Moreover, the testimonies regarding the existence of Jewish tribes in Ḥijāz do not enlighten us on the nature of their Judaism, although some clues would point to Jews coming from Palestine.²⁸ Even if one can detect the impact on **(p.148)** earliest

Islam of some ideas originating in the Sasanian realm,²⁹ the Qur'an clearly points to the fact that the main religious trends underlying Islamic monotheism come from Jewish and Christian milieus.

Reading the Qur'an in the light of late antique literature, as Angela Neuwirth proposes, is meaningful only if it is made clear that what is meant is Jewish or Christian late antique texts.³⁰ Classical *paideia* and the Greek philosophical tradition, which are of crucial importance in late antiquity, will have a major impact on Islamic culture, but only later, in Abbasid Baghdad. Even if limited to its Jewish and Christian expressions, however, late antique culture in the Near East offered a rich gamut of exegetical possibilities. All sectarian and hermeneutical trends stemming from the foundational texts of Jews and Christians must therefore be studied together. These include not only the various Jewish-Christian groups as mentioned by the Christian heresiologists, such as the Ebionites, the Nazoreans, or the Elchasaites, but also Gnostic and Manichaean dualists and also the "noble" heresies of the Monophysites and Nestorians, who together represent the majority of late antique Christians in the Near East, from Egypt and Syria to Armenia and Iran.

In 1978, John Wansbrough published *The Sectarian Milieu*, a book in which he sought to identify, beyond the multiple communities in Arabia at the dawn of Islam, a conflict of hermeneutics and even a midrashic mythopoiesis, within which one should study the formation of the Qur'an.³¹ Wansbrough's approach had a powerful impact upon Patricia Crone, one of the two co-authors of *Hagarism*, a book published the preceding year.³² *Hagarism* offers a fresh approach to Islamic origins, and establishes its argument solely on seventh-century sources, that is, mainly on Christian texts, while ignoring Islamic (Arabic) sources, all later, unless corroborated by other sources. To be sure, the reconstruction of Islamic origins thus obtained remains speculative, as the two authors willingly admit. Such a revisionist attitude, however, permits us to formulate anew the problem of Islamic origins within the frame of biblical hermeneutics among Jews and Christians.

(p.149) III

The scholarly oscillation mentioned in Section II, p. 144 above between emphasizing either the Jewish or the Christian roots of Islam (and, of course, the various movements between these two main traditions) stems, I think, from an error of method. It is a mistake to choose between a number of options (postulated to be exclusive of one another) in order to identify the roots of theological ideas in earliest Islam. There is no reason to think that in a religious, cultural, and political milieu as complex as that of the sixth- and seventh-century Near East, Islam would have originated from a single source. Moreover, categories which propose a taxonomy of religious ideas tend to freeze them,

suppressing their dynamism, erasing their free circulation and their constant restructuration in new forms.

In a world endowed with a great social and religious complexity, the constant interaction and transformation of ideas and persons is the default option, as it were, and permanent fluidity is the essential rule. This is how one should conceive the interface between religious traditions in the Near East, an interface in which Islam was born. One should insist on the flow of religious ideas between communities. The formation of Islam and its early conquests restructured religious communities in the Near East and permitted the stabilization of both religious ideas and boundaries between communities. Referring to the transmission of ideas between religious communities in the Arabic Middle Ages, Sarah Stroumsa has spoken of a “whirlpool effect,” as it is usually impossible to specify the origin of each specific element.³³

All this leads to what I propose to call the “principle of non-exclusivity.” I prefer to speak of communities rather than of sects, as this last term entails deviance vis-à-vis an orthodoxy, the existence of which cannot always be demonstrated.³⁴ Proper method demands that we do not identify a source as the sole origin of Qur’anic terms or formulas, to the exclusion of other possible filiations. At the same time, the “principle of non-exclusivity” is also a principle of indetermination. In a world in which religious ideas circulate freely and transform themselves constantly, it is almost impossible to determine the precise origin of these ideas or the proximate channels through which they reached the Qur’an.

(p.150) Arguments highlighting the similarity between various Jewish-Christian concepts and some Qur’anic passages receive their full value only in a discourse insisting upon the plurality of the sources of earliest Islam. According to a number of Christian traditions, the Prophet had met a heretical monk who taught him certain Christian doctrines (in a perverse way, of course). As early as 1858, Nöldeke had raised the question of Muḥammad’s Christian teachers.³⁵ For him, however, the Arab “priest” Waraka was a Jew rather than a Christian. In later Arabic sources, Waraka is deemed to have been “a bishop from the Naṣārā” who “belonged to the Prophet’s family.” Although *naṣārā* usually refers to Christians, the term may also indicate the *nazoraioi*, one of the Jewish-Christian sects according to Patristic heresiologists.³⁶

Concluding his analysis of the *naṣārā/nazoraioi* case, the New Testament scholar Joachim Gnilka notes the striking theological proximity between the Qur’an and Jewish-Christian traditions.³⁷ Like other scholars before him, he calls attention to the similarity between Sūra 19 (*sūrat Mariam*, which deals with Zechariah and the birth of John the Baptist) and the *Protoevangelium of James*. One must recognize that Gnilka’s results are slightly disappointing, as he remains unable

to explain the ways through which these Jewish-Christian concepts may have reached early seventh-century Ḥijāz.

Following Hans-Joachim Schoeps, Martiniano Pellegrino Roncaglia develops Harnack's thesis on the Jewish-Christian origins of Islam, in reference to the traditions concerning Waraka. For Roncaglia, as for the great German scholar of early Christianity, Islam represents the transformation on Arabic soil of what he calls "Gnostic Jewish-Christianity." Roncaglia notes that the Islamic prohibition on wine seems to be "Elchasaite." To the best of my knowledge, no extant source mentions the prohibition on wine among the Elchasaites, **(p.151)** although, according to Irenaeus, the Ebionites abstain from wine.³⁸ For Roncaglia, moreover, the Jewish-Christian idea of the true prophet lies at the root of the Islamic conception of prophecy. He also points out the similarity between the Ebionite conception of a diabolical falsification of Scripture and the Islamic concept of *taḥrīf*, that is, the falsification of their revealed Scripture by Jews and Christians.³⁹

For Roncaglia, then, Ebionites and Elchasaites are identical. Such an identification, however, is not based on the sources, and nothing points to an Elchasaite presence in Ḥijāz. The origin of this identification seems to go back to Renan, for whom the Qur'an's Sabaeans were Elchasaites and Mandaeans, and to Chwolson, who, in his great monograph on the Sabaeans, had detected some Manichaeic elements in Islam.⁴⁰ The Baptist group within which Mani had grown up, in North Mesopotamia of the early third century, had been called *mughtasila* (Baptists) by the tenth-century Islamic bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm. These *mughtasila* seem to have had many affinities with the Elchasaites as the Christian heresiologists present them. The final proof of the identity between the two groups was made by the publication, in 1975, of the Cologne Mani Codex, an ancient biography of the Prophet of Light, found in a Greek version. This text preserves for us precious details on the Elchasaites as Mani had known them in his childhood and youth.⁴¹

The discovery of the Cologne Mani Codex has triggered renewed reflection on some remarkable parallels between Manichaeism and Islam. Robert Simon, who studied these parallels, has noted that one might have overstressed Judaism and Christianity as possible sources of Islam and that the Manichaeic track has almost not been followed.⁴² Simon calls attention to both the universal character of these two religions, from the time of their birth, and their shared conception of holy books. The most striking similarity concerns the notion of the "seal of prophecy." This notion, which is fundamental for the Qur'anic idea of prophecy, can already be found in Manichaeism, as I have argued in Chapter 5. It originates in the Jewish-Christian roots of the Religion **(p.152)** of Light. As noted by Simon, both Mani and Muhammad perceive their prophetic role as being at once the summit and the conclusion of a long chain of prophets, from Adam to Jesus. The Manichaeans, for whom proselytizing was an essential

religious duty, had moved to the north-east of the Arabian Peninsula. Simon also postulates the arrival of the Manichaeans in Mecca, along with the Lakhmids, after the collapse of the kingdom of Ḥimyar following the Abyssinian conquest.⁴³ One should note with Patricia Crone, however, that there is no trace of Manichaeism in the Qur'an itself.

In three important articles, published between 1995 and 2004, François de Blois has made significant contributions to research on the Sabaeans in pre-Islamic Arabia, as well as on the terms *naṣrānī* (according to him an Arabic translation of *nazōraios*) and *ḥanīf* in the Qur'an, and finally on the comparison between Manichaeism and Islam.⁴⁴ In the first of these articles, de Blois argues that the religious milieu in which Islam emerged included at least five religions: Arab paganism, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism. Following the Maronite scholar Abraham Ecchellensis in 1660, Ernest Renan and Daniel Chwolson proposed in the nineteenth century, as we saw in Section I, p. 143 above, that the Qur'an's Sabaeans be identified with the Mandaeans. De Blois notes that there is no trace of a hypothetical Mandaean presence in seventh-century Arabia.

In his article on *Naṣrānī* and *ḥanīf*, de Blois first argues that in the Qur'an, *naṣārā* indicates Nazorean Jewish-Christians, rather than Christians. He then discusses the meaning of *ḥanīf*, a puzzling term of Aramaic origin. The Syriac equivalent is quite negative, as it refers to paganism, in contradistinction to the meaning of the term in the Qur'an, where a *ḥanīf* is a believer in the true religion of Abraham. According to de Blois, the Qur'anic conception of the *ḥanīf* reflects a polemic against the Nazoreans, a fact which proves the presence of a Jewish-Christian community in seventh-century Arabia.

In "Elchasai—Manes—Muḥammad: Manichäismus und Islam in religionshistorischem Vergleich," de Blois first offers a synthesis of the results of his investigations so far. Going further, he seeks to explain the remarkable parallels between those two syncretistic religions, Manichaeism and Islam. For him, these parallels, in particular those associated with the idea of prophecy in the two religions, come from their joint Jewish-Christian background. **(p.153)** De Blois thus proposes to see in the idea of a "seal of prophecy" a Jewish-Christian idea adopted by Muhammad. He concludes by noting that Jewish-Christians find themselves at the very epicenter of the history of religions in the Near East.

The Pseudo-Clementine Homilies offer a major testimony in our quest for Ebionite central theological conceptions, such as the chain of prophecy through the ages. Inter alia, the Pseudo-Clementine writings (both the Latin *Recognitions* and the Greek *Homilies*) develop the idea that some scriptural passages were inserted by Satan and must hence be expurgated from the sacred text.⁴⁵ This

early Jewish-Christian conception, which was picked up by Marcion for some of the gospels, will reappear in the (post-Qur'anic) concept of *tahṛīf*.⁴⁶

The latest contribution to our present problem which I should like to mention here is the work in progress by Holger Zellentin, who has discovered in some Qur'anic passages striking parallels with a number of patristic texts, in particular with the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and the *Didaskalia*, a fourth-century text on ritual and legal precepts, rooted in the *Didachē* (a Jewish-Christian text from the early second century) as well as on Christology and scriptural hermeneutics. Epiphanius, the bishop of Salamis in Cyprus in the fourth century and one of the major heresiologists, who was born in Eleutheropolis (Beit Guvrin), tells us that the *Didaskalia* was read by Audians in Palestine. We know precious little about the Audians, quartodeciman sectarians from Mesopotamia who read apocryphal texts retaining anthropomorphic esoteric traditions on God's body. Henri-Charles Puech, who had been the first to call attention to the Audians, showed that some of their traditions were patently Gnostic. He was unable, however, to identify the probable Jewish origin of their conception of the divine body.⁴⁷

Whatever the case might be, the *Didaskalia* originates in a milieu close to Jewish-Christians, a fact reflected by both its ethics and its conception of ritual purity. Basing his reflections on this closeness, Zellentin believes that the text of the Qur'an "responds" to a specific group of Jewish-Christians in its audience. More precisely, the Qur'an stands, for him, between Jewish-Christians and rabbinic Jews in its legal culture as well as in its approach to ritual practices. **(p.154)** Although Zellentin still has to publish much of his recent research, what we already know of it suggests that it will open new horizons and a broadened discussion of Qur'anic origins.⁴⁸

One of the most striking parallels between the Pseudo-Clementine writings and the Qur'an is probably Peter's claim, in the *Homilies*, that "God is one, and there is no God but Him."⁴⁹ Although this partial presence of the Qur'anic *shahāda* in an early Jewish-Christian text has already been noticed, it does not seem to have received all the attention it deserves. Other similarities are worth noting, although they do not constitute conclusive evidence, such as for instance the Qur'anic term "believers" (*mu'minūn*). The same word (*pisteuontes* in Greek), indeed, refers in the New Testament (Acts) to Jews who have recognized Jesus as the Messiah without giving up on the practice of the biblical commandments in their traditional Jewish interpretation. In patristic literature, from Origen to the testimony of Arculf, a Gaulish monk who came to the Holy Land on a pilgrimage in the 680s, *pisteuontes* (or its Latin equivalent, *credentes*) often refers to Jewish-Christians. Arculf, as quoted by Adomnan, mentions the existence in Jerusalem of a community of "believing" Jews, side by side with that of Jews who refuse to recognize Jesus as the Messiah announced by the prophets.⁵⁰ Shlomo Pines has proposed seeing in the Qur'anic concept *mu'min*, plur. *mu'minūn* (for

instance Qur'an 2:62; 5:69; 22:17), a linguistic calque of the term *pisteuōn* (or *credens*). According to him, "believers" would thus refer in the Qur'an to Jewish-Christians, side by side with Jews, Christians (*naṣārā*), Sabaeans, and Zoroastrians (*majūs*).⁵¹ One should also note that the Qur'anic *mushrikūn* (from *shirk*, association), traditionally perceived as polytheists, are considered by Gerald Hawting and Patricia Crone to have been monotheists.⁵²

In a series of articles, published from 1966 to 1987, Pines offered a very powerful argument for the survival of some Jewish-Christian communities until at least early Islam.⁵³ Sadly, Pines's articles have not had the impact one **(p. 155)** might have imagined. This is due both to the technical nature of his arguments and to the fact that these publications are not always easy to find. Moreover, the conservative instinct of the scholarly community, to some extent still prisoner of the patristic tradition, has proven unwilling to admit the survival of Jewish-Christian groups after the fourth century.⁵⁴ Pines establishes his arguments, first, upon the discovery of new anti-Christian polemical texts in Arabic (and Judeo-Arabic) and in Hebrew. He shows how the understanding of Christianity in these texts reflects a Jewish-Christian rather than an orthodox theology. Pines also point out how some of the concepts in these Arabic texts seem to be calques of terms used to describe Jewish-Christianity by the patristic heresiographers.⁵⁵

In a recent book, Fred Donner develops a controversial thesis on original Islam as an ecumenical movement which included monotheists from various denominations, former pagans, Jews, and Christians, all "believing" in Muhammad's mission without abandoning their original faith and community.⁵⁶ According to him, earliest Islam represents an Arab nativist movement rallying around an Abrahamic monotheism, close to both Judaism and Christianity, whose existence had been ignored by most scholars.

IV

From different angles, the hypothesis can be made of a pre-Islamic Abrahamic trend, that is, one or a few religious groups perceiving themselves as following in the spiritual footsteps of Abraham and practicing the true religion which Abraham had discovered (or established)—a religion perverted by both Jews and Christians, who considered themselves to be his [spiritual] offspring. Such a hypothesis would explain the Qur'anic allusions to "Abraham's religion" **(p.156)** (*millat Ibrāhīm*). However, even more than in the case of Jewish-Christians, our sources are here almost totally silent. In his *De Monogamia*, Tertullian, at the turn of the third century, had mentioned the existence of such a group. Sozomen, a fifth-century ecclesiastical historian born in Palestine, describes in a famous passage the annual Abrahamic festival in Mamre, an international and inter-religious fair in which Jews, Christians, as well as "Palestinians, Phoenicians, and Arabs," took part.⁵⁷ Sozomen writes elsewhere that the Arabs, having learned from the Jews about their Abrahamic roots, were practicing circumcision

and abstaining from eating pork, as well as practicing a number of other Jewish rituals and customs.⁵⁸ Sozomen's testimony has, of course, been noted by scholars and, in the last generation, a number of important studies have suggested a possible trajectory of Abrahamic rituals up to the birth of Islam, in particular those related to the Mecca sanctuary.⁵⁹

In late antiquity, Abraham was considered as a "culture hero" beyond the Jewish and Christian communities. For many pagans, his Babylonian origin made him the first astronomer. For both Jews and Christians, as Eusebius pointed out, Abraham was, of course, the first Hebrew patriarch as well as the inventor of true religion (*theosebeia*).⁶⁰ Moreover, according to Yehuda Nevo and Judith Koren, in the fifth and sixth centuries some Negev Arabs had been attracted by an "Abrahamic form" of monotheism, which expressed their ethnic identity and, in other words, Arab faith.⁶¹ Nevo and Koren underline the frequent mention of the name Abraham in the Nessana documentary papyri. These late papyri, dating from the sixth and seventh centuries, were redacted in a community of Christian Arabs who, according to Nevo and Koren, may have previously developed an "Abrahamic" identity. Yet, Abraham (**p.157**) is also common as a name in Egyptian papyri of the fifth century, a fact which makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions.⁶²

The idea of a late antique Abrahamic religious movement, flourishing especially among the Negev Arabs, is certainly a plausible hypothesis, but not one that can be demonstrated in the present state of our knowledge. Such a movement would have been located on the margins of both Judaism and Christianity, just like Jewish-Christianity. One might also point out the striking importance of Abraham in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*, a text according to which Abraham was the first man to cross from ignorance to knowledge.⁶³

For a very long time, the Jewish tradition had insisted upon Abraham's versatility. According to Genesis 17: 3-8, Abraham was both the ancestor of Israel and the father of "a multitude of peoples"—and not only the forefather of Ishmael's offspring. According to *Jubilees* (chapter 9), the Mishna (*Kiddushin* 4: 14), and the Babylonian Talmud (*Yoma* 28b), Abraham had followed God's commandments before the promulgation of the Torah. Similarly, according to Philo, Abraham had followed God's ways before Moses had proclaimed the written Law (*agraphos physis*; *De Abrahamo* 275-6). Philo also notes elsewhere (*De virt.* 216) that Abraham was the first man to have believed in God—an idea echoed by Paul (Rom. 4: 1), Philo's contemporary. In the footsteps of Pines and Dominique Urvoy, de Blois argues, as we have seen, that the Qur'anic *ḥanīf*, the Gentile truthful to Abraham's religion, reflects a conception of Abraham as the father of a multitude of nations, that is of pagan *ethnē* (*goyyim*). The Syriac term for pagan, *ḥanfa*, would have undergone a semantic inversion in its passage to Arabic. The Qur'anic concept of *fiṭra*, the original and primordial nature implanted in man by God (Q. 30.30), also reflects true religion and could well be

related to the idea of *ḥanīf*.⁶⁴ If this were the case, Abraham would have been neither a Jew nor a Christian. To be sure, this hypothesis on Islamic origins is different from that insisting on the Jewish-Christian origins of the Qur'an. The two hypotheses, however, are based on the same hermeneutical principles, as they connect contemporary prophetic activism among the Arabs to the biblical tradition. Can we draw any **(p.158)** conclusions from this rather disparate evidence? To my mind, it is probable that some Jewish-Christian groups survived until at least the seventh century. Such groups were probably not more than a few marginal communities, but this fact does not really impinge on the argument. Their ideas, unbearable for both rabbis and bishops, might well have appeared as a surprisingly attractive version of Christianity, at least for people living on the margins of the Byzantine Empire.⁶⁵ In particular, as surmised by Oscar Cullmann in 1930, the idea of the "true prophet" may certainly have survived in some circles. Such a possibility entails a significant reorientation of research on the origins of the Qur'an. Henri Corbin has claimed that arguments about anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemics in the Qur'an often reflect a category mistake. For him, the Qur'an cannot be either anti-Jewish or anti-Christian, as it is nothing but a Jewish-Christian text. As is well known, Corbin often expressed himself in allusive and hyperbolic terms not always very useful from an epistemological viewpoint. And yet, he was putting his finger on a remarkable phenomenon to which we should devote all our attention. If a text like the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* preserves in Greek a phrase strikingly reminiscent of the Qur'anic *shahāda*, the Jewish-Christian track imposes itself as having offered an exceptional yeast which allowed Muhammad's message to ferment in the rich humus of late antique religious traditions and attitudes. Jewish-Christianity seems not only to have survived across the centuries, but also to have retained a truly seducing power and to have been a key element of what I have proposed calling *praeparatio coranica*.

It is to its heuristic utility that the Jewish-Christian track owes its strength. One should remain aware, however, that it cannot stand alone. A number of reasons prevent us from considering Jewish-Christianity as *the* source of Islam. The evidence is too sparse; the precise mechanisms through which ideas are transmitted are too little known. Moreover, we know, as in the case of Manichaeism, that its influence was often indirect. Somewhat paradoxically, the essentially Jewish-Christian idea of a chain of prophecy offered a model applicable to religious trends stemming from new cultural and ethnic milieus, for Muhammad as well as for Mani. We have not dealt here with a teleological vision of the history of religious ideas. Like any complex historical phenomenon, the birth of Islam is overdetermined. Delimiting it too precisely risks oversimplifying reality and freezes the essentially fluid interaction of ideas and sects. The mystery of the birth of a religion cannot be solved and neither can the alchemical transformation of religious ideas, their passage from fluid to solid state.

Notes:

⁽¹⁾ On Toland's conception of Jewish-Christianity, see Gesine Palmer, *Ein Freispruch für Paulus: John Tolands Theorie des Judenchristentums, mit einer Neuausgabe von Tolands "Nazarenus" von Claus-Michael Palmer* (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1996).

⁽²⁾ On the *Gospel of Barnabas*, see *Évangile de Barnabé: Recherches sur la composition et l'origine*, ed. Luigi Cirillo and Michel Frémaux (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977).

⁽³⁾ John Toland, *Nazarenus, or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity* (London: J. Brotherton, J. Roberts, and A. Dodd, 1718); see F. Stanley Jones, *The Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity: From Toland to Baur* (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2012), p. 139.

⁽⁴⁾ On the Nazoreans, see especially Ray Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Leiden: Brill, 1988). Cf. Simon Claude Mimouni, "Les Nazoréens: Recherche étymologique et historique," *Revue Biblique* 105 (1998), 208–62. Cf. Mimouni, *Le Judéo-christianisme ancien: Essais historiques*, Patrimoines, (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998). Two recent studies: *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), as well as *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts*, ed. Matt Jackson-McCabe (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

⁽⁵⁾ Daniel Boyarin, "Rethinking Jewish-Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to which is Appended a Correction of My *Border Lines*)," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99 (2009), 7–36.

⁽⁶⁾ On Docetism and Jewish Christianity, see Guy G. Stroumsa, "Christ's Laughter: Docetic Origins Reconsidered," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12 (2004), 267–88, as well as Guy G. Stroumsa and Ronnie Goldstein, "The Greek and Jewish Origins of Docetism: A New Proposal," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 10 (2007), 423–41.

⁽⁷⁾ Günter Stemberger, *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land: Palestine in the Fourth Century* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), represents the *opinio communis* when he notes (p. 80): "no significant Jewish-Christians communities were left in Palestine itself [in the fourth century]."

⁽⁸⁾ John of Damascus, *De haeresibus* 53, *Patrologia Graeca* 94, 709 B. Although John repeats here a text from Epiphanius, one is allowed to accept his testimony, as he writes from Mar Saba, in the Judean desert, a monastery very close to the Dead Sea. On the Elchasaites, see in particular Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, *The Revelation of Elchasai: Investigations into the Evidence for a Mesopotamian*

Jewish Apocalypse of the Second Century and Its Reception by Judeo-Christian Propagandists (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985).

(⁹) Adolf Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 4th ed., 3 vols (Freiburg: Mohr Siebeck, 1909–10), Bd 2, pp. 529–38. As noted by Sidney Griffith, Julius Wellhausen had already put forward the same hypothesis in *Reste arabischen Heidentumes*, p. 232. See Sidney Harrison Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the “People of the Book” in the Language of Islam* (Princeton, N.J. and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 36, n. 84.

(¹⁰) Ernest Renan, “Note sur l’identité de la secte gnostique des elchasaites avec les mandaites ou sabéens,” *Journal Asiatique* 6 (1855), 292–4.; in the following year appeared Daniel Chwolson, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus* (St Petersburg: Imperial Academy, 1856). Cf. Toufic Fahd, “Sabi’a,” in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 8 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 675–8.

(¹¹) Adolf Schlatter, “Die Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums zum Islam,” *Evangelisches Missions-Magazin*, NF 62 (1918), 251–64; Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1949). See also Tor Andræ, *Mahomet, sa vie et sa doctrine* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1945), p. 99: “La notion d’une révélation particulière à chaque peuple est tout-à-fait étrangère à la doctrine chrétienne de la révélation.” Again, Andræ, *Mahomet*, 107: “L’idée de révélation chez Mahomet témoigne donc d’une parenté avec la doctrine ébionite-manichéenne, qui ne peut être fortuite.”

(¹²) See Arculf’s testimony (n. 50 below), as well as the studies of Shlomo Pines discussed in Section III, pp. 154–5 below.

(¹³) Günter Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur’ān: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophennieder im Qur’ān* (Erlangen: Lüling, 1974); Christoph Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 2000).

(¹⁴) See for instance Claude Gilliot, “Les ‘Informateurs’ juifs et chrétiens de Muhammad: Reprise d’un problème traité par Aloys Sprenger et Theodor Nöldeke,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 22 (1998), 84–126. One must not forget the dynamic interface between Judaism and Christianity in late antiquity, on which, see ch. 6 “Religious Dynamics between Jews and Christians” above.

(¹⁵) Averil Cameron writes: “Islam took shape within a context of extreme religious and cultural tension.” See Averil Cameron, “The Eastern Provinces in the Seventh Century: Hellenism and the Emergence of Islam,” in *Hellēnismos: Quelques jalons pour une histoire de l’identité grecque: Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 25–27 octobre 1989*, ed. Suzanne Saïd (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1991). On the context of nascent Islam, see for instance Fred McGraw

Donner, "The Background to Islam," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 511–33.

(¹⁶) See ch. 4 "False Prophet and False Messiah" above.

(¹⁷) On this, see Yuri Stoyanov, *Defenders and Enemies of the True Cross: The Sasanian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614 and Byzantine Ideology of Anti-Persian Warfare* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011). Cf. ch. 3 "False Prophets of Early Christianity" and ch. 4 "False Prophet and False Messiah" above.

(¹⁸) Andreas Kaplony, *The Ḥaram of Jerusalem, 324–1099: Temple, Friday Mosque, Area of Spiritual Power* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002). See further ch. 9 "Christian Memories and Dreams of Jerusalem" below.

(¹⁹) Robert G. Hoyland, "Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 1053–77, esp. p. 1069.

(²⁰) Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952).

(²¹) See esp. C. J. Robin, "Arabia and Ethiopia," in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 247–332.

(²²) See Glen Warren Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

(²³) See Peter Sarris, *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500–700*, Oxford History of Medieval Europe (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

(²⁴) On this, see Glen Warren Bowersock, *Empires in Collision in Late Antiquity* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2012).

(²⁵) C. J. Robin, "Les Signes de la prophétie en Arabie à l'époque de Muhammad (fin VI^e siècle et début VII^e siècle de l'ère chrétienne)," in *La raison des signes: Présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne*, ed. Stella Georgoudi, Renée Koch Piettre, and Francis Schmidt (Leiden and Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2012), pp. 433–76. Tor Andræ had already spoken of Muhammad's eschatological piety. Cf. Tor Andræ, *Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1926), p. 59.

(²⁶) Iwona Gadjia, "Quel monothéisme en Arabie du sud ancienne?," in *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux Ve et VI^e siècles: Regards croisés sur les sources*, ed. by Joëlle Beaucamp, Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, and C. J. Robin (Paris:

Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et de civilisation de Byzance, 2010), pp. 107–20.

(²⁷) François Villeneuve, “La résistance des cultes béthyliques d’Arabie face au monothéisme: De Paul à Barsauma et à Muhammad,” in *Le Problème de la christianisation du monde antique*, ed. Hervé Inglebert, Sylvain Destephen, and Bruno Dumézil (Paris: Picard, 2010), pp. 219–31 (p. 228).

(²⁸) On the Jews of Hijaz, see Robert G. Hoyland, “The Jews of the Hijaz in the Qur’ān and in their Inscriptions,” in *New Perspectives on the Qur’ān in its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 91–116.

(²⁹) See Shaul Shaked, “Popular Religion in Sasanian Babylonia,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1992), 103–17, esp. 115. For the broader perspective, see Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

(³⁰) See esp. Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010).

(³¹) John E. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978). In that same year appeared Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, a polemical book soon to become a cult book. On Wansbrough, see esp. Gerald R. Hawting, “John Wansbrough, Islam, and Monotheism,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9 (1997), 23–38.

(³²) Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. viii. Cf. ch. 4 “False Prophet and False Messiah” above.

(³³) Sarah Stroumsa, “The Muslim Context of Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: From Antiquity Through the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Steven M. Nadler and Tamar Rudavsky (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 39–59 (pp. 54–7).

(³⁴) On the concept of community, see Garth Fowden, “Religious Communities,” in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Post-Classical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 82–106.

(³⁵) For an updated *status quaestionis*, see Krisztina Szilagyi, “Muhammad and the Monk: The Making of the Christian Bahīra Legend,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008), 169–214.

⁽³⁶⁾ On *naṣārā*, see the references to the studies of Gnilka in note 37 and de Blois in note 44 below. On Waraka, see Chase F. Robinson, "Waraka b. Nawfal," *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002), 142–3. Robinson notes that we have few biographical details, most of them legendary, on Waraka, an Arab monotheist contemporary of the Prophet. The possibility that Waraka was an Ebionite or an Elchasaite has caught the fancy of some contemporary Arab intellectuals. Thus Joseph Azzi, in a book written in Arabic and translated into French with the title *La prêtre et le prophète: Aux sources du Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001), suggests, without bringing any evidence, that "la véritable intention de Waraqa était de désigner Mohammed pour lui succéder à la tête de l'assemblée des nazaréens de la Mecque" (p. 85) and that he had tried to unify the Jewish-Christian sects (p. 86). Cf. Édouard-Marie Gallez, *Le Messie et son prophète: aux origines de l'islam* (Versailles: Éditions de Paris, 2005–10), as well as vol. II: *Du Muhammad des Califes au Muhammad de l'histoire* and vol. III, *Histoire et légendologie*, which refers to the various sources in a highly confused way. Gallez cites Wilhelm Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1922).

⁽³⁷⁾ Joachim Gnilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran: Eine Spurensuche* (Freiburg: Herder, 2007).

⁽³⁸⁾ *Adv. haer.* V. 1. 3; cf. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30. 16, *Acts of Peter and Simon*, and Clement, *Strom.* I.96, who refers to heretics celebrating the Eucharist with pure water. On wine in ancient Christianity, see Andrew Brian McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁽³⁹⁾ The idea of mistaken (or wrong) passages inserted in Scripture is found in the second-century Valentinian theologian Ptolemaeus's *Epistle to Flora*. See for instance *Ep. Flora* 5.4 and 6.2 in Ptolemy, *Lettre à Flora*, ed. & trans. Gilles Quispel (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966).

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Renan, "Note sur l'identité de la secte gnostique"; Chwolson, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*. Cf. Fahd, "Sabi'a," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, pp. 675–8.

⁽⁴¹⁾ For the critical edition, see Ludwig Koenen and Cornelia Römer, *Der Kölner Mani-Code: Über das Werden seines Leibes* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1988). Cf. Albert Henrichs, "Mani and the Babylonian Baptists: A Historical Confrontation," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973), 23–59.

⁽⁴²⁾ Robert Simon, "Mani and Muhammad," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1997), 118–41.

⁽⁴³⁾ See Michel Tardieu, "L'Arrivée des Manichéens à Al-Ḥīra (?)," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe–VIIIe siècles*, ed. Pierre Canivet and Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1992), as well as Michel

Tardieu, "L'Arabie du nord-est d'après les documents manichéens," *Studia Iranica*, 23 (1994), 59–75.

(⁴⁴) François de Blois, "The 'Sabians' (*Ṣābi'ūn*) in Pre-Islamic Arabia," *Acta Orientalia* 56 (1995), 39–61; de Blois, "*Naṣrānī* (*Nazoraïos*) and *Ḥanīf* (*ethnikos*): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65 (2002), 1–30; de Blois, "Elchasai—Manes—Muḥammad: Manichäismus und Islam in religionshistorischem Vergleich," *Der Islam* 81 (2004), 31–48.

(⁴⁵) See for instance Ps-Clement, *Hom.* 2. 15. 17; cf. *Hom.* 2. 38. 1 as well as *Recognitiones* 1. 21. 8–9. See further Geneviève Gobillot, "Das Begriff 'Buch' im Koran im Licht der Pseudo-Klementinischen Schriften," in *Inārah 4: Schriften zur frühen Islamgeschichte zum Koran*, ed. Markus Gros and Karl-Heinz Ohlig (Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2009), pp. 397–489.

(⁴⁶) On the idea of *tahṛīf*, see *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), vol. 10, pp. 111–12.

(⁴⁷) On the Audians, and for a discussion of Puech's argument, see Guy G. Stroumsa, "Jewish and Gnostic Traditions among the Audians," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land: First-Fifteenth Centuries CE*, ed. Arie Kofsky and Guy G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 1998), pp. 97–108.

(⁴⁸) Holger Michael Zellentin, *The Qur'an's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013). See also Zellentin, *Islam Before Muhammad*, forthcoming.

(⁴⁹) *Heis estin ho Theos, kai plēn autou ouk estin Theos*, Ps.-Clement, *Hom.* 16.7.9.

(⁵⁰) Adomnan, *De locis sanctis*, quoted by Shlomo Pines, "Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), 135–52.

(⁵¹) Pines differs here from de Blois, for whom the Qur'ānic *naṣāra* are Jewish-Christians.

(⁵²) Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See for instance his conclusion, on pages 150–1. Cf. Patricia Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities," *Arabica* 57 (2010), 151–200. See further her "Pagan Arabs as God-Fearers," in *Islam and its Past: Jāhiliyya and Late Antiquity in the Qur'ān and Tradition*, ed. Carol Bakhos and Michael Cook,

Oxford Studies in the Abrahamic Religions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

⁽⁵³⁾ These articles are reprinted in Shlomo Pines, *Studies in the History of Religion*, ed. Guy G. Stroumsa, The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines, 4 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996).

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Pines's discovery triggered a virulent polemical response by Samuel Stern, who had collaborated with Pines in analyzing the newly discovered manuscript of 'Abd al-Jabbār. See Shlomo Pines, "The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source," in *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* (Jerusalem: The Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1966), 2(13), 237–310.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ See for instance Q. 7.159, on a group (*umma*) of the Just among "Moses' people," and Q. 43.65 and 61.14, according to which a faction (*ā'ifa*) from the *Banū Isrā'īl* "believed," while another one remained "unbelieving." On medieval Muslim authors discussing Jewish sects, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Fred McGraw Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010). Donner's thesis has been strongly rejected by Patricia Crone, "'Among the Believers': Review of Donner's *Muhammad and the Believers*," *The Tablet* (August 10, 2010) <<http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/42023/among-the-believers>>.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Sozomène, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, II.4 (vol. 1, pp. 244–9 [Sources Chrétiennes 306]). On this festival, see Arie Kofsky, "Mamre: A Case of Regional Cult?," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land: First-Fifteenth Centuries CE*, ed. Arie Kofsky and Guy G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 1998), pp. 19–30. See also Elizabeth K. Fowden, "Sharing Holy Places," *Common Knowledge* 8, 124–46.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Sozomène, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, VI.38.11 (vol. 3, pp. 242–6 [Sources Chrétiennes 495]). Sebeos, an Armenian ecclesiastical historian writing in the second half of the seventh century, also mentions that the Arabs had learned from the Jews about their Abrahamic ascendance. (Quoted by Nevo-Koren [n. 61 below], 187).

⁽⁵⁹⁾ See in particular Nagel, "'Der erste Muslim'." Crone and Cook, in *Hagarism*, grant much importance to the figure of Abraham in the late antique background of Islam. See also Michael Cook, *Muhammad* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 81: "This evidence [from Sozomen] is not lightly to be set aside...[There is] no evidence that would show any direct link between this

early religion of Abraham and Muhammad's message..., but it is at least a confirmation that Muhammad was not the first in the field..." On the late antique background of Islam, see Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁽⁶⁰⁾ *Hist. ecclés.* I.4.5 and I.4.9–10.

⁽⁶¹⁾ Yehuda D. Nevo and Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam: The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2003), pp. 189–90.

⁽⁶²⁾ Cf. Fergus Millar, "Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus, and the Origins of Islam," in Fergus Millar, *Rome, the Greek World, and the East*, vol. 3: *The Greek World, the Jews, and the East*, ed. Hannah M. Cotton and Guy M. Rogers (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 351–78. On the Nessana papyri, see Rachel Stroumsa, "People and Identities in Nessana" (unpublished PhD thesis, Duke University, 2008) <<http://hdl.handle.net/10161/619>> [accessed 30 June 2014]. For another allusion to the "Abrahamic" dimension of earliest Islam, see the "Sarah fresco" at Quṣayr 'Amra, which dates from the Umayyad period, and may reflect Sarah's identification with the Arabs. Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 145–9.

⁽⁶³⁾ Pseudo-Clement, *Recognitiones*, I.33.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ See Geneviève Gobillot, *La Conception originelle: Ses interprétations et fonctions chez les penseurs musulmans* (Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2000).

⁽⁶⁵⁾ See Patricia Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), 59–95; Patricia Crone, "Jewish-Christianity and the Qur'ān," forthcoming.