

“Jewish-Christianity” and Islamic origins.  
The transformation of a peripheral religious movement?

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Since the 70s of the last century, a heterogeneous group of researchers has been casting into doubt the traditional assumptions about the origins of Islam, which had been peacefully shared with some minor nuances by the academic community. In different ways and with their own theories, Günter Lüling (1970), Patricia Crone and Michael Cook (1977), John Wansbrough (1977-1978), Yehuda Nevo (d. 1992), Christoph Luxenberg (2000) and many others, in a nutshell affirm that the master narrative about the origins of Islam and the Qur’an is historically unreliable, and does not clarify what exactly happened to prompt the emergence of that new religion<sup>1</sup>.

The arrival of these “revisionist” theories, proposed by those and other authors who by no means may be considered members of a unified school, caused great commotion among the Western Islamicists (a phenomenon known as the “70s shock”)<sup>2</sup>. Firstly, challenging two attitudes inherited from the European Orientalism of the 19th and 20th centuries, namely, the confidence in the veracity of the information coming from the traditional Islamic sources (the Qur’ān, the *sīra* and the collections of *ḥadīths*)<sup>3</sup> and a subtle resistance to use the historical-critical method with this same documentation<sup>4</sup>. Secondly, creating either an enormous fascination or a vehement

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<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Böwering, “Recent Research on the construction of the Qur’ān”, *The Qur’ān in its historical context*, Gabriel Said Reynolds ed. (Oxon-New York: Routledge 2008), 70-87, Claude Gilliot, “Le débat contemporain sur Islam des Origines”, *Les Débuts du monde musulman VIIe-Xe siècle. De Muhammad aux dynasties autonomes*, Thierry Bianquis, Pierre Guichard, & Matthieu Tillier, eds. (Paris, Presses Univ. de France 2012), 355-371; Jaako Hämeen-Anttila, “Christians and Christianity in the Qur’ān”, in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Volume 1 (600-900)*, David Thomas and Barbara Roggema, eds. (Leiden: Brill 2009), 26-30.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, the Western origins of Revisionism have not facilitated its acceptance by the Muslim apologists, who have identified it as another new crusade or a manifestation of cultural imperialism.

<sup>3</sup> Theodor Nöldeke, *Orientalische Skizzen* (Berlin: Pætel 1892), 56 o Ernest Renan, “Mahomet et les origines de l’islamisme”, *Revue des Deux Mondes, Nouvelle période* 12 (1851): 1065. John E. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies. Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, London Oriental Series 31 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 1977), ix.

<sup>4</sup> John E. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies. Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, London Oriental Series 31 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 1977), ix.

rejection in the academic environment<sup>5</sup>. This is reflected in the current overwhelming quantity of scientific production on this subject, with complementary or opposing theories and new philological, archeological and historical information.

Some scholars regret the current panorama of studies on the origins of Islam, which has even been described as a “hopeless chaos”, *ein hoffnungsloses Chaos*<sup>6</sup>, where the revisionist production has become a true marginal “sub-culture” (*sic*), without unity between the theories, lacking a common methodology or a school that can be a real and organized challenge for the traditional paradigms<sup>7</sup>. In any case, the current research on the origins of Islam should take these perspectives into account, accepting the fact that an approach exclusively centered on the traditional sources or a simple view of Early Islam is insufficient to break new ground concerning the origin of this religion. To this day, there is no doubt that this field of research requires an interdisciplinary effort, taking into account information from both Muslim and non-Muslim sources, archaeological evidence, linguistic analysis and studies on contact and evolution of theological ideas<sup>8</sup>.

### **1. A ‘Jewish-Christian connection’ for Islamic origins.**

Without losing sight of this revisionist environment, among all the different theories that currently explore the religious milieu of Late Antiquity to elucidate the origins of the Islamic religion, there are some works that strongly attract our attention: I am referring to those that revive the question of a potential link between Early Islam and Jewish-Christianity; that is to say, Christians that maintained or adopted certain Jewish beliefs and practices, either Jews that believed in the messianism and/or the prophecy of Jesus (groups whose existence and nature is still a matter of debate).

This theory was proposed for the first time by the Irish freethinker John Toland (d. 1722), considered the creator of the modern concept of “Jewish-Christianity” together

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<sup>5</sup> The question has gone beyond the merely academic. Peter von Sivers, “The Islamic Origins Debate Goes Public”, *History Compass* (2013) 1-16.

<sup>6</sup> Angelika Neuwirth “Zur Archäologie einer heiligen Schrift: Überlegungen zum Koran vor seiner Kompilation”, in C. Burgmer (ed.), *Streit um den Koran* (Berlin: Schiler 2004), 82.

<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, “Introduction. Qur’ānic studies and its controversies”, *The Qur’ān in its historical context*, Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed. (Oxon-New York: Routedge 2008), 8. Otherwise, some scholars propose even “to reset the terms of discussion”. Aziz al-Azmeh, “Implausibility and Probability in Studies of Qur’ānic Origins”. Paper published by the International Qur’ānic Studies Association at [http://www.iqsaweb.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/baltimore\\_keynote\\_aa\\_t1.pdf](http://www.iqsaweb.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/baltimore_keynote_aa_t1.pdf) (file accessed July 20, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> The criticism claims that these ambitious projects lack decisive evidence and they move in the realm of plausibility, arguing that revisionist authors reconstruct the origins of Islam on the basis of imaginative and not sufficiently proved assertions, even forcing the sources to prove their own theories.

with Ferdinand Christian Baur<sup>9</sup>. Toland considered that the testimony of the *Gospel of Barnabas* (an apocryphal document probably of *morisco* origin) provided evidence that the roots of Islamic religion should be sought in the “most ancient monuments of Christian religion” and not in the Christian heresies<sup>10</sup>. Almost two centuries later, Adolf von Harnack (1909) reformulated the same idea with more contemporary terms, thus becoming the true precursor of the current theories on the Jewish-Christian origins of Islam<sup>11</sup>, a thesis that would be taken up by Adolf Schlatter (1918) and specially by Hans-Joachim Schoeps (1949). The same data would be re-examined in the works of Tor Andræ (1932) or more recently Martiniano Roncaglia (1971), among many others<sup>12</sup>.

Little more could be said in this regard using the method of establishing parallels between the Qurʾān and what could be known of the early Jewish-Christianity, and therefore the issue was more or less settled. Nevertheless, some works based on the linguistic analysis and the re-interpretation of the sources began to appear during the last third of the 20th century, paving the way for a ‘second generation’ of studies. Without losing sight of John Wansbrough’s revolutionary suggestions<sup>13</sup>, the first

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<sup>9</sup> F. Stanley Jones, ed. *The Rediscovery of Jewish-Christianity: From Toland to Baur* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2012). The first author to use such terminology seems to have been Daniel Zwicker, *Irenicum Irenicorum, Seu Recontiliatoris Christianorum hodiernorum Norma Triplex, Sana omnium hominum Ratio, Scriptura Sacra, & Traditiones* (Amsterdam? 1658).

<sup>10</sup> John Toland, *Nazarenus: or, Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity containing the history of the ancient Gospel of Barnabas and the modern Gospel of the Mahometans, attributed to the same Apostle*. (London: J. Brotherton 1718), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Gustav Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* [Textbook of History of Dogmes] (Tübingen: Mohr 1909), vol. 2, 529-538. Julius Wellhausen made passing reference to the *nasara* in his work *Reste arabischen Heidentums. Gesammelt und Erläutert* [Residues of Arab Paganism...] (Berlin: Georg Reimer 1897), 232, without taking up the idea.

<sup>12</sup> Adolf Schlatter, “Die Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums zum Islam” [The development of Jewish-Christianity to Islam], *Evangelisches Missionsmagazin* 62 (1918), 251-264; Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* [Theology and History of the Jewish-Christianity] (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1949), 334-342. And also in *Das Judenchristentum: Untersuchungen über Gruppenbildungen und Parteikämpfe in der frühen Christenheit*, (Bern: Francke Verlag 1964); Tor Andræ, *Mohammed, sein Leben un sein Glauben* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1932); Martiniano Pellegrino Roncaglia, “Éléments Ébionites et Elkésaites dans le Coran”, *Proche Orient Chrétien* 21 (1971) 101-126. Roncaglia developed Harnack’s theories and, basing on the legend of Waraqa ibn Nawfal, postulated an Elchasaite origin for Islam identifying Ebionism with Elchasaism.

<sup>13</sup> One of the pioneers of revisionism in Islamology with his works *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*. London Oriental Series vol. XXXIV (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 1978), and *Qurʾānic Studies. Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 1977). Carlos A. Segovia, “John Wansbrough and the Problem of Islamic Origins in Recent Scholarship: A Farewell to the Traditional Account”, in *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where,*

substantial turning point of this theory would be the proposal of Günter Lüling (1974), for whom the Qurʾān is a palimpsest in which it is possible to discover different redactional levels<sup>14</sup>. Islam in its origins would be related to a kind of marginal Christianity, which had its last refuge in Arabia: in fact, Lüling suggests that Muhammad, a member of one anti-Trinitarian Christian community (Ebionite?), inaugurated a strong monotheistic movement aiming to bring together Jewish and Jewish-Christians against the ‘idolatrous’ Trinitarians (that would be the original *mušrikūn*, and subsequently they were related to the pagans)<sup>15</sup>. Lüling’s theories had been noted in the scholarly world, but they failed to gain general acceptance, mainly due to his reconstructions of the Qurʾānic text that, at times, seemed to be at the service of his claims<sup>16</sup>. However, Lüling’s revisionist proposal would inspire many subsequent studies; in fact, his theory of a kind of Jewish-Christianity underlying Early Islam has been received with interest by many Islamicists.

Other authors pertaining to this second generation of researchers would raise again a ‘Jewish Christian connection’ for the Islamic origins<sup>17</sup>. Yehuda Nevo (d. 1992), looking into the Syro-Palestinian society of the 7th and 8th centuries, argued that the religious *formulæ* of the first ‘Islamic’ inscriptions found in the Negev suggested an undetermined monotheism that gradually progressed towards what later came to be known as “Islam”. Nevo, taking inspiration from the Wansbrough’s hypothesis about an Islam with a sectarian Jewish-Christian origin that progressively developed until its self-awareness, postulated that Islam was born in an environment where the vast

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*and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, Basil Lourie & Carlos A. Segovia, eds. (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias 2012), xix-xxviii.

<sup>14</sup> The oldest one being a Christian hymnary. Günter Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qurʾan. Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenlieder im Qurʾan* (Erlangen: Verlagsbuchhandlung Hannelore Lüling 1974).

<sup>15</sup> Günter Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad. Eine Kritik am "christlichen" Abendland* [The Rediscovery of the Prophet Muhammad] (Erlangen: Verlagsbuchhandlung Hannelore Lüling 1981), 73-89 and 423. A summary of his theories has been published in English: Günter Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation: the Rediscovery and Reliable Reconstruction of a Comprehensive Pre-Islamic Christian Hymn Hidden in the Koran under Earliest Islamic Reinterpretations* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 2003).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the review of his work by Gerald Hawting, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 27 (1982),

<sup>17</sup> The idea of a Jewish-Christian origin for Islam has also inspired several Christian Arab authors. In the 60s, Yūsuf Durra al-Ḥaddād suggested the identification of the Qurʾānic *naṣārā* with the Nazarenes: *Al-Qurʾān daʿwā naṣrāniyya* (Jounieh: Librairie Pauliste 1969) and *Al-Inḡīl fī l-Qurʾān*, Jounieh: Librairie Pauliste 1982. More recently, the Lebanese monk Youssif al-Azzi (Abū Mūsā al-Ḥarīrī) has imaginatively recreated the relationship of Muhammad with the “Jewish-Christian” Warāqa ibn Nawfal without providing proof. This work, subject of controversy within the Arab world, was translated into French in 2001: Abu Musa al Hariri (pseudonym), *Qass wa-nabī*, Jounieh-Kaslik 1979; *Nabī r-rahma* (Beirut: Diyār ʿAql 1990); Youssif Azzi, *Le prêtre et le prophète* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose 2001).

majority of people were pagan while the elite professed a certain kind of Jewish-Christianity<sup>18</sup>. Despite Nevo's theories having been strongly criticized from different perspectives<sup>19</sup>, his contributions are valuable for the study of a potential Abrahamic monotheism among the Negev Arabs of the 5th and 6th centuries<sup>20</sup>. On the other hand, back in the mid-60s Shlomo Pines (d. 1990) defended the survival of Jewish Christianity into Islamic times on the basis of the information conserved in the *taṭbīt dalā'il nubuwwat sayyidinā Muḥammad* by Abū I-Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Ġabbār (d. 415/1025) and in the *Ḥall aš-šukūk wa-l-radd ʿalā l-yahūdī l-muḥālif* by Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAwn (c. 1273)<sup>21</sup>. Pines was convinced that these texts contained Judeo-Christian traditions originating in a fairly late Judeo-Christian community, suggesting that Islam should be understood as a development of Jewish-Christianity<sup>22</sup>. Pines theories unleashed many virulent responses by several scholars<sup>23</sup> but also arouse the interest of others<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, even some of his critics admit that it is necessary to investigate how these concepts arrived to the Qurʾān, recognizing implicitly their presence in this text<sup>25</sup>.

The theories of François de Blois (2004) can be placed within this second generation of studies. According to this scholar, the Islamic religion —which was born in an

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<sup>18</sup> Yehuda Nevo, "Towards a pre-history of Islam", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 17 (1994), 108-141, especially 125-126. Yehuda Nevo and Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam. The Origins of the Arab Religion and the Arab State* (Amherst NY: Prometheus Books 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Robert G. Hoyland, "The Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1997), 96; Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton NJ: Darwin Press 1998), 62-63.

<sup>20</sup> Yehuda Nevo and Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam*, 189-190. Quoted by Guy Stroumsa, "Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins" in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts. Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone* (Brill: Leiden/Boston 2014), 88. This contribution has been recently republished with minor modifications as a book chapter. Id., *The Making of Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 2015), 139-158 ("Jewish-Christians and Islamic Origins").

<sup>21</sup> Shlomo Pines, *The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source*, (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities Proceedings 13, 1966); "Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judeo-Christianity", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), 135-152 and "Studies in Christianity and Judæo-Christianity based on Arabic Sources", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 6 (1985), 107-161; "Judeo-Christian Materials in an Arabic Jewish Treatise", *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 35 (1967), 187-217.

<sup>22</sup> Such as *mu'min/ūn* (Q 2. 62, 5.29 etc.), that he interpreted as a calque of οἱ πιστεύοντες/*credentes* (Acts 2.44 and specially 22.19), a term that, according to Pines, could be commonly used to refer to Jewish-Christians, who were different from the Christians (*naṣārā*), Jews or Zoroastrians.

<sup>23</sup> On the debate provoked by these proposals, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: ʿAbd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill 2004), 1-17.

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), 59-95, especially 74-85.

<sup>25</sup> Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian*, 15.

environment where Paganism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Manichæism coexisted— exhibits important similarities with this last one (especially in its conception of Prophecy) due to the common Jewish-Christian background of both religions. According to de Blois, Islam in its origins was a peripheral product in the religious life of the Near East. This early Islam had been in contact with ‘religious fossils’ of marginal character, just like Nazoræan Judæo-Christianity (the Qurʾānic *naṣārā*- Ναζωραῖοι), different from the *ṣābiʿa*<sup>26</sup> and from the Elkhasaites<sup>27</sup>: in fact, this author proposes “re-opening and re-evaluating the specifically ‘Jewish Christian’ influences on the original formulation of Islam”<sup>28</sup>. Joachim Gnilka (2007) has shared De Blois interpretation of the Qurʾānic term *naṣārā*, and he also defends the presence of Nazoræan communities in the early-Islamic environment. According to Gnilka, this fact might explain the close parallels between Islamic and Jewish-Christian theologies<sup>29</sup>. In any case, the different interpretations of Qurʾānic terminology in this point and the historical relevance of this theory have given rise to a lengthy debate, which has lasted until today<sup>30</sup>.

The current generation of studies, represented by authors such as Holger Zellentin or Carlos Andrés Segovia among others<sup>31</sup>, stands for an interdisciplinary approach effort

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<sup>26</sup> See Qurʾān 2:62, 5: 69 and 22: 17 and “Ṣābiʿa” in *The Encyclopædia of Islam*, Vol. VIII, Leiden-New York: Brill 1995, 675-677.

<sup>27</sup> François de Blois, “The ‘Sabians’ (ṣābiʿûn) in Pre-Islamic Arabia”, *Acta Orientalia* 56 (1995), 39-61; “Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanīf (ἕθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65/1 (2002), 1-30 and “Elchasai – Manes – Muhammad: Manichæismus und Islam in religionhistorischen Vergleich”, *Der Islam* 81 (2004), 31-48.

<sup>28</sup> De Blois, *Naṣrānī*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> Joachim Gnilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran: Eine Spurensuche* [The Nazarenes and the Qurʾān: Searching for clues] (Freiburg: Herder 2007).

<sup>30</sup> At the limit of the enthusiasm for a historical reconstruction of the Islamic religion origins, taking as a reference the Qurʾānic *nasara*, is the doctoral work of Edouard-Marie Gallez, *Le Messie et son Prophète: aux origines de l’Islam: vol. I: De Qumran à Muhammad* (Versailles: Editions de Paris 2005); *Vol. II: Du Muhammad des Califes au Muhammad de l’histoire* (Versailles: Editions de Paris 2010) and *Vol. III: Histoire et légendologie* (Versailles: Editions de Paris 2010). Furthermore, Sidney Griffith has presented his arguments against De Blois’ interpretation, an “ingenious but tortuous line of reasoning”, “Al- Naṣārā in the Qurʾān”, *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān. The Qurʾān in its historical context II*, Gabriel Reynolds, ed. (Oxon-New York: Routledge 2011), 301-322 (314, n. 35).

<sup>31</sup> Holger Michael Zellentin, *The Qurʾān’s Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2013); Carlos A. Segovia, “Thematic and Structural Affinities between 1 Enoch and the Qurʾān: A contribution to the Study of the Judæo-Christian Apocalyptic Setting of the Early Islamic Faith”, in *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where and th Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, Basile Lourié – Carlos A. Segovia, eds. Piscataway NJ: Gorgias 2012, 231-267. Anyway, some of the more recent Segovia’s works tend to identify a pro-Nestorian Christianity in the Islamic origins.

that continues to suggest a rapport between Jewish-Christianity and early Islam, but now taking a more cautious approach. Firstly, they propose a reformulation of the term “Jewish-Christianity” and its interpretation, in line with Claude Mimouni and Anette Joshiko-Reed. On the other hand —and from the current historical perspective that considers the birth of Islam as a phenomenon that should be placed within the late antique contexts<sup>32</sup>— this new line of research is not overly centered on linguistic analysis or lexical comparatives, but it gives more attention to the study of affinities between the Qurʾān and the Christian literature possibly originating in a Jewish-Christian milieu<sup>33</sup>. Indeed, these parallels can be detected in many formulæ, topics and structures, which are present in legal narratives, ritual norms, theological doctrines and hermeneutical practices.

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

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

The arguments defending the existence of a Jewish-Christian foundation in Early Islam are of unequal value; on the other hand, the advocates of this theory adopt different positions on the same subject: the most maximalist (purely revisionist but offering a captivating view of the facts) claims that ‘embryonic’ Islam was only but a certain kind of local Jewish-Christianity, possibly a peripheral religious movement, which developed into a differentiated religion for various reasons (Lüling, Nevo, Gallez, Segovia among others). Other moderate proposals recognize the existence of Jewish-Christian influences on the Qurʾān but they value differently the importance of those within the text. In fact, many striking data have been taken in consideration by different researchers, as is the case of the late Patricia Crone, who concluded that Jewish Christians were ‘the most obvious candidates’ for the role of transmitters of a number

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<sup>32</sup> Robert G. Hoyland, “Early Islam as a Late Antique Religion” in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Scott Fitzgerald Johnson ed. (Oxford-New York: Oxford Univ. Press 2012) esp. 1053-1056, 1069-1072.

<sup>33</sup> I am referring in particular to the Pseudo-Clementine literature that took form in 4th century Syria, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* —a late antique church order that circulated widely in Syriac communities on the Arabian periphery, and the Enochic eschatological traditions preserved in the Ethiopian Christianity—.

of Qurʾānic themes<sup>34</sup>; other scholars accept a possible presence in Arabia of Jewish-Christian groups, or accept the basic claim of Jewish-Christian influence on Early Islam as a reasonable possibility<sup>35</sup>.

However, there is a strong objection to the existence of real influences of Jewish-Christianity on Islam, namely, the allusion to the lack of geographic or chronological proximity between both religious phenomena. This observation is based upon the assumption that Jewish-Christianity disappeared probably after the 2nd century and certainly during the 4th century, and therefore it is not viable to explain neither the precise origin nor the channels through which those ideas reached the 7th century Hejaz. From this perspective it is possible to recognize in the Qurʾān some common *theologoumena*, but they would be little more than interesting (and useless) phenomenological coincidences<sup>36</sup>.

The scholars engaged in the study of early Islam usually accept at this point the most common historiographical opinion regarding Jewish-Christianity, which, at the same time, depends on the version of the facts provided by Eusebius of Cæsarea (d. 339). According to Eusebius, “Jewish-Christianity” (a denomination never used by this author or by any other Christian writer from the Patristic period) was a religious movement that ended during the 2nd century with the “parting of the ways”, with a diminishing trajectory after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. As I have just pointed out, it is common to accept the existence of Jewish-Christianity during the 2nd century and even until the 3rd and 4th centuries, denying to this phenomenon any subsequent continuity<sup>37</sup>. From this perspective it is impossible to establish any link between this first Jewish-Christianity and those supposed ‘Qurʾānic Jewish-Christians’, appearing

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<sup>34</sup> Patricia Crone, “Jewish Christianity and the Qurʾān (Part One)”, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74/2 (2015), 225-253.

<sup>35</sup> For example, Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allah and his People* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 2014), 273, 49 and 273; Gerhard Böwering, “Recent Research on the Construction of Qurʾān”, *The Qurʾān in its historical context*, Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed. (Oxon-New York: Routledge 2008), 76-77; Fred M. Donner, “The Qurʾān in recent scholarship”, *The Qurʾān in its historical context*, Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed. (Oxon-New York: Routledge 2008), 33.

<sup>36</sup> In any case, it seems difficult for the critics to give an alternative explanation for the more striking and unquestionable parallels: “The pertinent texts, such as the *Didascalia* and others, like the Pseudo-Clementine corpus, simply continued to be of interest and importance to the wider Christian communities of late antiquity”, Sidney H. Griffith, Review to Holger Zellentin’s *The Qurʾān’s Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure*, *Theological Studies* 76/1 (2015), 172-173.

<sup>37</sup> *Historia Ecclesiastica* III, 5.3; IV, 5.2 and 6.3. Annette Yoshiko Reed “Jewish Christianity as a Counter-history? The Apostolic Past in Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History and the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies”, in *Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2008), 208-216.



from nowhere at least three centuries later<sup>38</sup>. The authors holding this conclusion argue, with no small amount of reason, that the Rabbinical works barely mention this issue<sup>39</sup>. And the Christian sources —in reference to the heresiologists and historians of the Patristic period (Eusebius, yet again)<sup>40</sup>—, offer unreliable information regarding Jewish-Christians because of their ambiguity, their intentionality (to deny the ‘heterodox’ traditions’ vitality, and show that the ‘orthodox’ church represents the only true apostolic religion) and their dependence on other sources<sup>41</sup>. At this point, it is necessary to overcome this perspective, working on the question from two different aspects: 1) A reformulation of the meaning of the concept “Jewish-Christianity” and, from this starting point, 2) a new approach to the information provided by the sources.

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

As noted above, it is well known that “Jewish Christianity” and its related terms is a modern category that continues to be used with the same contradictory meanings attributed to it by Eusebius, because 1) it serves to name the ‘Orthodox’ movement of the Jews who followed Jesus in the earliest Church of Jerusalem, but 2) also it is used to group certain ‘heresies’ listed in Patristic works (i. e. Ebionites, Elcasaites,

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<sup>38</sup> Rémi Brague, “Le Coran: sortir du cercle?”, *Critique* 671 (2003), 251.

<sup>39</sup> Apart from the allusions to an early movement represented by figures such as Ya‘qob of Kfar Sakhnayya/Kfar Sama who, according to *Tosefta* (Hul. 2, 22-23) offered to heal Eliezer b. Dama in the name of Jesus b. Pantira (see also TB Avodah Zarah 17a and 27b; TJ, Shab. 14:4, 14d; TJ, Av. Zar. 2:2, 40d, etc.), or the references to certain *minim* who followed these same beliefs (TB Avoda Zara 27b). The mention in *Berešit Rabba* 25, 1 of a controversy between the Palestinian *amora* Rabbi Abbahu (c. 300) and the *minim* about some Enochic texts is very suggestive but it does not clarify the exact nature of these heretics. An interesting analysis of those passages in Philip J. Mayo, “The Role of the *Birkath Haminim* in Early Jewish-Christian Relations: A Reexamination of the Evidence”, *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 16.2 (2006), 325-344.

<sup>40</sup> Among them, Ignatius of Antioch (c. 107), Justin (c. 162/168), Hegesippos (d. 180) Irenæus (c. 202), Hyppolitus of Rome (c. 236), Origen (d. 254), the aforementioned Eusebius of Cæsarea, Marius Victorinus (c. 355), Epiphanius of Salamis (d.403) and Jerome (d. 420), although the list of authors belonging to the first five centuries is still longer. Albertus F. Johannes Klijn & G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden: Brill 1973).

<sup>41</sup> Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet. The End of Muhammad’s Life and the beginning of Islam* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press 2012), 209 n. 62. Other authors defend the cautious use of these sources to know some details of this heterogeneous phenomenon: Claude Simon Mimouni, “Le Judaïsme Chrétien Ancien: Quelques remarques et réflexions sur in problème débattu et rebattu”, *Judaïsme Antique* 1 (2013), 275. Mimouni also offers a geographical reconstruction of the 4<sup>th</sup> century Jewish-Christian settlements using the information provided by Epiphanius of Salamis, Jerome and, to a lesser extent, Eusebius, Origen and Hyppolitus. Id., “Les établissements naziréens, ébionites et elcasaites d’après les hérésiologues de la Grande Église”, *Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi* 31/2 (2014) 25-39.

Nazoræans, etc.) into a single category. This is precisely what has caused Jewish-Christianity to continue to be studied along these two lines, in spite of the fact that the concept thus expressed (as Daniel Boyarin said) has nothing to do with the reality of the facts and, therefore, is unsuitable for its correct description<sup>42</sup>. In any case, and lacking a better one, the composite word “Jewish Christianity” continues to be useful to refer to the common denominators of an extremely complex religious phenomenon that might well have continued to exist in many places of the Near East, including 7th century Arabia<sup>43</sup>.

The proposal for a redefinition of Jewish-Christianity has been ongoing since at least 1998<sup>44</sup>. As a result, there is a greater agreement to accept that under this denomination we should include the multiple ‘Jewish’ ways of belief and worship that continued to persist or were created thanks not only to the evolution of the original Christianity of Jewish origin but also to the continuous contact between Jews and Christians: a circumstance which caused new and different Judaizer Christianities<sup>45</sup>. Jewish-Christianity, far from diminishing after the catastrophe of the year 70, was emerging in different ways and forms as a vital strand, specially within Syriac, Ethiopic and Arabic Christianity, adopting the appearance of a complicated patchwork formed by different phenomena of unequal origins and nature, from which we do find cues and even proof that still needs to be further examined. Bearing in mind the inherent limitations of a presentation of this kind, paying attention to some information provided by the sources could be of interest to readdress the question of the continued existence of Jewish-Christianity in the age and environment that saw the birth of Islam.

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<sup>42</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judæo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: Penn, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press 2004), and “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.

<sup>43</sup> Stroumsa, *Jewish Christianity*, 74. Id., “From Qumran to Qur’ān: The Religious Words of Antient Christianity”, in *Christianity and Religious Plurality*, Charlotte Methuen, Andrew Spicer & John Wolffe (Woodbridge-Rochester NY: Boydell & Brewer 2015), 5-6.

<sup>44</sup> Claude Simon Mimouni, “Le Judaïsme Chrétien Ancien: Quelques remarques et réflexions sur in problème débattu et rebattu”, *Judaïsme Antique* 1 (2013), 266-274.

<sup>45</sup> Annette Yoshiko Reed, “‘Jewish Christianity’ after the ‘Parting of the Ways’”, *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Adam H. Becker & Annette Yoshiko Reed (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2003), 230-231. On Byzantine and Middle-Eastern judaizer Christians during the late Antiquity, Verner K. Vyhmeister, “The Sabbath in Asia”, in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, Kenneth A. Strand ed. (Review and Herald Publishing Association 1982), 153-158.

Even from a traditional perspective, influence of the synagogal Judaism in the origins of biblical, theological and liturgical traditions of Syriac Christianity (specially the Eastern branch) is a fact commonly accepted<sup>46</sup>. It would be imprecise, inaccurate and even deceptive to qualify this branch of Christianity as Jewish-Christian; however, it is true that Jewish-Christianity would have been a vital element of Syriac Christianity during the 3rd and 4th centuries, as witnessed by the works of Bardaisan (d. 222), Aphrahat (d. 345) or Mani. Even the *Book of Elchaasai*, as F. Stanley Jones suggests, should not be considered as a “Christian aberration”, but a founding document of early Syrian Christianity in Mesopotamia and Syria<sup>47</sup>. The same could be said of that literature close to the Jewish-Christian views, such as the Pseudo-Clementine writings or the *Didaskalia Apostolorum*. Sidney Griffith himself says that the texts of Jewish-Christian inspiration coming from the Syriac tradition continued to be of interest and importance for the Christians of late antiquity<sup>48</sup>: in my view, the profile of those Christians could be detected thanks to some testimonies belonging to the 4<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, telling about the presence of Jewish-Christian communities in Syria and Mesopotamia. I will limit myself to presenting some data for the purpose of drawing attention to the possible value of a sufficient number of indications.

As Patricia Crone noted, the presence of Judaizer Christians in Syria, Mesopotamia and Phrygia during the 4<sup>th</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup> centuries is a well-known fact, but it has significant implications in understanding the oldest Islamic argumentation, because Muslims and Jewish-Christians could argue that they were the true followers of Jesus’ teachings, creating an alliance against the corruption provoked by the “introduction of Roman customs” (Trinitarian beliefs). According to Crone, the Muslim writers knew of the existence of these heterogeneous groups (among them would also be ‘old-fashioned’ Jewish-Christians) and they used their argumentation in many works such as the aforementioned *Tatbīt* of ʿAbd al-Ġabbār<sup>49</sup>. On the other hand, John Chrysostome’s homilies against the Jews and Judaizer Christians of Antioch (386-387) —Christians keeping the Shabbat and practicing circumcision—, have been recently interpreted as a reflection of an atmosphere in which orthodox Christians, Jews and Jewish-Christians

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Murray, “The Characteristics of Earliest Syriac Christianity”, in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, Nina G. Garsoïan, Thomas F. Matthews & Robert W. Thomson eds. (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks 1982), 3-16; Gerard A. M. Rouwhorst, “Jewish Liturgical Traditions in Early Syriac Christianity”, *Vigiliæ Christianæ* 51 (1997), 74-82; Leslie W. Barnard, “The origins and emergence of the Church in Edessa during the First Two Centuries A. D.”, *Vigiliæ Christianæ* 22 (1968), 161-175; Sebastian Brock, “The Peshitta Old Testament: Between Judaism and Christianity”, *Cristianesimo nella storia* 19 (1998), 483-502.

<sup>47</sup> F. Stanley Jones, *Pseudoclementina Elchasaiticaque inter Judæochristiana: Collected Studies, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 203 (Leuven: Peeters 2012), 473.

<sup>48</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, Review to Holger Zellentin’s *The Qurʾān’s Legal Culture*, 172.

<sup>49</sup> Crone suggests a middle ground between the arguments of Pines y Stern. Crone, *Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 74-76.

of different types (converted Jews, Judaizers and ‘apostolic’ Christians) live together: a significant heterogeneity within a metropolis located on the western edge of the Syriac area<sup>50</sup>. This situation might be even more evident inland, and was still common during the 5th century, as Isaac of Antioch testifies (d. c. 459)<sup>51</sup>. In Mesopotamia there is no doubt that (in contrast with the official religion), different types of Jewish and Christian syncretism<sup>52</sup> were very widespread among the Christian popular classes, as is evidenced by the magic bowls dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8th centuries<sup>53</sup>. This finding illustrates the complaint of some ecclesiastical authors mentioning Christians who celebrated Pesah, kept Shabbat and circumcision, and use Jewish amulets<sup>54</sup>. The question appears again in the Synods of the early 8th century, referring to a oft-repeated but never respected regulation against these practices<sup>55</sup>. On the other hand, the reference to the *Šabtāyē* (lit. “Shabbat observers”) by Mārūtā of Mayfarqaṭ (d. a. 420) and Barḥadb<sup>e</sup>šabbā <sup>c</sup>Arbāyā, d. a. 650<sup>56</sup> (namely, circumcised Christians who considered that the New Testament has not abrogated the Torah and celebrated the Eucharist on Shabbat) fits well with the description of a Jewish-Christian group. Centuries later, Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) explicitly mentioned them in more detail, suggesting that *Šabtāyē* still existed at his time in the form of different homonymous groups of Novatian schismatics<sup>57</sup> and Jewish-Christians of apostolic origins. In another

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<sup>50</sup> John Chrysostom, *Discourses Against Judaizing Christians. Fathers of the Church* vol. 68, trans. Paul W. Harkins (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1979). Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity. How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*, (Princeton University Press: 1997), 66-67; Charlotte E. Fonrobert, “Jewish Christians, Judaizers and Christian Anti-Judaism”, in *Late Ancient Christianity, A People’s History of Christianity* vol. 2, Virginia Burrus, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress 2005), 234-254; Crone, *Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 83-95.

<sup>51</sup> Stanley Kazan, “Isaac of Antioch’s Homily against the Jews”, *Oriens Christianus* 45 (1961): 30-53; 46 (1962), 87-98; 47 (1963), 89-97; 49 (1965), 57-78.

<sup>52</sup> Understanding syncretism as the way in which a religious feature of one or more traditions becomes incorporated into another tradition.

<sup>53</sup> Tapani Harviainen, “Syncretistic and Confessional Features in Mesopotamian Incantation Bowls”, *Studia Orientalia published by the Finnish Oriental Society* 70 (1993), 36-37.

<sup>54</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism in Talmudic Babylonia* (Lanham MD: University Press of America 1986), 142.

<sup>55</sup> Simone Rosenkranz, *Die jüdisch-christliche Auseinandersetzung unter islamischer Herrschaft. 7.-10. Jahrhundert* (Bern-Berlin: Peter Lang 2004),

<sup>56</sup> Gustav Adolf von Harnack (tr.), “Der Ketzerkatalog des Bischofs Maruta von Maiperkat”, in *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, vol. IV Oscar von Gebhart & Gustav Adolf von Harnack eds. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichssche Buchhandlung 1899), 7 and 14; François-Nicolas Nau (ed. and tr.), “Histoire de Barḥadb<sup>e</sup>šabbā <sup>c</sup>Arbaia” *Patrologia Orientalis* 23 (1932), 187-188.

<sup>57</sup> There was a relationship between some *shabtāyē* and certain Sabbatios, a converted Jew who created a schism within Novatianism during the reign of Theodosius I (379-395), Vyhmeister, *The Sabbath in Asia*, 157.

passage, this same autor mentions the literal exegesis (“bodily”, Syr. *gušmānā*) used by the *Šabtāyē*, placing it next to the Jewish interpretation of the Bible<sup>58</sup>.

On the other hand, the testimonies about a likely presence of Jewish-Christians in Palestine, Transjordan and even in Arabia deserve a careful consideration. We have, for example, the information provided by John of Damascus (d. 749) regarding the Elchasaite communities that “up to the present time inhabit that part of Arabia which lies on the further side of the Dead Sea”<sup>59</sup>. Although his testimony in this point usually is considered dependent on Epiphanius of Salamis, it should be noted that (as Stroumsa points out) this author lived in the monastery of Mar Saba, located 11 km. from the shore; this circumstance makes plausible that John could give first-hand information concerning this point<sup>60</sup>. There are also references to the survival of Jewish-Christian communities in the *Anonymous of Piacenza*, who described the Holy Land in the 570s, and in *De Locis Sanctis*, by the Irish abbot Adonman of Iona (a. 670). The author of the *Anonymous of Piacenza* claimed to have found Hebrew women in Nazareth that, unlike their co-religionists, were “full of charity” for Christians. Those women assured that their physical beauty “was granted them by the Blessed Mary, who they say was their mother”. The *Anonymous* (which uses the word *Hebrews* (*Hebræi*) only in this paragraph) is not speaking in this case of rabbinic Jews (*Iudæi*). On the other hand, the “Christian” synagogue to which this same passage refers probably corresponds to the building described by Bellarmino Bagatti after the excavations carried out between the 1950s and 60s<sup>61</sup>. Adomnan of Iona used for his work different sources whose identification and content is still a matter of controversy<sup>62</sup>. In a paragraph of his work, he makes explicit reference to a dispute that took place in Jerusalem between believing Jews, namely Jewish-Christians (*Iudei vero credentes*) and unbelieving Jews (*cum infidelibus Iudeis*) because of a Christian relic. Mu<sup>c</sup>āwiya I

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<sup>58</sup> *Gušmānāʿīt u-yūdāʿīt u-sabtānāʿīt* (sic). R. Schröter, “Erster Brief Jakob’s von Edessa an Johannes den Stiliten”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 24 (1870), 271 (Syriac) and 275 (German). William Wright (ed.), “The Epistles of Mar Jacob, Bishop of Edessa”, *Journal of Sacred Literature 4th Series* 10 (1867), 26; François-Nicolas Nau, “Traduction des Lettres XII et XIII de Jacques d’Édesse”, *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 10 (1905), 278. Crone, *Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 84-85.

<sup>59</sup> *St. John of Damascus: Writings, The Fathers of the Church. A new Translation* vol. 37, trans. Frederic H. Chase (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press 1958), 124 (§53).

<sup>60</sup> Stroumsa, *Jewish Christianity*, 75.

<sup>61</sup> Aubrey Stewart (tr.), *Of the Holy Places visited by Antoninus Martyr* (London: Adelphi 1887), 4-5. Bellarmino Bagatti, *Excavations in Nazareth. Vol. 1: From the Beginning till the XII Century* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press 1969).

<sup>62</sup> Robert G. Hoyland & Sarah Waidler, “Adomnán’s *De Locis Sanctis* and the Seventh Century Near East”, *The English Historical Review* 129/ 539 (2014), 787-807.

himself, d. 680 (*Saracenorum rex nomine Mavias*) had to intervene in this conflict<sup>63</sup>. In reference to the Hejaz, aš-Šahrastānī (d. 1153) mentions some Jews that accepted Jesus as a Prophet, although they continued to observe the norms of their religion<sup>64</sup>.

Finally, the Ethiopic influence on the Qurʾān has been recognized for a long time, especially from the perspective of the comparative lexicography<sup>65</sup>. Even so, the studies on the possible theological influence from the Ethiopic side on Early Islam traditionally remained vague and rare, probably due to the little relevance of this field of studies in the framework of scientific research<sup>66</sup>. In the light of our approach, the presence alongside nascent Islam, *côte à côte*, of a Christian tradition strongly influenced by Judaism has raised enormous interest from some researchers. Beyond the Jewish practices clearly present in the Ethiopic Orthodox Church from at least the 5th century (most likely the product of different influences coming from the ancient Jewish-Christianity and from local and South-Arabian Judaism)<sup>67</sup>, the preservation within the Ethiopian Biblical Canon of books such as 1 Enoch is a fact that could explain the similarity of the Qurʾān with the images and narratives of this literature<sup>68</sup>. Apart from that, and from this standpoint, the epigraphic evidence is currently being studied, especially the Himyarite inscriptions with invocations to “Raḥmānān and His Messiah” (*rḥmnn w-ms<sup>1</sup>ḥ-hw*) from the times of the Aksumite Abraha (d. a. 553), and its striking resemblance with the Qurʾānic Christological expressions. Some authors have suggested a Jewish-Christian origin of this formula with a clear Syriac influence, even though it might not be the only suitable explanation for this fact.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Note the similarity with Q 61, 14. Ivan Pomialovsky (ed.), *Arculfi Relatio de Locis Sanctis Scripta ab Adamnano c. 670* (Saint Petesburg: Pravosl. Palestinsk. 1898), 13; James Rose Macpherson (tr.), *The Pilgrimage of Arculfus in the Holy Land* (London: Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society 1895), 14. Quoted by Stroumsa, *Jewish Christianity*, 86.

<sup>64</sup> Abu l-Faḥ aš-Šahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wan-niḥal*, Beirut: al-maktaba al-<sup>c</sup>aṣriyya H1431/2010, 180-182.

<sup>65</sup> Theodor Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strassburg: Trübner 1910), 31-66 (“Lehwörter in und aus dem Äthiopischen”); Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of Qurʾān* (Baroda: Oriental Institute 1938).

<sup>66</sup> Manfred Kropp, “Beyond Single Words: Mā’ida- Shayṭān – jibt and ṭaghūt. Mechanisms of transmission into the Ethiopic (Gə<sup>c</sup>əz) Bible and the Qurʾān”, in *The Qurʾān in its historical context*, Gabriel Said Reynolds ed. (Oxon-New York: Routledge 2008), 204-206.

<sup>67</sup> Especially the circumcision, the observance of *Shabbat*, the persistence of laws of ritual purity and the *kasherut*. Edward Ullendorf, “Hebraic-Jewish Elements in Abyssinian (Monophysite Christianity)”, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956), 216-256; Maxime Rodinson, “Sur la question des ‘Influences Juives’ en Éthiopie”, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 9 (1964), 11-19; John T. Pawlinowsky, “The Judaic Spirit of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church”, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 4 (1971-1972), 178-199.

<sup>68</sup> Segovia, *Thematic and Structural Affinities between 1 Enoch and the Qurʾān*, 257-260.

<sup>69</sup> Christian Robin & Salim Tayran, “Soixante-dix ans avant l’Islam: L’Arabie toute entière dominée par un roi chrétien”, *Comptes Rendus des Séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 2012/I, 540.

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

Guy Stroumsa has proposed applying a “principle of non-exclusivity” to identify the sources of early Islam, making explicit reference to the question of a Jewish-Christian influence on this religion and warning of the risk of over-simplifying reality. In this same context, Stroumsa states that there are two circumstances that impede the determination of the Jewish-Christian origin of some Qurʾānic terms and formulæ: the sparse evidence of a movement such as this in the area, and the lack of knowledge of the mechanisms through which Jewish-Christian ideas were transmitted. For this reason, he says, it is only workable in accepting a hypothetical Jewish-Christian contribution within a context of the sources’ plurality<sup>70</sup>. In my view, an equidistant position is valid if we regard early Islam as a *cluster* formed by isolated contributions, but I prefer to understand the Qurʾānic theological system as the sedimentation of different contributions of unequal value, which ended up forming a coherent unit — despite the inner contradictions—, thanks to the hermeneutic reading of the holy text. In this sedimentation it is possible to identify 1) the oldest elements, namely those characteristics of the primitive belief that led to a fully differentiated religion, 2) the elements making up structured notions added to that original stratum and 3) other contributions of unequal value.

We will put aside for now the numerous parallels that are being discovered between the Qurʾān and the literature or the expressions presumably originating in a Jewish context (coincidences in legal narratives, etc.), which can be considered as a circumstantial evidence or as mere coincidences<sup>71</sup>, what does seem likely is that the oldest ideological stratum in the Qurʾān presents a monotheistic faith of apocalyptic nature with some local features, allusively formulated, and which presupposed the knowledge of Christian and extra-biblical traditions by the audience<sup>72</sup>. A characteristic feature of this foundational faith is its conception of Prophecy that, united together with its peculiar Christology, forms a typically Jewish-Christian system<sup>73</sup>.

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Carlos Andrés Segovia, “Abraha’s Christological Formula Rhmn w-ms<sup>1</sup>h-hw and Its Relevance for the Study of Islam’s Origins”, *Oriens Christianus* 2016. Forthcoming,

<sup>70</sup> Stroumsa, *Jewish Christianity*, 81-82, 90.

<sup>71</sup> Id., *Jewish Christianity*, 86; Zellentin, *The Qurʾān’s Legal Culture*; Khalil Samir Khalil, “The Theological Christian Influence on the Qurʾān. A Reflection”, in *The Qurʾān in its Historical Context*, Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed. (London-New York: Routledge 2008) 143-144; François de Blois, “Islam in its Arabian Context”, in *The Qurʾān in Context. Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth (Leiden-Boston: Brill 2010), 621-623.

<sup>72</sup> Stephen J. Shoemaker, “Muhammad and the Qurʾān” in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 2012), 1085 and 1090.

<sup>73</sup> For example, Andræ, *Mohammed*, 88-110; Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*, 23-89.

As I already noted on a previous occasion<sup>74</sup>, the key element of all the proto-Islamic argumentation is the conception of prophecy, very similar to the Jewish-Christian conception almost in three aspects: 1) the reproduction of a history inspired by the five Covenants of early Christianity, in which the main axis is formed by the figures of Abraham, Moses and Jesus<sup>75</sup>, 2) the lack of progress in the Revelation, that is to say, a revelation without innovations, in which the Holy Scriptures are merely a repetition of a single message, and 3) the role of Muhammad as a copy of the Jewish-Christian Jesus' role. In this conception of Prophecy, the figure of Jesus is treated in a particular way, with a characterization (i. e. Christology), which is different to that adopted by other prophets, including Muhammad himself. As Gerald Hawting recently showed, the characteristics of the Qur'ānic Jesus and the specific significance of his titles in the narrative contexts of the holy book (*masīh*, *kalimat Allāh*, *rūḥ min Allāh*, etc.), his identification with Adam and his vaguely angelic and celestial character set up a Christology that leads us in the direction of Gnostic Jewish-Christian groups. This Christology has clear parallels with Epiphanius' descriptions of Jewish-Christian doctrines and especially with the mentioned Pseudo-Clementine literature<sup>76</sup>.

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In historical and philological research, the value of the information provided by the sources frequently depends on how researchers select, analyze and interpret it<sup>77</sup>; this principle acquires even more relevance in the current studies on early Islam and its origins, in which it is in vogue "to take absence of evidence as evidence of absence"<sup>78</sup>. Such ambiguity and even arbitrariness in the choice and interpretation of the data is probably due to the impossibility of separating humanistic study from the passions, interests, expectations and even political circumstances underlying the same defended theories.

With respect to the support of a Jewish-Christian connection for the early Islam, Jonh Toland himself in the 18th century appeared to be motivated by an aesthetic feeling

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<sup>74</sup> Francisco del Río Sánchez, "The rejection of Muhammad's message by Jews and Christians and its effect on Islamic theological argumentation", *Journal of Middle East and Africa* 6 (2015), 62-63.

<sup>75</sup> Khalil Samir Khalil, *The Theological Christian Influence on the Qur'ān*, 143-145.

<sup>76</sup> Gerald Hawting, "Has God sent a mortal as a messenger? (Q 17:95). Messengers and Angels in the Qur'ān", *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān in its historical context II*, Gabriel Reynolds, ed. (Oxon-New York: Roulledge 2011), 372-389.

<sup>77</sup> John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2006<sup>2</sup>), 32.

<sup>78</sup> Robert G. Hoyland "The Jews of the Hijaz in the Qur'ān and in their inscriptions", *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān in its historical context II*, Gabriel Reynolds, ed. (Oxon-New York: Roulledge 2011), 114.



when he understood as a poetic justice that the ancient Jewish-Christianity had survived in Islam<sup>79</sup>. Indeed, besides the pure scientific interest, this kind of fascination has been present in several authors<sup>80</sup> (just as a desire to remove any sense of originality from Islam). Likewise, the refusal to accept a Jewish-Christian substrate in Early Islam at times has been motivated by and avoidance of reshaping the traditional framework from a revisionist point of view. This position might be caused by a spreading group consciousness in the Western Islamology or even by a certain short-shrift attitude to proposals coming from academic and extra-academic environments not always linked to Islamology or Arabism. As already has been noted by other authors, the situation has been made worse by political events in the USA, Europe and the Near East after the Twin Towers attack, pushing scholars into being involuntarily anti-Muslim propagandists (in the case of revisionists) or apologists for it (in the case of traditionalists)<sup>81</sup>. In this context, the proposal for a Jewish-Christian influence on nascent Islam has even been qualified as a Zionist theory<sup>82</sup>.

It is difficult to specify if the Qurʾān was influenced —and to what extent—, by Jewish-Christianity, and if it really depends on this religious movement<sup>83</sup>. In any case, this question reveals that we know much less about the origins of Islam than about those of Christianity and Judaism, despite the epistemological optimism, which has traditionally marked the modern and contemporary historical research focused on Muhammad and the beginnings of Islam<sup>84</sup>. Fortunately, there is still much to be done in this field. And perhaps the same Qurʾānic text may be the strongest evidence for those seeking traces of Jewish-Christian communities during the late antiquity.

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<sup>79</sup> John Toland, *Nazarenus*, iii-vii.

<sup>80</sup> Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, 342.

<sup>81</sup> Hoyland, *Early Islam*, 1056.

<sup>82</sup> Pieter S. Van Koningsveld, "Revisionism and Modern Islamic Theology", *Hikma* 1 (2010), 19.

<sup>83</sup> About the problematic concepts of "dependence" and "influence", see Holger M. Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011), 21 and n. 61.

<sup>84</sup> Río Sánchez, *The rejection of Muhammad's message*, 59-62.