

Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part One)

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1. Introduction

“Jewish Christianity” is a modern term for the beliefs of those followers of Jesus who saw devotion to Jesus as part of God’s covenant with Israel, not as a transfer of God’s promise of salvation from the Jews to the gentiles. Some of them regarded Jesus as a prophet, others saw him as a heavenly power, but all retained their Jewish identity and continued to observe the law.¹ The first Christians were all Jews, but they were not all Jewish Christians by this definition, for they disagreed over the necessity of keeping the law after the coming of Christ. The question of whether gentile believers in Christ should undergo full conversion to Judaism is a highly contentious issue in the New Testament. Both Paul and his opponents, the leaders of the Jerusalem church, are presented as accepting that gentile Christians did not have to be circumcised or

otherwise observe Jewish law (with some exceptions), but whereas Paul, “the apostle to the gentiles,” seems to have been happy with the idea of any Christ-believer abandoning Jewish law, his opponents insisted that those of Jewish origin must continue to practice it. This was the Jewish Christian position. It was somewhat like saying today that non-Muslims attracted to Sufism can be accepted as Sufis without full conversion to Islam, whereas Sufis of Muslim origin must continue to observe Islamic law.

It was not a stable solution in the long run, and as Christianity spread among the gentiles, the latter became the dominating force. Observance of Jewish law was now forbidden and Jewish Christians were marginalized, to be described by patristic authors of the third and fourth centuries under the names of Ebionites, Nazoreans, and Elchasaites.² These labels notwithstanding, it would be a mistake to think of them as divided into three neatly demarcated sects. Rather, they formed a wide variety of Christians who did not think of Christianity as a religion that abrogated Judaism. Their views shaded into those of other Christians who followed select aspects of the law such as circumcision, Sabbath-observance, or avoidance of pork (as did Ethiopian Christians and many Syrian

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¹ My minimalist definition of Jewish Christianity is indebted to that of Edwin Keith Broadhead, *Jewish Ways of Following Jesus* (Tübingen, 2010), e.g., 161. For an extended discussion of the term, see James Carleton Paget, “The Definition of the Terms Jewish Christian and Jewish Christianity in the History of Research,” in *Jewish Believers in Jesus*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Peabody, MA, 2007), 22–52.

² Their testimonies are helpfully assembled and translated in Albertus F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden, 1973).

“Judaizers”),³ or who interpreted Jesus’ message in the light of Jewish traditions without following Jewish law at all, but on the contrary engaged in anti-Jewish polemics (after the fashion of Aphrahat).⁴

Originally, the bastion of law-observing Christianity was the Jerusalem church, the undisputed center of Christianity until the first Jewish war with Rome (AD 66–70). When this war broke out, the Jerusalem Christians reportedly fled to Pella (Ar. Fiḥl) in the Decapolis in Transjordan, and though some returned to the devastated city in 70,⁵ they were expelled again after the suppression of Bar Kokhba’s revolt in 135, when Hadrian forbade Jews to reside in Jerusalem. Thereafter, Jewish Christians were concentrated in the Aleppo region in northern Syria, in the Decapolis around Pella, including Dir‘a in the territory of the Ghassānids, and in the Dead Sea region, as we know from Epiphanius (d. 403) and Jerome (d. 420).⁶ They would seem also to have been present in the Golan, where excavators of an abandoned village have found lintels decorated with a combination of crosses, menorahs, and other mixed Jewish and Christian symbols, probably indicating that the building was a Jewish

Christian synagogue.⁷ After Epiphanius and Jerome, however, we have no certain evidence for the existence of Jewish Christians in Greek, Latin, or Syriac sources written before the rise of Islam.⁸ Theodoret of Cyrus (d. 457) even claims that they and other early sects, such as the Marcionites, had been so completely forgotten that most people did not know their names.⁹ But this is hyperbole, for Theodoret himself claims to have converted eight Marcionite villages in Syria to the true faith;¹⁰ and even if we assume that they were the very last Marcionites left in Syria, there were many more of them on the Persian side of the Euphrates. Jewish Christians, too, could well have survived beyond the Byzantine border, in the Sasanian empire, Ethiopia, and Arabia, and even in that part of Arabia which formed the deep south of the Byzantine empire itself. They certainly reappear after the Arab conquests. According to the seventh-century abbot of Iona, Adomnán, the Frankish pilgrim Arculf (c. 670) heard, during his visit to Jerusalem, that back in the days after the resurrection of Jesus, a believing Jew (a common term for what modern scholars call a Jewish Christian) had stolen the sacred linen cloth from Jesus’ sepulcher and that this linen cloth had recently been rediscovered. By now, however, it had passed into the hands of unbelieving Jews and the believing Jews wanted it back; both parties appealed to Mu‘āwiya, who threw the cloth into a fire, over which it hovered

³ For the Ethiopian observance of both Sabbath and Sunday, circumcision (a local custom interpreted in a Biblical vein), and other Jewish customs, see Edward Ullendorff, “Hebraic-Jewish Elements in Abyssinian (Monophysite) Christianity,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1958): 216–56; Ephraim Isaac, “An Obscure Component in Ethiopian Church History,” *Le Muséon* 85 (1972): 225–58 (suggesting Jewish Christian roots). For the Syrians, see Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert, “Jewish Christians, Judaizers, and Christian Anti-Judaism,” in *Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. Virginia Burrus (Minneapolis, 2005), 234–54; cf. also Anders Ekenberg, “Evidence for Jewish Believers in ‘Church Orders’ and Liturgical Texts,” in *Jewish Believers*, ed. Skarsaune and Hvalvik, 640–57.

⁴ For the Jewish element in Syriac Christianity, see Sebastian Brock, “Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): 212–32; Bas ter Haar Romeny, “Hypotheses on the Development of Judaism and Christianity in Syria in the Period after 70 C.E.,” in *Matthew and the Didache: Two Documents from the Same Jewish Christian Milieu?*, ed. Huub van de Sandt (Assen, 2005), 13–33. For Aphrahat, see William L. Petersen, “The Christology of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage: An Excursus on the 17th Demonstration,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 241–56; Adam Lehto, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (Piscataway, NJ, 2010), 48ff. and the literature cited there.

⁵ The main sources for the flight to Pella are Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.5.1–3; Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 29.7.7; and Epiphanius, *Treatise of Weights and Measures: The Syriac Version*, trans. and ed. James Elmer Dean (Chicago, 1935), par. 15, 2–5 (the Greek original only survives in fragments).

⁶ The testimonia are discussed in Broadhead, *Jewish Ways*, chapters 7–11.

⁷ Claudine Dauphin, “Farj en Gaulanitide: Refuge judéo-chrétien?,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 34 (1984): 233–45; cf. Joan E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford, 1993), 39ff. (which disputes that the remains are necessarily Jewish-Christian); Broadhead, *Jewish Ways*, chapter 14, esp. 346ff., on this and other real and alleged archaeological remains.

⁸ Both John of Damascus and Theodore Bar Koni describe Jewish Christians as still living in the Dead Sea region (Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 265, 267), but their information plainly comes from Epiphanius. Only he knew about the two women of Elxai’s family, Marthous and Marthana, one of whom had died in Epiphanius’ time (cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 19.2.3) and neither of whom can have been present among them “even up to now,” as John of Damascus says (my thanks to Tommaso Tesesi for reminding me of these passages).

⁹ Theodoret of Cyrus, *Haereticarum Fabularum Compendium* (MPG 83), II, 11; trans. Glenn Melvin Cope, “An Analysis of the Heresiological Method of Theodoret of Cyrus in the ‘Haereticarum Fabularum Compendium’” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1990), 155.

¹⁰ Theodoret of Cyrus, *Correspondance*, trans. and ed. Yvan Azéma (Paris, 1955–98), 2:196–97 (letter 81).

until it descended in the camp of the Christians.¹¹ This story is one out of several involving Jewish possession of a Christian relic in Jerusalem or Constantinople,¹² but Arculf is the only author to mention “believing Jews” in this connection. We also hear of them later in the Islamic world, in sources composed from the second/eighth centuries onwards.¹³

The relevance of all this to Islamicists lies in the fact that many scholars have come away from the Qurʾān with the impression that Jewish Christianity must have played a role in its formation. A major argument to this effect was mounted by Aloys Sprenger in 1861.¹⁴ His thesis was taken up by several specialists in Chris-

tian theology, notably Jules-Charles Scholl in 1874,¹⁵ Gustav Rösch in 1876,¹⁶ Adolf von Harnack in 1909,¹⁷ Adolf Schlatter in 1918,¹⁸ Hans-Joachim Schoeps in 1949,¹⁹ M. P. Roncaglia in 1971,²⁰ J. Dorra-Haddad in 1973,²¹ Magnin in 1977–78,²² Édouard Gallez in 2005,²³ and Joachim Gnilka in 2007;²⁴ but several scholars coming to the subject from the study of Islam have likewise argued for, or simply assumed, a Jewish Christian input, notably Clément Huart in 1904,²⁵ Tor Andrae between 1918 and 1932,²⁶ Karl

¹¹ Arculf, *De Locis Sanctis*, I, 11 (composed c. 679–88 by Adomnán on the basis of, among other things, Arculf’s information), trans. James Rose Macpherson, *The Pilgrimage of Arculfus in the Holy Land* (London, 1889), 12–15; cf. the helpful discussion of Adomnán’s text by Robert Hoyland and Sarah Waidler, “Adomnán’s *De Locis Sanctis* and the Seventh-Century Near East,” *English Historical Review* 129/539 (2014): 787–807, with reference to a more recent edition and translation. Arculf’s “believing Jew” was first brought to scholarly attention by Shlomo Pines, “Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984): part i, 135–52, esp. 145.

¹² Cf. Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary’s Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford, 2002), 71–72, in which two converts from Arianism, Galbuis and Candidus, transport the Virgin’s robe to Jerusalem after stealing it from a Jewish woman who had kindly offered them hospitality on their way to Jerusalem; Arculf, *De Locis Sanctis*, III, 5, pp. 62–63, in which an unbelieving Jew in Constantinople has a picture of Mary.

¹³ Shlomo Pines, “‘Israel, My Firstborn’ and the Sonship of Jesus,” in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem*, ed. Efraim Urbach et al. (Jerusalem, 1967), 177–90, esp. 179, citing Saadia Gaon, *al-Amānāt wa’l-i’tiqādāt*, ed. S. Landauer (Leiden, 1880), 90–91. Saadia explicitly says that this group emerged recently. Other relevant works of Shlomo Pines include “The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* (Jerusalem, 1968), 2:237–309; “Judaeo-Christian Materials in an Arabic Jewish Treatise,” *American Academy for Jewish Research* 35 (1967): 197–217; “Studies in Christianity and in Judaeo-Christianity Based on Arabic Sources,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 6 (1985): 107–61; and “Gospel Quotations and Cognate Topics in ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *Tathbūt* in Relation to Early Christian Readings and Traditions,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987): 195–278. See also Patricia Crone, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980) (= Crone, *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī* [Aldershot, 2005], no. III): 59–95, in which the Jewish Christians reflected in ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s account are seen as a response to the rise of Islam. All of Pines’ articles on the subject can now be found in his *Collected Works*, vol. 4, ed. G. G. Stroumsa (Jerusalem, 1996).

¹⁴ Aloys Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad* (Berlin, 1861–65; repr., Hildesheim, 2003), esp. 1:22–43.

¹⁵ Jules-Charles Scholl, *L’Islam et son fondateur* (Neuchâtel, 1874), 64–73.

¹⁶ Gustav Rösch, “Die Jesusmythen des Islam,” *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* (1876): 409–54, esp. 415, 417–18, 426–27, 433–34.

¹⁷ Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 4th ed. (Tübingen, 1909), 2:529–38.

¹⁸ Adolf Schlatter, “Die Entwicklung des jüdischen Christentums zum Islam,” *Evangelisches Missionsmagazin* 62 (1918): 251–64.

¹⁹ Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums* (Tübingen, 1949), 334–42. Sidney Griffith adds R. Pritz, S. C. Mimouni, and G. Parrinder in his “Syriacisms in the ‘Arabic Qurʾān’: Who Were ‘Those Who Said “Allāh Is Third Of Three”’ according to *al-Māʾida* 73,” in *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Mediaeval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qurʾān presented to Haggai Ben Shammai*, ed. Meir Michael Bar-Asher et al. (Jerusalem, 2007), 83*–110*, esp. nn. 16–17. But Pritz and Mimouni wrote on Jewish Christianity without reference to the Qurʾān, and Parrinder mentioned the Jewish Christian hypothesis only to say that it was beyond his concern (Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qurʾān* [London, 1965], 11).

²⁰ M. P. Roncaglia, “Éléments ébionites et élkésaites dans le Coran,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 21 (1971): 101–26.

²¹ J. Dorra-Haddad, “Coran, prédication nazaréenne,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 23 (1973): 148–55 (the book of the same title mentioned at p. 155 does not seem to have been published). The article by C. Colpe, “Die Mhagrae—Hinweise auf ein arabisches Judentum?,” *Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift* 76 (1986): 203–17, is not based on the Qurʾān.

²² J. M. Magnin, “Notes sur l’Ébionisme,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 27 (1977): 250–73, and 28 (1978): 220–42. These are the last two of six articles on the Ebionites with this title published by this author in that periodical from 1973 onwards.

²³ Édouard M. Gallez, *Le messie et son prophète: Aux origines de l’Islam* (Versailles, 2005).

²⁴ Joachim Gnilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran: Eine Spurensuche* (Freiburg, 2007).

²⁵ Clément Huart, “Une nouvelle source du Qoran,” *Journal Asiatique*, 10th series, 4 (1904): 125–67, esp. 161ff., treating Sprenger’s thesis as generally accepted, and postulating poets such as Umayya b. Abī Ḥ-Šalt as intermediaries.

²⁶ Tor Andrae, *Die Person Muhammads in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde*, Archives d’Études Orientales 16 (Stockholm, 1918), 292–93 and 293n, where Muḥammad’s chain of prophets, ablution, *qibla*, and other matters are considered perhaps all of Ebionite origin; see also Andrae, *Mohammed, the Man and His Faith*

Ahrens in 1935,²⁷ Günter Lüling from the 1970s onwards,²⁸ Abū Mūsā al-Ḥarīrī in 1979 (= J. Azzi, 2001),²⁹ Thomas O'Shaughnessy in 1984,³⁰ Shlomo Pines in 1984,³¹ Julian Baldick in 1989,³² and François de Blois in 2002.³³ Holger Zellentin, a Judaist, has now joined the fray,³⁴ and a book by John Jandora in support of the Jewish Christian thesis has recently appeared, too.³⁵ Some of these works are based on

(German orig. 1932; New York, 2000), 98–107, on the Ebionites, Elchasaïtes, and Manichaeans as contributors to Muḥammad's concept of prophecy; and Andrae, "Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum," *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift* 23 (1923): 149–206 (the first of three installments), 153, on the chain of prophets. Griffith, "Syriacisms," 87*–88*, nonetheless adduces Andrae in support of his view that only mainstream Christianity is reflected in the Qurʾān.

²⁷ Karl Ahrens, *Muhammad als Religionstifter* (Leipzig, 1935), 130–31, on the prophetic chain.

²⁸ Günter Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qurʾān* (Erlangen, 1974); index s.v. "Judenchristentum"; *Der Christliche Kult an der vorislamischen Kaaba als Problem der Islamwissenschaft und Christlichen Theologie* (Erlangen, 1977), 41 and n. 88 thereto (at 91*; 59 and the notes thereto); and briefly also *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation* (Delhi, 2003), 21. It is also in his *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad* (Erlangen, 1981), on which see the full review by Uri Rubin in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 6 (1985): 481–92. See also the summary of this thesis by Gerhard Böwering, "Recent Research on the Construction of the Qurʾān," in *The Qurʾān in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London, 2008), 74–77.

²⁹ Abū Mūsā al-Ḥarīrī, *Qiss wa-nabī: Bahth fi nashʾat al-Islām* (Jounieh-Kasslik, 1979); translated as Joseph Azzi, *Le Prêtre et le prophète: Aux sources du Coran* (Paris, 2001). On this work, see Böwering, "Recent Research," 79–80.

³⁰ Thomas J. O'Shaughnessy, *Word of God in the Qurʾān* (Rome, 1984), 20: "Certain teachings of Elkesaïsm and the sect of the Nazarenes, both similar to Essenism, bear such close resemblance to certain points of Qurʾānic Christology that these also must be seen as part of the religious background that prepared the Arabs to receive the message Muhammad was to bring"; cf. also 30, 33.

³¹ Pines, "Notes." His other articles on Jewish Christianity (above, note 13) are not concerned with the Qurʾān.

³² Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism* (New York, 1989), 19, 25 (drawn to my attention by Matthijs van der Bos).

³³ François de Blois, "Naṣrānī (nazōraïos) and ḥanīf (ethnikos): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and Islam," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65 (2002): 1–30; de Blois, "Elchasaï — Manes — Muhammad," *Der Islam* 81 (2004): 31–48; recapitulated in de Blois, "Islam in Its Arabian Context," in *The Qurʾān in Context*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden, 2011), 615–24, esp. 621–22.

³⁴ Holger M. Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture* (Tübingen, 2013).

³⁵ John Jandora, *The Latent Trace of Islamic Origins: Midian's Legacy in Mecca's Moral Awakening* (Piscataway, NJ, 2012). I have not been able to procure a copy.

poor scholarship (especially, but not only, those by laymen, who seem to have a particular liking for the Jewish Christian thesis);³⁶ but this certainly is not true of all of them. Yet many Qurʾān scholars ignore the Jewish Christian thesis, and some argue against it.³⁷ The most notable opponent of a Jewish Christian input is Sidney Griffith, who holds that nothing but mainstream Near Eastern (i.e., Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian) Christianity is reflected in the Qurʾān.³⁸ This is a somewhat extreme position, but it provides a useful benchmark.³⁹

In what follows, I re-examine the question of whether there is a Jewish Christian input in the Qurʾān by examining the Qurʾānic topics of relevance to the subject, taking full account of Griffith's position where known. The argument may be summarized as follows.⁴⁰ Four points are extremely hard to explain without recourse to the hypothesis of a Jewish Christian contribution: the Qurʾānic Jesus is a prophet sent to the Israelites, not to the gentiles (no. 2); the Israelites appear to include Christians (no. 3); the Messenger sees Jesus as second

³⁶ Thus Nick Brown, *The Judaeo-Christian Presbyter of Makah [sic] & Madinah* (New York, 2011) (drawn to my attention by Adam Silverstein); Samuel Zinner, *The Abrahamic Archetype: Conceptual and Historical Relationships between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Bartlow, 2011), a work in the metaphysical and philosophical tradition of Frithjof Schuon which takes the Jewish Christian contribution to Islam for granted on the basis of Schoeps. Jandora is also a layman, though he has published extensively on Islamic subjects (esp. military matters); and Azzi, also known as Abū Mūsā al-Ḥarīrī, is not a specialist either.

³⁷ E.g., S. D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages* (New York, 1964), 53–54.

³⁸ Sidney H. Griffith, "Christians and Christianity," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* (Leiden 2001–2006), 1:313, dismissing this and other views with which he disagrees as the product of a polemical or apologetic agenda; Griffith, "Syriacisms," 85*ff.; Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque* (Princeton, NJ, 2008), 8; Griffith, "Al-Naṣārā in the Qurʾān: A Hermeneutical Reflection," in *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān: The Qurʾān in Its Historical Context* 2, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London, 2011), 301–22, esp. 313–14. Cf. also his *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (Princeton, NJ, 2013), 29.

³⁹ For the opposite view that the Messenger never knew mainstream Christianity, see Scholl, *L'Islam et son fondateur*, 63. Neuwirth similarly holds that the Meccan suras do not reflect interaction with "official Christians" of any kind, but rather syncretistic circles perhaps related to Jewish Christians (Angelika Neuwirth, "The House of Abraham and House of Amram," in *Qurʾān in Context*, ed. Neuwirth, Sinai, and Marx, 505; also in Neuwirth, "Mary and Jesus—Counterbalancing the Biblical Patriarchs," *Parole de l'Orient* 30 [2005]: 232).

⁴⁰ The first half of this article will cover sections no. 1–7, with 8–15 in the next half.

in importance to Moses and as charged with confirmation of the Torah (no. 4), and insists that Jesus was only a human being, not the son of God (no. 9). Another two doctrines are often held to point away from Jewish Christianity, but actually point in that direction, too: some of the Messenger's opponents regarded both Mary and Jesus as divine beings (no. 7), and the crucifixion is interpreted docetically—as though it did not really happen—even though the death of Jesus seems to be accepted (no. 10). Yet another doctrine, namely the virgin birth of Jesus, at first sight looks equally compatible with mainstream and some strands of Jewish Christianity, but must in fact also have come from a Jewish-Christian milieu (no. 11). Another is incompatible with mainstream Christianity and probably also of Jewish-Christian origin, namely that Mary was an Aaronid (no. 12); and the Qurʾānic chain of prophets may be related to that of the Elchasaites and other Jewish Christians, though this is much less obvious to me than it was to Schoeps, Andrae, and others (no. 13). Two further elements of Qurʾānic Christology are incompatible with mainstream Christianity without pointing in a Jewish-Christian direction: the Messenger seems to think that Jesus was born under a palm tree rather than in a cave or stable (no. 14); and although he calls him *al-masīḥ* (Christ) and *al-kalīma* (the Word), he does not credit Jesus with the characteristic features of the Christian messiah or present him as the *logos* in the Christian sense (no. 15). All in all, a full seven doctrines, several of them central to the Qurʾān, point to the presence of Jewish Christians in the Messenger's locality, and since they are attested in Egypt in the seventh century (no. 8), there is nothing particularly hazardous about postulating that they were present in Arabia too.

It is also clear that in order to understand the Qurʾānic Jesus, whether as seen by the Messenger or by his opponents, one has to go back to the early centuries of Christianity. This would appear to be when these Jewish Christians parted ways with mainstream Christianity and Judaism, not in the sense that their further development took place in isolation, but rather that whatever mainstream ideas they received thereafter were interpreted in the light of their own fundamental convictions.

2. Christ's mission is to the Israelites

Along with the *mushrikūn*, the sons of Israel (*banū Isrāʾīl*) are the prime audience to whom the Qurʾān is directed: "This Qurʾān tells the sons of Israel most of

what they are disagreeing about," as a Meccan sura says (27:76). The reference may be to the disagreement over Jesus, though the immediate context suggests that it is over the resurrection; it is at all events clear that the Messenger was active in a locality in which Israelites formed part of the population. (One can, of course, strike out all passages mentioning Israelites in the Meccan suras, as the exegetes tend to do, on the premise that all such passages must reflect Medinese conditions, but the premise is not valid.)

Several suras, both Meccan and Medinese, inform us that Jesus was sent to the Israelites. Thus the angels announced to Mary that her son would be a messenger to the Israelites (*rasūlan ilā banī Isrāʾīl*, 3:49). Jesus himself declared, "O Sons of Israel, I am God's messenger to you, confirming the Torah in front of me and giving good news of a messenger to come after me whose name is Aḥmad" (61:6). God made Jesus an example (*mathalan*) to the sons of Israel, as we are also told (43:59); Jesus came with evident proofs to explain the things they disagreed about, but the disagreements only increased (43:63–65), for one party of the Israelites believed in him while another did not (61:14). The sons of Israel fell into disagreement after knowledge came to them, presumably meaning after Jesus had brought them the Gospel (45:17; cf. 2:253). All these passages present the mission of Jesus and the conflict it generated as internal to the Israelites.⁴¹

That Jesus was sent to the Israelites is an astonishing claim for a seventh-century preacher to make. It is perfectly true, of course, that Jesus was a Jew who preached to Jews, some of whom believed while others did not, and that one can read as much in the New Testament; but it is not how gentile Christians normally thought of his mission. To their minds, the Jews were those who refused the new covenant and crucified Jesus, whereas Jesus and his disciples were Christians like themselves. As Origen explains, when Jesus says, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matthew 15:24), we should remember that there was an Israel according to the flesh and another according to the spirit; we should not think that Christ came especially to the Israelites according to the flesh, as the Ebionites, poor in understanding, claimed.⁴² But

⁴¹ Similarly Pines, "Notes on Islam," 137–38; Gnlika, *Nazarener*, 111–12.

⁴² Origen, *On First Principles*, IV, 3, 8 (trans. G. W. Butterworth, *On First Principles* [New York, 1966], 299–300); Greek and Latin text with English translation in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 124–25.

it is precisely to the Israelites according to the flesh that Jesus came in the Qurʾān.

It might be argued that all we see here is an example of the Messenger's belief that all prophets were sent to their own people,⁴³ but leaving aside that this belief is not always in operation in the Qurʾān (e.g., that Moses was sent to Pharaoh, not the Israelites), it is hard to believe that any seventh-century (as opposed to first-, second-, or third-century) Christian saw the Jews as Jesus' own people. One would have expected the Messenger to say that Jesus was sent to the *Christians*. Of course there were no Christians before Jesus, but this would hardly have prevented the Messenger from seeing God as sending Jesus to them; and even if we assume his historical sense to have been too well developed for him to do so, one would have expected him to say that the Israelites responded to his preaching by dividing into Jews and Christians, which is historically correct. But what he actually says is that they divided into believing and unbelieving *Israelites* (61:14): in religious terms they split, but ethnically they remained the same. This is in line with a famous passage in the Jewish Christian section of the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* (probably composed in the mid-fourth century), in which we are told that the only difference between the authors and "those of our people who do not believe" or, as the Latin version puts it, "between us who believe in Jesus and the unbelieving Jews," is that "we" believe Jesus to be the prophet foretold by Moses and the eternal Christ whereas the unbelieving Jews do not.⁴⁴ It is not easy to imagine Chalcedonian (Melkite), West Syrian (Monophysite or Jacobite), or East Syrian (Nestorian) Christians presenting Jesus as a prophet to the Israelites, nor have mainstream Christian parallels ever been adduced to my knowledge (and Griffith says nothing about it). The perspective here is unquestionably Jewish Christian.

How then did the Messenger know that Jesus was sent to the Israelites? We are hardly to imagine that he had worked it out on the basis of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, for even if he possessed the requisite books and skills, he had no interest in the

past for its own sake. He was a preacher rather than a historian, and he routinely rewrote the past in his own image: all the prophets before him preached the same message as he did, and all contended with opponents guilty of the same "polytheism" (*shirk*) and denial of the afterlife. It will not have been on the basis of research that the Messenger knew Jesus to have had Israelite followers. Rather, he will have taken it for granted, because believing and unbelieving Israelites were what he was confronted with in his own locality. Indeed, everybody in his locality seems to have taken it for granted, for he did not engage in polemics about it or argue against alternative views. He does not explain how Jesus had come to be "the King of all the gentiles,"⁴⁵ or even that there were people who saw him as such. Paul is not mentioned, and though the Disciples are called *hawāriyyun*, an Ethiopic word for apostles, there is no reference to their apostolic role as missionaries to the gentiles.⁴⁶

All this is surprising, for the Messenger must have had considerable contact with gentile Christians. For example, his famous statement "there is no compulsion in religion" is downstream of third-century Christianity.⁴⁷ Further, he plainly had a concept of religion in the sense of a system of beliefs and laws separate from ethnic and civic affiliation, a concept pioneered by the Christians. It is true that every messenger is sent to his own people in the Qurʾān,⁴⁸ and

⁴⁵ Jacob of Sarugh, *On the Mother of God*, trans. Mary Hansbury (New York, 1998), 637 of Bedjan's edition (Paul Bedjan, *S. Martyrii, qui et Sabdona quae supersunt omnia* [Paris, 1902]), to which the editor refers in the margin = 40 of the translation (homily 1).

⁴⁶ The commentators make up for it by unpersuasively identifying the *mursalūn* sent to a town in 36:13 as disciples of Jesus, while Reynolds identifies the *rusul* of 23:51 as apostles in the sense of missionary disciples of Jesus rather than messengers sent by God to their own communities on the model of Muḥammad himself (Gabriel Said Reynolds, "The Quran and the Apostles of Jesus," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 76 [2013]: 1–19, esp. 16). Though I am generously thanked in this article, I disagree with almost every word said in it.

⁴⁷ For the emergence of the idea among third-century Christians, see Patricia Crone, "No Compulsion in Religion: Q. 2:256 in Medieval and Modern Interpretation," in *Le Shi'isme imāmite quarante ans après*, ed. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Meir M. Bar-Asher, and Simon Hopkins (Turnhout, 2009), 131–78, esp. 164–66.

⁴⁸ This notion is probably also rooted in Christianity, though its pre-history is still obscure. The starting point would be the New Testament concept of the apostles as missionaries. When the apostles came to be understood as divinely-commissioned envoys (prophets), it was they who were seen as sent to a specific people, as already in Manichaeism (at least in the case of the Buddha and

⁴³ This possibility was suggested to me by Adam Silverstein.

⁴⁴ *Recognitions* 1.43.2, in F. Stanley Jones, *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source on the History of Christianity: Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 1.27–71* (Atlanta, GA, 1995) (also translated in Robert E. van Voorst, *The Ascents of James: History and Theology in a Jewish-Christian Community* [Atlanta, GA, 1989]). The Latin and Syriac translations were made in c. 406 and before 411, respectively, from a Greek original now lost.

that each messenger addresses his people in their own language; but the result is not a string of ethnic religions, for all genuine messengers preach the same message. The Messenger never addressed his audience as Arabs, only as believers and unbelievers, and he made it clear that there had been believers in quite different communities.

In addition, he often fielded arguments against the Jews that he must have learned from Syriac-speaking Christians, and retold several Old Testament stories in versions partly or wholly filtered through the Syriac tradition.⁴⁹ He may have been addressing gentile Christians in 6:101, and even seemed to side with them at times. When the Qurʾān informs us in the course of anti-Jewish polemics that God promised Jesus to make his followers superior to the unbelievers until the day of resurrection (3:55), one could admittedly take it simply to predict the victory of the Messenger's followers—but it could also be taken to suggest that he saw himself as continuing the veneration of Jesus by the dominant, i.e., gentile, Christians, or more probably, by all Christians without distinction. Further, when he says that Jesus and his mother were a sign to all beings (*lil-ʿālamīn*) (21:91), he appears to be adopting a universalist view of the two of them that sits better with gentile than Jewish Christianity; and finally, when he notes that one party of the Israelites believed in Jesus and another did not, he says that it was the believers that won: “We assisted those who believed against their enemy and they became victorious” (61:14). If this statement is taken to refer to the believing Israelites, it is wildly unrealistic.⁵⁰

It is admittedly possible that the Messenger identified so strongly with the believing Israelites that he presented them as victorious by way of predicting

his own victory over the Jews: he promised God's help (*naṣrun min Allāh*) and a victory soon to come (*faṭḥun qarībun*) to the believers in the preceding verse, and started 61:14 by presenting his position as analogous to that of Jesus: “O you who believe, be helpers of God (*anṣāra ʾllāh*), as Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Who will be my helpers unto God?’ So the disciples said, ‘We are God's helpers.’” The expression “God's helpers” (*anṣāra ʾllāh*) is undoubtedly a word play on “Christians” (*naṣārā*). But leaving aside the question of whether the *naṣārā* were Jewish or gentile Christians, it seems more likely that the Messenger was ignoring the divided state of the Christians in order to field them as a single, dominant party against the Jews. All in all, the Messenger was clearly familiar with gentile Christianity; but even so, the fact that Jesus had a following outside the ranks of the Israelites cannot be said to receive much attention in the book.

3. The Israelites include Christians

The term *banū Isrāʾīl* (“sons of Israel”) occurs forty-four times in the Qurʾān, in both Meccan and Medinese suras. Many of the passages concern the Israelites in the past, especially in the time of Moses, but some relate to the time of Jesus, and others to that of the Messenger himself; and a few of these passages suggest that the Israelites included both Jews and Christians, not just Jews, as normally assumed. This may sound like a wild theory, but it is actually what many exegetes say in their comments on 27:76 (“This Qurʾān tells the sons of Israel most of what they are disagreeing about”). Thus Qatāda (d. 117/735) glosses “the sons of Israel” as meaning Jews and Christians here,⁵¹ while al-Ṭabarī adduces the Israelite disagreement over Jesus as an example of the type of question on which the Israelites could not reach agreement.⁵² Other exegetes say much the same.⁵³ Even a modern scholar such as Heikki Räisänen renders “the sons of Israel” in 27:76 as “Jews and Christians.”⁵⁴ The exegetes do not seem to give thought to the implication that the Israelites of

Zoroaster), though the Manichaeans retained the idea of disciples as missionaries too.

⁴⁹ Karl Ahrens, “Christliches im Qoran. Eine Nachlese, III,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 84 (1930): 148–90, esp. 156ff.; Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext* (London, 2010), 251; and above all Joseph Witztum, “The Syriac Milieu of the Quran: The Recasting of Biblical Narratives” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2011), on the fall of Iblīs and the expulsion from paradise, Cain and Abel, Abraham, and Joseph. See also Witztum, “The Foundations of the House (Q. 2:127),” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72 (2009): 25–40, and “Joseph among the Ishmaelites: Q. 12 in Light of Syriac Sources,” in *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān*, ed. Reynolds, 425–48.

⁵⁰ This is nonetheless how S. Pines seems to understand it; cf. his “Notes on Islam,” 135–52, esp. 137.

⁵¹ Cited in ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr* (Beirut, 1983), 6:376.

⁵² Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Beirut, 1988), vol. 11, part 20, 11.

⁵³ Thus, Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* (Beirut, 2008), 3:386–87; al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān* (Beirut, 1995), 7:402.

⁵⁴ Heikki Räisänen, “The Portrait of Jesus in the Qurʾān: Reflections of a Biblical Scholar,” *The Muslim World* 70/2 (1980): 122–33, esp. 125.

Muḥammad's own time included Christians, for they usually read the verse with the Israelite division over Jesus with the time of Jesus in mind; but wittingly or unwittingly, they do of course imply that the Israelites consisted of Jews and Christians in the Messenger's time as well. So too do the traditions regarding Waraqa b. Nawfal, Khadija's cousin, have "presentist" implications. He is said to have abandoned idolatry in pre-Islamic times and to have become a Christian who reacted to Muḥammad's revelation by declaring that it was "the law which God had sent down to Moses." Some corrected this apparent asymmetry by having him become a Jew rather than a Christian, others by having him declare Muḥammad's revelation to be "the law of Christ"; but the combination of Jewish and Christian features recurs in the report that he could write Hebrew and used his skill to copy the Gospel in Hebrew. The asymmetry here caused some to replace Hebrew (*'ibrāniyya*) with Arabic (*'arabiyya*), but the sheer existence of traditions in which a Christian identifies his own law as that given by Moses, and the language of the Gospel as Hebrew (presumably in the sense of Jewish Aramaic) is noteworthy.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Sprenger, *Leben*, 1:124–25, 128, citing Ibn Hishām, the *Aghānī*, Bukhārī, and Muslim, with a different explanation of the languages. Hebrew in the sense of Aramaic is well attested in Greek writings from the New Testament period onwards. This has usually been debited to Greek confusion, but a more interesting explanation has recently been proposed by D. R. G. Beattie and Philip R. Davies, "What Does Hebrew Mean?," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 57/1 (2011): 71–83 (drawn to my attention by Kevin van Bladel). According to them, "Hebrew" was actually a word for Aramaic, not for "the holy tongue" (i.e., the language of what we now call the Hebrew Bible). It was only later—in the West perhaps as late as the nineteenth century—that the word came to stand for the "holy tongue." This is wonderfully thought-provoking, but at the very least in need of modification. Leaving aside the complicated and often enigmatic Talmudic statements on the languages and scripts used by the Jews (to which Rachel Neis drew my attention), Judah Halevy (d. 1141) distinguishes clearly between Hebrew (*'ibrāniyya*), the holy tongue which was called after Eber, and Aramaic (*sur'yāniyya*), the language of the Chaldaeans that Abraham brought with him and continued to speak for everyday purposes (Hartwig Hirschfeld, trans., *Judah Halevy's Book of Kuzari* [New York, 1946], 309, part III, sections 66–67, drawn to my attention by Adam Silverstein; for the text I have used the edition of Nabīh Bashīr, *al-Kitāb al-Khazārī* [Freiberg am Neckar, 2012], which presents the Arabic text in Arabic script rather than the Judaeo-Arabic used by Halevy himself, retaining Hirschfeld's parts and sections). The *Kuzari* was translated into Hebrew by Judah b. Tibbon in 1167, to be much read by Jews in Europe from then onwards (cf. Adam Shear, *The Kuzari and the Shaping of Jewish Identity, 1167–1900* [Cambridge, 2012]).

Sura 5 contains one of the passages suggesting that the Israelites included Christians. Here we are reminded that when God made a covenant with the Israelites and sent messengers to them, the Israelites reacted by calling the messengers liars or by killing them, thinking they would not be tested (after death?) (5:70–71); the next verse continues on to say that those who (go to the other extreme and) say "God is Christ" are unbelievers (5:72, similarly 5:17). This is normally understood as a reference to mainstream Christians, and Griffith too takes it as such.⁵⁶ Given that abrupt changes of subject are common in the Qur'ān, this would have been a reasonable interpretation if the verse had not continued on to explain that the culprits should not say this, because Christ had told the *Israelites* not to ascribe partners to God (5:72). Why does the Messenger envisage Jesus as saying this to the Israelites rather than the Christians? Jesus does of course address his preaching to Jews in the Gospels, but neither the Gospels nor the mainstream Christian tradition say anything that could have caused the Messenger to envisage Jesus as reproaching the *Israelites* for casting *Jesus* as divine. The idea would have sounded utterly absurd to both the Jews and the mainstream Christians of the Messenger's time. If there were Israelites who were at fault for deifying Christ, they must have been Israelite Christians.

The sura continues that those who say that "God is the third of three" are also unbelievers (5:73). One assumes the reference still to be to the Israelites, and this is also how some early readers understood it, for Ibn al-Najīḥ apparently held that it was the *Jew* Phinehas who said that "God is the third of three."⁵⁷ Further, Qatāda is credited with the view that when the early Christians split into several groups, it was a certain *Isrā'īl* who held that "God is the third of

⁵⁶ Griffith, "Al-Naṣārā," 311, explaining that the Qur'ān is not quoting the Christians correctly (the Christians only said that Christ was God) and that the statement is a polemically inspired caricature. But if the reference is to mainstream Christians, it is not actually much of a caricature. Isaac of Antioch, for example, says that people disputed about whether God had died or not, and exclaims in indignation that His death had redeemed the world—and still they asked whether He had died! (P. S. Landersdorfer, trans., *Ausgewählte Schriften der syrischen Dichter* [Kempten, 1912], 140 of the continuous pagination). God is indeed Christ here, exactly as the Messenger says.

⁵⁷ Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, part 4, 195, on 3:181 (noted by Abdelmajid Charfi, "Christianity in the Qur'ān Commentary of Ṭabarī," *Islamochristiana* 6 [1980]: 105–48, esp. 132).

three,” and that this Isrāʾīl was supported by the king and others who came to be known as the Melkites!⁵⁸ The sura continues by polemicizing against a Trinity consisting of God, Christ, and Mary, which it refutes with reference to the fact that both Jesus and Mary ate food (5:75; cf. below, no. 7). The culprits are now addressed as “People of the Book,” which leaves their ethnicity unidentified, but Qatāda once more knows them to be *al-isrāʾīliyya min al-naṣārā*, Israelite (as opposed to Jacobite and Nestorian) Christians: it was they who said that Jesus was a deity (*ilāh*), and his mother a deity, along with God Himself. A variant version of his statement once more identifies them as Melkites, or more precisely as the “kings of the Christians” (*al-isrāʾīliyya mulūk al-naṣārā*).⁵⁹ Qatāda’s strange idea that there were Israelite Melkites reflects the fact that he was trying to combine several Qurʾānic passages to fit a single group,⁶⁰ though there could conceivably be more to it.⁶¹ Here, however, the key point is that Qatāda took the Qurʾānic Israelites to include Christians.

Other passages in the same sura also suggest that the Jews and Christians formed two parts of a whole. In 5:18 they both declare that “We are children of God and His beloved,” and the Messenger is instructed to retort, “Why then does He punish you for your sins?” That God was punishing the Jews for their sins by depriving them of sovereignty was a well-known anti-Jewish trope, but how could the same be said of the Christians, God’s seeming favorites at the time? Perhaps the Persian victories over the Byzantines had enabled the Messenger to turn the anti-Jewish argument against the Christians, but a more persuasive explanation would be that the local Christians were Israelites suffering from the same loss of autonomy

⁵⁸ Aḥmad b. Yahyā b. al-Murtaḍā, *al-Munya waʾl-amal fī sharḥ al-milal waʾl-niḥal*, ed. Muḥammad Javād Mashkūr (Beirut, 1979), 74. My thanks to Hassan Ansari for helping me locate the passage.

⁵⁹ Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, vol. 9, part 16, 85–86, on 19:27; Charfī, “Christianity,” 140.

⁶⁰ Apart from 5:73 and 5:75, the main passage Qatāda was working with was 61:14, in which the Israelites split into two—those who believed in Jesus and those who did not—adding that “We assisted those who believed against their enemy and they became victorious” (61:14). As noted, this does not fit the believing Israelites, whereas it does fit the Melkites. But he also worked, in 5:82, on the *naṣārā* who were friendly to the Muslims because their *qisṣīsūn* and monks were not arrogant (cf. the passage in Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Munya*, 74, in which the Christian leader who represents the truth is called *Qisṣīs*, the antithesis of Isrāʾīl).

⁶¹ See below, p. 251 and n. 213.

as their unbelieving counterparts. What is more, at the beginning of the sura, the Messenger declares the food of the People of the Book to be lawful to Muslims (5:5), which is puzzling. Jesus had supposedly declared all foods to be clean (Mark 7:18–19), and Paul had allowed the Christians to eat anything “from gnats to elephants,” as a later Muslim polemicist put it,⁶² meaning that the Christians were free to eat foods forbidden in the Qurʾān.⁶³

How then could their food be permitted to the believers? One solution would be that the “People of the Book” here stands for the Jews alone: this is what Griffith argues.⁶⁴ But the Messenger is engaging in legislation, not in loose polemics: he can hardly have used a term bracketing Jews and Christians if he meant the Christians to be excluded. The only alternative is that the local Christians also followed dietary law. In fact, all Near Eastern Christians did follow some dietary law, notably the prohibition of Jewish food, sacrificial meat, blood, and thus also strangled animals (which had not been drained of blood).⁶⁵ But that still left them free to eat many things forbidden in Muslim law, e.g., pork, so that does not solve the problem. In 7:157, which is addressed to the followers of Moses and set in Moses’ own time, God says that He will have mercy on those who follow the gentile prophet predicted in the Torah and the Gospel who will release them from the burden and fetters upon them. The reference is to the Messenger, who believed himself to be predicted in both the Jewish and the Christian

⁶² Sayf b. ʿUmar (d. before 193/809), *Kitāb al-ridda waʾl-futūḥ wa-kitāb al-jamal wa-maṣīr ʿĀʾisha wa-ʿAlī*, ed. Qasim al-Samarrai (Leiden, 1995), 133 ult. (par. 133); cf. Sean Anthony, “The Composition of Sayf b. ʿUmar’s Account of King Paul and His Corruption of Ancient Christianity,” *Der Islam* 85 (2008): 164–202, esp. 177 (with beetles in lieu of gnats).

⁶³ Noted by de Blois, “Naṣrānī,” 16. The continuation that “your food is permitted to them” is hardly a problem. The message is that the believers may share their food with the People of the Book; whether the latter regard the believers’ food as kosher was not for the Messenger to decide.

⁶⁴ Griffith, “Syriacisms,” 87*, n. 18; Griffith, “Al-Naṣārā,” 315–16.

⁶⁵ See David M. Freidenreich, *Foreigners and Their Food* (Berkeley, 2011), part 3 (drawn to my attention by Sarah Stroumsa). For the prohibition of blood, which is still upheld in the Greek orthodox church today, cf. the Council of Gangra (AD 340), canon 2; Council of Trullo (AD 692), canon 67; Herman G. B. Teule, “Juridical texts in the *Ethicon* of Bar Hebraeus,” *Oriens Christianus* 79 (1995): 23–47, esp. 33 (Jacob of Edessa). In the Latin West, too, the prohibition of blood was often upheld, but in the end the Latins followed Augustine, who held that it need not be upheld any more (Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, XXXII, 13).

scripture, and it implies that the devotees of the Torah and the Gospel alike carried heavy legal burdens, from which he would free them. The prohibitions observed by the gentile Christians hardly suffice in the role of their “burden and fetters,” however; the local Christians must have observed dietary restrictions comparable with those of the Jews.

Finally, in the originally Christian story of the Companions of the Cave, one of the young men is sent out to find the cleanest (*azkā*) food available (18:19). Torrey thought that the Qurʾānic story might reflect a Jewish recension, on the grounds that there are no Christian elements in it and that the clean-food motif is not found in any early Christian version.⁶⁶ This argument would work equally well if the transmitter was a Jewish Christian.

It is not until the Medinese suras that the Messenger uses the terms Jews (*yahūd*) and Christians (*naṣārā*), though the expression *alladhīna hādū*, “those who Judaize/follow Judaism,” appears in three Meccan (or one Medinese and two Meccan) suras (6:146; 16:118; 22:17). In the Medinese suras, we find both the expression *alladhīna hādū* (seven attestations) and the term *yahūd* (nine attestations) along with the term Israelites. The Christians, on the other hand, are either covered by the term “Israelites,” or else not mentioned by name at all in the Meccan suras, though there are certainly references to their doctrines (notably 19:16–36). It is striking that once the Messenger starts speaking of Jews and Christians, he almost always speaks of them in tandem, casting them as equally misguided rivals: the Jews say that ‘Uzayr is the son of God, the Christians say the same of Jesus (9:30); both treat their religious leaders as lords (9:31); both claim to be sons and beloved of God (5:18); both claim that one can only be saved as a member of their community; both denigrate the rival community as worthless; both proselytize

(2:111, 113, 120, 135); and both claim Abraham as their own.⁶⁷

The Messenger does engage in polemics against the Jews on their own in one verse (5:64: the Jews say that God’s hand is tied), and links the *naṣārā* with the Israelites rather than with the Jews in another (5:12–14: the Israelites broke their covenant, the Christians forgot theirs, and both forgot a portion of what they had been reminded of). There is also a famous passage describing the Christians as being friendlier to the believers than were the Jews, with the explanation that their presbyters or priests (*qīssīsūn*) and monks were not arrogant (5:82).⁶⁸ Even so, we are assured, the believers should not choose friends from either the Jews or the Christians (5:51). There are also three passages in which the Jews and Christians are listed together, but there together with other religious groups.⁶⁹ In short, the Messenger seems to think that the Jews and Christians belonged together, as also when he subsumes them under the label of “People of the Book” (*ahl al-kitāb*). This strengthens the case for the view that both had been covered by the name of Israelites.

That the Israelites included both Jews and Christians is also suggested by the very substitution, in the Medinese suras, of *yahūd* and *naṣārā* for *banū Isrāʾīl* when the Messenger is speaking of contemporaries. It is not the case that *banū Isrāʾīl* always refers to the ancient Israelites, as some have held: the Meccan verse 27:76 (“This Qurʾān tells the sons of Israel most of what they are disagreeing about”), for example, clearly envisages the Israelites as alive and well in the Messenger’s own locality, and they are addressed directly in several other passages as well (e.g., 2:40, 47, 122; 17:5–8). But the Qurʾān does seem to separate the Israelites of the past from their contemporary manifestations as Jews and Christians in the Medinese suras.

⁶⁷ The Messenger retorts that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian (2:140; 3:67) and that the same was true of Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the (twelve) tribes (2:140). Compare Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, 1.2.5.

⁶⁸ This passage is discussed in Patricia Crone, “Pagan Arabs as God-Fearers,” to appear in *Islam and Its Past: Jāhiliyya and Late Antiquity in Early Muslim Sources*, ed. Carol Bakhos and Michael Cook (Oxford, forthcoming).

⁶⁹ God would judge between the believers, Jews, Christians, Sabians, Zoroastrians, and polytheists on the day of judgment (22:17); and anyone who believed in God and the last day and did good works, including the Jews, Christians, and Sabians, would get their due reward (2:62; similarly 5:69).

⁶⁶ Charles C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York, 1933), 121. Griffith does not discuss the reference to clean food, or for that matter the absence of Christian features, in his study of the “Companions of the Cave” (Sidney Griffith, “Christian Lore and the Arabic Qurʾān: The ‘Companions of the Cave’ in Sūrat al-Kahf and in Syriac Christian Tradition,” in *The Qurʾān in Its Historical Context*, ed. Reynolds, 109–31), although he does speak of “the way in which the Qurʾān . . . removes the Christian frame of reference” of the story, 130.

Why did the Messenger start using these terms in Medina? One possibility is that the change reflected a new hostility to the Jews and Christians, or perhaps just to the Jews, for Israel(ites) is what the Jews called themselves in their liturgy and other religious writings (such as the Talmud)—and also, at least in Graeco-Roman Palestine, in everyday usage. It was outsiders and Jews writing in Greek outside Palestine who used the term “Jews” (*Ioudaioi*, i.e., inhabitants of Judaea).⁷⁰ Polemical works, whether written in Greek, Syriac, or (after the conquests) in Arabic, were always directed against “Jews,” and the word quickly acquired derogatory overtones. One would have expected the Messenger likewise to direct his anti-Jewish polemics against “Jews,” and so eventually he did. But though he argued against them already in the Meccan suras, he still called them Israelites, accepting their self-designation. This is why the switch to “Jews” in Medina comes across as a sign of increased hostility to them.

The usual term for Christians in Syriac was *kristyānē*, which was also a self-designation and which is translatable as *masīḥiyyūn*. This term does not appear in the Qurʾān. Hostile Zoroastrians in Mesopotamia, however, would call the Christians *nāšrāyē*, Nazoreans, using the same word as the Qurʾānic *našārā*.⁷¹ *Kristyānē* and *nāšrāyē* were not simply insider and outsider terms for the same group, however, for they appear as the names of two separate religious communities in the inscriptions of Kirdīr in the late third century; they could stand for gentile and Jewish Christians.⁷² One takes it that the gentile Christians disliked being mixed up with their Jewish Christian counterparts, whom they probably despised, and that this is precisely why the Zoroastrians would taunt them by calling them *nāšrāyē*.

Did the Messenger also use the name in a derogatory vein? It would be a neat parallel to the derogatory “Jews,” but it does not go well with 5:14 and 5:82, for both verses refer to those who say, “we are *našārā*”; and though the first passage is hostile, the second eulogizes the *našārā* as believers, so the apparent self-designation cannot be explained away as a sar-

casism. If *našārā* was a self-designation, the Messenger probably adopted it in Medina simply because he had to call the Christians something now that the unitary category of “Israelites” had broken down. But why was it *našārā*, rather than *masīḥiyyūn*, that the local Christians called themselves? The simplest solution is the one proposed by de Blois, namely that they were Jewish Christians,⁷³ though that solution also leaves some problems.⁷⁴

4. The relative importance of Moses and Jesus

By far the most prominent prophet in the Qurʾān is Moses. He is mentioned in thirty-six suras, Jesus in eleven; Moses’ name appears in 153 verses against a mere twenty-five for Jesus. There are many more references to the book of Moses than to the Gospel, and far more material from the Old Testament than from the New. The New Testament material is concentrated in eight suras, whereas there is Old Testament material in almost every sura.⁷⁵ The Qurʾān refers to the birth of Moses, his exposure in a box (not basket), his upbringing among Pharaoh’s people, his killing of an Egyptian, his time in Midian, the burning bush, the miracles that he and Aaron performed at Pharaoh’s court, the exodus from Egypt, the revelation at Sinai, the golden calf, and the dispatch of scouts to the holy land: practically all the key points of his life are narrated. As regards Jesus, we hear of the annunciation, Mary’s labor pains under a palm tree (cf. Part Two, no. 14), the Jewish calumnies against her (see also no. 14), his childhood miracles (3:46, 49; 5:110), and, in the view of some modern scholars, his second coming

⁷³ De Blois, “Našrānī,” 12–15; cf. also Gnilka, *Nazarener*. De Blois holds them to have been Nazoreans/Nazarenes “pure and simple,” but it is not clear exactly what he means by that, given that, as he himself notes, “Nazorean” would seem not always to be the name of a clearly defined sect, but rather to cover a large part of the Jewish Christian spectrum (de Blois, “Našrānī,” 4). The picture drawn of them in Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity* (Jerusalem, 1988), is misleadingly coherent. On top of that, there is no direct continuity between any of the Jewish Christian sects described by Patristic authors and those reflected in the Qurʾān: for every similarity, there are numerous differences.

⁷⁴ The main problem is 5:82, in which those who call themselves *našārā* have priests/presbyters/elders (*qisīsūn*) and monks (*ruhbān*), which suggests that they are gentile Christians. De Blois does not discuss the passage.

⁷⁵ Cf. Gnilka, *Nazarener*, 123–24; similarly Goitein, *Jews and Arabs*, 55–56.

⁷⁰ Cf. Malcolm Lowe, “Ioudaioi of the Apocrypha,” *Novum Testamentum* 23 (1981): 56–90 (covering the Greek-speaking world in the period c. 200 BC–200 AD), 56–57.

⁷¹ See de Blois, “Našrānī,” 8; cf. also Reynolds, “The Quran and the Apostles,” 4, n. 19, mistaking Griffith’s use of this observation to mean that it is Griffith’s own insight and directed against de Blois.

⁷² Cf. de Blois, “Našrānī,” 5ff. There are several other proposals.

(43:61);⁷⁶ but not of his baptism, his temptation, his descent into hell, the last supper (the echoes in 5:112–15 notwithstanding), Gethsemane, or the betrayal of Judas. His adult miracles are mentioned only in general terms (3:49; 5:110), and the crucifixion is denied (see Part Two no. 10), while his resurrection is left unmentioned. In short, the Jesus venerated by mainstream Christians is barely represented.

Instead, Jesus had become a prophet like Moses, and indeed like the Messenger himself, in that he had become a prophet bringing a revealed book. There are admittedly verses which could be taken to imply that the only recipient of a book before the Messenger himself was Moses: “We gave Moses the book . . . and We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign” (23:49–50); “We gave Moses the book . . . and We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, the clear proofs (*al-bayyināt*) and strengthened him with the holy spirit” (2:87, 253). But in another verse, Jesus declares, “I am God’s servant; God has given me the book and made me a prophet” (19:30), and elsewhere God is said to have given him the Gospel (5:46; 57:27) and to have sent down the Torah and the Gospel (3:3, 65; cf. 3:48; 5:46, 66, cf. 68; 9:111, all Medinese).⁷⁷

Injil is a derivative of the Greek *evangelion*, not a translation, and it is not clear how far the Messenger knew that the word meant good news; but he depicts all God’s messengers, Jesus and himself included, as bringers of good news (*bushrā*). The good news that Jesus brings is not, however, the news of God’s incarnation in a human being, the sacrifice of His only son, or the latter’s resurrection, but rather the news of the coming of Aḥmad (61:6). In addition, Jesus preaches strict monotheism (5:72; cf. 3:51; 19:30), and the duty to pray and pay alms (19:31). The Gospel seems to be the contents of the teachings of Jesus, presumed by the Messenger to be identical with his own, not the news of God’s redemption of mankind through the death of Jesus.

Jesus by this account was sent to confirm (*muṣaddiqan li-*) the book of Moses or (as the Medinese suras say) the Torah (3:50; 5:46; 61:6); so too was the Messenger himself (e.g., 3:3; 46:12, cf. 46:30). The idea of Jesus as a prophet confirming the Pentateuch would have been alien to gentile Christians. Jesus did of course say in the Gospel that

he had come to fulfill the law, not to abolish it, and that not a single jot of it would ever pass away (Matthew 5:17–18); but Christians explained the law as meaning the Decalogue, dismissing everything else as punishment imposed on the Jews for their worship of the golden calf,⁷⁸ or they used the word “law” in the vague sense of natural law, moral principles, or “the law of the Gospel.”⁷⁹ Origen, for example, held Ebion (the supposed ancestor of the Ebionites) to have destroyed the law, even though it was by observing Jewish law that Ebion did so: Christ came to lead people away from the law, as Origen said.⁸⁰ Or, as a converted Jew exclaims in the *Doctrina Iacobi*, written in the 630s: “After the law of Moses another law has been proclaimed, that of Christ, the holy gospels of the new covenant . . . We will no longer Judaize or observe the Sabbath.”⁸¹ What is so striking about the Qur’ānic Jesus is that it is specifically the *Torah*, at least in the Medinese suras, and not the law in some unspecified sense, that he was sent to confirm. God taught him the book, wisdom, Torah, and Gospel, apparently all containing the same message (5:110). The Qur’ān also says that Jesus came to undo some of the prohibitions imposed on the recipients of the Torah (3:50), and informs us that some foods had been forbidden for the Jews by way of punishment for their sins (4:160). This is much more suggestive of a gentile Christian perspective. Christ came to fulfill the law and to loosen us from the bonds of the “second legislation” (i.e., Jewish law), as the twelve apostles are made to declare in the *Didascalia* (composed in

⁷⁸ Cf. Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire* (London, 1946), 88–91. The argument is used in the *Didascalia*, chap. 2 (Arthur Vööbus, ed. and trans., *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac* [Louvain, 1979], 18 = 15); cf. also chap. 26 (esp. 244–45 = 226–27). This text nonetheless speaks in rapturous tones about the law, claiming that Jesus did not come to abrogate the law, but rather to renew, confirm, and perfect it (cf. Joel Marcus, “The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the *Didascalia Apostolorum*: A Common Jewish Christian Milieu?” *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 61/2 [2010]: 596–626, esp. 608, cf. also 616–17, 625).

⁷⁹ Cf. *Didascalia*, chap. 15 (ed. and trans. Vööbus, 166 = 151); cf. Zellentini, *The Qur’ān’s Legal Culture*.

⁸⁰ Origen in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 130, 132 (*in epist. ad Rom.* III, 11; *in Matth. comm.* ser. 79).

⁸¹ *Doctrina Iacobi*, ed. and trans., with commentary, in Gilbert Dagron and Vincent Déroche, “Juifs et Chrétiens dans l’Orient du VII^e siècle,” *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991): I, para. 29, line 13.

⁷⁶ This view is not tenable; see Part Two, no. 15.

⁷⁷ For all the passages on the Injil, see Parrinder, *Jesus*, 143–44.

Syria c. 200), contradictory though it sounds.⁸² But it is only some of the prohibitions that Jesus came to undo in the Qurʾān, and the very same passage has him confirming the Torah too. In short, the Messenger's view of Jesus suggests that he had been shaped in a community in which Jesus was revered, but Moses remained the paradigmatic prophet. Only Jewish Christians fit that description.

5. Jewish Christian Christologies

Before proceeding, the reader needs to invest a bit of energy into familiarizing him/herself with Jewish Christian Christology. It is often assumed, especially by laymen, that all Jewish Christians regarded Jesus as a prophet of the purely human kind, much as did the Messenger, but this is not correct. There were indeed Jewish Christians who espoused a low Christology, and it is indeed likely that the Christology of the Qurʾān is of Jewish Christian origin, though it is difficult to prove (see no. 9, in Part Two). But many other Jewish Christians—perhaps most of them—had high Christological views of the type that some modern scholars classify (or classified) as Gnostic, and we need to understand both types in order to assess the degree to which Jewish Christian ideas are present in the Qurʾān, whether as an element of the Messenger's thought or as a target of his polemics.

Unlike the question of whether gentile converts had to follow Jewish law, Christology was not an object of debate between Paul and the Jerusalem church, so we do not actually know how the earliest Christians envisaged Christ, or even whether they shared a single understanding of him. However, a famous passage from an epistle of Paul, widely assumed to be a hymn, and perhaps one translated from Aramaic, may give us a glimpse of early Palestinian Christology.⁸³ It appears in the Epistle to the Philippians (2:6–11), one of the seven Pauline letters generally accepted as genuine; if it was indeed written by him, it takes us back to the 50s or 60s, a mere twenty or thirty years after the death of Jesus. Against this, it must be said that the Epistle to the Philippians is not among the four letters to which Baur, the founder

of the Tübingen school, would reduce the authentic Pauline corpus, and that the Dutch Radicals, who dated all the Pauline epistles to the second century, still have their sympathizers.⁸⁴ There is, in fact, something suspicious about the fact that Paul's letters simply presuppose a high estimation of Jesus as messiah, Lord, and son of God instead of explaining that he was all of these things, especially considering that his audience included gentile newcomers.⁸⁵ But be that as it may, the hymn is certainly early.

In this hymn, Christ is described as a pre-existing heavenly being that assumed human form and was obedient even to the point of death: “though he was in the form of God,⁸⁶ [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be desired, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.” Moreover, as a human he humbled himself to the point of dying on the cross; therefore God exalted him and gave him the name above all names, “so that every knee should bend . . . at the name of Jesus and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” In other words, instead of seeking parity with God (after the fashion of arrogant human kings), he chose to become a slave, i.e., a human being, and further humiliated himself by letting himself be killed on the cross, whereupon God exalted him. It is not clear whether his exaltation simply restored him to his former position or rather elevated him to parity with God, but the latter seems the more likely implication.⁸⁷ Contrary to what used

⁸⁴ Notably Hermann Detering (cf. his “The Dutch Approach to the Pauline Epistles,” *Journal of Higher Criticism* 3 [1996]: 163–93); also Robert M. Price, whose delightful reviews can be found at <http://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com> (accessed August 2012 onwards).

⁸⁵ Cf. Hurtado, *How on Earth*, 33, taking this to mean that all these concepts had established themselves at enormous speed. “More happened in Christology within these few years than in the whole subsequent seven hundred years of church history,” he cites Martin Hengel as saying. It similarly used to be thought that more happened in the decades from Muhammad to the First Civil War than in the next seven hundred years of Islamic history. It is the pattern you get when all legitimate doctrine has to go back to the time of the founder and his disciples.

⁸⁶ *Morphē theou*, a much-debated expression which could perhaps be taken to mean that he was an angel.

⁸⁷ Needless to say, opinions are divided. The fact that he is addressed as “lord” (*kyrios*) is not decisive, but the “name above all names” that he receives must surely be that of God; and, above all, the hymn is paraphrasing Isaiah 45:24, in which it is God who says, “to me every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear by God.”

⁸² *Didascalia*, chap. 2 (ed. and trans. Vööbus, 18 = 15); cf. Zeltin, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture*.

⁸³ The literature is enormous. For a readable introduction and references, see Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2005), chap. 4.

to be thought, there was nothing particularly unusual about the idea of such a second divine power in Judaism at the time.⁸⁸ Philo happily called the *logos* both an archangel and a “second God,” as well as God’s “first-born son” and His viceroy (*hyparchos*);⁸⁹ many modern scholars speak of Jewish “binitarianism.” But Philo never envisaged this archangel or “second God” as appearing on earth in human form. It was this idea that was new, and clearly immensely exciting to people at the time.

In Paul’s hymn, the heavenly Christ is born in the likeness of a human being; so too in the *Dialogue* of Justin Martyr (d. c. 165), if we take “in the likeness of” to mean no more than “as.”⁹⁰ This was to become the standard Christian position: the word became flesh, as John 1:14 puts it. Other Christians, however, used imagery implying that the pre-existing being did not actually become flesh, but rather assumed flesh as an outer cover: they compared the body to a vessel or temple that he filled, or to clothes that he put on. Christ’s body was “the receptacle of the spirit,” as we read in the epistle of Barnabas (130s?); or “God caused the holy pre-existent spirit which had created the whole of creation to dwell in flesh that He desired,” as the probably mid-second-century *Shepherd of Hermas* says.⁹¹ Christ “clothed himself with the/a man,” as Melito of Sardis (d. c. 180) and Clement of Alexandria (d. c. 215) put it.⁹² “There are some who say that Jesus was merely a receptacle of Christ, upon whom the Christ, as a dove, descended from above,” as Irenaeus (d. c. 202) informs us.⁹³

The two concepts of the incarnation coexisted in the first centuries, and the differences between them

may sometimes have been purely verbal, but this was certainly not always the case. Those who saw the body of Jesus as a receptacle for the pre-existing being often envisaged this being as having taken up abode in him when he was an adult, usually (but not always) meaning when he was baptized; until then, Jesus had been an ordinary man. They also saw the pre-existing being as remaining distinct from its human host, and as departing when the latter died. “My God, why have you abandoned me?” as Jesus says in Mark (15:34) and Matthew (27:46): this could easily be understood as a complaint about the departure of the spirit that had taken up abode in him. “My power (*dynamis*), O my power, you have left me behind!” as Jesus exclaims in the Jewish Christian Gospel of Peter.⁹⁴ Modern scholars often refer to this idea as “spirit Christology,” meaning the concept of the spirit as the pre-existing Christ that dwelt in the man Jesus.⁹⁵

But it was not necessarily the spirit, as opposed to the word (*logos*), wisdom, or power of God, or a power or angel, or the son, or simply the pre-existing Christ without further explanation, that was said to have filled the human Jesus.⁹⁶ Some scholars speak of “possession Christology,” which has the unfortunate effect of suggesting that Jesus was in need of exorcism; still others speak of “separation Christology,” with reference to the fact that the human Jesus and the divine Christ were distinct and eventually separated. An even better term, if it were not so crass, would be hotel Christology, since it is precisely as if the body were a hotel that the spirit (or word, wisdom, angel, etc.) moves in and out of. Since one can say that the body hosted the pre-existing Christ, I shall settle for “host Christology.” The doctrine was premised on a sharp distinction between the human Jesus and the heavenly Christ, and since mainstream Christians stopped making this distinction, they sometimes found the doctrine contradictory: *on the one hand*, the Ebionites

⁸⁸ Cf., for example, S. G. F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church* (London, 1951), 78, 82–83, in which the older view shapes the interpretation of the hymn.

⁸⁹ Philo, *On Agriculture*, 51; *Who is the Heir of Divine Things*, 205; *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, II, 62; *On the Confusion of Tongues*, 146–47.

⁹⁰ “You say that this Christ existed as God before the ages, then that he submitted to be born and become a man, yet that he is not a man of man,” as the Jew protests to Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 48. This could be read as a summary of Paul’s hymn.

⁹¹ Both cited in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th ed. (New York, 1978), 144.

⁹² Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 145, 154. Compare the Valentinian *Excerpta ex Theodoto* compiled by Clement, ed. and trans. Robert Pierce Casey (London, 1934), 1:1: Christ’s body was a “receptacle of flesh for the *logos*” and “clad in it the Saviour descended.”

⁹³ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 3.16.1 (ed. and trans. Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau [Paris, 1965–82]).

⁹⁴ Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, ed. and trans., *The Apocryphal Gospels* (Oxford, 2011), 381 (Akhmim fragment, 19). This understanding of the passage is questioned by P. M. Head, “On the Christology of the Gospel of Peter,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 209–24, esp. 214.

⁹⁵ Cf. Manlio Simonetti, “Note di cristologia pneumatica,” *Augustinianum* 12 (1972): 201–32; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 143–44.

⁹⁶ For the near-synonymity of these terms, see Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, chap. 61: God begat a rational power called now the holy spirit, now the glory of God, now the son, wisdom, angel, god, lord, and *logos*.

claimed that “Christ” (read: Jesus) was an ordinary human being, and *on the other hand*, they held that he was a heavenly power, as Epiphanius complained, though the two doctrines were two sides of the same coin (as in fact he knew very well).⁹⁷

Modern scholars sometimes react much like Epiphanius.⁹⁸ But host Christology was a very old form of Christology, perhaps the oldest recorded.⁹⁹ It is combated already in the first Epistle of John (probably c. 90),¹⁰⁰ and it seems to be espoused in the Gospel of Mark, which “begins with the entrance of the Holy Spirit into Jesus and ends with the Spirit forsaking him on the cross,” as Price nicely puts it,¹⁰¹ though Mark does tell of the resurrection as well.¹⁰² Mainstream Christians rejected this view of the incarnation as heretical, but it remained characteristic of that stream of Christianity that modern scholars label Gnostic, and also of much Jewish Christianity.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30.34.6; cf. 30.3.1–6; 30.14.4. He himself explained that according to the Ebionites, “Christ himself is from God on high, but Jesus is the offspring of a man’s seed and a woman,” and responded that Jesus was Christ and God from the moment of his birth, not thirty years later or after his baptism (*Panarion*, 30.29.1–10).

⁹⁸ See, for example, Darrell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (Tübingen, 1999), 176.

⁹⁹ Cf. Goulder, below, n. 101; Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York, 1996), 48ff. (here adoptionist Christology); Sakari Häkkinen, “Ebionites,” in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian “Heretics,”* ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen (Leiden, 2008), 247–78, esp. 268–69 and n. 60 (here, “possessionist Christology”).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Christoph Marksches, “Kerinth: Wer war er und was lehrte er?,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 41 (1998): 48–76, esp. 67–68.

¹⁰¹ Robert M. Price, review of Michael Goulder, *St. Paul versus St. Peter: A Tale of Two Missions* (Louisville, KY, 1995) (for the website, see note 84; this review was accessed January 2013). Goulder himself believes Mark to be a reworking of an earlier gospel espousing the Christology of the Jerusalem church (*Two Missions*, 129, 134), which would indeed make it the oldest known Christology.

¹⁰² The last twelve lines of the gospel are deemed to be a later addition, but the original includes the empty tomb. The resurrection is actually something of a problem in terms of host Christology, for if the spirit left Jesus on the cross, what enabled him to be resurrected? Cerinthus did say both that the Christ flew away and that Jesus rose again if Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.*, 1.26.1) is to be trusted. But Epiphanius, who repeats this at *Panarion*, 28.1.7, also has Cerinthus claim that Christ (i.e., Jesus?) would not rise again until the general resurrection (*ibid.*, 28.6.1).

¹⁰³ For a discussion of Jewish Christian host Christology (here “possession Christology”), see Goulder, *Two Missions*, chapters 15–18.

Host Christology could be understood in both a high and a low Christological vein, and both positions were found (with many variations) among Jewish Christians. Many passages in the Patristic literature taken by modern scholars to deny Christ’s divinity actually deny only the virgin birth. From a mainstream Christian point of view, of course, anyone who denied the virgin birth ipso facto denied that Christ was the son of God, and modern scholars sometimes seem to share this view;¹⁰⁴ but it was not how Jewish Christians reasoned. Most of them denied that Jesus had been born of a virgin, but that still left the question of whether he remained a human being or achieved divine or angelic status when he was baptized; alternatively, when he was transfigured (on which more below); or when he was resurrected (the position in Romans 1:4). There were also some who postponed his deification until he was raised to heaven,¹⁰⁵ and still others held that Jesus was never deified at all. Low Christology is attested (along with high Christology) in early Christian literature such as the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, a work of uncertain date variously held to be a Jewish work adapted by Christians, a Christian composition ab initio, or a work by Jewish Christians. Jesus was here predicted as “a man who by the power of God renews the law.”¹⁰⁶ “The most High will send forth His salvation in the visitation of an only-begotten prophet,” as we are also told (however exactly this is to be understood).¹⁰⁷

It is not always clear what type of Christology is implied in the texts. Our earliest heresiographer, Irenaeus (d. c. 202), says that the views of the Ebionites regarding Christ were similar to those of Cerinthus

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 173–74: of the four attestations that Hannah adduces in support of the view that the Ebionites denied the divinity of Christ, only one passes muster (like Epiphanius, Hannah also sees contradictions where there are none); and according to Simon Claude Mimouni, *Le judéo-christianisme ancien* (Paris, 1998), 88, the Ebionites and Elchasaïtes regarded Jesus as a man chosen by God to be the messiah and refused to deify him in any way!

¹⁰⁵ Thus some of the pupils of Theodotus of Byzantium, fl. c. 190 (Hippolytus, *Refut.*, 7.35).

¹⁰⁶ T. Levi 16:3, in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments* (New York, 1983), 794; cf. Torleif Elgvin, “Jewish Christian Editing of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,” in *Jewish Believers*, ed. Skarsaune and Hvalvik, chap. 10, 287–88; Marcus, “The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” 598, n. 8.

¹⁰⁷ T. Benj. 9:2, cited in Elgvin, “Jewish Christian Editing,” 288.

(c. 100) and Carpocrates (fl. 130s).¹⁰⁸ Of the latter two, he informs us that they held a pre-existing, heavenly being (the Christ according to Cerinthus, a power according to Carpocrates) to have descended upon, or rather into, Jesus, thanks to his superior merits. According to Cerinthus, it came down in the form of a dove when he was baptized.¹⁰⁹ The reference of Cerinthus is to Mark 1:10 (cf. Matthew 3:16–17; Luke 3:21–22): “just as he was coming out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove [going] into him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’” The passage obviously suggests that Jesus only became the son of God when God’s spirit entered him (which it only does in Mark).¹¹⁰ But does it mean that Jesus became divine? “Son of God” could simply mean the messiah. Irenaeus says that Christ eventually “flew away” from Jesus, presumably during the crucifixion (though he also seems to say the opposite);¹¹¹ but this does not necessarily mean that Jesus had been divine before the departure of Christ.

Irenaeus further says that Cerinthus held the pre-existing Christ to have descended on, or rather into, Jesus by way of reward for his righteousness, prudence, and wisdom, with the result that he proclaimed the unknown Father and performed miracles.¹¹² This

¹⁰⁸ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 1.25.1, 1.26.2, in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 105, where the second passage has Irenaeus declare the Ebionite view to be *not* similar to that of Cerinthus and Carpocrates, which contradicts Irenaeus as understood by Hippolytus, ed. Miroslav Marcovich (Berlin, 1986), 7.34.1; 10.22.1 (trans. John Henry Macmahon, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson [Edinburgh, 1868], with a chapter numbering that is lower than Marcovich’s); and Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30.1.2. As noted by Petri Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels* (Leiden, 2012), 234, the Latin translation is corrupt here.

¹⁰⁹ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 1.26.1 (in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 103–105).

¹¹⁰ Mark 1:10 has *eis auton* where Matthew 3:16 and Luke 3:22 have *ep’ auton*; and Irenaeus’ account of Cerinthus likewise has *eis auton* in Greek, *in eum* in the Latin translation (*Adv. Haer.*, 1.26.1). Modern translations of both the gospels and Irenaeus routinely opt for “upon” whatever the preposition.

¹¹¹ He continues that Jesus suffered and rose again while Christ remained impassible, being a spiritual being, as if Christ had not left him after all, but rather stayed to be crucified along with his human host, who suffered whereas he did not. This would certainly help to explain how it was possible for the human host to be resurrected (see above, note 102), but in that case Irenaeus is combining two different positions.

¹¹² Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 1.26.1 (in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 103–104).

suggests that Jesus acquired otherwise unobtainable knowledge and power when he was baptized and used them to preach and work wonders, just as other prophets did. He had special powers, but he was not divine. Those Ebionites who held a position similar to Cerinthus (according to Irenaeus) are said by Hippolytus (d. 235) to have held it possible for everyone to become Christ on the grounds that Christ was a man like any other; he was named both Jesus and “Christ of God” (not Christ *and* God) because he had kept the law, whereas everyone else had failed to do so—these Ebionites lived according to the law and believed in justification by it, as Hippolytus explains, without telling us exactly what the status of Jesus as Christ or messiah meant to them.¹¹³ Hippolytus does not explicitly say that they denied the divinity of Jesus Christ, but a group so committed to the observance of the law was not likely to have believed it possible for the divine to manifest itself in a man, let alone for every human to be a potential host: direct contact with the divinity normally led to the view that the observance of the law was superfluous.

Justin Martyr (d. c. 165) also knew of Christians who held that Christ was an ordinary human being and the messiah by election: they are “of your race,” he said, i.e., they were Jews.¹¹⁴ Theodotus of Byzantium (fl. c. 190), a leatherworker or shoemaker who disseminated host Christology some thirty years after Justin, had followers who likewise denied that Jesus was ever more than a man.¹¹⁵ These Ebionites probably believed Jesus to have been filled with God’s spirit in the same way that ordinary prophets were, or more so, but not to the point of making him divine: it enabled him to prophesy, but did not alter his human status. If so, it was prophetic status that all could hope to achieve by imitation of Jesus. This is perfectly credible, for it was widely held in the first two centuries of Christianity that ordinary believers

¹¹³ Hippolytus, *Refut.*, 7.34.1–2 (in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 113).

¹¹⁴ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 48:4–5. In most editions Justin says that they were “of our race,” i.e., gentiles; but according to Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects*, 240, this rests on a mistaken emendation. The un-emended version certainly makes better sense.

¹¹⁵ Theodotus, who also held the Christ to have descended on Jesus when he was baptized, apparently held this to deify him, but some of his followers thought that Jesus never became divine, and others held that he did so when he was resurrected (Hippolytus, *Refut.*, 7.35). For the third position, compare Romans 1:3–4; Acts 13:32–33, discussed by Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 48–49.

could be filled by the spirit and function as prophets while it was in them.¹¹⁶

Ebionites who cast Jesus as an ordinary human being were known to others too. According to Origen, some Ebionites accepted that Jesus was born of a virgin, but did so without any *theologia*, presumably meaning without any talk about divinity.¹¹⁷ They did not accept his pre-existence as God, the *logos*, and wisdom, as Eusebius reformulated it.¹¹⁸ They claimed that Christ did not exist before Mary, as Jerome put it.¹¹⁹ According to Tertullian, Ebion asserted that “Jesus is a mere man and only of the seed of David, that means not also the son of God.”¹²⁰ Here it is not just virgin birth that was denied (though Tertullian knew the Ebionites to reject that too), but also the status of Jesus as the son of God. Tertullian further said that the Ebionites made their claim about Jesus as a mere man even though Jesus was obviously more glorious than the prophets (according to them or to him?), “so as to say that an angel is in him in the same way as in Zachariah.”¹²¹ In other words, they agreed with adherents of host Christology that an angel dwelt in Jesus, but they held this angel to be his source of inspiration rather than a being which raised him to the status of mediator between the divine and human worlds. The fact that these Ebionites spoke of an angel “in him” (*in illo*), which is not dictated by the text of Zachariah, suggests that the union of Jesus with a pre-existing being was taken for granted even by those who wanted to keep him as a mere man.¹²² Tertullian

later mentioned that, in Ebion’s opinion, one ought to believe that Jesus was nothing more than Solomon and Jonah.¹²³ This confirms that the Ebionites in question regarded him as a prophet of the normal human kind.

Modern scholars usually call the position of Cerinthus and the Ebionites adoptionist, but it is a misleading label in that the crucial movement is that of a heavenly being from heaven to the earth,¹²⁴ and it also fails to bring out that the result was the indwelling of a heavenly being in the body of an ordinary man. Like Cerinthus and Carpocrates, the Ebionites (and others too) saw the transformation as having taken place when Jesus was baptized.¹²⁵

Both the Ebionites and the Nazoreans read an uncanonical gospel in “Hebrew” (i.e., Aramaic),¹²⁶ which they called the *Gospel According to the Hebrews* and which was widely believed to be a “Hebrew” version of Matthew,¹²⁷ though that read by the Ebionites was

¹¹⁶ Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 18 (in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 109).

¹¹⁷ “Adoptionism” is actually defined by Kelly as the doctrine that Christ was a mere man on whom God’s spirit had descended (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 115), but this does not fit the ordinary sense of adoption, so it is not a helpful term. Another expression for “adoptionism” is “dynamic monarchianism,” which requires more explanation than the phenomenon it is meant to explain.

¹¹⁸ For the Ebionites, see their gospel in, for example, Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 213, from Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30.13.7; for the Nazoreans, see the same work, in *ibid.*, 221. The position is also attested for Theodotus of Byzantium (fl. c. 190), cf. Hippolytus, *Refut.*, 7.35.

¹¹⁹ For Hebrew in the sense of Aramaic, see now Beattie and Davies, “What Does Hebrew Mean?,” and note 55, above.

¹²⁰ Most scholars postulate the existence of three distinct Jewish Christian gospels, of which only one, the Gospel of the Nazoreans, was in Aramaic; the other two, the Gospel of the Ebionites and that of the Hebrews, are both held to have been in Greek (for this view, pioneered by J. Waitz, see A. F. J. Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition* [Leiden, 1992], chap. 2; Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 197ff.; P. Vielhauer and G. Strecker, “Jewish Christian Gospels,” in *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson [Cambridge, UK, 1991–92], 1:134–78, esp. 135–36; J. K. Elliott, trans., *The Apocryphal New Testament* [Oxford, 1993], 3ff.). But a few (with whose position I sympathize) hold that there was only one Jewish Christian gospel, or at least that the Ebionites and the Nazoreans read different recensions of the same Aramaic gospel known as *According to the Hebrews*. Pioneered by A. Schmidtke, this view is favored by William L. Petersen, “A New Testimony to a Judaic-Christian Gospel Fragment from a Hymn of Romanos the Melodist,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 50 (1996): 105–16 (reprinted in his collected essays, *Patristic and Text-Critical Studies* [Leiden, 2012], chap. 18), n. 4; Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, 85–86. Whether this gospel was

¹²¹ Cf. David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1983), chap. 8.

¹²² Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, XVI, 12 (in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 129–30, translating it quite differently); cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, V, 61 (in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 134–35). Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects*, 28, 234, unpersuasively argues that Origen’s distinction between the two groups is a mere inference from the two versions of Irenaeus’s statement that Ebionite Christology was/was not similar to that of Cerinthus (who did not believe in the virgin birth); cf. above, note 108.

¹²³ Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 3.27.3.

¹²⁴ Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, 9 (in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 211), crediting this position to Cerinthus and the Ebionites in general.

¹²⁵ Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 14 (in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 109).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*; and cf. Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 21–22, whose interpretation does not tally entirely with mine.

¹²⁷ Cf. Zachariah 1:14; 4:1; 5:2: the angel spoke *bī* and *alay*, all rendered *pros me* in the Vulgate and “to me” in English versions, not “in me.”

actually closer to Mark in its account of the baptism.¹²⁸ In the gospel used by the Nazoreans, the account of the baptism is somewhat different:

When the Lord came up out of the water, the whole fount of the holy spirit descended upon him and rested on him and said to him, My Son, in all the prophets I was waiting for you that you should come and I might rest in you. For you are my rest, you are my firstborn son, who rules for ever.¹²⁹

Here Jesus is presented as the culmination of a chain of prophets in all of whom the spirit has been: the spirit of God, which is the spirit of wisdom, had passed into holy souls before, making them prophets and friends of God, but the whole fount of the holy spirit descended on Jesus when he was baptized and it found its final resting place in him.¹³⁰ This is also compatible with the interpretation of Jesus as a human prophet, but the Nazoreans known to Jerome understood it to mean that “the whole fullness of the godhead (*omnem plenitudinem divinitatis*) took pleasure to dwell corporeally” in Jesus, whereas it had only dwelled “moderately” in the earlier holy persons.¹³¹ In this

a “Hebrew” version of Matthew is another question, but even if it was, it evidently would not follow that it was the *original* version of Matthew, as some assume (rejecting its identification as Matthew, because the canonical Matthew clearly is not a translation of a Semitic original). If a “Hebrew” version of Matthew circulated, Greek-speaking Christians who had not seen or read it would have naturally assumed it to be the original behind the Greek text.

¹²⁸ As in Mark (cf. above, note 110), the holy spirit comes down as a dove which enters him (cf. Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 213, from Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30.13.7). Here the word “entered” has been added for clarification, as has the statement, “Today I have given you birth.”

¹²⁹ Jerome, *In Esaiam*, 11:1–3, in Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 221; in Klijn, *Jewish Christian Gospel Tradition*, 98 (text and a less idiomatic translation; the passage is cited only in a truncated form in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 223). It is on the basis of the difference between these two baptism narratives that some hold that there must have been at least two different gospels.

¹³⁰ The passage weaves together Isaiah 11:2; Wisdom of Solomon 7:27; Sirach 24:7. For further discussion, see Patricia Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge, 2012), 291–93.

¹³¹ Jerome, *In Esaiam*, 11:1–3, in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 223; cf. Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition*, 19, strangely supposing that their version of Isaiah had revealed to Jerome a Christology “which might be called orthodox.” That the fullness of divinity dwelt in Christ is Pauline orthodoxy (cf. Colossians 1:19; 2:9), but the idea that it had done so moderately in earlier figures was not.

passage, the human Jesus is indeed deified when the heavenly being (here the holy spirit) takes up abode in him. A stronger version of this view is voiced in a passage in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, in which we are told that the pre-existing being “has changed his forms and his names from the beginning of the world until, coming upon his own times, and being anointed with mercy for the works of God, he shall enjoy rest for ever.”¹³² Here all the prophets are the same divine being in different human bodies, but only the last of them is the messiah (who seems still to be awaited). Yet another view is found in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*: Jesus (presumably in the sense of the heavenly Christ) “took a Jewish body and was born among the Jews.”¹³³ As in other forms of host Christology, Jesus assumes a body as if it were clothing, but here he does so before, or when, he is born.

Both the Nazorean understanding of the divinity dwelling moderately in the prophets before Jesus, but fully in him, and the passage in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* in which the messiah is still to come are likely to reflect the magnetic pull of the Book of Elchasai, a work composed in Aramaic by a Jew or Jewish Christian writing in Parthian Mesopotamia in 116–17.¹³⁴ Elchasai (if that is indeed what he called himself) construed all the prophets as incarnations of the same pre-existing Christ in different bodies: all prophets were ultimately identical and all bore the same message, but only the last of them was the messiah, in whom the spirit would enjoy rest for ever. About a century later this book, now apparently translated into Greek, was brought to Palestine and Rome, where it stirred up much excitement among Christians and so attracted the attention of Hippolytus, Origen, and Epiphanius.

¹³² *Homilies*, III, 20; discussed in Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 289ff. This does not represent the normal view in the *Homilies*, in which only Adam and Christ are incarnations of the divine spirit.

¹³³ *Recognitions*, 1.60.7 (cf. 1.48.4). The passage is deemed remarkable by van Voorst, *Ascents of James*, 164, in view of the “generally low” Christology of the second and third centuries, when there was supposedly no belief in the pre-existence of Jesus, an extraordinary claim for an expert to make. Yet Richard Bauckham, “The Origin of the Ebionites,” in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, ed. Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry (Tübingen, 2003), 162–81, esp. 171, goes so far as to dismiss the passage as an editorial interpolation.

¹³⁴ For the Mesopotamian/Iranian background and further details, see Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, esp. chaps. 11, 14, and pp. 336–41 (at which point I would have cited the Biblical scholars advocating host Christology as the oldest form of Christology if I had been aware of them at the time).

The heavenly Christ was “transfused” into many bodies and was now in Jesus, as Hippolytus observed with reference to the beliefs of the Elchasaites in Rome.¹³⁵ “When he chooses, he takes Adam’s body off and puts it on again,” as the Sampseans, formerly called Ossenes, said according to Epiphanius.¹³⁶ The Ossenes/Sampseans were one of four groups that the Elchasaites had corrupted, according to Epiphanius, the other three being the Ebionites, the Nazoreans, and the Nasareans:¹³⁷ in other words, at least some if not all of them had adopted this Christology. It is clear from both Hippolytus and Epiphanius that on the Greek side of the border the number of divine incarnations was reduced to two, Adam and Christ, whereas the Book of Elchasai postulated many more. By contrast, the Elchasaites of Iraq apparently accepted all their prophets (or, as they more commonly said, apostles) as the same divine being in human bodies; or at least their Manichaean offshoot did, and so too did the Mandaeans.¹³⁸

The Elchasaites explicitly identified the pre-existing Christ as an angel created by God.¹³⁹ If nothing created can be divine, as the Qurʾānic Messenger held, the Elchasaites and the many Jewish Christians who adopted their Christology could claim that they did not deify him. Whether they made this claim or not we cannot tell, presumably because it did not matter yet: nobody operated with a sharp distinction between divine and angelic status at the time. Thus Melchizedek, identified with the archangel Michael, was called both *el* and *elohim* in the Dead Sea scrolls;¹⁴⁰ and when God’s spirit, power, wisdom, or *logos* were personified as angels, the import was not that they were angels as *opposed* to divine beings, but rather that they were part of Him. The sharp distinction between God and angels that we encounter in the later literature, including the Qurʾān, seems to be a product of the Christian battle against paganism.

¹³⁵ Hippolytus, *Refut.*, 10.29.2.

¹³⁶ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 53.1.8. Further discussion in Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, chap. 14, 283ff.

¹³⁷ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 19.5.4–5.

¹³⁸ For all this, see Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 293–301.

¹³⁹ Hippolytus, *Refut.*, 9.13.2; Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30.3.4; 30.16.4. Christ also appears as an archangel in a passage in the North African author Pseudo-Cyprian, probably active in the late second century, and in an inscription on a fourth-century gem, both probably Jewish Christian; cf. Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London, 1964), 122–23.

¹⁴⁰ See 11Q13 in Geza Vermes, trans., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 4th ed. (London, 1997), 500–502.

What the Elchasaites did claim, according to Epiphanius, was that the heavenly Christ was a being “created before all things . . . higher than the angels and Lord of all,” which sounds much like Christ in Paul’s hymn.¹⁴¹ Like the Michael/Melchizedek of the Dead Sea scrolls or Philo’s *logos*, the heavenly Christ occupied the position of mediator, a heavenly being placed at the intersection between the divine and human worlds; and on lodging himself in a human host, he propelled the latter, too, to mediator position: this seems to be the sense in which Jesus became the son of God and Christ in their view.

6. The Gospel According to the Hebrews in the Seventh Century

All this is relevant to a book called the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, which in turn has a bearing on the Qurʾān. We hear about it in a Coptic sermon attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386), but probably composed in the sixth or seventh century.¹⁴² In the sermon, “Cyril” discusses a heresy to the effect that Mary brought her body from heaven, which he traces to Ebion and Harpocratius (also known as Carpocrates), informing us that a monk in the neighborhood of Maiuma at Gaza was among those who had been spreading it.¹⁴³ The monk, whose name was Annarichos or Annarikos, is presented as crediting his own beliefs to Ebion and Sator/Sarton/Sarto, i.e.,

¹⁴¹ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30.3.4.

¹⁴² The sermon has been edited and translated three times, by Ernest A. Wallis Budge, “Discourse on Mary Theotokos,” in his *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London, 1915), 626–51 (reproducing British Library Or. 6784, fols. 1a–23b; the folio numbers are given in the left margin); by Antonella Campagnano, *Omèlie Copte: sulla passione, sulla croce e sulla vergine* (Milan, 1980), 152–95 (based on Pierpont Morgan M 583); and by Stefan Bombeck, “Pseudo-Kyrrillos *In Mariam virginem*,” *Orientalia* 70 (2001): 40–88 (based on Pierpont Morgan M 597). I shall use the title “On the Virgin” for all three versions. For all of the works attributed to Cyril with short summaries of their contents, see Tito Orlandi, “Cirillo di Gerusalemme nella letteratura copta,” *Vetera Christianorum* 9 (1972): 93–100.

¹⁴³ For the date, see Simon Claude Mimouni, *Dormition et assumption de Marie* (Paris, 1995), 193–94 (between 431 and the second half of the sixth century); Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 60 (before the mid-sixth century); cf. Terry Wilfong, “Constantine in Coptic: Egyptian Constructions of Constantine the Great,” in *Constantine: History, Historiography, and Legend*, ed. Samuel N. C. Lieu and Dominic Montserrat (London, 2002), chap. 9, esp. 181 (placing the six pseudo-Cyrrillian works in Coptic in the sixth or seventh century).

Satornilus (a Gnostic active in Antioch c. 120); and we are told that the bishop of Gaza sent him to Cyril in Jerusalem, whereupon we get some snippets of the debate between them. The monk cited the Gospel of the Hebrews as saying that

when Christ wished to come upon the earth to men, the Good Father called a mighty “power” in the heavens which was called “Michael,” and committed Christ to the care thereof. And the “power” came down into the world, and it was called Mary, and [Christ] was in her womb for seven months.¹⁴⁴

The monk affirmed that there were five gospels, the four canonical ones plus the Gospel written to the Hebrews. “Cyril” responded by emphatically declaring Hebrew doctrine to be incompatible with that of Christ, whereupon the monk realised his error and repented. Ebion (once just Bion) and Harpocratus are probably concatenated in this story because Ebion had once been depicted as adhering to much the same views regarding Christ as Carpocrates and Cerinthus. But Cerinthus is missing in the Coptic sermon and, though Irenaeus is cited, the doctrine reported is unknown to the patristic literature.

Just as the pre-existing Christ was an archangel according to Jewish Christians influenced by Elchasai,¹⁴⁵ so Mary was a power identified as an archangel according to the Gospel of the Hebrews available in the seventh-century Gaza region. But the Ebionites and Nazoreans saw the heavenly Christ or holy spirit as having descended on the human Jesus, son of Joseph and Mary, to take up abode in him when he was baptized, whereas the Jewish Christians quoted by Annarichos held that the heavenly being was actually born to Mary as the Christ and son of God; and the idea that *Mary* was a heavenly being is new. This makes it unlikely that the passage quoted from the Gospel of the Hebrews in the Coptic sermon originated in the older gospel of that name. It is hard to be sure,

¹⁴⁴ Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Virgin,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 12a = 637; Campagnano, *Omelie Copte*, par. 28; Bombeck, “Pseudo-Kyrrillos,” par. 28; cf. Pieter van der Horst, “Seven Months’ Children in Jewish and Christian Literature from Antiquity,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 54 (1978): 346–60. For Micha and (in the BL manuscript used by Budge) Michael, see Roelof van den Broek, “Der Bericht des koptischen Kyrrillos von Jerusalem über das Hebräerevangelium,” in his *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity* (Leiden, 1996), chap. 9, esp. 147, nn. 13, 15.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. above, pp. 241–43.

for if the older gospel grew by accretion as its readers updated it, the passage cited in the Coptic sermon could perhaps have come to form part of it by “Cyril’s” time.¹⁴⁶ But more probably, the gospel read by Annarichos was a later Jewish Christian composition of the Gnosticizing type.

Whatever the precise identity of Annarichos’ gospel, is “Cyril” right to identify the doctrine he quotes from it as Jewish Christian? Or should we rather see it as having developed within Monophysitism? There are several reasons to think that “Cyril” is right. In the first place, Jewish Christians were not normally envisaged as a live presence anymore, and as a heresiographical bugbear, Ebion stood for the view that Jesus was a mere man born to ordinary human parents, not that he was a heavenly power born of an archangel in human guise.¹⁴⁷ If “Cyril” had been thinking stereotypically, he would have attributed the doctrine regarding Mary’s angelic status to “Manichaeans” or “Borborians” or some such Gnostic group, not to Ebion. The tenth-century Eutychius of Alexandria (Sa’id b. Baṭrīq), followed by the fourteenth-century Abū al-Barakāt, did in fact ascribe the doctrine to the Borborians, in wording taken from the Qur’ān (16:51). Van den Broek is inclined to agree with them, without explaining why in that case “Cyril” chose to present the doctrine as Hebrew.¹⁴⁸

In the second place, there is nothing implausible about the claim that a Jewish Christian gospel (even an ancient one) was available in the sixth or seventh century. The sixth-century Byzantine poet Romanos the Melodist, who was born in Emesa (Hims), “of the Hebrew race,” and who drew heavily on Syrian traditions, has two quotations from a Jewish Christian gospel. One of them is also found in Tatian’s *Diatesseron*, which is probably where Romanos found it, but the other is not attested anywhere else apart from a fourteenth-century Latin source, which credits it (in a variant form) to the gospel used by the Nazoreans. Romanos may have quoted or paraphrased this passage directly from a Jewish Christian gospel.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ The citation is accepted as part of the original Gospel of the Hebrews in Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 177, but it is omitted in other compilations, and van den Broek, “Kyrrillos,” 148–50, fiercely rejects it.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Schoeps, *Theologie*, 324.

¹⁴⁸ Van den Broek, “Kyrrillos,” 152–53.

¹⁴⁹ For all this, see Petersen, “New Testimonium,” 105–16 and n. 24. Petersen regards Romanos’ familiarity with this gospel as a testimony to his great learning (p. 110), but one might also infer that the Hebrew family he was born into was Jewish Christian.

In the third place, a variant version of the passage cited by “Cyril” from the Hebrew Gospel turns up in a medieval Latin source. In the *Interrogatio Iohannis* used by the Cathars of Italy and southern France, Christ says, “When my Father thought to send me to this earth, He sent before me one of His angels through the holy spirit; this angel was called Mary, my mother. I descended: I entered and left again through her ear.”¹⁵⁰ The Cathars had obtained their book around 1190 from the Bogomils of Bulgaria,¹⁵¹ and the Bogomils had it from an unknown eastern source, presumably Paulician. There can in any case be no doubt that it was based on Near Eastern materials.¹⁵² As noted already, the passage quoted by “Cyril” probably did not form part of the Hebrew Gospel known to the Church Fathers, but it was not spurious in the sense that “Cyril” had invented it. He had it from a real book. It is of central interest for a doctrine about Jesus and Mary rejected in the Qurʾān, namely that both Jesus and Mary were divine.

7. Mary and the Trinity

In the Medinese sura 5:116, we are told that on the day of judgment God will ask Jesus, *a-anta qulta lil-*

¹⁵⁰ Edina Bozóky, trans. and ed., *Le Livre secret des Cathares: Interrogatio Iohannis* (Paris, 1980), 68 V; cf. also Roelof van den Broek, “The Cathars: Medieval Gnostics?” in his *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity*, chap. 10. Van den Broek notes the parallel with the Qurʾānic Trinity of God, Mary, and Jesus at p. 167.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Nazarius, an old former bishop of the Cathars, who declared that he had heard many declare in his presence that the Blessed Virgin was an angel and that Christ did not assume human nature but an angelic one, and a celestial body. “He said he got this error from the bishop and elder son of the church of Bulgaria almost sixty years ago” [i.e., around 1190] (Rainerius Sacconi, *Summa de catharis*, cited in Bozóky, *Livre*, 151–52; Walter L. Wakefield and Austin P. Evans, trans., *Heresies of the High Middle Ages: Selected Sources Translated and Annotated* [New York, 1969], 344 [25]).

¹⁵² The Paulician origin is denied by van der Broek, “Kyrillos,” 155; van der Broek, “Cathars,” 168, on the grounds that both the Armenian and Byzantine Paulicians held Mary to be an ordinary woman who had merely served as a conduit for the heavenly Jesus (she had children by Joseph afterwards; cf. Peter of Sicily below, notes 222, 224). But they share the conduit idea (first proposed by Valentinus), and there must have been many kinds of Paulicians, not just the Armenian and Byzantine varieties. There were at least three kinds of Cathars (some thought Mary was an archangel, others that she was a real woman born without human seed, and still others that her body was made of heavenly elements; cf. Bokózy, *Livre*, 152). For the eastern origins, see van den Broek, “Cathars,” esp. 164–65, 172–76.

nāsi ʾttakhidhūnī wa-ummī ilāhaynī min dūnī ʾllāhī, “did you tell people, ‘adopt me and my mother as two gods apart from God?’” Jesus responds with a vigorous denial. That there were people who venerated both Jesus and his mother as divine beings could hardly be clearer.¹⁵³ This is not how Griffith reads the passage, however: in his view, its rhetoric is designed to bring out the absurdity of the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus by showing that it would entail that Mary was also divine.¹⁵⁴ But this cannot be right. For one thing, there is no inference from the one to the other in the passage, nor is the response that such a doctrine regarding Mary would be manifestly absurd, but rather that there is no basis for deification of either her or her son in Jesus’ own preaching. For another thing, an earlier passage in the same sura tells us that “Christ (*al-masīḥ*), the son of Mary, was nothing but a messenger and his mother was [simply] a truthful woman, both of them ate food” (5:75). The fact that they ate food is given as proof of their human status. According to the Qurʾān, the messengers (in the sense of angels rather than prophets) who visited Abraham did not touch the calf that Abraham had prepared for them (11:69–70; 51:26–28). The polytheists who expected the Messenger to be an angel sarcastically asked what kind of messenger it was who ate food and walked about in the markets (25:7). God replied that all earlier messengers had also been humans, not endowed with bodies that did not eat, and not immortal (21:8). It is plain that the Messenger was up against opponents who regarded both Jesus and Mary as heavenly beings of the type indiscriminately known as angels or gods in the Qurʾān. This is also why he declared that God could destroy both Jesus and his mother if He wished (5:17), and probably why he denied that God had either a consort (*ṣāḥiba*) or a son (6:101; 72:3). The adherents of the view he opposed were identified as People of the Book in 4:171, where they were told (for the second time) not to go to extremes and say “three,” and here the Messenger affirmed that Jesus was just a messenger of God, His Word, and a spirit from him that God cast into Mary.

That angels did not eat or drink was an old view. The Bible does of course depict them as eating with Abraham (Genesis 18:8; 19:3) and describes manna

¹⁵³ Similarly de Blois, “Naṣrānī,” 13, noting the agreement of the exegetes.

¹⁵⁴ Griffith, “Syriacisms,” 103*.

as their food,¹⁵⁵ but Jewish readers from the Second Temple period onwards interpreted these and other passages in a docetic vein. “Although you were watching me, I really did not eat or drink anything—but what you saw was a vision,” the archangel Raphael explains to Tobit and Tobias in the Book of Tobit (second century BC).¹⁵⁶ The angels who visited Abraham only seemed to eat and drink, as Philo, Josephus, and the Palestinian targums inform us.¹⁵⁷ According to the Testament of Abraham (c. AD 100?), God told the archangel Michael to eat whatever Abraham ate, whereupon Michael protested that angels neither ate nor drank, so God assured him that an all-devouring spirit would consume the food for him.¹⁵⁸ When in Rome one must do as the Romans do, the rabbis explained, so Moses abstained from food and drink when he ascended on high, while conversely the angels ate with Abraham down below—except that the angels only appeared to eat.¹⁵⁹ The view that angels did not eat is also widespread in the patristic literature.¹⁶⁰

The question discussed with reference to angels came to be debated about Jesus as well. The fact that he ate food and drank wine was an objection to his status as the heavenly being “Son of Man,” already to be found in the Gospels (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34); and many Christians reacted, like the Jews, by recourse to docetic interpretation. The apocryphal Acts of John (c. 150–200) simply denied that Jesus ate.¹⁶¹ Others affirmed that his flesh, though a mere appearance, allowed physical attributes such as eating to be performed: this seems to have been the position of Marcion, who adduced Abraham’s angelic

visitors as a parallel.¹⁶² Still others granted that Jesus ate and drank, but insisted that he did not do so out of physical need, only for the sake of appearance.¹⁶³ There were also some who granted that Jesus ate and drank, but held that he did so in a special way, without excreting and experiencing corruption.¹⁶⁴ To other Christians, however, the essence of Christianity lay in the fact that the son of God had become human and died for us, so they insisted on the reality of Christ’s body. “He ate and drank,” as already Ignatius (d. before 117) declared, sounding much like the Messenger.¹⁶⁵ Tertullian, writing against Marcion, insisted that even the angels who visited Abraham had solid bodies and truly ate;¹⁶⁶ and a Coptic sermon seems to share this view, for it has Abraham casually mention that he ate with the archangel Michael.¹⁶⁷ Even the Monophysite Julian of Halicarnassos, who was often accused of docetism (and on whom more will be said below), accepted that Christ ate and drank and had normal vital functions.¹⁶⁸

This was also the Messenger’s view. Like his “polytheist” and Christian opponents, he held that angels did not eat, but he did not think that either Jesus or Mary were angels, let alone gods. In sura 16:51, God tells people not to adopt two gods (*lā tattakhidhū ilāhayni ’thnayni*) without naming the deities in question. The passage is so similar in wording to the Medinese 5:116—in which God asks Jesus, “did you tell people, ‘adopt me and my mother as two gods apart from God’ (*ittakhidhūnī wa-ummi ilāhayni min dūni ’lābi*)?”—that one wonders if the reference is not to Jesus and Mary here too. In short, it is hard to see how Griffith, who is presumably familiar with all these passages, can deny that the Messenger was arguing against Christians who operated with a Trinity consisting of God, Mary, and Jesus as Father, Wife/Mother, and Son.

¹⁵⁵ Psalms 77:25 LXX (78:25 RSV); Wisdom of Solomon 16:20; cf. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (orig. 1909–56; Baltimore, 1998), 1:243. See also Joseph and Asenath 16:8, where a honeycomb made by the bees of the heavenly paradise is the food of angels: he who eats it will never die.

¹⁵⁶ Book of Tobit 12:19.

¹⁵⁷ Philo, “On Abraham,” 118; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.11.2 (197); Roger le Déaut and Jacques Robert, trans., *Targum du Pentateuque* (Paris, 1978), 1:187 (on Gen. 18:8), with further references; cf. also Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:243.

¹⁵⁸ *Testament of Abraham*, version A, 4:4 (version B lacks Michael’s protest and God’s response) in Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:884.

¹⁵⁹ *Genesis Rabba*, 48:14; cf. the later *Deuteronomy Rabba*, 11:4; *Exodus Rabba*, 47:5.

¹⁶⁰ See *Realexikon für Antike und Christentum*, ed. Theodor Klauser (Stuttgart, 1950–2010), s.v. “Engel IV (christlich),” cols. 123–24 (J. Michl).

¹⁶¹ Daniel R. Streett, *They Went Out from Us: The Identity of the Opponents in First John* (Berlin, 2011), 44 (Acts of John, chap. 93).

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 39–40, 199.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 45 (Acts of Peter, chap. 20).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 46–47 (Clement, *Stromata*, 3.59.3, on Valentinus, apparently in an approving vein). Compare Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, 57, on the angels who visited Abraham: they ate the way fire devours wood, without teeth and jaws.

¹⁶⁵ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Trallians*, 9:1 (in Michael W. Holmes, trans. and ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* [Grand Rapids, MI, 1999], 165).

¹⁶⁶ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, III, 9.

¹⁶⁷ Theodosius of Alexandria, “Encomium on St Michael, the Archangel,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, 910 (fol. 18a).

¹⁶⁸ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part 4, 352, n. 45. See also below, sections 7 and 10a (in Part Two).

In the wording of the Qurʾān, the offensive Christians said that “God is the third of three” (5:73).¹⁶⁹ The Messenger could of course have made this observation with reference to any Trinitarian Christians: only the continuation in 5:75 indicates what kind of Trinity is involved. But Griffith does not even grant that the reference is to the Trinity, a fact which necessitates a brief digression. According to him, the expression “the third of three” (*thālithu thalāthatin*) is enigmatic and best understood as a rendering of the Syriac epithet for Christ, *tl̄thāyā*, meaning treble or threefold: Christ is threefold with reference to Biblical narratives figuring “three days,” taken as types of Christ’s three days in the tomb; and the expression also refers obliquely to Jesus as one of the persons in the triune God.¹⁷⁰ But this is somewhat far-fetched, and in any case it is not Christ who is characterized as *thālithu thalāthatin*, but rather God, nor is the expression enigmatic, since it simply means “the third of three,” just as *thāniya ʿthnayni* means “the second of two” in the account of those who sought refuge in a cave (9:40).¹⁷¹ The charge is that the Christians reduce God to the position of the third of three deities by giving Him two partners, even though Christ explicitly tells them not to do so according to the preceding verse (5:72).¹⁷² “Do not say three . . . [for] God is one deity,” as a variant version addressed to the People of the Book has it (4:171). One partner they ascribe to God is Christ, as we are also told in 5:72; the other is Mary, whose full humanity is asserted against them along with that of Christ in 5:75. The evidence is both coherent and unambiguous.

(a) *The Offensive Christians*

So what kind of Christians was the Messenger confronting here? I shall start by discussing the possi-

¹⁶⁹ Cf. further above, in section 3.

¹⁷⁰ Griffith, “Christians and Christianity,” 312–13; “Syriacisms,” 103ff.*; and “Al-Naṣārā,” 316ff.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 317 n. 9. where this is pointed out to him by Manfred Kropp and Joseph Witztum; also noted in Joseph Witztum, “The Syriac Milieu of the Qurʾān: Recasting the Biblical Narratives” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2011), 60.

¹⁷² For other attempts to make the statement technical, see Parrinder, *Jesus*, 31, 133–34, 137, construing 5:72 as a reference to Patripassians; C. Jonn Block, “Philoponian Monophysitism in South Arabia at the Advent of Islam with Implications for the English Translation of ‘Thalātha’ in Qurʾān 4.171 and 5.73,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 23 (2012): 50–75, arguing that the reference is to a Philoponian type of Monophysitism derided by opponents as Tritheist.

bilities fielded in the secondary literature and then move on to the Coptic evidence, which no Islamicist seems to have considered yet.

One view is that the Messenger’s target was a sect dignified by Epiphanius with the grand name of “Collyridians.”¹⁷³ Actually, there was no sect of that name, merely a practice that Epiphanius had learned about from oral sources,¹⁷⁴ and which he deemed quite ridiculous, absurd, nonsensical, mad, and more besides. The practice had been brought to Arabia by Thracian and Scythian women, presumably wives of the legionaries at Bostra (Buṣrā). Once a year, they would cover a square seat with a cloth, put bread (or cake) on it, offer it to Mary, and eat it. What incensed Epiphanius about this practice, making him write page after page against it, was the fact that the ritual was performed by women. “Never at any time has a woman been a priest!” he thundered:¹⁷⁵ women were unstable, prone to error, and mean-spirited; all priests had been men; even Mary, deemed worthy of bearing the son of God, had not served as a priest; even Eve had not undertaken anything so impious; and so on. “Servants of God, let us adopt a manly frame of mind and dispel the madness of these women”:¹⁷⁶ Mary was not to be worshipped, nor were any of the saints.¹⁷⁷ Epiphanius did not actually know whether the “worthless women” were offering Mary the loaf “as though in worship,” but whatever they were doing, it was an altogether silly, heretical, and demon-inspired insolence and imposture.¹⁷⁸

It would have been good to know how these women regarded Mary, but since even Epiphanius could not claim to know, we shall have to leave this aside. It is in any case somewhat unlikely that a ritual attested for a clutch of foreign women in fourth-century Arabia should have been sufficiently long-lived

¹⁷³ Cf. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden, 1960–2009), s.v. “Maryam,” col. 629b (Wensinck, Johnstone); Parrinder, *Jesus*, 135. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 78.23.2ff.; 79.1–9.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.23.3–4 (“I have heard,” “they say that”); 79.1.1 (“word of it has reached me”).

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.2.3.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.4.6; 5.3.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.9.3. For the issue of saint veneration in connection with the Collyridians, see S. J. Shoemaker, “Epiphanius of Salamis, the Collyridians, and Early Church Dormition Narratives: The Cult of the Virgin in the Fourth Century,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008): 371–401.

¹⁷⁸ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 79.9.3; cf. also Averil Cameron, “The Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity,” *Studies in Church History* 39 (2004): 1–21.

and widespread to attract the polemical attention of the Qurʾānic Messenger.

Another hypothesis is that the Qurʾānic Trinity had something to do with the fact that “spirit” is grammatically feminine in Aramaic and Syriac, and often envisaged as female by Syrian Christians, meaning that it could be identified as Mary. (This was so up to the early fifth century; thereafter, it became customary to treat the word *ruhā* as masculine in connection with the holy spirit even though this did violence to the grammatical rules).¹⁷⁹ Sometimes the spirit was envisaged as a daughter of God. Thus a Mandaean hymn cast the human spirit as God’s daughter when it had it ask, “My Father, my Father . . . why hast thou . . . cut me off and left me in the depths of earth?”¹⁸⁰ The holy spirit was similarly cast in the Book of Elchasaï, which described two giant angels identified as Christ and his sister, the holy spirit (i.e., the son and daughter of God).¹⁸¹ Origen remarks that his Hebrew teacher used to say that the two angels (seraphs) with six wings in Isaiah were the only begotten son of God and the holy spirit, probably meaning that this teacher likewise envisaged the holy spirit as Christ’s sister.¹⁸²

More often, however, the spirit was envisaged as a mother. Sometimes she was said to be the mother of all of us, just as God was the father of all of us, and not just of Christ; sometimes she was said to be the mother of the entire creation; and at other times it was her status as the mother of Christ that was singled out.¹⁸³ Christ referred to himself as “the son of the

holy spirit” in the (possibly second-century) letter or apocryphon of James (“James” is a confusing English form of the name Jacob).¹⁸⁴ The Greek version of the possibly third-century Acts of Thomas, which was composed in Syriac and translated into Greek from a more primitive Syriac version than the one extant today, repeatedly invoked the holy spirit as “mother” (once as “hidden mother”) and declared to Christ that “We hymn you and your unseen Father and your holy spirit, (and) the mother of all created things.” As Brock says, the “and” placed in parenthesis here should be deleted as an intrusion; the passages, he notes, provide clear evidence of a Trinity consisting of Father, Mother, and Son.¹⁸⁵ Such a Trinity is also reflected in the Hymn of the Pearl, which was incorporated in the Acts of Thomas and which features a king, a queen, and their son (Christ).¹⁸⁶ Bar Dayṣān similarly spoke of a Father and Mother of Life who begot a Son of Life, i.e., Christ,¹⁸⁷ while Mani envisaged God (“the Father of Greatness”) as having evoked the Great Spirit (alias “the Mother of Life”), who evoked the firstborn Son of God (i.e., Ohrmazd), who was Primal Man.¹⁸⁸

The spirit also appears as a mother in the old *Gospel According to the Hebrews* read by the early Jewish Christians. Origen cites it as containing a passage in which Christ says that “My mother, the holy spirit, took me by one of my hairs and brought me to a great hill, the Tabor.”¹⁸⁹ The reference is to either the

¹⁷⁹ Sebastian Brock, “The Holy Spirit as Feminine in Early Syriac Literature,” in *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice (London, 1990), 73–88; and “Come Compassionate Mother . . . Come Holy Spirit: A Forgotten Aspect of Early Christian Imagery,” *Aram* 3 (1991): 249–57 (reprinted in his *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy* [Aldershot, U.K., 2006], no. VI), 252ff., with examples.

¹⁸⁰ E. S. Drower, trans., *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans* (Leiden, 1959), 74 (my thanks to Charles Häberl for locating the reference for me), in which the human spirit is said to be crying out because it has been abandoned in the darkness of the material world.

¹⁸¹ Hippolytus, *Refut.*, 9.13.2–3; Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 19.4.1–2; 30.17.6; 53.1.9; cf. de Blois, “Naṣrānī,” 14.

¹⁸² Origen, *On First Principles*, I, 3, 4 (trans. G. W. Butterworth [New York, 1966], 32); John Anthony McGuckin, ed., *The SCM Press A-Z of Origen* (London, 2006), 11.

¹⁸³ Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, rev. ed. (orig. 1975; Piscataway, NJ, 2004) 312ff.; Brock, “The Holy Spirit as Feminine,” 78; cf. Brock, “Come Compassionate Mother,” 251, citing Aphrahat: as long as he remains unmarried, a man has no love other than God his father, and the holy spirit, his mother.

¹⁸⁴ “The Apocryphon of James,” in Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 293.

¹⁸⁵ Brock, “The Holy Spirit as Feminine,” 79.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ P. O. Skjaervø, “Bardesanes,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (London, 1988), 3:780–85; cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 318, remarking that Bar Dayṣān’s holy spirit looks like an allegorization of Atargatis, the goddess of Hierapolis/Mabbog.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Iain Gardner and Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2004), 13, deeming this a consciously Trinitarian structure.

¹⁸⁹ Origen, *Commentary on John*, II, 12; Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, XV, 4, in *Patristic Evidence*, ed. Klijn and Reinink, 127; Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition*, 52–53 (probably the Gospel read by the Ebionites [“in Micha,” 7:5–7; “in Esaiam,” 40:9–11; and “in Hiezechielem,” 16:3]); brief references to the passage in Jerome with reference to that read by the Nazoreans, in *Patristic Evidence*, ed. Klijn and Reinink, 209, 225, 227; compare the apocryphal “Bel and the Dragon,” verses 33–42, in which an angel carried Habakkuk by his hair from Judaea to Babylon to feed Daniel in the lions’ den. The inspiration of both is Ezechiel 8:3, in which a supernatural being carried Ezechiel by his hair from Babylon to Jerusalem; cf. Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition*, 54, for two further parallels.

transfiguration or the temptation of Christ. In the synoptic gospels, the transfiguration took place on a great mountain which was not named; some readers took it to be the Mount of Olives,¹⁹⁰ but Origen identified it as Tabor, and this was the winning solution.¹⁹¹ When Jesus went up this mountain, we were told that his face became radiant (like that of Moses at Sinai), both Moses and Elijah appeared to him, and a voice said, “This is my son in whom I am well pleased.”¹⁹² These are the words that others place at the baptism of Jesus, suggesting that the story of the transfiguration originated as one out of several different accounts of how the holy spirit transformed the human Jesus into the pre-existing Christ. But it is in the company of the Disciples that Jesus goes up the mountain in the Synoptics, whereas he seems to be transported on his own in the Gospel of the Hebrews, so the reference is perhaps more likely to be to the temptation. It was the spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (Mark 1:12; Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1), and the temptation continued first in Jerusalem and next on a mountain (thus Matthew 4:8–11; implicitly also Luke 4:5, not Mark). This mountain, too, was identified as Mount Tabor.¹⁹³ But it was the Devil rather than the spirit who took Jesus to Jerusalem and up this mountain in the Synoptics (Matthew 4:10; similarly Luke 4:5). Maybe the Jewish Christian gospel presented the spirit as transporting Jesus through all three stages of the temptation. In any case, it is its identification of the spirit as Christ’s mother that matters here.

The fact that the spirit was often identified as Christ’s mother does not necessarily mean that it was identified with Mary, however.¹⁹⁴ Neither Bar Dayṣān nor Mani seems to have envisaged the Mother of Life as having

appeared on earth in a human body, whether real or illusory; and the readers of the Gospel of the Hebrews probably distinguished between Mary, the mother of the human Jesus, and the holy spirit, the mother of the heavenly Christ. The *Odes of Solomon*, written in Mesopotamia in the second or third century, do connect the holy spirit with Mary, but they too stop short of identifying them. “I rested on the spirit of the Lord and she lifted me up to heaven and caused me to stand in the Lord’s high place,” the author tells us, adding, now speaking as Christ, that “(the spirit) brought me before the Lord’s face, and although I was human [or, “because I was the Son of Man”], I was named the Light, the son of God.”¹⁹⁵ Jesus here becomes the son of God, not by baptism or ascent of Mount Tabor, but rather by ascent to the highest realm, carried by the spirit. (This too models Jesus on Moses, who was envisaged as having ascended to heaven when he went up Mount Sinai.)¹⁹⁶ In another passage, the spirit milks the Father, then herself, and gives the milk of both to the womb of Mary, who conceives and gives birth; the son is the cup, the Father is he who was milked, and the holy spirit is she who milked him, we are told.¹⁹⁷ The two portions of milk were envisaged along the lines of sperm and egg, which were mixed in a heavenly petri dish and then implanted in Mary. The real parents of Christ were clearly God and the spirit. But in the *Odes*, as in the other works, Mary is a human being distinct from the members of the Trinity. Ephrem does have a verse blessing “the child [Jesus] whose mother [Mary] is the bride of the Holy One,”¹⁹⁸ but he does not mean that Mary was God’s consort in a literal sense. In short, none of this takes us to the doctrine condemned in the Qurʾān.

¹⁹⁰ Thus the Bordeaux pilgrim of 333 (A. Stewart, trans., “Itinerary from Bordeaux to Jerusalem,” in *Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society* 1 [London, 1887]: 24–25); similarly *Pistis Sophia*, chap. 1 (here placed after the resurrection).

¹⁹¹ Mount Tabor won universal assent as the location of the transfiguration among other things because both Origen and Cyril of Jerusalem had placed it there; see above, note 189, and Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, trans. Edward Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem* (London, 2000), 12:16.

¹⁹² Matthew 17:1–9, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36; compare *Pistis Sophia*, I, 15ff., in which Jesus was enveloped by a light-power and transported to heaven, just as Moses was enveloped by a cloud and, in the view of many, transported to heaven when he stood on Mount Sinai.

¹⁹³ Thus Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 51.21.7.

¹⁹⁴ This point seems always to be overlooked by those who adduce the feminine nature of the spirit in explanation of the Qurʾānic Trinity (most recently de Blois, “Naṣrānī,” 14–15; Gallez, *Le messie*, II, 80ff.).

¹⁹⁵ J. H. Charlesworth, ed. and trans., *The Odes of Solomon* (Chico, CA, 1977), ode 36:1–3 (cf. Charlesworth, *Critical Reflections on the Odes of Solomon*, vol. 1 [Sheffield, 1998], for the work). Charlesworth prefers the translation that I have put in parenthesis. The passage is also discussed in Murray, *Symbols*, 314–15, 318, on the basis of Charlesworth’s translation, which he does not discuss. He does wonder, though, whether there is a reminiscence of Origen’s Mount Tabor account (see above note 189, in verse 1).

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Wayne A. Meeks, “Moses as God and King,” in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of E. R. Goodenough*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden, 1968), 354–71, esp. 357ff.

¹⁹⁷ Charlesworth, *Odes of Solomon*, ode 19:1–6; also in Murray, *Symbols*, 315.

¹⁹⁸ Sebastian Brock, “Passover, Annunciation and Epiclesis: Some Remarks on the Term Aggen in the Syriac Versions of Lk. 1:35,” *Novum Testamentum* 24/3 (1982): 228, citing Ephrem, *H. de Nativitate*, VIII, 18, 2–3.

Yet another (by no means incompatible) hypothesis is that the Trinity reflected in the Qurʾān should be related to the long tradition in the Near East for divine triads consisting of Father, Mother, and Son. The best known example is probably the Egyptian triad of Osiris, Isis, and their child Horus, but other triads are attested for the pagan Syrians at Hierapolis/Mabbog,¹⁹⁹ and for the pagan Arabs at Hatra.²⁰⁰ (It used to be thought that there was also one at Heliopolis/Baʿlabakk, but this seems not to be correct.²⁰¹) At Petra, a virgin mother and her son Dusares were venerated without any father being named.²⁰² If the virgin mother was al-ʿUzzā, the father was presumably the chief deity (Dhū ʾal-Sharā), with whom she was associated. Christianization eliminated the pagan divinities, but even so the triads reappeared. In fact, they remained alive into the twentieth century, for Alois Musil heard an old tribesman in the Kerak area of the Syrian Desert mumble, “In the name of the Father, the Mother, and the Son” as he crossed himself.²⁰³

That the triads played a role in the formation of the Trinity consisting of Father, Mother, and Son is undoubtedly true: we have seen them return in the Acts of Thomas, the Hymn of the Pearl, and in Bar Dayṣān’s and Mani’s thought. But Mary is not implied to be the divine Mother until we reach the heresy about her heavenly body.

The earliest evidence thus dates from the late fourth century, when Epiphanius says, against the women denounced as Collyridians, that Mary was not to be worshipped (see above, p. 247). Though he did not actually know whether these women worshipped Mary as a superhuman being, it does suggest that he knew of people who did, and this is confirmed by another

passage in which he sternly warns us that “Mary is not God and does not have her body from heaven but by human conception.”²⁰⁴ In another work, he or a Coptic author writing as him tells us not to think that Mary’s status was so exalted that she could not have been of this earth or born of a man, but rather must have come from heaven, as claimed by those “who go about publicly stirring up schism.”²⁰⁵ The adherents of the doctrine that Mary’s body was from heaven were disseminating it quite openly, then. The doctrine is also reflected in a Sahidic fragment which affirms that “she died like all human beings and was generated from human seed, like us.”²⁰⁶ In the same vein, a Coptic sermon on the dormition by Theodosius of Alexandria (d. 566 or 567) has Christ tell Mary that he did not want her to know death: “I wanted to carry you up to heaven, like Enoch and Elijah,” he says, but if he had done so, “bad people would think that you are a heavenly power descended on the earth from heaven and that the plan for the incarnation and the way it has come about is an illusion.”²⁰⁷ The heresy reappears in the Coptic sermon by “Cyril,” in which he mentions Annarichos and the Gospel of the Hebrews.²⁰⁸ “Cyril” protests that Mary was flesh and blood, begotten by a human father and mother like all other human beings, and not a power (*dynamis*), as claimed by Ebion and Harpocratius, the godless heretics who said that she was a power of God that took the form of a woman and came upon the earth, to be called Mary.²⁰⁹ “Cyril” rehearses her conception and childhood as presented in the Protoevangelium of James, assuring us that she died like everyone else as well.²¹⁰ Here we have the divine Mary also opposed by the Messenger in the Qurʾān.

¹⁹⁹ J. B. Segal, *Edessa, the Blessed City* (Oxford, 1970), 46 (Zeus, Hera, and Apollo, i.e., Hadad, Atargatis, and a third deity whose native name is unknown).

²⁰⁰ Brock, “Come Compassionate Mother,” 249, with reference to Francesco Vattioni, *Le Iscrizioni di Hatra* (Naples, 1981), no. 25, 26, 29, 30, etc.

²⁰¹ It has been rejected on the basis of epigraphic evidence by Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 283–85; and on the basis of iconographic evidence by Andreas J. M. Kropp, “Jupiter, Venus and Mercury of Heliopolis (Baalbek): The Images of the ‘Triad’ and Its Alleged Syncretisms,” *Syria* 87 (2010): 229–64, esp. 248–49 (with full reference to earlier literature).

²⁰² Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 51.22.12; cf. Fawzi Zayadine, “The Nabataean Gods and Their Sanctuaries,” in *Petra Rediscovered: Lost City of the Nabataeans*, ed. Glenn Markoe (New York, 2003), chap. 4, 60.

²⁰³ Alois Musil, *Arabia Petraea* (Vienna, 1907–1908) 3:91.

²⁰⁴ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 78.23.10.

²⁰⁵ Epiphanius (attrib.), “On the Holy Virgin,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, 701.

²⁰⁶ van den Broek, “Kyrillos,” 150, citing Forbes Robinson, ed., *Coptic Apocryphal Gospels* (Cambridge, 1896), 108.

²⁰⁷ M. Chaîne, “Sermon de Théodose, patriarche d’Alexandrie, sur la dormition et l’assomption de la vierge,” *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 29 (1933–34): 272–314, esp. 309; cf. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 58, deeming it authentic.

²⁰⁸ See note 142, above..

²⁰⁹ Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Virgin” (cf. the previous note), in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 3a = 628; Campagnano, *Omélie Copte*, par. 7; Bombeck, “Pseudo-Kyrillos,” par. 7.

²¹⁰ Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Virgin,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fols. 4bff. = 629ff.; Campagnano, *Omélie Copte*, pars. 10ff.; Bombeck, “Pseudo-Kyrillos,” pars. 10ff. His source is Africanus’ letter; see Eusebius, *Hist. Ecc.* 1.7; 6.31.

The doctrine also appears in the Greek *Doctrina Iacobi* (*Didascalía Iakóbow*), written in Syria in the 630s. Here, a Jewish teacher of the law from Tiberias is presented as denying that Mary was the mother of God (*theotokos*), and affirming that she was of Davidic descent, which to him (as to “Cyril”) means that she was an ordinary human being. “So don’t let the Christians think that Mary is from heaven,” he concluded.²¹¹ In the next paragraph, the Jews are presented as arguing that Jesus could not be God’s son, because God had not taken a wife, presumably another reference to Mary.²¹² The *Doctrina Iacobi* was written for Jews forced into Christianity, and its Christian author apparently wanted these Jews to understand that even their own rabbinic authorities believed Mary to be of Davidic descent (which is quite untrue, of course). Apparently, he also wanted them to understand that Jewish objections to the Trinity rested on a misunderstanding of the Christian doctrine: Christians did not in fact regard Mary as God’s wife or a heavenly being, though they did regard her as the mother of God. The author was clearly familiar with a Christian version of the Near Eastern triads of Father, Mother, and Son. So too was the Messenger, for it is surely the same doctrine that he is rejecting when he says that “God has taken neither a wife nor a son” (72:3). In another passage he asks, “How can God have a son when he does not have a consort?” (6:101); but here the opponents would seem to share his assumption that God did not have a wife, suggesting that they were mainstream Christians, or alternatively that he has caught them in an inconsistency.

(b) *The Role of Mainstream Christianity*

Even if we accept that “Cyril” was familiar with a Jewish Christian gospel of the Gnosticizing type, its readers had long coexisted with gentile Christianity, and “Cyril” clearly envisaged some of them as gentile Christians themselves. The monk Annarichos is presented as a Christian subject to the bishops of Gaza and Jerusalem (which makes him a Melkite),²¹³ who repents of his errors when he realizes that he was wrong. Annarichos does say, in two manuscripts, that

²¹¹ *Doctrina Iacobi*, II, 42.

²¹² *Ibid.*, II, 1.

²¹³ This could conceivably have contributed to Qatāda’s idea of Melkite Israelites (above, 14).

he had been baptized in “the heresy of Ebion,”²¹⁴ but it sounds like the mere elaboration of a story which probably was not literally true, but rather meant to illustrate where the heresy regarding Mary flourished. In his sermon on the passion, “Cyril” observed that “We do not say, as Anthony the shoemaker (or leatherworker) and Severus say . . . that the Theotokos is a spirit; rather, we believe she was born in the same way as other human beings.”²¹⁵ Anthony the shoemaker/leatherworker and Severus also sound like gentiles, presumably Monophysites, though they could all have been Melkites. This was also true of the “bad people” who saw Mary as a heavenly power (according to Theodosius) and of the unidentified people from whom the author of *Doctrina Iacobi* had heard of Mary as a heavenly being and the wife of God. In fact, the doctrine of Mary’s heavenly origins was occasionally branded Eutychian or Julianist, but this does not seem to be right at all.

That the doctrine should be debited to Eutyches (d. c. 456) was the view of the late sixth/early seventh-century Oecumenius, who wrote in Greek in (probably) Anatolia. He assured us that Mary was consubstantial with us: “the unholy doctrine of Eutyches, that the virgin is of a miraculously different substance from us, together with his other docetic doctrines, must be banished from the divine courts.”²¹⁶ Eutyches was a Monophysite monk who seems not to have had any theological training, and who could not bring himself to accept two natures in Christ. He did not deny that two natures had gone into his making (though he did object to explaining the deity in terms of notions about “nature”); but he insisted that in the incarnate Word the two were fused, and he would not affirm that Christ’s body was consubstantial with ours: the body of God was not a human body, as he said. Accordingly, he was accused of saying that Christ had taken his flesh from heaven, which he himself characterized as an insane belief.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Virgin,” in Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, par. 32; Bombeck, “Pseudo-Kyrrillos,” par. 32.

²¹⁵ Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Passion (α),” par. 6.

²¹⁶ Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, trans. John N. Suggit (Washington, DC, 2006), 12:2.

²¹⁷ Cf. George A. Bevan and Patrick T. R. Gray, “The Trial of Eutyches: A New Interpretation,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 101 (2008): 617–57, esp. 619, 633, 638, 640–41, 645; Vasilije Vranić, “The Christology of Eutyches at the Council of Constantinople 448,” *Philoteos* 8 (2008): 208–21. (Pseudo-?)Isaac of Antioch duly refutes the view that Christ had brought his body with him

That Christ (not Mary) had taken his flesh from heaven was an old view, however. It was associated, among others, with the Gnostic Valentinus (d. 160), and it had proven hard to eradicate. In the Apocalypse of Paul, a fourth-century work extant in several languages, Paul (or, in an Ethiopic version, Mary) visits heaven and hell, and sees a flaming pit in hell full of people who said “that Jesus has not come in the flesh and that he was not brought forth by Mary,” i.e., that he did not receive his body from her.²¹⁸ Shenoute (d. 465) also knew of blasphemers who denied that Christ was conceived by Mary, and four centuries later Peter of Sicily (c. 870) informed the archbishop of Bulgaria that the Paulicians claimed that Christ had brought his body from heaven, denying that he was born of Mary.²¹⁹ But this evidently was not what Eutyches himself believed.

That the doctrine was Julianist, on the other hand, is the view of the modern scholar Dirk Krausmüller, who simply treats it as self-evident that the “bad people” mentioned by Theodosius were “aphthartodoceticists.”²²⁰ Julian of Halicarnassos (d. after 527) was a Monophysite who held that Christ’s body was incorruptible (*aphthartos*) from the moment of its conception, not just from the resurrection, so that he could not sin, an uncontroversial point, and was not subject to pain or death, which seems to make the doctrine docetic. If Christ had not suffered and died, in what sense had he died for us? Had he merely seemed to do so? It was because the Julianists were taken to deny the reality of the incarnation that they were saddled with the cumbersome name of aphthartodoceticists.

What neither Oecumenius nor Krausmüller explains is how a doctrine regarding Christ’s body had come to be transferred to *Mary*, for neither Eutyches

nor Julian nor their followers are on record as having professed that *Mary*’s body was incorruptible, let alone that she had come from heaven. On the contrary, Eutyches explicitly affirmed that the virgin’s body was consubstantial with ours.²²¹ Denying that Christ was consubstantial with us in no way implies that Mary, too, was a heavenly being. On the contrary, if Christ had brought his body from heaven, Mary did not have to be seen as the mother of God, but rather an ordinary woman who had served as a mere conduit for the entrance of Christ into this world, a point which some Paulicians emphasized by accepting the idea that she had children after the birth of Christ.²²² Bar Koni presented Eutyches as sometimes claiming that Christ entered Mary through her ear and came out through her side, thus stressing that she had served as a mere conduit for him, but this is actually unlikely: what Eutyches meant seems rather to have been that Christ had taken his human flesh from his mother, but that the union with the Word had so glorified his flesh that it differed from ours from the moment of the incarnation.²²³

Exaltation of Mary was a general feature of Byzantine Christianity in the sixth century, when both Chalcedonian and Monophysite Christians had come to accept that although she was born and died in the same way as other human beings, her body was too pure to have suffered decay after death: when she died, her body was transferred to paradise and either reunited with her soul, or else left beneath the Tree of Life to await the resurrection.²²⁴ It could perhaps be postulated that the veneration of Mary had caused her to be envisaged as a pre-existing heavenly being by analogy with Christ himself at a popular level. But even if we accept this, it does not explain how she came to be seen as an angel or archangel in human guise, as she is in the doctrine refuted by “Cyril.” Angel Christology had disappeared from mainstream Christianity in its Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian

from heaven in his polemics against Eutyches (Landersdorfer, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 144).

²¹⁸ “The Apocalypse of Paul,” in Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 637 (par. 41), with an introduction to the work; in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, 1066.

²¹⁹ Peter of Sicily in Charles Astruc et al., trans. and ed., “Les sources grecques pour l’histoire des Pauliciens d’Asie Mineure,” *Travaux et Mémoires* 4 (1970): 3–67; and in Janet and Bernard Hamilton, trans., *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650–c. 1450* (Manchester, 1998), 63–92, par. 39, cf. par. 22.

²²⁰ Dirk Krausmüller, “Timothy of Antioch: Byzantine Concepts of the Resurrection, Part 2,” *Gouden Hoorn* 5/2 (1997–1998): (unpaginated web publication):

<http://goudenhoorn.com/2011/11/28/timothy-of-antioch-byzantine-concepts-of-the-resurrection-part-2/>.

²²¹ Vranić, “Christology of Eutyches,” 219–20; cf. Theodore Bar Koni, *Livres des scolies (recension de Séert)*, ed. A. Scher, *Liber Scholiorum* (CSCO 55, 69/Syr. 19, 26) (Paris 1910, 1912); trans. R. Hespel and R. Draguet (CSCO 431–32/Syr. 187–88) (Louvain, 1981–82), mimrā XI, 81.

²²² Peter of Sicily in Astruc et al., “Les sources grecques,” par. 22.

²²³ Bar Koni, *Scolies*, XI, 81; cf. Vranić, “Christology of Eutyches,” 219–20.

²²⁴ Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 198 and passim; cf. also Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part 4, 340, n. 11; 352–53, n. 45.

form alike by the time of “Cyril.” It was a feature of Jewish Christianity of the Elchasaite type, and as noted, Christ still appears as a “great angel” in the Ethiopian *Liber Requiei*. In short, the adherents of the heresy were formally mainstream Christians, or at least they lived among them; but “Cyril” was probably right that the heresy was of Jewish Christian origin.

will take up the subjects of Jewish Christians contemporary to the life of the Messenger (no. 8); the view that Jesus was held to be a prophet, but not the son of God (no. 9); docetic crucifixion (no. 10); the virgin birth (no. 11); Mary as an Aaronid (no. 12); the prophetic chain (no. 13); the birth of Jesus under a palm tree (no. 14); and Jesus as the messiah and the Word (no. 15).]

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