

# Jewish Christianity and The Qurʾān (Part Two)

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[Ed.: This takes up and concludes Part One of an essay which begins in vol. 74 no. 2 of the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (October 2015), which, after an Introduction (no. 1), addressed the subjects of Christ's mission to the Israelites (no. 2), "Israelites" as including Christians (no. 3), the relative importance of Moses and Jesus (no. 4), Jewish Christian Christologies (no. 5), the Gospel According to the Hebrews (no. 6), and Mary and the Trinity (no. 7). Readers are directed there for bibliography previously cited.]

## 8. Live Jewish Christians

"Cyril" (hereafter Pseudo-Cyril) is an extremely interesting author in that he seems to be a former Jewish Christian himself who is writing for other Jewish Christians (in the hope of converting them to mainstream Christianity), and whose tradition went all the way back to the earliest centuries of Christianity. We may start by noting that he goes out of his way to relate himself and his authorities to a Jewish Christian environment. Most strikingly, he tells us that the fourteenth and fifteenth bishops "of the circumcision" in Jerusalem were Joseph and Judas; that they were followed by Mark, the first bishop who was not a native of Jerusalem;<sup>225</sup> and that he himself was brought into the church by Apa Joseph, the fourteenth of them.<sup>226</sup> He must be indebted to Eusebius or the latter's source (Hegesippus, d. c. 180) for this, for Eusebius gives us a list of the "Hebrew" bishops of Jerusalem, of whom Joseph and Judas were the fourteenth and fifteenth and also the last: thereafter the bishops were

gentiles.<sup>227</sup> Eusebius calls the first gentile bishop Xystus rather than Mark, but more significantly, he is speaking of the bishops of Jerusalem from the time of Christ to Bar Kokhba's revolt (132–36). Pseudo-Cyril has moved the last Hebrew bishops to the reign of Constantine (306–37), when the genuine Cyril of Jerusalem was active, and apparently envisages all the bishops of Jerusalem as Hebrews from the beginning down to the time of the Cyril he is impersonating. He is taking the Hebrew bishops to have come to an end with the victory of Christianity under Constantine and casts "Cyril of Jerusalem" (i.e., himself) as a Christian converted by the penultimate bishop "of the circumcision." In fact, he explicitly says of himself that he was of Hebrew origin.<sup>228</sup> That he was a former Jewish Christian rather than a former Jew is clear from his handling of Josephus and Irenaeus, a Jewish and a gentile Christian author respectively, whom he

<sup>227</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 4.5.1–12.

<sup>228</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, "On the Virgin," in Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, par. 12; Bombeck, "Pseudo-Kyrillos," par. 12 ("Josephus and Irenaeus, former Hebrews like me"). Budge translates differently: "Josephus and Irenaeus [and] those of the Hebrews which I have searched out for myself" (*Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 5a = 630), but Orlandi, "Cirillo," 100, summarizing the sermon on the basis of the same BL manuscript as that used by Budge, also has "former Hebrews like me."

<sup>225</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, "On the Cross," in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fols. 31b, 37b = 799, 805; Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, par. 95 (without mention of the end of Mark).

<sup>226</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, "On the Cross," in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 32b = 799; Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, par. 95.

cites and characterizes together as “Hebrew sages” and “former Hebrews.”<sup>229</sup>

Among the points for which Josephus and Irenaeus, the former Hebrews, are adduced as authorities is that Mary was descended “from the Jews, from the tribe of David.”<sup>230</sup> Indeed, Mary herself tells Pseudo-Cyril that she is of Davidic descent, or it is the Paraclete, identified as the holy spirit, who fills Cyril’s heart with this knowledge after Cyril has implored him to reveal the truth of the matter against the godless heretics who claim that she was a divine power.<sup>231</sup> Here as in the *Doctrina Iacobi*, her Davidic descent is being mobilized against the view that she was a heavenly figure;<sup>232</sup> and just as the *Doctrina Iacobi* puts the information in the mouth of Jews, so Pseudo-Cyril attributes it to Hebrews, or former Hebrews. Both authors, in other words, seem to be writing for an audience to whom Jewish/Hebrew authorities were more persuasive than gentile Christian ones, even though they were in principle gentile Christians themselves. Pseudo-Cyril may have written about the same time as the author of *Doctrina Iacobi*, and it is a reasonable guess that in both cases the background is Heraclius’ forced conversion of the Jews (and thus Jewish Christians too) after his reconquest of Jerusalem in 628. But whereas the *Doctrina Iacobi* invokes the rabbis as authorities, Pseudo-Cyril marshals Josephus and Irenaeus and associates his opponents with heresiarchs such as Harpocratius (Carpocrates) and Ebion, suggesting that his audience were Jewish Christians of long standing, with very deep roots.

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Virgin,” in Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, par. 39 (“Josephus and Irenaeus, former Hebrews”); similarly Bombeck, “Pseudo-Kyrrillos,” par. 39 (“people of Jewish descent”); Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 17a = 643, again tones the statement down (“Josephus and Irenaeus and the Hebrew authorities”). See also Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Cross,” in *ibid.*, fol. 18b = 781 (“Irenaeus, Josephus and Philemon on the authority of Hebrew writers”); fol. 22a = 785 (“Josephus and Irenaeus and other historiographers”). Campagnano’s versions have “former Hebrews” (par. 49), and “Irenaeus and Philo” (par. 60, where Philo is presumably the residue of Philemon).

<sup>230</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Virgin,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 5a = 630; Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, par. 12; Bombeck, “Pseudo-Kyrrillos,” par. 12.

<sup>231</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Virgin,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fols. 3a–4b = 628f; Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, pars. 7–10; Bombeck, “Pseudo-Kyrrillos,” pars. 7–10. Cyril invokes the Paraclete in all three versions, but Mary only speaks in two of them, the exception being Bombeck’s version.

<sup>232</sup> Cf. *Doctrina Iacobi*, II, 42 (discussed in Part One of this article, p. 251).

In fact, Pseudo-Cyril seems to know Carpocrates from live tradition, for he has Annarichos depict him as expelling demons, which is unknown to the patristic literature.<sup>233</sup> He also polemicizes against him in his sermon on the passion, addressing him as a Jew and crediting him with the view that Christ could not have known that the vinegar offered to him on the cross was vinegar unless he had tasted it.<sup>234</sup> This point, to which Pseudo-Cyril objects, seems to be directed against Ephrem’s claim that Christ “did not taste” it,<sup>235</sup> and this too is unknown to the Patristic literature.

As noted, Pseudo-Cyril affirms that Mary was of the tribe of Judah and the house of David, against the view that she was a heavenly figure.<sup>236</sup> In fact, he frequently mentions her Davidic descent. Yet he also says that Mary’s grandfather heard a voice saying, “O Aaron, the redeemer of Israel shall spring from *your family*.”<sup>237</sup> Here we have the Virgin as an Aaronid, implied by her kinship with Elizabeth in the gospels and related to the idea of an Aaronid messiah found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Testaments of the Twelve Apostles which is also reflected in the Qur’ān (cf. below, no. 12). This shows the roots of Pseudo-Cyril’s sermon, and those of the Qur’ān as well, to be very long indeed. It may be added that Pseudo-Cyril places the transfiguration on the Mount of Olives, in agreement with the Bordeaux pilgrim of AD 333, not on Mount Tabor, which had won universal assent as the location by the sixth or seventh century, among other things because both Origen and the genuine Cyril of Jerusalem had placed it there.<sup>238</sup>

All in all, Pseudo-Cyril’s sermons, especially the one on Mary, read like a potpourri of Jewish Christian writings hastily reworked to persuade Jewish Christians of the truth of mainstream Christianity. There can be no doubt that Pseudo-Cyril lived in a milieu

<sup>233</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Virgin,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 1b = 627; Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, par. 27; Bombeck, “Pseudo-Kyrrillos,” par. 27.

<sup>234</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Passion (α),” in Campagnano, *Omēlie copte*, pars. 22–23.

<sup>235</sup> Ephrem cited in Pines, “Gospel Quotations,” 219.

<sup>236</sup> See the references given above, notes 230 and 231.

<sup>237</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Virgin,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 6a = 631; Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, par. 14; Bombeck, “Pseudo-Kyrrillos,” par. 14, here “David son of Aaron,” a clumsy attempt at harmonization.

<sup>238</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* (trans. Edward Yarnold, *Cyril of Jerusalem* [London, 2000]), 12:16; for Origen, see above, note 189.

in which Jewish Christians of the high Christological type were a real presence.

It was Jewish Christians of this type who said that God was the third of three according to the Qurʾān and who were characterized by Qatāda as *al-isrāʾīliyya min al-naṣārā*. We too ought to speak of Israelite rather than Jewish Christians (though in practice the standard terminology always wins out), for one of the men whom Pseudo-Cyril boasts of having baptized was not a Jew, but rather a Samaritan called Isaac, a native of Joppa, whom Pseudo-Cyril supposedly converted to Christianity along with other Samaritans. Pseudo-Cyril polemicizes against unconverted Samaritans for not believing in “the cross as God,”<sup>239</sup> and he cites Isaac as holding, before his conversion, that “the son of Mary was a prophet of God” and as explaining the crucifixion docetically (cf. below, no. 10).<sup>240</sup> This Samaritan must have been a Samarito-Christian then.<sup>241</sup> Since neither of the two beliefs is mentioned in the refutation of his views or the account of his conversion that follow, this too would seem to come from an earlier source. That “the son of Mary” was a prophet of God rather than His son is the view we have encountered in connection with those Ebionites who had resisted the blandishments of Elchasai (Part One, no. 5). It was also the view of the Qurʾānic Messenger (cf. below, no. 9), who also explained the crucifixion docetically (cf. below, no. 10).

In short, Pseudo-Cyril was familiar with live Israelite Christians, mostly of the Gnosticizing type, but including at least one adherent of low Christology. A good deal of what he says in his sermons comes from much earlier sources; and he may well be right that a Jewish Christian scripture was circulating in the Gaza region. Gaza was a region frequented by Quraysh according to the tradition, and Pseudo-Cyril was writing either shortly before or shortly after the rise of Islam. He does not say in what language the gospel was written, but it could well have been in “Hebrew”

<sup>239</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Virgin,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 2a = 627; Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, par. 5; Bombeck, “Pseudo-Kyrrillos,” par. 5; Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Cross,” in Budge, fol. 6b–15a = 766–76; Campagnano, pars. 14–40.

<sup>240</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, “On the Cross,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 8a = 768; Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, par. 17.

<sup>241</sup> Cf. Alan D. Crown, Reinhard Pummer, and Abraham Tal, eds., *A Companion to Samaritan Studies* (Tübingen, 1993), s.v. “Jesus” (end), where the existence of such Samaritans is still conjectural.

(i.e., Aramaic).<sup>242</sup> If Annarichos’ gospel was in “Hebrew,” it could have been on the basis of the very same gospel that the Messenger’s Christian opponents had come to think of Jesus and Mary as angels who did not eat or drink: as we have seen, Waraqa b. Nawfal, Khadija’s cousin, was reported to have copied a gospel written “in Hebrew.”<sup>243</sup> If Pseudo-Cyril is held to have written after the beginning of the conquests, it could even have been thanks to the Arab conquerors that the gospel had come to be available in the Gaza region, just as it was probably thanks to them that there had come to be “believing Jews” in Jerusalem by Muʿāwiya’s time (if only in the sense that the Muslim conquest had allowed them to come out of the woodwork). But this is pure guesswork. However this may be, it evidently was not the case that “believing Jews” had disappeared by c. AD 400.

## 9. Jesus Was a Prophet, But Not the Son of God

That leaves us with Jewish Christians of the low Christological type. In the Qurʾān, Jesus is accepted as a prophet (19:30; implicitly also in many other passages), a messenger (3:49; 4:157, 171; 61:6), a servant of God (4:172; 19:30; 43:59), the Word (3:45, 171), and the messiah (*al-masīh*, altogether eleven passages, all Medinese),<sup>244</sup> but not as the son of God or divine. He differs from all other messengers in the Qurʾān in the manner of his birth (cf. below, no. 11), and in that he is sent as an example (*mathalan*, 43:59) or a sign and a mercy (19:21); in fact, both he and his mother were a sign (23:50). Jesus is also the only messenger who is not presented as a “warner” (*nadhīr*). He does preach monotheism, as we have seen, and he threatens polytheists with hellfire too (5:72), but he is not sent to warn the Israelites of their impending doom or call his people to turn to God before it is too late. Rather, he is sent to confirm the Torah, as we have seen (Part One, no. 4), and to clarify some things, though in practice his mission only increased the disagreement (43:63–65). This was the fault of wrongdoers, presumably meaning all those who either rejected him or went to the other extreme of deifying him instead

<sup>242</sup> Van den Broek, “Kyrrillos,” 144, holds the sermons to be original compositions in Coptic on the grounds that none of them are known in Greek, but he does not consider the possibility of Aramaic. For Hebrew in the sense of Aramaic, see Part One, note 55.

<sup>243</sup> Bukhārī and Muslim in Sprenger, *Leben*, 1:128.

<sup>244</sup> For all the passages on all four titles with a discussion, see Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qurʾān*, 30–48.

of sticking to the obvious truth, for Jesus himself had openly declared that he was a servant of God (19:30) and that God was his lord (3:51). He was a created being like Adam, whom God created from dust and then told, “Be!” (3:59).

That the Qurʾānic denial of Christ’s divinity is a Jewish Christian legacy has been suggested before,<sup>245</sup> and it is certainly the simplest explanation. But it is not easy to prove. Unlike the tradition, the Qurʾān never distinguishes between true Christians who remained faithful to the message of Jesus, and false Christians who corrupted it by turning Jesus into God.<sup>246</sup> We only hear of those who got things wrong, either by deifying or by rejecting him. No recipients of the earlier book are praised for holding that Jesus was a mere man, nor do we find indirect evidence for this view in statements attributed to the pagans. On the contrary, they too—or some of them—took it for granted that Jesus was regarded as divine: “What, are our gods better or he [Jesus]?” they would ask (43:58). The Qurʾān does mention scripturaries who believed in the Messenger’s revelations, and so must be presumed to have shared his view of Jesus,<sup>247</sup> but whether they had done so before they were exposed to the Messenger’s message is impossible to establish. If Jewish Christians of the low Christological type were in fact present in the Messenger’s town, it will have been among the believing scripturaries that they were found, at least after his appearance.

By far the strongest reasons for postulating that Jewish Christians of the low Christological type were present in the Messenger’s locality is that the Messenger’s view of Jesus as an ordinary human prophet

<sup>245</sup> Schoeps, *Theologie*, 338–39; Pines, “Notes,” 139.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, part 28, on 61:14, where the Christians divide into Jacobites, Nestorians, and Muslims after the death of Jesus, and the Muslims are persecuted until Muḥammad’s time, when they become victorious; similarly Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, on 61:14; cf. also Suliman Bashear, “Qurʾān 2:114 and Jerusalem,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 52 (1989): 221, on those who were forbidden to mention God’s name in His mosques. There are countless versions of the story about the split that caused the believing Israelites/people of Islam to be persecuted, some with and some without Paul as the villain, in *tafsīrs* and other works alike, both early and late, in both Arabic and Persian. It would be good if somebody would collect them.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. Crone, “Pagan Arabs as God-Fearers.” Many of the passages from the Medinese period are cited in a different vein by Fred M. Donner, “From Believers to Muslims,” *al-Abhath* 50–51 (2002–2003): 9–53; cf. also Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

was so unusual by his time that no other antecedent is plausible. Contrary to what is often said, the Qurʾānic doctrine of Jesus cannot have grown from Arian or Nestorian roots. All gentile Christians held Jesus to be divine even though they sometimes subordinated Jesus to God in order to preserve their monotheism, and always differed violently about the manner in which the divine and the human elements were united in him. O’Shaughnessy quotes an anti-Arian passage by Alexander, bishop of Alexandria (d. 326 or 328), which seemingly agrees with the position taken in the Qurʾān: the bishop quotes Arius as holding

that the word of God has not always been, but that it has been made from nothing; that this so-called son is a creature and a work; that he is not at all like to the father in substance, nor his true Word, nor his true Wisdom, but one of those things that has been made and created.<sup>248</sup>

This does indeed sound entirely in line with the Qurʾān, but only if it is read in isolation. The reference is to the Word, the heavenly *logos* with which God created everything and which was to be born as Jesus. This Word or son was indeed a created being in Arius’ view, but he was created long before the history of mankind began, and he was certainly divine: the unbegotten God engendered “the only begotten God” who never concealed that “this God is in second place,” as an Arian bishop put it.<sup>249</sup> Arius evidently did not think that divinity required pre-eternity. It was his view of Christ, God’s Word, as created that made him a heretic: to Nicene Christians, Christ was begotten beyond time, without a beginning, as Jacob of Sarugh said.<sup>250</sup> There is only the most superficial similarity with the Qurʾānic view of Jesus here.

The Messenger’s view of Christ could not be rooted in Nestorianism either. There was a long tradition of host Christology in East Syrian Christianity, of the type which deified the host. Nestorius was accused of casting Jesus as a mere “God-receiver,” and East Syrian Christians continued to stress the separate divine and human natures in Christ along lines that were

<sup>248</sup> O’Shaughnessy, *Word of God in the Qurʾān*, 22.

<sup>249</sup> Letter of Auxentius in Roger Gryson, ed., *Scripta Arriana Latina*, part 1 (Turnhout, 1982), pars. 25–26; Peter Heather and John Matthews, trans., *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool, 1991), 137–38 (my thanks to Yitzhak Hen for this reference).

<sup>250</sup> Jacob of Sarugh, *On the Mother of God*, 640 = 43 (homily 2).

unacceptable to Christians of other kinds.<sup>251</sup> But contrary to what their opponents routinely claimed, this was not in any way meant to deny Christ's divinity.<sup>252</sup> Monophysites and Dyophysites alike accepted the Nicene creed (AD 325), which identified Christ as consubstantial with God. Gentile Christians had their Judaizers, subordinationists, monarchianists, Arians, Nestorians, and many others written off (under complicated names) as heretics for what appeared to those in authority to give Christ less than his due, and some Christians held Muḥammad to have been taught by an Arian or Nestorian monk.<sup>253</sup> But modern scholars ought to do better. There simply was no gentile Christian precedent for upholding Jesus' purely human status as the truth that all devotees of Jesus ought to acknowledge.

Maybe no precedent is needed. Many Christians have been privately troubled by the doctrine of Jesus' divinity, and it is possible that the Messenger was among those who had come to doubt it on their own. In early modern Europe, a whole movement was formed against the Trinity by the so-called Socinians, who appear to have been the first to postulate a historical link between Jewish Christianity and Islam (and who hoped for Muslim support).<sup>254</sup> They postulated the link because they had an interest in it, but one does not have to be a Socinian to see that they were on to something real: if the Messenger had not

inherited the Jewish Christian view of Jesus, he had certainly reinvented it; and though the Qurʾān does not identify Islam with Jewish Christianity, the tradition certainly does.<sup>255</sup> Muqātil even speaks of "unbelieving Israelites" (*kuffār banī Isrāʾīl*) who killed, captured, and expelled their believing counterparts.<sup>256</sup>

Given that the Messenger casts Jesus as a prophet sent to the Israelites and treats Moses as by far the more important of the two, one suspects that the tradition is right, or in other words that the Messenger inherited the conception of Jesus as a purely human prophet from Jewish Christians. Griffith, who insists that only mainstream Christianity is reflected in the Qurʾān, does not discuss the question.

### 10. Docetic Crucifixion

According to sura 4:157, the Jews claimed to have killed Jesus, the son of Mary and messenger of God, but they did not kill or crucify him; it was just made to appear to them that way (*wa-lākin shubbiha la-hum*). That the Jews only seemed to crucify Jesus could mean that Christ was a heavenly figure whose body was not real; or that he left his perfectly real body when he was crucified; or that somebody else was crucified in his place. In any case, the Qurʾān here explains the crucifixion docetically. A few modern scholars deny this,<sup>257</sup> but *shubbiha la-hum* is perfectly unambiguous even though the manner in which the crucifixion was only apparent is left unspecified. Just what the expression would mean if the passage is taken to endorse the crucifixion, whether at the hands of God, the Jews,

<sup>251</sup> Cf. Sebastian P. Brock, "The Christology of the Church of the East," in his *Fire from Heaven*, no. III, 159–79; cf. also Brock, "The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods of the Fifth to Early Seventh Centuries: Preliminary Considerations and Materials," in his *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature and Theology* (Ashgate, 1992), no. XII; Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 301–303.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. the charge in the *Martyrium Arethae* that the Nestorians believe Christ to be a mere prophet (cited in Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 2nd ed. [Atlanta, 1975–96], vol. 2, part 4, 321). Isaac of Antioch (if he it is) similarly wrote against Nestorius in the conviction that he held Christ to be a mere man (Landersdorfer, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 141–42); cf. also Frank van der Velden, "Konvergenztexte syrischer und arabischer Christologie: Stufen der Textentwicklung von Sure 3, 33–64," *Oriens Christianus* 91 (2001): 189, 190n.

<sup>253</sup> See Krisztina Szilágyi, "Muḥammad and the Monk," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 200; *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Bahīrā" (A. Abel).

<sup>254</sup> Cf. Martin Mulsow and Jan Rohls, eds., *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists, and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Leiden, 2005), esp. 58–59, 153; Martin Mulsow, "Socinianism and the Radical Uses of Arabic Scholarship," *Al-Qantara* 31 (2010): 549–86, with further references.

<sup>255</sup> See, for example, Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, part 28, 29, on 61:14: when Jesus died, the Christians split into Jacobites, Nestorians, and a group who continued to regard Jesus as a plain servant of God and who are the Muslims. For traditions connecting this development with Paul's corruption of Christianity, see the articles by Pines mentioned in Part One, note 13; S. Anthony, "Sayf b. ʿUmar's Account of 'King' Paul and the Corruption of Ancient Christianity," *Der Islam* 85/1 (2008): 164–202. There are many more stories of this kind.

<sup>256</sup> Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shihāta (Beirut, 2002), vol. 2, 137, on 2:246, on the Israelites who said they had been expelled.

<sup>257</sup> Thus Suleiman A. Mourad, "Does the Qurʾān deny or assert Jesus' Crucifixion and Death?," in *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān*, ed. Reynolds, ch. 13, 354–55; Gabriel Said Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72 (2009): 252; cf. also Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qurʾān*, 119–21.

or others, is either left unexplained or answered in a highly contrived manner.

Docetism, encountered above in connection with the question of whether Jesus ate or drank, was a very old doctrine for which one could claim the authority of the New Testament itself: God sent his son “in the likeness of” sinful flesh, as Paul says in his letter to the Romans (8:3). No wonder that already Ignatius had to combat those who denied that Christ was truly born of a virgin or that he ate or drank or really died on the cross, and that he had suffered, except in appearance.<sup>258</sup> Marcion (d. c. 160), Valentinian (d. c. 160), the Manichaeans (240s onwards), and other Gnostics were among those who denied that his body was flesh,<sup>259</sup> though Marcion still accepted the reality of the crucifixion. Cerinthus was among those who held that Christ left the body of his human host when he was crucified,<sup>260</sup> and Basilides (d. 138) is the best known exponent of the doctrine that another was crucified in Jesus’ place.<sup>261</sup>

Docetism is an odd doctrine for the Qur’ānic Messenger to adopt, given that he insists on Jesus’ humanity and stresses not only that Jesus and his mother

ate food, but also that Jesus died. Exactly how he envisages Jesus as departing from this world is unclear. “I will make you die (*mutawaffika*) and raise you to Myself,” God declares in one verse (3:55), which does not leave much room for the exegetical idea that Jesus was raised live to heaven, unless we take him to have been resurrected first. But his resurrection is not mentioned here, or for that matter elsewhere in the book, so perhaps God is saying that Jesus will go straight to heaven when he dies, after the fashion of martyrs (cf. 2:154; 3:169). Both interpretations are compatible with a passage set on the day of judgment in which Jesus refers to “when You [God] made me die” (*tawaffaytanī*, 5:117); but given that his resurrection is never mentioned, the second interpretation is perhaps the more plausible. However, in the Meccan sura 19:33 the infant Jesus says, “Peace be on me the day I was born, the day I will die (*amūtu*), and the day I will be raised up alive” (*ub‘athu hayyan*), clearly meaning that he will die and be resurrected on the day of judgment like everyone else (cf. 19:15, where the same phrase is used of John the Baptist, in the third rather than the first person;<sup>262</sup> cf. also 5:75). This is hardly compatible with God’s promise in 3:55 that He will raise Jesus to Himself, but all statements do at least agree that Jesus died. Why then did the Messenger opt for docetism instead of simply accepting that he died by crucifixion? His choice of docetism is all the odder in that it makes him sound Pauline to the point of siding with the Marcionites, Manichaeans, and other Gnostics whom later Muslims were to denounce as *zindīqs* and *ghulāt*; and that the doctrine also looks superfluous, for it has no bearing on any other religious issue discussed in the Qur’ān. The Messenger frequently accuses the Jews of killing their prophets, a standard Christian charge, so why did he not simply charge them with killing Jesus as well, as the gentile Christians were constantly doing? Perhaps he wanted to avoid entanglement with the idea of Christ’s redemptive death, but one can deny

<sup>258</sup> Ignatius (in Michael W. Holmes, trans. and ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* [Grand Rapids, MI, 1999]), “To the Trallians,” 9–10; “To the Smyrnaeans,” 1–6.

<sup>259</sup> Marcion deemed both the birth and the flesh of Christ to be *phantasma* (E. C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* [Eugene, OR, 1948, repr. 2004], 99ff.); Valentinus also held his body to be spiritual (Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 1:96, 99); and the Manichaeans known to Augustine held that Jesus did not come in real flesh, merely in a shape which resembled it (Augustine, *De Haeresibus* [MPL 42, cols. 21–50], par. 46; similarly Hegemonius, *Acta Archelai*, trans. Mark Vermes [Louvain, 2001], VIII, 4).

<sup>260</sup> Hippolytus, *Refut.*, 7.33 (the human Jesus suffered, but the heavenly Christ, who had come down to him when he was baptized, departed from him); similarly the Nag Hammadi Apocalypse/Revelation of Peter (3rd century): Jesus’ body was crucified while the real Jesus, the heavenly revealer, stood by laughing at his enemy (NH VII, 3, 81–83, “Apocalypse of Peter,” James Brashler and Roger A. Bullard, trans., in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, rev. ed., ed. James Robinson [Leiden, 1996], 377).

<sup>261</sup> Basilides said that Simon of Cyrene had taken his place; the heavenly Jesus, assuming the appearance of Simon of Cyrene, stood by and laughed (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 1.24.4); similarly the Second Treatise of the Great Seth (Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library in English*, VII, 2, 56). It is condemned as a Manichaean doctrine in Samuel N. C. Lieu, “An Early Byzantine Formula for the Renunciation of Manichaeism,” in his *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East* (Leiden, 1994), 203–51 (first published in a slightly different version in *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 26 [1983]: 152–218), 242ff.

<sup>262</sup> Neal Robinson (*Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, s.v. “Jesus” [IV, 17]) claims that Jesus is speaking of his death as a past event, just as John the Baptist’s death lay in the past. But for one thing, how could the *infant* Jesus speak of his death as a past event? His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection took place shortly before he ascended to heaven, and he is not presented as making predictions here. For another, of both Jesus and John the Baptist it is said that they *will* die (*amūtu*, *yamūtu*) and *will be* resurrected (*ub‘athu*, *yub‘athu*).

that his death was redemptive while still accepting that he died on the cross. It may admittedly have been difficult to do so without falling into the camp of the unbelieving Jews, who would have none of Jesus at all. But what 4:157 actually suggests is that the Messenger simply found the idea of the Jews killing and crucifying Jesus too offensive for acceptance. The Jews did claim responsibility for his death: in accordance with Mishnaic law, they first stoned him and next crucified him, or, as the rabbis called it, “hanged” him on a tree for practicing sorcery and luring Israel into idolatry.<sup>263</sup> To the Messenger, this was outrageous: the charges were false, and the Jews could not possibly have succeeded in killing so revered a prophet in so demeaning a way.<sup>264</sup> They did not kill or crucify him, as 4:157 asserts. God kept the Israelites away from Jesus when he was accused of sorcery, as another sura says (5:110). In sum, the Messenger had no problem with Jesus’ death, only with the idea of the Jews having brought it about.<sup>265</sup>

That still leaves the question of how the Messenger had come to be familiar with the docetic doctrine with which the Jewish claim is denied. A common answer is that he had it from the Manichaeans,<sup>266</sup> for by the sixth century they were the only well-known docetists left. A sixth-century abjuration formula for Manichaeans anathemizes those who say that Christ suffered in appearance and that there was one on the cross while another stood by and laughed.<sup>267</sup> The man on the cross is the earthly Jesus, not a person crucified in his place, for Jesus had come without a body: the heavenly being had entered and transformed the human Jesus when he was baptized, as the same abjuration formula explains. It is the heavenly being that stands by and

laughs. The *Kephalaia* (c. 400) similarly tells us that Jesus Christ “came without a body” and “received a servant’s form (*morphē*), an appearance (*skhēma*) as of men.” The passage continues by fully endorsing the crucifixion, however: the Jews took hold of the son of God, they crucified him with some robbers and placed him in the grave, and after three days he rose from the dead and breathed his holy spirit into his disciples.<sup>268</sup> All that remained after the crucifixion was the *skhēma*, the material shape, as the Coptic Psalm-book says.<sup>269</sup> The savior from on high did not die (a fundamental point), but the man Jesus certainly did. Indeed, his suffering on the cross typified the pain endured by all the light imprisoned in this world, subsumed as *Jesus patibilis* (also known as the Living Self): he hangs on every tree, he suffers whenever you pluck a fruit, he is being crucified every day. Mani’s own death is described as a crucifixion.<sup>270</sup> In short, the position of the Manichaeans is quite different from the Messenger’s: they could not accept that the divine Jesus died, but they fully accepted the death of the human Jesus (the only Jesus known to the Qurʾān), and it never occurred to them to deny the crucifixion.

In fact, it is not likely that there are any Manichaean doctrines in the Qurʾān at all, for Mani’s thought world was quite alien to the Messenger’s, and on several fundamental points their doctrines were diametrically opposed. The Manichaeans denied that God had created this world; they would have none of Moses and disliked the Old Testament depiction of God as prone to anger and punishment; they did not believe in bodily resurrection, only in spiritual afterlife in conjunction with reincarnation, and they denigrated both marriage and meat-eating. The Qurʾān devotes much attention to God’s creation of the world, the punishments He inflicts, the high status of Moses, bodily resurrection, marriage and ritual slaughter, but at no point does he engage in polemics against a Manichaean doctrine. It is scarcely conceivable that the

<sup>263</sup> Cf. Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton, NJ, 2007), 63–66. Talmudic law dropped hanging from the list of legal modes of capital punishment (pp. 63–64), so its appearance in connection with Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud suggests that the material goes back to Mishnaic times, as one would indeed expect.

<sup>264</sup> Crucifixion was demeaning whether it was a mode of execution or just “hanging,” i.e., post-mortem exposure of an executed criminal. As a method of execution, crucifixion was a Roman institution and not used in Judaism. The Muslims did speak of crucifixion, but what they meant by it was usually post-mortem “hanging,” as probably in the case of 4:157, given that it mentions killing and crucifixion in that order.

<sup>265</sup> Similarly Gnllka, *Nazarener*, 114–15.

<sup>266</sup> E.g., Andrae, *Muhammed, the Man and His Faith*, 112; Moshe Gil, “The Creed of Abū ‘Āmir,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 12 (1992): 41.

<sup>267</sup> Lieu, “Formula for the Renunciation of Manichaeism,” 242ff.

<sup>268</sup> *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, trans. Iain Gardner (Leiden, 1995), 18–19 (chap. I, 12, 24ff.). Cf. also Werner Sundermann, “Christianity, v. Christ in Manichaeism,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (Costa Mesa, CA, 1991), 5:335–39.

<sup>269</sup> Paul van Lindt, “Remarks on the Use of *Skhema* in the Coptic Manichaeica,” in *Manichaean Studies: Proceedings of the First International Conference of Manichaeism*, ed. Peter Bryder (Lund, Sweden, 1988), 97, 101.

<sup>270</sup> See Majella Franzmann, *Jesus in the Manichaean Writings* (London, 2003), 10, 24.

Manichaeans should have been sufficiently important in the Messenger's locality for a doctrine of theirs to be reflected in the Qurʾān without there being any polemics against what the Messenger would have regarded as their fundamentally misguided and impious beliefs. This is not to deny that there is some overlap between Manichaeism and the Qurʾān: both espouse doceticism (in different ways); both present Mary as an Aaronid (cf. below, no. 12); both may operate with the concept of a prophetic chain (cf. below, no. 13); and both speak of apostles in the sense of prophets bearing revelation;<sup>271</sup> but the simplest explanation is that this reflects common origins, for Mani grew up in an Elchasaite community.

Griffith suggests that docetism had come into the Qurʾān from Julianists (though he also seems to deny its presence in the book).<sup>272</sup> As noted in Part One, no. 7(b), the sixth-century Julian of Halicarnassos held that Christ's body was incorruptible already before the resurrection so that from the moment of union of divinity and humanity in him he was incapable of undergoing physical suffering or death. His opponent, Severus of Antioch, complained that this amounted to docetism: it implied that Christ had only seemed to suffer and die on the cross, thus denying his redemptive death. In actual fact, Julian does not seem to have denied the reality of Jesus' suffering and death: apparently he held that Christ could and did suffer and die by the free disposition of the *logos* (presumably meaning by choice), as opposed to by necessity.<sup>273</sup> There may have been Julianists in Arabia,<sup>274</sup> as Griffith notes, but Griffith does not attempt to prove that they were docetists in actual fact; and if they were not, how could the Messenger have picked up docetism from them? He is not likely to have been sympathetic to the doctrine if it was only from refutations that he knew it. On top of that, Julianist docetism was not of the right kind: no Julianist denied that Christ had been

crucified, only that he had suffered in the process, or that he had suffered as a human subject to the laws of nature rather than by choice, an issue in which the Qurʾān displays no interest. So the Julianists cannot account for the Qurʾānic position.

The Qurʾānic refusal to accept the crucifixion is more likely to have Israelite Christian roots. Annarichos, the Gazan monk who read the Gospel of the Hebrews, tells us that "when he [Jesus] was put on the wood of the cross, his Father saved him from their [the Jews'] hands and brought him up to heaven, beside him in glory."<sup>275</sup> Here we have the same denial that the Jews succeeded in killing Jesus as in the Qurʾān, and here too God moves Jesus to heaven, apparently snatching him directly from the cross. Pseudo-Cyril attributes the same doctrine to the Samaritan Isaac whom he claims to have converted to Christianity. As we have seen, Isaac's errors before his conversion included his belief that "Jesus, the son of Mary," was (only) a prophet of God, but he combined this belief with a docetic interpretation of the crucifixion.<sup>276</sup> In Budge's British Library manuscript he first claims that Jesus, the son of Mary, was crucified by the Jews because he abrogated the law of the Sabbath; but he adds that the man they crucified instead of Jesus was also a prophet called Jesus. The true Jesus went up "a certain mountain" and it is not known what happened to him.<sup>277</sup> Here we have the Qurʾānic view of Jesus as a mere prophet, complete with the designation "Jesus, the son of Mary," and docetism, possibly as understood by the Messenger himself and certainly as understood by the exegetes. There is a crucifixion, but it is of the wrong man; the real Jesus ascends the mountain (which is not mentioned in the Qurʾān), perhaps the mountain on which others said that he was transfigured, and then he disappears, presumably by translation to heaven. But according to Cerinthus, Jesus would not rise again until the general resurrection, as is also said (or at least implied) about Jesus in

<sup>271</sup> Cf. Jarl Fossum, "The Apostle Concept in the Qurʾān and Pre-Islamic Near Eastern Literature," in *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Studies in Honor of James A. Bellamy*, ed. Mustansir Mir (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 149–67.

<sup>272</sup> Griffith, "Christians and Christianity," 312; Griffith, "Al-Naṣārā," 318–19. For an earlier attempt to link the verse with Julianism, see Henri Grégoire, "Mahomet et le Monophysitisme," *Mélanges Charles Diehl*, vol. 1, *Histoire* (Paris, 1930), 116ff.

<sup>273</sup> Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part 2, 213, 216.

<sup>274</sup> Theresia Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam* (Leuven and Paris, 2007), 133–34; cf. Grégoire, "Mahomet et le monophysitisme," 1:117–18.

<sup>275</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, "On the Virgin," in Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, par. 28 (as translated into English by Roelof van den Broek, *Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem on the Life and Passion of Christ* [Leiden, 2012], 94); Bombeck, "Pseudo-Kyrrillos," par. 28. Budge's version (*Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 12a = 637) is shorter and less explicit.

<sup>276</sup> See above, p. 3.

<sup>277</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, "On the Cross," in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 8af = 768 (a confusing narrative); Campagnano, *Omēlie Copte*, par. 17.



the Qurʾān (19:33).<sup>278</sup> Pseudo-Cyril does not mention Cerinthus' claim, but his sermons show us a thought world closely related to that of the Qurʾān. Its roots are clearly Israelite Christian. That the milieu from which the docetic interpretation of the crucifixion passed into the Qurʾān was Israelite Christian (or, in the traditional nomenclature, Jewish Christian) was clear already to Schoeps and Busse.<sup>279</sup>

### 11. The Virgin Birth

The Messenger accepts that Jesus was born of a virgin (3:45–47; 19:16–22; 21:91; 66:12), which is odd, given that he insists on Jesus' ordinary human status. To late antique Christians, Mary's virginal motherhood and Jesus' divinity were two sides of the same coin;<sup>280</sup> and if Jesus was the son of Mary by an infusion of the spirit of God, as the Qurʾān seems to say (21:91; 66:12), he would be the son of God by the Messenger's own standards. The second point, however, only holds true if the spirit is seen as impregnating Mary, and this does not appear to be the case. God does say in one verse that He blew some of His spirit into Mary (*naḥḥnā fihā min rūḥinā*, 21:91), but in 66:12 He says that He blew it into him (Jesus) or it (Mary's vagina), and Jesus could be the ultimate recipient in all three cases. If God blew His breath into Jesus, the latter was already present in some form in Mary's womb, and the parallel with Adam and Jesus' clay birds suggests that this is in fact what is intended. Jesus is explicitly said to be like Adam, whom God created from clay and into whom He then blew His breath (15:29; 32:9; 38:72). In the same way, Jesus himself

first created birds of clay and next blew his breath into them, with the result that they became real birds and flew away (3:49; 5:110). In both cases it is the infusion of breath that makes the inert model come alive: the models exist already. We are also informed that Jesus was like Adam in that God first created him from dust and next (*thumma*) said "Be," whereupon he was (*kun fa-yakūnu*, 3:59); here the divine command "Be" replaces the infusion of divine breath, suggesting that the two were regarded as largely or wholly identical. In line with this, when Mary asks how she can have a son when no man has touched her, she is told that God creates what He wants: when He has decided something, He merely says "Be" to it, whereupon it is (*kun fa-yakūnu*, 3:47). In short, what God blew into Jesus was the spirit of life, but one of a special, divine power, since it enabled Jesus to speak in the cradle and work other miracles (5:110). "I assisted you (*ayyadtuka*) with the holy spirit," as God tells him (5:110, cf. 2:81, 254), now leaving no doubt that Jesus was the ultimate recipient of the spirit that God blew into Mary. It played no role in his conception.

Unlike Adam and Jesus, other prophets received the divine spirit indirectly, and the command with which it is closely associated is now an order to speak, recite, or do whatever God wants, not a command to be. "Thus We have revealed to you a spirit of Our command," as God tells the Messenger in 42:52, using a somewhat enigmatic expression and explaining that this was how the Messenger had acquired his knowledge of the book and the faith. "He sends down an angel with the spirit of His command on whomsoever He wants of His servants," as we are also told (16:102; cf. 70:4; 97:4, where the angels and the spirit descend and ascend together). As an agent of revelation, the spirit is called the holy spirit (*rūḥ al-qudus*, 16:102) and personified as Gabriel, who brings down the revelation to the Messenger's heart (2:97). But no intermediary is involved in the case of Adam and Jesus. Both are created by God Himself, neither has a father, and both receive their life and superhuman powers by God blowing His spirit directly into them.

The presentation of Adam and Jesus as recipients of God's holy spirit in the Qurʾān has affinities with the account of the same subject in the Jewish Christian Pseudo-Clementines (though this work has a high rather than low Christology). Here, too, Adam, formed by God's hands, is given God's great and holy spirit, that is, the spirit of foreknowledge by which the True Prophet knows hidden things, at all times, not

<sup>278</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 28.6.1. If Christ here is Epiphanius' word for the human Jesus who suffered on the cross, whereas the heavenly Christ did not (see Part One, note 97), this makes good sense: the human host would indeed have died and been left in the grave until the general resurrection.

<sup>279</sup> Schoeps, *Theologie*, 339, noting that 4:157 shows traces of "post-Ebionitic docetic Christology"; Heribert Busse, "Das Leben Jesu im Koran," *Christiana Albertina* 15 (1981): 23, without explanation.

<sup>280</sup> "If the Mother had not remained a virgin, her child would have been a mere man and his birth not wonderful," as Proclus of Constantinople (d. 446) declared. "If he had been born like us, he would have been a man," as Theodotus of Ancyra (d. before 446) put it, also observing that "the fact that he did not destroy her virginity plainly shows that the one born is the Word of God" (Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church* [Rome, 1991], 253, 262–63, 269). "If he was not God, how could he leave the virginity of his mother intact?" as Isaac of Antioch (d. c. 451) agreed (Landersdorfer, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 142).

just in moments of inspiration.<sup>281</sup> This spirit is that of Christ as well, the latter being a prophet by virtue of an inborn and ever-flowing spirit,<sup>282</sup> since Adam and Christ are identical; for there is only one True Prophet, Christ, a pre-existing angelic being who has manifested himself in different forms and under different names from the beginning of the world.<sup>283</sup> The Pseudo-Clementine argument is shaped by different concerns (notably anti-Marcionism) from those of the Qurʾān, which does not identify Adam and Christ, but merely presents them as parallel cases. Unlike the Pseudo-Clementines, it does not deny that Adam sinned or discuss the question of whether the spirit left him when he did so;<sup>284</sup> and it draws on the apocryphal infancy gospels for its depiction of Jesus, which the Pseudo-Clementines do not. But the fact remains that both see the divine spirit in Adam and Christ as the factor endowing them with special knowledge, not as an agent of conception. In short, the Qurʾānic doctrine of the virgin birth is quite different from that current among gentile Christians.

That still leaves the question of why the Messenger accepted a dogma so intimately linked with Jesus' divinity instead of just making him a son of Joseph (who is not even mentioned in the Qurʾān): if Jesus was a ordinary human being with special gifts rather than the son of God, one would expect him to have ordinary human parents too. The Messenger does insist on the humanity of Mary, so why does he not give her a husband by whom to father Jesus? The answer is surely that by the Messenger's time it was difficult to cast Joseph as Jesus' father any more without implicitly identifying Jesus as a bastard, for everyone knew that if he was not born of God and a virgin, as the Christians insisted, then he was the son of Panthera/Panther, the Roman soldier who had slept with Mary, as the Jews asserted (and as pagans too had said in the past).<sup>285</sup> Scurrilous stories about Jesus' birth to an unmarried

woman clearly circulated in the Messenger's locality, for Mary's people, i.e., the Jews, are presented as accusing her of fornication; Jesus clears her reputation by explaining the truth in the cradle (4:156; 19:27ff.), and it is repeatedly stressed that Mary was a virgin (3:47; 19:20) and a chaste woman (21:91; 66:12) who spoke the truth (5:75). All this is in line with Syriac Christian views,<sup>286</sup> but it is striking that Mary's virtue is in need of repeated defense. The Messenger evidently did not live in an environment where her unblemished nature had come to be taken for granted, and this is probably why he liked the doctrine of the virgin birth: Jesus' birth had to be miraculous in order not to be scandalous. It may have been for the same reason that some Ebionites had come to accept the doctrine of virgin birth by Origen's time,<sup>287</sup> and that the Nazoreans known to Jerome (or some of them) had as well.<sup>288</sup> It had no soteriological function for them, nor did it for the Messenger.

It is not just the virgin birth that is accepted in the Qurʾān; Mary seems to be envisaged as a perpetual virgin. She has no husband, only a guardian, to whom she is awarded by lots (3:44) and who is identified as Zachariah (3:37). The Qurʾān is here following the Protoevangelium of Jacob/James, the gospel in which the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity was first formulated, apparently for purposes of defending her against Jewish calumnies.<sup>289</sup> According to the Protoevangelium, Mary was dedicated to the temple at the

<sup>286</sup> Cf. the dialogue poem in Sebastian Brock, "Mary in Syriac Tradition," Ecumenical Marian Pilgrimage Trust (2007), <http://ecumenicalmarianpilgrimage.faithweb.com/07Brock.pdf>: 19–20 (accessed Nov. 2015; this is the later of two articles with identical titles by the same author): accused of unchastity by Joseph, Mary declares that the child in her womb will reveal that she is still a virgin. Here too her chastity and truthfulness are stressed.

<sup>287</sup> For Origen, see Part One, note 117; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 3.27.3. Horner seems not to be aware that some Jewish Christians accepted the virgin birth, though he cites both of these passages (cf. Timothy J. Horner, "Jewish Aspects of the Protoevangelium of James," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12 [2004]: 333).

<sup>288</sup> Epiphanius did not know whether the Nazoreans accepted the virgin birth (*Panarion*, 29.7.6), but Jerome claims that they did: in a letter to Augustine he writes that they "believe in Christ, the Son of God, born of Mary the Virgin . . ." (*Ep.*, 112, 13, in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 201). But he also has a passage implying that they regarded Jesus as the son of the carpenter (*In Matth.*, 13, 54, in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 217); differently interpreted by Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, 54–55, so as to eliminate the contradiction.

<sup>289</sup> Horner, "Jewish Aspects," 330, noting that it has even been presented as a direct response to Celsus.

<sup>281</sup> Clement (attrib.), *Homilies*, III, 12–14 (in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 17 [Edinburgh, 1870; repr. 2005]); cf. H. J. W. Drijvers, "Adam and the True Prophet in the Pseudo-Clementines," in *Loyalitätskonflikte in der Religionsgeschichte: Festschrift für Carsten Colpe*, ed. Christoph Elsas and Hans Kippenberg (Würzburg, 1990), 314–23.

<sup>282</sup> Clement (attrib.), *Homilies*, III, 15.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 20.

<sup>284</sup> Cf. Drijvers, "Adam and the True Prophet," 315.

<sup>285</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I, 32; Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, esp. 18ff., 97–98, 113–14; Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited* (Tübingen, 2011).

age of three years and a day, the age at which infant girls became minors according to the Mishna, and also the earliest age at which she could be betrothed; and Zachariah, the priest in charge of the temple in which she grows up, hands her to Joseph when she is twelve and becomes pubescent.<sup>290</sup> Joseph is presented as an old man with children from a previous marriage (explaining Jesus' brothers and sisters in the Gospels) and as reluctant to take on a young bride. The message is that he never claimed his conjugal rights. In fact, it is not even clear that he had such rights, for although Zachariah is informed that Mary will be Joseph's wife, Zachariah himself tells Joseph that he must take Mary ("this virgin of the Lord") into his care and protection;<sup>291</sup> and when Mary gets pregnant, Joseph is accused of having violated her, if only in the sense of having slept with her without having the marriage solemnized first.<sup>292</sup> That the marriage was to be understood as nothing but guardianship is told to us explicitly by Epiphanius.<sup>293</sup> In short, Mary was the bride of God: betrothed to Him at the age of three and a day, the earliest possible age, she was fully married to Him when the vow was consummated, i.e., when the spirit impregnated her.

It has been suggested that the Protoevangelium, which dates from the late second century, was composed by an author who understood Christianity from a Jewish point of view.<sup>294</sup> It does seem to argue in favor of Mary's perpetual virginity on the basis of Mishnaic rules. But it quickly became enormously popular with all Christians and came close to achieving canonicity, so that it had completely saturated Christian literature by the time it was rejected as apocryphal, by the *Decretum Gelasianum* in the fifth or sixth century.<sup>295</sup> The Messenger's use of this gospel, or of ideas rooted in it, cannot be taken to indicate that the Christians in

his locality were more Jewish in their orientation than any other Christians. Only Jewish Christians, however, could accept the virgin birth without *theologia*, as Origen put it.<sup>296</sup> Differently put, only they could decouple Jesus' virgin birth from his status as the son of God (which some Jewish Christians rejected and others accepted with reference to his baptism rather than his birth). To all other Christians, the one was the proof of the other, a fact of which there is no awareness in the Qurʾān.

## 12. Mary as an Aaronid

Jesus' mother, Mary (Maryam), was "the sister of Aaron" (19:28) and "daughter of ʿImrān" (Amram, the father of Aaron and Moses in the Bible) (66:12). This is a well-known puzzle. Aaron and Moses did have a sister called Mary (Miriam in the Bible), but the Qurʾān distinguishes quite clearly between this sister (left unnamed in the Qurʾān), who kept an eye on her little brother in Egypt (20:40; 28:11–13), and Mary, who spent her childhood in the temple in Jerusalem (3:36–37). Accordingly, one takes the identification of Mary as the daughter of ʿImrān and sister of Aaron to mean that she was a member of ʿImrān's/Aaron's lineage, which accords with normal Arabic (and indeed Qurʾānic) usage.<sup>297</sup> But another verse calls Mary's mother "the wife of ʿImrān" (3:35) and this can only be understood literally: here, ʿImrān, presumably known to the Messenger's audience as the father of Moses and Aaron, is envisaged as the father of Mary too, not her distant ancestor, even though the story line about Mary follows the Protoevangelium, in which Mary's mother is the wife of Joachim.<sup>298</sup> The common explanation that the Messenger is envisaging Mary as a sister of Aaron in a typological sense does not help. For one thing, the Christians, from whom the Messenger would have picked up typological

<sup>290</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 323, 325.

<sup>291</sup> *Protoevangelium of James* (in Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, no. 3), par. 9; Horner, "Jewish Aspects," 326.

<sup>292</sup> *Protoevangelium of James*, Horner, "Jewish Aspects," 327–28.

<sup>293</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 78.7.2ff; cf. 28.7.6. Mary was betrothed to a suitor "who was to be, properly speaking, the guardian of her virginity," as John of Damascus put it (Homily 1 on the Dormition, 6, in B. E. Daley, trans., *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* [New York, 1998], 190).

<sup>294</sup> Thus Horner, "Jewish Aspects" (not all the arguments are convincing). Rösch, "Jesusmythen," 426–27, takes the Jewish Christian origin of this text for granted.

<sup>295</sup> Cf. Horner, "Jewish Aspects," 315 (fifth century); Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1:38 (sixth century).

<sup>296</sup> Cf. Part One, 241.

<sup>297</sup> Cf. Suleiman A. Mourad, "Mary in the Qurʾān," in *The Qurʾān in Its Historical Context*, ed. Reynolds, 165–66. Compare the Qurʾānic use of "brother" in the sense of fellow tribesman (e.g., 7:65: "[We sent] to ʿĀd their brother Hūd"; similarly 7:73, 85; 11:50, 61, 84; 27:45 of this and other Arabian prophets). Gallez, *Le messie*, 1:20, strangely denies that "sister" can be used in the sense of fellow tribeswoman.

<sup>298</sup> Pace Mourad, "Mary in the Qurʾān," 166, claiming that Mary's mother was Amram's wife in the sense that she was married to a descendant of Amram. This is not idiomatic usage: one could not say of a woman married to a Tamīmī that she was the wife of Tamīm.

interpretation, did not see Miriam as the prototype of Mary.<sup>299</sup> It would in fact have made more sense for Moses' mother rather than his sister to be presented as such. For another thing, the relationship between Mary and Aaron was not typological if both were the offspring of 'Imrān and his wife. Besides, the Medinese sura which identifies Mary's mother as the wife of 'Imrān also says that God chose Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of 'Imrān above all beings, adding that some of them were descendants of others (*dhurriyyatan ba'dubā min ba'din* [3:33–34]). If Jesus is here included in the family of 'Imrān, as has been argued,<sup>300</sup> the relationship is clearly envisaged as physical yet again: *dhurriyya* are descendants in the flesh, not spiritual progeny, a concept which is in general somewhat alien to the Qur'ān.<sup>301</sup> However this conundrum is to be resolved,<sup>302</sup> it is Mary's relationship with Aaron that matters in the Qur'ān: she is never called the sister of Moses. And whether she was literally a sister of Aaron or just a member of the Aaronid clan, she was not a descendant of David. Since the Messenger accepts the doctrine of the virgin birth, neither was her son.

<sup>299</sup> Neuwirth holds that Mary as the "sister of Aaron" may be understood as reflecting a typological interpretation cherished by the Old Church, which sought to connect the events around Moses with those around Mary and Jesus. But she does not give any examples or references (Angelika Neuwirth, "Imagining Mary – Disputing Jesus," in *Fremde, Feinde und Kurioses*, ed. Benjamin Jokisch, Ulrich Rebstock, and Lawrence I. Conrad [Berlin, 2009], 399). Van der Velden, "Konvergenztexte," 176–77, also postulates a Christian tradition without documenting it. Dye tries his best to find Christian precedents for the Miriam/Mary typology, but he admits that it is hard (see Guillaume Dye, "Lieux saints communs, partagés ou confisqués," in *Partage du sacré: transferts, dévotions mixtes, rivalités interconfessionnelles*, ed. Guillaume Dye and Isabelle Dépret [Brussels, 2012], 95–98).

<sup>300</sup> Samir Khalil Samir, "The Theological Christian Influence on the Qur'ān: A Reflection," in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, ed. Reynolds, 142–43; Reynolds, *Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, 145–46. Neuwirth, "House of Abraham," 507, goes so far as to claim that Āl 'Imrān here consist of Mary, her mother, and her son only.

<sup>301</sup> Michael Marx, "Glimpses of Mariology in the Qur'ān," in *The Qur'ān in Context*, ed. Neuwirth, Marx, and Sinai, 548–49, claims that *dhurriyya* in the Qur'ān can also refer to "a spiritual adherence, the participation in a 'prophetic project.'" But he gives no examples.

<sup>302</sup> One possibility is that she was called the sister of Aaron and the daughter of 'Imrān in the sense of an Aaronid in old texts reflected in the Meccan suras and that this had gradually come to be understood literally, giving us Mary's mother as the wife of 'Imrān in the Medinese 3:5.

What we have in the Qur'ān, then, seems to be residues of the idea of an Aaronid messiah which we also encountered in the sermon on the virgin by Pseudo-Cyril. It was a concept that went a long way back. Priests had been the leading political force in Palestine in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, and in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* it is predicted that God will raise up a high priest from Levi (the ancestor of Aaron) and a king from Judah (the ancestor of David).<sup>303</sup> Salvation would come through Judah, or God would raise up a savior from both Levi and Judah, whom one patriarch after the other tells his children to honor,<sup>304</sup> "because from them shall arise the salvation of Israel."<sup>305</sup> In the Gospel of Luke we are told that Mary was a relative of Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist) and that Elizabeth was an Aaronid.<sup>306</sup> This could be taken to imply that Jesus was regarded as an Aaronid on his mother's side and of Davidic descent on his father's until the adoption of the doctrine of the virgin birth. There were certainly people who held Mary to be of Levite descent in the time of Origen (d. 253f.).<sup>307</sup> Origen did not share their view, for by then the virgin birth had come to be generally accepted, and so Mary too had to descend from David in order for her son to do so. Her Davidic descent seems to be affirmed already by Ignatius, and Justin Martyr (d. c. 165) certainly endorses it,<sup>308</sup> as do other authors of the second century.<sup>309</sup> But this

<sup>303</sup> "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, T. Reuben, 6:7–12; T. Simeon, 7; T. Levi, 2:10; cf. T. Dan, 5:4.

<sup>304</sup> T. Naphtali, 8; T. Gad, 8:1; T. Joseph, 19:11.

<sup>305</sup> T. Joseph, 19:11, Armenian version, reflecting an earlier redaction than the Greek.

<sup>306</sup> Luke 1:5, 36.

<sup>307</sup> Cf. O. Skarsaune, "Fragments of Jewish Christian Literature Quoted in Some Greek and Latin Fathers," in *Jewish Believers*, ed. Skarsaune and Hvalvik, 3355, n. 102, citing Origen's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 1.5.4; cf. 353–55 on why Christians might have wanted Jesus to be of double descent.

<sup>308</sup> Ignatius, in "To the Ephesians," 18:2, 19:1; "To the Tralians," 9:1; and "To the Smyrnaeans," 1:1, mentions that Jesus was born of David's seed and of a virgin, but he never explicitly says that the virgin was of David's seed. Differently Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 100, where the Virgin is explicitly said to be of David's family.

<sup>309</sup> E.g., "Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah," trans. M. A. Knibb, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, *Expansions of the Old Testament and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York, 1985), chap. 11, 2. For other second-century authors, see Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh, 1990), 26–27.

created problems. “How could Mary, of the tribe of David and Judah, be related to Elizabeth, of the tribe of Levi?” people were asking in Epiphanius’ time, and still in that of Jacob of Sarugh (d. 521).<sup>310</sup> The standard answer was that the royal and priestly tribes had intermarried, as Epiphanius duly explains, though Jacob of Sarugh had a different solution: he held the kinship to be a metaphor for similarity, much as do many modern Islamicists.<sup>311</sup> A few went so far as to make Mary and Jesus descendants of Levi and Judah alike,<sup>312</sup> but even this partial Levite descent was never more than a marginal idea. In the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews, Jesus is of Davidic descent and *superior* to the Aaronids, who were priests according to the flesh, and this seems to have been a more comfortable position.<sup>313</sup>

How did the idea of Mary as an Aaronid pass into the Qurʾān? The view is not represented in mainstream Syriac, nor in any other mainstream form of Christianity,<sup>314</sup> for the obvious reason that it would invalidate Jesus’ messianic status. Even the Ebionites are reported to have accepted Jesus as a descendant of David, evidently via his father, Joseph. Where we do find the idea of an Aaronid who is to come, apart from the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, is in the Dead Sea scrolls from Qumran. Here we hear of the “messiahs of Aaron and of Israel” or, as all the other passages say, “the messiah of Aaron and Israel,” which

<sup>310</sup> Jacob of Sarugh, *On the Mother of God*, 642 = 46 (homily 2).

<sup>311</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 78.13.6; Jacob of Sarugh, *On the Mother of God*, 644 = 48 (homily 2).

<sup>312</sup> Cf. Hippolytus, anonymous people refuted by Julius Africanus, and Gregory of Nazianzus in Joseph Fischer, “Die Davidische Abkunft der Mutter Jesu,” *Weidenauer Studien* 4 (1911): 63–64, 69, 79–81 (an extremely learned trawl through all the sources directed against the skeptics of the day).

<sup>313</sup> Hebrews 7:4–10, 14; 8:4ff, etc. cf. Eric F. Mason, “*You are a Priest for ever*”: *Second Temple Judaism and the Priestly Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden, 2008), 33ff.

<sup>314</sup> According to Neuwirth, “House of Abraham,” 507, n. 25, a number of East Syrian liturgical texts, still unpublished, present Mary as belonging to the Aaronid lineage. This would be a major discovery with radical implications for our view of the origin and nature of Syrian Christianity if it were true, but the examples adduced by Michael Marx, “Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qurʾān: From Hagiography to Theology via Religious-Political Debate,” in *Qurʾān in Context*, ed. Neuwirth, Sinai, and Marx, 557–59, on the basis of what I take to be the same liturgical texts, do not make her an Aaronid, merely the type of Aaron’s rod (which sprouted on its own), as Marx himself acknowledges. Ephrem explicitly identifies her lineage as Davidic (Brock, “Mary in Syriac Tradition” [2007], 3), and so does the Syriac tradition in general (Murray, “Mary, the Second Eve,” 374).

could mean that in fact there was only one. Modern scholars assume the messiah of Israel to be the Davidic messiah, but he is never actually identified as such, and one would have expected the counterpart of Aaron to be Judah rather than Israel, to whom they both belonged.<sup>315</sup> The sect behind these scrolls is usually (but not always) held to be Essene and to have disappeared in the course of the Jewish revolt against Rome. It has been conjectured on poor evidence that thereafter they converted to Christianity and merged with their Jewish Christian neighbors.<sup>316</sup> The best evidence for this is actually Epiphanius’ familiarity with a Jewish Christian sect in the Dead Sea region called the Sampsaeans: formerly they were known as Ossenes, he says, including them among the many Jewish Christians who have been corrupted by Elchasaï. He has considerable local knowledge about them.<sup>317</sup> These Ossenes were probably Essenes. This is sometimes denied on the grounds that Epiphanius mentions the Essenes under their normal name as well,<sup>318</sup> but it makes good sense that he should have written about them under two names, for he knew of the Ossenes by word of mouth and/or personal observation, whereas he speaks of the Essenes on the basis of literary sources of some kind. He does not know that the two sects were identical. Like the Essenes of Qumran, moreover, the Ossenes/Sampsaeans and the Elchasaïtes were baptists. We do not know what the Ossenes or the Elchasaïtes said about the descent of Mary, but we do know that the Manichaean offshoot of the Elchasaïtes denied that she was of Davidic descent: in their view she was “from the tribe of Levi, from which the priests came.”<sup>319</sup> This strengthens the case for the view that

<sup>315</sup> Cf. John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York, 1995), chap. 4, arguing in favor of two messiahs.

<sup>316</sup> Oscar Cullmann, “Die neuentdeckten Qumran-Texte und das Judenchristentum der Pseudoklementinen,” in *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann zu seinem 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Walther Eltester (Berlin, 1954), 35–51. His evidence is the similarities between the Dead Sea scrolls and the Pseudo-Clementines, though the most obvious explanation for that is shared roots in second-temple Judaism.

<sup>317</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 19.2.1ff.; cf. 19.5.4.

<sup>318</sup> Epiphanius mentions the Essenes as a Samaritan (!) sect in his *Panarion*, 10.1.2 (cf. the brief discussion in Crown, Pummer, and Tal, ed., *Companion to Samaritan Studies*, s.v. “Essenes”).

<sup>319</sup> Faustus in Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, 23:4. Faustus knows Mary’s father to be Joachim, the name given to him in the Protoevangelium of James, chap. 1, but he also identifies him as a priest, which the Protoevangelium does not. He is putting his own construction on the text to support an idea he has from elsewhere.

the Qurʾānic conception of Mary as an Aaronid had Elchasaite roots as well.

One does not get the impression that Mary's Aaronid descent was of great importance to the Messenger, for all that he mentions it three times.<sup>320</sup> Maybe it sounded right to him because he knew her to have been brought up in the temple, a fact familiar to him as to so many others from the Protoevangelium of James. This text admittedly identifies her as a member of David's house in its present form,<sup>321</sup> but the chapter in which it does so did not form part of the original work and probably was not known to either the Messenger or the Manichaeans.<sup>322</sup> At all events, the Messenger does not seem to have given much thought to the fact that Mary's Aaronid descent made Jesus an Aaronid too, and it is a striking fact that he does not try to connect Jesus with David in any way, except perhaps in a Medinese verse proclaiming that the unbelieving Israelites have been cursed by the tongues of David and Jesus (5:78). Jesus' Davidic descent, crucial for his messianic status, was not apparently of interest to him.

### 13. The Prophetic Chain

The Messenger operates with the assumption that prophets have appeared throughout history and that all of them have been bearers of the same monotheist message. "We believe in God and that which He sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the [twelve] tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus, and what was given to [all the other?] prophets; we do not distinguish between any of them," as a characteristic passage says (2:136; similarly, 3:84; 4:150–52). God "has prescribed for you the religion that He enjoined on Noah and which We revealed to you (sg.) and which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus," as another passage has it (42:13). Yet another enumerates Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zachariah, John, Jesus, Elijah, Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot (in that peculiar order) as righteous people favored by God, presumably all as prophets, though this is not specified (6:83–86). God taught Jesus the book, wisdom, the Torah, and the Gospel, apparently all

<sup>320</sup> Differently Marx, "Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qurʾān," who sees an intention to revive memories of the temple tradition founded by Aaron here.

<sup>321</sup> *Protoevangelium of James* (in Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, no. 3), par. 10.

<sup>322</sup> Cf. Fischer, "Davidische Abkunft," 26ff.

containing the same message (5:110). "We did not send any messenger before you without revealing to him that there is no God except for Me, so serve Me," as God declares (21:25). As noted above, the book of Elchasai, composed in 116–17, construed all the prophets from Adam to the messiah as incarnations of the same pre-existing Christ, all ultimately identical and bearing the same message, though the last of them was a fuller incarnation than the rest. The godhead dwelled "moderately" in the earlier holy persons to appear fully in Christ, as Jerome explained with reference to the Nazoreans,<sup>323</sup> whose Gospel of the Hebrews similarly presented Jesus as the culmination of a chain of prophets in all of whom the spirit of God had resided.<sup>324</sup> The Pseudo-Clementine Homilies operate with a comparable succession of prophets, and the chain of prophets also appears among the Mandaeans and the Manichaeans.<sup>325</sup>

Schoeps, Andrae, and others postulated that the Qurʾānic concept of successive prophets developed out of the Jewish Christian chain of prophets as we know it from the Book of Elchasai and other works.<sup>326</sup> The similarity is obvious. Like their Jewish Christian predecessors, the Qurʾānic prophets bear the same message from Adam, or at least from Noah, until "today," and though the prophets are no longer incarnations of the same pre-existing figure, they are united by the fact that all are members of the same prophetic line: all are descendants of Noah and Abraham, in whose offspring God had placed prophethood and the book (57:26); all are descendants of Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Israel, as we are told with reference to a selection of them (19:58). The trouble is that shorn of their divinity and identity as incarnations of the same figure, the prophets who succeed one another have no diagnostically Jewish Christian features. Mainstream Christians sometimes speak of something close to a chain of prophets too. Jacob of Sarugh, for example, lists Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, his twelve sons, Moses, Aaron, Eliezer (cf.

<sup>323</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 11:1–3, in Klijn and Reinink, *Patristic Evidence*, 223.

<sup>324</sup> See Part One, p. 242.

<sup>325</sup> Cf. Clement (attrib.), *Homilies*, II, 15; III, 20. John C. Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions* (Leiden, 1996), 5–30; Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 293, 296ff.

<sup>326</sup> Schoeps, *Theologie*, 335–36; Ahrens, *Muhammed als Religionsstifter*, 130–31; Andrae, *Mohammed*, 99–107; cf. also Andrae, *Person Muhammeds*, 292–93.

I Chron. 15: 24), the Levite priests, David, Samuel, Ezechiel, Isaiah, and all the prophets as rejoicing at Mary's role in the economy of salvation. In another passage, he lists Adam, Seth, Noah and his three sons, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, his companion Hur, Joshua, Aaron and the Levites, David, Daniel, Jephta, Gideon, Samson, the twelve (minor) prophets, Samuel, Jeremiah, Ezechiel, Isaiah, and all righteous people in illustration of the many generations who had died before Mary.<sup>327</sup> Both passages envisage these figures as forming a chain of righteous people, many of them prophets. The case for a Jewish Christian origin of the Qurʾānic chain thus has to rest on the names included and excluded, and this does not get us anywhere. According to Epiphanius, the Ebionites accepted Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Aaron, and Christ, but not Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezechiel, Elijah, and Elisha.<sup>328</sup> This fits the Qurʾān, which also accepts Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, and Christ, and which only makes minimal reference to the great Old Testament prophets, though it does mention both Elijah and Elisha in an approving way (6:85f.; 37:123, 130; 38:48). In addition, however, the Ebionites rejected David and Solomon, whereas the Qurʾān thoroughly approves of both.<sup>329</sup> A passage in the Pseudo-Clementines enumerates Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Jesus, who are all mentioned in the Qurʾān (Enoch twice, under the name of Idrīs, the other six repeatedly).<sup>330</sup> But the Pseudo-Clementines reject John the Baptist,<sup>331</sup> who is accepted in the Qurʾān, so again there is no direct carry-over. It is of course likely that there were many different versions of the Jewish Christian chain and that local differences developed in the course of time, so it remains perfectly possible that the Jewish Christian and the Qurʾānic chains are connected, but where is the evidence for it? None of those postulat-

ing a genetic relationship between these chains has actually tried to prove it.

The only evidence I can think of is the Meccan verse which tells us that “for every prophet We established an enemy—the demons of mankind and of the spirits (*shayāṭīna ʿl-insi waʿl-jinni*, 6:112). This is a distinctive position which is not enunciated or elaborated in the rest of the Qurʾān, but which is characteristic of the Pseudo-Clementines. Here every prophet has a false or unrighteous counterpart, so that the history of error always runs parallel to that of salvation. There are ten pairs of opposites (syzygies) from Adam until the destruction of the temple, including Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, Ishmael and Isaac, and Simon Magus (the arch-villain of the Pseudo-Clementines) and Peter (who narrates all this). The inferior half of the syzygies always comes first, for this world is female whereas the next is male. (Accordingly, false prophecy is also female whereas true prophecy is male, but the false prophets themselves are male, of course).<sup>332</sup> Though the Qurʾān has different heroes, there can hardly be much doubt that it is espousing the syzygy idea in 6:112. Syzygies (known to the Ismailis as *addād*) are not exclusive to the Pseudo-Clementines, of course; we also find them in Valentinian Gnosticism, for example, but here the pairs are male and female without representing truth and falsehood (thus Mind is paired with Truth). The fact that the Qurʾān has *both* a prophetic chain *and* a residual syzygy idea reminiscent of that in the Pseudo-Clementines strengthens the case for the view that Jewish Christians are lurking in the background here. But it is only after the conquests, when chains of divine prophets representing incarnations of the same holy spirit reappear, that the continuity with Jewish Christianity is obvious.<sup>333</sup>

Adherents of the Jewish Christian origin of the Qurʾānic chain sometimes hold that the concept was transmitted to the Messenger by Manichaeans,<sup>334</sup> but as Ahrens notes, this is most unlikely.<sup>335</sup> Leaving aside the points already raised against the idea

<sup>327</sup> Jacob of Sarugh, *On the Mother of God*, 711–12, 717–18 = 91–92, 97–98 (homily on the death of the virgin).

<sup>328</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30.18.4–5. They also accepted Joshua, but only as Moses' (political) successor.

<sup>329</sup> See *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, s.vv.

<sup>330</sup> Clement (attrib.), *Homilies*, XVII, 4; cf. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., and *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, s.v. “Idrīs.”

<sup>331</sup> Clement (attrib.), *Homilies*, II, 23, where he is the teacher of Simon Magus, presumably directed against baptists such as the future Mandaeans. For others who took a negative view of John the Baptist, see Majella Franzmann, *Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Writings* (Edinburgh, 1996), 52–53 (“The Testimony of Truth”).

<sup>332</sup> See F. Stanley Jones, “Jewish Christianity of the *Pseudo-Clementines*,” in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian “Heretics*,” ed. Marjanen and Luomanen, 316ff, listing all ten syzygies; Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Heresiology and the (Jewish-)Christian Novel,” in *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity*, ed. Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin (Tübingen, 2008), 284–85.

<sup>333</sup> See Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 221–32, 281–303, 326–41; cf. also chap. 19, *passim*.

<sup>334</sup> Schoeps, *Theologie*, 110, 335; Andrae, *Mohammed*, 105ff.

<sup>335</sup> Ahrens, *Muhammed als Religionsstifter*, 131.

of Manichaean elements in the Qurʾān (above, no. 10), their chain is very different from the Messenger's even if we disregard the fact that they rejected Moses, the hero of the Qurʾān.<sup>336</sup> If the Qurʾānic and the Manichaean chains are indeed related, it is in terms of shared origins, not transmission from the one to the other.

#### 14. Jesus' Birth under a Palm Tree

In sura 19, we are told that after Mary conceived, she withdrew to a remote place, and that her labor pains drove her to the trunk of a palm tree, where she exclaimed that she wished she had died. A voice then cried out from under her that she should not grieve, for God had placed a spring under her and the palm tree would provide her with ripe dates, so she should eat and drink and be content (19:23–26). God sheltered her and her son on a restful hill endowed with a spring, as we are also told, probably with reference to the same episode, though there is no mention of a palm tree here (23:50). The story is rather odd: Mary is driven to the palm tree by labor pains (*al-makhbād*), but the divine consolation takes the form of food and drink, not exactly what a woman needs in that situation. It is in the context of the flight to Egypt after Jesus' birth that the story of the palm tree appears in the earlier *Liber Requiei* (dating from fifth century and fully preserved only in Ethiopic translation)<sup>337</sup> and in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (a Latin reworking of the Protoevangelium of James which was probably composed in the early seventh century).<sup>338</sup> It is in this context that it fits: where could Mary and Joseph find food to eat on such a journey, as unbelieving people would ask.<sup>339</sup> If the Qurʾān had not mentioned Mary's

<sup>336</sup> For a detailed exposition, see Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm*, 5–30.

<sup>337</sup> Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 34, 93, 292–94 (Ethiopian *L. Requiei*, 5–7, and Georgian parallel); cf. Shoemaker, "Christmas in the Qurʾān: The Qurʾānic Account of Jesus' Nativity and Palestinian Local Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28 (2003): 20–21, quoting the Ethiopic *Liber Requiei*. In this work we hear only of the palm tree providing food, though it is apparently by a spring that it does so.

<sup>338</sup> Pseudo-Matthew, 20:2, ed. Jan Gijssels, *Libri de Nativitate Mariae: Pseudo-Matthaei Evangelium Textum et Commentarium* (Turnhout, 1997), 460–65; for the dating, see 66–67; trans. in Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 109. Here both the palm tree and the spring appear.

<sup>339</sup> Pseudo-Cyril, "On the Virgin," in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 9a = 634; Campagnano, *Omèlie Copte*, par. 20; Bombeck, "Pseudo-Kyrrillos," par. 20. There was also a story of an

labor pains, one would have assumed its account of the palm tree miracle to relate to the flight to Egypt as well, for the passage does not actually mention Jesus' birth. But the Qurʾān omits the flight to Egypt (a feature it shares with the second-century *Ascension of Isaiah*).<sup>340</sup> Given that Mary is driven to the palm tree by labor pains and that the continuation, again in agreement with the *Ascension of Isaiah*, has her bring Jesus to her people, we are probably meant to infer that the palm tree was his birthplace.

If Jesus was born under the palm tree, he evidently was not born in a stable or cave, as mainstream Christians believed.<sup>341</sup> He could still have been born in or near Bethlehem, but the Qurʾān displays no interest in the location of the palm tree, and this is noteworthy, for Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, as prophesied, was crucial to his messianic status for Christians. In fact, a passage in the Gospel of John (7:41–43) has a crowd deny that he was the messiah on the grounds that the messiah was expected to come from Bethlehem in Judea, not from Galilee. The Gospel of Luke duly assures us that although Jesus grew up in the Galilean town of Nazareth, he did in fact come from Bethlehem. But this is not an issue in the Qurʾān. In line with this, the Qurʾānic Jesus is the messiah only in name (cf. below, no. 15).

It has been argued that the Qurʾānic conflation of the stories of Jesus' birth and the miracle of the palm tree reflects developments within mainstream Christianity. According to Shoemaker, the so-called Kathisma church on the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, originally built in celebration of the nativity, had come to be associated with the flight to Egypt by the sixth century at the latest. The spring from which Mary drank during the flight to Egypt is explicitly located on the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem by the pilgrim of Piacenza, who wrote between 560 and 570, i.e., around the time of Muḥammad's birth; and the pilgrim also mentions that a church had been built there. Shoemaker proposes that the Qurʾānic conflation of the themes of nativity and palm

Egyptian tree which bent down to worship Christ when the holy family arrived there, but it did not deliver food (Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, V, 21.8–11).

<sup>340</sup> "Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah," chap. 11, relating Jesus' birth and continuing: "And they took him and went to Nazareth in Galilee."

<sup>341</sup> Cf. Luke 2:7 for the stable (manger). The cave appears already in Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chap. 70, 78; and the Protoevangelium of James, 18:1.



tree miracle could be rooted in the liturgy associated with this church, which he assumes to have combined the themes of flight into Egypt and nativity. He further takes this hypothesis to imply that the Muslims must have picked up the story of Mary and the palm tree after the conquests, though this does not follow, of course.<sup>342</sup> We need not even postulate that Qurayshī merchants had frequented the church during their trading journeys,<sup>343</sup> for narratives connecting the story of the palm tree with Jesus' birth could have traveled from the Bethlehem region to Arabia, disseminated by popular preachers. This would dispose of the problem that services at the Kathisma church, a bastion of Chalcedonian (Melkite) Christianity, were conducted in Greek, a language that the Quraysh are not normally assumed to have mastered (though it is not impossible that some did); the story would have passed into other languages as it spread.

Shoemaker's hypothesis is not without its problems, however. For a start, it is based on the assumption that one and the same church had come to be associated with two hitherto separate themes, nativity and flight to Egypt, but archaeologists have discovered *two* churches on the Bethlehem road, located within a couple of hundred meters of each other,<sup>344</sup> so maybe the themes had a church each. Further, the postulated conflation of the two themes at the Kathisma church is not actually reflected in the account of the Piacenza pilgrim, who does not mention Jesus' birth at all, only the water from which Mary drank during her flight to Egypt.<sup>345</sup> He does not even mention the palm tree, so what his account offers is at best a parallel to the Qurʾānic verse 23:50, in which God shelters Mary and her son on a restful hill endowed with a spring.<sup>346</sup>

<sup>342</sup> Shoemaker, "Christmas in the Qurʾān," esp. 12–13, 35–36, 38–39; cf. also Shoemaker, "The (Re?)Discovery of the Kathisma Church and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antique Palestine," *Maria 2* (2001): 21–72.

<sup>343</sup> A possibility considered by Dye, "Lieux saints communs," 110.

<sup>344</sup> Shoemaker, "Christmas in the Qurʾān," 31ff., and the literature by R. Avner cited there.

<sup>345</sup> Shoemaker takes the pilgrim to be describing the "new Kathisma" (the more recent of the two neighboring churches), but the "new Kathisma" was an octagonal structure built around a rock much like the Dome of the Rock (which it is now held to have inspired), and the Piacenza pilgrim does not convey the impression that the church he saw enclosed or covered the rock and its water, so it probably was not this church he was describing.

<sup>346</sup> Shoemaker, "Christmas in the Qurʾān," 28–29, arguing that the palm tree was no longer there because several versions of the legend say that Christ rewarded it by transferring it to paradise.

Above all, the Kathisma church was Chalcedonian, and Chalcedonian Christians generally denied that Mary had suffered labor pains; indeed, so did most mainstream Christians. Already Moses' mother had given birth to her son without much pain, as we are told by Josephus (d. c. 100),<sup>347</sup> and Jesus' mother soon followed suit. In the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the child simply appears to an astonished Mary, who has been pregnant for a mere two months (cf. Isaiah 66:7: "before the pangs of labor arrived, a male child came forth and was born"); and we are told that many refused to believe that she had given birth on the grounds that "the midwife did not go up (to her) and we did not hear cries of pain."<sup>348</sup> The Syriac *Odes of Solomon*, perhaps composed in the early second century, also tells us that Mary gave birth without a midwife and that she labored without pain.<sup>349</sup> The passage from the *Ascension of Isaiah* is quoted in the *Acts of Peter* (a work eventually declared heretical) and the same point is made by Irenaeus (a bastion of orthodoxy),<sup>350</sup> and thereafter the idea of Mary's freedom from labor pains spread together with the doctrine that her virginity was left intact by the birth. Mary was cast as the antitype of Eve, who was cursed for her disobedience by painful childbirth, and Mary's freedom from labor pain was endorsed by Epiphanius,<sup>351</sup> Gregory of Nyssa

But if it played an important role in the legend, it would have been commemorated at the site one way or the other. The Kathisma church does have a mosaic depicting a palm tree, but it was only put in around 800, when the church was being converted into a mosque, and it displays the palm tree with two smaller ones next to it, which does not fit the legend. A single palm tree does figure on the back of a sixth-century ivory, but it depicts the flight into Egypt, not the nativity.

<sup>347</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, II, 218; cf. Exod. Rabbah, 1:20; bSotah, 12a (my thanks to Adam Silverstein for getting my references straight).

<sup>348</sup> "Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah," 11:14, trans. Knibb, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:175. In the Protoevangelium of James, 19:1, the child also seems simply to appear, though here a midwife has been summoned (compare the Muslim exegetical view that Mary gave birth as soon as she had conceived in Charfi, "Christianity," 116); but the absence of labor pains is not explicitly mentioned.

<sup>349</sup> *Odes of Solomon*, ed. and trans. Charlesworth, 19:8.

<sup>350</sup> Acts of Peter, 24 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 417); Irenaeus in P. F. Buck, "Are the 'Ascension of Isaiah' and the 'Odes of Solomon' Witnesses to an Early Cult of Mary?," in *De Primordiis Cultus Mariani*, vol. 4, *De Cultu B. V. Mariae respectu habito ad mythologiam et libros apocryphos*, Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani in Lusitania Anno 1967 Celebrati (Rome, 1970), 392.

<sup>351</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30.20.4.

(d. c. 394),<sup>352</sup> Hesychius of Jerusalem (d. c. 433),<sup>353</sup> Theodotus of Ancyra (d. before 446),<sup>354</sup> Severus of Antioch (d. 538),<sup>355</sup> Oecumenius (late sixth/early seventh-century),<sup>356</sup> and John of Damascus (d. 749),<sup>357</sup> as well as others in the Latin West.<sup>358</sup> Judging from the web, the idea is still alive today.

Syriac and Coptic authors were also familiar with it, though they tended not to stress it because it lent itself to docetist interpretations of the incarnation (a much more pressing problem in the eastern provinces than in the rest of the Byzantine empire, “aphthartodoceism” notwithstanding). Ephrem does tell Mary that “your womb escaped the pangs of the curse” and that she bore Christ “truly and really but without pain,” but he also speaks of “the pains of his [birth].”<sup>359</sup> And though both Isaac of Antioch (fl. c. 450) and Jacob of Sarugh (d. 521) mention that the birth left Mary’s virginity intact, the former does not seem to mention her freedom from labor pain, while the latter explicitly mentions that “birth pangs smote the young mother.”<sup>360</sup> Narsai (fl. late 5th century) also mentions her birth pangs, though he assures us that God’s blessing to Mary did away with the prison of birth pangs in which He had confined Eve.<sup>361</sup> That Mary gave birth without pain is stated in Coptic sermons attributed to Cyril of Alexandria and Cyril of Jerusalem,<sup>362</sup> but another Coptic sermon (attributed to Demetrius

of Antioch) mentions that Mary felt the birth pains blowing over her like the droppings of rain water and that she was miserable, even though it also quotes Isaiah 66:7 (“Before she felt the pangs of childbirth she brought forth”).<sup>363</sup> In short, Mary’s birth pangs are sometimes accepted, but no Christian author of late antiquity known to me highlights Mary’s suffering after the fashion of the Qurʾān, where her pain is such that she wishes she was dead; and the fact that Hesychius of Jerusalem celebrates her freedom from pain is particularly significant in that his sermons show us the themes that people would hear during the feast of the nativity in the Jerusalem region, including the Kathisma church.

How then are we to account for the Qurʾānic version of the nativity? It has been suggested that Jesus’ birth under a palm tree is modeled on the myth of Apollo’s birth under a palm tree,<sup>364</sup> but this seems unlikely, given that the Qurʾānic passage is not really about the birth of Jesus at all, but rather about the miraculous appearance of sustenance for Mary. Busse suggests that the pregnant Mary is depicted along the lines of Hagar, who wandered in the desert and abandoned her enfeebled child when an angel saved her and the child from death by making a spring appear (Gen. 21:14–19; cf. 16:7).<sup>365</sup> But this goes better with the account in 23:50, in which only the spring is mentioned, than with that in sura 19, in which the palm tree appears along with food and water. The main inspiration behind the Qurʾānic account is probably the Revelation of John. Here we read of a woman who is “crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth” and who flees into the wilderness after giving birth and is nourished there for a time (Rev. 12:1–6, 13f.). Ancient authors generally agreed that the woman stood for the church fleeing from the Romans about to destroy Jerusalem,<sup>366</sup> but she also evoked Mary to them, Mary being the “type of the

<sup>352</sup> Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 158, citing Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs*, 13 (where Isaiah 66:7 is invoked).

<sup>353</sup> Robert S. Pittman, “The Marian Homilies of Hesychius of Jerusalem” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1974), 82 (MPG 93, col. 1463); cf. 62 (col. 1453), where Hesychius even claims that Mary removed the pains of childbirth for all women!

<sup>354</sup> Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 271, citing Theodotus, “On the Mother of God and on the Nativity,” in *Patrologia Orientalis* 19, 330–31.

<sup>355</sup> Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London, 1963), 123.

<sup>356</sup> Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, trans. John N. Suggit (Washington, DC, 2006), 6.19.7ff.

<sup>357</sup> Graef, *Mary*, 158.

<sup>358</sup> Buck, “Are the ‘Ascension of Isaiah’ and the ‘Odes of Solomon’ Witnesses,” 392, citing Venantius Fortunatus (d. c. 600).

<sup>359</sup> Ephrem in Robert Murray, “Mary, the Second Eve in the Early Syriac Fathers,” *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1971): 379.

<sup>360</sup> Jacob of Sarugh, *Homilies on the Nativity*, trans. and ed. Thomas Kollampampil (Piscataway, NJ, 2010), homily 1, v. 826; homily 2, v. 188; cf. Landersdorfer, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 288.

<sup>361</sup> Frederick G. McLeod, trans. and ed., *Narsai’s Metrical Homilies (Patrologia Orientalis 40/1)* (Turnhout, 1979), no. I, 249, 467–68; cf. no. III, 60 (pp. 53, 67, 109).

<sup>362</sup> Cyril of Rakote (Alexandria), “On the Virgin Mary,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, 717–24, 719 (31b); Pseudo-

Cyril, “On the Cross,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, fol. 17a = 779; Campagnano, *Omélie Copte*, 107, par. 47.

<sup>363</sup> Demetrius, “On the Birth of Our Lord,” in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, 684 (fols 58a–58b).

<sup>364</sup> Thus Suleiman A. Mourad, “From Hellenism to Christianity and Islam: The Origin of the Palm Tree Story Concerning Mary and Jesus in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Qurʾān,” *Oriens Christianus* 86 (2002): 206–16. Mourad is unwittingly reviving an old idea, cf. Rösch, “Jesusmythen,” 437, with reference to a publication of 1832; but already Rösch argues against it.

<sup>365</sup> Busse, “Leben Jesu,” 19.

<sup>366</sup> John Barton and John Muddiman, eds., *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford, 2001), *ad loc.*

church.”<sup>367</sup> Thus Epiphanius focused on Revelations 12:13f. in his search for evidence regarding Mary’s death, concluding from its wording that she had not died, though he was not sure.<sup>368</sup> As Andrew of Caesarea remarks, there were some who took the woman to be the Theotokos, though he himself agreed with Methodius, who took her to stand for the church.<sup>369</sup> His younger contemporary Oecumenius nonetheless persisted in identifying the woman with Mary, doing his best to explain away her birth pangs.<sup>370</sup> (But “if one interprets the sun-clad woman in Rev. 12 as being Mary, then one would have to say that she was not exempt,” reads one contemporary comment by a David Bjornstad to a web discussion of whether Mary was exempt from labor pains.)<sup>371</sup> Since the woman in Revelations 12 gives birth before fleeing into the desert, she cannot be Mary unless she is fleeing to Egypt, and this is in fact what Oecumenius takes her to be doing.<sup>372</sup> According to Revelations 12 the sun-clad woman was nourished in the desert for awhile, and from the fifth century onwards a story circulated about how dates and the water had miraculously appeared to her when she rested under a palm tree on her way to Egypt.<sup>373</sup> Oecumenius does not mention the story of the palm tree, but others would seem to have taken this story to explain how the woman who fled into the desert was nourished there, and this would be how the themes of labor pains and nourishment came to be combined. All that is missing in the Qurʾān is the information that the episode took place during the flight to Egypt. Whether it was mainstream or marginal Christians who put Revelations 12 and the story of the palm tree together is impossible to tell.

<sup>367</sup> Cf. Ephrem in Murray, “Mary, the Second Eve,” 384 (“Mary, type of the church”); in Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 115 (“We call the Church by the name of Mary”). Similarly Zeno of Verona, Augustine, and Ambrose in Graef, *Mary*, 56–57, 97–98.

<sup>368</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 78.11.3–4; Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 12.

<sup>369</sup> Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, trans. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou (Washington, DC, 2011), chap. 33.12.1.

<sup>370</sup> Oecumenius, *Commentary*, 6.19.2; 6.19.7ff.

<sup>371</sup> Catholic Answers, “Catholic Answers Forums,” accessed November 2015, <http://forums.catholic.com/showthread.php?t=11734>. Similarly Timothy George, “The Blessed Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective,” in *Mary, Mother of God*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI, 2004), 110.

<sup>372</sup> Oecumenius, *Commentary*, 7.3.9.

<sup>373</sup> See above, notes 337–38.

## 15. Jesus as the Messiah and the Word

Jesus is regularly called *al-masīḥ* (the messiah, Christ) in the Qurʾān, but he does not die to undo the sin of Adam and redeem mankind, the role of the Christian messiah as normally understood; he is never called king; and he is not expected to come back on the day of judgment. Some scholars disagree as regards his return, on the grounds that a verse says that Jesus is a sign of the hour (*la-ʿalamun lil-sāʿa*), i.e., of the day of judgment, so that one should not doubt it (43:61).<sup>374</sup> This has been taken to mean that Jesus will return on the last day, but it is hard to see why: the point of the statement is that the day of judgment will certainly come, however much people may doubt or deny it, and Jesus is invoked as an authority for this, not as somebody who will inaugurate it. The Qurʾān devotes enormous attention to the day of judgment, which is described and foretold in many suras, so if the Messenger expected Jesus to return on that day, he would surely have said so repeatedly too. But in fact he never explicitly says so.

In fact, the Qurʾānic Jesus does not have the qualifications for status as the Christian messiah, for as we have seen, he is not born in Bethlehem (see above, no. 14), and three passages implicitly identify him as an Aaronid rather than a member of David’s house (see above, no. 12). Jesus was a strange messiah, then: not of David’s house, not a king in any sense, and not a sacrificial victim who died for our sins either. He was the messiah only in the sense that this is what everyone called him, perhaps already in pre-Islamic Arabia.<sup>375</sup> It is notable that although Jesus is always the messiah in Jewish Christian writings after his union with the heavenly Christ, it is never explained what he will do in that capacity. After the conquests Jacob of Edessa noted with satisfaction that the Hagarenes held Jesus to be of Davidic descent and the messiah, a position they apparently expounded with enthusiasm.<sup>376</sup> This implies that they had come to credit Mary with Davidic descent too, but Jacob of Edessa does not actually say so. Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767) did give her a genealogy going back to David, however, or more

<sup>374</sup> The phrase can also be read as “knowledge for the hour” (*la-ʿilmun lil-sāʿa*), but “knowledge for” is not idiomatic.

<sup>375</sup> Michel Hayek, “L’Origine des termes ‘Isā al-Masīḥ (Jésus-Christ) dans le Coran,” *L’Orient Syrien* 7 (1962): 366ff.

<sup>376</sup> F. Nau, “Lettre de Jacques d’Édesse sur la généalogie de la sainte Vierge,” *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 6 (1901): 518 = 523–24.

precisely to Solomon, without reference to Aaron.<sup>377</sup> But others explained that she was an Aaronid.<sup>378</sup> Jesus still was not much of a messiah by Jewish or Christian standards, but at least there were some who now gave him the requisite descent. By then, Jesus was also expected to return to the earth on the day of judgment, an idea amply attested in *ḥadīth*.

The Messenger also describes Jesus as “a word (*kalima*) from God/Him” (3:39, 45) and, in slightly greater detail, as “His [God’s] *word* which He conveyed [lit. threw] to Mary and a *spirit* [proceeding] from Him” (4:171). This last formulation appears to reflect the Syriac understanding of the annunciation. In Luke 1:35 the angel informs Mary that “the holy *spirit* will come upon you and the *power* of the Most High will overshadow you,” and Syrian churchmen generally took the power of the Most High to mean God’s Word (the *logos*).<sup>379</sup> As Jacob of Sarugh explains, the holy spirit sanctified Mary’s womb while the power was the word that entered it and dwelled there.<sup>380</sup> Exactly what the Messenger took “the word” to be is anything but clear,<sup>381</sup> but one is surprised that he had no compunctions about calling Jesus *al-kalima*, for as the word of God, Jesus was anything but an ordinary human being: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” as the opening of the Gospel of John says. As the *logos*, Jesus was divine. The Jewish Christians who held Jesus to have been a wholly human prophet duly denied that he was the *logos*,<sup>382</sup> but the Messenger betrays no awareness of the normal implications of the term, for all that the Christians of South Arabia seem to have accepted them.<sup>383</sup> On the contrary, he stresses that Jesus was *merely* God’s word and messenger in polem-

ics against believers in the Trinity (4:171), though it would have been an absurd statement to make in debate with mainstream Christians. The Messenger also seems unaware that Christians held God to have created the world through His *logos* in the sense of Christ or, as the Christians often put it, that Christ was the creator of the world. It is hard to avoid the impression that *al-kalima* was simply an epithet for Jesus that did not carry much meaning, much like *al-masīḥ*.

All in all, the Qur’ānic Christ is not the son of God, nor is he the messiah or the *logos* in anything but name; he is not baptized, crucified, or resurrected, and he has no redemptive role: some verbal residues notwithstanding, all the central doctrines of mainstream Christianity are missing. One takes it that whatever they may have been, the local Christians were not of the mainstream kind.

## 16. Conclusion

In sum, the view that only mainstream Christianity is reflected in the Qur’ān cannot be said to accord with the evidence for either the Meccan or the Medinese suras. Standard Christian doctrines about Jesus are absent, while numerous non-standard ideas are present: no mainstream Christians of the Messenger’s time saw Jesus as a prophet to the Israelites, denied that he was the son of God, credited him with a revealed book, held him to have confirmed the Torah, took the virgin birth to mean that God blew His breath into a model, denied that the Jews had crucified Jesus, held his mother to be a Levite, nor envisaged Jesus as having been born under a palm tree. All gentile Christians seem rapidly to have accepted that Jesus was the pre-existing (usually pre-eternal) *logos* and son of God, that Mary was of Davidic descent, that Jesus died on the cross, and that he had been born in a cave or stable; and it was only in Mesopotamia and Iran that the concept of the prophets as constituting a chain of divine incarnations survived, this being probably where it had originated and where the Christian leadership had no state support and could not suppress it.<sup>384</sup> With the exception of Jesus’ birth under a palm tree, it is in Jewish Christianity that we find the roots of the non-standard doctrines. Some of them could be the Messenger’s own innovations, but the existence of similar beliefs in both Jewish Christianity

<sup>377</sup> Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, series 1, ed. J. Barth (Leiden, 1879–81), 712. Ṭabarī himself completes the genealogy by identifying Solomon as the son of David in the genealogy he gives for Joseph, identical with Mary’s in its upper links.

<sup>378</sup> Charfi, “Christianity,” 111–12.

<sup>379</sup> Brock, “Passover, Annunciation,” 226–27. For the concatenation of word and spirit in the Old Testament, and apparently already in Sumerian and Babylonian thought, see O’Shaughnessy, *Word of God in the Qur’ān*, 25.

<sup>380</sup> Sebastian Brock, “Mary in Syriac Tradition,” (the earlier of two articles with the same title by the same author) in *Mary’s Place in Christian Dialogue*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Slough, UK, 1983), 184–85.

<sup>381</sup> On this question, see O’Shaughnessy, *Word of God in the Qur’ān*, 19ff, 34ff.

<sup>382</sup> See Part One, 241 (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 3.27.3).

<sup>383</sup> Cf. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part 4, 319–20, cf. 311, citing the Martyrium Arethae, said to date from between 529 and 597.

<sup>384</sup> For all this, see Crone, *Nativist Prophets*, 281–301, esp. 290–93.

and Manichaeism, a religion rooted in an Elchasaite community, makes it highly unlikely that this was true of many of them.

Even if we insist against the evidence that all Jewish Christians were dead and gone by the Messenger's time, a number of doctrines reflected in the Qurʾān take us back to the first three Christian centuries: thus the doctrine of Jesus as a purely human being and prophet sent to the Israelites, Mary as a Levite, docetism in respect of food intake and the crucifixion, the syzygies, and the chain of prophets (if actually present in the book). The denial of bodily resurrection by the Messenger's opponents, another key issue in the Qurʾān, is at home in the same period, but we do at least know that this question remained a contested issue for centuries thereafter.<sup>385</sup> And even if we strike out the prophetic chain as too uncertain, dismiss the

docetism in respect of food intake and the crucifixion as recent developments thanks to the survival of some unknown Gnostics, and for good measure explain Jesus' human status as a case of the Messenger reinventing the wheel, we are left with two doctrines (Jesus as a prophet to the Israelites and Mary as an Aaronid) which disappeared so fast from mainstream Christianity that they must have been transmitted to Arabia by people whose views had been formed in the first or second centuries. The most obvious candidates are Jewish Christians. They did not necessarily come to Arabia in the wake of the Roman wars against the Jews in the first and second centuries. But whatever the date of their arrival, they must in fact have been present in the localities in which the Messenger was active.

<sup>385</sup> Cf. Patricia Crone, "The Qurʾānic *Mushrikūn* and the Resurrection, Part II," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 76 (2012): 1–20.