

Nasrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and *hanīf* (ἔθνικός): studies on the religious vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam¹

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(1) *nasrānī*

In the Greek gospels Jesus is associated with the town of Nazareth (Ναζαρέθ, Ναζαρά, etc.; Syriac Nās(ə)raθ²), and is himself given the epithet ‘Nazarene’ (Ναζαρηνός) or ‘Nazoraean’ (Ναζωραῖος). The two adjectives are used interchangeably, with no difference in meaning—sometimes one is merely a textual variant for the other—and there are enough passages to show that the authors of the gospels, at least, did understand them to refer to Nazareth. The endings *-ηνός* and *-αῖος* are both used in post-classical Greek to form adjectives and they fluctuate with each other also in the case of Ἑσσηνός versus Ἑσσαιός, ‘Essene’. There are other examples, in the Septuagint and elsewhere, for the representation of North-West Semitic (affricative?) *š* by Greek ζ (ancient [zd]), and also for the representation of *šwa mobile* both by *a* (as in Ναζαρέθ, Ναζαρηνός, Latin Nazareth, Nazaraeus, Nazarenus) and by *ω* (as in Ναζωραῖος), the latter notably before laryngeals and *r*.³ There is, in short, no sound reason to doubt that ‘Nazarene’ and ‘Nazoraean’ do in fact mean ‘the man of Nazareth’.⁴

The plural *Ναζωραῖοι* occurs only once in the Bible, in Acts 24:5, where Paul’s opponents refer to him as the ‘leader of the sect of the Nazoraeans’ (πρωτοστάτης τῆς τῶν Ναζωραίων αἵρέσεως). This passage could have been understood as giving biblical sanction to the use of the name Nazoraeans to designate the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, as a community, but in fact in

¹ Extracts from the first and second sections of this paper were read at the Seminar for Arabian Studies, in London, in 1998 and 2000 respectively, and a version of the first section was read, and also distributed in typescript, at a conference on ‘Die Inkulturation des Christentums im Sasanidenreich’, in Wittenberg in 1999. I am very grateful for written or oral comments received from A. Khosroyev, M. Kropp, W. Müller, N. Sims-Williams, but especially W. Sundermann and R. M. Voigt.

² In their diverging accounts of the nativity both Matthew and Luke have *Ναζαρέθ*, variant *-έρ*, but in the story of Jesus’s preaching in the synagogue of his home town the best lectio both in Mt. 4:13 and Lk. 4:16 seems to be *Ναζαρά*, with the variant readings *-ράθ*, *-ράτ*, *-ρέθ*, *-ρέτ*; *Ναζαρά* was thus presumably the reading in Q. The Pšittā and Vetus Syrus have *Nāsraθ* in all passages, but *Ναζαρά* suggests an Aramaic status absolutus *Nās(ə)rā, while *Ναζαρέθ* points to the status constructus Nās(ə)raθ, presumably abbreviated from a phrase meaning ‘Nazareth of Galilee’ (cf. *Ναζαρέθ τῆς Γαλιλαίας* in Mt. 21:11, Mk. 1:9). Palestinian Christian Aramaic *nzrt*, *nzryt*, *nzwrt*, and the adjectives *nzry*’, *nzwry*’ all clearly derive from Greek and have no relevance for determining the indigenous Aramaic form of the name.

³ Examples for *ω* for *šwa* in the Greek versions of the Old Testament are listed in Schaefer, 1942. The legitimacy of these spellings is now supported by the fact that in the fragment of the Hebrew text of Isaiah discovered at Qumran (IQIsa^a) there are several instances where, in a similar phonetic environment, the *šwa* of the Masoretic text is represented by *w*, e.g. Isa. 10:12 *pwry* (MT: *ῥῶτ*); Isa. 37:38 *hwrt* (MT: *’ārārūt*), as has been noted by Wise, 1992.

⁴ For the preceding, see Schaefer’s still fundamental article ‘*Ναζαρηνός, Ναζωραῖος*’ (Schaefer, 1942), with a survey of the older literature. The lasting achievement of Schaefer’s study is that it showed that there are no valid linguistic objections to the derivation of *Ναζωραῖος*, or of Mandaic *n’swr’y*’, from the name of Nazareth and thus took away the foundation for all the adventuresome theories that assigned some different meaning to those names; most of these had linked them to the Hebrew or Akkadian root *n-s-r*, ‘to observe, watch over, guard’ (Aramaic *n-t-r*, Arabic *n-z-r*) and many had gone on to claim that the non-existent town of Nazareth was invented by the Christian tradition to account for Jesus’s supposedly misunderstood epithet. The phantasmagoric school of Nazoraean studies has survived Schaefer’s attack (e.g. with Gärtner), but it has not found much favour with competent Semitists.

extant early writings it does not seem ever to be used as a current self-designation of Christians, and even in the medieval period ‘Nazoraean’ is not the usual word for ‘Christians’ in any language, with the exception only of Arabic. The earliest post-biblical reference is in Tertullian, who, writing around the year 200, says that Christ was called the Nazoraean and for this reason ‘the Jews call us Nazarenes because of him’.⁵ Then, around 331, Eusebius says of the place name Nazareth that ‘from this name the Christ was called a Nazoraean, and in ancient times we, who are now called Christians, were once called Nazarenes’;⁶ thus he attributes this designation to an unspecified past and seems consequently to imply that the name was not used by the Christians of his own time. But from the latter part of the fourth century onwards, the name Nazoraean is used by Christian authors specifically to designate one or more of the supposedly heretical sects of the type which in modern theological literature are usually called Jewish Christians,⁷ that is to say Christian sects which (according to their opponents) followed the law of the Jews, in particular as regards circumcision and the sabbath. The earliest extant work to use the name Nazoraean in this sense is the great anti-heretical compendium of Epiphanius, written about 377. Like Eusebius before him, Epiphanius claims that once all Christians were known as Nazoraean⁸ and that when Paul’s opponents called him the leader of the sect of the Nazoraean he did not disown the name because ‘at that time everyone called Christians by that name’.⁹ But, Epiphanius says, the name was later appropriated by a group of heretics, who, he claims, believe, with the Christians, that Jesus is the Christ and the son of God, but otherwise follow the law of the Jews. Besides this they read the gospel of Matthew ‘in Hebrew’ and ‘in Hebrew letters’. They are ‘Jews and nothing else’, but the Jews hate them and malign them three times a day in their synagogues, saying ‘May God curse the Nazoraean’.¹⁰ Similarly, Epiphanius’s younger contemporary and associate Jerome also says that there are heretics ‘in all the synagogues of the east among the Jews’ who are cursed by the Pharisees, and who ‘are usually called Nazoraean’.¹¹

It has been noted¹² that the older form of the Jewish *‘āmīdā* prayer did

⁵ *adv. Marc.* iv 8 (K/R 108): ‘nazaraeus uocari habebat secundum prophetiam Christus creatoris, unde et ipso nomine nos iudaei nazarenos appellant per eum’. The author’s point seems to be that the Marcionites maintained that the ‘prophecy’ cited in Mt. 2:23, ostensibly stating that the Messiah would be called a Nazoraean, refers not to Jesus, the son of the Stranger, but to the ‘creator’s Christ’, the Messiah expected by the Jews; against this Tertullian objects that the Jews themselves ‘call us Nazarenes because of him’, thus supposedly admitting that the Christ whom the Christians follow is indeed ‘the creator’s Christ’.

⁶ Eusebius, *Onomasticon*, in de Lagarde (1887: 278; K/R 150): *Ναζαρέθ. ὅθεν ὁ Χριστὸς Ναζωραῖος ἐκλήθη, καὶ Ναζαρηνοὶ τὸ παλαιὸν ἡμεῖς οἱ νῦν Χριστιανοί.* Jerome’s Latin translation of the *Onomasticon* (i.e. his *de situ et nominibus locorum Hebraicorum liber*) has (de Lagarde, 1887: 175; K/R 206): ‘... nos apud ueteres quasi pro obprobrio nazaraei dicebamus ...’.

⁷ ‘Jewish Christians’ is a calque on the German term ‘Judenchristen’, coined, I think, by the Tübingen school of Protestant theologians in the early part of the nineteenth century. One finds also ‘Jud(a)eo-Christians’ used with the same meaning, but this term has a different sense in English (e.g. in ‘the Judaeo-Christian tradition’, meaning the tradition which encompasses both Judaism and Christianity) and consequently seems inadequate in the special historical sense that concerns us here. The name Jewish Christians is certainly justified for those who were both Jews and Christians, that is, who counted themselves among the children of Israel and regarded Jesus to be the Messiah. But there are also those (e.g. the Babylonian Elchasaites) who had similar doctrines, but of whom we cannot say with certainty whether they actually considered themselves to be Jews. With reference to the latter it is perhaps better to put the words ‘Jewish Christians’ in inverted commas.

⁸ *Panarion* 29.1.3 (K/R 168).

⁹ *Panarion* 29.6.5 (K/R 170).

¹⁰ *Panarion* 29.9.2 (K/R 174).

¹¹ *Epistula* 112, 13 (K/R 200).

¹² The Jewish attestations for *nōšrī* and *nōšrīm* are conveniently collected and analysed in Pritz, 1988: 95–107, with references to the earlier literature.

indeed contain a malediction against the *nōsrīm*. In the Talmud Jesus of Nazareth is referred to several times as **yšw hnwšry** and there are two talmudic passages which refer, unfortunately rather vaguely, to **nwšrym**, in the plural. The more helpful of these is in the treatise on fasting (*Ta'ānīθ* 27b). We read here that in the days before the destruction of the temple certain worthies would not fast on Friday, Saturday or Sunday. All the authorities agree that in the case of Friday and Saturday this was out of respect for the Sabbath, but in the case of Sunday three different opinions are cited, among them that of Rabbi Yōḥannān (who apparently lived in the second half of the third century) who declared that they did not fast on Sunday 'because of the *nōsrīm*'. The implication would seem to be that the *nōsrīm* fasted on Sunday and that Jews avoided doing so, so as not to conform with them, or be confused with them. But in this case one must conclude that, here at least, *nōsrīm* does not simply mean 'Christians', but refers to some particular sect who, unlike the main stream of Christians, regarded Sunday not as feast day, but as a day of fasting.¹³ The other talmudic passage (*šβōdā zārā* 6a) refers to the 'day of the *nōsrīm*', presumably meaning Sunday, but this does not tell us much.

There is naturally a discrepancy between the statement by Tertullian (in the second century) that 'the Jews call us', the Christians in general, 'Nazarenes', and the statements by Epiphanius and Jerome (in the fourth century) that this is a name which Jews give to a particular sect of Christians. It is possible that, originally, 'Nazoraean' was the Jewish name for all the followers of the Jesus, first and foremost for the Christians in the synagogue, with whom, naturally, Jews had most intimate contact, but also for the Christians among the gentiles. This would explain why the author of Acts could depict the Jewish adversaries of the primitive Church as designating the Christians, and specifically the Jewish convert Paul, as 'Nazoraean' and also why the gentile Christian Tertullian could maintain that 'Nazarene' is the name that Jews give 'us', though it is also possible that Tertullian has merely extrapolated this information from Acts 24. But in any event, very soon Jewish usage must have restricted this name to one or more of those Christian sects which continued to claim allegiance to Jewish law. The talmudic passage *Ta'ānīθ* 27b suggests that this happened before the end of the third century. In giving the name Nazoraean to non-catholic Jewish Christians the catholic polemicists of the fourth century were consequently following established Jewish usage, but on the same basis it is also likely that the Christians in the synagogue called themselves Nazoraean as well.

Although Epiphanius describes the Nazoraean as a specific sect within the 'Jewish Christian' complex, he does not differentiate them particularly clearly from the other supposedly Judaizing denominations. Indeed, he says that the Nazoraean had the 'same doctrines' as the Cerinthians,¹⁴ that they were joined by Elchasaï and adopted his teachings and that Ebion (the alleged founder of the sect of the Ebionites) came out of the Nazoraean. Similarly, the author of the *Anacephalaisis* says that the Ebionites are similar to the Cerinthians and Nazoraean, 'to whom the heresies of the Sampsaeans and

¹³ The passage can hardly mean that the Jews avoided fasting on Sunday so as not to provoke the Christians, for (as pointed out by Pritz, 1988: 98–9) neither at the time of the temple nor at that of Yōḥannān would the Jews have had to fear Christian harassment. Although there seems to be no evidence that any Christian sect ever fasted on Sunday, the Manichaeans did (more precisely: the Manichaean electi fasted every day and ate only at night, with the auditors joining their daytime fast on Sundays). If the Nazoraean really fasted on Sundays then the Manichaean practice might be a retention from their own Jewish Christian (Elchasaite) roots.

¹⁴ *Panarion* 29.1.1 (K/R 168); ἕμοια φρονήματα.

the Elkesaites combined'.¹⁵ Epiphanius also has an entry¹⁶ on a sect which he calls Nasaraeans (*Νασαραῖτοι*, with *σ*), who supposedly also follow the Jewish law, practise circumcision, etc. They are not mentioned by any other author, and one must suspect that the 'Nazoraean' and 'Nasaraeans' are very much the same thing. Perhaps Epiphanius received his information about the latter from a source in Aramaic or Hebrew, where the name would have been written with *-š-*. One does gain the impression that 'Nazoraean' is not, or not always, the name of a clearly defined sect, but covers a large part of the 'Jewish Christian' spectrum.

In Mandaic writings we find the singular *n'swr'y'*, the plural *n'swr'yy'* and the abstract noun variously spelt *n's'rw't'* and *n'syrwt'*, forms which reflect the same fluctuating realization of the *šwa* as in *Ναζαρηνός* versus *Ναζωραῖος*.¹⁷ In most passages 'Nazoraean' is a self-designation of the Mandaeans, in effect a synonym of *m'nd'y'*, this despite the fact that Mandaeans are not Christians, and certainly not 'Jewish Christians', but followers of a religion that distances itself emphatically both from Judaism and from Christianity. On the other hand, in *Ginzā* (right) 55 the demon Jesus Christ calls himself a 'Nazoraean' and one who has come from the town of Nazareth (*nysr't*), and elsewhere, in a passage of bitter anti-Christian polemic,¹⁸ the souls of the departed Christians declare to Christ that they have given alms 'in the name of Jesus Christ, in the name of the holy¹⁹ spirit, in the name of the god of the Nazoraean (*'P'h' d-n'swr'yy'*)'. But Christ is forced to prostrate himself before the Mandaean deity Mandā *δ-ḥayyē*, and when the deceased Christians ask their lord who this is to whom he has humbled himself, Christ admits that it is one who has 'not mentioned the name of the holy spirit, not mentioned the name of Christ, not mentioned the name of the god of the Nazoraean'. The 'god of the Nazoraean' is mentioned, again in a polemical context, also in *Ginzā* (left) 33. It is clear from this that the name Nazoraean is not only one by which the Mandaeans refer to themselves, but also one which their scriptures attach to certain Christians. The only plausible explanation for this is that the surviving community of Mandaeans (alias Nazoraean) are in fact the descendants of an ancient Jewish Christian community who, presumably in the aftermath of some catastrophe, lost most of their own religious writings and subsequently adopted those of a rival community, indeed writings that contained polemics against their own former beliefs. But, despite taking over these alien scriptures, the community retains its old self-designation as 'Nazoraean' and evidently also some quite substantial remnants of its original beliefs and cultic practices (in particular the typically Jewish-Christian emphasis on baptism, the designation of the baptismal water as 'Jordan', the incorporation of several Old Testament patriarchs, and of John the Baptist, into the Mandaean pantheon, etc.). In this sense, the surviving Mandaean-Nazoraean represent a synthesis of two different religious traditions: that of Nazoraean Jewish Christianity and that of the non-Christian, non-Jewish, Babylonian, semi-Iranized and quasi-gnostic complex of authentic Mandaism.²⁰

¹⁵ Pseudo-Epiphanius, *Anacephalaiosis* ii 30.1 (K/R 160).

¹⁶ *Panarion* 18.

¹⁷ References in Drower and Macuch, 1963: 286–7 (with an untenable etymology), and in the index to Lidzbarski's translation of the *Ginzā*, s.v. 'Nāšōrāer'. For the correct explanation of these forms I refer once again to Schaefer.

¹⁸ *Ginzā* (right) 185.

¹⁹ I translate *rw'h' d-qwdš'* etymologically, although in Mandaic *qwdš'* is always negative (or ironic).

²⁰ All students of Mandaism have recognized that the *Ginzā*, and the Mandaean writings as a whole, consist of many different strata. Quite a few of the treatises are of manifestly non-Mandaean origin and some of these are possibly genuine Nazoraean (Jewish Christian) documents. The specifically Mandaean writings comprise an older stratum, evidently composed before the

Manes, the founder of Manichaeism, was born in Babylonia and brought up in a 'Jewish Christian' baptist sect, the Elchasaites; this is stated quite clearly by an-Nadīm, who claims that these Elchasaites were still 'numerous' in the swamps of southern Iraq in his own times, that is to say in the tenth century. The recently discovered Manichaean treatise in Greek, the so-called Cologne Mani Codex, confirms the Elchasaite background of Manichaeism and reports at some length on Manes's debates with the Baptists.²¹ Given the fact that the Mandaeans live in the same swampland as was formerly the refuge of the Elchasaites it is naturally tempting to think that their 'Nazoraean' ancestors were in fact Elchasaites, but there is no evidence that the Elchasaites ever actually called themselves Nazoraeans. For this reason one must consider the possibility that the Mandaeans descend from some other 'Jewish Christian' sect.

The Manichaean Kephalaia in Coptic, for their part, contain an account of a debate between Manes and a certain 'Nazoreus' (four times *Ναζορευς* and once *Ναζοραϊος*).²² The latter asks Manes whether his god is good or evil. Manes answers (one has rather the impression that he falls into the trap set by his opponent) that he is a judge (*κριτής*). The 'Nazoreus' replies: There is no judge who does not do evil, a view which Manes then endeavours to refute. The words attributed to the 'Nazoreus' seem quite foreign to 'Jewish Christianity', neither are they at all reminiscent of Mandaeism. Rather, the standpoint which opposes justice to goodness points unmistakably to Marcionism, but there is no likelihood that Marcionites ever called themselves Nazoraeans. It is possible that the passage in the Kephalaia is a conflation of two different stories: a debate between Manes and a Nazoraean, and a debate with a Marcionite. But it is perhaps more likely that the illiterate *Ναζορευς* of the Coptic text (and its presumed Greek prototype) is an inadequate rendering of an Aramaic original which called the prophet's opponent a *nzīrā*, 'Nazirite', here in the sense of 'Christian ascetic, hermit'.

Although, as mentioned, Epiphanius is the earliest datable author to use the name Nazoraean to designate a specific Christian sect, 'Nazoraeans' and 'Christians' are mentioned as two apparently separate communities a hundred years before Epiphanius in three Middle-Persian inscriptions set up, around the end of the third century, by the Zoroastrian high priest Kirdīr (Kerdīr?),²³ where he boasts of having suppressed seven hostile faiths: **yhwdy W šmny W blmny W n'sl'y**—variant **(n)'s(I')[y]**—**W klstydn W mktky W zndyky**.²⁴ Six of these names are linguistically transparent: **yhwdy** is Middle Persian (=Neo-Persian) *jahūd*, 'Jews', borrowed from Aramaic before the MP shift of initial *y-* to *j-*. **šmny** (*šaman*) is Middle Indian *šamaṇa-*, etc., Old Indian *śramaṇa-*;²⁵

amalgamation with Nazoraicism (these would include the above-mentioned anti-Nazoraean polemics), and a neo-Mandaeian stratum, composed after the acceptance of the Mandaeian doctrines by the Nazoraeans, and containing elements both of Mandaeism and of Nazoraicism.

²¹ For the Arabic testimonia about the Elchasaites and the parallels in the Cologne Codex see in detail de Blois, 1995. For the Elchasaite background of Manichaeism see (besides other recent studies) in particular Merkelbach, 1988.

²² *Kephalaia*, ch. 89 (pp. 221–3).

²³ The name of this person appears in the inscriptions as **kltyl**, **kltyly**, **kltyr**, **krtyr**, **Καρτεϊρ**, **Καρδειρ** and in Manichaean MP as **kyrdyr**. The readings adopted by modern scholars have varied according to their conceptions of its etymology, but I shall refrain, for the present, from reheating this old debate.

²⁴ See most recently Gignoux, 1991: 60 (synoptic edition) and 70 (translation and notes). The list is complete in the inscription on the Ka'ba i Zardušt (KKZ, lines 9–10) and partially extant in those at Naqš i Rostam (KNRm, line 29) and Sar Mašhad (KSM, line 14); for the latter two see also the edition by MacKenzie, 1989.

²⁵ Turner, *CDIAL* no. 12685.

blmny (*braman*) is Middle Indian *bramaṇa*-, etc., Old Indian *brāhmaṇa*-.²⁶ The two terms occur in juxtaposition in Indian texts at least from the time of Aśoka onwards,²⁷ basically for the adepts of the two principal directions in Indian spirituality: those who seek salvation in personal devotion and asceticism, and those who seek it through the performance of the Vedic rituals, but in the time of Kirdīr they mean in the first instance ‘Buddhist’ and ‘Brahmanist’ respectively. **(n)’s(I’)[y]**, apparently the reading in KNRm, and **n’sl’y**, in KKZ and KSM, are two different Persian representations of Aramaic *nāsrāy*-.²⁸ **klstyd’n** (*kristiyān*) is from Aramaic *kristiyān*, Greek *Χριστιανός*, with **-d-**, as often in MP inscriptions, as a pseudo-archaic spelling for intervocalic **-y-**.²⁹ **zndyky** (*zandīk*), like Armenian *zandīk* (in Eznik and Ehišê), Arabic *zindīq*, means ‘Manichaean’.³⁰ **mktky**, on the other hand, has hitherto defied interpretation.³¹ After the Jews, who stand alone at the beginning of the passage, the list seems to comprise three pairs: *šaman* and *braman* are two Indian religions, *nāsrāy* and *kristiyān* appear to be two kinds of Christians, and

²⁶ Turner, no. 9327.

²⁷ e.g. in Aśoka’s inscription at Kandahar (Bloch, 1950: XIII 23); *bramaṇa* va *śramaṇa* va *amñe* va *prasaṃda*, in the Greek version (Benveniste, 1964: line 17): *βραμεναι η και σραμενοι η και αλλοι τινες οι περι την εδοσβειαν διατριβοντες*.

²⁸ The Persians were evidently undecided as to whether Semitic *š* sounded more like their *s* or their *š*. In initial position it is still *š-* in Neo-Persian *šalībā* (lexica: *šalīpā*), for Aramaic *šlībā*, ‘cross’. In old loanwords this *š*, like inherited Persian *š*, would presumably have become *z* in post-vocalic position, but this need not have been the case in words borrowed after the shift of *-š* to *-z*. So it is not really clear where **n’sl’y** is *nāsrāy* or *nācrāy*. Both readings also seem possible in a Manichaean account of the crucifixion in Parthian (M 4574; see Boyce, 1975: text **byd**) when it refers to **yyšw’ n’sr’y**, ‘Jesus the Nazarene’, though the first word is (with its final ‘) clearly an Aramaicizing spelling. Even in the seventh century, Arabic *š* is still represented in ‘Pahlavi’ script by **s** (evidently for *š*) on the coins of **hkm Y ’bwl’s’n**, i.e. al-Hakam ibn ‘Abī l-‘Aš (Walker, 1941: 86).

²⁹ *Hērbedistān* 12.3 has **klisy’** in a context where the meaning ‘Christian’ is required. Kotwal and Kreyenbroek read this as *kilīsyā*, ‘the Church, the Christians’ (i.e. for *ἐκκλησία*), but it is perhaps better emended to **klstyd’n**, as in Kirdīr’s inscription. Similar spellings are found elsewhere in Zoroastrian literature (*Zand ī Wahman-Yasn* 3.26, 6.3, 5, 6; *Dēnkard* VII 7.2, 47), in passages where ‘Christian’ is at least a possible translation, but the question is complicated by Avestan *karāsānī-* (*Yasna* 9.24), evidently a proper name cognate with Vedic *krśānu-*, rendered by a MP spelling which, though unclear in our manuscripts, the medieval Sanskrit translator clearly understood to mean ‘Christian’ (see Unvala, 1924: 37–8, with a long footnote). There is thus evidently a long-standing confusion between Avestan *karāsānī-* and the loanword *kristiyān*.

³⁰ For the etymology (not from Iranian *zand-*, but from Aramaic *zaddīk*) see my article ‘Zindīk’ in *EL*².

³¹ Bailey (1980: 7–10; 1983: 907–8) saw here an Iranian root **mak-*, supposedly ‘wash, moisten’, which (in Bailey’s view) underlies Armenian *mk-rt-em*, ‘I baptize’; **maktak-* thus means ‘baptized’ and refers to the Baptist community into which Manes was born (i.e. Elchasaites). But this alleged root has no unambiguous reflex in Iranian (Gignoux compares MP *makōg*, ‘cup, boat’, but I think this comes from Akkadian *maqqu*, ‘libation vessel’; see *JRAS* 1999, 160–1). More importantly, **mak-ta-ka-* would yield MP **maxtag*, which would have been written with **-h-**, not **-k-**. Sundermann (1977 [1980]: 241–2) also identified the **mktky** with Babylonian Baptists, but he derived it from Syriac *mnakkōdē*, ‘the purified ones’, the name which Theodore bar Kōnāy gives explicitly to the sect in which Manes was brought up, via **mnakkōdā*, with the Iranian suffix *-ag*. Frye (1967: 83) suggested that **mktky** is a scribal error for **mntky**, a rather strange spelling for Aramaic *mandāy-*, ‘Mandaean’, again with Iranian *-ag*, while de Menasce (1945: 244), and others after him, identified it with Sanskrit *mukta-*, ‘liberated’. As such it would not refer *per se* to any particular Indian sect, but seeing that Kirdīr has already mentioned Buddhists and Brahmanists, it has been argued (Widengren, 1965: 277) that this name might refer to the Jains. The three last-mentioned theories all share the difficulty that they assume that the Iranian suffix *-ag* was attached to a borrowed name, something for which there seems to be no parallel in Middle Persian. It is true that sometimes the MP relative ending *-īg* is added, pleonastically, to a name that already has the Aramaic relative suffix *-āy*, e.g. in inscriptional MP **hrwm’dyk** (*hrōmāy-īg*), ‘Roman’, but this is not the same as adding the semantically more-or-less otiose (originally diminutive) suffix *-ag* to a foreign adjective like *mnakkōdā*. Manichaean Parthian **zmbwdyg**, ‘the world’, appears to have added *-g* to an Indian loanword (Old Indian *jambudvīpa-*; the Parthian word assumes a form like Prakrit *jambudvīva-*, Turner no. 5134), but here **-yg** is perhaps only graphic for **-ī?** Against the Jain theory one must object further that *mukta-* ought (one thinks) to be written with **mw-** in MP; also it seems strange that the Jains should be called by the Sanskrit term *mukta-* (rather than a Middle Indian form like Pali/Prakrit *mutta-*, Turner no. 10151), while the Buddhists and Brahmanists have Middle Indian names.

it would consequently seem likely that **mktky** and *zandīk* are also a pair, presumably designating two groups within Manichaeism. In this case I can only suggest that the isolated form **mktky**, which we read in one of the three copies of Kirdīr's text (the other two being broken at this point), is perhaps a scribal error for **mztky** or **mṣtky**, either one of which would be an acceptable MP spelling for Aramaic *mzaddek*, 'one who justifies, one who declares another just, one who gives alms', which would be a plausible name for the Manichaean auditors, those whose principal task is precisely to give alms to the electi, the 'just ones' (*zaddīkē*). Thus, **mzaddek* and *zaddīk* (MP *zandīk*) would be the two components of the Manichaean church, the auditors and the electi. I make this proposal with the hesitation imposed by the fact that *mzaddek* is not actually attested in this meaning in any Aramaic document.³²

Be this as it may, the juxtaposition of *nāsrāy* and *kristiyān* speaks against the not intrinsically unlikely view that *nāsrāy* here means 'Mandaeans'.³³ 'Mandaeans' and 'Christians' are not a particularly plausible pair. It seems most likely that these names are used here in the same way as 'Nazoraean' and 'Christians' are in authors of the fourth century and later, that is, to designate two factions within the followers of Christ who differed in particular concerning circumcision and other aspects of the Mosaic law. *nāsrāy* would

³² I have been tempted to see corroboration for this hypothetical reading in two Arabic passages referring to Manichaeans. The first is al-Jāhīz, *al-Tarbī'u wa t-tadwīr*, ed. Pellat, 77 (par. 128), where, in the course of a polemic against the *zanādīqah* (here clearly: Manichaeans), the author says that we have seen '*al-muṣaddīqiyyata wa d-dīnāwariyyata wa t-tuḥuzūziyyah*', evidently three subdivisions within Manichaeism. *al-muṣaddīqiyyah* would indeed correspond to Aramaic *mzaddek*. Pellat (p. 28 of the French section) suggests two possible emendations: one (which he adopts in the edition itself) is to read *al-mazdaqīyyah* ('Mazdakites'), supposedly corrupted in oral dictation to *al-maṣdaqīyyah*, a proposal that has little in its favour; the other is to read *al-miqlāsiyyah*, the name of a Manichaean faction mentioned not only by an-Nadīm (as Pellat noted), but also by 'Abd al-Jabbār and in a Sogdian text (references and discussion in *ET*², s.v. 'zindīk'). The latter emendation is not difficult graphically and makes excellent sense of the passage: the Manichaeans are divided here into the Miqlāsi faction in Babylonia, the Dēnāwars in Sogdiana, and the Manichaeans among the Uighurs, alias Tughughuz. (See also, with a slightly different interpretation, Sundermann's article 'Dīnāvar' in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.) The second is in al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūju ḍ-ḍahab* (ed. Barbier/Pavet i, 200; ed. Pellat i, 109–10), where the printed text has *muṣaddīq* twice, but both times in corrupt contexts. The first part of the passage reads as follows in the old edition (with variants from the Taymūriyyah ms., as cited in Pellat's edition):

والشماع وغير ذلك وإن كان ماني حدث بعد والتسيس والشماس وغير ذلك فعل (ت: فعن) المانية لا (ت: الأ)
مضى المسيح المصدقون (ت: الصدوين)

The gist of the passage seems to be that the Manichaeans shared the names for some of the ranks of their hierarchy with the Christians, whereas others are particular to Manichaeism. The Arabic names of the five Manichaean ranks are given by an-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, 396, as: *al-mu'allimūn*, 'teachers', *aš-šammāsīn* (read thus), 'bishops' (but in Christian usage: 'deacons'), *al-qissīsīn*, 'priests', *aš-šiddīqīn*, 'elect', *as-sammā'im*, 'auditors'. So I would translate the cited passage from al-Mas'ūdī as: 'The terms *al-qissīs* and *aš-šammās* and some others are (taken by the Christians) from (read: 'an) the Manichaeans, not (however) **aš-šiddīqūn* and **as-sammā'* and some others, this despite the fact that Mānī came forth after the death of Christ'. The author then goes on to say that Bardesanes and Marcion also lived after Christ and that 'later the *muṣaddīqiyyah* and others who (likewise) follow the path of dualism branched off from them', but I suspect that here, as in the passage from al-Jāhīz, *al-muṣaddīqiyyah* is a scribal error for *al-miqlāsiyyah*.

³³ In the secondary literature it has been argued that Kirdīr's *nāsrāy* cannot be Mandaean because the Mandaeans are not mentioned by any author before Theodore bar Kōnāy (in the late eighth century). But the evident strong Iranian influence on Mandaeanism (Middle Iranian loan words, Zoroastrian religious influences, Mandaean use of the Persian calendar in its late Sasanian form, etc.) argues in favour of the assumption that the Mandaeans existed in their present location in southern Babylonia already in Sasanian times.

thus designate one group (or more) of ‘Jewish Christians’ and *kristiyān* one group (or more) of Pauline Christians. I doubt if one can be more precise than that.³⁴

In the Syriac dictionaries it is stated that *nāsrāyā* means, among other things, ‘Christian’,³⁵ and in the modern secondary literature it has even been claimed that it is the ‘usual’ Aramaic designation for Christians.³⁶ But one does not need to have very much experience of reading Syriac texts to know that the usual Syriac word for ‘Christian’ is in fact *kristyān*,³⁷ plural *kristyānē*. We do find *nāsrāyā*, in the singular, as an epithet of Jesus, translating *Ναζαρηνός* and *Ναζωπαίος* of the Greek Bible. The plural *nāsrāyē* renders the *Ναζωπαίτοι* of Acts 24:5, and is employed in the heresiographical literature both for ‘Jewish Christian’ Nazoraeans³⁸ and for Mandaeans.³⁹ There are also a small number of passages in late Syriac authors which, in evident or apparent dependence on Arabic sources, use *nāsrāyē*, like Arabic *naṣārā*, to mean ‘Christian’.⁴⁰ And even in early works one can find the odd passage where ‘Nazoraeans’ is a circumlocution for ‘Christian’.⁴¹ But this does not make it the ‘usual’ Syriac word.

On the other hand, there are a number of places where *nāsrāyē* is used not as a Christian self-designation, but in statements which Christian authors put into the mouths of non-Christians. Most of the attestations are in the acts of the Persian martyrs, where it is the persecuting Zoroastrians who refer to their Christian victims as Nazoraeans. A very characteristic passage is in the story of Saint Pethion: the persecutors ask the saint whether he is the ‘head of the Nazoraeans’ (*rešā δ-nāsrāyē*), whereupon the latter replies quite emphatically ‘I am not the head of the Nazoraeans, no, I am a servant of God and the minister of the Christians (*kristyānē*)’.⁴² Or again in the history of Pseudo-Zacharias,⁴³ where a Persian general, fearing defeat at the hands of Justinian’s

³⁴ de Menasce (1945: 207–8) suggested that *kristiyān* here means ‘Marcionites’. It is very likely that Marcionites were encompassed in Kirdīr’s *kristiyān*, and indeed possible that Marcionites (and not proto-catholics) were the main representatives of Pauline Christianity in Persia at the end of the third century, but the Syriac texts cited by de Menasce do not support his claim that it was only Marcionites who used the name ‘Christian’ at the time in question. Brock’s interpretation of Kirdīr’s inscriptions will be discussed below.

³⁵ See Payne Smith and Brockelmann, s.v., with textual references.

³⁶ e.g. Chaumont, 1988: 113: ‘Il est bien connu que *naṣrayā* [sic] (plur. *naṣrayē* [sic]) est la désignation usuelle des chrétiens dans les Églises de langue araméenne’, etc.

³⁷ Spelt *krystyn* and *krystyn*. I use the above transcription for both.

³⁸ Theodore bar Kōnāy, ii, 301, 302. But these flimsy accounts of the Nazoraeans derive entirely from the *Anacephalaiosis* of Pseudo-Epiphanius.

³⁹ Theodore, ii, 345, says that the ‘Dositheans’ (*dōstāyē*) are called **mdy**’ in Mesene, but **nsry**’ in Bēθ Armāyē, and proceeds to give a tolerably coherent account of the doctrines that we find also in Mandaean scriptures.

⁴⁰ The passage in Bar Hebraeus *Chron. Syr.*, ed. Bruns, 58 (=ed. Bedjan, 53; cf. his Arabic chronicle, ed. Pococke, 123), which quotes Galen’s opinion of the Christians (here: *nāsrāyē*), derives from a passage in Ibn al-Qifṭī’s Arabic biography of Galen (see, in detail, Walzer, 1949: 92–3), *nāsrāyē* is thus here merely a transcription of Arabic *naṣārā* and must not mislead us into thinking that Galen actually referred to Christians as *Ναζωπαίτοι*. The same seems to be the case when the Maronite Chronicle and Michael the Syrian both speak (with similar wording) of how the young Manes pretended to follow the doctrine of the *nāsrāyē*, in a context where this can only mean ‘Christians’; see Klein, 1997 (with a different interpretation), and my comments, *JRAS* 1999, 441–2.

⁴¹ In the preface to the *Didascalia*, ed. Vööbus, 10, in a flight of high rhetoric, the apostles address the Christian believers with the words *ō nāsrāyē mšihāyē*, but elsewhere in the same book Christians are consistently referred to as *kristyānē*. The preface is missing in the older version of the Syriac *Didascalia* (see Vööbus’s translation, 36*–37*) and this, and the fact that the quoted phrase inevitably reminds one of the usual Arabic words for ‘Christians’, i.e. *naṣārā* and *masīhiyyūn*, suggest that here too we might have to do with a translation from the Arabic.

⁴² Corluy, 1888: 16.

⁴³ Ps.-Zacharias, ed. Brooks, ii, 95 (lib. IX, cap. 4). Compare also ii, 28 (lib. VII, cap. 4), which tells of how the Sasanian king Kawād, after taking Amīd, enters the church and sees an icon of Jesus; on asking who this might be, he is told (presumably by his Persian entourage) that it is the ‘god of the Nazoraeans’ (*alāhā δ-nāsrāyē*).

commander Belesarius, sends a message to the Romans asking to delay battle until after Easter/Passover, ‘for the sake of the Nazoraeans (*nāsrāyē*) and Jews who are in my army, and for your sake, you who are Christians (*kristyānē*)’. From passages like this Horovitz⁴⁴ drew the conclusion that Syriac *nāsrāyē* is a designation ‘der Christen überhaupt, oder vielleicht richtiger der Christen des persischen Reiches im Gegensatz zu denen, welche der oströmischen Herrschaft unterstanden’. A similar line of reasoning has more recently been pursued (without reference to Horovitz) by Wiessner,⁴⁵ and then again (without mentioning either Horovitz’s or Wiessner’s contribution) by Brock.⁴⁶ From the fact that in Syriac texts the term *nāsrāyē* is ‘invariably’ put into the mouths of non-Christians Brock deduced that it is the name by which ‘the non-Christians in the Sassanid empire referred to Christians’ and that consequently also the *nāsrāy* of Kirdīr’s inscription ‘must refer to the native Christian population’ of the Persian empire, while his *kristiyān* designates ‘Christians of western origin, that is to say Christians who had been deported to Persia’. In my opinion, this argumentation involves various difficulties, both from a Syriac and from an Iranian point of view. First of all, there is a passage in the Romance of Julian the Apostate,⁴⁷ noted already by Horovitz, where the pagans of Harrān are said to express their fear that after Julian’s departure from their town they might be afflicted by ‘the dark night of Nazoraism (*nāsrāyūθā*)’. Thus, it is not only Persian pagans whom the Syriac authors depict as calling the Christians ‘Nazoraeans’, but also the pagans of Syria. Second, if the non-Christians in the Sasanian empire really referred to Christians as *nāsrāyē*, then one must ask why in the whole corpus of Middle Persian literature the word *nāsrāy* occurs only once, namely in the mentioned inscription of Kirdīr. In fact, the well-known Persian word for ‘Christian’, in the common usage of Christians, Zoroastrians and later of Muslims, is Middle Persian *tarsāg*,⁴⁸ Neo-Persian *tarsā* ‘(God) fearer’.⁴⁹ This Persian usage is

⁴⁴ Horovitz, 1926: 144–6. It might be noted that the transcribed Syriac quotations on these pages contain a fair number of mistakes, especially ‘našrāje’ (sic passim), for *nāsr-*, and ‘krestjānē’, for *-t-*.

⁴⁵ Wiessner, 1967: 294, n. 32: ‘Die vielleicht naheliegendste Annahme ist diejenige, in den *nāsrāyē* aramäisch-christliche, in den *krestyānē* griechisch-christliche Gemeinschaften zu sehen’.

⁴⁶ Brock, 1974: 91–5.

⁴⁷ ed. Hoffmann, 146.

⁴⁸ MP *tarsāg* is well attested, in the meaning ‘Christian’, in Zoroastrian texts. It does not seem to be found in the hitherto published Western Iranian Manichaean texts, but D. Durkin informs me that the unpublished fragment M 15 V 1 contains the words *pd trs’gyy*, ‘in fear/piety’.

⁴⁹ For the background of *tarsāg* (*tarsā*), compare the thought-provoking article by Pines on ‘The Iranian name for Christians’ (Pines, 1968) where these, and also Mandaic *d’h’ly*, are connected with the ‘God fearers’ (φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν, alias σεβόμενοι) mentioned several times in the Acts of the Apostles, Juvenal’s *metuentes*, etc., a much-discussed designation for gentiles who believed in the god of the Jews without actually converting to Judaism, and who were among the prime targets of Paul’s preaching. In my view, when the Iranian Christians decided to call themselves *tarsāgān* they were, in all probability, indeed likening themselves to the φοβούμενοι mentioned in the Bible, but, unlike Pines, I think it unlikely that there was actually any historical connection between the first Persian Christians and the ‘God fearers’ of the primitive church. Also, the linking (with Nöldeke, Pines and others) the Arabic *rāhib*, pl. *ruhbān*, ‘monk’ (ostensibly a participle of the verb r-h-b, ‘to fear’), with Persian *tarsāg*, seems semantically tenuous; whereas the Persian term encompasses the Christians as a whole, the Arabic word has a much narrower meaning. It might be better to rehabilitate (at least in part) Geiger’s (1833: 51) connection of the Arabic word for ‘monk’ with some derivative of Aramaic *rabb*, ‘lord, master, religious teacher’; I would suggest that the Arabic plural *ruhbān* comes from the (reduplicated) Syriac plural *ravrβānē* (also *rabbānē*, etc.), either with dissimilation of *r-r-* to *r-h-*, or by popular etymological attachment to the (Arabic, not Aramaic) root r-h-b, with back-formation of the singular *rāhib*. In support of this it could be noted that the juxtaposition of *ahbār* and *ruhbān* in Quran 9:31 and 34 seems to parallel that of *rabbāniyyūn* and *ahbār* in 5:44 and 63. By way of curiosity, Colin (1960–63: 13–14) derived Arabic *ruhbān* from the *rūhbān* which he found in some Persian dictionary, supposedly meaning ‘protecting piety’ or the like. In fact, the fake Persian words *rūhbān* and *rūh* (supposedly = Arabic *zuhd*, but apparently inspired by Arabic *rūh*) were invented by the šu‘ūbī philologists specifically to provide a ‘Persian’ etymology for Arabic *ruhbān*.

reflected in another of the anti-Christian passages in the Mandaean *Ginzā*, which says that the followers of Christ are called ‘fearers’ (**d’h’ly’**), ‘righteous ones’ (**z’dyqy’**) and ‘Christians’ (**krysty’ny’**).⁵⁰ The passage is presumably directed specifically against the Persian-speaking Christians of the Sasanian empire, as opposed to the previously quoted Mandaean polemic against those Christians who worship the ‘god of the Nazoraeans’. This suggests that also in Persian usage *tarsāgān* and *kristiyān* are interchangeable names for Pauline Christians, as opposed to Nazoraeans (*nāsrāy*). Similarly, in the Choresmian glosses to az-Zamaxšarī’s *Muqaddimatu l’adab*, Arabic *naṣrānī* (*naṣārā*) is translated as **trs’k** and **trs’k’nk**.⁵¹ And in Sogdian the name ‘Christian’ is very well attested, both in (Nestorian) Christian and in Manichaean texts, as *tarsāk*, *tarsākānē* and *tarsākānč*.⁵² In one text we do find the term **n’sr’yq**; this is in the Sogdian translation (from the Syriac, which in turn derives from the Greek) of the Life of St George, where a demon, exorcised by the saint, calls in his despair upon the ‘Nazoraeans’, that is Jesus.⁵³ It is thus clear that neither in Middle Persian nor in Sogdian is ‘Nazoraeans’ ever used as a Christian self-designation, nor even as a name with which followers of other faiths refer to catholic Christians.⁵⁴

In the light of this one must search for a different explanation for the Syriac usage. I would suggest that when Syriac authors depict their non-Christian opponents as calling the Christians ‘Nazoraeans’, they are in fact using a literary topos, that is to say consciously alluding to Acts 24:5. This seems particularly likely in the cited passage from the life of Pethion, when the Persians accuse the saint of being the ‘head of the Nazoraeans’ (*rēšā ḏ-nāsrāyē*); compare the Syriac version of Acts 24:5, where Paul’s opponents call him precisely the ‘head (*rēšā*) of the sect of the Nazoraeans’. ‘Nazoraeans’ are what Christians are supposed to be called by their enemies. As for the passage in Pseudo-Zacharias, although this could be cited as evidence that the Persians called the followers of Jesus in their own country ‘Nazoraeans’, but those in the Byzantine empire ‘Christians’, it could also be understood differently, namely as indicating that the Syriac author, in his account of the alleged Sasanian diplomatic initiative, naturally did not think it appropriate to depict the Persians as applying the insulting term ‘Nazoraeans’ to the addressees of their message. Real Persians spoke Persian, not Syriac, and presumably used the loanword *kristiyān* (as in Kirdīr’s inscription) as well as the Persian *tarsāg* both for their own Christians and for those on foreign soil. It is only in Christian church literature that they are depicted as aping the words of Paul’s persecutors.

In the Armenian Bible we find *nazovrec’i*, reflecting *Ναζωπαῖος* (with the Armenian ending *-ec’i*), but translating both this and the synonymous *Ναζαρηνός*. In one work, the history of the Armenian-Sasanian war by Efišē, and nowhere else in Old Armenian, there are several occurrences of the plural

⁵⁰ *Ginzā* (right) 55.

⁵¹ az-Zamaxšarī 11:4,6; 466:3.

⁵² For spellings and references, see Gharib, 1995: no. 9667–9675. The word is evidently a borrowing from Western Iranian (Middle Persian or Parthian).

⁵³ The **n’sr’yq** of the Sogdian version (Hansen, 1941, i, 249) corresponds to either *Ἰῆσῶς* or *nāsrāyā* in the extant Syriac manuscripts (Brooks, 1925: 89 apu) and to *Ἰησοῦ Ναζαρηνέ* in the Greek original.

⁵⁴ In one of the Sasanian papyri edited by Weber (1992: text P 61), the editor read **šmwyl** (...) (**n)cwlytwm BRH MN** ..., making this Samuel ‘der christlichste Sohn des ...’, but Gignoux (1997: 139) has pointed out that the second word should be read as (**w)swlgtwm**, i.e. *wuzurgtom*, ‘eldest’; I add that **BRH MN** cannot mean ‘son of’, but only ‘son/child from’. Similarly, the supposedly Christian personal names which Weber read as **ncwlyk** and **nclyk** are more likely to be **wš(w)lgk**, presumably a hypocoristicon from a compound name with first element *wuzurg-*.

noun *nacrac'ik'*, as the word for 'Christians' in alleged quotations of speeches by Zoroastrian Persians, exactly like Syriac *nāsrāyē* in similar contexts.⁵⁵ Lacking other occurrences of this form, we must suspect that these supposed quotations derive from a source in Syriac and that *nacrac'ik'* is simply an ad hoc transposition of the Syriac word.

The Malayalam term *nasrāni*, plural *nasrānikal*, 'Christian',⁵⁶ which various writers on the history of Christianity in India have considered to be of great antiquity, and which the author of the article 'Naṣārā' in *EI*² thinks, for some reason, to be relevant to the understanding of the Arabic word, is in fact manifestly borrowed (directly or indirectly) from Arabic *naṣrānī*.

The usage in languages other than Arabic (and those which borrowed their word for 'Christian' from Arabic) can thus be summarized as follows: Nazoraean (or Nazarene) is, first of all, the epithet of Jesus, the man of Nazareth. In the plural, Nazoraeans is a contemptuous name for Christians, put into the mouths of their enemies in Acts 24:5, and then, in imitation of the biblical passage, in some Syriac accounts (and one Armenian account) of the anti-Christian activities of Zoroastrians and others. But it is apparently also the name actually used by Jews in the first two or three centuries to designate the followers of Jesus, and specifically the Christians in the synagogue, and thus also by at least some of these Jewish Christians themselves. And it is in this sense, as a designation for certain Jewish Christians, that the name is applied by catholic Christian polemicists, by the Zoroastrian high priest Kirdīr, and finally in Mandaeen writings, where it occurs both in polemics against the Nazoraeans, and as a self-designation of the Nazoraean converts to Mandaeism.

This brings us at last to Arabic *naṣrānī*, plural *naṣārā*. That this name is connected with the town of Nazareth, in Arabic an-Nāṣirah, was recognized by most of the medieval Arabic philologists, though it was equally clear to them that *naṣrānī* is not easy to explain in terms of Arabic word formation; modern scholars have also failed, as far as I can see, to account adequately for the Arabic form. It can, in any case, hardly be derived either from Aramaic *nāsrāy-* or from Hebrew *nōsrī*, and one must consequently reject the occasional claim that the Muslims had their word for 'Christian' from the Jews. Aramaic can derive adjectives from nouns by means of the suffixes *-āy* or *-ānāy*, in both cases normally with reduction of any *ā* in the root (first to short *a* and then, in open syllables, to zero/*šwa*).⁵⁷ For example the name of the town Harrān forms the adjective *ḥar(rə)nānāy-*⁵⁸, borrowed into Arabic as *ḥarnānī*. The adjective from Nāṣ(ə)raḥ, *Nāṣ(ə)rā, 'Nazareth', is attested in Syriac as *nāsrāy-* (thus vocalized in the Pšīṭṭā, with retention of the long *ā*), but **naṣrānāy-* would also be a correct Aramaic formation, which could have been borrowed into Arabic as *naṣrānī*. But the fact that **naṣrānāy-* is not attested in any Aramaic dialect is a serious obstacle to this etymology. On the other hand, in Arabic the ending *-ānī* is used, without affecting the vocalism of the stem, typically to form adjectives implying copious possession of some quality, e.g. *ša'rānī*, 'hirsute', from *ša'r*, 'hair'. Thus, from a purely Arabic point of view

⁵⁵ See Thomson's translation, 80, n. 5: 'It is important that Elishē only uses the term in the mouth of a Persian. (...) The word is not found in other early Armenian authors'.

⁵⁶ Gundert, 1872: 537, where it is glossed 'A Nazarene, Syrian or Syro-roman Christian', and (wrongly) derived from Syriac.

⁵⁷ See Brockelmann, 1908–13: i, 397–400; Nöldeke, 1898: par. 135–6. Brockelmann explains the reduction of the long vowel of the stem as dissimilation of *ā* before the *ā* of the suffix.

⁵⁸ Syriac script has no way of indicating either the gemination or the reduced vowel. It is thus difficult to determine whether at any particular stage in the history of the language the name was pronounced *ḥarrānāy-* or *ḥarnānāy-*.

naṣrānī looks like an intensive adjective from *naṣr*, ‘(divine) help, victory’, and could consequently be thought to mean something like ‘having received much aid from God’. As such it could conceivably represent an attempt by the ancient Arab Christians to re-etymologize Aramaic *nāsrāy-* (or **naṣrāy-*) as an Arabic *naṣrānī*, in the same way that they re-etymologized the biblical name Yuhannā, ‘John’, as Arabic Yahyā, ‘he lives’.⁵⁹ The Arabic lexica adduce for ‘Christian’ also the form *naṣrān*, which, if authentic, could be interpreted as an adjective from the verbal root n-ṣ-r, ‘to help’, then with the regular plural *naṣārā*, like *sakrān*, plural *sakārā*, from s-k-r, ‘to be drunk’, or *kaslān*, plural *kasālā*, from k-s-l, ‘to be lazy’. Or else, *naṣrānī* was reinterpreted as a *nisbah* from **naṣrān*, and a plural was formed from the assumed simple form.⁶⁰

Scholars have not failed to remark on the affinity of the Arabic word for ‘Christian’ with the name of the sect of the Nazoraeans and it has more than once been suggested that the Christians of ancient Arabia might have included a contingent of Nazoraeans or that they might for some other reason have taken the name of that sect.⁶¹ But the possibility that the *naṣārā* of the Quran were Nazoraeans, pure and simple, has not seemed a very attractive one. For one thing, Muslim authors of the Abbasid period frequently and unambiguously give the name *naṣārā* to the well-known Nicene (catholic) denominations (Melkites, Jacobites and Nestorians) and it is used also as a self-designation of members of those churches when writing in Arabic.⁶² For another, at the time of Muḥammad,⁶³ even if ‘Jewish Christianity’ had not died out completely, it was very much a marginal phenomenon. The Nicene creed was not only firmly established in the Mediterranean world, but also well entrenched on the fringes of the Arabian desert, at the courts of the Ghassanids and Lakhmids, and in Naḡrān. But, although these objections are weighty, they are not decisive. To begin with, although contemporary Christian sources give fairly extensive documentation of the catholic presence in peripheral Arabia, Central Arabia is pretty much blank on the map of seventh-century Christianity, suggesting that any Christians in the Ḥijāz were not in fact members of the catholic churches. Second, usage in the Arabic of the Abbasid period is not necessarily indicative of that in early Arabic. The Quran contains a good number of words that were not used, and no longer understood in later times, or that were employed in quite different meanings. It is possible that when, following the conquest of Byzantine and Sasanian territories, the

⁵⁹ The occasional attempts to explain quranic Yahyā as a scribal error for Yuhannā are misguided. Mandaic **y’hy’** is evidently a late form, borrowed from Arabic, alongside the older **ywh’n** (see Drower and Macuch, 1963: 185, 190; Horovitz, 1926: 151–2). It might be mentioned that Arabic and Persian speaking Christians likewise not rarely use the Islamic forms of names like Yahyā or ‘Isā even in their own sectarian writings, for example in the (wrongly) so-called ‘Persian Diatessaron’.

⁶⁰ For the formation of the plural *naṣārā*, and for virtually nothing else, I am in broad agreement with Horovitz, 1926: 144–6.

⁶¹ Wellhausen (1887: 200) writes: ‘Man darf natürlich bei dem Christentum, welches in Arabien eindrang, nicht an das officielle und orthodoxe der Byzantiner denken. Arabia ferax haereseon. Man hat sich obscure Sekten vorzustellen, die, von dem Hauptstrom der Kirchengeschichte unergriffen, die Entwicklung unter klassischem Einfluss nicht mitgemacht hatten, sondern auf primitiven Stufen stehen geblieben und dem Judentum noch näher verwandt waren. Schon der Name Naḡāra weist darauf hin’. In the corresponding passage in Wellhausen, 1897: 232, this has been toned down somewhat: ‘Der Orient war monophysitisch oder nestorianisch. Daneben gab es grade an der Grenze des Culturlandes und der Wüste, z.B. in Ostpalästina, noch manche obscure Secte. (...) Auch durch diese wurden die Araber mit dem Christentum bekannt; der Name Naḡāra, mit dem sie es bezeichneten, ist ein Sectenname’. Both formulations seem to me to be very close to the truth, like so much else in this giant from the heroic age of Oriental studies.

⁶² This is commonplace in medieval Christian Arabic. Even the Maltese, who for a long time now have not lived under Muslim rule, say *nisrani*, pl. *nsara*, for ‘Christian’, a distinctly Muslim usage, like *ir-randan* (Arabic Ramaḡān), for ‘lent’.

⁶³ For a discussion of the time and place of the origin of Islam see below, section 3.

Muslims came into extensive contact with catholic Christians, they decided to transfer the quranic name *naṣārā* to these Christians, while the Christians, for their part, would have been happy to adopt this name, at least when speaking to Muslims, in Arabic, so as to lay claim to the status of *'ahlu l-kitāb*.

The possibility that the *naṣārā* of the Quran were not catholic Christians, but Nazoraean 'Jewish Christians', is suggested not only by their Arabic name, but also by what the Quran has to say about Christians. I should like to concentrate on two points, the first being the quranic rejection of the doctrine of the trinity. The relevant passages are the following:

(*an-Nisā'* 4:171): Oh people of the book! Do not exaggerate your religion and do not speak of god other than the truth. The Christ, 'Īsā son of Maryam, is only god's emissary and his word, which he cast towards Maryam, and a spirit from him. So believe in god and his emissaries and do not say: three.⁶⁴

(*al-Mā'idah* 5:73): Verily, those ones were unbelievers who said that god is the third of three.⁶⁵

And two verses later (5:75):

The Christ, the son of Maryam, is only an emissary, in advance of whom the (other) emissaries have passed away, and his mother is a righteous woman, the two of whom used to eat food.⁶⁶

(*al-Mā'idah* 5:116): When god said: 'Oh 'Īsā son of Maryam! Didst thou say to men: Take me and my mother as two gods apart from god?', ('Īsā) said: 'Be thou exalted (above that)! It is not for me to say that to which I am not entitled.'⁶⁷

(*al-Jinn* 72:3): And (it was revealed to me) that the good fortune of our lord was elevated, (for) he did not take for himself a consort, nor a child.⁶⁸

From these passages the Muslim commentators drew the inevitable conclusion that Christians believe in three deities: god, the Christ and the Christ's mother.⁶⁹ In 5:116 Jesus himself has to deny that he taught men to believe that he and his mother are 'two gods apart from god', and in 5:73–75 the notion that god is one of three is repudiated by the statement that the other two members of the alleged trinity, the Christ and his mother, 'used to eat food'; compare this with Luke 7:34: 'the son of man has come eating and drinking, and you say: Behold a gluttonous man and a drunkard'. Thus, the Quran rebuts trinitarianism with Jesus's own words, in one case taken from the canonic gospels. Moreover, in 72:3 it is thought necessary to reject the idea that god had a consort (*ṣāhibah*) and a child.

Of course, catholic Christians do not believe that Jesus's mother is a deity, or part of the trinity, nor that god has a wife. Consequently the majority of Western scholars have assumed either that Muḥammad grossly misunderstood

⁶⁴ *yā 'ahla l-kitābi lā taḥḥadū fī dīnikum wa lā taqūlū 'alā llāhi 'illā l-ḥaqqa 'innamā l-masīhu 'īsā bnu maryama rasūlu llāhi wa kalimatuhū 'alqāhā 'ilā maryama wa rūḥun minhu fa 'āminū bi llāhi wa rusulihī wa lā taqūlū ḥalāḥatun.*

⁶⁵ *laqad kafara llaḏīna qālū 'inna llāha ḥalīḥu ḥalāḥatin.*

⁶⁶ *mā l-masīhu bnu maryama 'illā rasūlun qad xalat min qablihi r-rusulu wa 'ummuhū ṣiddīqatun kānā ya'kulāni i-ta'ām.*

⁶⁷ *wa 'id qāla llāhu yā 'īsā bna maryama 'a'anta qulta li n-nāsi ttaxidūnī wa 'ummī 'ilāhayni min dūni llāhi qāla subḥānaka mā yakūnu lī 'an 'aqūla mā laysa lī bi ḥaqqin.*

⁶⁸ *wa 'annahū ta'ālā jaddu rabbīnā mā ttaxaḍa ṣāhibatan wa lā waladan. ('annahū depends on 'ūhiya lī in vs. 1).*

⁶⁹ See Ṭabarī's commentary on 5:73.

the Christian doctrine of the trinity, or else that he had been wrongly instructed concerning that doctrine by malicious Jewish informants. But a few scholars have considered the possibility that the quranic polemic is directed not against catholic Christians, but against some sect that actually believed these things.⁷⁰ As a possible candidate a number of authors have referred to Epiphanius' account⁷¹ of 'some women in Thrace, Scythia and [the Roman province of] Arabia' who adored Mary as a goddess and offered her a certain cake (κολλυρίδα τινά), hence their name 'Collyridians'. But there is no indication that these people regarded Mary as part of a trinity, or that they saw her as god's consort. Moreover, since nothing seems to link these female devotees to 'Jewish Christianity', the hypothetical localization of Collyridians in seventh-century Hijāz does not help us with the identification of the quranic *naṣārā*. I should like therefore to follow a different trail, one which leads directly to the Nazoraeans of Christian heresiographers.

The best known of the so-called Jewish Christian groups are the Elchasaites. Hippolytus, writing around the year 230, says that the Elchasaites taught that god was assisted by two angels of gigantic size, one of them male, called the 'son of god', and one female, 'the holy spirit'.⁷² We remind ourselves that the Semitic word for 'spirit' (*rūh*, etc.) is feminine. A century and a half later Epiphanius also mentions Elchasai's two giants and says in three passages that the male and female entities were identified as Christ and the holy spirit respectively,⁷³ adding in one passage⁷⁴ that the Elchasaites called the holy spirit Christ's sister. And the Muslim scholar an-Nadīm, in his account of the Elchasaites, or *muytasilah*, in southern Iraq, also says that these believed that 'the two existences (*kawnayn*) are male and female'.⁷⁵ If Hippolytus is right in saying that they called the male being the 'son of god', and if Epiphanius is right in claiming that they identified the two giants as 'Christ' and 'Christ's sister' respectively, it follows that the Elchasaites taught that the holy spirit is the daughter of god. This is not identical with the view condemned in the Quran, but it is close to it.

We come even closer with the information that Jerome gives us about the Nazoraeans in Palestine and their version of the gospel. The famous translator

⁷⁰ For a survey of the literature see Henninger, 1951: 51–6, where this line of enquiry is rejected. Already in 1734, Sale, in the 'Preliminary discourse' to his English translation of the Quran (reprint 1850: 25) claimed that the 'notion of the divinity of the virgin Mary was also believed by some at the council of Nice [Nicaea], who said there were two gods besides the Father, viz. Christ and the virgin Mary, and were thence named Mariamites', and that 'this foolish imagination is justly condemned in the Korān as idolatrous, and gave a handle to Mohammed to attack the Trinity itself'. For these 'Mariamites' he referred to the tenth-century Arabic chronicle of the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria Eutychius, alias Sa'īd b. al-Bīṭrīq (ed. Selden and Pococke, i, 440; ed. Cheikho, i, 126). In fact, no early source mentions such a sect. Moreover, it ought to have been clear that the doctrinal formulation which Eutychius ascribes to them (*fa minhum man kāna yaqūlu 'inna l-masīha wa 'ummahū 'ilāhayni [sic] min dūni llāhi wa humu l-burburāniyyatu [Borborians? Hardly 'barbari' as Selden and Pococke have it] wa yusammawna l-maryamiyyūn*) is lifted more or less verbatim from Quran 5:116. It is thus likely that Eutychius (or his source) has invented the '*maryamiyyūn*' precisely to deflect the quranic polemic from catholic Christianity. A much deeper scholar than Sale, the Huguenot Isaac de Beausobre, in a book printed in the very same year (de Beausobre, 1734: i, 532–3), observed that Eutychius' Mariamites are a 'secte imaginaire' and that 'jamais aucune Secte Chrétienne n'a fait de Marie une troisieme Personne Divine', that is to say, a member of the trinity. He suggested moreover that the inventor of the 'Mariamites' had simply misunderstood reports of how the Nazoraeans regarded the holy spirit to be Christ's mother and had confused her with Mary. Unfortunately, Beausobre did not know Arabic and consequently failed to notice the textual similarity between Eutychius and the Quran; otherwise he might very well have anticipated the conclusion spelt out in the following paragraphs of this article.

⁷¹ *Panarion* 79.

⁷² *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,13,2–3 (K/R 114).

⁷³ *Panarion* 19,4,1–2; 30,17,6; 53,1,9 (K/R 158, 186, 196).

⁷⁴ *Panarion* 53,1,9 (K/R 196).

⁷⁵ *Fihrist*, 404; see de Blois, 1995: 58–9.

of the Latin Bible claims on several occasions that he had access to a copy of the ‘Gospel according to the Hebrews’, which the Nazoraeans read ‘in Hebrew’, from which he quotes a number of extracts. One passage is quoted (with slight variants in the wording) no fewer than three times by Jerome, and twice already by the older Origen. We read here: ‘But in the gospel written according to the Hebrews which the Nazoraeans read the lord says: Just now my mother, the holy spirit, lifted me up’.⁷⁶ Origen gives the same quotation, again from the ‘gospel according to the Hebrews’, as: ‘Just now my mother, the holy spirit, lifted me up by one of my hairs and brought me to the great mountain Thabor’.⁷⁷ Thus, the holy spirit is Christ’s mother. This is confirmed by another quotation which Jerome brings from ‘the gospel which the Nazoraeans read, written in the Hebrew language’, an account of Christ’s baptism: ‘And it came to pass when the lord came up out of the water, the whole fount of the holy spirit descended upon him and rested over him and said to him: My son (...), thou art my first-begotten son that reignest for ever’.⁷⁸ The conclusion that the Nazoraeans made the holy spirit Christ’s mother is not negated by the fact that elsewhere Jerome quotes the ‘gospel according to the Hebrews’, ‘which the Nazarenes use’ as referring to Mary as ‘mother of the lord’ and also to ‘his brothers’.⁷⁹ It would appear that for the Nazoraeans Jesus had both a natural and a supernatural filiation.

If we combine the Elchasaite material with the Nazoraean we can conclude that there was a widespread notion in ‘Jewish Christian’ circles of a trinity, a supernatural holy family, consisting of god the father, his son the Christ, and a female holy spirit, who is identified in one branch of the tradition as Christ’s sister, but in another as his mother. Also in the ‘Jewish Christian’ material contained in the two extant versions of the fictitious autobiography of Clement of Rome (the *Homilies* and *Recognitions*) we have the idea that god is accompanied by a supernatural male-female syzygy; here too the male syzygos is the cosmic prototype of Jesus, and of the other true prophets, but the female syzygos is no longer the holy spirit, but the principle of evil. This must be a special development in the sect represented by the Pseudo-Clementine writings.

We have consequently in the Quran a large number of passages polemicizing against Christians of one sort or another, in many of which they are given the name *naṣārā*, that is, ‘Nazoraeans’, while in others they are accused of believing in an anthropomorphic trinity precisely of the type that Jerome attributed to the Nazoraeans in Palestine, a trinity consisting of god, his son the Christ, and Christ’s mother. Thus, the name and the doctrines agree.

The second point that I should like to raise concerns the quranic food regulations. In *al-Mā'idah* (5:5) god says to his people:

⁷⁶ Jerome, in *Esaiam* 40,9 (K/R 224): ‘sed et in euangelio quod iuxta hebraeos scriptum nazaraei lectitant dominus loquitur: modo me tulit mater mea spiritus sanctus’.

⁷⁷ Origen in *Johannem* 2,12 (K/R 126): ἄρτι ἔλαβέ με ἡ μήτηρ μου τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα ἐν μιᾷ τῶν τριχῶν μου καὶ ἀπήνεγκέ με εἰς τὸ ὄρος τὸ μέγα Θαβώρ. Similarly his *hom. in Jer.* 15,4 (K/R 126), but without ...ἐν μιᾷ τῶν τριχῶν μου... See also Jerome in *Micah* 7,6 (K/R 208): ‘modo tulit me mater mea sanctus spiritus in uno capillorum meorum’; id., in *Hiez.* 16,13 (K/R 226): ‘modo me arripuit mater mea spiritus sanctus’.

⁷⁸ Jerome in *Esaiam* 11,2: ‘sed iuxta euangelium quod hebraeo sermone conscriptum legunt nazaraei: descendit super eum omnis fons spiritus sancti. (...) porro in euangelio, cuius supra fecimus mentionem, haec scripta reperimus: factum est autem cum ascendisset dominus de aqua, descendit fons omnis spiritus sancti et requieuit super eum et dixit illi: fili mi, in omnibus prophetis exspectabam te ut uenires et requiescerem in te. tu es enim requies mea, tu es filius meus primogenitus qui regnas in sempiternum.’ Although the two quotations are separated by other material, it is sufficiently clear from the context that the ‘euangelium cuius supra fecimus mentionem’ must be the ‘euangelium quod legunt nazaraei’.

⁷⁹ Jerome *adv. Pelag.* 3,2 (K/R 226–8).

Today the good things have been permitted to you—and the food of those to whom the book was given is permitted to you and your food is permitted to them—and (likewise) the (legal) wives from amongst the believing (i.e. Muslim) women and the (legal) wives from amongst those to whom the book was given before you, provided you give them their wages (dowries) as (legal) husbands, not as fornicators nor as those who take lovers.⁸⁰

‘Those to whom the book was given’ (with or without ‘before you’) is the usual quranic circumlocution for ‘Jews and *naṣārā*’. The second part of the verse clearly means that Muslims are allowed to marry the women of these two communities and the implication of the first part is surely that Muslims are allowed to eat food prepared by Jews and *naṣārā*, or considered clean by them. In the case of the Jews there is no difficulty with this, since Jews do not in fact eat any of the foods that are explicitly prohibited in the Quran (pork, carrion, etc.). Consequently, anything that Jews can eat can safely be regarded as permissible for Muslims as well. But if *naṣārā* means ‘catholic Christians’, then it is very difficult to see how their food should be ‘permitted to you’, seeing that the catholic canon contains statements to the effect that Jesus ‘declared all food clean’ (Mark 7:19) and that catholic Christians are notorious for their porcophagy. But if the *naṣārā* of the Quran are indeed Nazoraeans, who observed the Jewish laws of purity, then the statement that ‘the food of those to whom the book was given is permitted to you’ would make very good sense.

But the quoted quranic passage goes on to say that ‘your food is permitted to them’, a statement that is difficult to reconcile with the fact that the food taboos of the Jews (and presumably also of the Nazoraeans) are considerably more stringent than those of the Muslims. This would seem to suggest that this verse belongs to a stage in the development of Islam at which the Old Testament food regulations were strictly implemented and that passages like 6:146–7, where the Muslims are explicitly exempted from certain food restrictions which god had previously imposed on the Jews, reflect a subsequent abrogation (*naṣṣ*) of the divine revelation, in the same way that in 2:142–5 god orders the Muslims to abandon the direction of prayer of ‘those to whom the book was given’ and to pray towards the Ka‘bah at Mecca. The picture that emerges is thus that at one stage, early in the history of Islam, Muslims, Jews and Nazoraeans all shared the same dietary restrictions.⁸¹

I suggest, in short, that one should seriously consider the possibility that the *naṣārā* of the Quran were indeed Nazoraeans and that it is consequently likely that there was a community of Nazoraean Christians in central Arabia, in the seventh century, unnoticed by the outside world. But this is a suggestion which would require reopening and re-evaluating the question of specifically ‘Jewish Christian’ influences on the original formulation of Islam.

(2) *ḥanīf*

The word *ḥanīf* occurs in the Quran ten times in the singular and twice in the

⁸⁰ *al-yaḥma 'uḥilla lakumu t-tayyibātu wa ta'amu llaḍina 'ūtū l-kitāba ḥillun lakum wa ta'āmukum ḥillun lahum wa l-muḥsanātu minā l-mu'mināti wa l-muḥsanātu minā llaḍina 'ūtū l-kitāba min qablikum 'idā 'ataytumūhunna 'ujūrahunna muḥsinīna ḡayra musāfihīna wa lā muttaxiḍī 'axḍān.* What exactly is meant by *muḥsin* (masc. act. part.) and *muḥsanah* (fem. pass. part.) is the subject of much debate, but they must mean something like ‘legal husbands’ and ‘legal wives’ respectively.

⁸¹ Quran 5:5 does not explicitly state that the people of the book cannot marry Muslim women, and indeed the verse could very well be understood to mean that what is true of food is also true of women, in other words that Muslims, Jews and Nazoraeans not only share the same table but are also allowed to intermarry. But this is rejected by the Muslim commentators and jurists.

plural (*ḥunafā*).⁸² In eight of its occurrences (2:135, 3:67, 3:95, 4:125, 6:79, 6:161, 16:120, 16:123) it refers explicitly to 'Ibrāhīm, the Abraham of the Bible, and in all but one of these the verse goes on to say that the *ḥanīf* Abraham was 'not one of the associators' (*mā kāna mina l-mušrikīn*, or words to that effect), that is to say, not one of the polytheists, who associate others with god.⁸³ The one exception is 4:125, where we find a truncated doublet of 3:95, without the final period. In two of these verses the *ḥanīf* Abraham is also explicitly dissociated from Judaism and (Nazoraean) Christianity; 3:67 says: 'Abraham was not a Jew and not a Nazoraean, but he was *ḥanīf muslim*, nor was he one of the associators'. And 2:135 declares: 'They said: Become Jews or Nazoraean and find the path! But thou shalt say: No, (I obey) the religion of Abraham, who was a *ḥanīf*, and he was not one of the associators'.⁸⁴ The remaining four attestations (10:105, 22:31, 30:30, 98:5) do not explicitly mention Abraham, but they use the word in contexts otherwise similar to those mentioned above. 10:105 and 22:31 repeat that the *ḥanīf* is not an 'associator', 30:30 mirrors the language of 6:79 and of 10:105, while 98:5 is in the context of a polemic against the 'people of the book' (i.e. the Jews and Nazoraean) and the 'associators'. The formulaic nature of these statements is underlined by the fact that the word, whether singular or plural, occurs always in the undetermined accusative case (*ḥanīfan*, *ḥunafā'a*). There is no suggestion, at least not in the Quran, that there was ever a group of people, a religion, known as *ḥunafā*'. We are told only that Abraham, or some other person, or persons, was, or did something, 'in the state of a *ḥanīf*'.

The Quran commentators of the classical period reckoned the word *ḥanīf* to be part of the *ḡarību l-qur'ān*, that is to say, of those expressions the precise meaning of which was unknown and the interpretation of which was considered a legitimate subject of scholarly disagreement. In his great compendium of Islamic exegetical doctrine, the *Jāmi'u l-bayān 'an ta'wīli l-qur'ān*, at-Ṭabarī says (commenting on 2:135) that the exegetes had offered five explanations of

⁸² For the reader's convenience, I cite here in transcription all the occurrences of the word in the Quran: (*al-Baqarah* 2:135) *wa qālū kinū ḥudān 'aw naṣārā tahtadū qul bal millata 'ibrāhīma ḥanīfan wa mā kāna mina l-mušrikīn* (*'ālu 'Imrān* 3:67) *mā kāna 'ibrāhīmu yahūdīyyan wa lā naṣrāniyyan wa lākin kāna ḥanīfan musliman wa mā kāna mina l-mušrikīn* (*'ālu 'Imrān* 3:95) *qul ṣadaqa llāhu fa ttabi'ū millata 'ibrāhīma ḥanīfan wa mā kāna mina l-mušrikīn* (*al-Nisā'* 4:125) (...) *wa ttaba'a millata 'ibrāhīma ḥanīfan* (...) (*al-'An'ām* 6:79) *'innī wajjahtu wajhī li lladī fatara s-samāwāti wa l-'arḍa ḥanīfan wa mā 'ana mina l-mušrikīn* (*al-'An'ām* 6:161) *qul 'innī hadānī rabbī 'ilā ṣirāṭin mustaqīmīn dīnan qiyaman millata 'ibrāhīma ḥanīfan wa mā kāna mina l-mušrikīn* (*Yūnus* 10:105) *wa 'an 'aqīm wajhaka li d-dīni ḥanīfan wa lā takūnanna mina l-mušrikīn* (*an-Nahl* 16:120) *'inna 'ibrāhīma kāna 'ummatan qānitan li llāhi ḥanīfan wa lam yaku min al-mušrikīn* (*an-Nahl* 16:123) *ḥumma 'awḥaynā 'ilayka 'anī ttabi' millata 'ibrāhīma ḥanīfan wa mā kāna mina l-mušrikīn* (*al-Hajj* 22:31) *ḥunafā'a li llāhi ḡayra mušrikīna bihī* (...) (*ar-Rūm* 30:30) *fa 'aqīm wajhaka li d-dīni ḥanīfan fīrāta llāhi llatī fatara n-nāsa 'alayhā* (*al-Bayyinah* 98:5) *wa mā 'umirū 'illā li ya'budū llāha muxliṣīna lahu d-dīna ḥunafā'a* (...). The principal secondary literature is, in chronological order: Wellhausen, 1887: 207–9 (somewhat differently Wellhausen, 1897: 238–40, 250); de Goeje, *BGA* viii, glossarium, xvii–xviii; Grimme, 1892–5: i, 12–14; ii, 59–60; Margoliouth, 1903; Lyall, 1903; Buhl, [1903] 1930: 68–71; Schulthess, 1906: 86–7; Nöldeke, 1910: 30; Buhl, art. 'Hanīf' in *EI*¹; Horovitz, 1926: 56–59; Ahrens, 1930: 27–8, 190; Jeffery, 1938: 112–15; Farris and Glidden, 1939 (non vidi); Bell, 1953: 12; Moubarac, 1958: 151–61 (of value only for the bibliography); Watt, art. 'Hanīf' in *EI*², and the recent contributions by Beeston, Rubin and Rippin mentioned below, note 104.

⁸³ A different interpretation of the term *mušrik* has been posited in Hawting, 1999. I intend to reply to this in another context.

⁸⁴ The syntax of the second half of the passage is problematic, but the Muslim commentators were doubtless correct to say that it assumes an unexpressed verb, of which *millata 'ibrāhīma* is the direct object (as in 16:123: *'an ittabi' millata 'ibrāhīma ḥanīfan*, etc.; similarly 3:95 and 4:125), and that *ḥanīfan* is a *ḥāl*.

the word, all of them manifestly extrapolated from the contexts in which the word occurs in the Quran: first, that *ḥanīf* means *ḥājj*, ‘pilgrim’, or more precisely, a person who performs the *ḥajj* at Mecca. Second, *ḥanīf* means ‘obedient’ (*muttabi*); compare 16:123). Third, ‘Abraham’s religion is called *al-ḥanīfiyyah* because he was the first imam to prescribe circumcision for worshippers’, implying, it seems, that these authorities thought that *ḥanīf* means ‘circumcised’. Fourth, the *ḥanīf* is the person who ‘devotes his religion to god alone’ (*al-muxliṣu dīnahū li llāhi waḥdih*; compare 98:5). And fifth, *al-ḥanīfiyyah* means *al-islām* (compare 3:67, where Abraham is called *ḥanīf muslim*). For his part, aṭ-Ṭabarī says that *ḥanīf* actually means ‘straight’ (*mustaqīm*, inspired doubtless by 6:161, where the two words occur in some proximity to each other) and he supports this with a decidedly bizarre etymology, connecting it with *’ahnaf*, ‘having a crooked foot, lame’, whereby he tells us that this quite ordinary word actually means ‘straight’ and is applied to a person with a crooked foot only as a way of presaging his recovery from the ailment.⁸⁵

The Arabic lexica repeat most of these options and add another, which has also found favour with some modern scholars: *ḥanafā* supposedly means ‘it turned to one side, it bent’; the *’ahnaf* is so called because his foot is bent to one side and the *ḥanīf* is the one who, like Abraham, turns to one side, away from the worship of idols. I am not sure that this etymology is really very much better than the one offered by aṭ-Ṭabarī, especially since it seems doubtful whether the verb *ḥanafā* is actually attested in classical Arabic in the alleged meaning.⁸⁶ One suspects rather that this meaning was invented by the lexicographers to explain the quranic term.

In post-quranic Arabic *ḥanīf* is used quite commonly as a synonym for *muslim*, ‘true believer’; the community of Muslims is called *al-ḥanīfah* and *al-ḥanīfiyyah*. It is certainly not implausible to understand the word in this way also in the context of the Quran: Abraham and all the other ancient prophets taught the same true religion as Muḥammad; thus Abraham, like Muḥammad, was a *muslim*, and the follower of Muḥammad is, like Abraham, also a *ḥanīf*. The difficulty faced by Semitists, as by students of religious history, is that in other Semitic languages the root ḥ-n-p is used in very different, intrinsically negative, meanings that seem quite irreconcilable with the usage in the Quran. It is best attested in Aramaic: Syriac has *ḥanpā*, very widely used in the sense ‘pagan, non-Christian’, *ḥanpūthā*, ‘paganism’, etc.⁸⁷ In Babylonian and Palestinian Jewish Aramaic the root ḥ-n-p carries the meaning ‘to deceive, to flatter’.⁸⁸ Mandaic has *ḥ’nypp*, ‘false gods’, *ḥ’nypt*, ‘worship of false gods’,

⁸⁵ *qīla laḥū ’ahnafa naṣran laḥū ’ilā s-salāmah*.

⁸⁶ Margoliouth, 1903: 478, cites a verse in one of the poems by al-’A’šā commemorating the victory of the Arab tribesmen over the Persians at ḏū l-Qār, reading, in Cheikho’s edition (Cheikho, 1890: iii, 385): *kafaw ’id ’atā l-hāmurzu taḥnifu fawqahū * ka zilli l-’uqābi ’id hawat fa tadallati*. But *taḥnifu* (allegedly: ‘bends’) does not make sense here. In Geyer’s critical edition of the *dīwān* of al-’A’šā the verse appears on p. 182 (poem 40, verse 7) and has, with the Escorial MS., not *taḥnifu* but *taxniqu*. Translate: ‘They fought well, when al-Hāmarz (the Persian commander) came, as there fluttered over him (something) like the shadow of an eagle when it swoops and then descends’; the reference is either to a banner, or perhaps rather to the angel of death. The Arabic historians say that al-Hāmarz (thus vocalized in Geyer) is the commander’s name, but the fact that it takes the article in Arabic suggests that it is a title; cf. Manichaean Parthian *h’mhyrz* (*hāmherz*) ‘attendant’.

⁸⁷ See the dictionaries by Payne Smith (i, col. 1322) and Brockelmann (p. 244); the history of the Syriac word will be discussed in detail below. In the etymological section of the relevant entries in Koehler’s standard dictionary of Biblical Hebrew, Syriac *ḥanpā* is rendered (not quite adequately) as ‘Gottloser’ in Koehler¹ i, 317 (s.v. *ḥנפ*), and (absurdly) as ‘Bauer’ in Koehler³ i, 322 (Koehler and Richardson i, 335: ‘peasant’), evidently a grotesque misunderstanding of Brockelmann’s ‘paganus’.

⁸⁸ Sokoloff, 1990: 209; Levy, *Wb. Targ.*³ i, 270; id., *Wb. Talm. u. Midr.*² ii, 84.

ḥwnp'n', 'hypocrite'.⁸⁹ Outside of Aramaic we have the Hebrew adjective *ḥanēf*, mostly translated as 'godless' or 'hypocrite' (though the precise meaning is debated) and the verb *ḥānef* (in the basic form), 'be polluted', and (in the causative form) 'pollute' or the like.⁹⁰ The oldest occurrences are in the letters from Tell Amarna, documents ostensibly in Babylonian, but containing many words that are in fact North-West Semitic: we find here the phrases *ḥanpa ša ihnuḥ ana muḥḥiia*, roughly 'the villainy that they committed against me', and *ša ḥannipa iteju*, 'who knows vileness',⁹¹ implying the old Canaanite nouns **ḥanpu* and **ḥannīpu* and the verb ḥ-n-p. These have been compared also with Ugaritic **ḥnp**, and the verb **yḥnp**, for which various meanings have been proposed, principally on the basis of assumed etymological connections.⁹² If the Ugaritic words are left out of the equation, then all the cited forms could be traced to a Semitic root ḥ-n-p, presumably with the basic meaning 'lame' (like Arabic 'aḥnaf), which in North-West Semitic would have taken on the meanings 'morally lame, crooked, dishonest', and then, in Hebrew and Syriac, the specifically religious senses of 'godless' or 'pagan'. If, however, one were to insist on including the Ugaritic forms in the comparison, one would probably have to posit two different roots, ḥ-n-p (presumably 'lame') and x-n-p (perhaps 'polluted' or 'dishonest'), either one (or both) of which could be the source of Aramaic and Canaanite ḥ-n-p. As far as the formation is concerned, we must assume a primary noun **ḥanp-* and the adjectives **ḥānip-* and **ḥanīp-*, all with more or less the same meaning, like the Arabic triad 'abd, 'ābid, 'abīd.

In the Arabic of Christian authors, *ḥanīf* and *ḥanafī* are very widely used in exactly the same meaning as Syriac *ḥanpā*, namely 'pagan'. This meaning fits, I think, all the genuinely pre-Islamic attestations of *ḥanīf* in Arabic poetry,⁹³ and is well attested in Christian authors in Islamic times, who, for reasons discussed elsewhere, also use *ṣābi*' in the same sense. Thus, in Christian usage we have:

ḥanīf = *ḥanafī* = *ṣābi* = 'pagan'

al-ḥanafīyyah = 'paganism'

But in Muslim usage:

ḥanīf = epithet of Abraham and of those who follow his religion = 'Muslim'

al-ḥanīfiyyah = *al-ḥanīfah* = 'Abraham's religion' = 'Islam'

As distinct from:

ḥanafī = 'follower of the law school of 'Abū Ḥanīfah'

al-ḥanafīyyah = 'the school of 'Abū Ḥanīfah'.

Christian Arabic *ḥanafī* is evidently the source for the word which in Ethiopic is spelt *ḥānaḥī*, *ḥonaḥī*, *ḥonofe*, etc., 'pagan' (the last two written with etymologically spurious ḥ).⁹⁴ But this 'Christian' usage can occasionally be found also in Muslim authors. Thus, the historian al-Ya'qūbī, in his précis of Old Testament history, speaks of how Saul has done battle with the *ḥunafā'*, who were, he explains, 'worshippers of the stars' (*abadatu n-nujūm*).⁹⁵ an-Nadīm⁹⁶ and al-Bayrūnī⁹⁷ both apply the name *ḥunafā'* to the polytheists

⁸⁹ Drower and Macuch, 1963: 125, 136.

⁹⁰ Koehler¹ i, 317; Koehler/Richardson i, 335–6.

⁹¹ See *CAD*, volume H: 79, 80.

⁹² See most recently del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, 1996: 195, where **ḥnp** is glossed 'impiedad, iniquidad', and the verb ḥ-n-p as 'obrar perversamente'. In the secondary literature, the Ugaritic words have been compared not only with North-West Semitic ḥ-n-p, but also with Arabic *xānīf*, supposedly 'proud' (according to the lexica), and the Ethiopic forms with (spurious) *ḥ-*, discussed below.

⁹³ See Horowitz, 1926: 56–9, recapitulating earlier studies.

⁹⁴ See Dillmann, 1865: col. 605 (with references, all to fairly late authors), and Leslau, 1987: 263.

⁹⁵ al-Ya'qūbī I, 51–52.

⁹⁶ *Fihrist*, 383.

⁹⁷ *Aḥār*, 206, 318.

(so-called Sabians) of Ḥarrān. Similarly, al-Masʿūdī, when he speaks repeatedly in his *Kitābu t-tanbīhi wa l-ʿiṣrāf* of how the Roman emperors, before adopting Christianity, had been *ḥunafāʾ*, equated with *ṣābiʿūn*,⁹⁸ or of how they had followed ‘Sabianism, that is to say, *al-ḥanafiyyah* (variant: *al-ḥanīfiyyah*)’,⁹⁹ or of how the emperor Julian the Apostate (whom, in an earlier work, he calls *Lulyānusu l-maʿrūfu bi l-ḥanīfi*¹⁰⁰) abandoned Christianity, persecuted those who did not return to *al-ḥanafiyyah* (variant: *al-ḥanīfiyyah*) and restored the sacrifices of the *ḥunafāʾ*.¹⁰¹ And in another passage he says that the Persians before the time of Zoroaster had followed the doctrine of ‘the *ḥunafāʾ*’, and they are the *ṣābiʿūn*.¹⁰² It is likely that these Muslim historians had all this information from Christian sources, but what is significant is that they themselves did not hesitate to use the word *ḥunafāʾ* in its specifically Christian sense of ‘pagans’. They were clearly under no illusion that the ancient Romans had been followers of the ‘true religion of Abraham’. In the last-mentioned passage al-Masʿūdī actually goes on to say that *ḥanīf* is a Syriac loanword in Arabic (*kalimatun suryāniyyatun ʿurribat*), from **ḥanpā*, ‘and it is said that it is pronounced with a letter between *bāʾ* and *fāʾ*’ (i.e. with *p*), and that there is no *fāʾ* in Syriac.¹⁰³ Naturally, al-Masʿūdī could not have believed that *ḥanīf* means ‘pagan’ in the Quran as well. Rather, in his usage at least, *ḥanīf* is a *didd*, a word with two contradictory meanings.¹⁰⁴

We are thus very clearly confronted with the dilemma that a word which in some Arabic contexts is used to mean ‘pagan’, and which is manifestly cognate with words having similarly negative connotations in other Semitic languages, is, in the Quran, used to qualify the patriarch Abraham and other followers of the true religion. I do not think it at all likely that, as has sometimes been suggested, Muḥammad simply misunderstood a term that was in use among Christians or Jews and consequently employed it in exactly the opposite of its correct meaning. It would seem rather that the repeated, formulaic statement that Abraham was a *ḥanīf* and ‘not one of those who associate’ has its basis in pre-Islamic religious vocabulary. But from whom did Islam take it? Certainly not from Jews; it is quite unthinkable these could ever have

⁹⁸ *Tanbīh*, 6, 122, 123.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 136.

¹⁰⁰ *Murūju ḍ-ḍahab*, II, 323.

¹⁰¹ *Tanbīh*, 145.

¹⁰² *Tanbīh*, 90.

¹⁰³ *Tanbīh*, 91, where de Goeje’s edition, presumably following the Paris manuscript, spells the Syriac word as *ḥnyfwʾ*. The London MS. has (according to my collation) *ḥfwʾ*, which I assume to reflect a miscopying of *ḥnfʾ*. The statement that ‘there is no “f” in Syriac’ is broadly true as far as Eastern Syriac is concerned.

¹⁰⁴ Since the present study is concerned principally with the meaning of *ḥanīf* in quranic Arabic and its Semitic antecedents, I have felt justified in leaving out of consideration the decidedly vague statements in some of the Muslim sources concerning alleged *ḥunafāʾ* and followers of the ‘religion of Abraham’ among the Qurayṣ before and even during the time of the prophet Muḥammad. The material has been collected in a prudent, and necessarily rather inconclusive, article by Rubin on ‘*Ḥanīfiyya* and *Kaʿba*’ (Rubin, 1990) and was then discussed in a highly speculative, indeed fantastical, contribution by Gil (1992). I think that the historical value of these traditions is very slight; it is possible that they all derive from sources which spoke of *ḥunafāʾ*, i.e. ‘pagans’, among the ancient Arabs, which the Muslim authors misunderstood to mean ‘followers of the religion of Abraham’. As stated at the beginning of this section, the quranic material does not, in any case, support the notion of the *ḥunafāʾ* as a discrete religious community surviving until the time of Muḥammad. The question posed to us by the Quran is not: ‘Who were the community known as *ḥunafāʾ*?’ but: ‘What is the meaning of the epithet *ḥanīf*, and why is it applied to Abraham?’ For this reason I also find it difficult to accept Beeston’s (1984) hypothesis linking the quranic *ḥanīf* with the (apparently) non-Christian and non-Jewish monotheism of some of the late South Arabian inscriptions, specifically those invoking the god Raḥmānān. There are no real reasons to think that this is the case: there is no intrinsic connection between the term *ḥanīf* and the content of these inscriptions, nor is there anything to suggest that the undifferentiated monotheists in the Yemen attached any importance to Abraham, who, in the Quran, is the exemplar of the *ḥanīf*. Rippin (1991) criticizes Beeston, but does not offer any positive suggestions.

called Abraham a *ḥānēf*, a ‘hypocrite’.¹⁰⁵ I should like to suggest rather that this formula originated among Christians. But to make this hypothesis plausible it is necessary to take a closer look at the precise meaning of the Syriac word *ḥanpā*, specifically in the translations of the Bible.

Our survey of the Semitic material has suggested that the basic meaning of Aramaic *ḥanpā* is ‘dishonest, deceitful’. But in the Syriac versions of the New Testament it is used consistently to translate one or another of the Greek words for ‘gentile, non-Jew’, as a rule either the plural noun *ἔθνη* (‘nations’, which the Septuagint uses to render Hebrew *gōyīm*), the corresponding adjective *ἔθνικός*, or the noun *Ἕλληνα* (literally ‘Hellene, Greek’). In one passage only (1 Cor 10:27) *ḥanpē* translates *ἄπιστοι*, ‘unbelievers’, but here this too is used in the sense ‘gentiles’. As a translation of *ἔθνη* and *ἔθνικοί*, *ḥanpē* alternates with *‘ammē* (evidently a borrowing from Hebrew *‘ammīm*, ‘nations, gentiles’), while as a rendering of *Ἕλληνας* it alternates with *‘ammē* and with *armāyē*, literally ‘Aramaean’.¹⁰⁶ It is evident that Greek-speaking Jews referred to their non-Jewish compatriots as ‘Hellenes’, while Aramaic-speaking Jews called the gentiles ‘Aramaean’; this usage was then continued by Christians. As is known, the Greek Christians of the Middle Ages normally called themselves not ‘Hellenes’ but ‘Romans’ (*Ῥωμαῖοι*), just as Aramaic-speaking Christians called themselves not ‘Aramaean’ but ‘Syrians’ (*suryāyē*), a Greek form of ‘Assyrians’. The fact that the Syriac Bible can designate the gentiles with a word, *ḥanpē*, which etymologically means ‘deceitful ones’, is clearly also a continuation of Jewish usage; the gentiles (*gōyīm*) are by definition godless (*ḥānēf*).

But in the context of the New Testament the concept of the ‘gentile’ is not always a negative one. Paul declared himself the ‘apostle of the gentiles’. According to his teaching, Jesus promised salvation both to the Jews and to the gentiles, and to partake of this promise the gentiles do not need to become Jews, they are not subject to the law of Moses, for Christ has ‘set us free’ (Galatians 5:1), he has ‘redeemed us from the curse of the law’ (Gal. 3:13).

The Syriac versions of the Bible do use *ḥanpā* to render *ἔθνη*, *ἔθνικός* and *Ἕλληνα* in passages where these have the negative sense of ‘gentile, non-believer’,¹⁰⁷ and tend to prefer *‘ammē* or *armāyē* in passages where these Greek words are used in the positive sense of ‘gentile as a candidate for salvation in Christ’.¹⁰⁸ But this is not always the case. In the language of the translators *ḥanpā* can also be used in contexts where the concept of the ‘gentile’ has no negative connotations. Thus, Mark 7:26 tells of a ‘gentile (literally: Greek) woman, a Syrophenician by race’ (*Ἕλληνίς Συροφονικίσσα τῶ γένει*)¹⁰⁹ whose faith Jesus rewards by healing her daughter; for ‘gentile woman’ the Pšittā has *ḥanpθā*; the Vet. Syr. Sin. calls her ostensibly a ‘widow’ (*armaltā*), but this is doubtless a scribal error for *armāytā*, ‘gentile (lit. Aramaean) woman’. Acts 18:4 tells of how Paul, in Corinth, preached ‘to the Jews and the gentiles’ (literally: Greeks, *Ἕλληνας*); the Pšittā has *l-ḥūḏāyē wa-l-ḥanpē*, though in

¹⁰⁵ As is claimed by Torrey, 1933: 51, 87.

¹⁰⁶ The Syriac school tradition distinguishes between *ārāmāyā*, ‘Aramaean’, and *armāyā*, ‘gentile, pagan’, which are identical in unvocalized script. The latter is the genuine Aramaic adjective from *aram*. The former is a Syriac derivation from the expected Hebrew equivalent **ārām* (although the Masoretic text actually uses the irregular *ārām*, presumably a back-formation from a trisyllabic form like *ārāmīṯ*). For the semantic and phonetic development of these names see the fundamental article by Nöldeke, 1871.

¹⁰⁷ The Pšittā uses *ḥanpā* (-*pē*) for *ἔθνη* or *ἔθνικός* in Mt. 6:7, 10:5 (Vetus Syrus: *‘ammē*), 18:17, 1 Cor. 5:1, 10:20, 12:2, 1 Pet. 4:3; for *Ἕλληνας* in Joh. 7:35 (Vet. Syr.: *armāyē*) and Act. 18:17.

¹⁰⁸ Thus *passim* in the Pauline epistles.

¹⁰⁹ In the expanded version of the same pericope in Mt. 15:21–8 she is called a ‘Canaanite woman’ (Mt. 15:22: *γυνή Χαναναία*; the Pšittā and the two MSS of the Vetus Syrus have *kna’ nāytā*).

other occurrences of the same phrase (e.g. Acts 19:10), Ἕλληνας is rendered by *armāyē*. In Romans 1:16, Paul says that the gospel offers salvation ‘to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the gentile’ (or Greek, Ἕλληνας); here the Pšīṭṭā has *armāyē*, but the Harkleian version has *hanpā*. And John 12:20 speaks of ‘certain gentiles’ (or Greeks, Ἕλληνας) who wished to meet Jesus. The Vet. Syr. Sin. calls them *armāyē*, the Pšīṭṭā ‘*ammē* and the Harkleian version *hanpē*. It is thus clear that, despite its etymological meaning, *hanpē* could be used by the translators of the New Testament, without derogatory connotations, to designate also those gentiles who believe in the gospel of Jesus, in this sense interchangeably with ‘*ammē* and *armāyē*. This contrasts with the usage in non-biblical texts, where *hanpā* almost always means ‘non-Christian’, reverting to the original negative implications of the word. This development corresponds precisely to that of Latin *paganus* and Old English *hæþen*, etc., which start out as straightforward (if doubtless inadequate) renderings of ἔθνικός and its biblical equivalents,¹¹⁰ but later take on the exclusive meanings of ‘non-Christian, unbeliever’. In Pauline Christianity the gentile looses his abject status and becomes a partaker in salvation, but in the catholic faith of the Christianized Roman Empire, the gentile (redefined now not as the non-Jew, but as the non-Christian) resumes his role as the outsider, the enemy.

But in Paul’s doctrine of the redemption of the gentiles a central role is assigned to the figure of Abraham. This is spelt out in the third and fourth chapters of the letter to the Galatians, where Paul engages in a decidedly forced exegesis of the passage in Genesis 22:18 in which Yahweh’s angel declares to Abraham: ‘In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed’. This promise, Paul tells us, was made to Abraham’s seed, in the singular, not to his seeds, that is to say, not to the Jews as a whole, but to Christ (Gal. 3:16). The promise, moreover, was made ‘four hundred and thirty years’ before the law (3:17), that is to say, before the time of Moses. Only later was the law ‘added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise had been made’ (3:19). ‘And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations/gentiles (τὰ ἔθνη) by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying: In thee shall all the nations/gentiles (τὰ ἔθνη) be blessed’ (3:8).¹¹¹ Further: ‘Abraham had two sons, one by the handmaid, and one by the freewoman’ (4:22). This, Paul says, is an allegory. The handmaid Hagar represents ‘the Jerusalem that is now: for she is in bondage with her children’, that is to say the unconverted Jews are enslaved both by the ritual law of Moses and by the secular law of the Romans, ‘but the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother’ (4:25–6).

Paul pursues a similar line in the fourth chapter of the letter to the Romans: God declared Abraham righteous ‘not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision’ (Rom. 4:10), that is to say, the election of Abraham took place before the circumcision. ‘For not through the law was the promise to Abraham or to his seed, that he should be heir to the world, but through the righteousness of faith’ (4:13).

¹¹⁰ ἔθνος basically means ‘group, swarm, tribe, nation’, but already in classical Greek ἔθνη are also ‘foreigners, provincials, barbarians’ as opposed to Ἕλληνας. The latter sense is rendered by Latin *paganus* (from *pagus*, ‘village’) as well as by Germanic forms like Gothic (fem. sing.) *haiþnō*, Old English *hæþen* (from *haiþi*, *hæþ*, ‘heath’). The ‘pagan’ and the ‘heathen’ are thus both etymologically ‘countryfolk’. Since the Gothic gospel was translated directly from the Greek, there is no good reason to assume that the Germanic usage derives from the Latin. The once widely held view that the Germanic ‘heathen’ words are mere transcriptions of ἔθνικός is in any case no longer tenable.

¹¹¹ The English Bible reflects the ambiguity of the verse by rendering the first ἔθνη as ‘heathen’ and the second as ‘nations’. The Pšīṭṭā has ‘*ammē* both times.

It is easy to imagine what impact such teachings would have had in ancient Arabia. According to the usual Jewish and Christian interpretation of the biblical genealogies, the Arabs are children of Abraham, but at the same time they are gentiles, not Jews. But Paul declared that it is precisely Abraham who is the paradigm of salvation to the gentiles: God promised this salvation to Abraham, 430 years before sending the law to Moses. In the flesh, the Arabs descend from the slavewoman Hagar, the Jews from the freewoman Sarah, but Paul says that he is not interested in physical descent, but sees Abraham's two wives as an allegory. The Jews are physically the children of the freewoman, but, unless they accept Christ, they are spiritually the children of the slave, for they are slaves of the law. The Arabs descend from the slavewoman, they are gentiles, but if they accept the gospel, they, like the believing Jews, become children of the freewoman, of 'the Jerusalem that is above', 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16).

We have seen that one of the Syriac words for 'gentile' is *ḥanpā*. But in the Quran *ḥanīf* is an epithet of Abraham, the one to whom God, according to Paul's interpretation, promised the redemption of the gentiles. *ḥanīf* and *ḥanpā*, though they share the same root, are different forms. It is possible that *ḥanīf* is an inherited Arabic word which, in a Christian or Jewish environment, took on the meaning of Aramaic *ḥanpā*, but it is also possible that the singular *ḥanīf* is merely a back-formation from the plural *ḥanaḥā*, which, for its part, could represent a borrowing of the Aramaic plural *ḥanpē*, remodelled to fit a regular Arabic plural pattern,¹¹² as there are other examples of loanwords that entered Arabic in the plural and whose Arabic singular is secondary.¹¹³ As it happens, Paul does not say outright that the uncircumcized Abraham was a gentile, but this is a plausible deduction from his argument, and in Syriac church literature, in at least one text, this is stated explicitly: the Syriac life of Clement of Rome¹¹⁴ says that Clement's parents were pagans/gentiles (*ḥanpē*), but nonetheless pious, and 'in them was fulfilled the word of the scripture', namely that 'Abraham believed in god, when he was a *ḥanpā*' (*ḥaymen aβrāhām l-alāhā xad ḥanpā wā*).¹¹⁵ If we were to put this last phrase into Arabic, the first part would come out as *'āmana 'ibrāhīmu bi llāhi*, and the second part could be rendered most idiomatically as a *ḥāl* clause: *wa huwa ḥanīf*, or in one word: *ḥanīfan*, making the whole thing sound very much like a quranic *'āyah* such as 16:120, which declares Abraham to have been *qānitan li llāhi ḥanīfan*. This, assuming for the moment that *ḥanīf* does in fact have the same meaning as *ḥanpā*, might be rendered: 'Abraham was obedient to god, as a gentile'.¹¹⁶

It is possible that the designation of Abraham as a *ḥanīf* was inherited from Christian parlance and that the original meaning of the term was no longer understood at the time when the Quran was composed.¹¹⁷ But it is not necessary to assume this. *ḥanīf* can, in all of its quranic contexts, plausibly be translated as 'gentile', or perhaps more specifically as 'a person in the state of religious innocence, not bound by Jewish law', even if this is not the most

¹¹² The latter suggestion was made already by Bell, 1953: 12.

¹¹³ See Colin, 1960–3 (discussed above in footnote 49) and also Spitaler, 1955.

¹¹⁴ i.e. the life of Clement contained in *Lives of the Saints from Za'farān*, published by Mingana in his article on 'Some early Judaeo-Christian documents' (Mingana, 1917). I hasten to add that there seems to be nothing in the text that would justify seeing it as a Jewish Christian document, or as exceptionally early.

¹¹⁵ Syriac text, 34 of the offprint.

¹¹⁶ The whole *'āyah* reads: *'inna 'ibrāhīma kāna 'ummatan qānitan li llāhi ḥanīfan wa lam yaku mina l-mušrikīn*, probably meaning something like 'As for Abraham, he was a tribe (unto himself), obedient to god, as a gentile, and he was not one of the associators'.

¹¹⁷ As suggested for *sijīl*, and some of the other 'mysterious' words in the Quran, in de Blois, 1999.

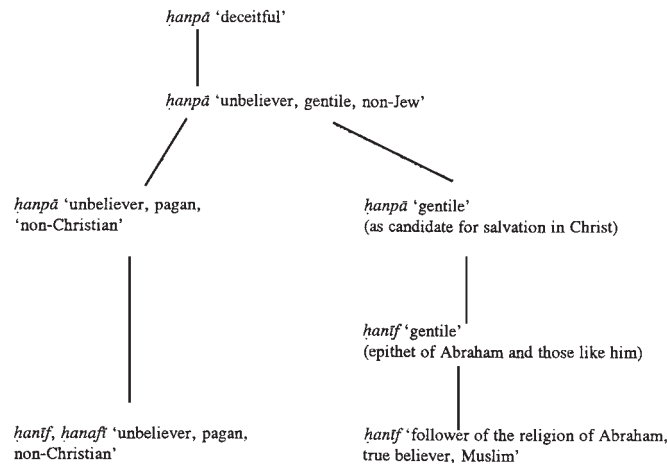


FIG. 1. The proposed development of the Semitic word *ḥanpā*.

immediately obvious rendering. This interpretation seems particularly attractive in a verse like 30:30 where the *ḥanīf* is linked explicitly to man's state of primeval innocence,¹¹⁸ or like 3:67,¹¹⁹ where it is stated that 'Abraham was not a Jew and not a Nazoraean'—that is, not one of those who, like the Jews and the Nazoraean Jewish Christians, considered the strict observance of Mosaic law to be the precondition of salvation—'nor was he one of the associators', 'but he was a submissive gentile' (*ḥanīfan musliman*). He was a *ḥanīf*, not subject to Jewish law, but also a *muslim*, a person submissive to god. The proposed development of the Semitic word is illustrated in Figure 1.

In conclusion, it is necessary to state that the thesis presented here is not entirely new. Margoliouth remarked as early as 1903¹²⁰ that the identification of quranic *ḥanīf* with Syriac *ḥanpā* 'has much in its favour' and that:

by calling Abraham a *heathen* the author would be alluding to a favourite topic of Christian apologetics, first suggested, it would seem, by St. Paul. In Rom. iv, 10–12, it is argued that Abraham's faith was accounted upon him for righteousness before he had received the mark of Judaism, so that he might be the father of all non-Jewish believers (...). This argument would have by no means been valueless to Mohammed, though he cannot have been accurately acquainted with it;¹²¹ but the Christian insistence on the fact that Abraham was a *Gentile* would give a good reason for the name *ḥanīf* being applied to him by Mohammad. This theory, however, seems to be seriously opposed by the occasional employment of the word in the Koran *without* the addition 'and not one of the polytheists.' And where men are told to be 'Ḥanīfs unto God' (xxii,3)¹²², what sense would the word have if it meant 'heathen'?

Margoliouth then proceeded to expound his own hypothesis, namely that both

¹¹⁸ *fa 'aqim wajhaka li d-dīni ḥanīfan fīrāta llāhi llatī faṭara n-nāsa 'alayhā*. 'And direct thy face towards the faith as a gentile, in keeping with god's (original) creation according to which he created men.'

¹¹⁹ Text above, note 82.

¹²⁰ Margoliouth, 1903: 478–9.

¹²¹ Why not?

¹²² Read: 'xxii, 31'. The phrase *ḥanaḥā'a li llāhi ḡayra mušrikīna bihī* means, I think, 'as god's gentiles, not as those who associate (others) to him', that is, as *ἕθνη* in the positive (Christian) sense of 'believing gentiles', not in the negative sense of 'pagans'.

muslim and *hanīf* originally designated the followers of Musaylimah, the prophet (or so-called pseudo-prophet) of the Banū Ḥanīfah, and were in effect usurped by Muḥammad and his followers in the sense ‘monotheist’. This is a most implausible suggestion.¹²³ But by admitting that the ‘original’ meaning of *hanīf* (‘follower of the prophet of the Banū Ḥanīfah’) might be different from its acquired meaning in the Quran (‘monotheist’), Margoliouth undermined his own objection that the quranic usage does not always seem to agree with the etymological meaning ‘heathen, pagan’.

Then, in 1930, Ahrens considered at least the possibility¹²⁴ that the positive connotations of Arabic *hanīf* originated ‘auf Grund der christlichen Anschauung von den frommen Heiden als den von Gott erwählten Nachfolgern der ungehorsamen Israeliten’, with reference to Rom. 2:14, 11:30 sqq., and ‘5. Esra’ 2:34 sqq.¹²⁵ And at the end of the same article he expresses, this time more assuredly, the opinion¹²⁶ that ‘die christliche Anschauung von Abraham als dem Vater der gläubig werdenden Heiden’ (Rom. 4:11–12) was one of the sources for ‘die Lehre vom Hanifentum Abrahams als einen “Heiden”, der aber kein Götzendiener war’. Ahrens did not refer to Margoliouth’s article, so it is possible that he came upon the same idea independently. I am compelled to confess that I had not read either of these articles until a time when the present study was substantially complete. It does not seem that this line of thought has been pursued by any author in the last seventy years, so perhaps it will not be considered superfluous to attempt to relaunch it from a different perspective.

(3) Conclusions

Similarities in religious content between Islam and ‘Jewish Christianity’ have been noted by a fair number of writers, in particular by specialists in the early history of the Christian church. Notable among these is no less influential a figure in that field than Harnack, more than a century ago,¹²⁷ but the question has also been addressed in more recent times, especially by Schoeps,¹²⁸ Roncaglia¹²⁹ and Colpe.¹³⁰ It is really astonishing that this discussion has had virtually no resonance among specialists in Arabic and Islamic studies, ‘Jewish Christianity’ is not a phrase that one finds very often in Arabist discourse, whether from the ‘traditionalist’ or from the ‘revisionist’ stable. Of course, it is one thing to notice similarities between the teachings of two religious

¹²³ Cogent objections against this hypothesis were raised, in the very next issue of the same journal (scholars and editors worked quickly in those days), by Lyall (1903), who remarked, among other things, that *hanīf* cannot be a *nisbah* of *hanīfah*.

¹²⁴ Ahrens, 1930: 28 (‘liegt es im Bereich der Möglichkeit’).

¹²⁵ i.e. the book called ‘IV Esdras’ in the Vulgata and ‘II Esdras’ in the KJV. It should be noted that the first two chapters of that book are a Christian interpolation into this originally Jewish writing. The passage cited is thus presumably theologically dependent on Pauline doctrine.

¹²⁶ Ahrens, 1930: 190.

¹²⁷ The very interesting excursus ‘Der Islam’ seems to be contained only in the fourth edition of his *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (Harnack, 1909–10: ii, 529–38), and incorporates the text of a lecture which he had delivered as early as 1877. The gist of Harnack’s argument is that Islam developed out of what he called ‘gnostic Jewish Christianity’ and inherited from this a true monotheism that is vastly superior (i.e. closer to Harnack’s own rationalistic Protestantism) than the abstruse trinitarian Christianity prevalent in the Middle Ages.

¹²⁸ See the chapter ‘Ebionistische Elemente im Islam’ in Schoeps, 1949: 334–42. Schoeps’s influential book (an attempt to rehabilitate ancient Jewish Christianity as the acceptable philo-semitic antidote to the ingrained anti-semitism of mainstream Christianity) culminates in the assertion (p. 342): ‘Und somit ergibt sich als Paradox wahrhaft weltgeschichtlichen Ausmaßes die Tatsache, daß das Judenchristentum zwar in der christlichen Kirche untergegangen ist, aber im Islam sich konserviert hat und in einigen seiner treibenden Impulse bis in unsere Tage hineinreicht.’

¹²⁹ Roncaglia, 1971.

¹³⁰ Colpe, 1986, discussing also (on pp. 215–17) the *hanīf* problem, without coherent results.

traditions, and another to construct a plausible historical model to account for the influence of one upon the other. Harnack explicitly sidestepped this question and concentrated entirely on a typological comparison between Islam and 'Jewish Christianity' (specifically Elchasaism), especially in their respective christologies. But his successors have seen the 'Jewish Christian' input in Islam channelled primarily through the sect known in the Quran as *ṣābi'ūn* (Sabians),¹³¹ whom Chwohlsion had identified with the Elchasaites (but also, simultaneously, with the Mandaeans), but whom Schoeps preferred (unfortunately without any real arguments) to see as an Arabian offshoot of the Ebionites, the sect whose doctrines are (still according to Schoeps) enunciated in the 'Jewish Christian' parts of the pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions*.¹³² Roncaglia chose to sit on the fence and speak of 'Ebionite and Elchasaite elements in the Qur'ān'. The equation of the quranic *ṣābi'ūn* with Elchasaites (or with Mandaeans) was criticized by Tardieu in 1986 and I also argued against it in 1995 and made a new suggestion for the positive identification of the *ṣābi'ūn*.¹³³ But even without this, the *ṣābi'ūn* are mentioned in the Quran only in passing, there is no polemic against their specific teachings, and thus no reason to think that the primitive Muslim community had an intimate knowledge of their doctrines or is likely to have been influenced by them to any decisive extent. My proposal now is that the 'Jewish Christians' in the environment of primitive Islam were not those whom the Quran calls *ṣābi'ūn*, but those that it calls *naṣārā*, the Nazoraeans. This is the conclusion of the first part of this article.

In the second part I have attempted to show that the quranic polemics precisely against the Nazoraeans make use of motives that can be traced to the Pauline epistles, specifically the notion that Abraham had been elected 'in uncircumcision' and that he is consequently the paradigm of salvation for the gentiles. The realization that the *naṣārā* of the Quran are not simply Christians, but 'Jewish Christians', who maintained, against Paul, the continued validity of the law of Moses, explains why the quranic notion of Abraham the *hanīf*, the gentile, stands in polemical juxtaposition not only to the Jews, but also to the Nazoraeans.

This suggests that the primitive Muslim community had contact with Nazoraeans. But the author of the Quran must have had some knowledge also of the teachings of Pauline (or rather pseudo-Pauline, presumably catholic) Christianity. One does not, however, gain the impression that catholic Christians were perceived as a serious rival to nascent Islam. The polemical demarcation of Islam against competing faiths repeatedly mentions Jews, Nazoraeans and 'associators', separately or together, rarely joined by Sabians and, once only, by Magians (Zoroastrians). Catholic Christians do not seem

¹³¹ In the mentioned chapter 'Der Islam' Harnack does not say anything about Sabians. Elsewhere in the book (Harnack, 1909–10: i, 331, n. 2) he does mention them as one of several possible channels of Jewish Christian influence: 'Als Religionssystem basiert der Islam z. Th. auf dem synkretistischen Judenthume (einschliesslich der ihrem Ursprung nach so räthselhaften Çabier) und ist—ohne dass dabei der Originalität Mohammed's zu nahe getreten werden soll—nur unter Berücksichtigung desselben geschichtlich zu verstehen.'

¹³² The question of what differences (if any) existed between the 'Jewish Christian' sects attacked by the catholic heresiographers and of where the pseudo-Clementines fit into this sectarian quagmire are problems that remain at the heart of Jewish Christian studies.

¹³³ de Blois, 1995, with a survey of the previous literature. The publication of the book by Gündüz (1994) coincided with that of my article and it could not be discussed there. It is, at least as far as the Sabians are concerned, only a rehash of old secondary literature (see also the review by Buckley, 1996). Bellamy, 1996: 201–3, has come to a conclusion superficially similar to mine, to which I have replied succinctly in de Blois, 1999: 65, n. 10. Alberto Fratini and Carlo Prato kindly sent me a copy of their study of the *σεβόμενοι* ('god fearers', see above n. 49) and the *ṣābi'ūn* (whom they identify with one another), printed privately in 1997 but not to my knowledge published. I regret to have to say that I find their arguments very far-fetched.

to fit into this spectrum. One could imagine a situation where there existed, presumably in Mecca, an isolated outpost of Nazoraean 'Jewish Christianity' and where Muḥammad's acquaintance with Pauline teachings would have come merely from hearsay, or from his contacts with catholic (Melkite or Jacobite) Christians during his travels to Syria. But it would have been only from the former that Islam had to distance itself in its original Arabian environment. Admittedly, the traditional *sīrah* has nothing to say about these Arabian Christians, but this is a matter that needs to be pursued in another context.

Naturally, I am aware that there are scholars who have doubted the idea that Islam had its beginnings in Central Arabia in the first half of the seventh century and who have proposed a later and more northerly origin. I am not alone in thinking that as yet no really convincing arguments have been offered for this temporal and spatial relocation of Islam. It is easy (and, no doubt, instructive) to criticize the available sources, but it is not easy to reconstruct history in the ensuing vacuum. But I would suggest that even those who wish to put the inception of the Muslim community somewhere other than Arabia might wish to consider the implications of the proposed interpretation of the terms *naṣrānī* and *ḥanīf* and to address the question of whether the apparent preoccupation of primitive Islam with 'Jewish Christianity' and its apparent indifference to the rivalry of the great mainstream of eastern Christendom is indeed reconcilable with its relocation into such well-charted provinces of church history as Syria or Mesopotamia. My view is that Islam, in its original form, is a doctrine not at the centre, but on the periphery, of religious life in the Near East. And it is its peripheral nature, its living contact with forgotten fossils of world religions, that make the Quran a vitally important source also for the history of Christianity.

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