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THE JEWISH THEME IN THEOPHANES THE CONFESSOR'S TESTIMONY ON THE PROPHET MUḤAMMAD

Abstract. Theophanes' account regarding the rise of Islam and the history of the Prophet Muḥammad appears to be the most detailed and precise one that can be found in Byzantine historiography. The Confessor's aim was to reproduce as many details about Muḥammad's life as possible. Since his focus was not on religious ideas, but on key events surrounding the rise of the new religion, his account is not predominantly concerned with discussing Islam's ideology. However, this does not allow us to regard it as in any way objective. Some of the views it contains were included with the clear goal of discrediting Islam as a religion that rivalled Christianity. This, for example, can be said of Theophanes' remarks about the relationship between Muḥammad and the Jews. In this article, I focus on this aspect of Theophanes' account, discussing it in the context of the long-running (the last several decades) scholarly debates regarding Jewish-Muslim relations.

Keywords: Theophanes the Confessor, Byzantine historiography, Christian-Muslim relations, Muḥammad, Islam's Prophet

Theophanes's work provides a great deal of information about the Prophet Muḥammad¹. The Byzantine chronicler, who can be considered to have obtained detailed knowledge of Muḥammad's life, lived in a country (150 years after the Prophet's death) that maintained constant relations with the Caliphate, both in war and on peaceful terms. It was thus impossible for Islam's founder to remain an unknown figure in the Empire². The reason why the information about

¹ Some of the issues dealt with in this article I have also discussed in B. CECOTA, *Islam, the Arabs and Umayyad Rulers according to Theophanes the Confessor's Chronography*, SCer 2, 2012, p. 97–111. For detailed discussion of Muḥammad as presented in Theophanes the Confessor's Chronography cf. IDEM, *Islam, Arabowie i wizerunek kalifów w przekazach Chronografii Teofanesa Wyznawcy*, Łódź 2022 [= BL, 43], p. 51–73.

² The knowledge of Islam and the Prophet in the early period of the Arab invasion of Syria and Egypt was scarce, if there was any awareness at all that Islam was a new religion (it was difficult to become aware of the fact not only because of the lack of reliable information, but because chaos and anarchy arose during these events and the level of understanding of Islam's principles among Arab

him seems so precise may lie in the fact that Theophanes strove to give an account not only of Muḥammad's ideas, but also of Muḥammad's life, focusing on details that went unnoticed by other chroniclers, whether the Byzantine ones or the ones coming from countries that remained under Arab occupation. However, one may be puzzled by the fact that the fullest account of the Prophet's life given from the Byzantine perspective comes from as late as the beginning of the eleventh century³.

Regardless of these biographical details, Theophanes never lost sight of the fact that his main goal was to point out the falseness of the Islamic doctrine. One cannot agree with the view that he aimed to offer an objective description of the Muslims' religion⁴, although his account is actually calm and balanced, as was rightly stressed by Teresa Wolińska⁵. On the other hand, however, one should bear in mind the opinion expressed by Sidney H. Griffith, according to whom Christian apologists (including Theophanes) drew on details of Muḥammad's life in order to show that he was not a prophet in a biblical sense of the word, and that what he was after was mainly power. There was then no doubt that he was not called by God, but by people who gave him some notion of Christian and Jewish doctrines. The apparent interest in details of his life may thus have stemmed from the intention of discrediting him and his ideas⁶.

The pejorative attitude towards the Prophet is attested to in three fragments of Theophanes' account. The first concerns the Jews and their reaction to Muḥammad's teachings, while the remaining two pertain to his supposed illness and women's role in the spread of the new doctrine. This article discusses only the first of those fragments. Theophanes employed a clever strategy of making the Jews seem to be casting something of a 'double' doubt on Islam. They are reported to have at first recognised the doctrine, a fact sufficient for a Christian to deny

warriors was low); J. FLORI, *L'islam et la fin des Temps. L'interprétation prophétique des invasions musulmanes dans la chrétienté médiévale*, Paris 2007, p. 114–122; J.V. TOLAN, *Réactions chrétiennes aux conquêtes musulmanes. Etude comparée des auteurs chrétiens de Syrie et d'Espagne*, CCM 44, 2001, p. 350–352. However, in the years that followed the awareness of Islam's distinctiveness spread not only among Byzantium's lay and clerical elites, but also among its lower strata, for example, among soldiers from the themes of Asia Minor. According to David TURNER, the theme Anatolikon's cry regarding the faith in the Holy Trinity, reported from the reign of Constantine IV (668–685), can be interpreted as aimed at stressing the importance of the Christian religion as opposed to strictly monotheistic Islam: *The Trouble with the Trinity: The Context of a Slogan during the Reign of Constantine IV (668–685)*, BMGS 27, 2003, p. 118–119.

³ For similar conclusions cf.: L. BORAS, *A Prophet has appeared coming with the Saracens. The Non-Islamic Testimonies on the Prophet and the Islamic Conquest of Egypt in the 7th–8th centuries* (MA Thesis, Radboud University, Nijmegen 2017), p. 14.

⁴ In this way: Ю. МАКСИМОВ, *Прп. Феофан Исповедник Сигрианский об исламе*, БВе 4, 2004, p. 312–335.

⁵ T. WOLIŃSKA, *Elity chrześcijańskie wobec islamu (VII–X wiek)*, VP 35, 2015, p. 558–559.

⁶ S.H. GRIFFITH, *The Prophet Muhammad, his Scripture and his Message, according to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the first Abbasid Century*, [in:] IDEM, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*, Aldershot 2003, p. 132.

its authenticity⁷. We are explicitly informed of the conversion of some members of Jewish communities to Islam: ὡς καὶ τινὰς τῶν προυχόντων αὐτῶν προσελθεῖν αὐτῷ καὶ δέξασθαι τὴν αὐτοῦ θρησκείαν. Theophanes accuses them of disowning Moses, while at the same time confirming the credibility of his mission: καὶ ἀφήσαι τὴν τοῦ θεόπτου Μωσέως. He then goes on to state that those Jews who converted to Islam soon found the religion false. They took note of the fact that Muḥammad's habit of eating some foods ran counter to the principles of Judaism (the ban on eating camel's meat): θεωρήσαντες δὲ αὐτὸν ἐσθίοντα ἀπὸ καμήλου ἔγνωσαν, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτός, ὃν ἐνόμισαν. However, acting out of fear, they stayed with the Prophet and, it is emphasized, affected his mission in such a way that it became directed mainly against the Christians: καὶ ἠπόρουσαν τί πράξει, καὶ ἀφήσαι αὐτοῦ τὴν θρησκείαν δειλιῶντες οἱ τάλανες ἐδίδασκον αὐτὸν ἀθέμιτα καθ' ἡμῶν τῶν Χριστιανῶν. The chronicler thus seems to suggest that Islam's hypocrisy was so dreadful that even the Jews, themselves guilty of blasphemy, realised that it was not a true religion⁸.

Given the above, it seems that the range of arguments on which Christian apologists drew in dealing with Islam involved accusing it of ties to Judaism⁹. It holds especially true for the circles that remained under Islam's direct influence – the Christians of Syria, both the Monophysites and Nestorians. The latter included so distinguished an apologist as Timothy I (almost the peer of Theophanes the Confessor), Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 780–823¹⁰. In one of the surviving letters, addressed to Sergius, Elam's future Metropolitan (the end of the eighth century), Timothy referred to the Muslims as the 'new Jews', regarding polemical engagements with them as a direct continuation of the early Christians' disputes with Jewish communities in Palestine¹¹. Similar references appeared in the

⁷ The whole of this complicated description is found between the lines: *Theophanis Chronographia*, AM 6122, ed. C.G. DE BOOR, Lipsiae 1883 (cetera: THEOPHANES), p. 333.4–9.

⁸ THEOPHANES, AM 6122, p. 333.9–13.

⁹ It is still open to debate to what extent Christian works from the seventh century engaged in polemics with Judaism were directed only against the Jews and to what extent they referred to the new variant of Moses' religion – that is, Islam. It is worth noting here that this polemic always pertained to similar elements: The Holy Trinity, Incarnation, Crucifixion etc. There is a vast body of literature on the topic. Cf.: Sh. O'SULLIVAN, *Anti-Jewish Polemic and Early Islam*, [in:] *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, ed. D. THOMAS, Leiden–Boston 2007 [= HCh-MR, 6], p. 49–68; V. DÉROCHE, *Polémique anti-judaïque et émergence de l'Islam (7^e–8^e siècles)*, REB 57, 1999, p. 141–161; A. CAMERON, *Byzantines and Jews: Some Recent Work on Early Byzantium*, BMGS 20, 1996, p. 249–274; G. DAGRON, V. DÉROCHE, *Juifs et chrétiens dans l'Orient du VI^e siècle*, TM 11, 1991, p. 17–273.

¹⁰ For more on this distinguished Christian philosopher known for translating Greek treatises into Syriac and Arabic and for playing an important role as an organizer of the Church of the East in the new conditions that arose under the Caliphate authority cf.: D.D. BUNDY, *Timotheos I* (the bibliographical notes therein), [in:] *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition*, ed. S.P. BROCK, A.M. BUTTS, G.A. KIRAZ, L. VAN ROMPAY, <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Timotheos-I> [10 IV 2023].

¹¹ T.R. HURST, *Letter 40 of the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (727–823). A Edition and Translation* (MA Thesis, The Catholic University of America, Washington 1981), p. 48.

record of a supposed debate (there is still no agreement among scholars about its authenticity¹²) between the patriarch and representatives of Caliph al-Mahdī in 782. Syrian and Arab sources that record the supposed debate contain a fragment in which Caliph and his representatives point to their kinship with the Jews and Moses' mission, trying to infer from the Book of Deuteronomy 18.18 (*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kindred, and will put my words into the mouth of the prophet; the prophet shall tell them all that I command*) a herald of Muḥammad's advent. The patriarch questions this assertion by indicating that ancient peoples, such as the Edomites, the Ammonites, or the Moabites, were more closely related to the Israelites than the Ishmaelites¹³. Another Theophanes's 'peer'¹⁴, Theodore Bar Koni, also representing the Church of the East¹⁵, wrote in his *Ktābā d-'eskoliyon*, in the part presenting arguments against Islam, that Muslims *believe in the same way as Jews*¹⁶. Among those who claimed that the latter paved the way for regarding the crucified Christ as a human being was Abū Rā'īta l-Takrītī¹⁷, a representative of the Syrian Monophysite Church. However, he drew no distinction between Muslims and members of Christian denominations holding such a view of Christ¹⁸. The charge of the Jewish origin of Islamic dogmas

¹² Conclusions regarding this debate continue to appear in academic discourse, including that produced by authors from Muslim academic centres: H.A. HARMAKAPUTRA, *Muslim-Christian Debates in the Early 'Abbasid Period. The Cases of Timothy I and Theodore Abu Qurra*, MIQOT 38, 2014, p. 435–445.

¹³ C. HACKENBURG, *An Arabic-to-English Translation of the Religious Debate between the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I and the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdi* (MA Thesis, The Ohio State University 2009), p. 126–129.

¹⁴ Older historiography associated Theodore Bar Koni with bishop Beth Germai, Patriarch Johann IV's nephew who lived in the tenth century: W.A. WRIGHT, *A Short History of Syriac Literature*, London 1894, p. 222. However, this view was refuted already in the first half of the twentieth century by Jean-Baptiste CHABOT – *Littérature syriaque*, Paris 1934, p. 107–108. Theodore is usually considered to have lived in the times of Patriarch Timothy: W. BAUM, D.W. WINKLER, *The Church of the East. A Concise History*, London–New York 2003, p. 63.

¹⁵ For more on Theodore's life (along with secondary literature) cf.: A.M. BUTTS, *Theodoros bar Koni*, [in:] *The Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. S.P. BROCK, A.M. BUTTS, G.A. KIRAZ, L. VAN ROMPAY, Piscataway, New Jersey 2011, p. 405–406.

¹⁶ *Theodorus Bar Koni Liber Scholiorum*, ed. A. SCHER, Paris 1910, p. 69. For discussion of this fragment cf.: S.H. GRIFFITH, *Chapter Ten of the Scholion: Theodore Bar Koni's Apology for Christianity*, OCP 47, 1981, p. 158–188.

¹⁷ Al-Takrītī was also Theophanes the Confessor's 'peer'. He died in around 830 in Tikrit (northern Iraq): *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, vol. I, (600–900), ed. D. THOMAS, B. ROGGEEMA, Leiden–Boston 2009, p. 567–580. On his activity as a theologian and apologist cf.: S.T. KEATING, *Defending the 'People of Truth' in the Early Islamic Period. The Christian Apologies of Abū Rā'ītah*, Leiden–Boston 2006 [= HCh-MR, 4], p. 24–55; S.H. GRIFFITH, *Habib ibn Hidmah Abu Rā'ītah, a Christian mutakallim of the First Abbasid Century*, OCh 64, 1980, p. 168–169.

¹⁸ *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Habib Ibn Hidma Abu Ra'īta*, ed. G. GRAF, Louvain 1951, vol. CXXX, p. 83; vol. CXXXI, p. 10.

appeared in the Apology of Al-Kindi¹⁹, a work dating from the ninth or tenth century, depending on which modern interpretation we accept²⁰. The Apology also contains a suggestion, according to which the idea of establishing a new religion came from two Jewish scholars, (actually against Muḥammad's will)²¹, one of whom is known in the Muslim tradition as a companion of two just Caliphs – 'Umar and 'Uthmān²². In accordance with the later Islamic traditions, a famous monk, Bahīrā²³, reported to have prophesied Muḥammad's future greatness as a prophet, was in fact a rabbi²⁴. To the above, one might add the account by the Armenian historian Sebeos who claimed that the Arab invasion was inspired by the Jews who

¹⁹ *Apology of Al Kindy Written at the Court of Al Mamun in Defence of Christianity against Islam*, trans. et ed. W. MUIR, London 1882, p. 3. Other modern translations: AL-KINDI, *Apologia del cristianesimo*, trans. L. BOTTINI, Milano 1998; *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue. A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632–900 A.D.)*, trans. N.A. NEWMAN, Hatfield 1993, p. 355–546 (text p. 381–402 and 411–516); G. PASTEUR TARTAR, *Dialogue islamo-chrétien sous le calife al-Mamun (813–834). Les épîtres d'al-Hashimi et d'al-Kindi*, Paris 1985.

²⁰ For discussion of the Apology – its authorship, dating and surviving manuscripts, especially later Arab versions (seventeenth century!), cf.: P.S. VAN KONINGSVELD, *The Apology of Al-Kindi*, [in:] *Religious Polemics in Context. Papers presented to the Second International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR) Held at Leiden, 27–28 April 2000*, ed. T. HETTEMA, Ch. KOOI, R. VAN GORCUM, Assen 2004, p. 69–92.

²¹ *Apology of Al Kindy*..., p. 23–24.

²² M. PERLMANN, *A Legendary Story of Kalb al-Ahbar's Conversion to Islam*, [in:] *Joshua Starr Memorial Volume*, New York 1953, p. 85–99; IDEM, *Another Ka'b al-Ahbar Story*, JQR 45, 1954, p. 48–58.

²³ On the rise of the Monk Bahīrā's legend: K. SZILÁGYI, *Muhammad and the Monk: The Making of the Christian Bahīrā Legend*, JSAI 34, 2008, p. 169–214. Both culturally and linguistically different versions of the myth are discussed in A. BAKHOU, *The Monk Encounters the Prophet – the Story of the Encounter between Monk Bahīrā and Muhammad as it is Recorded in the Syriac Manuscript of Mardin 259/2*, CRS 3, 2015, p. 349–357 (an extended version can be found in: IDEM, *The Christian Legend of Monk Bahīrā. The Syriac Manuscript of Mardain 259/2: Study and English Translation*, June 2006, http://www.baylorisr.org/wp-content/uploads/bahkou_monk.pdf [10 IV 2023]); S.H. GRIFFITH, *Muhammad and the Monk Bahīrā: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times*, OCh 79, 1995, p. 146–174; R.W. THOMPSON, *Armenian Variations on the Bahira Legend*, HUS 3/4, 1979/1980 [also as: *Eucharisterion: Essays Presented to Omeljan Pritsak on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students (1979–1980)*], p. 884–895. Bahīrā was not always presented as a heretic responsible for leading Muḥammad into doctrinal errors. Particularly interesting in this context is the version created by William of Tripoli who, exceptionally for Latin circles, built an image of Bahīrā as a faithful and saintly Christian attached to Muḥammad throughout his life and serving as his mentor in respect of the basic elements of the Christian doctrine: J.D. PEARSON, *The Islamic World and the Latin East. William of Tripoli and his Syrian Context* (PhD Thesis, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville 2018), p. 36100.

²⁴ B. ROGGEMA, *The Legend of Sergius Bahira. Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, Leiden 2009 [= HCh-MR, 9], p. 44. On the other hand, however, there is also the version suggesting that Bahīrā came from the Arab tribe of Qays: B. DE VRIES, *On the Way to Bosra. Arab Settlement in South Syria before Islam – the Evidence from Written Sources*, [in:] *Hereux qui comme Ulysse a fait un beau voyage. Movements of People in Time and Space*, ed. IDEM, N. NAGUIB, Bergen 2010, p. 72.

had fled Edessa for fear of Byzantine persecution²⁵. In the High Middle Ages, the charges and suggestions that Muḥammad had ties to the Jews spread as far as the circle of *Slavia Orthodoxa*. We find them, explicitly offensive in form, in the Palea from the fourteenth century, where the Prophet is referred to as a Jewish slave²⁶.

This brief review of the attitudes of Christian apologists who, coming from different circles and belonging to warring Christian denominations, wrote about Islam in the early stages of its development allows us to conclude that the 'Jewish issue' was exploited to a significant extent²⁷. There was thus nothing surprising about the fact that Theophanes decided to refer to it in his own work. It is interesting to note that by drawing so extensively on anti-Jewish themes, Christian apologists may have brought about their increased occurrence in Muslim literature²⁸. Particularly interesting in this context is the figure of 'Abdallāh ibn Saba', one of the first infidels and heretics of the early Islam, who was accused of the Jewish origin²⁹. Those involved in the ongoing political struggle did not flinch from

²⁵ Cf. R. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam as Other Saw It. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Princeton–New Jersey 1997, p. 124–132. Considering the fact that Sebeos described the rise of Islam (or at least the invasion of Christian lands) as a Jewish intrigue, it is worth noting that the tendency to regard the Jews as conspirators who spread subversive ideas undermining social order can also be found in Muslim literature: B. LEWIS, *Jews of Islam*, Westport, Connecticut 2002, p. 103.

²⁶ Z.A. BRZOWSKA, *Jeden z herezjarchów? Przedstawienia ikonograficzne Mahometa w rękopisie PHB, F.IV.151 w kontekście staroruskich narracji na jego temat*, VP 38, 2018, p. 464.

²⁷ For a multifaceted discussion of the anti-Jewish rhetoric used by Christian apologists writing about Islam cf. S.H. GRIFFITH, *Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth century*, JH 3, 1988, p. 65–94. It is worth noting that the Arabs were accused of having ties to the Jews already in pre-Islamic era. It suffices to mention here Hermias Sozomenos who noted that in following some habits and rituals such as circumcision or the ban on eating pork, the Arabs were similar to the believers of Judaism. Sozomenos even suggested that the Arabs had initially been, and some still continued to be, of Jewish faith (SOZOMENUS, *Kirchengeschichte*, VI, 38.10–13, ed. J. BIDEZ, G.Ch. HANSEN, Berlin 1995 [= *GCS.NF*, 4], p. 299). According to Greg FISHER, these insinuations aimed to denounce the Arabs as having ties to the Jews. – *Between Empires. Arabs, Romans and Sasanians in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 2011 [= *OCM*], p. 166–167. However, one should keep in mind here the essay by Elizabeth Jeffreys. Although she described her text as only an introduction to a wider discussion worthy of a whole book, she began it by comparing references to the Arabs from the pre-Islamic era to those found in Theophanes and Patriarch Nikephoros. Thus, references to the Jews, rather than being Chronographer's original idea, may have been part of the specific tradition of describing this desert tribe: E. JEFFREYS, *The Image of the Arabs in Byzantine Literature*, [in:] *The 17th International Byzantine Congress at Dumbarton Oaks, Major Papers*, New York 1986, p. 305–323.

²⁸ A. TEIPEN, *Jews in Early Biographies of Muhammad. A Case Study in Shifting Muslim Understandings of Judaism*, JAAR 88, 2020, p. 543–568. The complex nature of anti-Jewish arguments that began to be used in Christian literature in connection both with Islam's appearance, including in the context of iconoclastic debates held in the eight century, and with different religious communities' adherence to the idea of the covenant with God, has been dealt with by V. DÉROCHE in *Polémique...*, p. 141–161.

²⁹ S.W. ANTHONY, *The Caliph and the Heretic. Ibn Saba' and the Origins of Shi'ism*, Leiden–Boston 2012 [= *IHC*, 91], p. 313–317. Jewishness was only one element of 'Abdallāh ibn Saba' negative leg-

making similar accusations against members of the ruling family – the Umayyads – in some traditions Muḥammad is reported to have called ‘Uqbah ibn ‘Abī Mu‘ayt, Umayyah great-grandson (a representative of one line of the family, the other lines were led by ‘Uthmān bin ‘Affān, Mu‘āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān and Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam) a Jew³⁰.

Interestingly, Theophanes' remarks, which are unique in their account of the Jews' hesitation in deciding whether or not to accept Muḥammad's doctrine, partly reflect today's view of the problem. As long as a quarter-century ago, Steven M. Wasserstrom argued in the work devoted to the early Jewish-Islamic relations that Muḥammad proclaimed himself the last prophet and not a Messiah. The acceptance of this 'human' function, and the rejection of any claims to 'divine' messianism³¹, must have been disorienting to Jews and the Christians alike, producing different, not always negative, attitudes towards the new religion. This state of unclearly defined positions and the problem of how to understand Muḥammad's message is rightly reflected in the *Chronography*³². In the context of the Jewish roots of Islam, one cannot omit to mention here the theory put forward ten years ago by Fred M. Donner, according to whom the Muslim religion originated in a monotheistic reform movement, which included both Jews and Christians. Donner claims that it emerged from the movement only several decades after the Prophet's death³³. However, based on his research into the writings of John of Damascus, Peter Schandler has noted that even if Donner's theory is generally acceptable, it certainly is not so with regard to the lifespan of the great philosopher and theologian whose works are indicative of the fully shaped doctrine of the new religion, and

end. The others included black mother or the late conversion to Islam. Cf.: E.R. FIĞLALI, *The "Problem" of Abd-Allah Ibn-Saba*, IIED 5, 1982, p. 379–390.

³⁰ Significantly, there are some genealogical and historical reasons to suggest that these allegations were not without foundation: S. WARD, *Muḥammad Said: "You Are Only a Jew from the Jews of Sephoris": Allegations of the Jewish Ancestry of Some Umayyads*, JNES 60, 2001, p. 31–42.

³¹ One should keep in mind here a theory (P. CRONE, M. COOK, *Hagarism. The Making of the Islamic World*, Cambridge 1977), according to which Muslims' interest in these themes dates back to the beginning of their religion, and the second Caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, referred to in the Islamic tradition by the nickname *Al-Fārūq*, a word derived from the Syriac 'saviour', may have been regarded by them as their Messiah. Following the review of Quranic testimonies and the re-examination of the sources on which the two authors mentioned above drew, Fred DONNER rejected this hypothesis, claiming that the hard evidence that can be adduced to prove the existence of messianic themes in Islam comes from after the first century of the Hijra: *La question du messianisme dans l'islam primitif*, RMMM 91/94, 2000, p. 17–28.

³² For more on this problem, dealt with in the context of the Jewish polemical engagements with Islam, cf.: S.M. WASSERSTROM, *Between Muslim and Jew. The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam*, Princeton 1995, p. 47–90.

³³ F.M. DONNER, *Muḥammad and the Believers. At the Origins of Islam*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2010, p. 194–224. Donner is not of course the only scholar who has raised the issue of some vagueness of the early monotheism adhered to by future Muslims: M. GRODZKI, *Yehuda D. Nevo – A Comprehensive Skeptical Theory on the Genesis of Islam*, ROR 71, 2018, p. 55–95.

not of any kind of Christian or Judaic heresy³⁴. If the son of Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik’s treasurer Sargūn ibn Manṣūr stressed that Muḥammad had become acquainted with the books of the Old and New Testament before embarking on his teaching mission, as is indicated by Diego Sarrió Cucarella in his polemic with Peter Schandler³⁵, this can hardly be taken to mean that the Prophet was either a member or an organizer of any Christian or Jewish community.

It should be kept in mind that the Muslims’ leader was not considered to act, in line with the idea of supersessionism³⁶, as a continuator of the previous revelations, at least in the sense of nullifying all other revealed beliefs and replacing them with Islam as their natural fulfilment. Contrary to the suggestions that can be encountered in historical studies, Quranic texts and traditions, especially Hadiths, indicate that Muḥammad put forward the entirely new, if not systematically developed, revelation theology, which was not a simple reformulation of the older Judaic and Christian beliefs. For this reason, Islam’s possible link with supersessionism can be conceived of only in connection with the *tahrif* – an idea which, while it was fully articulated in the eleventh century by Ibn Ḥazm³⁷ (that is, long after Muḥammad’s death) and served as an inspiration to Theophanes’s work, can also be found in Islam’s theologically primary texts – Quran and Sunna. According to this idea, both Jews and Christians, acting independently of the Lord, introduced many changes to the message of the revelation, and only Muḥammad managed to rectify these mistakes. Consequently, Islam cannot be regarded as a continuation, but rather as a negation of these two religions. While the latter distorted God’s revelation, Islam’s view of it was purified and flawless³⁸.

In view of the above, Theophanes’s remarks regarding the Jewish attitudes toward Islam take on an interesting meaning. They can be considered to confirm the suggestion that Muḥammad established an entirely new religion, which thus was not a continuation of either Judaism or Christianity. It seems paradoxical that the supposed ties between Islam and Judaism, to which Christian apologists paid special attention in the early Middle Ages, are today part of the reflection of ecumenically inclined theologians. One may mention here the recently late Hans

³⁴ P. SCHANDLER, *John of Damascus and Islam. Christian Heresiology and the Intellectual Background to Earliest Christian-Muslim Relations*, Leiden 2018 [= HCh-MR, 34], p. 32.

³⁵ D.S. CUCARELLA, *Schadler, Peter, John of Damascus and Islam: Christian Heresiology and the Intellectual Background to Earliest Christian-Muslim Relations [review]*, MIDÉO 34, 2019, p. 390–394.

³⁶ For brief discussion of the Christian version of supersessionism cf.: D. PLISZKA, *Wypełnienie bez zastępstwa: Matthew Levering o relacji Kościół–Izrael*, BST 3, 2017, p. 42–54.

³⁷ A. LJAMAI, *Ibn Hazm et la polémique islamo-chrétienne dans l’histoire de l’Islam*, Leiden 2003 [= MEMIW, 17]; C. ADANG, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible. From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, Leiden 1996 [= IPTS.TS, 22].

³⁸ On the idea of the *tahrif* considered in the context outlined above cf.: S.T. KEATING, *Revisiting the Charge of Tahrif. The Question of Supersessionism in Early Islam and the Qur’an*, [in:] *Nicholas of Cusa and Islam. Polemic and Dialogue in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. I.Ch. LEVY, R. GEORGE-TVRTKOVIĆ, D. DUCLOW, Leiden–Boston 2014 [= SMRT, 183], p. 202–217.

Kung who argued for recognizing Islam as revealed religion based on its similarity to the Jewish forms of the early Christian communities³⁹. Some also call for such arguments, which arise from the past coexistence of the two religions, to be used in today's politics⁴⁰. However, it does not mean that nowadays no one is willing to support the view⁴¹ that our efforts to understand the origins of Islam should take into account its similarities to Judaism, an approach which was suggested even by Theophanes. The first to be mentioned among today's advocates of the view are the scholars (Patricia Crone, Michael Cook and Martina Hids)⁴² who, half a century ago, put forward a theory of Hagarism, drawing not only on literally understood accounts of such authors as Sebeos⁴³, but also on the suggestion that Muḥammad had ties to the Jewish apocalyptic traditions⁴⁴.

One should note in conclusion that it is impossible to absolutely rule out the possibility that Theophanes could have referred in his enigmatic remarks to some complex historical relationship between Muḥammad and local Jewish tribes. A good example of this is provided by the tradition recounting Banu Qurayza's tragic fate⁴⁵, especially as it is known to us from Ibn Hišām's account (indebted to Ibn Ishāq), which was, as is sometimes suggested in scholarly literature, used by the group involved in preparing the *Chronography*. However, it seems that had it actually been the case, the Confessor would not have missed a chance of emphasising

³⁹ Similar analyses can be found in D. MARSHALL, *Muhammad in Contemporary Christian Theological Reflection*, ICMR 24, 2013, p. 161–172.

⁴⁰ M. PYTLIK, *Jews and Muslims in Cooperation – Lunch and Learn* (paper presented to the “Jews and Muslims. A Forgotten History of Coexistence” forum, Oakland University, 12 March 2015), <https://www.oakland.edu/Assets/Oakland/religiousstudies/files-and-documents/faculty-research/Pytluk,%20Michael%20%20Jews%20&%20Muslims,%20A%20Forgotten%20History%20of%20Coexistence.pdf> [10 IV 2023].

⁴¹ As A.P. PIERZYŃSKI wrote in *Christians and Jews: Historical and Theological Perspectives of their Relationship*, SOec 19, 2019, p. 331: *The study of the Church Fathers in order to understand their relationship with the Judaism of Eretz Israel and the diaspora (as expressed in particular in the Talmud) has not yet been completed. Herein, the study of the heresies of the first centuries, especially in Asia and the East, and their relationship with the Jewish thought, would be valuable to understand the origins of Islam.*

⁴² P. CRONE, M. COOK, *Hagarism. The Making of...*; P. CRONE, *Slaves on Horses. The Evolution of the Islamic Polity*, Cambridge 1980; EADEM, M. HINDS, *God's Caliph. Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge 1986; P. CRONE, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, Princeton 1987.

⁴³ EADEM, M. COOK, *Hagarism. The Making of...*, p. 77–79. The efforts to explain the origins of Islam by means, among others, of its ties to Judaism are excellently discussed in M. GRODZKI, *Panteon sceptyków. Przegląd współczesnych teorii naukowych poświęconych genezie islamu*, Warszawa 2017, p. 165–212.

⁴⁴ M. COOK, *Mahomet*, trans. B.R. ZAGÓRSKI, Warszawa 1999, p. 113–114.

⁴⁵ On Banu Qurayza cf.: W. MONTGOMERY WATT, *The Condemnation of the Jews of Banū Qurayza. A Study of the Sources of the Sira*, [in:] IDEM, *Early Islam. Collected Articles*, Edinburgh 1990, p. 1–12; M.J. KISTER, *The Massacre of the Banū Qurayza: A Re-Examination of a Tradition*, JSAI 8, 1986, p. 61–96; W.N. ARAFAT, *New Light on the Story of Banū Qurayza and the Jews of Medina*, JRAS 108.2, 1976, p. 100–107.

the fact that Muḥammad, in accordance with the account mentioned above, carried out the execution of almost genocidal proportions.

Also interesting in this context are references pertaining to Moses. As is known from Muḥammad's first *sīrat's*, the motive of comparing the Prophet with Israel's Patriarch became part of the Jewish-Muslim polemics already at the dawn of Islam. As Shari L. Lowin reminds us, modern scholarship has found these references unreliable because they come from late Muslim sources. However, the tradition of drawing comparisons between Moses and Muḥammad (favourably to the former) can also be found in the surviving Jewish apologetic literature, which, argues Lowin, prevents us from excluding the possibility that such comparisons could have been a constant part of the polemics under discussion, although such an exclusion is inherent in the Prophet's various biographies. It seems that the remarks about Moses found in *Chronography* can be regarded as a contribution to discussions concerning the comparisons in question. However, they can also be treated as part of the anti-Jewish rhetoric regarding the believers of Judaism who abandoned their own (and the Christian) Patriarch's teachings in favour of those of the Messenger. Thus, the Confessor could be considered to have attempted to simultaneously undermine the message of both Islam and Judaism.

To sum up, the above introduction to the topic is hoped to give an idea of how many issues regarding Muḥammad's relationship with the Jews can be touched upon based on a brief passage, only a few lines long, from Theophanes' chronicle. In writing it, Theophanes certainly aimed to discredit the Prophet. However, he also included in it details that, when interpreted by comparison with other scholars' findings that are based on other sources (including Jewish ones) pertaining to the history of Islam, may help us ask new questions and draw interesting conclusions regarding Theophanes' view of Muslims.

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