

The orientation of the Ka'ba to Jerusalem: two sanctuaries. An older love affair?

“And they shall make for Me a sanctuary (*mikdash*) and I will dwell (*mishkan-shokhen*) among them” (Ex. 25:8)

Submitted by **Robert Charles Fuller**, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies, January 2022.

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(Signature) *Rob Fuller*

Abstract

The primary question of this research thesis stems from one apparently undocumented observation; that the current building of the Ka‘ba in Mecca, appears to be physically orientated towards Jerusalem.

This deduction is based on the location of the *Ḥaṭīm*, a low semi-circular wall on the north-west side of the building, which is the demarcation of the original Abrahamic structure and the resting place of *Ismā‘īl* and his mother *Hājar*. The question that arises from this is whether there is any historical evidence for this format, relating back to the earlier structures of 7th century Mecca and before. The only other sacred buildings in Late Antiquity that are consistently orientated towards Jerusalem are Hebrew sanctuaries and synagogues.

The secondary question is why there were paintings of Abraham, Jesus, and Mary in the Ka‘ba at the time of its cleansing from idols by Muḥammad in 630 C.E.

These questions led my research into the Jewish messianic tradition of the *Messiah ben Joseph* typology in Hebrew texts, sacred art and architecture; its presence in the Hebrew gospels of the Nazoraeans; and in the alleged Jewish restitution of sacrifices in the Temple in 614 C.E. by the Ephraimite messianic figure, Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel at the time of the Persian occupation of Jerusalem.

The deduction within the thesis is that, following Persian acquiescence to the Byzantines in 619 C.E., a return to Jerusalem became impossible and for some believers the orientation of prayer turned to the closer “House of Abraham”, the Ka‘ba in Mecca. The conclusion of the thesis suggests that at a time in Late Antiquity, the Ka‘ba had been a “House of Abraham”, within the Hebrew messianic tradition of the Ephraimite Messiah maintained by the Jewish Nazoraean movement.

Keywords

Anşār; H̄aṭīm; Jerusalem; Ka'ba; Mecca; Medina; Messiah ben Joseph; Muḥammad; Naşārā;
Nazoraean.

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For Jesse, born into the world the year 5782

סבא

1. Introduction

The primary question of this research thesis, whether the Ka'ba in Mecca is physically orientated toward Jerusalem, appears never to have been studied before.

The secondary question is, if later accounts are correct, why were paintings of Abraham, Jesus, and Mary found in the Ka'ba at the time of its cleansing from idols by Muḥammad in 630 C.E.?

The primary hypothesis is based on the location of the *Ḥaṭīm*, a low semi-circular wall on the north-west side of the current structure of the Ka'ba, which is the demarcation of the original Abrahamic structure and the resting place of *Ismā'īl* and his mother *Hājar*. Relating back to the earlier structure of the Ka'ba in 7th century Mecca and before, the question that arises from this observation is whether there is any historical evidence for the *Ḥaṭīm* being part of the earlier framework.

Whether the Ka'ba is a directional building has several key concepts that need to be explored. Firstly, how to evidence the orientation of the Ka'ba from historical texts, theological tenets, and empirical material. From this central challenge develops an exploration into the nature and purpose of the pre-Islamic building and its potential roots within a Hebrew heritage. This requires a study of Jewish, Christian and Nazoraean¹ writings, art and architecture, together with the life and activities of the nascent Muslim community as documented in early Islamic writings. In this thesis I will mainly use the term *Nazoraean* movement within the Jewish communities of Late Antiquity, and *Nazarene* for the same movement within canonical Christian writings. I will assess how scholars developed their arguments within the context of a religious, cultural and political analysis, drawing on theories within phenomenology,

¹ Nazarene (*Ναζαρηνός*) or Nazoraean (*Ναζωραῖος*) cf. Matthew 2:23 “So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene (*Ναζωραῖος*).”

language and epistemology to analyze the meaning and structure of historical texts, theological tenets and religious symbolism.

My background comes from a revisionist and phenomenological approach to religious and historical texts, developed through the modern hermeneutics of the 19th and 20th centuries found in the Biblical literature of the mid-twentieth century by such scholars as John Robinson, John Hick and more recently Shlomo Pines and Robert Eisenman. The hermeneutical approach is a form of analytic philosophy that can be used to understand the play within religious texts and precepts, between realism and anti-realism. This allowed the thesis to uncover what is beneath the “is”, the “given” of religious texts and precepts and consider the religious and social aspirations and motivations of Late Antiquity. Therefore, this hermeneutical method analyzes the use of texts and beliefs as the expression of conventions linked to the experience of the author and/or faith community. The interpretation of religious texts, art or architecture reveals something about the religious, social and political contexts in which they are formed. Using this form of theoretical analysis provides an insight into historical events, the lives and thoughts of those involved, as portrayed in Jewish, Christian, Nazoraean and Islamic writings, art and architecture.

An Interpretive Phenomenological approach² to religious language provides insight to how historical and scriptural texts are interpreted and how myth can develop (Benner 2008)³. The studies of Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 1968), Bultmann (Bultmann 1961) and Tillich (Tillich 1952) are relevant here in considering the use and interpretation of metaphysical

² See Alfred Schutz's model of interpretive social science: Schutz, Alfred. 1967. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.

Also: Gephart, Robert P. 2018. “Qualitative Research as Interpretive Social Science” In *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods*, edited by Cassell, Catherine and Ann L Cunliffe and Gina Grandy, 33-53. Thousand Oaks California: SAGE Publications.

³ Patricia Benner: “Interpretive phenomenology, also called hermeneutical phenomenology, is based on the assumption that humans are interpretation through and through.” 462, and “The human is embodied, situated, finite, and thrown into a particular culture, time, and place. This situated, social, and sentient person dwells in a world of common meanings, habits, practices, meanings, and skills that are socially prior to the individual and are socially disclosed or encountered. These socially situated meanings, habits, practices, and skills are the foci of interpretive phenomenology.” 463

language, symbol, and myth in the development of messianic concepts, the question of religious orthodoxy and the reinterpretation of religious structures or typologies.

To conclude, I question how knowledge, and particularly religious “truth” have come to be known and understood. This is done by studying the myths and narratives that formulate concepts that appear to be “given” in religious precepts and therefore create a framework of religious knowledge and certainty, as occurred in the case of the nature and purpose of the Ka‘ba. The use of epistemological analysis of religious narratives provides new insights throughout this thesis. This analysis questions how we cognize and interpret religious statements, images, and architecture.

1.1. Methodology

The hypotheses have been formulated by analyzing primary Jewish, Christian and Islamic texts together with modern analytic and critical literature, and some use of archaeological material. This included a study of published excavation reports (Hachlili 1976, 1988, 1989, 1997, 1998; Magness, Urman, and Flesher 1997; Magness 2003, 2010, 2012a; Weiss 2005; Weiss, Zeev 2005; Weiss 2010, 2016), complemented by a visit to the Galilee and Golan regions. These assessments supported my quantitative analysis that Jewish sanctuaries in Late Antiquity were mainly orientated towards Jerusalem, with eastern entrances, and contained certain depictions of the prophets and some “pagan” images.

The use of these methodologies was necessary as the sources used were late antique and medieval. I was able to use a “reverse” compass point from the *Qubbat aṣ-Ṣakhra*, the Dome of the Rock, towards the Ka‘ba in Mecca to make a preliminary judgement on orientation.

The existence and nature of a community such as the *nāṣārā* (de Blois 2002, 13) could only be deduced from indirect sources, conflicting evidence, and an understanding of the polemic and prejudgement of groups such as post-Nicene Christianity and nascent Islam.

Discourse analysis and textual criticism are necessary to understand the rules and conventions of sacred writings such as messianic Jewish literature, canonical and non-canonical Christian writings, and early Islamic literature, within the context of their time and situation. This hermeneutical study taken in conjunction with archaeological and political evidence, brings into question the high christological doctrines relating to the figure of Jesus, and the polemics against idolatry in Islamic literature. Johan Degenaar describes this premodern discourse in this way:

Premodern discourse is characterised by an absence of a self-critical approach to one's understanding of the world which is structured by the language of the community to which one belongs. It is typical of so-called 'primitive' or 'preliterate' cultures in which the discourse of the community is said to move within 'a socio-mythic orbit' - a term which emphasises the role of myth in language and the collective nature of this kind of understanding.' (Degenaar 1997, 39)

Looking how religious language functions at different times and for different social or political needs is a significant tool in my research study. I use a non-realist approach that uses form criticism to analyze scriptural texts, including both canonical and non-canonical Jewish and Christian literature, as well as Qur'ānic and non-Qur'ānic Islamic material, together with a redactive study of religious motifs and myths that are replicated in different sources and religious streams of belief. Using a historical-critical model with religious texts is not to undermine traditional beliefs but to open them to new understandings. Although I use a variety of texts, I seek to consider their impact on the hearer rather than primarily to question their authenticity. For example, Joseph Schacht questioned the historicity of the *ḥadīths*. David Forte considers Schacht to have presented the *ḥadīth* as having compacted a variety of sources, such as “pre-Islamic custom, Umayyad regulations, Qur'anic injunctions, foreign influences, scholarly interpretations and created traditions crashed against one another in a creative

turmoil.” (Forte 1978, 13). The development of religious texts has ever been such, whether it is the four sources of the Pentateuch or the canonization of the Gospels. This is the nature of religious discourse, a mix of story and history and myth.

This thesis is not an attempt to prove a case, but to make a judgement based on probability and rigorous academic analysis. The topics and evidence required offering plausible answers to such questions as the orientation of the Ka’ba towards Jerusalem, and the later recorded development of the presence of images within it in 630 C.E. (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 552).

1.2. Literature Review

A review of the literature regarding the main hypothesis of the orientation of the Ka’ba shows there has been no significant level of academic insight to date. However, the secondary study of the later recorded myth of the presence of images in the Ka’ba at the time of its cleansing have been studied. In this thesis their potential existence is analysed from a purely Hebrew tradition, arguing that Jewish art in Late Antiquity encompassed the use of imagery⁴, and that the pictures of Jesus and Mary may have been acceptable within the spirituality of Nazoraean Jews.

There have been studies of the astrological importance of the Ka’ba building developed from the position of the cuboid structure and the direction of its four corners to the cardinal points of the compass (King 1982). Dan Gibson has also written extensively on the nature of the Ka’ba building and suggests other similar locations, such as Petra (Gibson 2018). Both of these studies refer to the building as a cube, therefore not recognizing the importance of the *Ḥaṭīm* in governing orientation, nor the convention that Muḥammad prayed towards the northwest from Mecca/ Medina until 624 C.E. (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 289).

⁴ As opposed to the Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4-6)

Other writers have recounted later Islamic traditions that the Ka‘ba is sited at the centre of the earth, the point where Ādam built the first house and subsequently Abraham and Ismael rebuilt it after the Flood (Akkach 2005, 179; Wensinck 1916, 37). In the Umayyad period and beyond, a defined literature developed, *Faḍā’il Bayt al-Maqdis* (Praises of Jerusalem), based on the celestial relationship of the Ka‘ba with Jerusalem. Although this is beyond the purpose and scope of this thesis, it does indicate a recognized relationship between the two sanctuaries. I will examine this tradition later in chapter 2.5 when considering the dynamics of the two sites. In the latter part of the thesis (chapters 4-7) I will present supplementary and supportive evidence on the two main research questions. As I state in my conclusion there is rarely “something new under the sun”, so to ensure an academic foundation I consider the roots of my analysis. These roots are found in Hebrew and Christian writings and the socio-political and cultural environment of the times in which they were written, and the times in which they were used.

These areas are:

- a) Muḥammad as a righteous figure, and his relationship to the Ka‘ba and its images in 630 C.E.
- b) The political and messianic events surrounding the Persian conquest of Jerusalem 614 C.E.
- c) The continuity of Jewish messianism in Late Antiquity.
- d) The Nazarene (Nazoraean) movement as a continued presence within the wider Jewish community.
- e) The Nazarenes (Nazoraean) as a remnant of the teachings and community of John the Baptist, Jesus, and his brother James.
- f) The origins and nature of the *Messiah ben Joseph* figure in Jewish literature from First Zechariah to the *Sefer Zerubbabel*.

As mentioned, there is very little existing academic research studying the orientation of the Ka‘ba, so the thesis has to be built on probability and piecing together of evidence from diverse sources over an extended period of time. It also questions and analyzes the realist approach (Pihlström 2020, 2)⁵ of a great volume of Islamic, Jewish and Christian scholarship, and this also reduces the breadth of academic research available. There is a large amount of scholarly work focussed on “Jewish-Christianity” and this also suffers from a realist approach that is found in some New Testament Studies. Below are the six foundation stages I have used to structure my review of the literature surrounding the thesis’s two research questions:

a) Muḥammad as a righteous figure, and his relationship to the Ka‘ba and its images in 630 C.E.

The thesis is centred around the observation that the Ka‘ba in Mecca appears orientated towards Jerusalem and the *al-Haram al-Sharīf* (الحرم الشريف), the ‘Noble Sanctuary’. The general Islamic belief is that the *Ḥaṭīm* was part of the pre-Islamic structure of the Ka‘ba (Rubin 1986; Rāshid 2015), and is situated on the north-west wall of the Ka‘ba, the direction in which Muḥammad originally prayed (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 135, 158, 202; Rubin 1986, 103) and the route of his night journey (Azād 1983; Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 181; Rubin 2008; McMichael 2011; Khetia 2012).

Second to this is the question over the myths and stories surrounding the accounts of the images of Ibrāhīm, ‘Īsā and Maryam and other prophets within the Ka‘ba at the time of its cleansing by Muḥammad in 630 C.E. (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 552). These suggested images and figures are clearly not polytheistic idols in the sense of the notion intended by the term *jāhiliyya* in Islamic tradition. The task of this area of the study is to offer an answer as to why these “unlikely” images were documented and retold, if the main storyline was to

⁵ To question a realist approach: whether religious or metaphysical language has any objective truth value.

emphasize the number of pagan idols e.g. “360 idols” (Ibn al-Kalbī 1952, 23; Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 552).

In analysing the “myth of *jāhiliyya*”, I use the approach of “historical-critical” authors, from both Jewish and Christian traditions such as D.F. Strauss, Martin Buber, John Robinson, and John Hick (Strauss 1836; Buber 1937; J. Robinson 1963; Hick 1977), proposing that early Islam, after the life of the Prophet, required an antithetical concept to establish its identity as an original monotheistic religion (Lichtenstadter 1940; Gibb 1962; G. R. Hawting 1999, 18; Berg 2003; Gajda 2017). It maybe noteworthy that, despite this heightened emphasis on an “age of ignorance” in later writers, al-Azraqī (d. A.H. 251/ 865 C.E.) still included references to Ibrāhīm, ‘Īsā and Maryam and other prophets in his writings on the events of 630 C.E. (al-Azraqī 1969). In a comparison to the later al-Azraqī, al-Kalbī (d. 819 C.E./204 A.H.) writes of a presence of idols, but no prophets (al-Kalbī 1952, 23). This later myth of paintings in the Ka‘ba will be held in the light of Jewish communities in Late Antiquity where there is plenty of evidence of the use of images in the synagogues of Galilee, Golan and Dura Europos, including messianic and Temple-cult symbolism (R Hachlili 1998; Reeves 2005; Sonne and Wischnitzer 2007; Stroumsa 2015b; Yuval-Hacham 2019).

Based on the myths surrounding the cleansing of the Ka‘ba, the deduction is that the offence (the *non-halakhic* act) of Muḥammad’s understanding of the paintings, could be the introduction of *divination arrows* to the images between 622-30 C.E. (al-Azraqī Cf. G. R. D. King 2004, 223), not the images of Ibrāhīm, ‘Īsā and Maryam and other prophets in themselves.

b) The political and messianic events surrounding the Persian conquest of Jerusalem 614 C.E.

The Ka‘ba and its form of decoration will be seen within the context of how they were interpreted in the literature and events occurring at the time. The birth pangs at the end of the power struggle between the Roman and Persian Empires was evident at the beginning of the

seventh century. Apocalyptic and messianic narratives were present in Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian literature. The Hebrew messianic paradigm of an Ephraimite Messiah had re-emerged and was at its height in the 6-7th century C.E. Jewish community, evidenced within the apocalyptic midrashim, particularly the *Sefer Zerubbabel* (Reeves 2005). This messianic tradition within Jewish communities would be re-ignited in the narrative surrounding an alleged messianic figure, Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel, in the Judeo-Persian conquest of Byzantine Jerusalem in 614 C.E.⁶ Within the midrashim there is a suggested re-establishment of sacrifices at the Temple site, with the defeat of the enemy of the Jews [Rome]. This would have been understood as a divine portent of the end times and an ingathering of Jew and Gentile to Jerusalem.

The Jews and Nazoraeans would have been watchful for a unifying messenger (Cook 2021, 5). The Persian conquest is significant in adding a layer to the understanding of the orientation and purity of the Ka'ba, the earlier *qibla* focus towards Jerusalem (until 624 C.E.)⁷, the participants in the first Pledge of al-'Aqaba (621 C.E.), and Medina, where Jews and the *anṣār* were anticipating a new dispensation (Lecker 2004b, 45).

c) The continuity of Jewish messianism in Late Antiquity.

To understand the context of the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in 614 C.E. I analyzed the presence of Jewish messianism in Late Antiquity, as expressed through art and architecture (Rachel Hachlili 1997, 1998; Yuval-Hacham 2019). To achieve this I reviewed post-Second Temple diaspora Jewish sanctuaries in the Galilee and Golan regions (3rd-8th century C.E.), and at the Dura Europos synagogue (3rd century Syria) (Drews 2011; Rachel Hachlili 1976, 50; 1988, 68; Goodenough 1988; Fine 1999; Kraeling, C. H. and Bradford Welles 1967; Magness 2010, 158; Rajak 2011, 94; Schenk 2010, 197).

⁶ *Sefer Zerubbabel*, 'Otot of R. Šim'on b. Yōḥai, and 'Otot ha-Mašiah (see Reeves 2006)

⁷ Q 2 (*Al-Baqarah*):142-145; Eighteenth month after the Hijra in the month of Sha'bān (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 289)

Whilst it was important to understand the continuity of Jewish messianism and the Temple cult (Fine 1999; Yeivin 2004; Weiss 2010, 2016), I also visited the Palestine area to study the orientation of synagogues towards Jerusalem, their Torah niches, and their east-facing entrances, together with their participation in the formation of collective Jewish memory and anticipation (Magness et al. 2014, 354; Stern 2019, 54; Sukenik 2019).

A pertinent aspect of Wischnitzer's study is her consideration of the messianic and apocalyptic thought within the artwork of Dura Europos, particularly the precedence of the image of the Ephraimite Messiah in the central mural above the niche, the figure that was particularly linked to the Northern Tribes (the "ten tribes"), exiled by the Assyrians (c. 722 B.C.E.), and never returned to Palestine (Wischnitzer 1948, 96-99). The debates of the rabbis of the Tannaitic period (c. 220 C.E.) indicate an interest in the ten tribes and their potential rediscovery, as a foretaste to the return of the Davidic Messiah of the southern tribe of Judah. These concepts go back to the early exilic period but resonate amongst all Jewish communities in Palestine and the diaspora, as they suffer periods of persecution, exile and return (Golb 1961, 45; Laurin 1963, 49) even up to the 7th century C.E. (Fitzmyer 1955; Joseph 2018; Necker 2018).

David Mitchell has written extensively on the Jewish concept of *Messiah ben Joseph*, or Ephraimite Messiah, the messiah of the lost Northern Kingdom (2009, 2016). This Ephraimite Messiah is a human figure that continued to spark messianic hopes at various stages during the history of Jews. To some degree he is "the other", as he has his roots in the "unfaithful" Northern Kingdom that was taken into Assyrian exile in the 8th century B.C.E., never to return. On the other hand, he is the messianic forerunner of the Davidic Messiah and the end times (Margoliouth and British Academy 1924; Wasserstrom 1995; de Lange 2007; Stroumsa 2015b). When Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel was framed in this messianic concept and died in Jerusalem during the Persian conquest, there would have been a fervent expectation of an

imminent coming of the Davidic messiah to resurrect him and return all Jews finally to Jerusalem.

d) The Nazarenes (Nazoraeans) as a remnant of the teachings and community of John the Baptist, Jesus, and his brother James.

Originating from evidence in Christian canonical writings, together with other writings on the life of James,⁸ this analysis supports the hypothesis that James and the Jewish Nazarenes remained Torah observant (*halakhic*) Jews whilst maintaining a messianic belief system based on Jesus as a Ephraimite/Josephite messiah/prophet [cf. Hegesippus *Hypomnemata*]⁹ (see also Pines 1966, 23; Eisenman 2002, 521; Myllykoski 2007, 25; Royalty, Jr. 2013, 10). I suggest the Nazoraeans (within a *Northern Kingdom* tradition) maintained the bridge with and understanding of the Ephraimite/Josephite messiah into Late Antiquity.

I will posit that the Nazoraean movement was a wholly Jewish tradition to avoid confusion in typologies, as some scholars call this movement (with the Ebionites)¹⁰ “Jewish-Christian” (Kitzler 2014, 505). The term “Christian” postdates¹¹ the existence of the Jewish messianic communities in Galilee and Jerusalem (Slee 2003, 8-9)¹², and the term Christ (Messiah) has a wholly different meaning in Christianity (Skolnik, Fred & Michael Berenbaum 2007, 14.112)¹³ from Jewish messiah-hood.¹⁴

⁸ *The Gospel of the Hebrews; Protoevangelium of James (c. 150 C.E.)*; Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiae*. Book II. Chapter 23. *The Martyrdom of James, who was called the Brother of the Lord*; Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus 2*

⁹ No original copy of Hegesippus’ *Hypomnemata* exists however references are found in Eusebius’ *Historia Ecclesiae*.

¹⁰ Ebionite: an early ascetic sect from the Hebrew *ebyonim*, or *ebionim* (“the poor”); there is no evidence that it was founded by an individual Ebion (Tertullian), see *De Carne Christi* (c.203 C.E.)

¹¹ “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.” (Acts 11:26 NIV)

¹² The earliest Jewish messianic community was that of James, the brother of Jesus (Acts 15). The use of “Christian” which may have been localized to Antioch at the time appears set in the late 1st to early 2nd century C.E.

¹³ “The Messiah was expected to attain for Israel the idyllic blessings of the prophets; he was to defeat the enemies of Israel, restore the people to the Land, reconcile them with God, and introduce a period of spiritual and physical bliss. He was to be prophet, warrior, judge, king, and teacher of Torah.”

¹⁴ “The King Messiah will arise and re-establish the monarchy of David as it was in former times. He will build the Sanctuary and gather in the dispersed of Israel. All the earlier statutes will be restored as they once were. Sacrifices will be offered, the Sabbatical and Jubilee years will be observed, as commanded in the Torah.”

Mishneh Torah, Kings and Wars: Halakhah 11:1. Accessed 7th May 2021.

https://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh_Torah%2C_Kings_and_Wars.11.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en

There are two areas that challenge Christian studies, firstly that Jesus remained within his Galilean, perhaps Hasidic tradition and therefore should remain a figure for Jewish studies. Secondly, what may be deduced from his life may later have been interpreted by his Jewish followers within the Josephite messianic tradition and not as the Son of David. This is important to understanding the Nazoraean and Qur'ānic view of Jesus as a human messiah/prophet, and the expectation that the Davidic/final messiah was still to come.

This area required a study of James (the brother of Jesus)¹⁵ as the leader of the Nazarene movement in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus,¹⁶ together with evidence in Christian writings of his opposition to Paul, and Paul's undermining of Jewish *halakhic* practices (Acts 15, 21).¹⁷ James calls on Paul to show himself a true Jew by paying for four men to end their vows by having their heads shaved (cf. nazirite vows) (Skolnik, Fred & Michael Berenbaum 2007, 15.45)¹⁸ and making a sacrifice at the Temple (cf. Acts 21:22-26). This supports the hypothesis of Jesus as messiah/prophet that is recognized within Qur'ānic literature¹⁹.

In addition, Stuart Chepney suggests a link between the Jewish Nazirite tradition and the Nazarenes (Chepney 2005), William Smith indicates that the Nazarene tradition pre-dates Jesus (Smith 1905, 42; Chepney 2005, 2fn.), and the Nazarene-style "Ebionites" may have been influenced by the communities near Qumrān close to the Dead Sea, and of Damascus (Fitzmyer 1955; Skolnik, Fred & Michael Berenbaum 2007, 16.774).²⁰ John the Baptist is often recounted

¹⁵ Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55

¹⁶ Acts 21:17-19

¹⁷ This is highlighted by James and the elders of the Jerusalem community challenging Paul when he arrives in Jerusalem: "They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs." (Acts 21:21-2 NIV).

¹⁸ A "person who vows for a specific period to abstain from partaking of grapes or any of its products whether intoxicating or not, cutting his hair, and touching a corpse (6:3-9). Such a person is called a Nazirite (Heb. nazir, נַזִּיר (from the root nzt (נָזַר), (meaning to separate or dedicate oneself (e.g., nifal, Lev. 22:2; hifil, Lev. 15:31; Num. 6:2, 5, 12)."

¹⁹ See Q 2:87; 2:136; 2:253; Q 3:45; 3:52; 3:55; 3:59; 3:84; Q 4:163; 4:171-2; Q 5:17; 5:46; 5:72; Q 9:31; Q 19:36; Q 33:7-8; Q 43:63-64; Q 57:27; Q 61:6; 61:14.

²⁰ Communities present in the area appear to have "libraries of the two divisions of the "Sons of Light," the priestly Yahad "Community" and the laity Israelites (both divisions of which are, by nature, ideologically and typically "Essene" as described by Josephus; the term "Qumran Community" is inappropriate since the movement, as described in the scrolls, was not confined to this site"

as presenting Nazirite and Essene motifs.²¹ There is evidence that James,²² Jesus' brother was a devout Nazirite and a Torah observant Jew until his death (68 C.E.) (Scarborough 1941, 237; Eisenman 2002, 128, 132; Myllykoski 2007, 29).

The resources for this study [*The Letter of James* (c.65 C.E.); the *Didache* (c.96 C.E.); Hegesippus' *Hypomnemata* (c.170 C.E.); Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* (c.180 C.E.); Tertullian. *An Answer to the Jews* (198 C.E.); *The Clementine Literature* (c.250 C.E.); Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiae* (313 C.E.); *Letter on the Council of Nicaea* (325 C.E.); *Life of Constantine* (c.338 C.E.); Epiphanius' *Panarion* (c.375 C.E.); Jerome *De Viris Illustribus* (c.393 C.E.); *On Isaiah*; *On Matthew* (c.404–410 C.E.); *Epistula from Jerome to Augustine* (c.419 C.E.)] need to be read in a close context, as well as with that of wider Jewish messianism, in light of textual studies of the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* (Reynolds 2007, 179; Sinai 2010, 438; Reynolds 2010b, 190f; Zellentin 2019, 228).

This thesis considers material through a Jewish and Islamic perspective to make an initial study of the divergence in the understanding of messiah-hood within a Jewish tradition and the separate development of a divine-messiah typology within Christianity, up to its crystallization in the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon [4th – 5th century C.E.]. This fundamental difference highlights the distinctive nature of Jewish, Nazoraean and Islamic concepts of messianism as apart from Christianity in its various forms by the 7th century C.E.

e) The Nazarene (Nazoraean) movement as a continued presence within the wider Jewish community.

The key analysis here is: what was the impact of the events in the late first and early second century on the Jewish Nazoraean movement's and the Josephite messiah's

²¹ John's birth to Elizabeth alludes to a Nazirite narrative: "He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born." (Luke 1:15 NIV) and in Matthew (3:1-6) he is presented as an ascetic wandering preacher of repentance (Matthew 3:1-6) much like the Essenes (Box 1912, 78fn.; Chepey 2005, 156; Reed 2014, 42; Waqas 2018, 10)

²² Sometimes titled, "James the Just".

understanding of Jesus' life? Soon after the death of James (62 C.E.), the destruction of the Temple (70 C.E.) occurs at the hands of the Romans, and later, the Fall of Jerusalem (135 C.E.) (Eisenman 1990, 176). Evidence from the Patristic writers indicates that the "sect" (*haireseōs*) of Nazarenes and/or Ebionites continued in towns east of the Jordan river and in Berœa (Aleppo) (Trimingham 1979). Much of the material evidence from this time comes from the writings of the Church Fathers and must be read in the light of their context as heresiologists. Some scholars claim there are unique allusions that demonstrate a continuity of Nazoraean belief and practices until 6th century C.E. (Bauckham 2003). Fred Donner supports the possibility of Nazoraeans being present in the Ḥijāz in the 6th century, but does not evidence, or develop his observation (Donner 2010, 31).

The hypothesis within this study is that there was a Jewish Nazoraean presence in Medina in the early 7th century, drawing on evidence in early Christian writings including a consideration of *Q* (Vermees 2003; Boyarin 2012; Kloppenborg 1999, 2008), the study of the "original" *Gospel of the Hebrews* often from within the *Paralipomena* of early Christian writings (J. R. Edwards 2002, 568; 2009; R. A. Edwards 1976; Funk 1993); the later Patristic writings, the *Talmud* and other *midrashim*.

f) The origins and nature of the *Messiah ben Joseph* figure in Jewish literature from First Zechariah to the *Sefer Zerubbabel*.

An additional factor that supports the line of argument of the Ka'ba's relationship with Jerusalem and its Hebrew heritage, comes through investigating the early sources of messianic and apocalyptic writings. This heritage grew from the roots of messianic aspiration within the Jewish communities from the Mosaic period through the Exilic eras (c. 722 B.C.E. (Assyrian)/ 586-538 B.C.E. (Babylonian)), and then its expression within the Maccabean revolt (167-160 B.C.E.), the first Jewish-Roman War (66-73 C.E.) and later the Bar Kokhba revolt (130-132 C.E.). These later conflicts resulted in the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.) and the

establishment of the city of Jerusalem as the secular *Aelia Capitolina* (130 C.E.), further enhancing and embedding messianic beliefs, that impacted on Jewish art and architecture into Late Antiquity.

This messianic and apocalyptic zeal appears to have been heightened in Jewish communities in the early 7th century C.E. with the Persian conquest of Jerusalem and the apparent renewal of the Temple cult, embodied in a figure, Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel, and documented in the *Sefer Zerubbabel* and other later apocalyptic midrashim. As Helen Spurling observes:

Sefer Zerubbabel is perhaps the most widely known and discussed Jewish apocalyptic text of the seventh century. The apocalypse is dated to this period largely on the basis of a concern for the role of the Persians in the final redemption of Israel. (Spurling 2015, 110)

Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel appears as a messianic figure in the *Sefer Zerubbabel* but has a prophetic typology within the *Messiah ben Joseph* tradition from Jewish communities going back to the Exilic era and before. This Ephraimite Messiah figure is particularly linked to the Northern Kingdom and the hoped-for return of the ten lost tribes (Dix 1926, 133; Wischnitzer-Bernstein 1941, 47-50; D. Mitchell 2005, 14). The Jews of the diaspora, and more particularly the Jewish Nazoraeans, would understand their position as an exiled community. This often-neglected tradition of an “outsider” messiah from the Northern Kingdom, that would die and rise again to herald a new era of ingathering and return, is a major theme within this thesis.

The foundation for this slain messiah and the overturning of a great oppressor comes from the Book of Zechariah (from the 6th century B.C.E.), and is recounted again and again in Hebrew literature until he surfaces as the elusive Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel in early 7th century Jerusalem and the *Sefer Zerubbabel* (E. G. King 1882, 69; Torrey 1947, 257; Rubenstein 1996, 195).

The recurring theme of a suffering and dying Jewish Messiah is a paradigm that goes back to the early Exilic period but resonates amongst all Jewish communities as they suffer

periods of persecution, exile, and return. This requires a renewed study of the continuity of the Jesus figure of the Gospels (Gnilka 1997, 3; Sanders 1993, 238; Vermes 2004, 417), through to the expectations of Jews in the environment of *al-Hijāz* in the 7th century C.E.

2. The Ka‘ba - the House of God

2.1. Introduction to Chapter 2

The Ka‘ba is the central point of reference in this thesis, as it is for many faithful Muslims throughout the world. It is a symbol of God’s constant presence and blessings on the Muslim community and a focus of prayer in the spiritual life of many individuals. The purpose of this research is to search for a probable answer to whether the Ka‘ba was once a directional building, and if so, why did it appear to point towards Jerusalem? In this thesis, the evidence considered is assessed through modern hermeneutics, phenomenology, and historical-critical analysis. It is not intended to question or undermine faith, but it might enhance a new understanding. As mentioned earlier, “truth” in the context of what speaks to the heart, or the “ground of being” (Tillich 1952), is a complex combination of historical fact and religious and cultural narrative. This thesis attempts to make an objective and honest consideration of the nature of the pre-Islamic Ka‘ba as a directional sanctuary pointing towards Jerusalem, with narratives linking it to the story of Abraham and the prophets, including Jesus and Mary. The conclusions formed are presented for debate and certainly not as a *fait accompli*.

2.2. The Ka‘ba: the point of reference

The primary focus of this chapter is to consider whether there is a historic, cultural, or religious reason for the Ka'ba in Mecca to be orientated towards Jerusalem. For many the Ka'ba is a 'black cube' in the centre of *al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*, the Sacred Mosque. It is itself the orientation for daily prayer (*Ṣalāh*) for all Muslims, and the location of a lifetime vision to be able to perform pilgrimage, the *Hajj*, and to make *Ṭawāf*, circumambulating the Ka'ba seven times (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Aerial picture of the Ka'ba. Creative Commons.



The Qur'ān makes the link to the origins of the Ka'ba as the "House of Abraham", and it is this belief that appears to be strengthened through this research:

Our Lord, I have established some of my offspring in an uncultivated valley, close to Your Sacred House, Lord, so that they may keep up the prayer. Make people's hearts

turn to them, and provide them with produce, so that they may be thankful. (Q 14:37)
(Haleem (trans.) 2004, 161)

Although it is common belief that the Ka‘ba was the original place of worship built by the first man created by God, Ādam, as a replica of the eternal Temple in heaven, it is more familiarly known in Islam as the House of Abraham. This building is believed to have been built by Abraham and Ismail, as with other Abrahamic shrines, Beth El, Hebron and Mount Moriah (Jerusalem), or Mount Gerizim (Samaritans). Mount Moriah or Gerizim are believed by Jews/ Samaritans to be the site of the near sacrifice of Isaac (see references to the Torah niche in chapter 4). As Angelika Neuwirth considers it: “It is on this axiom [of monotheist sanctuaries with Abrahamic origin] that the qur’anic foundation story of the Ka‘ba as the new Temple builds.” (Neuwirth 2017, 180). This joint designation of Abrahamic origins makes the 180° turnabout from Jerusalem to Mecca that much more understandable in 624 C.E. (see Chapter 2.8).

On the north-west side of the current Ka‘ba building lies a low semi-circular wall, the *Ḥaṭīm* enclosing the *Ḥijr Ismā‘īl* (The Enclosure of Ismail) (cf. حجر Lane 1863 517, Col. 2).²³ For Muslims, this area is the demarcation of the original Abrahamic structure and the resting place of Ismā‘īl and his mother Hājar.

The thesis is centred around the observation that the Ka‘ba appears orientated towards Jerusalem and the *al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf*, the “Noble Sanctuary”. The general Islamic belief is that the *Ḥaṭīm* was part of the pre-Islamic structure of the Ka‘ba (Rubin 1986, 113; Rāshid 2015, 16). The north-west wall of the Ka‘ba, the direction in which Muḥammad originally prayed²⁴

²³ And الحجرُ That [space] which is comprised by [the curved wall called] the حطيم (Ṣ, A, Mgh, Ḳ.) which encompasses the Kaqbeh on the north [or rather north-west] side; (Ṣ, A, Ḳ;) on the side of the spout: (Mgh:) or the حطيم [itself], which encompasses the Kaqbeh on the side of the spout. (Mṣb.) [It is applied to both of these in the present day; but more commonly to the former.] (Lane 1863).

²⁴ “According to some reports, Muḥammad started to pray towards Jerusalem right after the *Hijra*, in order to please the Jews of al-Madīna. See Ṭabarī, *Tafṣīr*, II, 4, 13; Rāzī, IV, 104. See also *Fath al-bārī*, I, 88, 90; Rāzī, IV, 110. According to other reports, however, Muḥammad had already started praying towards Jerusalem before the *Hijra*. According to Ḥalabī, I, 264, he had done so since the *isrā’*. According to others, Jerusalem became Muḥammad’s *qibla* 18 months before the *Hijra* (*Fath al-bārī*, I, 90, from Ibn Māja). Still others maintain that

(Rubin 1986, 103) also marks the site of where he rested before the Night Journey (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 182; Hawting 2017, 205).

Uri Rubin recounts that the Kaʿba was originally an *ʿarsh* (booth or shed, cf. Lane 1863, 2000, Col. 1),²⁵ a building with low walls “into which cattle could burst” and covered with a *kiswa* (a large cloth) (cf. ʿAbd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ḥimyarī, Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān Aʿzamī 1970, 98; Rubin 1986, 98fn.). The *Ḥijr Ismāʿīl* was part of the whole building, so that the *Ḥijr* and the Kaʿba formed one sacred space, consisting of a rectangle and a “D” shaped structure, directed towards the north-west (Rubin 1986, 101). Ibn Ishāq states that the Kaʿba originally enclosed the graves of Hājar and Ismāʿīl within the *Ḥaṭīm*²⁶ and it remained in this condition until the Quraysh re-built it, in the years before Muḥammad’s first revelation (c. 605 C.E.) (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 62). Rubin also indicates that Ibn Jurayj (d. A.H. 150/ 767 C.E.) implies that the Kaʿba was originally built and treated like a sacred tabernacle (Rubin 1986, 98-9).

There are a few studies that suggest an alignment with astrological or meteorological events (Akkach 2005, 179; King 1982; Gibson 2018), or “perhaps an astral orientation towards the Levant in pre-Islamic times” (“Kaʿba”, Wensinck, A.J., and Jomier, J. *EI2*). However, they all consider that medieval writings support their hypothesis, and make no reference to the *Ḥaṭīm* or to possible non-polytheistic origins for the Kaʿba (Hawkins, Gerald S. 1982).

Muḥammad prayed towards Jerusalem since his first revelation. See ʿAdawī, 151^a (in Ḥirā); *Faṭḥ al-bārī*, I, 88. The latter opinion seems to be secondary, its aim being to suppress the fact that Muḥammad, at a certain stage, abandoned his original *qibla* (the Kaʿba) in favour of Jerusalem. In fact, most of the traditions describing his prayer towards Jerusalem, while in Mecca, maintain that he used to stand opposite the south eastern wall of the Kaʿba, so that the Kaʿba was between him and Jerusalem. See e.g., Ibn Hishām, I, 319, 372; Bayhaqī, I, 439; Suyūfī, Durr, III, 183; Ḥalabī, I, 264, 332, 414; Ibn Saʿd, I, 243.” (Rubin 1986, 103-4fn.)

²⁵ عَرَشٌ A booth, or shed, or thing constructed for shade, (مِظَلَّةٌ,) mostly made of canes, or reeds; (K;) and sometimes, (TA,) made of palm-sticks, over which is thrown تُشَامٌ [A species of panic grass] (Lane 1863).

²⁶ When Abdu’l-Muṭṭalib was sleeping in the *ḥijr*, he was guided by a vision to dig the well Zamzam. At the time the *ḥijr* was, “the semicircular spot between the wall called *Ḥaṭīm* and the Kaʿba, which is said to contain the graves of Hagar and Ishmael” (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 62fn.).

Today, the *Ḥaṭīm* is a low (three feet high, five feet thick) semi-circular wall that encloses the space *al-Ḥijr* or *Ḥijr Ismāʿīl*, believed to be the graves of Ismāʿīl and his mother Hājar.

The Qurʾān refers to the Kaʿba in the following ways:

We made the House a resort and a sanctuary for people, saying, ‘Take the spot where Abraham stood as your place of prayer.’ We commanded Abraham and Ishmael: ‘Purify My House for those who walk round it, those who stay there, and those who bow and prostrate themselves in worship.’ (Q 2:125) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 15)

God has made the Kaʿba - the Sacred House - a means of support for people, and the Sacred Months, the animals for sacrifice and their garlands: all this. Know that God has knowledge of all that is in the heavens and earth and that He is fully aware of all things. (Q 5:97) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 77)

With reference to Q 2:125, the Qurʾān implies it is divine ordinance that set the foundation of the building for Abraham. It could therefore be judged that the origins of the Kaʿba are found within an earlier Hebrew tradition, albeit masked by an “age of ignorance”, misused and misunderstood until the revelation to Muḥammad. There is no reference to the Kaʿba in the Medinan period, other than that the early Muslim community in Yathrib performed their prayers facing Jerusalem (“Kaʿba” EI3) and it remained for a time the *qibla* for the early *umma*. The tradition suggests that this was to win over the Jews of that city, who had formed part of the Charter of Medina with other tribes in the city (Lecker 2004, 47). This act of favouritism seems unusual, although they were a powerful group. To challenge this assumption, I would suggest that for Muḥammad, as with many who have a religious experience, the reality of divine guidance and the apodictic certainty that comes with it, would take precedence over a preferential attitude to others (James 1917, 326). Soon after the *Hijra*, the Community (*umma*) was guided to turn towards the Kaʿba in Mecca (624 C.E.), and so it has remained:

Many a time We have seen you [Prophet] turn your face towards Heaven, so We are turning you towards a prayer direction that pleases you. Turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque: wherever you [believers] may be, turn your faces to it. Those who were given the Scripture know with certainty that this is the Truth from their Lord: God is not unaware of what they do. (Q 2:144) (Haleem 2004, 16-17)

Arising from the observational deduction that if the *Ḥaṭīm* is to be considered as part of the early 7th century Ka‘ba then there may be an indication it was orientated to the north west. According to Ibn Kathir this enclosure formed part of the building before c.605 C.E. and Ibn al-Zubayr rebuilt the Ka‘ba after the Umayyad war (683 C.E.) to include the *Ḥaṭīm* as he believed this was the original structure:

This was how Ibn Zubayr rebuilt it, just as the Messenger of God (SAAS) had indicated. It was done in the utmost splendour and beauty, one complete whole on the foundations of al-Khall (Abraham). (Le Gassick (trans.) 1998, 203)

It is also known that the early *umma*, perhaps in line with Muḥammad’s observances, considered their *qibla* to be Jerusalem to the north west of Mecca and Medina. Although there are no written primary sources defining the Ka‘ba’s relational status to Jerusalem, there is significant secondary evidence that I have used that may indicate this is the case. There can be no conclusive proof within this thesis, but rather a building up of evidence that intertwines to develop a realistic hypothesis. In this chapter, I will present ideas and deductions based on material evidence that have not been compared before in such a format.

2.3. The structure and development of the Ka‘ba

Apart from Islamic writings the only reference to a sanctuary in Mecca is in the writings of the 2nd century C.E. geographer Ptolemy who speaks of a “*mikrab*”, or temple in Macoraba (Mecca) (Wensinck, A. J. “Ka‘ba” In *EI2* 1927, 318). Islamic tradition firmly roots the foundations of the Ka‘ba with an Abrahamic origin. Ibn Ishāq recounts in his *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* that the Tubba‘ (king of the Ḥimyar) Tibān As‘ad Abū Karib (370-433 C.E.), who was an “idolater”, met two Jewish rabbis from Banū Qurayza when he stayed in Medina and was in dispute with the “tribe of the Anṣār” (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 7). The *Sīra* confirms the conversion of the King to Judaism:

They [the two rabbis] had heard about the king's intention to destroy the town and its people and they said to him: 'O King, do not do it, for if you persist in your intention something will happen to prevent your carrying it out and we fear that you will incur speedy retribution.' When the king asked the reason for this they told him that Yathrib was the place to which a prophet of the Quraysh would migrate in time to come, and it would be his home and resting-place. Seeing that these men had hidden knowledge the king took their words in good part and gave up his design, departed from Medina and embraced the rabbis' religion. (1998, 7)

The *Sīra* reports that the rabbis said the following to the King regarding the Ka'ba: "By Allah it is the House of our father Ibrahim and it is as we told you but its people interpose between us and the House by the idols they station around it and the blood they shed there. They are impure people associating others with Allah." (Ibn Hishām 2000, 8). Even so, the King recognizes its sanctity and has visions that guide him to embellish it. There is no mention of the need to cleanse the building itself of idols:

He went round the Ka'ba, sacrificed, and shaved his head, staying there six days (so they say) sacrificing animals which he distributed to the people and giving them honey to drink.

It was revealed to him in a dream that he should cover the temple, so he covered it with woven palm branches; a later vision showed him that he must do better so he covered it with Yamani cloth; a third vision induced him to clothe it with fine striped Yaman cloth. People say that the Tubba' was the first man to cover the temple in this way. He ordered its Jurhumi guardians to keep it clean and not to allow blood, dead bodies, or menstuous cloths to come near it, and he made a door and a key for it." (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 9)

Although written sometime after the alleged incidents, and the story may have other purposes such as to strengthen traditions of a *kiswa* or the Jewish heritage of the Ḥimyar. There are notable allusions within the text. In the report, the two rabbis are unquestionably indicating that the Ka'ba had been a sanctuary within their Hebrew tradition, but it had been desecrated by surrounding idols and the use of blood, and that the King shaved his head and offered sacrifices (cf. the four Nazirites in Acts 21:20-5). The King, who was to instil Judaism into Yemen, recognised its sanctity by purifying and venerating it, and then covering it with a Yemeni cloth (*kiswa*) after first covering it with palm branches and made a door with a key. The first covering is in common with the earlier tradition of the Ka'ba being a low-lying

building covered with palms. To consider my earlier suggestion that the Ka'ba had been a valued sanctuary within a Hebrew tradition is not so strange in this case.

I now intent to present supplementary material from an earlier Abrahamic tradition. Within the Hebrew scriptures there is the account of Abraham setting up an altar “east of Beth-el” (Gen. 12:8), which is later validated by Jacob, who erected a shrine, a holy stone (Gen. 28:10-15; cf. Gen. 35:6, 14). This sanctuary at Beth-el בֵּית אֵל (the “House of God”) later became the Ephraimite sanctuary of the Northern Kingdom, pre-dating and challenging the tradition of the southern tribal Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem.²⁷ Although distinct from the Temple in Jerusalem it is noteworthy that Beth-el was an Abrahamic Sanctuary, and in addition, it engages with the tradition of the Northern Kingdom messiah, the *Messiah ben Joseph*, or Ephraimite Messiah - as will be discussed in later chapters. It was also a valued shrine and place of covenant (with Jacob) by the Essenes of Qumrān.²⁸

The concept of a sacred “House of Abraham” is indeed very early. Its origins may be traced back to the *Book of Jubilees* (c.160-150 B.C.E.). Abraham addresses Jacob saying:

This house have I built for myself that I might put my name upon it in the earth: [it is given to thee and to thy seed for ever], and it will be named the house of Abraham; it is given to thee and to thy seed for ever; for thou wilt build my house and establish my name before God for ever: thy seed and thy name will stand throughout all generations of the earth. (Jub. 22:24)

It seems that in this passage Jacob is commanded by Abraham, to build an eternal sanctuary named “the House of Abraham”. The place he chooses is Beth-El and plans to build and to surround it with a wall and make it an eternal sanctuary for himself and for his seed. But

²⁷ “True, none of these sites [*Lachish, Tabor, Carmel, Hermon, Hebron, Mamre*] may have been able to compete successfully with Jerusalem [*Second Temple period*], but it is certainly conceivable that the residents of one such site might see a time in which there was some question regarding the legitimacy of Jerusalem, its Temple and priesthood as the perfect opportunity to re-assert the cultic rights and privileges of that site. This, as we have seen, was exactly the case vis-à-vis Bethel.” (Schwartz 1985, 80)

²⁸ “It is quite noteworthy that the passage from the Temple Scroll [*11Q19*], which refers to the future or eschatological Temple of Jerusalem, states that this Temple is dependent upon the covenant between God and Jacob at Bethel (!): ‘And I will consecrate my [t]emple by my glory, (the temple) on which I will settle my glory, until the day of blessing on which I will create and establish it for myself for all times, according to the covenant which I have made Jacob at Bethel.’” (Schwartz 1985, 80)

that night Jacob has a vision. An angel shows him seven tablets on which is written the history of all generations to come. The angel says to him, “Do not build this place, and do not make it an eternal sanctuary, and do not dwell here; for this is not the place.” (Jub. 32:22). In this passage it is stressed that Beth-El was not destined to be the place for the eternal Abrahamic sanctuary, but the right place is not specified. The appropriate site, according to the prevalent Jewish concept, was on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, where Solomon built the Temple (2 Chronicles 3:1). This was said to have been the site of the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22:1), which I will evidence in later chapters, as replicated on the Torah niches of synagogues orientated towards Jerusalem from Galilee to Dura Europos. The concept of a “House of Abraham”, whether at Beth-El or Jerusalem would have been known in pre-Islamic Jewish and some Christian communities.

The messianic idea of the belief in the “House of Abraham” is not beyond the scope of monotheistic groups in western Arabia. ‘Abdallāh b. Salām of Medina could be considered as an example of a Jew who converted to Islam in the early years. It is suggested that he had wished to visit “the mosque of our father Abraham” but allegedly denounced the change of *qibla* to Mecca (Rubin 1990, 109), indicating a recognition of Jerusalem as the site of the House of Abraham.

We saw previously that the Ka‘ba was originally an *‘arsh*, a building with low walls and covered with a *kiswa* (cf. Rubin 1986, 101; see also *sukkah* סוכה). The term *‘arsh* (booth, shed or throne, cf. Lane 1863, 2000, Col. 1; cf. Jer. 3:16-18) has a significant sacred symbolism [“The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD’s throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.” Psalm 11:4 JPS] and occurs many times in the Qur’ān, emphasizing the rule and majesty of Allāh:

It is God who raised up the heavens with no visible supports and then established Himself on the throne (- العرش - *al-‘arshi*); He has subjected the sun and the moon each to pursue its course for an appointed time; He regulates all things, and makes the

revelations clear so that you may be certain of meeting your Lord; (Q 13:2) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 153)

As stated earlier, the word *'arsh* can also be translated as 'booth', 'shed' or 'tent' (Lane 1863, 2000) and can refer to the Tabernacle that was built in the wilderness by the Children of Israel for the Ark of the Covenant, in the time of Moses (Ex. 25:10-22; 37:1-9). In his report, Ibn Jurayj (d. A.H. 150 / 767 C.E.) seems to imply that the Ka'ba was originally built as a sacred tabernacle or tent/ *'arsh*, covered with the *kiswa* (*al-qirā* as quoted in Rubin 1986, 99). According to other sources, the length of the *'arsh* of Moses was seven cubits, (Khargūshī as quoted in Rubin 1986, 99n) these dimensions being identical with the dimensions of the Tabernacle (Rubin 2001, 212).

According to some Islamic writings, the *'arsh* (booth, shed or tent) of Moses also served as the model for the mosque of the prophet in Medina. We find in al-Ṭurtūshī's *Kitāb al-hawādith wa-l-bida'* (as quoted in Kister 1962, 150), which is not included in the traditional collections of *ḥadīth*:

Abū'l-Dardā' and Ubayy b. Ka'b measured the mosque [in Madīnah]; they came afterwards to the Prophet with the rod of the cubit. The Prophet then said: 'Nay, a booth like the booth of Moses: *thumām* and wood, because the affair (will happen) sooner than that (*bal 'arīshun ka-'arīshi Mūsā thumāmun wa-khashabun fa-'l-amru a'jalu min dhālika*)'.

Also, Ibn Kathīr's *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya* states:

When the Messenger of God (ṢAAS) built the mosque, his Companions helped him; he worked along with them, carrying the bricks so that his chest became brown. He told them, 'Build an *'arīsh*, a trellis roof, like that of Moses.' I asked al-Ḥasan, 'What was the "trellis of Moses"?' He replied, 'When he raised his hands they would reach the *'arīsh*, meaning the roof.'" (Kathīr Vol. 2 1998, 201)²⁹

The evidence suggests that the pre-seventh century Ka'ba appears to have been a low-lying tabernacle-style building, covered with a *kiswa*, orientated toward Jerusalem and

²⁹ عَرِشٌ The wooden thing [or trellis] which serves for the propping of a grape-vine. (TA.) [But this is more commonly called عَرِيشٌ, q. v.] (Lane 2010, 2000, Col. 2)

including the *Ḥaṭīm* in its structure. This could be a later literary construction by Islamic writers through dialogue with Jews, however, in the light of the *jāhiliyya* polemic, it would seem unusual to insert this if it had not been evident at the time.

In other accounts within Islamic tradition (Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Azraqī, 9th century C.E.) it is told that in the early seventh century (c.605 C.E.) the Quraysh, with the help of Muḥammad, rebuilt the Ka‘ba with wood from a shipwreck under the guidance of an Ethiopian architect, Bāqūm al-Rūmī (as quoted in G. R. D. King 2004, 220). He is said to have been a Coptic Christian. This has led various writers (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 84) to imply that there was some Christian influence on the building, suggesting a possible syncretism and idol worship of the tribal polytheists.

Further Islamic literature speaks of the Ka‘ba itself coming to be associated with the worship of many idols, perhaps most notably the deity Hubal. Icons and devotional images were apparently kept in the Ka‘ba, as were, perhaps, some other cultic objects and votive offerings in the enigmatic “well of the Ka‘ba” (G. E. Hawting 1980, 51). It is acknowledged that there would have been a prevalence of cultic deities associated with tribes, clans and families of that era but, as I mentioned earlier, it is unlikely to have been to the exclusion of Jewish monotheism. Within the milieu of Arabia in Late Antiquity, as in other parts of the world, it would have been natural to have cultic images in a diverse society. Within the tradition of Jewish communities in Late Antiquity there is plenty of evidence, as I will point out, of the use of images, both sacred and profane, in the synagogues of Galilee, Golan and Dura Europos including messianic and Temple-cult symbolism (Reeves 2006, 21, 137n; Yuval-Hacham 2019, 12; Hachlili 1998, 13).

Although there is consistent evidence in Islamic writings of the Ka‘ba being a polytheistic shrine. It can be seen in the *Ḥadīth* there are a number of references to the 7th century Ka‘ba and its earlier “Abrahamic” foundations that included the *Ḥijr Ismā‘īl*. Most of

the passages are ascribed to ‘Ā’isha, the Prophet’s third wife. In a *ḥadīth*, she reports to Ibn ‘Umar that Muḥammad told her:

(The wife of the Prophet) Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) said (to her). ‘Don’t you see that when your folk built the Ka’ba, they did not build it on all the foundations built by Abraham?’ I said, ‘O Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ)! Why don’t we rebuild it on the foundations of Abraham?’ He said. ‘But for the fact that your folk have recently given up infidelity (I would have done so)’. Narrated Ibn ‘Umar: Aisha must have heard this from Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) for I see that Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) used not to touch the two corners facing Al-Hijr only because the House had not been built on the foundations of Abraham. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (3368) (Khan (trans.) 1997b, 360)

This indicates that the two northwest corners were not original boundaries but that the building should have included the *Al-Hijr*. Muhammad did not include this area (in c. 605 C.E.)

‘but for the fact that your folk have recently given up infidelity (I would have done so)’.

And ‘Ā’isha continues to describe the 7th century Ka’ba:

If your people had not been recent converts to Islam, I would have spent the treasure of the Ka’ba in the way of Allah and would have constructed its door just on the level of the ground and would have encompassed in it the space of Hijr. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 1333d (Ṣiddīqī (trans.) 1973, 65)

It can be understood from these passages that the two northwesterly corners, and probably the wall between them that separated the *Hijr Ismā’īl* from the building, were not deemed by ‘Ā’isha to be original to the Abrahamic structure, and therefore could not be respected by Muḥammad.

In *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, ‘Ā’isha speaks of the understanding of the Prophet that the *Hijr Ismā’īl* was to be respected as part of the House of God:

I very much desired to enter the House and pray in it. Once the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) held on to my hand and brought me into the Hijr, and said: ‘Whenever you wish to enter the House, pray in the Hijr, for it is a part of the House. Your people, when they built the Ka’bah, fell short (in building material), so they left it out of the House. (2028) (Qadhi (trans.) 2008, 489)

and in *Sunan an-Nasā’ī* ‘Ā’isha is said to have emphasized this distinction:

I said: ‘O Messenger of Allah! Can I not enter the House?’
He said: Enter the Hijr for it is part of the House.
(2911) (Al-Khattāb (trans.) 2007, 557)

Jābir b. ‘Abdullāh al-Ansāri, a Companion to Muḥammad made a significant observation with regard to the narrative surrounding the Night Journey recorded by Ibn Hishām:

While I was sleeping in the Hijr, Jibril came and spurred me with his foot. I sat up and saw nothing so I slept again. He came a second time and spurred me with his foot. I sat up and saw nothing so I slept again. He came to me the third time and spurred me with his foot. I sat up, he took hold of my arm and I stood beside him. Then he took me out to the door of the Mosque. There stood a white beast, half mule, half donkey with two wings at its thighs to propel its feet with them, putting down each forefoot at the limit of its sight. He bore me onto it then he went out with me keeping close to me. (Ibn Hishām 2000, 73)

This account links the *Hijr Ismā‘īl* to Jerusalem. In fact, by standing in the *Hijr*, while looking at the centre of the apse-like arc engendered by the *Hijr*, Muḥammad would be facing northwest, towards Jerusalem. As mentioned, after Muḥammad’s death, the “counter-caliph” Ibn al-Zubayr (A.H. 2-73/624-692 C.E.), nephew of ‘Ā’isha, rebuilt the Ka‘ba in a way that imitated what he believed to be the original Abrahamic foundations, following damage caused by the Umayyads in 683 C.E. The account is further developed in *Sunan an-Nasā’ī*, in that Muḥammad said:

‘O Aishah, were it not for the fact that your people have recently left Jahiliyyah, I would have commanded that the House be knocked down, and I would have incorporated into it what was left out of it. I would have made its (door) in level with the ground and I would have given it two doors, an eastern door and a western door. For they built it too small, and by doing this, it would have been built on the foundation of Ibrahim, peace be upon him.’ He (one of the narrators said: ‘This is what motivated Ibn Az-Zubair to knock it down.’ Yazid said: ‘I saw Ibn Az-Zubair when he knocked it down and rebuilt it, and included part of the Hijr in it. And I saw the foundation of Ibrahim, peace be upon him, stones like the humps of camels joined to one another.’ (2903) (Al-Khattāb (trans.) 2007, 553)

In this later rebuild by Ibn al-Zubayr, the northwest wall of the Ka‘ba was redeveloped to include the *Hijr Ismā‘īl*, which he believed to be Muḥammad’s original intent, and added an additional western door to the original east-facing one [cf. “...I would have given it a back door.” (*Sunan an-Nasā’ī* 2901) if one compares this to the account: “The back of the Ka‘ba to

B. Jumāḥ and Sahm, the two sons of ‘Amr b. Huṣayṣ b. Ka‘b b. Lu‘ayy.” (i.e. western side)(Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 85)].³⁰

Uri Rubin summarizes this by saying: “In fact, most of the traditions describing his prayer towards Jerusalem, while in Mecca, maintain that he used to stand opposite the south eastern wall of the Ka‘ba, so that the Ka‘ba was between him and Jerusalem” (1986, 103fn.), suggesting that the Ka‘ba pointed to Jerusalem and Muḥammad used it as a *qibla*.

Further information can be gleaned from reports attributed to ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and included in the *Sīra*. He describes the demolition and rebuilding of the Ka‘ba in the late seventh century, but adds:

I was told that Quraysh found in the corner a writing in Syriac. They could not understand it until a Jew read it for them. It was as follows: ‘I am Allah the Lord of Bakka, I created it on the day that I created heaven and earth and formed the sun and moon, and I surrounded it with seven pious angels. It will stand while its two mountains stand, a blessing to its people with milk and water,’ and I was told that they found in the maqām Ibrāhīm (shrine) a writing, ‘Meccah is God’s holy house, its sustenance comes to it from three directions; let its people not be the first to profane it.’ (Ibn Ishāq as quoted in Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 85-86).

That a Jew was called to read a Syriac text would appear incongruous as many would consider it to be the language of others, such as eastern Christian communities. It is evident, though, that there were Jews who were translators of Old Syriac Gospels, but also used West Aramaic. Thus, it is not so straightforward to deduce a solely Christian source in this case, as it is credible that a Jew was able to translate the Syriac inscription (Joosten 1991, 271-89). The fact that the inscription was in Syriac does not necessarily make it Christian, it could have been written by Jews, as they also used Syriac.

Ibn al-Zubayr also states that Layth b. Abū Sulaym describes a stone, found in the Ka‘ba forty years before the Prophet’s first revelation, with these words written on it: “*He that soweth good shall reap joy; he that soweth evil shall reap sorrow; can you do evil and be rewarded*

³⁰ East facing entrance of the Ka‘ba: see figure 2.

with good? Nay, as grapes cannot be gathered from thorns.” [no original language mentioned] (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 86). Guillaume states in the footnote: “A strange place in which to find a quotation from the Gospel; cf. Mt. 7. 16.” (1998, 86fn.). It is this incongruity that may suggest its authenticity. Why this quote, and why apparently from the Gospel of Matthew in the 6th century Ka‘ba?

This text, within the context of the traditional Gospel of Matthew, points to “judgement”, and particularly warns the readers to be aware of “wise and false prophets”. The reader is told to watch out for false prophets, and by their fruits they will be known. The chapter also points to the way being “narrow” and is to be found in the teachings of “the Law and the Prophets”. As will be explored later, the Jewish Nazoraean movement was alleged to be Torah observant, maintaining use of a Gospel of Matthew/Hebrews in Hebrew (de Blois 2002, 3), and seeing Paul as an apostate: this passage would have been of relevance for a Jewish Nazoraean movement at the Ka‘ba. This extract from Matthew can also be found in the formulation of the source (*Quelle*) document *Q* of the Synoptic Gospels, a foundational, singular ‘gospel’ (Edwards 1976, xi-xiii) as I will discuss in later chapters.³¹

Subsequently, Ibn al-Zubayr’s extended structure was again revised into a cuboid structure by al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf, the commander of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (A.H. 65–86/685–705 C.E.). It may be suggested that ‘Abd al-Malik was reforming other traditions. M.J. Kister highlights a possible attempt to increase the precedence of Jerusalem over Mecca:

The ta‘rīf in Jerusalem is linked in some sources with ‘Abd al-Malik, who is accused of having built the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem in order to divert the pilgrimage from Mecca to Jerusalem, since ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr, the rival caliph in Mecca, forced the pilgrims to give the oath of allegiance. When the Dome of the Rock was built people used to gather there on the Day of ‘Arafa and performed there the *wuqūf*. So the *bid‘a* of *wuqūf* in Jerusalem arose. Al-Ṭurṭūshī describes a gathering of the people of Jerusalem and of its villages in the mosque, raising their voices in supplications. They believed that four “standings” (*waqafāt*) in Jerusalem were equal to a pilgrimage to Mecca. (Kister 1990, XIII, 32)

³¹ The question of *Q*. Chapter 5.8.

There are other debates concerning the reason for and role of ‘Abd al-Malik’s Dome of the Rock, but they are not in the remit of this thesis. It is important to recognize that lasting structures were being set down in this era, in the late 7th and early 8th century. From this time onwards, extant sources and studies do not indicate any substantial change in the Ka‘ba’s floorplan.

2.4. How the Ka‘ba was used by Muḥammad

It appears that in the time leading up to Muḥammad’s first revelation, the Ka‘ba was rebuilt because of a fire or flood, and that he was involved in its construction and the positioning of the Black Stone. The exact date is not clear, but it would be around the turn of the seventh century. Ibn Ishāq recounts:

The Quraysh decided to rebuild the Ka‘ba when the apostle was thirty-five years of age (c. 605). They were planning to roof it and feared to demolish it, for it was made of loose stones above a man’s height, and they wanted to raise it and roof it because men had stolen part of the treasure of the Ka‘ba which used to be in a well in the middle of it. (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 84)

This reinforces earlier accounts that the Ka‘ba was a low-lying building, with low walls “into which cattle could burst”, covered with a *kiswa* (Rubin 1986). In addition, it appears that the door of the Ka‘ba faced east, as it does today (see Figure 2). Recognizing the respect given to its form and structure at the time of the rebuilding, it is likely to have faced east in the earlier “low-lying” structure.

According to Ibn Ishāq when the Quraysh rebuilt the Ka‘ba in the early 7th century with Muḥammad’s help, they were assigned sections (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 85), thereby indicating the door was on the side of the cuboid building as it is today, facing east.

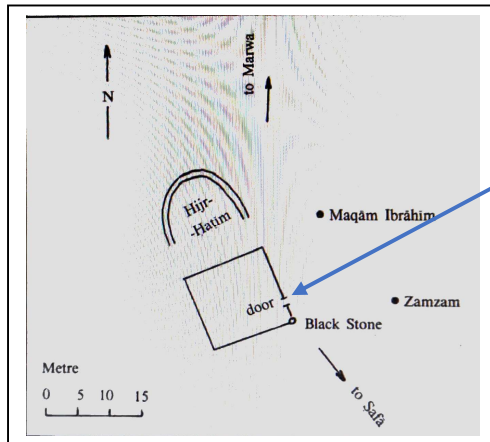


Figure 2: Diagram of the Ka'ba showing the position of the east-facing door according to Ibn Ishāq's account of the re-building in the early 7th century. (Rubin 1986, 98).

“Then Quraysh divided the work among them;

the section near the door was assigned to B. ‘Abdu Manāf and Zuhra.

The space between the black stone and the southern corner, to B. Makhzūm and the Qurayshite tribes which were attached to them.

The back of the Ka'ba to B. Jumaḥ and Sahm, the two sons of ‘Amr b. Huṣayṣ b. Ka'b b. Lu'ayy.

The side of the *hijr* to B. ‘Abdu'l-Dār b. Quṣayy and to B. Asad b. al-'Uzzā b. Quṣayy, and to B. ‘Adīy b. Ka'b b. Lu'ayy which is the *Ḥaḥīm*.” (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 85)

It is important to recognize that all synagogues from the second century C.E. were expected to place their entrance door facing east (cf. *Tosefta Megillah* 3:14 (c.190 - c.230 C.E.)). This observation will be used in a critical analysis of the hypothesis that the Ka'ba was previously a Hebrew sanctuary, orientated towards Jerusalem with its door facing east.

Ibn Ishāq continues to indicate the priority of Muḥammad when he describes his place of authority in resolving the placement of the black stone:

When they saw him they said, ‘This is the trustworthy one. We are satisfied. This is Muḥammad.’ When he came to them and they informed him of the matter he said, ‘Give me a cloak,’ and when it was brought to him he took the black stone and put it inside it and said that each tribe should take hold of an end of the cloak and they should lift it together. They did this so that when they got it into position he placed it with his own hand, and then building went on above it. (1998, 86)

Although this report includes elements that already seem to aim at heightening his status and connection with the Ka'ba in the pre-Islamic period, it is possible that Muḥammad was

involved in the construction of the early 7th century cuboid building, an event prior to the time thought of as traditionally Muḥammad's first revelation in 610 C.E. The importance of this expectation of Muḥammad's authority here, in the first decade of the 7th century, is to highlight whether he understood to have been aware of or condoned the images of the Prophets and Jesus and Mary that were part of the myth story of his cleansing of the Ka'ba in 630 C.E. (Ibn Ishāq (704-67 C.E.); al-Azraqī (d. 865 C.E.)). Within the account, if the images were there at the time of rebuilding, and Muḥammad was involved, he must then either have supported, or passively acknowledged, the presence of the images of Abraham, Jesus and Mary and other prophets (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 552). If he was not aware of them, they needed to have materialized in the Ka'ba after the *Hijra* (622 C.E.) to have been newly discovered in the capture of Mecca in 630 C.E., as recounted in al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*:

It was related that Ibn 'Abbās said: 'When the Prophet came to Mecca he refused to go into the Ka'ba as idols (*al-ālihatu*) were still inside it. He ordered them removed and so they were removed. The people took out the pictures of Ibrahim and Ismā'īl holding arrows (*fa-amara bi-hā fa-ukhrijat, fa-akhrajū šūratay 'Ibrāhīm wa-Ismā'īl fī aydī-himā al-azlām*) and the Messenger of God said: 'May God obliterate these people. By God! They knew well that neither Ibrahim nor Ismail ever divined with arrows.' Then he entered the Ka'ba and said 'God is Great' at its corners, but he did not pray in it.' (from al-Azraqī's *Akhbār Makka* as quoted in G. R. D. King 2004, 223)

This story indicates the possibility of an adaptation or alteration of earlier images to include divination symbols, and belomancy ("divination" being *non-halakhic* – "*There shall not be found among you ... that useth divination*" Deut.18:10 JPS). Although, the account found in al-Azraqī's *Akhbār Makka* suggests the paintings and divination arrows were present from the reconstruction in which Muḥammad was involved:

Bāqūm al-Rūmī said to [the Quraysh]: 'Do you want the roof [of the Ka'ba] pitched or flat?' 'Rather build the house of our Lord (*rabb*) flat.' He [apparently al-Azraqī's grandfather, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Azraqī] said: 'So they built it flat and they put in it six columns (*da 'ā'im*) in two rows: in each row were three columns from the northeast (*shāmī*) corner (*shaqq*) where is the [Black] Stone, to the southwest (*yamānī*) corner, and they made its external height from the ground to its summit eighteen cubits (*dhirā'*) high, and previously [the pre-Quraysh Ka'ba] had been nine *dhirā'* high. The Quraysh added another nine *dhirā'* to the upper part, and they built it from the top to the bottom with courses (*madamāk*) of stone and courses of wood, and

fifteen courses were of wood and sixteen courses were of stone, and they fixed its water-spout (*mīzāb*) that pours forth [water] in stone, and they placed wooden steps inside it at the *shāmī* corner to ascend by them to its rear (*zahrāhā*), and they decorated its ceiling and its internal wall surfaces and its columns, and they put on its columns pictures of the Prophets (*al-anbiyā'*), pictures of trees, and pictures of the angels (*al-malā'ika*), and there was a picture of the Prophet Ibrāhīm Khalīl al-Raḥmān with divining arrows, and a picture of 'Isā b. Maryam and his mother [i.e., Jesus and Mary], and a picture of the angels (*al-malā'ika*), upon them be peace, all of them.' (al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, Vol. I, 165) (quoted in G. R. D. King 2004, 219)

This later developed report does not indicate the presence of any statues in the Ka'ba at all and supports only the theme of murals or portable paintings. A further account by al-Azraqī describes two images:

He [‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ] said: ‘I do not know, other than that they were obliterated, with the exception of those two pictures [‘Isā b. Maryam and Maryam]. I saw them [i.e., the rest] and their obliteration.’ (as quoted by G. R. D. King 2004, 220)

These passages complement the earlier story that a statue of the ‘god’ Hubal was taken out of the Ka'ba and destroyed, as were the other pagan deities in and around the building: “It stood inside the Ka'bah. In front of it were seven divination arrows – used to decide whether a child was legitimate or not. Other arrows for the dead and on marriage.” (al-Kalbī 1952, 23).

Al-Kalbī continues:

It was before [Hubal] that ‘Abd-al-Muṭṭalib shuffled the divination arrows [in order to find out which of his ten children he should sacrifice in fulfilment of a vow he had sworn], and the arrows pointed to his son ‘Abdullāh, the father of the Prophet. (1952: 24)

What can be deduced is that the original pre-Islamic Ka'ba was a low-lying structure made of stones and covered originally by palm leaves and later by a *kiswa*.³² This building originally included what is known as the *Hijr Ismā'īl* that pointed to the northwest. In the first decade of the 7th century the building was reconstructed and Muḥammad was possibly involved in this reconstruction. Muḥammad is said to have preferred the inclusion of the *Hijr Ismā'īl* into the structure (he is found asleep here before his Night Journey), but this had not been the case.

³² See Chapter 2.2.

Azraqī indicates that Bāqūm painted the walls with pictures of “the Prophets (*al-anbiyā'*), pictures of trees, and pictures of the angels (*al-malā'ika*)”, and pictures of 'Īsā b. Maryam and his mother Maryam (Peters 1994, 48). Some might indicate that this use of imagery was Coptic or Ethiopian Christian, which may be so. But, this does not answer why they would have been requisitioned in a story of a building that was not intended to be a Church, nor had been a Christian building. Stephen Shoemaker appears to suggest the absence of a Christian presence too: “Although Christianity had literally encircled the Ḥijāz by Muhammad’s lifetime, there is no evidence of a significant Christian community in either Mecca or Medina.” (Shoemaker 2012, 225)

Divination arrows may have been brought in as an addition, which became the focus of Muḥammad’s ire in 630 C.E. 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ also recounts where the images were placed within the Ka'ba. He explains:

Ibn Jurayj said: ‘Then 'Ata' returned to the sketch of the six columns that he had drawn in plan. Then he said: ‘The representation of 'Īsā and his mother, upon them be peace, was in the middle of the row that was in front of the door that we came through when we entered [the Ka'ba].’ My grandfather [Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Azraqī] said: ‘Dā'ūd b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān told me that 'Amr b. Dīnār said: ‘A [picture] of 'Īsā b. Maryam and his mother was set in the interior of the Ka'ba before the destruction of the idols.’ [al-Azraqī, *Akḥbār Makka*, Vol. I, 167.] (as quoted in G. R. D. King 2004, 220)

Within in this developing myth, it could be inferred that there was some primacy for 'Īsā b. Maryam and Maryam within the Ka'ba, especially as they seem to be placed in the centre of the north-west wall of the building, much in the style of the Ephraimite Messiah image in the centre of the Jerusalem-facing wall of the Dura Europos Synagogue. Azraqī goes on to recount Muḥammad saying:

...Shihāb (said) that the Prophet (peace be upon him) entered the Ka'ba the day of the conquest, and in it was a picture of the angels (*malā'ika*) and others, and he saw a picture of Ibrahim and he said: ‘May Allah kill those representing him as a venerable old man casting arrows in divination (*shaykhan yastaqsim bi-'l-azlām*).’ Then he saw the picture of Maryam, so he put his hands on it and he said: ‘Erase what is in it [the Ka'ba] in the way of pictures except the picture of Maryam.’ [al-Azraqī, *Akḥbār Makka*, Vol. I, 168-69.] (as quoted in G. R. D. King 2004, 223)

Despite his scholarly assessment of the historicity of biographical material on Muḥammad, Gerald Hawting does indicate that there are glimpses of potentially original material that stand out as distinct. Hawting acknowledges:

The traditional Muslim texts that describe or allude to conditions in the Ḥijāz at the time of the Prophet contain material, stories and details which have often been understood to indicate that monotheism of various sorts was present there. Apart from the already mentioned presence of Jews in Yathrib (Medina), for example, according to some accounts the prophethood of Muḥammad was first confirmed, after the initial revelation to him, in Mecca by Waraqa b. Nawfal, an individual described as having had knowledge of the Jewish and Christian scriptures or even, sometimes, as having adopted Christianity [...] The Ka'ba in Mecca is reported to have contained a picture of Jesus and Mary, a picture which the Prophet commanded to be preserved when he ordered the obliteration of others. (1999, 14)

Here we see evidence in Hawting of a traditional understanding of a *ḥadīth* that translated *naṣārā* as “Christian”, without question. It is easy to link the images of Jesus and Mary in the Ka'ba to Christianity, but the reason for their presence was possibly more complex, as I will investigate in later chapters. Within the narrative, these images and figures are apparently not polytheistic idols in the sense of the notion intended by the term *jāhiliyya* in Islamic tradition. Nor were they considered idols by any examples given in the Islamic literature analyzed in this thesis, including the Qur'ān or the *Hadīth* (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998; Ibn Hishām 1955; Al-Kalbī 1952; al-Azraqī 1964). So an answer must be sought as to why these “unlikely” images were later documented, if the main storyline was to emphasize the number of pagan idols, e.g. “360 idols” (al-Azraqī 1969; Ibn Hishām 1955).

These passages recounting stories of when Muḥammad entered Mecca in 630 C.E. contain small disparities such as sometimes only referring to Mary but at other times to both Jesus and Mary; mentioning only Abraham and then both Abraham and Ismail. It should be noted that it appears generally that the offence is that of divination, and perhaps more so when replicating divining arrows on or onto the pictures of Abraham (and Ismail). Thereby, this is understood as an act of sacrilege against the memory of the prophets and the original monotheistic foundation of the Ka'ba. Note that as Abraham, Ismail and Jesus were understood

as prophets, why would Abraham and Ismail be singled out for erasure? Was it because their images had been tainted by the depiction of divination arrows?

If the polemic of *jāhiliyya* is put to one side, then another tradition may be found, one that demonstrates an older relationship between Mecca and Jerusalem; one of an earlier monotheistic, Abrahamic sanctuary, founded on the traditions of the Hebrew Prophets, including Jesus.

2.5. The Ka‘ba and its relationship with Jerusalem

On the northwest side of the current Ka‘ba building lies a low semi-circular wall, the *Ḥaṭīm*. As discussed in the previous section this area is the demarcation of the original Abrahamic structure and the resting place of *Ismā‘īl* and his mother *Hājar*. Here in this part of the chapter, there will be a consideration of the orientation of the building and possible reasons for its direction towards Palestine. There have been other studies with suggestions including a link to Petra (Gibson 2017), however, throughout this thesis and within Jewish and Islamic traditions there are a number of reasons to suggest Palestine, and Jerusalem as the direction of orientation. There are other considerations I would suggest, such as the Abrahamic shrines of Beth-El, Hebron or Be'er Sheva as potential foci for the Ka‘ba, and these will be discussed too. There is an indication that either from a religious or a political response, there were writers in the late 7th and early 8th century that considered the relationship of the Ka‘ba with Jerusalem as one of divine purpose. In the *Faḍā'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, 'Praises of Jerusalem', the writer indicates the metaphysical nature of these two sites and their engagement within Islamic cosmology.

In an account in the *Faḍā'il Bayt al-Maqdis*, the Ka'ba is to visit Jerusalem at the end times leading to the point where both will ascend together into heaven with their inhabitants. The divine love affair is then completed with unified sanctuaries in the divine realm on Judgement Day: “the Ka'ba will be incorporated into Jerusalem, at the Day of Judgement, like a bride, joined by all who pilgrimage to it.” (al- Maqdisī 1995, 211:307).

In addition, a Companion of Muḥammad, Abū Dharr (d. 32/653), considered Jerusalem and the al-Aqṣā Mosque second only to the Ka'ba in sanctity and origins (Livne-Kafri 2001, 52). According to Ofer Livne-Kafri:

The conception, well known in the Jewish tradition, of an upper or heavenly Temple, set opposite a lower Temple, is most probably connected to the idea of a celestial temple parallel to the Ka'ba in Mecca. This temple is identified with the term *al-bayt al-ma'mūr*, which appears in the Qur'ān [Surat al-Tur 4] and which was also called *ḍurākh*.”(Livne-Kafri 2008, 62)

It appears that the relationship of these two sanctuaries in addition to an earlier connection, as revealed in this thesis, also has a cosmology developed in the early period of Islamic Literature.

2.6. The original direction of prayer

Jerusalem was the earlier *qibla* for the nascent Muslim community (pre-624 C.E.) and there may be some additional evidence to suggest this. The *Masjid al-Aqṣā* (The Furthest Mosque), as part of the setting for the *Qubbat al-Ṣakhra* (the Dome of the Rock) is the third most holy shrine in Islam after the Ka'ba in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. (Insol 1999, 49) Therefore, 'Imād al-Dīn al-Asfahānī (A.H. 519-597/1125-1201 C.E.) said, describing al-Aqṣā Mosque: “*wa-huwa ūlā al-qiblatayn, wa-thānī al-baytayn, wa-thālith al-ḥaramayn*” [it is the first *qibla* (prayer direction) in Islam, the second house (of worship ever built on earth), and the third holiest shrine in Islam] (El-Khatib 2001, 26). Ibn Ishāq clearly

affirms that while Muḥammad was in Mecca, when praying, he turned his face towards Syria: “While he was in Mecca he faced Syria in prayer, and when he prayed, he prayed between the southern corner and the black stone, putting the Ka’ba between himself and Syria.” (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 135)

2.7. The House of Abraham

The origin of the idea of the “House of Abraham” is frequently found within Islamic literature. The Islamic tradition, which ascribes to Abraham the establishment of the Ka’ba as a sanctuary, does not seem surprising considering the Jewish presence in the Ḥijāz and the presence of several verses in Genesis (12:7, 13:18, 21:33), which claim that Abraham created several shrines in different locations (Firestone 1990, 82). As with many transient tribes travelling the Fertile Crescent, shrines would have been established at sites of spiritual or cultural significance.

The 19th century Dutch Orientalist, Snouck Hurgronje, argued that the orientation of early prayer towards Jerusalem by Muḥammad and his followers and the attribution of the Ka’ba as the House of Abraham, were only suggested to gain the support of the Jews in Medina. I have questioned this line of thought elsewhere in this thesis. It would be unusual for someone who has had a noetic religious experience to be particularly swayed by a search only for political or religious advantage (James 1917, 370). Furthermore, it is clear that Abraham was recognized as significant in the Meccan period before Muḥammad emigrated to Medina and the role the Jews of Medina was considered.

“Say, ‘My Lord has guided me to a straight path, an upright religion, the faith of Abraham, a man of pure faith. He was not a polytheist.’” (Q 6:161) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 93)

Wensinck presents a possible reason behind Muḥammad's adoption of the Abrahamic concept: he argues that the new orientation was designed to provide the Prophet with a means of demonstrating the independence of the Islamic faith vis-à-vis Judaism and to present Islam from that time on as the originally revealed religion. Moreover, by adopting Abraham's religious heritage, he acquired the tools that later enabled him to emphasize the sanctity of Mecca as a first step in the reconciliation with the people of Mecca (Wensinck, Arent Jan 1982, 94-95).

In contrast to Hurgronje and Wensinck and maintaining the profound nature of Muḥammad's revelation, it could be questioned whether he was attempting to manipulate either the Jews in Medina or the people of Mecca. Far more significant may be his spiritual upbringing and family ties, which led him to recognize the religious experience he had. What could be said is that he was conversant with Jewish scripture and other apocryphal writings, with an awareness of Jesus as a prophet, and an absence of the use of Pauline writings. The hypothesis of this study will present that the Nazoraean community in Medina were familiar with the continuity of the prophetic line from Abraham to Jesus as a matter of belief, and so not adverse to seeing prophethood arising again at such messianic moments in history. This can be seen in the response from Waraqa, some *hanīf*, and the *ansār* to Muḥammad's message, as I will outline.

2.8. Which way to turn: Jerusalem or Mecca?

Meir Jacob Kister suggests that there had been a tradition among the Aws and Khazraj that they used to pray in the direction of Jerusalem two years before the *Hijra*,³³ and that they

³³ See Maḥmūd Ibrāhīm, *Faḍā'il bayti l-maqdis fī makhṭūṭāt 'arabiyya qadīma* (al-Kuwayt, A.H. 1406/1985 C.E.), 365, 1. 3. - M. J. Kister 1996, 52fn.

may have “intended to continue to set out to Jerusalem after they had embraced Islam” (1996, 19). This possibly indicates a pre-existing tradition of Jerusalem-orientated prayer amongst the Aws and Khazraj, and that the later change of orientation to Mecca was an innovation.

Although many writers³⁴ indicate the reason for the removal of Jerusalem as a *qibla* and place of pilgrimage was caused by the break with Medinan Jews, or the desire for early Islam to reduce the importance of Jerusalem over Mecca as the centre of pilgrimage, it may have been for other reasons. I would suggest that in the early 7th century, the political and religious situation in Jerusalem after the Persian invasion and subsequent capitulation to the Romans in the previous decade would have significantly influenced the decision to travel there on pilgrimage. As Jerusalem had become inaccessible to Jews (and Nazoraeans), following a time of apocalyptic hope when Jews imagined returning after 500 years of exclusion, as described in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, a more immediate shrine needed to be sought as a focus of prayer, hope and community identity. That would become the Ka‘ba, the House of Abraham in Mecca, and thus, in Medina, the *qibla* turned 180° away from Jerusalem. If the reason for the turn of the *qibla* was indeed the inaccessibility of Jerusalem, then it remains unclear why it happened at that specific moment.

Many shrines redevelop when the original centre of pilgrimage becomes out of bounds. One such example is the House of Mary, the Shrine of Walsingham in Norfolk. The shrine at Walsingham was established in 1061 when, according to Richeldis de Faverches’ account, she prayed that she might undertake some special work “in honour of Our Lady”. In answer to her prayer, the Virgin Mary led her in spirit to Nazareth, showed her the house where the Annunciation occurred, and asked her to build a replica in Walsingham to serve as a perpetual memorial of the Annunciation (Dunn-Hensley 2018). This occurred in the years that led to the First Crusade and at a time when Jerusalem (and Nazareth) were impossible to access for

³⁴ al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma‘ al-bayān fī Taḥṣīr al-Qur‘ān* (Cairo, 1321/1903) “and the Jews were glad” as quoted in Peters 1985, 182; and “the desire for a reconciliation with the Jews” by Watt 1956, 200.

Christians, and would remain so for many years to come. It therefore became a pilgrimage site for Christians during the centuries of the Crusades and for years after, even until the time of writing.

Returning to Kister's suggestion, he continues to examine the reasons for the idea that the prophets turned their faces towards the Ka'ba as their *qibla*. He considers the writings of two jurists, Ibn Jamā'a (1241-1333 C.E.) and al-Suyūṭī (1445–1505 C.E.). Al-Suyūṭī claims, "Never did God send a prophet without enjoining him to pray in the direction of the Ka'ba. The Jews and the Christians were ordered to do so but strayed from the right path." (1996, 53). The concept of the pre-existing Ka'ba is then pushed back to the first prophet Ādam, with the tradition was that he completed the *hajj* and circumambulated the Ka'ba. It is further established in a metaphysical realm by al-Shāfi'ī, in his *Umm*, that the angels meet Ādam on his return from the *hajj* and told him that they used to perform the pilgrimage two thousand years earlier.

According to Ibn Jamā'a, after the Flood, Abraham moved Hājar and her son to the *wādī* of Mecca and there, on direction from God, he built the Ka'ba, and it became the *qibla* from then on. Ibn Jamā'a continues to say that this was in accordance with a revelation from God. He concludes that The Rock (Jerusalem) remained the *qibla* of the prophets who dwelt in the Holy Land; but they also revered the Ka'ba and performed the *hajj* to Mecca (1996, 57).

With regard to Muḥammad standing to the southeast of the Ka'ba and facing it to pray, Kister remarks that Ibn Jamā'a argues that he did it out of preference for facing the Ka'ba, since it was the *qibla* of his ancestor Ibrāhīm, and in order to gain the sympathy of Quraysh. When the Prophet came to Medina – as it was impossible to combine the two *qiblas* – he prayed in the direction of Jerusalem (*bayt al-maqdis*) in order to gain the sympathy of the Jews. When he realized that they did not abstain from their wrong course, he turned, while praying, in the direction of the Ka'ba, thereby fulfilling the edict of the Qur'ān:

Yet even if you brought every proof to those who were given the Scripture, they would not follow your prayer direction, nor will you follow theirs, nor indeed will any

of them follow one another's direction. If you [Prophet] were to follow their desires, after the knowledge brought to you, you would be doing wrong. (Q 2:145) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 17)

Ibn Jamā‘a finally touches upon the interpretation of a tradition recorded on the authority of al-Zuhrī after completing the treatise of “*Facing the Two Qiblas*”: the first House created by God for worship was the Ka‘ba; and forty years later the Temple in Jerusalem was built [al-Ṭabarī – *Tafṣīr* VII, 22] (1996, 61). This continues to highlight the precedence of the Ka‘ba over Jerusalem as the historic focus for prayer from the time of Ādam up to and including Muḥammad, overwriting the Jewish tradition of the Davidic establishment of the Jerusalem tabernacle. Of course, one should bear in mind the existence of the Abrahamic shrine at Beth-El and other Judaic sanctuaries that were believed to predate the Jerusalem Temple too.

To challenge this tradition there is some evidence of the significance of the Jerusalem *qibla* in the early years of Muḥammad’s mission before the *Hijra*. In what is thought to be the first ever mosque in the African continent, in the remains of the *Masjid al-Ṣaḥābah*, (615 C.E.) in the city of Massawa, Eritrea (see Figure 3 below), there is a *qibla* that is oriented towards Jerusalem. It is suggested that it was built by companions of Muḥammad who were fleeing persecution in Mecca (Reid 2012, 106).



Figure 3: The remains of the *Masjid aṣ-Ṣaḥābah*, Massawa, Eritrea. Creative Commons. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosque_of_the_Companions,_Massawa

Another example of a Jerusalem-orientated *qibla* is in the *Masjid as-Shawādhinah* in Nizwā in what is now Oman (see Figure 4 below) (Bandyopadhyay 2005, 28). This mosque allegedly dates back to A.H. 14 /635 C.E. but the “official date” is A.H. 7 /628 C.E. (see Damlūji 1998, 241). If this is the case, the mosque goes back to a time concurrent with Muḥammad’s being in Medina. It appears unlikely given the location of the mosque so far from the Ḥijāz, however it could be another example of an early tradition of Jerusalem-orientated mosques.

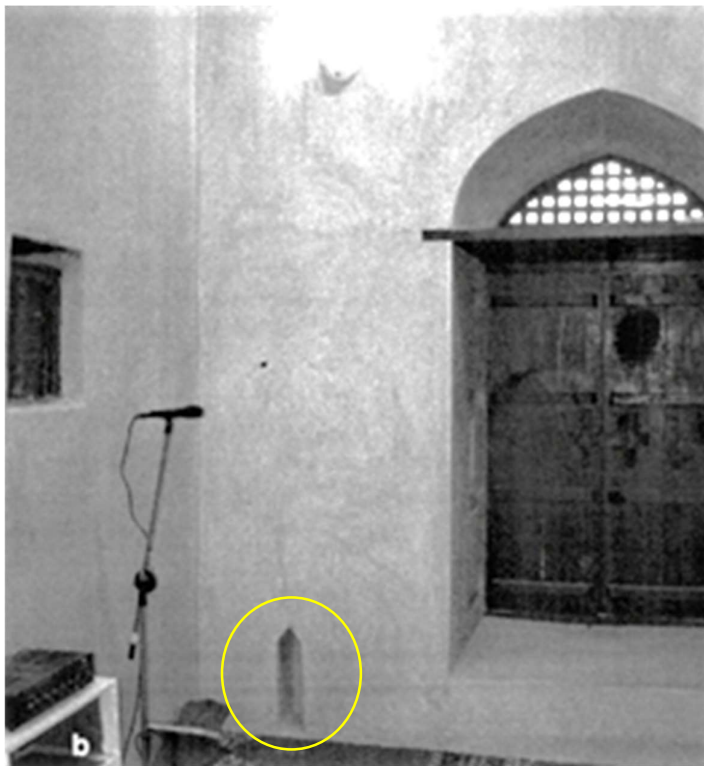


Figure 4: The *Masjid as-Shawādhinah* in Nizwā, Oman. (Bandyopadhyay 2005, 27)

2.9. The change of *qibla*

Although there is much evidence of the change of the *qibla* towards the Ka‘ba, it appears not to be endorsed by Muḥammad in the early years after the *Hijra*. The story of Muḥammad’s companion al-Barā’ recounts the differences:

Ma‘bad b. Ka‘b b. Malik b. Abū Ka‘b b. al-Qayn, brother of the B. Salima, told me that his brother ‘Abdullāh b. Ka‘b who was one of the most learned of the Anṣār told him that his father Ka‘b who was one of those who had been present at al-‘Aqaba and did homage to the apostle, informed him saying: ‘We went out with the polytheist pilgrims of our people having prayed and learned the customs of the pilgrimage. With us was al-Barā’ b. Ma‘rūr our chief and senior. When we had started our journey from Medina al-Barā’ said, ‘I have come to a conclusion and I don’t know whether you will agree with me or not. I think that I will not turn my back on this building’ (meaning the Ka‘ba), ‘and that I shall pray towards it.’ We replied that so far as we knew our prophet prayed towards Syria and we did not wish to act differently. He said, ‘I am going to pray towards the Ka‘ba.’ We said, ‘But we will not.’ When the time for prayer came we prayed towards Syria and he prayed towards the Ka‘ba until we came to Mecca. We blamed him for what he was doing, but he refused to change. When we came to Mecca he said to me, ‘Nephew, let us go to the apostle and ask him about what I did on our journey. For I feel some misgivings since I have seen your opposition.’ So we went to ask the apostle. [...] al-Barā’ said, ‘O prophet of God, I came on this journey God having guided me to Islam and I felt that I could not turn my back on this building, so I prayed towards it; but when my companions opposed me I felt some misgivings. ‘What is your opinion, O apostle of God’ He replied, ‘You would have had a *qibla* if you had kept to it,’ so al-Barā’ returned to the apostle’s *qibla* and prayed with us towards Syria. But his people assert that he prayed towards the Ka‘ba until the day of his death; but this was not so. We know more about that than they. (1998, 202; cf. I. J. Al-Ṭabarī 1988, 132)

It is recognized that Muḥammad used to like to pray towards the Ka‘ba, and this is highlighted in the verse: “We have seen the turning of your face to Heaven ...” (Q 2:144, Al-Ṭabarī 1987, 25). In conjunction with this, it is documented that the *qibla* was changed from “Syria” to the Ka‘ba in *Rajab*, the seventeenth month after the apostle’s arrival in Medina (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 258). The editors of al-Ṭabarī (W. Montgomery Watt and M. V. McDonald), recount the belief that the shift was caused by “changing attitudes towards the Jews” in Medina (I. J. Al-Ṭabarī 1987, 24n): however, I have previously argued that the change may have been brought about by political and religious upheaval in Jerusalem at the time. Suliman Bashear refers to al-Suyūṭī (d. A.H. 880), who focussed on the merits (*faḍā’il*) of the Jerusalem sanctuary; “It was revealed”, al-Suyūṭī says, “concerning the barring of Muslims by the Byzantines from the Jerusalem sanctuary” (Ithāf al-Akhiṣṣā 1, 100 quoted in Bashear 1989, 215). Bashear argues that the Qur’ān refers to this conflict over the barring of Muslims from Jerusalem:

Who could be more wicked than those who prohibit the mention of God's name in His places of worship and strive to have them deserted? Such people should not enter them without fear: there is disgrace for them in this world and painful punishment in the Hereafter. The East and the West belong to God: wherever you turn, there is His Face³⁵. God is all pervading and all knowing. (Q 2:114-5) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 14)

Bashear cites the Kūfan al-Sha'ibī (d. A.H. 103-110/721-728 C.E.) who claimed that Muḥammad only turned away from Jerusalem because he was angered by its people and not because of his conflict with the Jews of Medina (1989, 229):

wherever you may have started out, turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque; wherever any of you may be, turn your faces towards it, so that people may have no argument against you – except for the wrong- doers among them: do not fear them; fear Me– and so that I may perfect My favour on you and you may be guided, (Q 2:150) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 17)

He argues on the basis of Q 2:114-115 that the Jews were not necessarily angered at the change of direction of prayer, but rather it went beyond their acceptable practice to stop praying towards Jerusalem. Further evidence is suggested, as highlighted in Q 2:114-115, that the Christian/Byzantine authorities had banned Jews and by implication nascent Muslims from Jerusalem, in the third decade of the 7th century. This argument of Bashear appears to reflect the political and religious turmoil occurring in Jerusalem during Muḥammad's lifetime, and the traditions found in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*.

Bashear concludes, “it has been demonstrated how up to the mid second century a clear anti-Christian/Byzantine sentiment prevailed in the exegesis of 2:114 which overwhelmingly presented it as referring to the Jerusalem sanctuary-temple.” However, in a conclusion differing from this thesis, Bashear (with Wansbrough) indicates that the reasons for the change from Jerusalem were “to assert the Ḥijāzī origins of Islam” (1989, 229).

This thesis will suggest that the Jews of Medina would have interpreted the Persian victory in Jerusalem (614 C.E.) as a portent for an apocalyptic event, replicated in the acts of Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel, the Ephraimite messiah, re-establishing the sacrifices and the *mitzvot*

³⁵ Or 'His direction'.

of the Temple cult. For all Jews of the diaspora including Nazoraeans, at that apocalyptic moment in history all nations would be drawn to Jerusalem as expressed in First Isaiah. God restores Jerusalem and the family of Abraham, all people will be drawn to the Kingdom of God, resulting in peace among all the nations (Isaiah 2:1-4 JPS).

This hope, echoed from Isaiah, begins to crumble in 617 C.E. when the Persians re-engaged with the Christians in Jerusalem, leading to the apparent murder in 619 C.E. of the Ephraimite messiah figure of Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel, thereby ending the aspiration of the Jews of an imminent return to Jerusalem until a Davidic messiah comes to resurrect the Ephraimite messiah and establish peace on earth with all nations united under God's reign. The following year in Mecca, Muḥammad is said to have taken his Night Journey to Jerusalem, with the seal of the earlier prophets and divine blessing, and soon after it was time to leave for the *Hijra* to Medina (622 C.E.). In 624 the *qibla* was moved from "Syria" to the Ka'ba in *Rajab*, the seventeenth month after the apostle's arrival in Medina. The "door" to the sanctuary in Jerusalem was finally "closed" in March 21 630 C.E. when Heraclius marched into Jerusalem with the True Cross. Once again, "Roman" or Byzantine power [in the form of Armilos (a cryptogram for Heraclius)] excluded Jews from Jerusalem, echoing the disaster of 135 C.E. and reworked for the 7th century in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*:

I continued asking there about the prince of the holy covenant. He held me close and they (sic) brought me to the 'house of filth' [and scorn]. There he showed me a marble stone in the shape of a maiden: her features and form were lovely and indeed very beautiful to behold. Then he said to me, 'This statue is the [wife] of Belial. Satan will come and have intercourse with it, and a son named Armilos will emerge from it, [whose name in Greek means] "he will destroy a nation." He will rule over all (peoples), and his dominion will extend from one end of the earth to the other, and ten letters will be in his hand. He will engage in the worship of foreign gods and speak lies. No one will be able to withstand him, and anyone who does not believe in him he will kill with the sword: many among them will he kill. He will come against the holy people of the Most High, and with him there will be ten kings wielding great power and force, and he will do battle with the holy ones. *He will prevail over them and will kill the Messiah of the lineage of Joseph, Nehemiah b. Hushiel, and will also kill sixteen righteous ones alongside him. Then they will banish Israel to the desert in three groups.* (cf. Reeves 2005, 58-59) [my italics].

I suggest that prayer and pilgrimage turned from Jerusalem to the Ka‘ba in Mecca, but this was unacceptable to the majority of the Jews of Medina, who could only foresee a reestablishment of a sanctuary on Mount Zion and a coming Davidic messiah.

2.10. The Ka‘ba as Muḥammad’s *qibla*

With respect to Ibn Jamā‘a’s argument that Muḥammad was attempting to satisfy the Quraysh by standing facing the southern [southeastern] wall of the Ka‘ba to pray, thereby venerating it, Ibn Ishāq suggests an earlier interpretation of this orientation for prayer:

When morning came Abū Jahl took a stone and sat in wait for the apostle, who behaved as usual that morning. While he was in Mecca he faced Syria in prayer, and when he prayed, he prayed between the southern corner and the black stone, putting the Ka‘ba between himself and Syria. (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 135)

Here, Muḥammad is facing the Ka‘ba but in doing so is also facing “Syria” (Jerusalem), and by *de facto* using the Ka‘ba as a *qibla*. And again, this interpretation is given in the story of ‘Abdullah b. Abū Najīh, a Meccan:

So I came to the mosque meaning to go round the Ka‘ba and there was the apostle standing praying. As he prayed he faced Syria, putting the Ka‘ba between himself and Syria. His stance was between the black stone and the southern corner. When I saw him I thought it would be a good thing if I could listen to Muḥammad so as to hear what he said. If I came near to listen to him I should scare him, so I came from the direction of the *hijr* and got underneath its coverings and began to walk gently. Meanwhile the prophet was standing in prayer reciting the Quran until I stood in his *qibla* facing him, there being nothing between us but the covering of the Ka‘ba. When I heard the Quran my heart was softened and I wept, and Islam entered into me; but I ceased not to stand in my place until the apostle had finished his prayer. Then he went away. (1998, 158)

This seems to suggest that whilst in Mecca Muḥammad prayed towards the northwest using the Ka‘ba. I would argue that al-Zubayr’s reconstruction of the Ka‘ba at a later date that included the *Hijr Ismā‘īl* within its walls, re-created a directional building that had been neglected since the restructuring of the building by the Quraysh in c. 605 C.E. It appears that

Muḥammad's normal practice before the *Hijra* was to pray towards the northwest, with the help of the Ka'ba as a *qibla* between him and Jerusalem.

In later Islamic writings there may have been a reticence in the Muslim community to maintain a link to Jerusalem, and they also saw a need to establish the identity of the Ka'ba and Mecca as a centre of the faith:

...in the first half of the second century there was some reluctance to give full recognition of sanctity to the third mosque and to grant Jerusalem an equal position with the two holy cities of Islam Mecca and Medina. (Kister 1980, 180)

Kister suggests a series of traditions where Muḥammad advises individuals to refrain from the journey to Jerusalem and to pray either in Mecca or Medina (1980, 180-184). This may be for later Islamic apologetics as he suggests, or it may have arisen from the fact that Jerusalem had recently become "out of bounds" due to the Persian capitulation to Byzantine demands, leading to the eventual re-establishment of the "true cross" in the city (617-630 C.E.). Kister does highlight one instance where Mecca and Jerusalem are understood as having equal value. This is found in the words of al-Farazdaq (c. 641– c.730 C.E.) quoted by Kister:

(To us belong) two Houses; the House of God, of which we are the governors: and the revered House in the upper (part of) Īliyā'a (i.e., Jerusalem). (1980, XIII: 182)

This maybe one example, and one that favoured the Damascene rule of the Umayyads, but the overwhelming evidence is that in early Islamic writings (Jābir b. 'Abdallah; Abū Sa'īd (al-Khudrī); Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab) the role of Jerusalem would decline and the precedence of the Ka'ba and Mecca would become firmly established. Although there would continue to be a contest between Mecca and Medina, the sanctity of Jerusalem remained present as the third most valued sanctuary. This importance was retained through the story of Muḥammad's Night Journey (*Isrā'*) to the "farthest mosque", which Uri Rubin establishes as the "axis of sanctity" (2008, 153) between the Ka'ba and Jerusalem.

2.11. The Night Journey (c. 621 C.E.)

The Night Journey and Ascension (*al-Isrā' wal-Mi'rāj*) are descriptions of a miraculous experience of Muḥammad as he travelled to the Temple in Jerusalem (*al-Masjid al-Aqṣā*) to lead the prophets in prayer, and from there to ascend into heaven. Islamic tradition suggests that the account has its source in the Qur'ān:

Glory to Him who made His servant travel by night from the sacred place of worship³⁶ to the furthest place of worship³⁷, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him some of Our signs: He alone is the All Hearing, the All Seeing. (Q 17:1) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 176)

The verse begins with the verb *'asra*, “he made to travel”, indicating this event as an act of God, not the will of Muḥammad. Ibn Ishāq confirms this emphasis:

It was certainly an act of God by which He took him by night in what way He pleased to show him His signs which He willed him to see so that he witnessed His mighty sovereignty and power by which He does what He wills to do. (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 182)

This establishes the event as a prime indicator of Muḥammad's prophethood as divinely ordained, in a similar manner to Jesus' transfiguration on Mount Tabor (Matt. 17:1–9). The account by Ibn Ishāq (cf. Rāshid 2015, 25) describes how Muḥammad was called by the Angel Gabriel three times as he slept in the *Ḥaḫīm*:

I was told that al-Ḥasan said that the apostle said: ‘While I was sleeping in the Ḥijr Gabriel came and stirred me with his foot. I sat up but saw nothing and lay down again. He came a second time and stirred me with his foot. I sat up but saw nothing and lay down again. He came to me the third time and stirred me with his foot. I sat up and he took hold of my arm and I stood beside him and he brought me out to the door of the mosque and there was a white animal, half mule, half donkey, with wings on its sides with which it propelled its feet, putting down each forefoot at the limit of its sight and he mounted me on it.’ (1998, 182)

³⁶ In Mecca.

³⁷ In Jerusalem.

Again, echoes of prophethood resound in this account. Regarding the three calls, there is a replication of the report of the beginning of Muḥammad's revelation, initiated also by Gabriel on Mount Ḥirā':

When it was the night on which God honoured him with his mission and showed mercy on His servants thereby, Gabriel brought him the command of God. 'He came to me,' said the apostle of God, 'while I was asleep, with a coverlet of brocade whereon was some writing, and said, 'Read!' I said, 'What shall I read?' He pressed me with it so tightly that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said, 'Read!' I said, 'What shall I read?' He pressed me with it again so that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said 'Read!' I said, 'What shall I read?' He pressed me with it the third time so that I thought it was death and said 'Read!' I said, 'What then shall I read?' - and this I said only to deliver myself from him, lest he should do the same to me again. He said:

'Read in the name of thy Lord who created, Who created man of blood coagulated. Read! Thy Lord is the most beneficent, Who taught by the pen, Taught that which they knew not unto men.'

So I read it, and he departed from me. And I awoke from my sleep, and it was as though these words were written on my heart. When I was midway on the mountain, I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'O Muhammad! thou art the apostle of God and I am Gabriel.' I raised my head towards heaven to see (who was speaking) and Gabriel in the form of a man with feet astride the horizon, saying, 'O Muhammad! thou art the apostle of God and I am Gabriel.' I stood gazing at him, moving neither forward nor backward; then I began to turn my face away from him but towards whatever region of the sky, I saw him as before. And I continued standing there, neither advancing nor turning back, until Khadīja sent her messengers in search of me and they gained the high ground above Mecca and returned to her while I was standing in the same place; then he parted from me and I from him, returning to my family. (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 106)

In a precedent, Samuel as a child was called three times before he was confirmed with prophethood by an act of God (1 Samuel 3:1-21); and in the Gospel of John (21:15-17) Jesus confirms Peter's future role as founder of the Church in a tripartite call to "feed my sheep". As for the night flight to a sanctuary by God's will, in the *Targum Yonatan*, authored by R. Yonatan Ben Uziel in the Tannaitic period, there is a description of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and how God raised them "on wings of eagles" (*al kanfei nesharim*) in sanctifying them:

Ye have seen what I did to the Mizraee; and how I bare you upon the clouds as upon eagles' wings from Pelusin [*Pelusium, Egypt*], to take you to the place of the sanctuary, there to solemnize the Pascha; and in the same night brought you back to

Pelusin, and from thence have brought you nigh, to (receive) the doctrine of My law. (*Targum Jonathan on Exodus 19:4*)³⁸

The Aramaic translation describes how God carries them as if on wings from Egypt to the *Beit-HaMikdash* (Temple) in Jerusalem. The Israelites are brought to Mount Moriah, the place where the Temple would later be built, so they could offer the Passover sacrifice on the altar. They then immediately return that night to Egypt (Nisan 2000, 276). This appears to fulfil the *halakhic* requirement (Deut. 16:2), that no sacrifice is permitted outside the precincts of the Great Sanctuary (the *Beit-HaMikdash*), even if historically the Temple had not yet been built. In addition, there is a Jewish tradition that the Messiah figure will enter Jerusalem on a white donkey. The white she-donkeys in Judges 5:10-11 (JPS) is a highly significant symbol because it relates to the prophecy that the Messiah will enter Jerusalem on a donkey:

רִכְבֵי אֲתָנוֹת צְהָרוֹת יִשְׁבִי עַל־מַדְיִן וְהִלְכִי עַל־דֶּרֶךְ שִׁיחוֹ:

You riders on tawny she-asses, You who sit on saddle rugs, And you wayfarers, declare it! Louder than the sound of archers, There among the watering places Let them chant the gracious acts of the LORD, His gracious deliverance of Israel. Then did the people of the LORD March down to the gates!

The Hebrew word for white is צְהָרוֹת [*tzchoròt*] and the word's root is צָהַר. The word 'white' formed from this root appears only twice in Hebrew Scriptures, the first in Judges 5:10 and the second linked to white wool in Ezekiel 27:18 (חֲלָבִיּוֹן וְצֹמֵר צָהָר). Rare usage of this term indicates a common theme of light, purity and sanctity. I suggest that the themes of night, flight, purity and the Temple Sanctuary are all present within the narrative of Muḥammad's Night Journey. It is not that there would necessarily be a textual link, but rather it reveals a literary type that drops an "anchor" onto a place of significant sanctity, and thereby locks the person or people into a divine plan or narrative linked to that site.

³⁸ *Targum Jonathan on Exodus*. Sefaria.org. Accessed 24th April 2021. https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Exodus.19?lang=bi

As Muḥammad accepts this call to Prophethood by Gabriel, he is sitting on the beast Burāq and is carried in the night to the *Masjid al-Aqṣā*, “which is the temple of Aelia” i.e. Jerusalem (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 181). Some question remains as to whether the “farthest mosque” was meant as the Jerusalem sanctuary (Cattan 1985, 131; McMichael 2011, 294; Magness 2012a, 351). Rubin confirms this, “the earliest *tafsīr* sources are unanimous that the Qur’ānic al-Masjid al-Aqṣā stands for Jerusalem (Bayt al-Maqdis)” (2008, 148), and is confirmed by Ibn Hishām (2000, 72).

Muḥammad’s prophethood is once more emphasized through echoing the acts of earlier prophets, Enoch, and Ezekiel:

And I went from thence to the middle of the earth, and I saw a blessed place [in which there were trees] with branches abiding and blooming [of a dismembered tree]. And there I saw a holy mountain, [[and]] underneath the mountain to the east there was a stream and it flowed towards the south. And I saw towards the east another mountain higher than this, and between them a deep and narrow ravine: in it also ran a stream [underneath] the mountain. (Enoch 26:1-3 in Charles, R. H., 2013)

Here the Prophet Enoch is brought to the middle of the Earth, with a description of the city of Jerusalem and the Kidron valley to the East, from which direction the final messiah will enter Jerusalem (Rubin 2008a, 347). The Prophet Ezekiel recounts one of his visions that is echoed in the account of *al-Isrā’*:

Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory. And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house. (Ezekiel 43:1-5 JPS)

The Eastern Gate or Golden Gate is often seen as a symbol of messianic return, as noted in the eastern entrances of synagogues (and possibly the Ka’ba). It is also alluded to in the Gospel of John, by Jesus riding into the city via this gate on a “young donkey” (John 12:12-16

NIV). The *l-Bāb al-Dhahabī* (The Golden Gate) is located in the east wall of *al-Haram al-Sharīf*, as the “Gate of Mercy” (*Sha’ar HaRachamim*), is where Jews and Muslims believe they should ask for mercy before the Day of Judgment.



Figure 5: The Golden Gate, Jerusalem. Creative Commons.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Golden_Gate_of_Jerusalem_2218_\(508026890\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Golden_Gate_of_Jerusalem_2218_(508026890).jpg)

Uri Rubin summarizes the significance of the relationship to Jerusalem in the narrative of *al-Isrā’ wa-l-Mi’rāj*:

The fact remains that these events provoked a wave of apocalyptic writings in which Jerusalem played a central role. There were Jewish eschatological expectations as well. Furthermore, the above events [the Persian conquest] took place during Muḥammad’s lifetime, and therefore they may perhaps shed some more light on the textual significance of the *isrā’* verse. Assuming that the rapid changes in the situation in Jerusalem reflected also on the hopes and fears of Jews and Christians within Arabia, one may infer that the *isrā’* verse shares perhaps some of these feelings, and translates them into an Islamic messianic longing for Jerusalem. It is therefore not surprising that the first Muslim troops that appeared in southern Palestine seemed to Heraclius or to his advisors as some special sect of Jews. Perhaps the confusion was the result of the fact that the Arabs too gave the impression of an army driven by messianic zeal.” (Rubin 2008, 156)

Muḥammad's Night Journey takes him to the city of Jerusalem, to the *al-Masjid al-Aqṣā* where he is tested by Gabriel and proves himself to be in the state of original purity (*fiṭra*).

Muḥammad gives an account of his ascension (*Mi'rāj*) reported by Ibn Ishāq:

After the completion of my business in Jerusalem a ladder was brought to me finer than any I have ever seen. It was that to which the dying man looks when death approaches. My companion mounted it with me until we came to one of the gates of heaven called the Gate of the Watchers. An angel called Ismā'īl was in charge of it, and under his command were twelve thousand angels each of them having twelve thousand angels under his command. (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 185)

The story of Ibn Ishāq recounts Muḥammad travelling through the levels of Heaven meeting a number of Prophets; Ādam, John the Baptist and Jesus, Joseph, Enoch, Aaron, Moses and finally Abraham (1998, 186). This story finds a parallel in how Jacob sets up a sanctuary at Beth-El after his night-time dream of the ladder to Heaven and angels ascending and descending (Gen. 28:10-22).

It seems significant that Muḥammad's account as reported by Ibn Ishāq mentions Joseph, who was the grandchild of Isaac and not Ismā'īl: "Then to the third heaven and there was a man whose face was as the moon at the full. This was my brother Joseph, son of Jacob." (cf. 1998, 186). Strangely, in the light of Ismā'īl's later role in the Meccan sanctuary, he is not mentioned other than as an angel,³⁹ contrary to what one might expect to link the "axis of sanctity" to the Ka'ba. It may require further research to consider the Josephite line of prophethood to Jesus and Muḥammad.

As Vinay Khetia sums up: "Night Journey and Ascension are not only a great moment of revelation for Muḥammad, but it marked a watershed moment in his life, for the events to be discussed confirmed for him his Prophethood." (Khetia 2012, 44). The development of this moment Muḥammad's life, connecting the Ka'ba with Jerusalem at a time of change and flux,

³⁹"An angel called Ismā'īl was in charge of it, and under his command were twelve thousand angels each of them having twelve thousand angels under his command. As he told this story the apostle used to say, "and none knows the armies of God but He." When Gabriel brought me in, Ismā'īl asked who I was, and when he was told that I was Muhammad he asked if I had been given a mission and on being assured of this he wished me well." (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 185)

for the nascent Muslim community, the Jewish community in Jerusalem, and the diaspora is profound. “In the Islamic traditions, Muḥammad’s ascension from Jerusalem takes him to *al-bayt al-ma‘mūr* - an allusion to Q 52:4, i.e. the heavenly Ka‘ba. The Prophet sees it in the seventh heaven, with Abraham sitting at its door. This means that Jerusalem, as the Syrian end of the Mecca-Jerusalem axis of sanctity, has become the gate to the upper Ka‘ba.” (Rubin 2008, 160).

The Night Journey may be a later outworking of Muḥammad’s religious experience and the impact of the words of the Qur’ān (the first verse of Sūrat al-Isrā’ / Sūrat al-Najm (Q 53:1-18)), but the writings of Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Hishām, the various *ḥadīths*, and al-Ṭabarī bring together many unique allusions to Jewish prophetic narratives. These allusions would not appear to be necessary in an expanding Islamic world in the three centuries after the Prophet’s death, so may therefore be all the more poignant. Such peculiarities support the arguments for the Mecca-Jerusalem compass point and the recognition of a continuity of prophethood from a Hebrew/Nazoraean tradition to Muḥammad, as I will discuss in later chapters.

2.12. Conclusion to Chapter 2

There are a number of additional threads running throughout this thesis that support the conclusion that the Ka‘ba was, for a time, orientated towards Jerusalem. In the next chapter I will focus on Islamic literature and tradition that need to be reassessed in order to consider earlier narratives masked by Islamic polemics.

In later chapters I will explore the thread of the *Messiah ben Joseph* typology that manifests in Jews an expectation of a final Davidic era of peace and unity focused on Jerusalem, as enacted in the festival of *Sukkōt*. This Jewish messianic paradigm can be seen reflected in the life of the prophet figure of Jesus, and in the movement of the Nazoraeans throughout Late

Antiquity until seen again in the figure of Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel in 614 C.E. There is also the thread of Jewish art and architecture that forms a backcloth to recognizing the importance of art in maintaining a link with Jerusalem through the depiction of Abraham and the prophets, and the Temple cult. Architecture is evident in this apocalyptic focus on the Temple through the orientation of the Hebrew sanctuaries, the use of the Torah niche and eastward-facing entrances. There is also the allusion to a Nazoraean presence in Medina and the wider family of Muḥammad. Nazoraean spirituality was centred on purity and holiness codes of a Torah-observant Jewish identity, with an emphasis on the Northern Kingdom, Ephraimite (human) messiah/prophet figure. They appear to preserve the sayings of Jesus in a singular Hebrew Gospel and seek a future coming of a Davidic messiah, with a gathering of Jew and non-Jew that will, “go up to the mountain of the Lord” and God will, “judge between the nations and shall decide for many peoples.” (Isaiah 2:2-4 JPS)

3. The narrative surrounding the Ka‘ba

3.1. Introduction to Chapter 3

How is history written? The Crusades, the British Empire, Colonial Africa, or Northern Ireland all have one form of history built on the foundation of events recounted by the dominant storyteller. The other story, that of the outcast, heretic or “native” can be very different and not so glorious or sublime. Why do these dominant narratives build up to become the “only story” in the historical, political and cultural context? Many nations and peoples need to preserve the memory of events for collective identity or to allow for justification of decisions or “victories” of the past. Storytellers have been central to every tribe and state. Significant events are immortalized in story, ritual, building up and re-enactment, to allow the individual and society to form purpose and meaning from those foundational events.

The single story creates stereotype and the problem with stereotype is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete, they make one story become the only story.⁴⁰

In the first section of this chapter, I will attempt to examine the narrative of an early Islamic polemic that emphasized the uniqueness of the new faith, and how this may have impacted on the way the Ka‘ba has been understood within Islamic thought. Did the *jāhiliyya* narrative dominate, to present a single story and thereby mask other accounts?

⁴⁰ Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. 2009. “The danger of a single story.” Filmed July 2009. TEDGlobal video, 3:45. https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

3.2. *Jāhiliyya* and the Ka‘ba

The term *jāhiliyya* is often portrayed as a pre-Islamic “age of ignorance”, and in a more specific form as an “age of idolatry and moral decline”. The initial seed that is found within the Qur’ān and speaks of individuals as being ignorant of the revealed message, may have blossomed into a different fruit than had been first intended. As with many examples from religion and society, an initial concept or narrative becomes fashioned out of its original context as the environment and societal needs change in time and place. As a balance to the dominant *jāhiliyya* motif, I will examine the accounts of early Islamic writings, together with evidence of Jewish sanctuaries, their orientation and their use of images, both sacred and profane. I will also consider the environment of the 7th century Ka‘ba, recognizing the presence of religious diversity within the Jews of Medina and Himyar, including the *hanīf* and *anṣār* groupings.

I will be following the approach of “historical-critical” and phenomenological authors, from both Jewish and Christian traditions. As early as 1836, D. F. Strauss applied his naturalistic approach to the metaphysical to argue that all supernatural claims fall into natural causes, if the phenomenon is examined historically (Strauss 1836). In this way the commonality of understanding religious narratives is discovered through the humanity of religious experiences, as natural events interpreted within a mythical framework. I engage with the concept of Buber’s “phenomenon of the spirit”, in such a way that recognizes the continuity and identity of religious experience in differing traditions of religious belief.

In this way I have highlighted the commonality of the individual’s relationship with the divine, particularly within Jewish, Christian and early Islamic religious experiences. When compared with Qur’ānic Studies, this phenomenological approach appeared later in the field of

scholarship on Islam. Günther Lüling (Lüling 1977) and the authors of *Hagarism* (Patrica Crone and Cook 1977) made investigations into the historical “truths” of Islam, which have since been questioned (Stroumsa 2015a, 148; Shoemaker 2021, 3). In the introduction to his book *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History*, Gerald R. Hawting sets the scene for an overarching agenda for the critique of *jāhiliyya*: that Islam required an antithetical concept to establish its identity as an original monotheistic religion (see also Berg 2003, 90; Lichtenstadter 1940, 191; Gibb 1962, 269; Gajda 2017, 255). He argues that the “traditional texts, especially those pertaining to the *jāhiliyya*, can help us to see how early Muslims understood and viewed the past but are not primarily sources of information about that past.” (1999, 9).

Hawting (1999, 2fn.) states that Wellhausen in *Reste* (1897, 71, 1fn.) suggested a Christian origin for the typology of *jāhiliyya*, as an Arabic use of the Greek term *agnoia* (Acts 17:30 KJV – ‘the times of this ignorance’) used by Paul to refer to Athenian idolatry, and that it can be paralleled in Jewish-Hellenistic material such as the Wisdom of Solomon 14:22 (CEB):

Then, as if it weren’t enough that they should err concerning the knowledge of God, other things follow. When living ignorantly in the midst of great war, people call such evil things peace.

The nature of the word *jāhiliyya* is used in a similar context within four verses of the Qur’ān that will be reviewed later in this chapter, where it refers to an “ignorant people”, unaware of the knowledge of God. I will detail the development of the use and interpretation of the term *jāhiliyya*, from the Qur’ānic passages through to 14th century C.E. Islamic literature. Religious symbol and metaphor grow from real foundations, but often develop to serve the purpose of establishing “truth” from “error”. As Hawting succinctly says: “the traditional Muslim literature which gives us details about the idolatry and polytheism of the pre-Islamic Arabs of the *jāhiliyya* is largely stereotypical and formulaic and its value as evidence about the religious ideas and practices of the Arabs before Islam is questionable.” (1999, 5)

The interpretation of the meaning of the word *jāhiliyya* impacts on what can be understood as a legitimate hypothesis over the nature and purpose of the Ka‘ba in pre-Islamic Arabia. Some scholars consider the Ka‘ba during the “Age of Ignorance” (*jāhiliyya*), to be a polytheist shrine, or being influenced by Christian imagery (King 2004, 220). Others consider, as I do, that there is insufficient evidence of such a domination of polytheism that other systems of belief, such as monotheistic groups, could not flourish too (Hitti 2002; Hoyland 2002). The context was most likely a mixture of traditions and personal beliefs. Javier Teixidor’s book *The Pagan Gods* encapsulates the difficulty of drawing conclusions from the evidence:

Our meager information about the North Arabian cults does not permit more than hypothetical conclusions, and the pretentious lists of Arabian gods compiled by some scholars from the inscriptions so far uncovered are far from presenting a well-defined pantheon. (Teixidor 1977, 75)

If the veneration of pre-Islamic deities were present, but not overwhelmingly so at the time of Muḥammad’s revelation, then it could be surmised that there were individuals who aspired to an Abrahamic monotheism (*hanīfs*) and some Medinese gathered to be “Helpers” (*al-anṣār*) to this renewed call to monotheism. Somewhere under the dominant metaphor of idolatry and paganism, there may be currents of Abrahamic monotheism linked to the pre-existing Ka‘ba.

3.3. The idea of *Jāhiliyya*

There is an established Islamic perception of an era of idolatry and polytheism (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 35; Shoemaker 2012, 119) prior to the revelation to Muḥammad in the 7th century C.E. In this context *jāhiliyya* is understood in many ways to be the true nature of the religious and socio-political environment into which the Messenger of God was born, and the context of the unique new revelation which later came to be known as Islam. The time before the revelation to Muḥammad is understood to have known monotheism, coming through

the revelations of Abraham, Moses and Jesus and other prophets, but this divine truth, it is believed, was masked by human moral corruption within Judaism and Christianity and manifest in the idolatry of the wider pagan or polytheist traditions. There is a significant corpus of Islamic literature that describes the conditions of this time. I will review a range of materials that have established the Islamic tradition of *jāhiliyya* as an “age of ignorance” or a “time of paganism and idolatry”.

The Qur’ān is the earliest document available within which the word الْجَاهِلِيَّةُ “of ignorance” is to be found and there are four occasions when the word *jāhiliyya* (of ignorance) is used as an “age of ignorance”:

After sorrow, He caused calm to descend upon you, a sleep that overtook some of you. Another group, caring only for themselves, entertained false thoughts about God, thoughts more appropriate to pagan ignorance (الْجَاهِلِيَّةُ), and said, ‘Do we get a say in any of this?’ (3:154) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 45)

Do they want judgement according to the time of pagan ignorance (الْجَاهِلِيَّةُ)? Is there any better judge than God for those of firm faith? (5:50) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 73)

stay at home, and do not flaunt your finery as they used to in the pagan past (الْجَاهِلِيَّةُ); keep up the prayer, give the prescribed alms, and obey God and His Messenger. God wishes to keep uncleanness away from you, people of the [Prophet’s] House, and to purify you thoroughly. (33:33) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 268)

While the disbelievers had fury in their hearts - the fury of ignorance (الْجَاهِلِيَّةُ) - God sent His tranquillity down on to His Messenger and the believers and made binding on them [their] promise to obey God, for that was more appropriate and fitting for them. God has full knowledge of all things. (48:26) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 336)

In each one of these quotations the word *jāhiliyya* (الْجَاهِلِيَّةُ) is composed of جاهل (*jāhil*, “ignorant”) and the suffix يَّة (-iyya). This indicates a group of ignorant people, individuals whose state of mind is ignorant, rather than for a time or era. It is important to recognize this baseline in highlighting the development of the term *jāhiliyya* in subsequent Islamic literature. The four passages within the Qur’ānic corpus would be understood as a caution against being in ignorance, as an attitude of mind to be overcome through the purification of faith. There is no indication within the word *jāhiliyya* of an age or era of ignorance, nor a specific link to

paganism or idolatry. Amund Bjorsnes quotes Franz Rosenthal highlighting this same point in his book *Knowledge Triumphant*: “in all its occurrences in the Qur’ān, *jāhiliyah* is used next to pluralic forms referring to people” (Bjorsnes 2018, 76). The foundation for the term *jāhiliyya* (الجاهليَّة) within the Qur’ān can be understood as directed towards people or individuals, rather than a time or epoch before Islam as coined later by the term “age of ignorance”.

One of the earliest biographies of Muḥammad is Ibn Ishāq’s (A.H. 85-150/704-767 C.E.) *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, which I will refer to in Ibn Hishām’s recension that is found in Alfred Guillaume’s *The Life of Muhammad*. Guillaume declares in his introduction to the translation; “It is certain that Ibn Ishāq’s biography of the prophet had no serious rival...” (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, xiv) and so this biography must be recognized as establishing further groundwork for the understanding of *jāhiliyya*. In respect to what could be a polemic against Abraha, the Christian King of Yemen, when he built the cathedral at Ṣan‘ā (c.570 C.E.) claiming it as a pilgrimage site for Arabs, Ibn Ishāq uses the term *jāhiliyya* referring to a time before Muḥammad when the Ka‘ba was threatened by the forces of Abraha (1998, 21). In another passage, he uses the term in a similar way to indicate a pre-Islamic time when the hospitality of the Quraysh was evident at Minā during pilgrimage festivals, “during the time of ignorance until Islam came.” (1998, 56). After a rift in the Quraysh, a pact was formalized at the Ka‘ba between the dissenting parties, and Ibn Ishāq reports that, “This was the state of affairs until God brought Islam, when the apostle of God said, ‘Whatever alliance there was in the days of ignorance Islam strengthens it.’” (1998, 57). This may indicate a shift of understanding in Islamic literature towards a “time of ignorance”, and away from the concept of ignorant people.

There is a section of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* that draws attention to a tradition of “soothsayers” in pre-Islamic times, repeatedly referring to them as existing in the “time of ignorance”:

A learned person told me that a woman of B. Sahm called al-Ghayṭala who was a soothsayer in *the time of ignorance* was visited by her familiar spirit one night.”(Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 91) [my italics]

‘Alī b. Nāfi‘ al-Jurashī told me that Janb, a tribe from the Yaman, had a soothsayer in *the time of ignorance*, and when the news of the apostle of God was blazed abroad among the Arabs, they... (1998, 92) [my italics]

Noteworthy in supporting this tradition is the role of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (c.586-644 C.E.) in declaring that this was the nature of the time before Islam: “I ask God’s pardon. In the time of ignorance we did worse than this; we worshipped idols and images until God honoured us with his apostle and with Islam.” (1998, 92-93).

To challenge this developing perspective of an “age of ignorance” there is evidence that Ibn Ishāq at times writes of ignorance in regard to a personal lack of knowledge, and refers to two verses (Q 6:54, Q 49:6):

When those who believe in Our revelations come to you [Prophet], say, ‘Peace be upon you. Your Lord has taken it on Himself to be merciful: if any of you has foolishly done a bad deed (بِجَهَالَةٍ), and afterwards repented and mended his ways, God is most forgiving and most merciful.
(Q 6:54) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 83)

Believers, if a troublemaker brings you news, check it first, in case you wrong others unwittingly (بِجَهَالَةٍ) and later regret what you have done,
(Q 49:6) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 338)

With these two Qur’ānic verses, Ibn Ishāq appears to recognize that people may be ignorant from a lack of knowledge rather than living in an “age of ignorance”. The contradiction in his perception may come from the nature of a biographer in interpreting events in the light of his current viewpoint. He was writing at a time of rapid change and the establishment of the new faith amongst those who were not direct companions of Muḥammad (mid-8th century C.E.).

The other key document in understanding the meaning of *jāhiliyya* is the renowned “*Book of Idols*” (*Kitab al-Aṣnām*) written by Hishām b. al-Kalbī in the 8th century C.E. This text does not establish the idea of *jāhiliyya* but rather accepts it as given, proceeding to embellish the concept with details and descriptions of the idols and images of the pre-Islamic era. As noted by Mehmed Simsar, the *Book of Idols* remains the earliest extant text for interpreting the pre-Islamic era: “All of these works [by Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq, Ibn Faḍīl b. Marwān, Jāḥiz, and Abū Zayd al-Balkhī] have perished. Therefore, the *al-Aṣnām* of Ibn-al-Kalbī is the only authentic source which supplies a rich nomenclature of the Arab idols and temples.” (Simsar 1953, 167). The *Book of Idols*’ enhancement of myth and story seems to be the fulcrum-balance between the earlier development of the “age of ignorance” motif and its full embellishment as an era of paganism and idolatry. The account by Hishām b. al-Kalbī states: “I was informed by my father [Muḥammad b. al-Sā’ib al- Kalbī (d. A.H. 146/768 C.E.)] and others, and I personally checked and ascertained their report, that when Ishmael, the son of Abraham, settled in Mecca, he begot many children.” (1952, 4). The *Book of Idols* builds the suggestion that Mecca and by inference, the Ka‘ba, is the centre of Abrahamic monotheism. This is again emphasized explicitly:

In fact, the Arabs still venerate the Ka‘bah and Mecca and journey to them in order to perform the pilgrimage and visitation, conforming thereby to the time-honored custom which they inherited from Abraham and Ishmael. (1952, 4)

This is a cycle of prophecy, much like that of the Prophets of the Hebrew scriptures (as in Moses and the Golden Calf) where the people lose their way until corrected by a new prophetic utterance. Ibn al-Kalbī continues, “Consequently they took to the worship of images, becoming like the nations before them.” (1952, 4). He validates this with reference to the existing Qur’ānic text: “most of them will only believe in God while also joining others with Him.” (Q 12:106) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 152)

Finally, before describing the idols of the *jāhiliyya*, Ibn al-Kalbī emphasizes the role of ‘Amr b. Luḥayy, who, in earlier times, is said to have fought the Jurhumites [the earliest tribe of Mecca after the time of Hājar and Ismā‘īl] and established custody of the Ka‘ba, placing idols [particularly Hubal] in or around the sacred building (1952, 7). Al-Kalbī picks up the theme of a multitude of deities in describing 360 idols in and around the Ka‘ba (Ibn al-Kalbī 1952, 23; Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 552). It might be that the number emphasized a “great number”, or the degrees of a circle, symbolically indicating the deities of the whole world. It certainly provides a resource to indicate Muḥammad’s dominance over idolatry in the account of his destruction of the 360 idols at the conquest of Mecca:

The apostle was standing by them [360 idols] with a stick in his hand, saying, ‘The truth has come and falsehood has passed away; verily falsehood is sure to pass away’ [Q 17:82]. Then he pointed at them with his stick and they collapsed on their backs one after the other. (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 558)

The question should be asked, to what extent this account of the 360 idols is history within a modern understanding, and to what extent this is a religious apologetic in a time of faith development in the formative period of the first two centuries of Islam. If it is the latter, which has a role and purpose in itself, then it is important for academic studies to make a critical assessment of the purpose of the notion of *jāhiliyya* as a polemic methodology. Subsequently, what might be understood through this, if anything at all, of the role or purpose of the Ka‘ba in pre-Islamic Arabia?

Before moving on to consider other literature surrounding the topic of *jāhiliyya*, I wish to reflect on the series of idols recounted in Kalbī’s book. In doing so, I will categorize those which are widely known as cultic deities of Arabia in Late Antiquity; those that are only linked to the Quraysh and the Ḥijāz; and those that may be a syncretistic development of pre-existing cults and local interpretation.

The widely evidenced cultic deities in Arabia during Late Antiquity mentioned in the *Book of Idols* are Allāt and al-‘Uzza, and Manāh (Manāt), and are all well documented in non-

Islamic sources (Hawting 1999, 54 (with regard to angels); Hoyland 2001, 187). Kalbī refers to Q 53:19-20:

Have you seen Allāt and al-‘Uzza, and Manāh the third idol besides? What? Shall ye have male progeny and God female? This indeed were an unfair partition! These are mere names: ye and your fathers named them thus: God hath not sent down any warranty in their regard. (1952, 23)

This does not indicate a world of chaos and moral decline, rather that within pre-Islamic culture there were other religions that did not ally with the revelation to Muḥammad. The *Book of Idols* describes Muḥammad sending ‘Alī ahead to destroy Manāh before he arrives in Mecca, in 630 C.E. After the destruction of the image, ‘Alī carries two swords away from the idol, thereby justifying the text: “It is, therefore, said that dhu-al-Faqār, the sword of ‘Ali, was one of them.” (al-Kalbī 1952, 14., cf. al-Ṭabarī vol. 1, 1706-1710). It is part of religious discourse to enhance the meaning of events through reference to past or future signs and symbols. This does not necessarily indicate a position of moral and religious depravity as some later writers suggest.

One example of alleged depravity linked particularly to the Ka‘ba and Mecca is the narrative of Isāf and Nā’ilah. Isāf and Nā’ilah are alleged to have committed adultery within the Ka‘ba, and as a result of this act they were turned into stone, taken out and later worshipped by the “Khuzā‘ah and the Quraysh” (1952, 11). The use of a physical change of substance is not unusual as a form of condemnation (for example, Lot’s wife being turned into a pillar of salt for acts of sin (cf. Gen. 19:26)). Thus, to worship that which had been condemned indicates a further level of moral error in the people of Mecca. This is further enhanced by al-Azraqī, who links the original worship of Isāf and Nā’ilah to ‘Amr b. Luḥayy, the arch-idolater of pre-Islamic times.

‘Amr b. Luḥayy is also cited as the individual who introduced a sculpture of the deity Hubal to the Ka‘ba (1952, 18), bringing it from Syria (Webb 2015, 141). Hubal comes into the third category as a deity that may be a syncretistic development of pre-existing cults and local

interpretation. The *Book of Idols* describes the figure made of chalcedony (al-Kalbī calls it red agate, while al-Azraqī, calls it carnelian pearl) as in the form of a man with the right hand broken off and replaced by the Quraysh with a hand of gold. This figure would have been small if made from chalcedony, probably between one and sixteen inches in height. Although sixteen inches is unusual for a chalcedony piece in late antiquity it would likely have been no more than 5 inches high (Padgett 1995, 6)

The statue of Hubal was placed inside the Ka‘ba and was used with divination arrows to provide guidance for local and family decisions. The use of divination arrows is not unusual amongst communities and is attested to, or condemned, in other literature including Hebrew scriptures:

For these nations, that thou art to dispossess, hearken unto soothsayers, and unto diviners; but as for thee, HaShem thy G-d hath not suffered thee so to do. (Deut. 18:14 JPS).⁴¹

Hubal may be linked to Nabatean deities, but as a deity it is not as widespread in literature or archaeology (Hawting 1999, 113) as are the records for Allāt and al-‘Uzza, and Manāh (Christides 2004, 71). Kalbī recounts that the Prophet once saying, “One day I beheld Hell from afar off, and saw therein ‘Amr ibn-Luḥayy, a short man of red [complexion] and blue eyes, dragging his guts [behind him] in the midst of the dancing flames. Thereupon I asked, ‘Who is this man?’, and was told, ‘He is ‘Amr ibn-Luḥayy, the first to institute the *baḥīrah*, the *waṣīlah*, the *sā’ibah*, the *ḥāmi[yah]*, change the religion of Ishmael, and summon the Arabs to worship of images.” [cf. Q 5:103 referring to the freeing of certain animals (camels and goats) in honour of idols.] (1952, 50). So, the emphasis inferred here may be that Hubal represented an evil spirit that also possessed ‘Amr ibn-Luḥayy and justified his condemnation to Hell.

The situation conveyed so far is that deities were used across Arabia in Late Antiquity but there only some are recounted within the context of the Ka‘ba and Mecca. Although there is

⁴¹ *HaShem*: some translators might use *YHWH* or *Adonai*

archaeological evidence of some of these native religious traditions (Hoyland 2001), they developed within Islamic literature at a time after the life of the Prophet when the nature of Islam was developing against a background of religious diversity in 8th century Arabia.

Of the earlier writers, the most significant in respect to the accounts given of idolatry surrounding the pre-Islamic Ka‘ba is found in the *Akhbār Makka* of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Azraqī (d. A.H. 251/ 865 C.E.). Al-Azraqī’s account of the conquest of Mecca and the cleansing of the Ka‘ba with the condemnation and destruction of the idols and symbols of divination has significant import to this chapter; as is the significance of his narrative on the preservation of the images of Jesus and Mary, which has been discussed earlier in this thesis in the analysis of the ‘cleansing of the Ka‘ba’ in 630 C.E.

The writings of al-Ṭabarī in the 9th century C.E. (al-Ṭabarī, 1989) demonstrate that the narrative of understanding pre-Islamic Arabia in terms of an age of idolatry and paganism became further embedded in Islamic tradition. In his works, the concept of *jāhiliyya* is firmly established as a period of time. In his commentary on Q 33:33 (*Tafṣīr* XIX.97), al-Ṭabarī refers to *jāhiliyya* as being between the time of Jesus and Muḥammad and between Ādam and Noah. He also refers to it as a time of “polytheist idol worshippers” (*Tafṣīr* VI.166/*Tafṣīr* VIII.503 cited in Bjorsnes 2018, 76). Al-Ṭabarī also writes extensively on the destruction of idols in neighbouring tribes and individual conversions to Islam (al-Ṭabarī 1997, 187). Here, we see the religious discourse that reiterates the victory of good over evil, which is present in countless narratives of faith and belief.

Al-Maqrīzī’s *al-Khabar ‘an al-bashar* (14th century C.E.), develops an intrusion of idolatry into the home in pre-Islamic times. This appears to emphasize the rejection of idolatry and the embracing of Islam by individuals, especially amongst the *Anṣār* in Medina. Michael Lecker recounts this as being: “a pattern known from similar stories of idol worshippers who repented having realized, upon the humiliation of their idol, the falsity of their belief.” (1993,

337). For example, the idols are destroyed, but not before the pleading of an elderly woman as an intermediary for the idol. In doing so the account reflects earlier motifs of an Abyssinian woman at the site of the destruction of al-‘Uzza (Kalbī 1952, 22 or Ethiopian woman cf. al-Ṭabarī 1997, 187).

Al-Maqrīzī’s collection of accounts in *al-Khabar ‘an al-bashar* replicate themes of named idols, elderly men or women as intermediaries, divination, individuals embracing Islam, often resulting in the destruction or disposal of an idol sometimes wrapped in carrion and often thrown down a well (Lecker 1993, 336), or into a cesspit (Klein 2017, 57).⁴² Lecker recounts one of these occasions in Al-Maqrīzī’s account of the clan idols (*The Hārith b. al-Khazraj*):

When the seventy who participated in the [second] ‘Aqaba-meeting arrived, they began destroying the idols. ‘Abdallāh b. Rawāḥa (may God be pleased with him) entered the house of an old man, bound up his idol with some carrion, then laid it at his door. The old man woke up and saw it. He said: ‘Who did this to our god?’ He was told: ‘This is the deed of Ibn Rawāḥa’. Ibn Rawāḥa came to him and told him: ‘Are you not ashamed, being one of our distinguished men, to worship wood which you made with your own hand?’ The old man said: ‘I do not attack it, I am worried about my young children’. Bashīr b. Sa‘d laughed and said: ‘Does it have the power to harm or benefit?’ Then ‘Abdallāh b. Rawāḥa broke it and the old man embraced Islam. (1993, 338)

This reflects the Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah*, chapter 38:13, which may have originated in the School of Rabbi Hoshaiiah in 3rd century Sepphoris and later redacted in the early 6th century Babylonian Talmud. It recounts the story of Abraham in his father’s Idol shop:

Rabbi Hiyya said: Terach was a manufacturer of idols. He once went away somewhere and left Abraham to sell them in his place. A man came in and wished to buy one. ‘How old are you?’ Abraham asked the man. ‘Fifty years old,’ he said. ‘Woe to such a man, who is fifty years old and would worship a day old object!’⁴³

⁴² “While Mu‘ādh was present at the first meeting at ‘Aqaba, his father kept to his idolatrous life and had a wooden idol of Manāfīl46 in his house. Mu‘ādh and his friends sneaked in at night, carried the idol away and threw it on its face into a cesspit.” (Klein, K.M. 2017. “The Silence of the Gods.” In *Religious Culture in Late Antique Arabia*, 6:11–88. New Jersey: Gorgias Press. Cf. Footnote 162)

⁴³ *Bereshit Rabbah* 38:13. Sefaria.org. Accessed 5th May 2021. (See also Q 21:51-9, 62-3). https://www.sefaria.org/Bereishit_Rabbah.38?lang=bi

In addition, Al-Maqrīzī employs the use of carrion, symbolizing the concept of the idol being/being marked as/humiliated as unclean (אמט Lev. 17:15), particularly as they are wrapped together. The use of a well into which the wrapped idol is thrown, often a symbol of living water, now becomes an image of emptiness and unfaithfulness:

For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. (Jer. 2:13 JPS)

The concept of *jāhiliyya* progresses from a reference to people who are ignorant, in the Qur'ān, to a “time of ignorance” and later fully into the myth of an age of idolatry and moral darkness in Pre-Islamic Arabia. The Ka'ba appears to become the epicentre of this idolatry and sinfulness, requiring cleansing and reapportionment to the moral values of God's people. This reflects the narratives behind Moses and the Golden Calf (Ex. 32) and Jesus' cleansing of the Temple (Matt. 21).

There are several theories on the evolution of Islam and the myth that surrounds the use of polemic. Following John Wansbrough, Hawting argues that the traditional understanding of Muḥammad's revelation and the early days does not come from the Qur'ān, “but from the extra-koranic tradition. The Koran has been seen to contain attacks on pre-Islamic Arab idolatry and polytheism because the tradition tells us that it does.” (G. R. Hawting 1999, 18)

Hawting also summarizes Julius Wellhausen's theory presenting a general movement in society towards monotheism that was given an extra “push” by Muḥammad:

Wellhausen's analysis of the situation is clear from his comparison with the Scandinavian *Götterdämmerung* – ‘the old in the process of dissolution, the new not yet showing forth’. It is in this context that Wellhausen refers to the *hanīfs*, whom he portrays as a group of religious ‘seekers’, discontented with the old polytheism, conversant with the Torah and Gospel, but not satisfied with either Judaism or Christianity. These seekers are [...] the symptom of a mood which was widespread throughout Arabia in the period before Muḥammad and dominated many of the most elevated spirits. The ground was prepared for Islam. (1999, 27)

Hawting argues for an ideological reason behind the myth of the idolatrous age of ignorance preceding Muḥammad's prophecy: if the polytheistic and idolatrous nature of pre-

Islamic society were dominant and Mecca was devoid of Jewish or Christian presence, then the revelations received by Muḥammad can be the only explanation for the existence of Islam. He points out that the myth creation of the age of ignorance would have been present soon after the life of Muḥammad so that it became embedded in the biographical and early writings. In demonstrating the close relationship of story and image he reflects that: “Myths and idols have much in common.” (1999, 151). I suggest that the situation was not as clear-cut as Wellhausen and Hawting suggest, and that Muḥammad was very aware of the mix of monotheism and other beliefs in society.

3.4. The reality of the polytheists (*mushrikūn*) – an analysis

Often the terms “pagan” or “polytheist” are used without regard to the unique place these traditions had in the lives and commerce of Late Antiquity. In every era in history, there have been times of reform, rejection, and replacement of earlier traditions. Some have happened gradually, others by force or through empire building. There are examples of the interpretation of “divine” action in native religions across the world. These earlier religions may be said to have been utilized, repressed or subsumed into more institutional “Religions”. Konstantin M. Klein highlights this process of demeaning previous religious traditions in reflecting on the demise of Plutarch and Eusebius’ interpretation of the story: “According to Eusebius, the coming of a more powerful God signified the eternal lapse into silence of another, older deity. In a similar fashion, though much later, al-Ṭabarī (mid to late 9th century C.E.) recorded that “when Jesus was born, every idol upon the earth fell on its face” (I. J. trans. M. P. Al-Ṭabarī 1987, 120)”, (Dmitriev 2017, 13). Likewise, in modern society, there is a parallel call for an iconoclasm of theist beliefs, encapsulated by the prophetic words of the Madman, as portrayed in Friedrich Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* (1882):

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. ‘Where is God?’ he cried; ‘I’ll tell you! *We have killed him*—you and I! We are all his murderers’...Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; they too were silent and looked at him disconcertedly... It is still recounted how on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there started singing his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but, ‘What then are these churches now if not the tombs and sepulchres of God?’ (Nietzsche 2002, 125)

It is important to recognize the validity and centrality of religious belief and its significance to individual lives, society and the political and economic balance to every era and time. The religious traditions of pre-Islamic Arabia have been documented widely and in detail after the rise and victory of Islam, and this documentation became formalized through time in a similar way to institutionalized Christianity with its views on Roman and Jewish religion. Much of the accepted narrative has come from the “successful partner” in the debate, leaving the “losers” to be deemed as heretics or pagans.

The situation within Arabia at the beginning of 7th century C.E. as understood through writings, art and archaeology shows a wide range of regional and local religious traditions that had been used or adapted over time. Many may have been crystalized into figurative forms, in statues or paintings, some in regional town or village shrines, but many as domestic foci. Also, there was widespread common recognition of Allāt and al-‘Uzza, and Manāh (Manāt), in addition to local or “transported” traditions, such as perhaps Hubal from Nabataean traditions. Such mixtures and diversities are now being realized within educational research in teaching religion in English schools today. A recent national consultation research report from Exeter University states there are five principles that should be recognized in teaching religion and worldviews in schools, recognizing diversity and interpretation.⁴⁴ The report recognizes the

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1. the complexity of the concept’s, ‘religion’ and ‘worldview’;
2. the diversity that exists within ‘dynamic’ institutional worldviews;
3. that personal worldviews draw on multiple sources and complex interactions;
4. that practice, emotion and lived experience are as significant as doctrine;
5. that the study of religion and worldviews is multi-disciplinary. (Freathy, Schmidt, and John, 2020: 11)

nature of religion as institutionalized *and* personal and therefore it is, “a construction by the individual of a collage, a pastiche, a bricolage; it is a composite and a process of ‘building’ that speaks to their life experiences and the organized worldviews that have influenced them, as well as the reflections thereon that will influence their beliefs and practices moving forward”. (2020, 14)

In this thesis there is a recognition of the reality and significance of the religious diversity of Arabia in the years surrounding the revelation to Muḥammad. The pre-Islamic environment was a variety of belief and difference, out of which grew a faith that echoed in the hearts of many at the time, and later became Islam as we know it today.

3.5. The development of the “other” – a critique

Stanley Leavy observes in his article *‘For Fear of the Jews’: Origins of Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, that the development of an anti-Jewish polemic within the New Testament was an attempt to establish the uniqueness of nascent Christianity and its distinction from Judaism (Leavy 2006, 57-79). Supersessionism has become a lasting theme within Christianity from the edicts of Constantine at Nicaea to the anti-Semitism of the modern world, where Jews are still accused of deicide. Hawting echoes this understanding in saying: “The gospels contain polemic against Jews, not against Graeco-Roman religion.” (Hawting 1999, 6).

According to Hawting, the identification of the *mushrikūn* (polytheists) as pre-Islamic idolatrous Arabs is dependent upon Muslim tradition and is not found within the Qur’ān. This should be understood in the context of naturally diverse religious traditions at the time, some more unified in belief and powerful than others. It must be borne in mind that in the formation of established religions (or other cultural groupings), it serves as a recurrent motif to maintain a monotheistic identity against ‘the other’. This ‘other’ allegedly derives from a place of

‘ignorance’ that existed prior to and parallel with the emerging faith. The argument is similar to that of early Christianity *Adversus Judaeos* (Against the Jews) in various accounts by Church Fathers such as Tertullian (155-240 C.E.), John Chrysostom (347-407 C.E.) and Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.) that typify Jews as remaining in ‘darkness’ by refusing to see the light of the divine Messiah, Jesus. St John Chrysostom (347- 407 C.E.) declares:

You Jews did crucify him. But after he died on the cross, he then destroyed your city; it was then that he dispersed your people; it was then that he scattered your nation over the face of the earth. In doing this, he teaches us that he is risen, alive, and in heaven. (Chrysostom 1979, 100)

I have described how the motif of *jāhiliyya* as a polemic that marked the boundary of Islam over all other forms of religious identity, which were in some degree of ignorance. As with other religious traditions, the development of the *jāhiliyya* concept is found in later commentators, in the authors of Muḥammad’s Sīra, Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Hishām and others who attempt to present the ‘truth’ of the pre-Islamic era, not as we have seen, but from the pages of the Qur’ān.

Ibn Warraq, as editor of the book *The Quest for the Historical Muḥammad*, points to the development of historical-critical analysis in Islamic Studies. He argues for the need for more open and academic analysis of the traditions:

No, Muslims do not need patronizing liberals to meet them ‘halfway’! Muslims need to write, for example, an honest biography of the Prophet that does not shun the truth, least of all cover it up with the dishonest subterfuge of condescending Western scholars. (Ibn Warraq 2000, 21)

Here he calls for academia not to “shun the truth”. Within religious discourse, however, it is not so easy to claim the “truth”, as history can be seen as a recounting of the “facts” but also containing “story”. Within religious narrative, fact and story can be inextricably bound, one fertilizing the other. To remove one might lead to the impoverishment of the other and this is not just seen in the study of religion. In a nation’s remembrance of war, there are the facts, the numbers killed, the battles and the treaties. Then comes the story in word or substance, the

cenotaph, the songs, or the recounting of heroism by the nation's soldiers and civilians. To discover the "truth" and "facts" of historical events will not abrogate the story that has become part of the collective memory. In this present study there is no claim for "truth", rather a "maybe", a "probability" and a "what if". Religious belief is story built in history. There is a desire among many academics to quest for the historical truth (Schweitzer, 2005; Ibn Warraq, 2000), however I do not consider that the absolute "truth" can be found, nor would empirical data be as timeless as the role of story in igniting the human imagination.

In 1975 the *Near Eastern History Group of Oxford University* organized its fifth colloquium on the theme of the formative period of Islamic history. Their statement of the aims of the colloquium were:

The existing cultures of the Middle East, which provided most of the raw materials of the new civilization, are reasonably well known to us, and so is the end-product, the 'classical' Islamic civilization. But since the conquerors took some time to settle down, their own version of the process by which the new society and culture were created is a belated one and open to considerable doubt. If we rely on it alone, we shall form a picture of a discontinuity between the pre-Islamic and Islamic worlds which strains the imagination; if on the other hand we begin by assuming that there must have been some continuity, we need either to go beyond the Islamic sources or to reinterpret them. (Juynboll 1982, 1)

If we stay with considering facts alone, without the lubrication of story, we may not move as efficiently through this thesis. If we can assume some continuity in historical "facts", then there is a need to find the "feeders" or links to the story. As will be seen within this study, the "feeders" into this section go beyond the boundaries of Arabia and the accepted purpose of the Ka'ba as tradition sees it (cf. the Ephraimite Messiah, the Dura Europos Synagogue and the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, etc.). Ella Landau-Tasseran suggests that: "The fusion of the traditions should not necessarily be considered as falsification, for it may have come about as the natural presuppositions and formulaic thinking of Muslim thinkers, who apparently saw and presented as they perhaps ought to have been, and not as they were." (1986, 262-3). This does not undermine the purpose of the narrative at the time. She describes later: "The historical material

underwent considerable changes not only as a result of tendentious forgeries but also through the mere process of redaction, which was for the most part carried out in good faith.” (1986, 270)

The threads and feeders of religious narrative develop in changing cultural, social and political contexts into the text or script studied. The task in the remainder of this chapter is to suggest that maybe there are “other” threads or feeders that have been subsumed into the story that will provide new insights and discussion on the nature and purpose of the Ka‘ba.

3.6. Interpreting the “Other” – The Jews & Nazoraean

The formation of the *jāhiliyya* narrative has its roots in history that became integrated into story and myth. This serves the purpose of enhancing and maintaining understanding and meaning within faith. The core of the *jāhiliyya* narrative as understood from the early writings of Ibn Ishāq through the editing of Ibn Hishām as detailed earlier, and developed and embedded over time, is that of the “Other”. The “Other” in this context is of a “time” of ignorance, developed into a concept of an era dominated by idolatry. This may serve the purpose in religious discourse to highlight the purity and integrity of the revelation to Muḥammad, against a tarnished world. Assessing and analyzing this “Other” does not aim to undermine belief in the revelation to Muḥammad. The reality of Muḥammad’s religious experience is not a matter of study here. By placing the revelation to Muḥammad to one side and reconsidering the pre-Islamic environment of the Ka‘ba as being less dominated by idolatry and paganism, we may come to another understanding of the role and purpose of the Ka‘ba in pre-Islamic times.

Hamilton Gibb, in his classic article *Pre-Islamic Monotheism in Arabia* (Gibb 1962), highlights the wide tradition of western scholars of Islam to search for Christian or Jewish sources to passages in the Qur’ān. He points to the fact that Muslim scholars do not deny the “relationship

of Islam with Judaism and Christianity” but do question their impact on the Revelation to Muḥammad. In his article he highlights:

There is considerable evidence both from Muslim texts and from external sources that other monotheistic groups were to be found in Arabia, independently of the organized churches and hence “heretical” in their eyes. Such groups may have been offshoots not only of Christianity, but also of Judaism, or Judaeo-Christian. (1962, 271)

The environment of the beliefs and events surrounding the Ka‘ba as found in 7th century Mecca need to be explored in a fresh light, separated from the cloak of the *jāhiliyya* narrative. This may reveal the “other” as a constituent part of society in the Ḥijāz, that was familiar to Muḥammad and the history of the Ka‘ba.

When considering the context of the Ka‘ba, there needs to be an understanding of the tribal groupings in the pre-Islamic Ḥijāz region. With the hypothesis that the Ka‘ba is orientated towards Jerusalem, there must be an acknowledgement of the potential influence of a Hebrew narrative. This requires a study of tribal and religious affiliations and the influence of family ties to allegiances and commitments across communities. This would be a massive study, exceeding the limits of this thesis, however some reference must be made to enlighten possible Jewish and/or Nazoraean influence as the “other”, on the pre-Islamic Ka‘ba.

3.7. The Ka‘ba in context - The tribe

To begin by opening a Hebrew thread, I will consider that Yemen had for periods been a Jewish Kingdom. In his *History (Ta’rikh)*, Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Ya‘qūbī (d. A.H. 284/897 C.E.) describes Yemen becoming Jewish after the Tubba‘/Tibān As‘ad Abū Karib (390–420 C.E.) returned to his country with “two rabbis” (Suḥayt and Munabbih) from Medina, as mentioned earlier in this thesis. These two rabbis reportedly foretold the coming of the Prophet who was to have his “home and settlement” in Medina (Ibn Hishām 2000, 7). The King and the people of Yemen are then reported to have converted to a Jewish tradition, being imported from

Medina (Al-Ya‘qūbī 2018, 502-3). Alfred Beeston queries: “Could it not be that the original story related to the abandonment of polytheism in favour of monotheistic Raḥmanism (in the latter half of the fourth century), rather than to a full commitment to Judaism?” (Beeston 1984, 278). It is unclear from this account regarding the two rabbis, what form of Jewish tradition developed in Yemen and to what degree a type of Judaism had been present within that community at the time. By the middle of the fifth century there were changes in the communities of Yemen that disturbed the trade routes north to Mecca and onwards to Syria. This allowed for a growth of influence from the Quraysh in Mecca (Kister 1968, 169). Reuben Ahroni argues that there was a strong influence on Himyarite conversion by local Jews who were members of “those Jewish communities in Yemen that had been populated by the descendants of Jewish exiles” (1986, 47-8). In which case the story of the two rabbis may be more of a re-ignition of an existent community, or the story serves a different function linking the Jews of Medina with the Jews of Yemen. Ibn Wāḍiḥ Al-Ya‘qūbī indicates a closer presence of the Jews to the Aws and Khazraj, the Banū l-Najjār and the Anṣar:

Tubba‘ thereupon marched against them, killed some of the Jews, and left a son of his among them as his deputy. When they killed the latter, Tubba‘ led an army against them and made war on them. Now the leader of the Anṣar was ‘Amr b. Ṭalḥa al-Khazrajī from the Banū l-Najjār. They would fight him by day and offer him hospitality by night—(‘Amr) would say, ‘Our people are indeed noble!’ (Tubba‘) called together the leaders of the Jews and said, ‘I am going to lay waste this town,’—meaning Medina—but the rabbis and leaders of the Jews said, ‘You will not be able to do it.’ ‘Why?’ he asked. They answered, ‘Because it belongs to a prophet from the descendants of Ismā‘īl whose place of emergence will be from beside the Sacred Sanctuary.’ (Al-Ya‘qūbī 2018, 502)

I will refer to the Jewish heritage of the Banū l-Najjār and their association with Muḥammad later in this chapter. The beginnings of the Himyarite Kingdom are still obscure and go back to the second century B.C.E., but in the second half of the 4th century C.E. there seemed to be a change within Himyarite society. The dedications to South Arabian gods disappear and their shrines including the Awām temple were abandoned. References to a single deity become evident: the “Lord of Heaven” or “Lord of Heaven and Earth,” who was

called *Raḥmānān*. Some writers argue that this is from a Christian influence citing the mission of Theophilus the Indian who was sent by Constantius II (337-361 C.E.) to the Himyarite court at Zafār. However, there is no complementary evidence of Christian inscriptions from this time (Gajda 2017, 4). Aaron Hughes argues for a more syncretistic environment where there were less clearly-defined boundaries or expressions of Judaism and Christianity. He says there was in this region, “a thin overlay of some type of non-normative Judaism over a type of autochthonous Arabian monotheism. We can call the latter *Raḥmanism* or *Ḥanifism*.” (Hughes 2020, 37-8) This reflects the evidence that there was an osmosis from Jewish communities into the local religious traditions, as there always has been.

The Himyarite Kingdom continued to expand until the 6th century when it succumbed to Christian Aksumite invaders. In 522 C.E., a Jewish Himyarite leader, Yūsuf As’ar Yath’ar, or, by the more familiar name, Dhū Nuwās, rebelled and defeated the Aksumite army. He went on to massacre part of the Christian population of Najrān. This resulted in the forceful reestablishment of Christianity from Ethiopia, and the apparent suicide of Dhū Nuwās (c. 525 C.E.).

The question appertaining to this thesis is what kind of faith did the Himyarite Jews practise? Did they observe the Sabbath? Or the rules of *kashrut*?⁴⁵ Christian Robin argues for “a minimalist variety of Judaism” and recognizes a “prophetic movement” in early seventh century Arabia (Yule and Galor 2015, 1).

Ibn Ḥazm (A.H. 384/994 C.E. – A.H. 456/1064 C.E.) wrote that the whole of Ḥimyar and many of the Kinda were Jewish, without further explanation. [Ibn Ḥazm, *Ansāb*, 49] (Lecker 1995, 636).

Subsequently, the Aws and Khazraj, who emigrated from Yemen, became Jewish after their association with the “Yahūd Khaybar and Qurayza and Naḍīr” in Medina (1995, 635).

⁴⁵ *kashrut*: kosher

Lecker also adds “that it was mainly the Jews who were the principal owners of fortresses and weapons in Medina; they were the allies (not the clients) of the Aws and the Khazraj.” (Lecker 1995b, 18).

Later, Mu‘ādh b. Jabal al-Anṣārī (B.H. 20/603 C.E. – A.H. 17/639 C.E.) was Muḥammad’s governor in Yemen, officiating over an area of Jewish population, and Ziyād b. Labīd, the governor in neighbouring Ḥaḍramawt was also an Anṣārī. There seems evidence to suggest that the Jews of Yemen had influence over the presence of Jews in Medina. Furthermore, the Anṣār from the tribes of the Aws and the Khazraj also had close associations and a relationship with Jews in Yemen (Lecker 1995a, 637).

The background to the rule of Muḥammad’s tribe, the Quraysh, is that Quṣayy b. Kilāb b. Murrah (400-480 C.E.) returned to Mecca from the tribe of Khuzā‘a and united the Quraysh. He removed the Khuzā‘as’ control over the Ka‘ba and expelled them from Mecca. He became ruler over the Quraysh and controlled the feeding and watering of the pilgrims at the Ka‘ba (Ibn Kathīr 1998, 133). Although Muḥammad was born into the Quraysh, the Islamic tradition describes that his preaching and the call to monotheism put him at odds with those in authority, to such an extent that his uncle, Abū Talīb, was called to account twice (Ibn Hishām 2000, 43) and tried to dissuade Muḥammad from his mission, but failed to do so. Abū Talīb subsequently reassured Muḥammad; “Go and say whatever you like, for by Allah I will never give you up.” (2000: 44). The Quraysh, on the other hand, believed Muḥammad “has ridiculed our values, reviled our forefathers, criticized our religion, made divisions among us and insulted our gods.” (Ibn Kathīr 1998a, 342) and their rejection finally led to the *Hijra* in 622 C.E. Over against his tribal animosity, it is not surprising that Muḥammad remained firm in his belief. It would be expected that someone who had had a profound religious experience would be undaunted (if not reaffirmed) by opposition.

3.8. The Ka‘ba in context - Family and Friends

Many believers would say that Muḥammad was blessed with a religious experience that made a lifetime impression on him, and a worldwide impact on history and the lives of the faithful. As with many individuals throughout time the ability to be receptive and responsive to an experience of the Divine is within the nature and nurture of the person themselves. As the earth needs to be fertile for a seed to grow, so does an individual need a positive context in which to engage with that religious experience and allow it to grow. I sought to find understanding in the earliest writings, in the *ḥadīth* and *sīra* of the Prophet, to discover the source of Muḥammad’s receptiveness and willingness to respond to and fight for the Message. Muḥammad’s first wife was Khadija, a merchant woman of great respect and wealth in Mecca. She recognized his honesty and good character and in B.H. 28/595 C.E. challenged him to go on a trading journey to Syria. According to Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad travelled with a young boy, Maysara, and whilst resting on the journey, a monk (*Bāḥīra*) recognized his prophethood: “None but a prophet ever sat beneath this tree.” (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 82). After he had finished trading in Syria, the story continues that Maysara saw two angels shading Muḥammad from the sun. On hearing this story from Maysara, Khadija declared to Muḥammad, “O son of my uncle I like you because of our relationship and your high reputation among your people, your trustworthiness and good character and truthfulness”, and offered to marry him. They remained in a monogamous marriage until her death in B.H. 3/619 C.E. She was the first woman recounted to have become a believer in Islam and she supported Muḥammad throughout his revelations.

There is an account of Muḥammad being lost in Mecca as a child. His grandfather, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, went to the Ka‘ba to pray for his return. The story describes how Waraqa b. Nawfal b. Asad, Khadija’s cousin, found him and brought him to ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib. His grandfather

then placed him on his shoulder and circumambulated the Ka‘ba offering him to God’s protection. This may be a childhood narrative; however, it does echo the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple and the witness of Simeon (and Anna) to the sanctity and mission of the child (Luke 2:21-38): “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” Waraqa in this example becomes the foreteller of a new dispensation from the old, and a witness to the Prophethood of Muḥammad.

Waraqa points to a time when Muḥammad’s prophethood was to be expected, when Khadīja tells him what Maysara had told her what the monk had said and how he had seen two angels shading Muḥammad. Waraqa responds, “If this is true, Khadīja, verily Muḥammad is the prophet of this people. I knew that a prophet of this people was to be expected. His time has come, or words to that effect” (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 83).

After Muḥammad’s first revelation, Waraqa b. Nawfal is described as having knowledge of the Jewish and Christian scriptures or even having adopted Christianity (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (3)). Hawting highlights the possible existence of a variety of religious groups in that region: “Some scholarship has postulated the existence of a Christian or Jewish sectarian group (e.g., the Samaritans or the Qumran sect) in the Ḥijāz which influenced the Prophet, and attention has focused, too, on reports which refer to the presence of Zindīqs (Manichaeans?, Mazdakites?) in pre-Islamic Mecca.” (1999, 14-15).⁴⁶

A further account is of four figures who removed themselves from a feast day in which an idol was to be venerated; one of these was Waraqa b. Nawfal. Ibn Ishāq recounts the occasion:

⁴⁶ Cf. The Samaritans: J. Finkel, ‘Jewish, Christian and Samaritan Influences on Arabia’, *The Macdonald Presentation Volume*, Princeton 1933, 145–66. A sect related to that of Qumran: C. Rabin, *Qumran Studies*, Oxford 1957. The Zindīqs in Mecca: C. Schefer, ‘Notice sur le Kitab Be‘ān il Edian’, in his *Chrestomathie persane*, Paris 1883, I, 146 (citing Ibn Qutayba via *Ṭabaqāt al-umam* of Ibn Sa‘īd); J. Obermann, ‘Islamic Origins: a Study in Background and Foundation’, in N. A. Faris (ed.), *The Arab Heritage*, Princeton 1944, 60; Jawād ‘Alī, *Ta’rīkh al-‘Arab qabla’ l-Islām*, 8 vols., Baghdad 1957, VI, 287–8; M. J. Kister, ‘Al-Ḥīra. Some Notes on its Relations with Arabia’, *Arabica*, 15 (1968), 144–5; G. Monnot, ‘L’histoire des religions en Islam: Ibn al-Kalbī et Rāzī’, *RHR*, 188 (1975), 23–34 (Hawting 1999, 15fn.)

They were of the opinion that their people had corrupted the religion of their father Abraham, and that the stone they went round was of no account; it could neither hear, nor see, nor hurt, nor help. “Find for yourselves a religion,” they [the four ḥanīfs] said; “for by God you have none.” So they went their several ways in the lands, seeking the Ḥanīfiyya, the religion of Abraham. (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 99)

What appears surprising in this account is that if Waraqa had become a Christian with extensive knowledge of scriptures, is that he had come through a Hebrew tradition recounting Abraham’s monotheism (Lecker 2017, 365). In addition, another one of the four ḥanīfs, Zayd b. ‘Amr “accepted neither Judaism nor Christianity”. Nevertheless, he “abstained from idols, animals that had died, blood, and things offered to idols” and “forbade the killing of infant daughters, saying that he worshipped the God of Abraham, and he publicly rebuked his people for their practices” (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 99). This proselyte-style doctrine is in close comparison to the “Laws of Noah” formula that is stated by James (the brother of Jesus) in the requirement for non-Jews to be faithful (Acts 15:29 NIV):

You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

In addition, on his travels in search of the religion of Abraham, Zayd meets a monk, Balqā, and asks him about the *Ḥanīfiyya*. The answer he received was: “You are seeking a religion to which no one today can guide you, but the time of a prophet who will come forth from your own country which you have just left has drawn near. He will be sent with the *Ḥanīfiyya*, the religion of Abraham, so stick to it, for he is about to be sent now and this is his time.” (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad, 1998, 103). From this account it may be that the *ḥanīfs* were searchers for an original Abrahamic religion, having knowledge of the Torah and some Christian scriptures. The *Ḥanīfiyya* perhaps reflect an awareness of a change in the role and purpose of the Ka‘ba, a seeking to return to an earlier Abrahamic tradition that had lapsed over time. This is similar to Rubin’s deduction (Rubin 1990, 98), although he deduces that if that was the case, all *ḥanīfs* would recognize Muḥammad’s Prophethood. As explored in later chapters, there were varying understandings of “end time” events and a return to an original

monotheistic religion. It is still the case today that many Hasidic Jews and others, see a return to their Abrahamic faith as happening at a time when non-Jews acknowledge the Laws of Noah, as eschatological signs of the final unity of humankind under one God. This belief is closely linked to a return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple as discussed in previous chapters:

And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more. *At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne (סֵדֶן) of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem:* neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel,⁴⁷ and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers. (Jer. 3:16-18 JPS)

Just before Muḥammad's first revelation Zayd b. 'Amr is presented with a bag of meat that had been sacrificed to the idols. Zayd refuses to eat what has been offered to idols and explains that he is now a follower of the religion of Abraham. This highlights Zayd's piety (*faḍā'il*) and his acceptance of monotheism before Muḥammad's revelation and reflects the Laws of Noah as previously mentioned. "Such a tradition could never have been invented, not even for the mere purpose of glorifying Zayd", Uri Rubin concludes, demonstrating that Zayd was, "indeed a *hanif* who introduced to Muḥammad the monotheistic idea of *din Ibrahim*." (1990, 101). It could be judged that from Muḥammad's family and friends that there is significant encouragement and support for his message that reflects a pre-existing Jewish monotheistic tradition that maintained the Sabbath, dietary laws and the expectation of a coming together of Jew and Gentile, with a return to Jerusalem for the "end times".

⁴⁷ Ephraimite northern kingdom.

3.9. The Jewish heritage in Medina

This section is mainly based on Haggai Mazuz's study on the question of Jewish heritage, which summarizes the existing scholarship. At the beginning of the 7th century, there appears to have been a large community of Jewish tribes in the Hijāz region; beginning in Wādī al-Qurā, they spread southward through Taymā', Fadak, Khaybar to Yathrib (Medina). Muḥammad's association with the Jewish tribes of Medina (the Banū Qaynuqā', the Banū al-Naḍīr and the Banū Qurayza) from 622 C.E. onwards appears to have led to their demise. The Mishnah and the Talmud present no detailed information on Arabian Jews, meaning that Islamic sources are the main area of knowledge. Haggai Mazuz (Mazuz 2014, 4) highlights this fact by referring to Kister and Kister's *Notes on the Jews of Arabia*:

If it is difficult to find historical evidence of the connection between the Arabian Jews and the Land of Israel, it is doubly so in regard to the presence of the Jerusalem (or Babylonian) Talmud amongst the Arabian Jews. The Arab sources on Jewish customs in this period are poor, and scarcely allow us to reach any conclusions on the subject. (1980, 236)

Mazuz suggests that some writers indicate the possibility of piecing together information from Islamic sources that show a knowledge of Jewish laws and teachings. He cites Shlomo Dov Goitein who explains: "one cannot expect this picture to be exact or complete, for the exposition in the Qur'ān of the tenets and the rites of the new religion [i.e., Islam] itself is very far from being comprehensive, systematic, or even unambiguous." (1955, 50, cf. Mazuz 2014, 5). In this same reference Goitein continues to express the potential reality of a more diverse Jewish community, leaving the door open to a wider interpretation of the Jewish heritage in Medina:

In particular, it is not expressly stated in the Qur'ān whether the Jewish community in Arabia in Muḥammad's time formed a single religious denomination; whether it contained a dissenting group or groups; or even whether the community as a whole

adopted one of the sectarian deviations from Judaism known to us from talmudic literature. (1955, 50, cf. Mazuz, 2014, 5)

Mazuz goes on to highlight that Moshe Sharon echoes Goitein's concerns over a unified orthodox Jewish community:

It is impossible to know what kind of 'Jewishness' it [i.e., Medinan Judaism] actually was... the fact that the Qur'ān states that the Jews 'say 'Uzayr is the son of Allāh' raises grave doubts about the identity of those 'Jews'. (Sharon 2007, 301, cf. Mazuz 2014, 5-6).

Sharon indicates here that the reference in the Qur'ān to Jews saying that "'Uzayr is the son of Allāh" would be an error in understanding Jewish monotheism. He examines it more closely, reflecting on the Qur'ān (*Sūrat al-Tawba*):

The Jews said, 'Ezra (عَزْرِيْرُ) is the son of God,'⁴⁸ and the Christians said, 'The Messiah is the son of God': they said this with their own mouths, repeating what earlier disbelievers had said. May God confound them! How far astray they have been led! (Q 9:30) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 118-119)⁴⁹

Moshe Sharon, in his entry "Ahl al-Kitāb" in the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, reconsiders the meaning of the word 'Uzayr (عَزْرِيْرُ) as being unfamiliar to Hebrew texts, and as previously mentioned, the concept of God's sonship is alien to Jewish belief. He suggests that the name 'Uzayr is a rewording in Arabic of the Hebrew word 'Ozer (עוֹזֵר), meaning "helper," or even "saviour." In the daily Amidah (תפילת העמידה) God is called:

Blessed are You, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the great, mighty and revered God, the Most High God who bestows loving kindnesses, the creator of all things, who remembers the good deeds of the patriarchs and in love will bring a redeemer to their children's children for his name's sake. *O king, helper, saviour and shield* (מְלִיךָ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמִגֵּן). (Rabbinical Assembly 2013, 159-60)

⁴⁸ "Clearly this refers to a certain group who, possibly at the time of the Prophet or earlier, made this claim" (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 119fn.)

⁴⁹ cf. "The Jews say, 'Ezra is the Son of God'; the Christians say, 'The Messiah is the Son of God.' That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted!" (Q 9:30) (Arberry (trans.) 1953)

The words helper [‘ozer (עֹזֵר)] saviour [moshi’a (מֹשִׁיחַ)] are very familiar words to Jews and to Christians but in a different context and setting. Sharon concludes that, “Based on the Qur’ānic material alone it is very possible that at least some of these Jews (if not all of them) represented a sect with a distinct messianic doctrine, who regarded the Messiah as the son of God and called him ‘the saviour,’ ‘the helper’ (‘Ōzer, ‘Uzayr).” (*Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān* 2001, 39, cf. Mazuz 2014, 6). Therefore, it could be concluded that through the term عَزَيْر (‘Uzayr) that some Jews in Arabia were understood as “helpers of God”. I now analyze whether there is evidence for “a sect with a distinct messianic doctrine” as a Jewish movement in Medina.

3.10. The *Anṣār* and the context of Medina

The *Anṣār* (helpers or supporters) who assisted Muḥammad and the *muhājirūn*, on their emigration (the *hijra*) to Medina, were members of two tribes, the Aws and the Khazraj. At the first Pledge of al-‘Aqaba, there were twelve individuals from these two tribes, the Aws and the Khazraj, including individuals of the clan Banū l-Najjār (“sons of the carpenter”). In his *History*, Al-Ṭabarī recounts this occasion and the promise made:

There were twelve of us, and we took an oath of allegiance to him according to the terms of the ‘pledge of women,’ this being before the duty of making war was laid upon us. The terms were that we should not associate anything with God, should not steal, should not commit adultery, should not kill our children, should not produce any lie we have devised between our hands and feet, and should not disobey him in what was proper. (al-Ṭabarī 1988, 127)

This meeting in the marketplace of ‘Aqaba in Mecca (621 C.E.) was a catalyst to the *hijra* where the *Anṣār* committed themselves to Muḥammad. Some might argue that their support was from a more “politico-religious agreement with Muḥammad” (Yazigi 2008, 293) without reflection on the numerology within the account. The symbolism of the twelve, parallels the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve inner disciples of Jesus (Ibn Warraq 2000,

21), or mission to Jews. I would suggest that at the Second Pledge of al-‘Aqaba, a year later, there is reference to seventy participants, (Al-Ṭabarī 1988, 136) which equates with the wider number of Jesus’ disciples sent out to spread the message to the gentile nations:

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’ (Luke 10:1-2 NIV)

This in turn, reminds the reader of the seventy nations of Genesis 10, the Generations of Noah (the *Origines gentium*), and their dispersal into many lands after the Flood. The two Pledges of al-‘Aqaba, and within them the role of the *Anṣār*, indicate a repetition of the messianic and apocalyptic narrative of the end times when humanity, both Jew and Gentile, would be drawn together in Jerusalem.

In relation to an understanding of the *Anṣār*, the following verse from *al-Ṣaf* requires study to analyze the significance of the repeated use of the word *أَنْصَارٌ* (*al-Anṣār*) as “supporters”, and to assess the phrase “a faction of the Children of Israel believed and a faction disbelieved”, and to consider this in relation to a 7th century Christian manuscript *De Locis Sanctis*.

You who believe, be God’s helpers (أَنْصَارٌ). As Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples, ‘Who will come with me to help (أَنْصَارِي) God?’ The disciples said, ‘We shall be God’s helpers (أَنْصَارُ).’ Some of the Children of Israel believed and some disbelieved: We supported (فَأَيَّدْنَا) the believers against their enemy and they were the ones who came out on top. (Q 61:14) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 371)⁵⁰

As a commentary on this *āya* the *Tafṣīr* by Ibn Kathīr (born c. A.H. 700/1300 C.E., d. A.H. 774/1373 C.E.) recounts that there were believing and unbelieving Jews at the time of Jesus the Prophet:

Allah said,

فَتَأْمَنَتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَكَفَرَتِ طَائِفَةٌ

⁵⁰ cf. “O believers, be you God’s helpers, as Jesus, Mary’s son, said to the Apostles. ‘Who will be my helpers unto God?’ The Apostles said, ‘We will be helpers of God.’

And a party of the Children of Israel believed, and a party disbelieved. So We confirmed those who believed against their enemy, and they became masters.” (Q 61:14) (Arberry (trans.) 1953)

(Then a group of the Children of Israel believed, and a group disbelieved.) When ‘Īsā, peace be on him, conveyed the Message of his Lord to his people and the disciples supported him, a group from the Children of Israel believed. They accepted the guidance that ‘Īsā brought to them, while another group, was led astray. This group rejected what ‘Īsā brought them, denied his prophethood and invented terrible lies about him and his mother. They are the Jews, may Allāh curse them until the Day of Judgement. Another group exaggerated over ‘Īsā, until they elevated him to more than the level of prophethood that Allāh gave him. They divided into sects and factions, some saying that ‘Īsā was the son of Allāh, while others said that he was one in a trinity, and this is why they invoke the father, the son and the holy ghost! Some of them said that ‘Īsā was Allāh, as we mentioned in the *Tafsīr of Sūrat An-Nisā*.⁵¹ (Ibn Kathīr, Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Umar, Ṣafī al-Raḥmān Mubārakfūrī 2000, 626)

This passage speaks of three groups: the Jews (Children of Israel) who believed and the Jews who disbelieved, but also “another group” who “exaggerated over ‘Isa”, and developed a belief beyond prophethood, dividing into sects and factions, some invoking the trinity and that Jesus was God. If we put the third group to one side (that appears to include Arian, Nestorian and Nicene Christians), we are left with two groups of Jews (unbelieving) and believing Jews at the time of Jesus and after. In addition to this commentary, the *Tafsīr Ma‘ārif-ul-Qur‘ān* by the Pakistani scholar Muḥammad Shafī‘ ibn Muḥammad Yāsīn al-‘Uthmānī ad-Diyūbandī (1897-1976) referring to the 11th century *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, makes this study of the Qur‘ānic text:

Three Groups of Christians

فَأَمَّنتَ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَكَفَرَتَ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا عَلَىٰ عَدُوِّهِمْ فَاصْبَحُوا ظَاهِرِينَ

(So, a group from the children of Isra'īl believed, and another group disbelieved. Then We supported those who believed against their enemy, and they became victorious...61:14)

Baghawi interprets this verse in the light of a narration of Sayyidna `Abdullah Ibn `Abbas that when Prophet `Isa (عليه السلام) was raised to the heaven, his followers disagreed and became three groups. A group claimed that He was Himself God who went back to the heaven. The second group claimed that He Himself was not God, but God's son. God lifted him up and salvaged him from the enemies and granted him superiority. The third group proclaimed the truth and said that he was neither god nor the son of god, but he was Allah's servant and His Messenger. Allah took him away to the heaven to protect him from the enemies, and to raise his status. These people were the true believers. Different sectors of the general public attached themselves to each one of these groups. The groups clashed with one another. The two of the non-believing groups overpowered the third group, which was a group of true believers. Eventually, Allah raised the Final Messenger of Allah ﷺ who supported the group of

⁵¹ See *Tafsīr of Sūrat An-Nisā* (4:171).

the true believers. This group thus dominated the others because of their correct belief and its solid proofs confirmed by the Qur'an. [Mazhari]

In this interpretation, the phrase الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ‘those who believed [14]’ would refer to the believers of the Ummah of the Prophet `Isa (عليه السلام) who would triumph against the unbelievers with the help and support of the Final Messenger ﷺ [Mazhari]. Some scholars hold that when Prophet Isa (عليه السلام) was raised to the heaven, his followers were divided into two groups. One of them believed that he was God or God's son and thus they became polytheists. The other group believed that he was the servant of Allah and His Messenger, and thus they stuck to the right religion. (Shafi‘ 2017, 443-4)

In this interpretation there is particular focus on the third group who had been suppressed by the dominant two. In this case they are not Jews, but two forms of Christians, one Nicene and the other perhaps Arian. With regard to the third group Muḥammad Shafi‘ says: “Eventually, Allah raised the Final Messenger of Allah ﷺ who supported the group of the true believers”, indicating that Muḥammad supported this group, and these were the Anṣār, by deduction from the Qur’ānic text.

Further evidence of this divide between believing and unbelieving Jews occurs in the account of a Frankish monk, Arculf, travelling through Palestine in c. 680 C.E. This account was transcribed by Adomnán, Abbot of Iona Abbey, and presented as a guide to the Holy Land to King Aldfrith of Northumbria in 698 C.E. In this account, *De Locis Sanctis*, there is reference to an argument between believing and unbelieving Jews over guardianship of the shroud (*sudarium*) of Christ’s body. The account continues to describe the two groups (*Iudaei Christiani ... increduli Iudaei*) making presentations to ‘Mu’āwīyya in Jerusalem (Hoyland and Waidler 2014, 795). This may suggest that Jewish Christians *Iudaei Christiani* were still present in Jerusalem in the late 7th century and that the term “believing Jew” was attributed to them, as it was used in Q 61:14 (cf. Pines 1984, 145).

With reference to the use of the term *Anṣār* for this collective group from the Aws and the Khazraj at al-‘Aqaba and later in Medina, there is more to consider when the etymology of the Arabic word is examined. The trilateral root *nūn ṣād rā* (ن ص ر) occurs 158 times in the Qur’ān, of which 15 are used as the proper noun *naṣrāniyy* (نَصْرَانِيّ). In all other references the

root is used in the context of “to help” or “helpers” (*anṣārin* أَنْصَارٍ). Many authors link the proper noun to the use of the word Nazarene for “Christians”, and this is the common term for translating the word *naṣārā* in English translations of the Qur’ān today. Similarly, נוצרי *notsrī* is used in Hebrew to mean Nazarene or Christian, and has its root נִצַּר (*n ṣ r*) with a middle letter as *ṣ ṣādi*, as in the Arabic *ص ṣād in n ṣ r* for *naṣārā* and *anṣār*. It is important to consider this common root in the light of the previous study of the text Q 61:14; the repeated use of the term أَنْصَارٍ and the distinction between unbelieving Jews, Christians and believing Jews. In addition, the contribution of the two Pledges of al-‘Aqaba, with the use of the term أَنْصَارٍ in conjunction with a group of twelve followers and then a group of seventy, should not go without recognition of the possibility of a Nazoraean community in Medina in Muḥammad’s lifetime. With reference to the etymology of the Qur’ānic term *naṣārā* and its root *n-ṣ-r*, used in the term *anṣār*, I will question whether there is a recondite use of the word *anṣār* to allude to a pre-Islamic tradition within the tribes of Medina, particularly a favourite clan of Muḥammad of which he took leadership, the *Banū l-Najjār* (the “sons of the carpenter”).

Further evidence to support a possible Jewish foundation of the *naṣārā* comes from Khadīja’s first cousin Waraqa b. Nawfal, who read the gospel in Hebrew and stated that the angel Gabriel that had appeared to Muḥammad, was “[...] the same angel whom Allah sent to the Prophet Moses.” (Khan 1997a, 48). Here Waraqa does not prioritize Jesus in a Christian (*kristyān*) tradition, but Moses in a Jewish prophetic tradition. Also, as discussed above, the words of the first Pledge of al-‘Aqaba parallel closely the words of James (as a Jew) for the requirement of Gentiles who accepted Jesus’ prophethood, in what is commonly called the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:19–21), which is also echoed in Zayd b. ‘Amr’s commitment as a *ḥanīf*:

..the undertaking being that we should associate nothing with God; we should not steal; we should not commit fornication; nor kill our offspring; we should not slander our neighbours; we should not disobey him in what was right; if we fulfilled this

paradise would be ours; if we committed any of those sins it was for God to punish or forgive as He pleased. (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 199)

This appears a replication of the Laws of Noah that is also found in the Talmud providing guidance for Jews to determine whether the prevailing religious cultures in which they lived were idolatrous. These laws encouraged Gentiles to refrain from idolatry, murder, blasphemy, incest, theft, and eating of a limb from a living animal, and the need to establish courts of law:

The earliest complete rabbinic version, as stated in the Tosefta to Avodah Zarah [2nd century C.E.], states:

Seven commandments were commanded of the sons of Noah: (1) concerning adjudication (*dinim*), (2) concerning idolatry (*avodah zarah*), (3) concerning blasphemy (*qilelat ha-shem*), (4) and concerning sexual immorality (*gilui arayot*), (5) and concerning blood-shed (*shefikhut damim*), and (6) concerning robbery (*ha-gezel*) and (7) concerning a limb torn from a living animal (*eber min ha-hayy*). (Segal 2014, 591) (see also, *Sanhedrin* 56a; *Genesis Rabbah* 34:8).⁵²

The reference to a Jewish Noahide prerequisite for gentile monotheism may have been utilized by the early Muslims and monotheists as a guide for the new faith, or it may have sprung from an existing practice in Medina amongst believing Jews who had incorporated this practice since the time of James in first century Palestine.

The Pledges of al-‘Aqaba can also be seen in the wider context of the messianic events in Jerusalem surrounding Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel (614-619 C.E.), who was understood as a *Messiah ben Joseph* figure, and the apocalyptic belief amongst Jews of the final ingathering of Jew and Gentile at the end times. All the material on Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel and the Temple may be of questionable historical authenticity and may be that of legend. Despite this, the tradition is evident in Jewish writings of the 7th century C.E. and therefore would have had a

⁵² *Sanhedrin* 56a. “The descendants of Noah, i.e., all of humanity, were commanded to observe seven mitzvot: The mitzva of establishing courts of judgment; and the prohibition against blessing, i.e., cursing, the name of God; and the prohibition of idol worship; and the prohibition against forbidden sexual relations; and the prohibition of bloodshed; and the prohibition of robbery; and the prohibition against eating a limb from a living animal.” Accessed 15th May 2021. <https://www.sefaria.org/Sanhedrin.56a.24?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>; *Genesis Rabbah* 34:8. “The children of Noah were enjoined concerning seven things: Idolatry, incest, murder, cursing the Divine Name [blasphemy], civil law, and a limb torn from a living animal.” Accessed 15th May 2021. https://www.sefaria.org/Bereishit_Rabbah.34.8?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en

real impact on the mindset of Jewish (and Nazoraean) beliefs in Arabia of an anticipated return to Jerusalem, and an ingathering of Jews and Gentiles to the renewed Temple.

To summarize, the *Anṣār* may be understood as the Nazoraean Jews who were the “believing Jews” alluded to in Q 61:14 and the subsequent *tafṣīr*, and that “believing Jews” were documented as still being present in Jerusalem in the 7th century. This would provide an important background story of a new dispensation to the Jews and Jewish Nazoraeans of Medina when it comes to understanding the orientation and purity of the Ka‘ba, the earlier *qibla* focus towards Jerusalem and the expectations of the first Pledge of al-‘Aqaba, on the nascent Muslim community in Medina. The Jews were believed to have said to the *anṣār* at the time:

“A Prophet who will be sent with a message is about to rise.’ And they [the *anṣār*] said ‘[...] this is the very Prophet with whom the Jews have threatened us; wherefore do not let them believe in him before you.’ (Ibn Hishām 2000, 84)

It is important in this hypothesis to consider the relationship Muḥammad may have had with the people of Medina. Firstly, to understand his welcoming at the time of the migration, but also to consider his recognition of, and leadership of the Anṣār.

3.11. Muḥammad’s family connections in Medina

It is important to recognize that the acceptance of Muḥammad and his beliefs by the *anṣār* in Medina was because many of the community were part of his cultural tradition and extended family. It is also significant that although the Aws and Khazraj were not of the main Jewish tribes of the city (*Banū Qaynuqā‘*, *Banū Qurayza* and *Banū Naḍīr*), they were of Jewish heritage from 4th century Yemen (The Constitution of Medina 29: “The Jews of the Banū l-Najjār have the same [rights] as the Jews of Banū Awf.” (Lecker 2005, 103), and because Anṣār appeared to be sympathetic to a Hebrew tradition that looked forward to a Prophet in the line of Abraham that might unite Jew and Gentile in a common monotheistic faith.

It is not surprising that Muḥammad gained acceptance by the *Anṣār* in Medina; there were many family connections with the city. When he was five, his mother (Āmina bt. Wahb) took him to visit her uncles in Medina, who were from the tribe of the Banū l-Najjār, the maternal clan of Muḥammad's grandfather 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (Power 1914, 143). The mother of Muḥammad's great-uncles, Ṣayfī and Abū Ṣayfī, was a freeborn woman from the Khazraj; his great-grandmother Salmā, the mother of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, belonged to the Banū l-Najjār (sons of the carpenter) of the Khazraj; and the mother of his wife Sawda (married just before the *hijra*) was Salmā's niece. Sawda was also called Sawda al-Yamāniyya or the Yemenite, recognizing her origins: the Khazraj (and the Aws) belonged to the tribe of Azd, and so also came from the Yemen. While the Khazraj tribe could claim 'to have born Muḥammad', this is especially true of the Banū l-Najjār (Lecker 2015, 117). On arriving at Medina, Muḥammad says: 'Tonight I shall stay with the Banū l-Najjār, the maternal uncles of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, as a tribute to them' [Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, IV, 366] (Lecker 2015, 118). Lecker points out that he stayed in the house of Abū Ayyūb and on the death of the *naqīb* or deputy of the Banū l-Najjār, As'ad b. Zurāra, he took the role, so becoming the head of his maternal uncles [Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, ii, 154; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III, 611.] Likewise, R.B. Sergeant recounts his appointment: "Now when a *naqīb* of the Banū 'l-Najjār died in Year 1, Muhammad being related to the tribe through the female line, made himself their *naqīb*." (Sergeant 1978, 26). It must be noted that within a pre-Islamic patriarchal system authority and inheritance would be passed to the male heir:

This tribal society was patrilineal in its structure and patriarchal in its ethos; individual tribes were formed of adult males who traced their descent from a common ancestor through exclusively male links. The tribe was bound by the body of unwritten rules that had evolved as a manifestation of its spirit and character. These rules served to consolidate the tribe's military strength and to preserve its patrimony by limiting inheritance rights to the male agnate relatives (*asaba*) of the deceased, arranged in a hierarchical order, with sons and their descendants being first in order of priority. (Powers 1993, 13-14)

In this event Muḥammad appoints himself as the *naqīb* in the Banū l-Najjār, because of his matriarchal lineage (Serjeant, 1978). This might be seen as unusual, unless the *Banū 'l-Najjār* were Jewish in structure with a matriarchal lineage. The Mishnah *Kiddushin* 3.12 from the Yavnean period (80-120 C.E.) set out this expectation of matrilineal descent, as it is practised by Orthodox Jews today (Cohen 1985, 6).

Khadīja bt. Khuwaylid belonged to a clan of the Quraysh tribe and her paternal cousin Waraqa b. Nawfal, was allegedly a “Christian” (تَنْصَرٌ) (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (3)). Both Muḥammad and Khadīja were descended from Quṣayy b. Kilāb and Khadīja’s paternal aunt, Umm Ḥabīb, was Muḥammad’s great grandmother, being the grandmother of Muḥammad’s mother Āmina. As mentioned earlier, Waraqa is described as literate in *‘ibrāniyya* or Hebrew, a language most Syriac Christians and/or Byzantine Christians would not know. Lecker suggests that the “mention of Hebrew can also be linked to the assertion that before becoming a Christian, Waraqa had been Jewish.” (2017, 365). It may be that, as a searcher (*ḥanīf*), Waraqa had converted from being born a Jew to Christianity and became open to Muḥammad’s revelation—but there are problems with this assertion. If this was so, according to halachic law it would mean that Waraqa’s mother was Jewish, but maybe his family or tribe would be Jewish too.

On the other hand, another of Khadīja’s paternal cousins, Tuwayt b. Ḥabīb is also among those Qurashīs who were born of Jewish mothers (the *yahūd al-anṣār*)⁵³ (2017, 375). Lecker finds a problem with this term suggesting it means either “the Anṣār who were Jewish”, or “the Jews of the Anṣār”, or a scribal error, and of course Tuwayt was born before the *hijra*, inferring there were no *anṣār* before the emigration, furthermore, the *anṣār* were not Qurashīs. I would suggest, from De Blois, what if *yahūd al-anṣār* is a valid term for Jews who were *naṣārā* (de Blois 2002, 12)? In which case, it would not be unusual for Waraqa (and the *Anṣār*) to have known Hebrew, recognized the authority of the Torah, and not to have converted from a Jewish

⁵³ Cf. Ibn Ḥabīb (1405/1985), *Kitāb al-munammaq fī akhbār Quraysh*, ed. Khūrshīd Aḥmad Fāriq, Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 403 (Lecker 2017, 375fn.)

community to Christianity and then to recognize Muḥammad's prophethood, but rather to have been a *naṣārā* or Nazoraean originally (de Blois 2002, 26; Stroumsa 2015c, 82).

3.12. The Jews and Nazoraeans in Medina

Beneath these various interpretations garnered with their own narratives, there may lie signs of a differing perspective. The alternative narrative may be glimpsed as it stands apart from the pervading description of the Ka'ba, as recounted in Islamic literature. This does not mean that this study reveals "the truth", rather it is offered as a contribution to academic research and discussion on the origins of the building. The Ka'ba of the early 7th century exists within the cultural environment and community expectations in the pre-Islamic *Hijāz*. The building is embedded in a history of commerce, trade, conflict, and religious symbolism. Tribal allegiances ebbed and flowed around the building for centuries, leaving their mark and an understanding of its role and purpose.

I will question the concept of "Jewish Christians" as a form of religious tradition straddling the divide between Judaism and Christianity in a later chapter. This tradition, which states that the Jewish-Christian community and Judaism "parted ways" and sank without trace in 6th century C.E., is questionable (Becker, Adam H. 2007). This concept either categorizes these communities as Christian heresies, or, in a modern interpretation, as "Messianic Jews", both understandings are questionable interpretations. I suggest that a "Northern Kingdom" Jewish Movement, rooted in elements of early non-canonical writings, continued as a plausible Jewish community with messianic expectations originally led by James and his brother Jesus. It will be evidenced in this thesis that after the Destruction of Jerusalem, this community, with other Jews, moved east of the River Jordan. This occurred simultaneously with the missionary

activity of St Paul that spread west across the Roman Empire, and established the tradition called Christianity.

There is evidence from Christian heresiologists that communities of Jews with some “Christian” elements existed in the East. This too will be documented and analyzed later in this thesis, with the critique of the narrative of post-Nicene orthodoxy and its understanding of heresy, and political or religious boundaries. These Christian polemical writings may inadvertently still contain important facts that have not been completely suppressed by the heresiologists’ pen. There is often a dearth of material from the “losers” of heretical battles, through the very nature of power imbalances. The task is to highlight and question signs of incongruity within the prevailing narrative and to discover continuity of thought and symbolism. It is often found that beneath the current reality of religious tradition there is a heritage that has been superseded, whether that is in festivals like Christmas or buildings such as the Great Mosque of Ayasofya.

Within this chapter, there has been consideration of imbalance, where history has been written from the view of Islam, rather than by the remnant of a strand of pre-Islamic monotheism. For this strand of pre-Islamic monotheism, I will use the term Nazoraean or Jewish Nazoraean, meaning the Jewish movement of the Nazarenes. François de Blois in his article, *Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanīf (ἕθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam* makes the proposal that “Jewish Christians” in nascent Islam were called *naṣārā*, the Nazoraeans (de Blois 2002, 26).

De Blois argues that the Qur’ānic polemic against the *naṣārā* is comparable to Pauline theology and the idea that Abraham had been elected “in uncircumcision” and that he is therefore is a “paradigm of salvation for the gentiles”. This polemic of Paul (that Abraham was righteous through faith rather than by birth) was used in his Letters of the New Testament to bring into doubt the validity of the Torah for all humanity, particularly for gentile (non-Jewish)

Christians (unlike the *Letter of James* (2.21)). For the Qur'ān, to use this style may indicate that the *naṣārā* still followed the Torah (the Law of Moses):

The realization that the *naṣārā* of the *Qur'ān* are not simply Christians, but 'Jewish Christians', who maintained, against Paul, the continued validity of the law of Moses, explains why the Qur'ānic notion of Abraham the *ḥanīf*, the gentile, stands in polemical juxtaposition not only to the Jews, but also to the Nazoraeans. (de Blois 2002, 26)

This suggests that the early Muslim community had contact with Nazoraeans, and some knowledge of the teachings of Pauline Christianity, but not enough for Byzantine Christianity to see it as a theological threat. There is evidence that the Nazoraean tradition saw Paul as an apostate so would not have had a positive acceptance of his teachings (Novenson 2009, 365; Dunn 1998, 256; Jipp 2020, 67). A strong Nazoraean presence and the relative absence of Nicaean Christianity may explain why in the Qur'ān there is an inference that Christianity had been led astray (Q 5:66), and only refers to a singular Gospel (*'Injīl*), together with a general lack of Pauline scriptural allusions in the text of the Qur'ān itself. The *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* implies there was no "prophet" between Jesus and Muḥammad, thereby appearing to write out the role of Paul completely:

I heard Allah's Apostle saying, 'I am the nearest of all the people to the son of Mary, and all the prophets are paternal brothers, and there has been no prophet between me and him [*Jesus*].' (3442) (Khan (trans.) 1997b, 409)

Paul, unlike John the Baptist, is not included into the line of prophethood within Islam. The lack of consideration of Pauline writings compared with the Gospel (*'Injīl*), the Torah (*Tawrāt*) and the Psalms (*Zabūr*) is significant. There are a number of examples in the canonical Christian writings that James and Paul considered faith/righteousness in very different ways, one by the Jews, and one by the Gentiles of the Pauline community. James argues, "Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?" (James 2:21 NIV). Paul states, "If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had

something to boast about—but not before God. What does Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’” (cf. Gen 15:6; Romans 4:2–3 NIV).

Another area of influence on the Abrahamic *ḥanīf* motif, is the “submissive gentile (seeker)” (*ḥanīfan musliman*) concept. Rabkin and Rabkin (2010, 31) argue that the Laws of Noah for gentiles began to be defined in 2nd century rabbinic literature. I have argued that this tradition was already present in the era of the early Nazoraean community of the 1st century C.E., when James called upon fellow Jews to consider the role of the non-Jew in the early community.⁵⁴

In line with Jewish law, emphasis was given to the prohibition of idolatry and that Gentiles were forbidden from holding any polytheistic belief. This developed an important distinction between a non-idolater and idolater Gentile and could be recognized in its use by Muḥammad in respect to the twelve *anṣār* in the first Pledge of al-‘Aqaba (cf. Qur’ān 60:12; al-Ṭabarī 1988, 127; Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 199)

This specific reference to a combination of laws highlights an understanding of the *halakhic* traditions familiar to Jews and the Nazoraean movement. In conjunction, as mentioned before, the symbolism with Nazoraean and Christian understanding of “the Twelve” should not be lost here (Twelve Tribes and Twelve Apostles), nor the Arabic root of *al-anṣār* and *nāṣārā* [cf. Qur’ān 61:14]. De Blois concludes his article with a pertinent observation that provides a link to further studies, on the style and nature of the Nazoraean presence in Mecca. He states:

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. (2002, 26-27)

⁵⁴ See Acts 15:13-21.

So how does De Blois come to this conclusion? What plausible historical model for the influence of one upon the other (Jewish Christianity on Islam) does he give? After analyzing his evidence, de Blois concludes that the term “Nazoraean” is not, or not always, attributed to a specific sect but rather expresses a spectrum of belief (2002, 4). Gerald Hawting, too, pointed to a conceptual theme running through these communities often labelled by heresiologists, as will be discussed in later chapters of this thesis:

The christology of the Koran has been recognised as similar to that of Judaeo-Christian groups such as the so-called Ebionites (groups that maintained the validity of the Jewish law but accepted Jesus as a messenger of God), but there is material in the Koran and other sources which could point in other directions for identification of the relevant sectarian milieu. (1999, 16)

I suggest that the Nazoraean movement was a continuum within Jewish apocalypticism (Jongeneel 2009, 117; Nel 2012, 68; Spurling 2015, 2), and may be a strand of observant Jewish practice akin to the Essenes or Nazirites. For many scholars, the silent centuries that divide the fifth and early seventh century are too wide to countenance the survival of the Nazoraeans or other “Jewish Christians” (Dauphin 1982, 142; Feldman 1993, 56). There may be some discrete signs and markers still present in the words and texts of early Islam to indicate their presence in the Ḥijāz region. Sidney Griffiths maintains, though, that “there is no historical evidence for the presence of Jewish Christians in its milieu, yet there is a convincing, rhetorical argument in favor of the Qur’ān’s polemic against the doctrine of the Christians known to be in its environs.” (Griffiths 2011, 318).

This view is supported by Stephen Shoemaker in his chapter “Jewish Christianity, Non-Trinitarianism and the Beginnings of Islam”, arguing that, “there is no reliable evidence of any Torah-observant Christian communities beyond the end of the fourth century, a point on which there is currently a strong consensus in early Christian studies.” (Shoemaker in Sanchez 2018, 108). This viewpoint comes from the Christian perspective that these were “Jewish-Christians”, a notion that struggles with the concept of this movement being “just Jews” and nothing else

(see 6.6). Although, Shoemaker does acknowledge that Christianity was a form of Judaism: “Yet early Christianity in all its variety remains inescapably a type of Judaism, which we may call Christian Judaism, a religion defined primarily by its confession of Jesus as the messiah sent by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (Shoemaker in Sanchez 2018, 106).

My argument is that the Nazoraeans were a Jewish movement led by James and other Jews who recognized the Josephite messiahship of Jesus. There is no Christianity in this tradition, and no “Torah observant” or “Torah relaxing” Christians (Shoemaker in Sanchez 2018, 107). The term “Torah observant Christian” appears a contradiction of terms, as I point out in Chapter 6.6. To suggest an end to “Jewish Christianity” is therefore a false quest. One should not search for the “*calf under the ox*”, although there would always be some Jewish proselytes from Christianity in any era.

To conclude, the customary understanding of the word *naṣrānī* (in plural *naṣārā*) is “Christian”, as indicated in many translations of the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth, and modern secondary literature (Steenbrink, 2002; Griffith, 2011). If the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth employed the well-used Syriac word *kristyān*, and plural *kristyānē* for Christian, it may be clearer that this is the group indicated by the word. Instead, the Qur’ān uses the Arabic *nāṣārā* (Syriac *nāṣrāyē*) (Reynolds, 2013; Crone, 2015). As additional evidence of the distinction of *nāṣrāyē* and *kristyānē*, de Blois cites the example of the story of the Syriac martyr, Saint Pethion (d. 449 C.E.). The persecutors ask the saint whether he is the “head of the Nazoraeans” (*rēšā ḏ-nāṣrāyē*), the saint replies clearly, “I am not the head of the Nazoraeans, no, I am a servant of God and the minister of the Christians (*kristyānē*)” (as quoted in de Blois 2002, 8; from Corluy, *Historia sancti Mar Pethion martyris syriace et latine*, 1888, 16). As I have previously mentioned, De Blois considers the *Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor* (c. 569 C.E.), where a Persian general, fearing defeat sends a message to the Romans asking to delay the battle of Amida (503 C.E.) until after Easter/Passover, “for the sake of the Nazoraeans (*nāṣrāyē*) and Jews who are in my army, and for your sake, you who

are Christians (*kristyānē*)” (2002, 9). These tentative references may suggest that there was a distinct Nazoraean element present in Sassanian/Syriac society in the 5th and 6th centuries C.E. and that Christians were considered *kristyānē*.

With reference to the Arabic *naṣrānī* (plural *naṣārā*), Muslim authors of the Abbasid period gave the name *naṣārā* to post-Nicene denominations (Melkites, Jacobites and Nestorians) and it was used in self-designation by these churches if writing in Arabic. It is possible that, following the conquest of Byzantine and Sasanian territories, the Muslims that came into extensive contact with Byzantine Christians, consciously decided to transfer the Qur’ānic name *naṣārā* to them.

De Blois argues that the term *naṣārā* transferred to Christians at a later date and it designates something other in the Qur’ān. He clarifies this:

The possibility that the *naṣārā* of the *Qur’ān* were not catholic Christians, but Nazoraean ‘Jewish Christians’, is suggested not only by their Arabic name, but also by what the *Qur’ān* has to say about Christians. (2002, 13).

He uses this Qur’ānic verse:

Today all good things have been made lawful for you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. (Q 5:5) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 68)

This appears to present evidence of a similarity in familial and dietary arrangements between the two communities, if the “food prepared by Jews and *naṣārā*, or considered clean by them” (de Blois 2002, 16) is acceptable to both. Therefore, *naṣārā* cannot mean “catholic Christians”, as they had no strict dietary laws. So, the *naṣārā* of the Qur’ān, he argues, should be understood as Nazoraean, who observed the Jewish laws of purity, and the statement that “the food of those to whom the book was given is permitted to you” supports this deduction.

He concludes his analysis of *Naṣrānī* by saying:

I suggest, in short, that one should seriously consider the possibility that the *naṣārā* of the *Qur’ān* were indeed Nazoraean 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. (2002, 16)

This is restated in his conclusion and makes a significant historical-critical model for the years between the writings of the Church fathers ending in the 5th Century and the inception of Islamic thought and text in the early 7th Century (Lecker 2015; Patricia Crone 2015, 2016; Stroumsa 2015c).

3.13. Conclusion to Chapter 3

This chapter sought to outline some new observations and deductions surrounding the context of the Ka’ba. Firstly, the religious environment of pre-Islamic Arabia may have been more diverse than is conventionally portrayed in traditional Islamic literature as well as most of modern scholarship. There appears a diversity of Jewish and Christian traditions that included monotheistic, messianic and apocalyptic movements including a Jewish movement that had its roots in first century Palestine, the Nazoraeans. An alternative argument can be seen in Shoemaker’s book *The Death of the Prophet*, in his analysis of the 6th century C.E. Christian polemic *Doctrina Iacobi* and the 8th century C.E. Jewish apocalyptic literature *Secrets of Rabbi Shim’ōn* (Shoemaker 2012, 21). Here Shoemaker indicates that the *Doctrina Iacobi* is (an) “accurate representation of its historical circumstances” (2012, 23) and describes Muḥammad’s conquest of Palestine “preaching the arrival of the anointed one who is to come, the Messiah.” ((*Doctrina Iacobi*) with no primary reference (2012, 24). Shoemaker recognizes that “the Qur’ān’s unmistakable eschatological urgency reveals that Muhammad and his early followers believed themselves to have been living in the final moments of history.” Thereby indicating there must be the “presence of a significant Jewish element among Muhammad’s earliest followers” (2012, 24).

Although there may be historical or geographical accuracy in some of the Christian polemic in *Doctrina Iacobi*, it does not indicate that the whole document is empirically correct. As I have indicated in the consideration of the *jāhilliya*, religious literature is a mix of myth and history, and these are always interdependent on each other. To indicate that Muhammad lived after 632 C.E. and led an army into Palestine as the coming messiah, stretches the historical framework. In a sound reflection on the diversity of apocalyptic anticipation at the time, Fred Donner assesses the religious mix of thought and anticipation in the early seventh century C.E.:

Apocalyptic ideas enjoyed wide currency in all Near Eastern religious communities in years before and following the rise of Islam. Indeed, apocalyptic notions were so widespread that the dramatic events associated with the rise of Islam in the early and middle decades of the seventh century CE were frequently interpreted by Jews and Christians as being portents of the impending apocalypse. (Donner 1998, 228)

On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that amongst the clans of Medina there were those who were sympathetic to Muḥammad's message of a return to Abrahamic monotheism, some individual *hanīf* and a group known as the *anṣār*. There is also evidence of a group of "believing" Jews who are referred to in Q 61:14 as the supporters or *anṣār*, of God. These supporters or helpers were the foundation of Muḥammad's *umma* and made their initial commitment to Muḥammad at 'Aqaba. It is suggested too that supporters, *anṣār*, of Muḥammad from the clans were familiar to him as some were members of his extended family in Medina, particularly the Banū l-Najjār, the "sons of the carpenter". Given this evidence of an embedded Abrahamic Jewish movement in Medina which was supportive of Muḥammad's call to monotheism, it may indicate why there was a hope for an initial return to Jerusalem at the time of the Persian occupation in the 7th century and the alleged cleansing of the Temple by Nehemiah ben Ḥushiel in 614 C.E., as documented in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*. All Jews of the diaspora would have felt betrayed following the acquiescence of the Persian control of Jerusalem to Byzantine forces (620-628 C.E.). This disaster highlights the moment when the door appears to slam shut on the Jewish messianic hope of a unified humanity centred on

Jerusalem. For the messianic monotheists in Medina there remained the Abrahamic “House of God”, the Ka’ba, as the closest sanctuary that maintained its cultic orientation to the Great Sanctuary in Jerusalem.

4. Art and Architecture of the synagogues of Late Antiquity

4.1. Introduction to Chapter 4

The evidence gathered in this fieldwork is significant to the developing framework of this thesis. The research area, nine archaeological sites in Galilee, Golan and the Yizra'el valley, was chosen because this was the location of the early diaspora of Jews after the sacking of Jerusalem with the final demise of Temple worship as a focus of the Hebrew people. The early Jewish refugees from Jerusalem settled in this region and the Transjordan area. There was a significant upheaval for the Jewish communities and a time for reflection and reappraisal of beliefs and culture. The communities in this region of the Roman Empire sunk beneath the weight of imperial authority and became assimilated into Graeco-Roman society (Weiss 2010, 185). As the Jewish communities reformed their identity, through increased wealth and Rabbinic authority, there appeared more confidence in preserving the Temple cult in the synagogues, which became a focus of life and worship.

I will include a study of the orientation of synagogues, their eastward facing entrances and the function of Torah niches, focusing on evidence in Jewish art of Late Antiquity, uniquely in the Dura Europos synagogue (3rd century C.E.) and the synagogues of the post Second Temple diaspora in the Galilee and Golan regions (3rd-7th century C.E.). This integrated study will include the relationship of the synagogue, the “House of Assembly” (בית כנסת *bet kneset*), to the tradition of the Temple cult following the destruction of the Temple and expulsion of the

Jews from Jerusalem in 2nd century C.E. (Hachlili 1997, 92). It will also consider the use of art to express messianic ideals during Late Antiquity, the images of the prophets, Abraham, and the Temple cult. I will also focus on the Torah niche as a receptacle for the Scrolls, or as a directional focus of prayer towards Jerusalem (Hezser 2016; Fine 2019, 209). Following the significant works of Rachel Hachlili on synagogue architecture, I decided to focus on the synagogues of Galilee, Golan, and Dura Europos (inaccessible at the time of writing).⁵⁵ This gave quantitative evidence to the earlier chapters in consideration of an orientation of the Ka'ba to Jerusalem:

Whenever a niche, edicule, or apse is found among the architectural remains of the synagogues in Israel, it faces in the direction of Jerusalem, e.g., at Eshtemo'a, Khirbet Susiya, Ḥammāt-Gader, Ḥammāt-Tiberias, En-gedi, Gerasa, Beth-She'arim, Jericho, Ma'on, Gaza and perhaps also Ḥusifah. The diaspora synagogues also face in the direction of Jerusalem: at Dura Europos in a westerly direction, and at Ostia, Sardis, and Stobi in an easterly direction. [...] all ancient synagogues apparently had sacred niches or edicules. (Hachlili 1976, 52-3)

This analysis potentially aims to create an epistemological bridge between first century messianic thought and belief, and the expectations of a diverse Jewish community in the *Hijāz* in the early 7th century (Lecker 1995b, 131; Munt 2014, 23; Shaddel 2016, 45; Wang 2016, 54). Within the context of the Dura Europos synagogue, I will draw further suggested evidence of the *Messiah ben Joseph* tradition found within the murals of the building (Wischnitzer 1948, 13) thereby indicating the possible importance of this Ephraimite motif amongst Jews in the diaspora, in this case the Persian border. Wischnitzer highlights the uniqueness of this community of Jews, recognizing the preservation of diversity of expression:

“A study of the layout of the synagogue and of its figurative decoration will reveal the attitudes of a small but interesting group of Jews who lived on old historic ground on the outskirts of the Roman Empire.” (1948, 15).

There needs to be a study of two central aspects of this building, the Torah niche and the messianic theme in the paintings, particularly those situated around the niche:

⁵⁵ The National Museum in Damascus was closed as a result of the conflict within Syria at this time.

As the worshiper entered the prayer hall of the synagogue at Dura through the colonnaded forecourt, he found himself in a rather broad chamber, facing a niche in the rear wall. This wall was oriented west, toward Jerusalem. [...] Next to the niche, to the spectator's right, rose the elder's seat, a plain step projecting above the upper bench. The main features of the Interior setup, a niche in the oriented rear wall and the elder's seat on the side next to the niche, as familiar as they may appear, were not common in early synagogues. (Wischnitzer 1948, 15)

Wischnitzer makes an important observation that highlights the uniqueness and early use of a physical focus of worshippers towards the city of Jerusalem and the Temple site (Spero 2003, 97; Schenk 2010, 205). These images of the Temple façade, the Menorah, and the Sacrifice of Isaac do not primarily focus on the Torah, Moses or Sinai as might be expected from the location of Torah scrolls, but rather on the cult of the Temple in Jerusalem:

[...] the hypothesis naturally emerges that the synagogues should not be viewed as being in opposition to the Temple, but rather as extensions of it. Specifically, I will argue that the synagogues in both Palestine and the diaspora served as subsidiary sacred precincts that extended spatially the sacrality of the Temple shrine and allowed Jew everywhere participation within the central cult. (Levine 2001, 20)

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the continuity of belief within Jewish communities and movements from the 2nd century diaspora through to 7th century Arabia, focussing on this messianic typology. This will be supported in Chapter 5 with a study of messianic and apocalyptic Jewish literature from "Second Zechariah" (c. 5th century B.C.E.) through to the *Sefer Zerubbabel* of the 7th century C.E. which highlights the *Messiah ben Joseph* figure as Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel and describes his reinstatement of Temple sacrifices at the time of Muḥammad's mission in Mecca and Medina. This study is important to understand the mindset of Jewish communities and movements in Medina and the expectations surrounding the role of the Ka'ba in pre-Islamic Arabia.

4.2. Post-Second Temple Jewish Art and Architecture.

The evidence that points to Jerusalem-orientated prayer amongst Jews goes back as far as the building of the first Temple by King Solomon (c. 10th century B.C.E.). According to the account in I Kings 8:22-53, Solomon brings the Ark of the Covenant into the newly build Temple, speaks of it as the “House of God” and that it is the place to orient prayer:

That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place.
And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive. (I Kings 8:29-30 JPS)

There is further evidence of this tradition found in the Book of Daniel, which although set in the 6th century B.C.E. was written much later with the apocalyptic Jewish literature of the 2nd century B.C.E. (Skolnik, Fred & Michael Berenbaum 2007, 5.421-22):

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. (Daniel 6:10 JPS)

In Late Antiquity there was the additional aspect of a seeking a now-destroyed Temple, which does not undermine the tradition that Jerusalem-orientated prayer was part of normative Jewish expectations as far back as the first millennium B.C.E.

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, Rachel Hachlili indicated that most Jewish synagogues in Late Antiquity almost uniformly pointed towards Jerusalem and the “Great Sanctuary”, the Temple site as the centre of the cosmos, where the foundation stone of the world was placed, from which all Jews gained purpose and meaning (Rachel Hachlili 1997, 94; Muchawsky-Schnapper 2006, 309). This remained significant for all Jews of the diaspora after the destruction of the Second Temple and the fall of Jerusalem (135 C.E.) as a symbol of an expected apocalyptic return and restitution of Jews and Gentiles at the Temple Mount, and Jerusalem as the ‘mother city’ of the Jewish people. This was unlike Christian Churches which were mostly east-facing, although there was diversity of expression as with the synagogues.

The impact of the 2nd century expulsion from Jerusalem and the earlier destruction of the Second Temple was far more significant for the Jewish communities of the diaspora, than for the ascending power of the Church. So although there may be similarities in style between churches and synagogues, by the 3rd century C.E. the “back story” was significantly different and this has continued to influence orientation of synagogues and churches (Wilkinson 1984, 26).

At this time, there was still a distinction between synagogues (*bātê kēnēsîyôt*) and schools or learning centres (*bātê midrāšôt*) (Cohen 1999, 298), and in this way they functioned as a focus of community life much like the Temple had done. The synagogues of Galilee and Golan, as well as the 3rd century Dura Europos synagogue on the Euphrates, faced Jerusalem with a Torah niche on the wall of orientation, celebrating the life of Abraham and the Temple cult, rather than the Torah scrolls themselves (Meyers 1980, 100).

In addition to the observation that many synagogues from 3rd century C.E. [or maybe earlier]⁵⁶ were orientated towards Jerusalem, it appears there was also a tradition for their entrance doors to face east, in the same way that the doors of the Tabernacle in the first Temple faced east (Figure 6a/b). The structure of synagogues in Late Antiquity was mostly orientated, with the Torah niche, towards Jerusalem with their main entrance facing east, regardless of the position of the Torah niche.

The Book of Ezekiel reflects this as it indicates the glory of God fills the Temple from the east:

Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.
 And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face.
 And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east.

⁵⁶ See the study on the synagogue at Gamla (1st century C.E.) (Chapter 4.4) indicates a Jerusalem orientated niche.

So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house. (Ezekiel 43:1-5 JPS)

The Tosefta Megillah (c.190 – c.230 C.E.) as a supplement to the Mishnah, required all synagogue doors to face east, as the doors of the Tabernacle in Jerusalem faced east (Cohen 1999, 320; Lansberger 1957, 188), echoing the words of the Torah (Numbers 3:38):

"אין פותחין פתחי בתי כנסיות אלא למזרח שכן מצינו בהיכל שהיה פתוח למזרח שנא' (במדבר ג':ל"ח) והחונים לפני המשכן קדמה לפני אהל מועד מזרחה אין בונין אותו אלא בגובהה של עיר שנא' (משלי א':כ"א) בראש הומיות תקרא."

Tosefta Megillah (3:14)⁵⁷

"Do not open the doors of the sanctuary except to the east, as we found in the temple that was open to the east and camp before the tabernacle before the tent of meeting toward the east;"

This passage highlights the need to open the synagogue entrance to the east as the sanctuary (למזרח שכן מצינו בהיכל) doors in the Temple faced east (המשכן):

And those that were to pitch before the tabernacle eastward, before the tent of meeting toward the sunrising, were Moses, and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary, even the charge for the children of Israel; and the common man that drew nigh was to be put to death. (Numbers 3:38 JPS)

⁵⁷ *Seder Moed: Tosefta Megillah (Vilna edition)*. Sefaria.org. Accessed 1st July 2021.
https://www.sefaria.org/Tosefta_Megillah.3.14?lang=bi

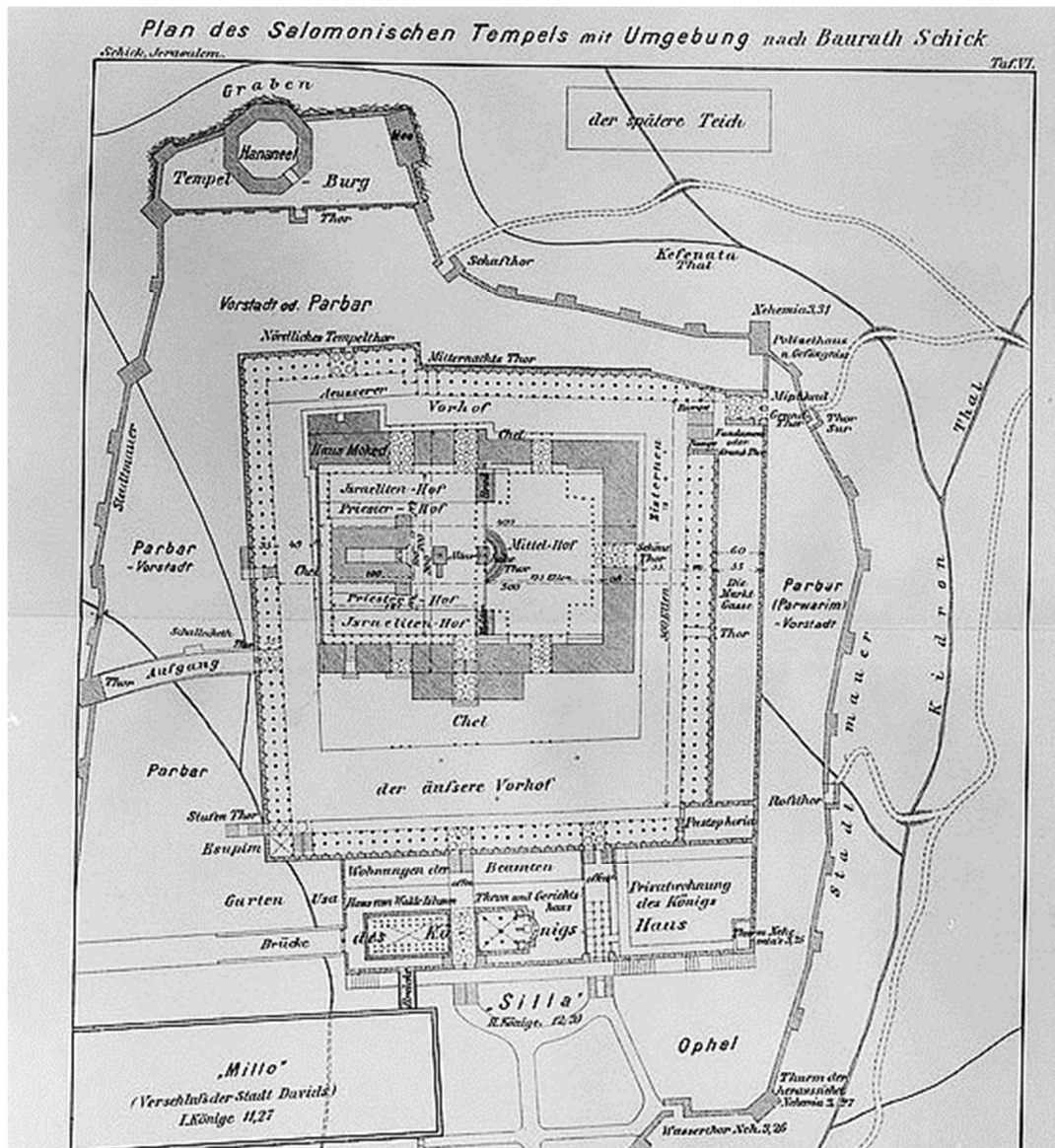
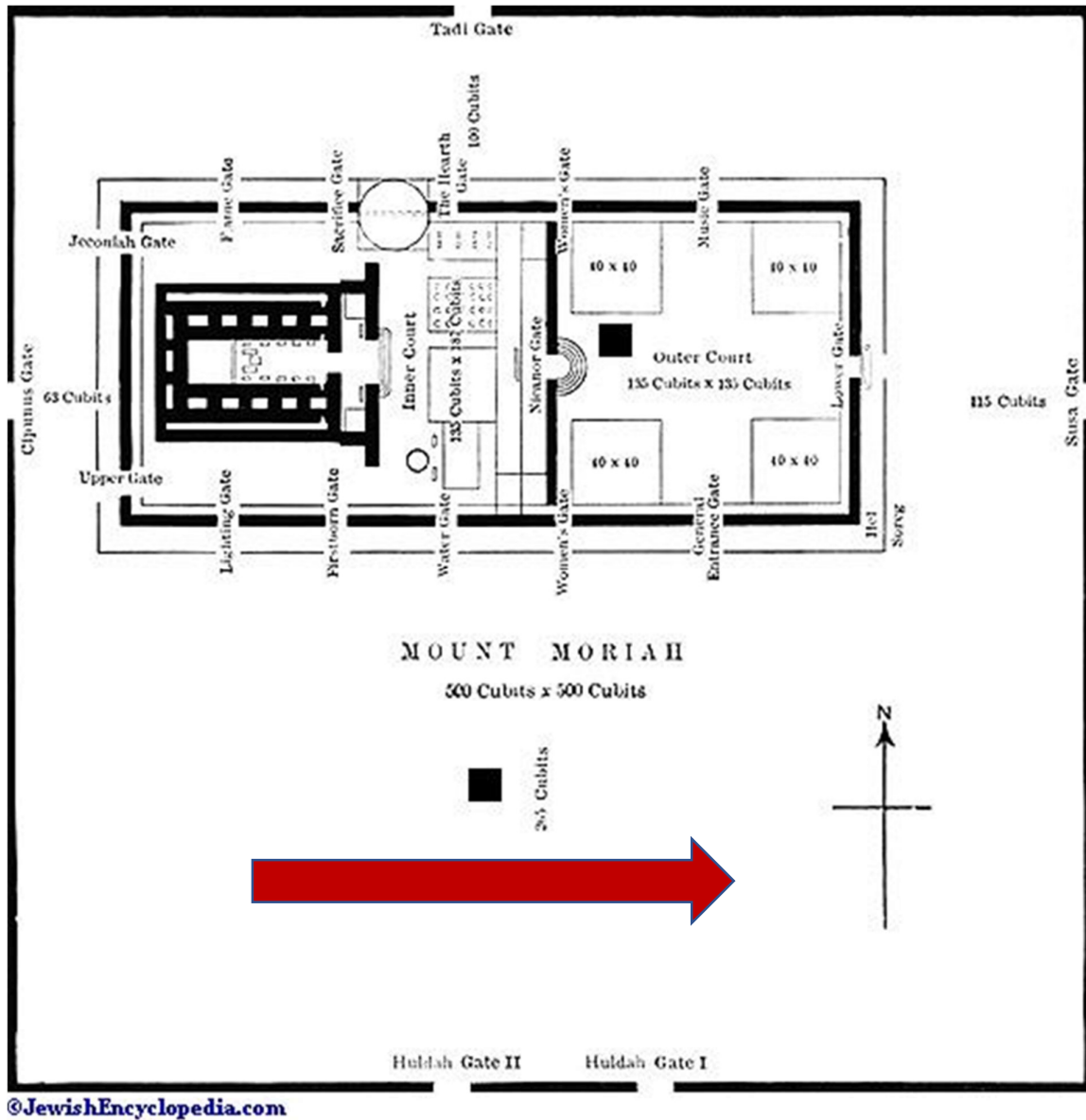


Figure 6a: Plan showing the position of the First Temple (Solomon's) (Schick 1923, Plate 6).

Figure. 6b: Plan Showing Position of the Temple facing east on Mount Moriah according to the Talmud. (Designed by J. D. Eisenstein, New York.), cf. *Temple in Rabbinical Literature* in Jewish Encyclopaedia online. Accessed 25th June 2021. <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14308-temple-in-rabbinical-literature>



This requirement is not demonstrated uniformly in the Galilean region but is evident at most of the sites visited during my fieldwork (discussed below), and at Dura Europos. It may also relate to the placement of the east-facing door in the pre-Islamic, and current Ka'ba as I considered earlier.

Together with areas studied in other chapters, Jewish art and architecture respond to the messianic hopes that existed through 'sects' or movements (as with the Essenes in 1st century C.E. Palestine), or through more mainstream beliefs. By whatever means, it is evident that, within synagogue architecture and art, we find a strong Jewish hope for a unified people under God's rule, led by prophet or messiah figures, and a restitution of Jerusalem and the longed-for third Temple. These themes can be found in sanctuary orientation, eastward entrances, and the mixture of 'pagan' and Temple cult images in the synagogues of Galilee and Golan (second to the eighth century C.E.), and in the paintings of the Dura Europos Synagogue of the third century C.E. It can also be found in rituals and worship, within the festival of *Sukkōt* and in Jewish liturgy to this day (Rabbinical Assembly 2013, 311):

Fifth B'rakhah: The Restoration of Zion

ADONAI our God, embrace Your people Israel and their prayer.
Restore worship to Your sanctuary. May the prayers of the
people Israel be lovingly accepted by You, and may our service
always be pleasing. May our eyes behold Your compassionate
return to Zion. Barukh atah ADONAI, who restores Your Divine
Presence to Zion.

4.3. *Sukkōt*, an annual festival of Ingathering

The most important aspect of Wischnitzer's study, *The Messianic Theme in the Paintings of the Dura Europos Synagogue*, for the present thesis is that the concept of a *Messiah ben Joseph* appears as a prime figure in the diaspora Jewish community, together with the focus on the cult of the Temple and the annual festival of ingathering, *Sukkōt*. Joseph Gutmann argues that all the paintings at Dura Europos form one narrative related to the Ark of the Covenant, beginning

with the Tabernacle in the Sinai Wilderness and ending with the Torah shrine, and that the synagogue was a replacement for the Temple (1973, 137-54). The conclusion is that within the Jewish diaspora the tradition of orientating their synagogues towards the Temple in Jerusalem and the aspiration towards the cult of the Temple was very much alive and present over a wide area.

Kära L. Schenk points to a small inscription within the Dura Europos synagogue, apparently made by its builder. It says:

I... made the beit (“house”)
[for the] arona (“ark”).
[I,] ... Joseph son of Abba.... (2010, 204)

The *aron ha-berit* or Ark of the Covenant was historically or traditionally the Ark moved by the Israelites from Sinai to the Promised Land, located in a ‘tent’, until King David sought to build a permanent ‘house’ or Temple in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 7), facing east. The synagogue in the diaspora had replaced the now absent, but long sought-for Temple. The tradition of a moving sanctuary, and the replication of this in synagogues that took their focus from the House of God in Jerusalem, does impact on the hypothesis that the Ka’ba was a pre-Islamic Hebrew sanctuary, ‘a tent of meeting’ or tabernacle (Exod. 33:7-11.).

Buildings and pictures are often reflections of a community’s wider narrative. The Dura Europos Synagogue appears to use paintings to tell the history of their Jewish identity. Through the blessings and destructions of history, a faithful Israel will return to Jerusalem and re-instate the Temple cult. The *Messiah ben Joseph* figure is operative in this event, but so too are God’s faithful people, who ‘in God’s time’ will bring about an ingathering of the nations of the world signified in the festival of *Sukkōt*. This festival of ingathering begins with the prophetic reading (*haftara*) of Zechariah:

And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD,
and his name one. (Zech. 14:9 JPS)

Part of this celebration of ingathering is the unity of the nations under one God:

And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. (Zech. 14:16 JPS) (cf. Vernoff 2019, 8-9)

The forty years the Israelites spent in the wilderness became the prototype of future exiles. The entry into the Promised Land led by Joshua, and the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths (*Sukkōt*), became the celebration of an eschatological redemption and unity surrounding the later, final, permanent House of God, the *Har HaBáyit* (הַר הַבַּיִת) in Jerusalem (Rubenstein 1996, 161-95). On the seventh day of *Sukkōt* (*Hoshana Rabbah*) the people circumambulate the Temple counterclockwise seven times, before the eighth day, when redemption will be completed. At the “end times” the twelve tribes and the ‘seventy nations’ of the gentile world will be in unity under the one God.⁵⁸

Sukkōt is the major festival *Chag* (גָּח) of the Temple cult, and is the reason for the *Eetrog* and *Lulav* being replicated in so much of Synagogue art. The ritual is mentioned in the Torah:

And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before HaShem your G-d seven days. (Lev. 23:40 JPS)

The *lulav* is a palm branch, and an *etrog* is a citron fruit (*Citrus medica*). the “fruit of goodly trees”, which are joined with myrtle and willow branches. The four species are held and waved during the festival of *Sukkōt* towards the four cardinal points, and up and down, to represent the seasons and the weather. It should be noted here, the similarity of the seven-times counterclockwise circumambulation around the Ka‘ba during the *Hajj* and the Jewish belief and cultic rituals surrounding the final establishment of the messianic third Temple in Jerusalem (cf. Rubenstein 1993, 188). This will be further discussed in later chapters.

⁵⁸ **Seventy bulls** were sacrificed over the days of the festival of *Sukkōt*: “Rabbi Elazar said: These seventy bulls that are sacrificed as additional offerings over the course of the seven days of Sukkot, to what do they correspond? They correspond to the seventy nations of the world, and are brought to atone for their sins and to hasten world peace.” *Bavli Sukkah* 55b:9 Sefaria.org. Accessed 3rd October 2021. <https://www.sefaria.org/Sukkah.55b.10?lang=bi>

4.4. The Synagogue sites of Galilee and Golan

The focus for my fieldwork was the synagogues of the Galilee and Golan regions. The reason for choosing these areas of northern Palestine was that this was the region of the early diaspora after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 135 C.E., following the Bar Kokhba revolt. In addition to synagogues being orientated towards the Sanctuary, there was a further seeking for restoration and return from the 2nd century onwards made evident in their artwork of the Temple cult. Many of the synagogues I wanted to visit were noted for significant structures or remains of Torah shrines:

The best-preserved examples of architectural fragments presumed to be from the Torah shrine consist of lintels, columns and reliefs. Several fragments were found in Galilee and especially in the Golan. Lintels possibly belonging to aediculae have been excavated at various sites in the Holy Land. The Hirbet en-Nebratēn lintel, the limestone fragment from Šārim (Rehov) depicting a striding lion, a decorated column from Chorazin, several basalt reliefs found in the Golan such as a double column and a small keystone from Qatzrin, a small double column capital of basalt with an eagle relief from Umm al-Qanāṭir, and a relief from Hirbet Zamīmrā showing a column and a lion, may have belonged to aediculae. (Rachel Hachlili 2000, 153)

Given the limited time to visit and observe size and orientation, the focus on Galilee and Golan proved to be the most effective way of studying these sites first hand and relate them to my archaeological secondary research.

As a contrast to my fieldwork aims, I wish to consider Gamla (Golan) as an example of the earliest synagogue structure (c. 1st century C.E.) (Levine 2000). Lidia Matassa in her study *Invention of the First-Century Synagogue* (Matassa 2018) describes “a sort of prototype aedicula”, which indicates a possible directional marker within the building. Rachel Hachlili, however, questions such an early use of the Torah Shrine for orientation:

These structures might have had a focal point in the center of the hall. However, they lack the most important feature of the later synagogue: the Torah shrine, an architectural structure that housed the Ark of the Scrolls and was usually located on the Jerusalem-oriented wall.[...] In most synagogue excavations in the Holy Land and in the Diaspora, the fact has emerged that nearly every excavated synagogue yields

fragments, traces of a site, or the actual site of the Torah shrine as early as the second century C.E. (Hachlili 2000, 146)

Elsewhere there does appear some suggestion that the Torah niche at Gamla was Jerusalem-orientated. In the excavation review of the synagogue in *Ancient Synagogues of the Golan*, the authors remark:

More surprises awaited the excavators. In the northwest corner of the synagogue was an alcove built in the stone wall, measuring 1.0 meter in width by 2.5 meters in height. It is possible that, within this niche, stood the wooden ark where the scrolls scriptures written on parchment — were stored. The Tosefta describes the orientation of the seating arrangements in synagogues and the reading of the Torah:

“How would the elders sit? They would face the congregation and their backs would be towards ‘the holy.’ [קודש קודש] When the ark was put down, it faced the congregation and its back was towards ‘the holy.’ When the Priests would raise their hands and bless the people, they would face the congregation and their backs would be towards ‘the holy.’ The cantor of the congregation would face ‘the holy,’ and the entire congregation would face ‘the holy,’ as is written: ‘And the congregation would gather towards the entrance of the Tabernacle.’ (*Tosefta Megillah* (3:21)⁵⁹)

From this text, it is possible to re-enact the Torah-reading ceremony as it was conducted in Gamla. The Torah scrolls were stored in an ark that was brought from its place of storage and placed in the center of the hall. The congregation would then take its place seated on the stone benches around the perimeter of the hall, with the town notables, elders, and priests sitting on the benches directly flanking the entrance. This was because the entrance to the Gamla synagogue faced the general direction of Jerusalem (west-southwest). (Meir, Dafna and Eran Meir 2005, 36,38)

Gamla was understood not to be within the category I had initially considered for later [post Second Temple] synagogues of 3rd-8th century Palestine, for the reasons Hachlili gives above (Hachlili 2000, 146). It does appear for some writers (Meir and Meir) that this 1st century synagogue contained an earlier tradition of Jerusalem orientation shrines and eastward facing entrances.

⁵⁹ *Seder Moed: Tosefta Megillah (Lieberman edition)*. Sefaria.org. Accessed 1st July 2021. [https://www.sefaria.org/Tosefta_Megillah_\(Lieberman\).3.21?lang=bi](https://www.sefaria.org/Tosefta_Megillah_(Lieberman).3.21?lang=bi)

The exact *terminus ad quem* for this site was 10 November 67 C.E. when Gamla fell to the Romans (Matassa 2018, 190). If this judgement on the positioning of the niche is correct it means that whilst the Temple was in existence there was a tradition of Jerusalem orientation in synagogues that was later documented in the 2nd century *Tosefta Megillah*. This is important when considering the extent of Jerusalem-orientated synagogues before the 2nd century and so impacts on the question of whether the Ka'ba potentially had a Hebrew foundation dating from before the Christian Era.

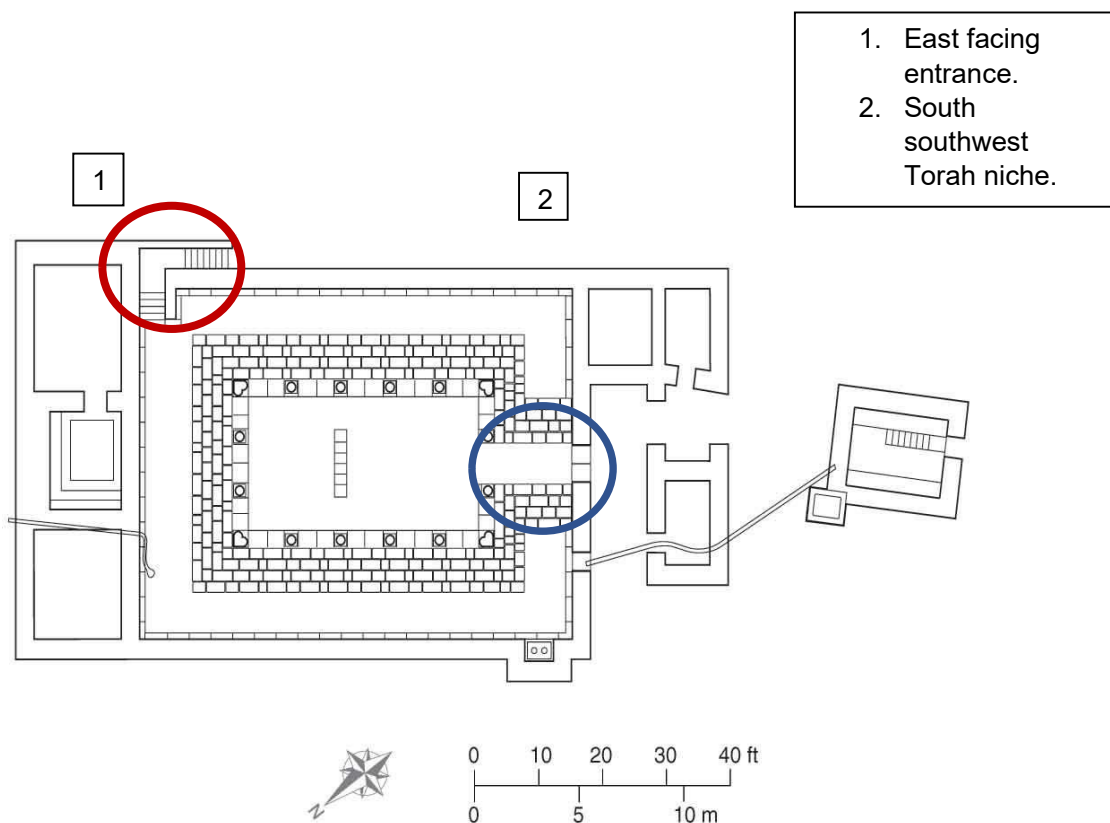


Figure 7: The floorplan of the synagogue at Gamla. Taken from the ESV® Study Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright ©2008 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Given these provisions, my fieldwork in this aspect of my thesis was a study of the Galilee and Golan regions as a centre of the early Jewish diaspora after the destruction of

Jerusalem, particularly in the city of Sepphoris (Magness 2010, 150). This decision was guided by the historical movements of Jewish communities in the 2nd – 7th centuries C.E. and their aspirations for a messianic restitution of the Temple and God's people, as ritualized in the festival of *Sukkot*. Rachel Hachlili indicates the importance of this northern area of Palestine in relation to synagogues of Late Antiquity:

Typological differences in the Torah shrines should be attributed to local preferences, popular vogues or historical development. Chronologically, the aedicula, already in existence by the second century, is the earliest type of Torah shrine. It was the most popular and characteristic type in Galilean and Golan synagogues throughout that period. (Hachlili 1989, 3)

This on-site research provided a resource for evaluating the use and continuation of Jewish art in a region of the diaspora forced apart from the Temple in the centuries following 135 C.E. As a foundation document for this research, I took recourse to Rachel Hachlili's study, *Ancient Synagogues in Israel: Third – Seventh century* (Hachlili 1989) and this led me to the specific sites that I visited in September 2019 (see Figure 8). Because of the Syrian conflict, I was not able to access the remains of the Dura Europos Synagogue that are currently located in the National Museum in Damascus. The aim and purpose of this fieldtrip to Galilee and Golan was to assess the orientation of the buildings indicated by their Torah niches, the directional location of their entranceways, and to review the consistent elements of cultic imagery, the Temple, and the Prophets.

Baruch Bokser in his article, *Rabbinic Responses to Catastrophe: From Continuity to Discontinuity*, highlights the significance of the Destruction of Jerusalem to the Jewish mindset:

The catastrophe posed a crisis of overwhelming proportions. The Second Temple had become the symbolic center for Jews in Palestine and throughout the Diaspora, an axis that insured the community's connection with the divine realm, and a place where to atone for sins and to satisfy other religious need. (1983, 37)

The narrative of sinfulness, destruction, expulsion, and return is woven into the lives of every Jew (cf. Exod. 25:8-9, 1 Chron. 28:18; and later Ezekiel 40-48, Zech. 2:5-9), and outlined in 2 Apoc. Bar. 44:5-7 (Charles 2006), [c 90 C.E.] (Rost 1976, 128-129):

And see you what hath befallen Zion,
 And what hath happened to Jerusalem.
 For the judgment of the Mighty One shall (thereby) be made known,
 And His ways, which, though past finding out, are right.
 For if you endure and persevere in His fear,
 And do not forget His law,
 The times shall change over you for good.
 And you shall see the consolation of Zion.⁶⁰

Concurrent with these later writings was the belief that the heavenly Temple and New Jerusalem would replace the earthly institutions at the “end times”, with the fulfilment of God’s redemption of all the peoples on earth. These events were interpreted within the narrative of 2 Maccabees (2nd century B.C.E.), which described the Temple desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes IV as the result of the “sins of Israel” (2 Macc. 5:17-20). In addition, in 1 Enoch 90:28-9 (also from the Maccabean era) it is understood these events were part of the coming eschatological era (cf. 4 Ezra 7:26, 2 Apoc. Bar. 32:2-4.) (Stone 1981, 197). It is important to study the evidence of this focus on the Temple in Jerusalem and its destiny at the end times. For those ejected from Jerusalem in 135 C.E. and the subsequent forceful establishment of the Roman polis of *Aelia Capitolina*, it meant an exclusion from the cultic traditions of the Temple Mount. Seth Schwartz in an article *Rabbis and Patriarchs on The Margins*, argues that for a significant time (up to 350 C.E.) there was little leadership under the Roman yoke, “for there was not really any Jewish society to lead.” (2001, 104). He develops this hypothesis:

We perhaps need to assume that some Jews retained a sense of being Jewish if only to understand how northern Palestine could have become Jewish in a strong sense after 350. We can only speculate about the character of its Jewishness before that date; for now it may prove instructive to try to imagine Judaism, or rather the disintegrated shards of Judaism, surviving as a nonexclusive religious option in a religious system that was basically pagan. (2001, 104-5)

It is of significant importance to this thesis to recognise that, despite diversity and assimilation in Late Antiquity, the universal focus of all Jewish movements – whether

⁶⁰ *The Apocalypse of Baruch (2 Baruch)*. Early Christian Writings. Accessed 1st July 2021.
<http://wesley.nnu.edu/sermons-essays-books/noncanonical-literature/noncanonical-literature-of-pseudepigrapha/the-book-of-the-apocalypse-of-baruch-the-son-of-neriah-or-2-baruch/>

Rabbinical, Nazoraean, or later Karaites, etc. – was to remain trusting in a hope for a future Restoration and Return⁶¹. Thus a tendency developed to orientate synagogues towards the cultic centre, the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem, using a Torah niche and to decorate them internally with images of the Temple cult and of Abraham and the Prophets.

I started my fieldwork at the site of the ancient city of Sepphoris (modern Tzipori) which was known as the ancient ‘Capital of Galilee’, dating back to the earlier Persian era (539-332 B.C.E.). Herod the Great built a royal palace there and his son Herod Antipas, made the city his capital. After the Great Revolt (70 C.E.) the city became a Roman *polis*, becoming a centre for public buildings, and a population apparently pro-Roman. The city remained a cultural mix into the second and third centuries, with synagogues, academies (*beit midrash*) and when the Patriarch (*Nasi*) Rabbi Judah moved to Sepphoris (early third century), there was a significant Jewish presence in the city council.

Following the destruction of Jerusalem in 135 C.E., Jewish influence remained weak in these areas of the early diaspora, Galilee, and Golan. Seth Schwartz clarifies this tenuous era where there was little effective leadership and Roman patterns of law and society were dominant:

The intermediaries of the Torah [the rabbis and patriarchs] lost not only their legal authority but also their status as cultural ideals. Indeed, if there was anything at all holding Palestinian Jewish society together, it may have been no more than an attenuated sense of a common past, a mild feeling of separation from their neighbors that the latter, who had shared memories of their own, may have conspired to maintain. Finally, some Jews, probably a very small number (among them were the rabbis) still insisted on the importance of the Torah, of Judaism, in their symbolic world, and these Jews, convinced of their elite status, tried to insinuate their way into general Palestinian society. (2001, 103)

Until the middle of the 4th century there was little evidence of leadership amongst Jewish society:

All legal authority and political power were in the hands of the Roman state and its local representatives, and the cultural norms, even in the countryside, were

⁶¹ See also *The Mourners for Zion* movement (Braude (trans.) 1968: Piska 34; Wasserstrom 1995b, 53)

overwhelmingly set by the elites of the Palestinian cities, including such 'Jewish' cities as Tiberias, Sepphoris, and Lydda. These norms were pervaded by pagan religiosity and were basically shared by imperial Greek cities generally. (2001, 104)

The mind-set of Jews in northern Palestine at this time was one of vague remembrance and absorption into pagan culture. Roman suppression through legal and social edicts provided little opportunity and structure for Jewish ideals and religiosity. *4 Ezra*, written in the late first century, encapsulates this pervading sorrow, leading to "a kind of submission to fate accompanied by a defiant assertion of the covenant's enduring validity" (2001, 109). The writer of the *Apocalypse* describes the abject sorrow at the loss of the Temple:

So I proceeded to speak further unto her, and said: No, woman! No woman! Do not do so;
 But suffer thyself to be prevailed upon by reason of Sion's misfortunes, be consoled by reason of Jerusalem's sorrow.
 For thou seest how our sanctuary is laid waste, our altar thrown down;
 our Temple destroyed, our harp laid low;
 our song is silenced, our rejoicing ceased;
 the light of our lamp is extinguished,⁶² the ark of the covenant spoiled;
 our holy things are defiled, the name that is called upon us is profaned;
 our nobles are dishonoured, our priests burnt, our Levites gone into captivity [...] (4 Ezra 10:20-22. Cf. Box 1912, 225-7)

However, with increased trade and wealth from the 4th century the Jewish communities began to gain confidence and revive leadership within their localities. This is seen in the later examples of synagogue art and architecture between the 4th and 7th centuries in the Galilee and Golan region, that I detail later in this chapter. Considering the chronology of synagogues in the Galilee and Golan locations, there is supportive evidence of renewed building from the 4th century C.E. and that earlier buildings, "of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, like Jewish public buildings before 70, apparently were relatively modest structures." (Magness 2012, 112). Jodi Magness continues by pointing out that the synagogues of Galilee, "date to the second half of the 5th century and the 6th century. Nonetheless, even synagogue buildings that fall into one of the traditional types display variations resulting from regionalism and local building materials, the

⁶² cf. the *Ner Tamid*, the Eternal light. One of the first steps by Judas Maccabeus was to re-light this lamp at the re-dedication of the Temple in 164 B.C.E. (1 Maccabees 4:36-69).

preferences of congregations and donors, the economic resources of the local community, and perhaps different movements or liturgies within Judaism.” (2012, 117). We see here that the current chronology of Galilean synagogues dates from the later 4th to the 7th century C.E. With regard to the chronology of the Golan synagogues, Zvi Ma‘oz offers a suggestion based on “a special blend of architectural styles” that divides them into two groups: “The first group consists of synagogues erected in the fifth century C.E., and the second of synagogues built in the beginning of the sixth century C.E.” (1988, 119).

The existence of sacred and pagan art reflects this situation where Roman cultural dominance had been present for the centuries since the expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem. What remains consistent and is important to recognize for this thesis is the unwavering focus on the ideal of a future return and renewal of the Temple cult, perhaps more significant than the words of the Torah or the Torah scrolls.

In the 2-3rd centuries immediately following the devastating destruction of and the expulsion from the city of Jerusalem, the Jewish community appears fragmented and at a loss (Hachlili 1997, 92). There is evidence over this time that alternative actions were substituted for an absent Temple, leading to extra-Temple sacrificial rites, and of course, Jerusalem-orientated synagogues.

Within the Talmud in the recension of the document *Abot de Rabbi Nathan version A*, the story of the Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai (teacher of Rabbi Ḥanina ben Dosa) is recounted:

Once as Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai was coming out of Jerusalem, Rabbi Joshua followed him, and beheld the Temple in ruins. Said R. Joshua, Woe unto us that this place, the place where the iniquities of Israel were atoned for, is in ruins. Said [Rabban Yohanan] to him, My son, be not grieved. We have another atonement that is like it. And what is it? It is acts of lovingkindness, as it is said, ‘For I desire mercy (chesed), not sacrifice’ (Hosea 6:6). (Bokser 1983, 37)

The adaptation of sacrificial rites did not abrogate the continued hope and aspiration of a return to Jerusalem and the sanctity of the Temple. This underlying thread, evidenced in the many eras of exile and expulsion of the Hebrews, impacts again on the Jewish mind-set during

the decades of Muḥammad's revelation, as I shall suggest later in this chapter. J.M. Baumgarten observes this thread even within the communities at Qumrān, coexisting with the other Jewish movements of 1st century Palestine:

It is true that the Qumrān sect was led by its separatist orientation to stress the value of substitute sacrifices, but it never abandoned the belief in the sanctity of Jerusalem and the centrality of the Temple. The hypothesis that they brought offerings there when religious and political circumstances were favourable is compatible with the presently available evidence. (Baumgarten 1977, 74)

Whilst the Temple could not be replaced and sacrifices resume, there was still a hope for a time when there would be a return and a restitution of the Temple cult in Jerusalem.

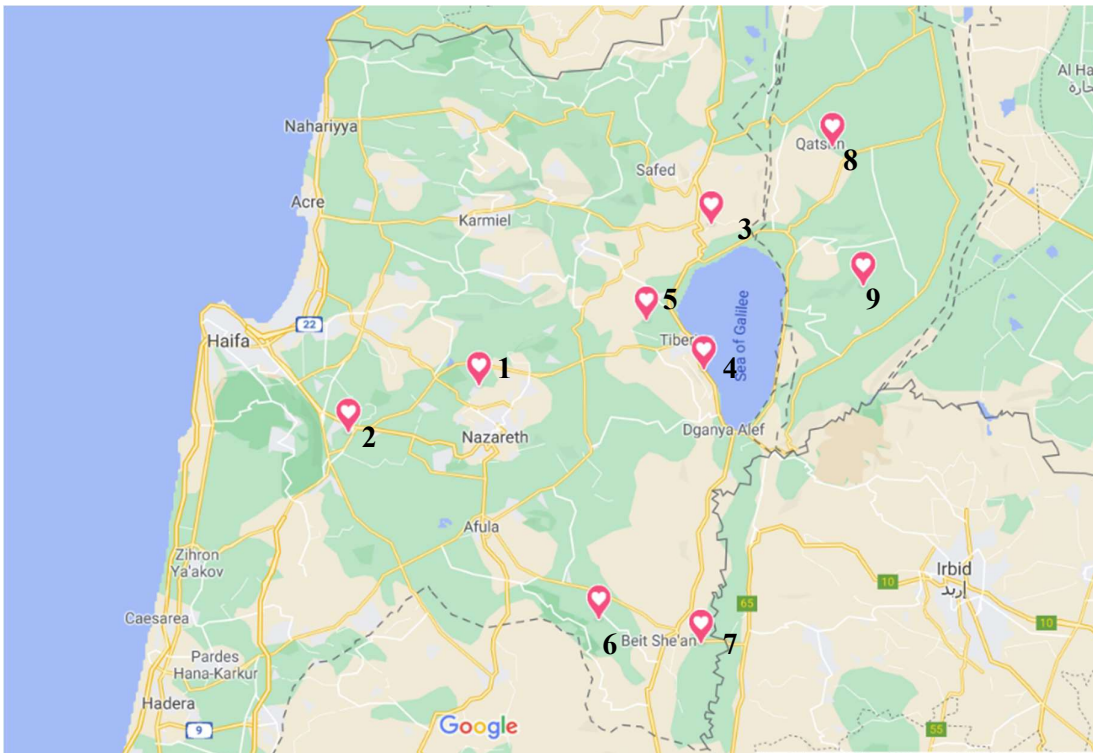


Figure 8: The location of ancient synagogue sites visited during my fieldwork in September 2019. (Map courtesy of Google maps).

1. Sepphoris
2. Bet She'arim
3. Korazim
4. Hamat Terverya
5. 'Arbel
6. Beit 'Alpha
7. Beit She'an
8. Katzrin
9. Ein Keshatot

4.4.1 The Synagogue at Sepphoris (Tzipori) - Lower Galilee

I begin with a study of the synagogue at Sepphoris because of the importance of the city to Roman northern Galilee and that this area, with Bet She'arim, were locations for the early Jewish diaspora after the Bar Kokhba revolt in 2nd century C.E. (Miller 1984, 132). The current synagogue of Sepphoris dates from the early 5th century to the early 7th century, the earlier building having been destroyed. This occurred either after the Jewish revolt against the rule of Constantius Gallus in lower Galilee and the subsequent destruction of the city (352 C.E.) (Stemberger 2000, 162) or through an earthquake in 363 C.E. (Weiss, Zeev 2005, 39). Zvi Ma'oz questions the extent of this chronology, pointing to the observation that the mosaic would have been unlikely to have remained without development for over 200 years (Ma'oz 2015, 291), suggesting rather its construction at a later point: "be fixed at c. 500 CE or, even more likely, at c. 600 CE." (2015, 294). As mentioned, this was a time of renewed strength within the Jewish communities of northern Palestine, whilst remaining under Roman law and culture. In addition, most of the structures evidently post-date the 4th century because of a major earthquake at that time (363 C.E.). The floor of the synagogue is covered with figurative scenes, with Aramaic and Greek dedicatory inscriptions. The mosaics are in seven 'bands' across the building leading to the northern wall. The zodiac dominates the centre of the whole floor mosaic (Figure 9a); the depictions below it are associated with the biblical patriarchs and illustrate the visit of the angels to Abraham and Sarah at Mamre and the Binding of Isaac, and the panels above it portray primarily motifs related to the Tabernacle and the Temple in Jerusalem (Figure 9b).

In addition to the well-known Jewish symbols – the Temple façade flanked on either side by a menorah, a shofar, and tongs (Figure 9b) – these panels display additional themes, such as Aaron's Consecration to the Service of the Tabernacle, the Daily Sacrifice, the Showbread Table, and the Basket of the First Fruits. The main theme of this mosaic is that God

is the centre of Creation, and He has chosen His people, the people of Israel; in the future, as fulfilment of His promise to Abraham on Mount Moriah, God will rebuild the Temple and redeem the children of Abraham. This messianic theme of redemption is not unusual and is pictured through the common motifs of Abraham, the binding of Isaac and separately, the Temple cult and the hope



Figure 9a: The central floor zodiac mosaic of the synagogue at Sepphoris. Photo taken on location 01/09/19.

of return. The Torah niche of the building is on the northern wall. This may appear to contradict the hypothesis of southerly, Jerusalem-orientated synagogues, however there is some evidence that the opposing door to the Torah niche was symbolic of a worshipper leaving the building facing south towards Jerusalem (Figure 4c) (Hachlili 1989, 16). Franz Lansberger highlights

the change occurring at a time when the Torah niche became more uniformly Jerusalem-orientated in the 5th century C.E. onwards:

In Palestine, this transfer of the sacred direction from the entrance to the opposite wall is reflected in architectural remains not earlier than the fifth or sixth centuries of our era. (Lansberger 1957, 185)

Although outside of Palestine the placing of the Torah niche towards Jerusalem happened earlier, such as in the Dura Europos synagogue (3rd century C.E.) (1957, 186).



Figure 9b: The second band mosaic of the synagogue at Sepphoris. Photo taken on location 01/09/19.

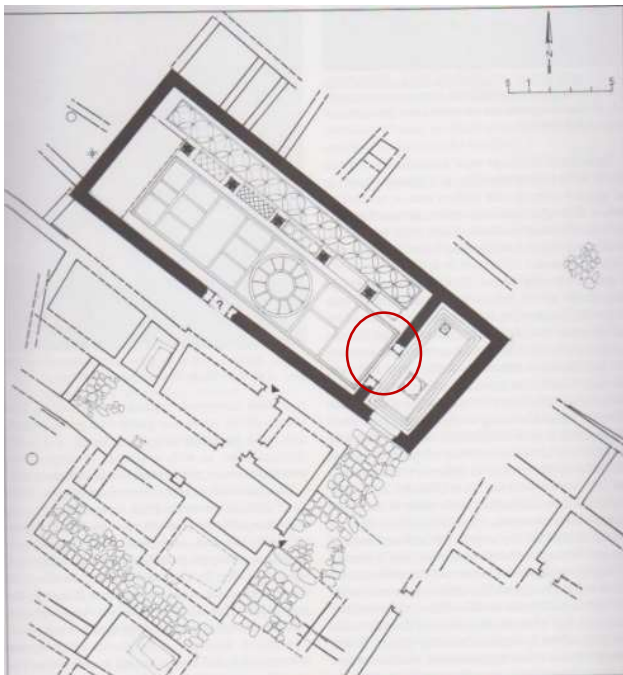


Figure 9c: Floorplan of synagogue at Sepphoris. Torah niche to NW and door facing SE (Jerusalem S.) (Weiss 2005, 9. Courtesy of Prof. Zeev Weiss, *The Sepphoris Excavations*, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

4.4.2 The Synagogue at Beit She'arim - Lower Galilee

The most recent major excavations of the synagogue at Beit She'arim occurred between 1936 and 1958, firstly by the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society, and later by the Israel Exploration Society with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Magness 2010, 137). The focus of the site was the large complex of catacombs in the caves on the site. I wished to focus only on the nature and orientation of the synagogue site. The town dates from the second century B.C.E., and in the late 2nd and early 3rd century C.E. it became the centre for Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (Judah the Patriarch), head of the Sanhedrin and formative teacher in the redaction of the Mishnah. For this reason, the synagogues at Sepphoris and at Bet She'arim are linked:

It is taught in a *baraita*: Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was lying ill in Tzipori and a burial site was ready for him in Beit She'arim. The Gemara asks: But isn't it taught in a *baraita*: 'Justice, justice shall you follow' [Deuteronomy 16:20]; follow Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi to Beit She'arim, i.e., one should seek to have his case adjudicated by Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's court in Beit She'arim. This indicates that Beit She'arim, not Tzipori, was Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi's place of residence, and therefore he must have been lying ill in Beit She'arim.
Talmud – Ketubot 103b:25.⁶³

Rabbi HaNasi died in 220 C.E. and within the cemetery there is significant evidence of images being used, the menorah, the etrog and lulav, together with possible Roman and Hellenistic influences including lions, eagles, and bulls. The towns were clearly comfortable with a cultural mix and were tolerant of non-Jewish influences (Magness 2010, 141).

At the end of the third century the Sanhedrin moved to Sepphoris from Bet She'arim, and the focus of Jewish study moved there too. The town was destroyed in the fourth century by the Romans after a Jewish revolt. This was followed by an earthquake in 363 C.E. and the site as a Jewish centre fell into disrepair for a time.

⁶³ *Seder Nashim: Ketubot*. Sefaria.org. Accessed 6th July 2021. <https://www.sefaria.org/Ketubot.103b.25?lang=bi>

The importance of these two sites is their link between the movement of Jerusalem Jews northward after the destruction of the Temple [70 C.E.] and the expulsion from Jerusalem [135 C.E.]. As suggested in the Talmud, Jewish scholars and the Sanhedrin relocated in this area after the Council of Yavne, meant that they became the centre for the new diaspora in the 2nd century C.E.⁶⁴

In neither site did I find the synagogue clearly orientated towards Jerusalem. Maybe these two synagogues were built too soon after the expulsion from Jerusalem to have developed a narrative of return, or the community was too worn down by Roman occupation. The cultic symbols in the mosaics of Sepphoris may have been a later development (5th century C.E.) and not associated with orientation being located in a pre-existing north facing structure (Avigad 1993). There is no evidence of mosaics present at Bet She'arim to make a comparison.

In the synagogue of Bet She'arim, the rectangular Torah niche is situated towards the north-west wall (see Figure 5a) and could have developed from the blocking-in of a doorway. The entrance is placed at the south-east corner. At the time of my visit, the synagogue site in Bet She'arim was still exposed and not enclosed by fences. It was difficult to recognize a clear floor plan as most of the synagogue site was situated in undergrowth and beyond a private boundary (Figure 5b). There was no remaining evidence of images or mosaics other than a couple of ornate (non-figurative) column capitals.

It is important to note that both synagogues were active at a time similar to that of Dura Europos in the 2nd and early 3rd centuries C.E. (Rajak 2018, 47).

⁶⁴ *Seder Nashim: Gittin*. Sefaria.org. Accessed 6th July 2021. <https://www.sefaria.org/Gittin.56b?lang=bi>

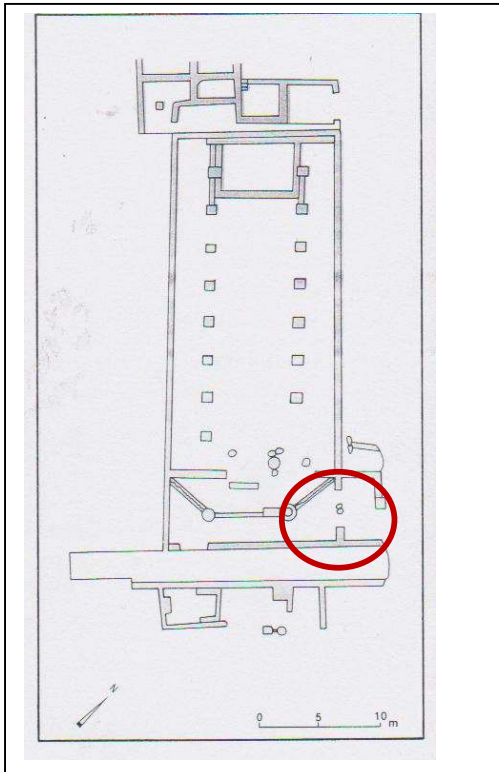


Figure 10a: Floorplan of north-orientated (away from Jerusalem) Beit She'arim synagogue with entrance facing east. Courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society. (Avigad 1993, 238).

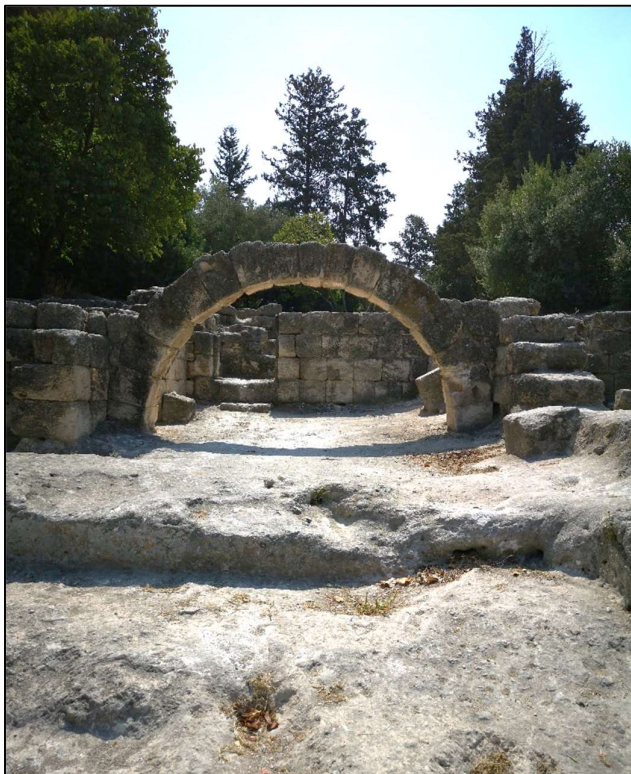


Figure 10b: The remains of Beit She'arim synagogue. Photo, looking south-east, taken on location 01/09/19.

4.4.3 The Synagogue at Korazim (Chorazin) - Lower Galilee

Similar to other synagogues in Lower Galilee, there are examples of diversity in the use of images in the 6th century synagogue at Korazim. The first century Jewish presence in this village is testified through the canonical Gospels (cf. Matt. 11:21; Luke 10:13; Safrai 1990, 181)⁶⁵ however the main settlement dates to the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E. (R. Hachlili 1998, 219) and this is supported by Uzi Leibner who argues for this earlier date of origin:

Korazim is the only other 'Galilean'-type synagogue that has been excavated and fully published, and its excavator⁶⁶ dates the beginning of its construction to the early fourth century CE and its completion to the late fourth. (Leibner 2018,10).

The current remaining structure has a high and wide entrance on the southern wall (Jerusalem-orientated), and this would have also been the wall of the Torah niche. The remains of the arch of the niche are still present, but not in position and the supporting columns are not used in a reconstruction. There are floral and figurative Hellenistic images including *Medusa*,⁶⁷ perhaps present as a token to dispel omens (see Figure 11a-c), however the Torah niche itself appears only to have geometric patterns. The entrance doorway is set to the east. Serapis is mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud as "Sar Apis", an idol thought to have been named after the biblical Joseph.

⁶⁵ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." (Matt. 11:21 NIV)

⁶⁶ Cf. קפלן, י., and J. Kaplan. "Notes on S. Yeivin's Remarks on the Beth-She'arim Excavation Report for 1940 / להערותיו של ייבין לדו"ח הזמני: על החפירות בבית-שערים (1940)." *Bulletin of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society* / *עיתון חפירות ארץ-ישראל ועתיקותיה* ט (1942): 14-113. Accessed July 12, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23725832>.

⁶⁷ It has also been suggested that this is the image of *Sarapis/Helios*, which is also linked to the figure of the Patriarch Joseph in Jewish 3rd century C.E. literature (Necker 2018, 9-15)



Figures 11a-c: The image of Medusa/Sarapis, and floral and geometric patterns within the synagogue at Korazim Photos taken on location 06/09/19.



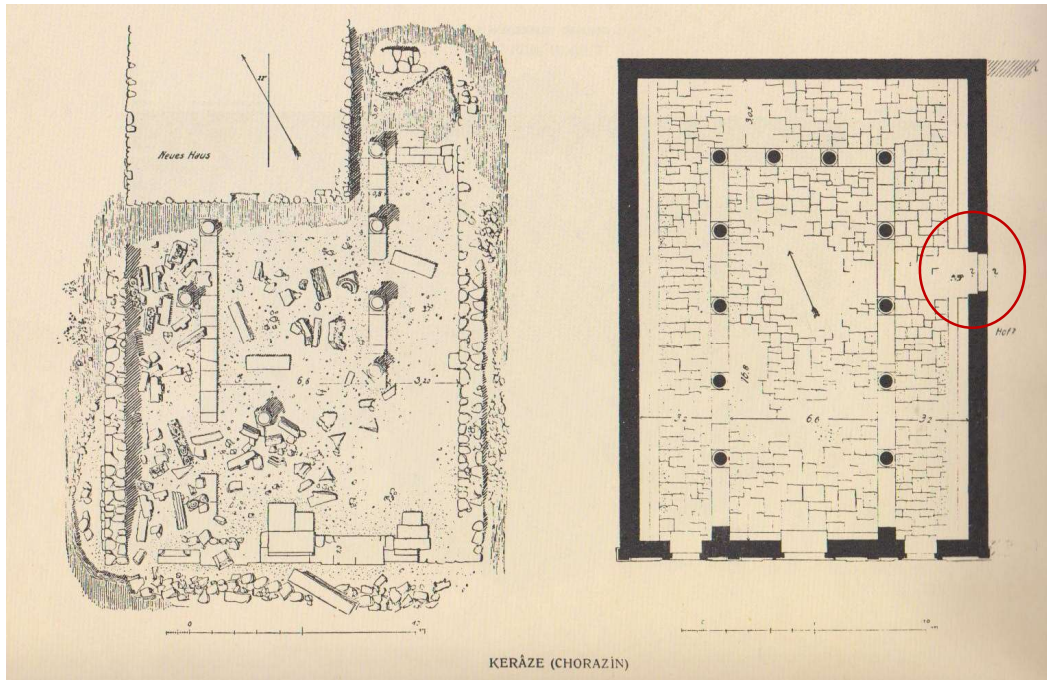


Figure 11d: Floorplan of the synagogue at Korazim with Jerusalem orientated niche (south) and east-facing entrance (circled). Kohl, Heinrich 1916, Plate VII.

4.4.4 The Synagogue at Hamat Terverya (Tiberias) - Lower Galilee

The city of Tiberias has a very long history, given the existence of hot (*hamat*) springs along the west coast of the Sea of Galilee (*Buḥayrat Ṭabarīyā /Yam Kinneret*), and the synagogue is renowned for its elaborate mosaic. There have been three synagogues built on top of each other over the years, which maybe a testament to the long-established Jewish presence in this area. The first building was founded about 230 C.E., with little remaining. The second synagogue, from the 3rd or 4th century, developed the complex mosaic floor (Dothan, 1983 (early 4th century); Magness, 2003 (late 4th century)). In addition, there are two inscriptions on the floor mentioning *Ioulios-Hillel* (Hillel, II), the Jewish Patriarch referred to in a text written by Julian the Apostate c. 361 and 363 C.E. (Appelbaum 2013, 201), which corroborates the late 4th century dating of Jodi Magness. Like those of Sepphoris and Beit ‘Alpha, this mosaic is

divided into three bands with a zodiac motif in the centre, although differing from them in that the third band, farthest from the south-orientated Torah niche, does not refer to Abraham or any biblical image. This band includes a tribute to the donors in Greek, set on either side by two lions. (Figure 12a).

The middle panel is the zodiac motif with a more skilled image than Beit 'Alpha of the sun god *Helios*. Together with the Greek inscription and nude males in *Libra* and *Aquarius*, this denotes a Jewish culture quite at ease with pagan neighbours. (Figure 12b) In the time leading up to the beginning of 5th century C.E. there appears to be a mixing of sacred images with pagan figures in Jewish sanctuaries (Hachlili 1997, 100). The final band nearest to the Torah niche displays the familiar images of the Temple, Menorah, Shofar, Etrog & Lulav and the incense shovel. There is no Eternal Light (*Ner Tamid*), rather the Temple curtain is tied in a knot (Figures 12c-e).

The third synagogue was built after an earthquake at the beginning of the 5th century, including a semi-circular Torah niche in the southern, Jerusalem orientated wall [note: following the southern road along the lake] (Figure 12f). This synagogue continued to be used until 8th century C.E.



Figure 12a: Hamat Terverya synagogue. The third band including Greek inscription. Photo taken on location 08/09/19.



Figure 12b: Hamat Terverya synagogue. The middle zodiac with nude figures. Photo taken on location 08/09/19.



Figures 12c-e:
Hamat Terverya
synagogue. The first
band with images of
Temple cult. Photos
taken on location
08/09/19.



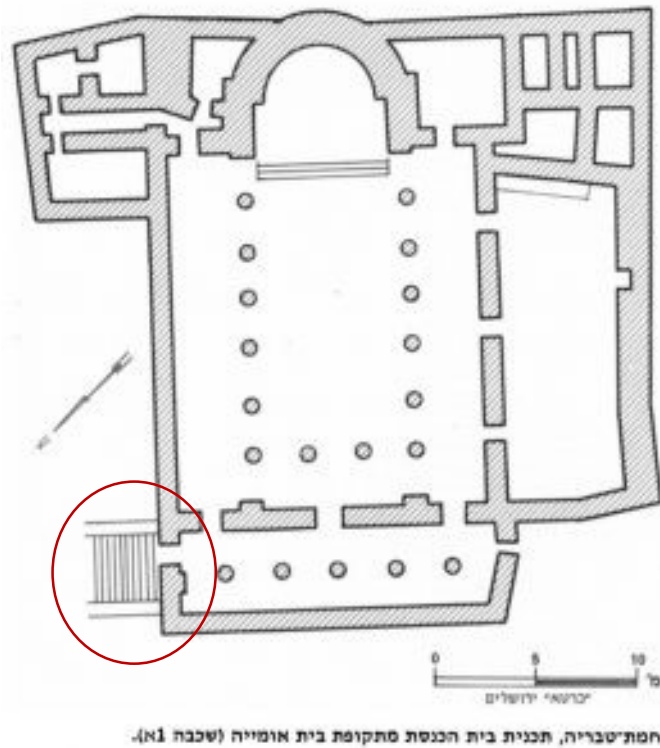


Figure 12f: Floorplan of the Hamat Terverya synagogue, Tiberias. Jerusalem orientated niche and east facing entrance (Dothan 1968, 123).

4.4.5 The Synagogue at ‘Arbel - Lower Galilee

‘Arbel, in the hills above Tiberias, had signs of ongoing excavation. The synagogue was first excavated by Kohl and Watzinger in 1905 (Kohl, Heinrich, 1916, 59), who proposed that the site was originally a 3rd century C.E. building. It has also been suggested that the synagogue is believed to have been built in the 4th century C.E. and probably suffered collapse in the Galilean earthquake of 749 C.E. The two specific areas of interest are the large door frame on the east side (Figure 13a) and the south facing Torah niche (Figure 13b). There was no evidence of stone carving or mosaics at a quite barren site.



Figure 13a: The Synagogue at 'Arbel. The eastward facing entrance. Photo taken on location 08/09/19.

Figure 13b: The Synagogue at 'Arbel.
The south facing wall with Torah Niche.
Photo taken on location 08/09/19.

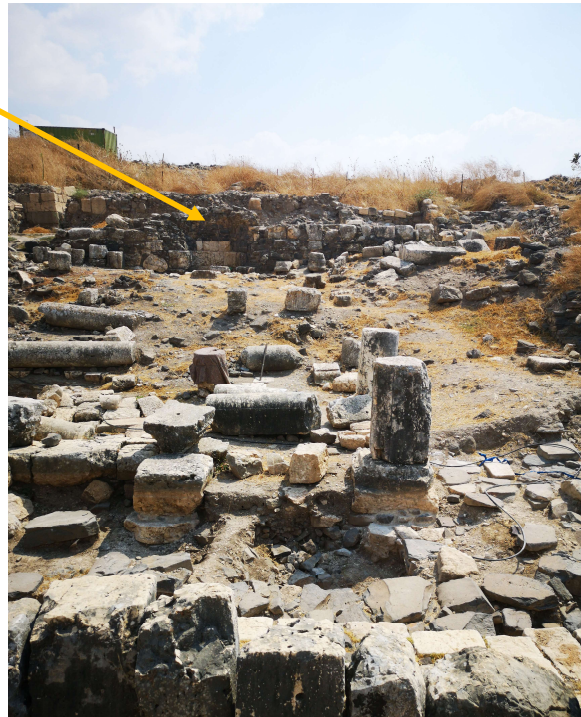


Figure 13c: The remains of
the 'Arbel Synagogue high
above Sea of Galilee. Photo
taken on location 08/09/19.

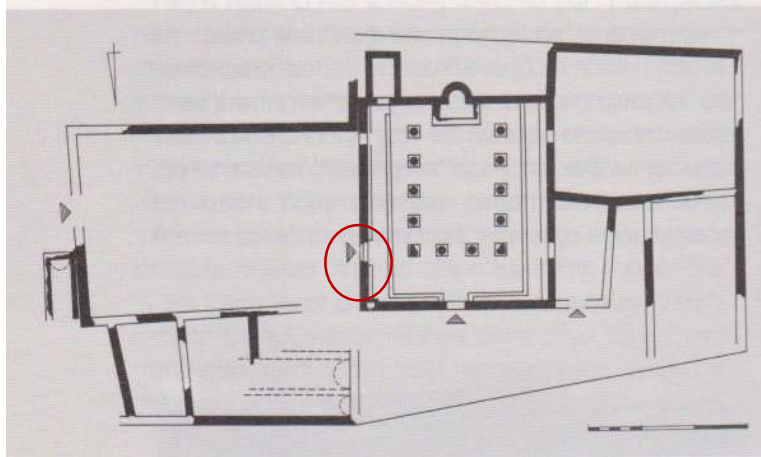


Figure 13d: Floorplan of the synagogue at 'Arbel with Jerusalem orientated niche (south) and east-facing entrance (circled). (Ilan 1989, 111)

4.4.6 The Synagogue at Beit 'Alpha - Yizra'el valley

In the Yizra'el valley, the synagogue at Beit 'Alpha dates from the 6th century C.E. and is also aligned towards Jerusalem. The Torah niche protrudes from the southern wall of the building in an apse and sits above the floor level. The synagogue floorspace is wide, containing its most significant mosaic in the central area. The mosaic is composed of three bands leading towards the Torah niche. On the third band, furthest from the niche are the familiar images of Abraham and the offering of Isaac. Notably there is in this band the 'Hand of God' (Figure 14a), not seen in other mosaics in this area (Dura Europos synagogue, which I will consider later, also contains images of the 'Hand of God' motif).

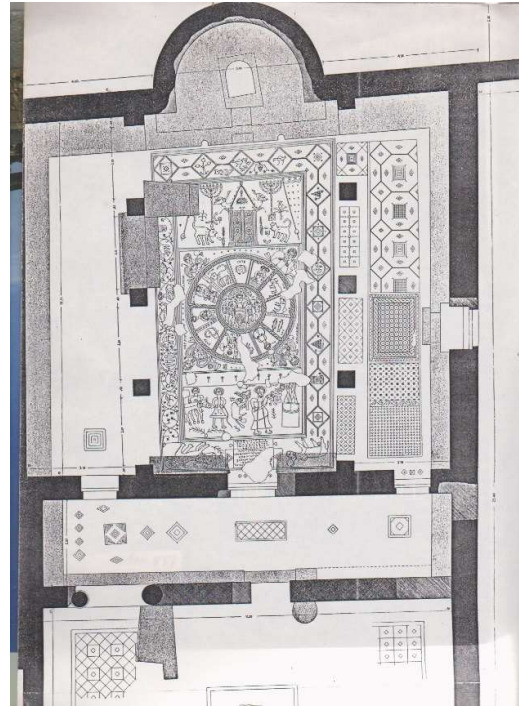


Figure 14a: The lower band of the Binding of Isaac with 'Hand of God' at Beit 'Alpha. Photo taken on location 08/09/19.

Figure 14b: The Floorplan of the synagogue at Beit 'Alpha with apse orientated toward Jerusalem, with entrance unclear. (Suknik 1932, Plate 27)

In the second or middle band there is a central zodiac circle with the names of the signs in Aramaic and Hebrew. This section is almost purely Greek in character with the sun god *Helios* in the centre. Finally, the first band, nearest to the Torah niche includes the motifs of the Temple cult: The Temple, Menorah, shofar, and incense shovels (Figure 14c). Most notable is the *Ner Tamid*, the eternal flame hanging in the middle of the Temple image, similar to the lamp symbol found in *mihrāb* stonework of later Islamic architecture.

Stephen Fine describes the significance of this mosaic in relation to Abraham and the redemption of the Jews:

This focus fits well with Jewish reflection on the Binding of Isaac, where Abraham's faith is subsumed to God's eternal pledge to redeem the children of Israel. The horn of the ram is much more bright than the rest of the creature, and draws attention. My sense is that this is quite intentional. The ram's horn is emphasized, I would suggest, specifically because of its enduring liturgical significance. Its blowing on Rosh ha-Shanah was considered to be a reminder of the Covenant, the Binding of Isaac being

the fullest statement of *zekhut avot*, the protective and enduring ‘merit of the fathers.’ (Fine 2019, 219)

The art of Beit ‘Alpha, as with other synagogues of the diaspora, points to the Temple site, the Binding of Isaac and the liturgical year recounting again in these sanctuaries the continuing importance of the Jewish Covenant with Abraham and Jerusalem. The original archaeologist Eleazar L. Sukenik, writes in his book *The Ancient Synagogue of Beth ‘Alpha*:

Like most of the synagogues north of Jerusalem and west of the Jordan, the building is oriented in an approximately southerly direction. A divergence to the west from this general direction (27 degrees S.W. by compass), which is actually justified in that Jerusalem is S.W. of Beth Alpha, is most probably accidental and due perhaps to the lie of the terrain. (Sukenik 1932)



Figure 14c: The band nearest to the Torah niche with the Temple doors and the Eternal Light *Ner Tamid* hanging above. The Temple entrance is flanked by menorah (Beit ‘Alpha). Photo taken on location 08/09/19.

4.4.7 The Synagogue at Beit She'an – Yizra'el valley

Beit She'an has had a settlement since the 5th millennium B.C.E. It is positioned in a rich and fertile area between the western Jordan valley and the Yizra'el valley. As a result of its position, it has been occupied by various cultures over the centuries. After the Roman conquest (63 B.C.E.) it became one of the ten cities of Decapolis, with a thriving population of pagans, Jews, and Samaritans. Later it became dominated by Byzantine churches and buildings. There are large numbers of ancient Roman buildings visible, but the synagogue has been recorded and then reburied to preserve it. The image of the mosaic is important in providing an example of the consistency of Temple cult typology (Figure 15). I could not confirm the orientation of the synagogue as it had been reburied at the time of my visit.



Figure 15: The Synagogue at Beit She'an. Temple door mosaic. Wikimedia Commons.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Synagogue_floor_-_Google_Art_Scythopolis_roject.jpg

The image of the mosaic, once again provides a symbol of the Temple façade, with two Menorah, shofar, and incense shovels visible. There is a likelihood of a *Ner Tamid* hanging from the apex, although obscured by damage to the tesserae, representing the light that burned continuously in the western section of the Temple.

4.4.8 The Synagogue at Katzrin (Qatzrin) – Golan

At the site of Katzrin, Golan there was an earlier synagogue, probably dating from the late 4th century C.E. (Ma'oz, Zvi Uri 1988, 7), whilst the current excavated structure dates from 100 years later. This structure used parts of the old building, including an original stone Torah niche and mosaic material, reinforced with mortar. This could have indicated that the original building had become damaged through subsidence and the community had become poorer, unable to afford a full renovation (Ma'oz 1988, 126). The new Torah niche may have been a wooden structure within the building, placed on a stone *bema* (בימה) against the south wall (Figure 16c). The existence of a Jerusalem-facing Torah shrine appears present in the earlier synagogue although developed and enlarged:

The platform for the Torah shrine, constructed against the south wall, which faced Jerusalem, was impressive. Built over the remains of the platform from synagogue A, it occupied the entire width of the nave from column to column. (Ma'oz, Zvi Uri 1988, 8)

Katzrin (Qatzrin) is orientated south towards Jerusalem (Figure 16a/b). There is little evidence now of mosaics or wall paintings, only a few small tesserae and a small amount of plaster visible. The building was destroyed by an earthquake in 746/7 C.E. (Ma'oz, Zvi Uri 1988, 11)



Figure 16a/b: Synagogue at Katzrin orientated towards Jerusalem. Photos taken on location 06/09/19.



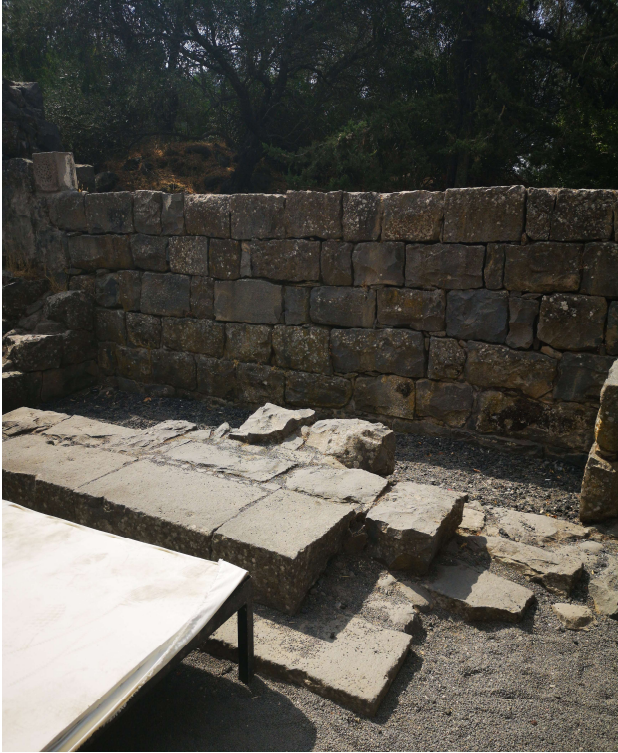


Figure 16c: The Synagogue at Katzrin. The remains of the *bema* on which the Torah niche was placed. Photo taken on location 06/09/19.

Figure 16d: Floorplan of synagogue at Katzrin with Jerusalem orientated niche/*bema* and east-facing entrance (Rachel Hachlili 2013, 89).

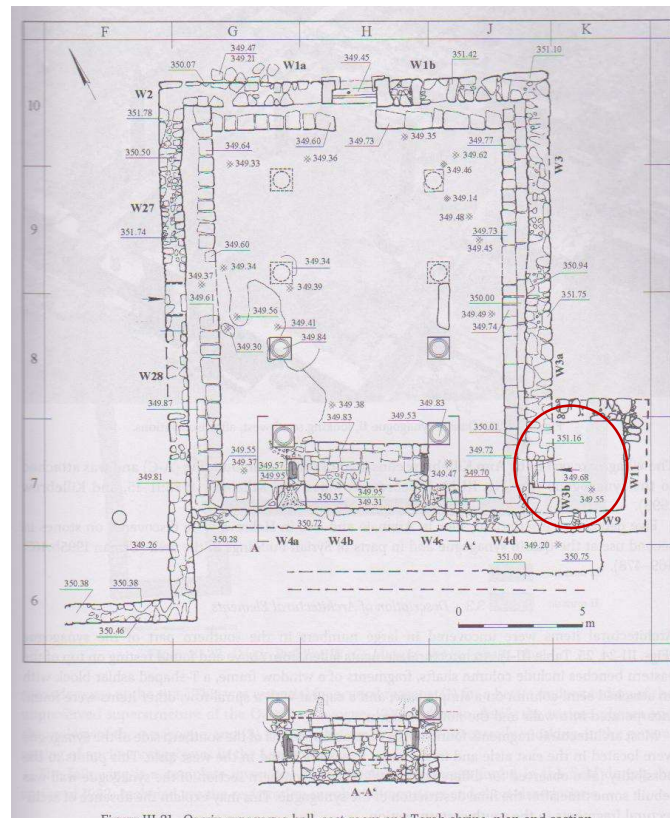


Figure III-21. Oasrin synagogue hall, east room and Torah shrine, plan and section.

4.4.9 The Synagogue of Umm al-Qanāṭir (Ein Keshatot) – Golan

The synagogue at Umm al-Qanāṭir is in a better condition than that at Katzrin (see following) and is dated from the 5th century,⁶⁸ but without restoration. The Torah niche is a highly developed structure on the southern wall and once more is pointing towards Jerusalem. The large Torah shrine is placed on a platform seven steps high and is built against the southern wall of the synagogue. The whole structure imitates the façade of the Temple (Figure 17a/b). The canopy is supported by four pillars with the two inner ones being highly decorated. The sculpting on these columns are geometric but also figurative. There are eagle and floral motifs by the column capitals. On the columns themselves could be found images of Menorah, with a Shofar (ram's horn), Etrog & Lulav and incense shovel (Figure 17d/e). Once again, reference is found to the Temple cult on the Torah shrine, rather than Biblical scenes or the Torah scrolls. The orientation and images appear to reinforce a direction of mind towards the destroyed, and longed-for Temple in Jerusalem. This is the best-preserved Torah niche in the whole of Israel/Palestine. There is an eastward facing entrance (Figure 17f).

⁶⁸ “The date attributed to the building by some scholars is the fifth century, a dating based on the unusual basket capital of the narthex that is considered to be Byzantine in style.” (Chiat 2020a, 302)

Figures 17a/b: The Torah Shrine at on the south wall of the synagogue at Umm Al-Qanātir. Photos taken on location 06/09/19.



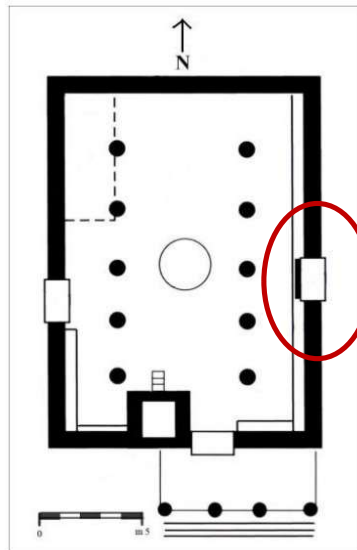


Figure 17c: Floorplan of Umm Al-Qanāṭir synagogue which is Jerusalem orientated (south) with an east-facing entrance (circled).

Figure 17d: Umm Al-Qanāṭir synagogue. Eastward facing entrance. Photos taken on location 06/09/19.



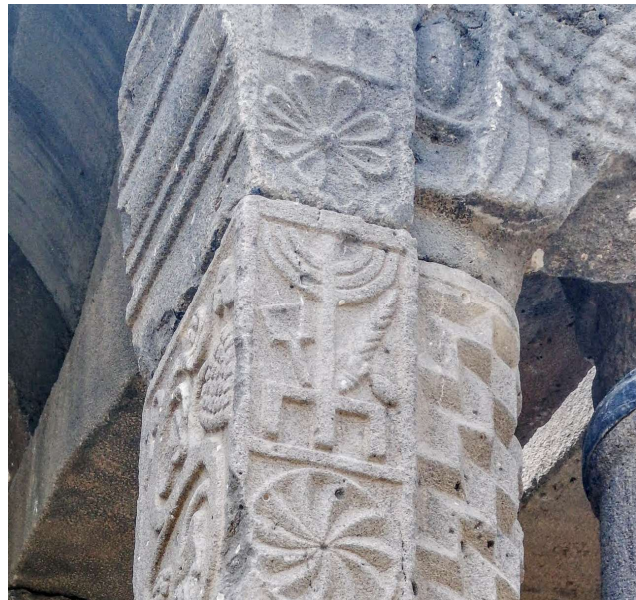


Figure 17e/f: A niche pillar at Umm Al-Qanāṭir with images including a Menorah with Etrog & Lulav, and an incense shovel. Eastward facing entrance. Photos taken on location 06/09/19.

4.5 Implications of Fieldwork in Galilee, Golan and the Yizra'el valley.

The synagogues studied in this chapter retained a focus on the Temple cult through the orientation of the building towards Jerusalem as focused on the Torah niche, and the eastward-facing entrance, replicating the orientation of the entrance to the Tabernacle that had been in Jerusalem. The art and structure of the buildings utilized Roman traditions and styles but integrated the Hebrew narratives of prophetic history and redemption. These included a focus on the Temple façade, the menorah and shofar, together with images of Abraham and the prophets. These elements of the Hebrew sanctuaries have been considered in earlier chapters that analyzed the 7th century Ka'ba and its perceived orientation, together with the wall paintings of Abraham and the prophets. Other sites in Galilee and the Yizra'el valley which are Jerusalem-orientated include those at: Huqoq,⁶⁹ Gush Halav, Kfar Bar'am, Khirbet Shema, Meron, Horbat Qazyon, Khirbet Umm el-'Amed, Capernaum, Migdal, and Rehov. There are many other sites that have no clear orientation, such as Yesud HaMa'ala, where there is not enough evidence (Chiat 2020b). Overall, there is no other tangible and repeated alternative to the dominant Jerusalem orientation.

These aspects of orientation and images of the Temple cult surrounding the Torah niche found within the synagogues of Galilee and Golan are predated by the paintings on the walls of the Dura Europos Synagogue in the upper Euphrates, dated in the first half of the 3rd century C.E.

⁶⁹ As an example of a recent and ongoing excavation: “So far there is no evidence of an earlier synagogue or an earlier floor under the mosaics. However, we found part of an earlier (undated) wall of different construction and orientation under the synagogue’s north stylobate. Pottery and coins from the foundation trench of the east wall and radiocarbon dating of a charcoal sample from the bedding of the mosaic floor indicate that the synagogue was constructed in the early fifth century (shortly after 400 C.E.). It is unclear when or why it went out of use, as there are no signs of destruction by fire. At some point, the superstructure collapsed—perhaps due to an earth-quake—but only after the building’s abandonment.” (Magness et al. 2019, 28)

4.6 The importance of Dura Europos Synagogue

The synagogue at Dura Europos (built c. 244 C.E.) provides another example from a more distant diaspora community of the use of figurative imagery, together with the thread seen in the Galilee and Golan sanctuaries of a Jerusalem orientated Torah niche and visual reminders of the Temple cult, and an eastern entrance. Dura Europos synagogue is situated on the banks of the Euphrates and was under Roman occupation at the time of building (Figure 18a/b). Jacob Neusner in his article *Judaism at Dura-Europos* observes the importance and unusual nature of this synagogue: “No era in the history of religions was more diverse or creative than the early middle third century, and no place ever exhibited greater variety or vitality than Mesopotamia. When we consider the maelstrom of religious activity in this brief period, we may see extraordinary signs of creativity and vitality.” (1964, 100).

The garrison town was overrun by the Sassanids in 256 C.E., and the synagogue was buried to form a defence against this attack, only to be rediscovered in the early 20th century (Kraeling, Carl H., C. C. Torrey, C. B. Welles 1956). This is a unique example of a preserved synagogue presenting an extensive display of wall paintings of the prophets and biblical narratives.

In relation to this thesis, my focus is on the prominence of the Torah niche and how it is surrounded by three layers of images of the prophets on three walls of the building (Figure 19a). As a link to previous and following chapters, most notable is the highest image above the Torah niche, purported to be the Second Temple messianic figure of Joseph – the Ephraimite Messiah, a pre-cursor to the end times and to the ingathering of Jews and Gentiles to a renewed Temple in Jerusalem (Wischnitzer 1948, 13).

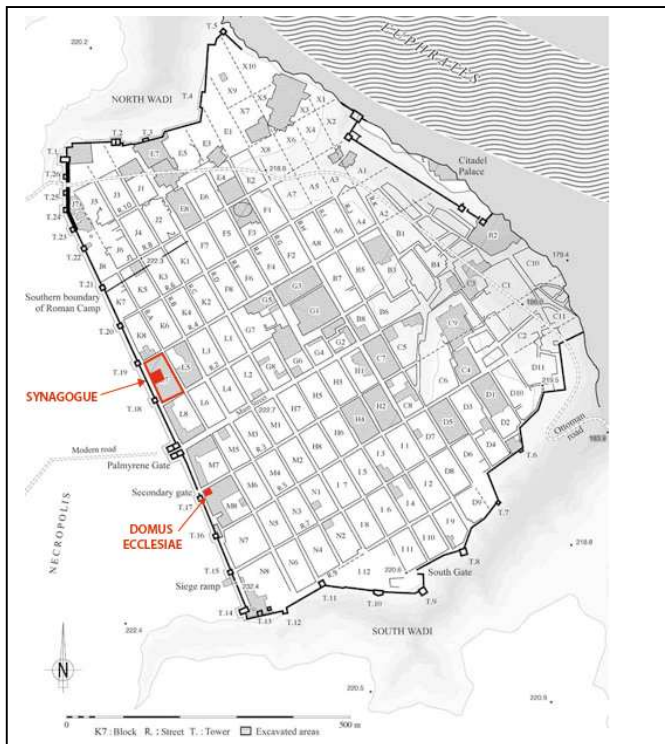


Figure 18a: Diagram of Dura Europos with Synagogue circled. Creative Commons.

https://www.wikiwand.com/fr/Synagogue_de_Doura_Europos

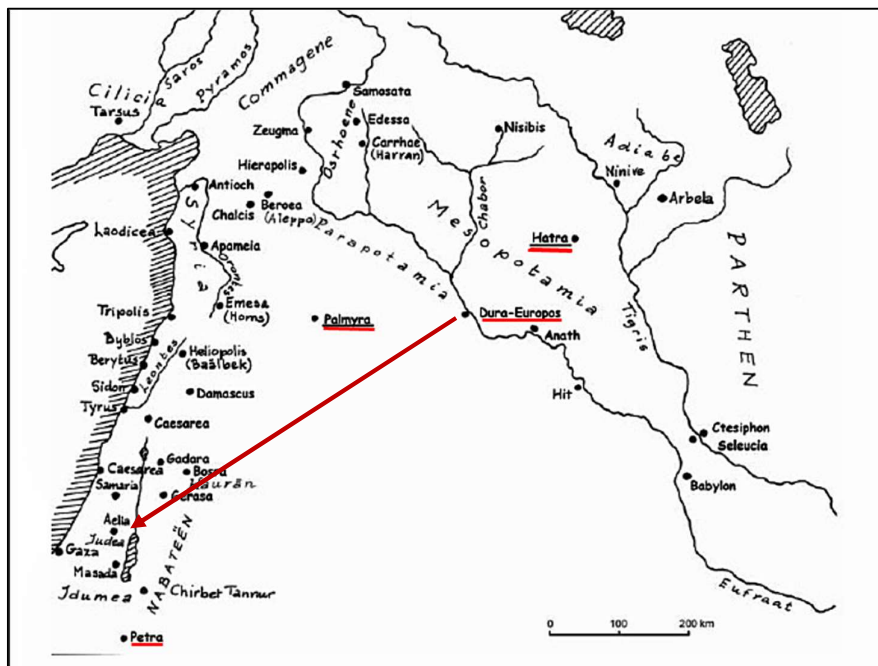


Figure 18b: Map of the location of Dura Europos and orientation. Creative Commons.

<https://www.ancientjewreview.com/read/2015/5/21/elegy-for-hatra-the-city-of-the-sun-god>

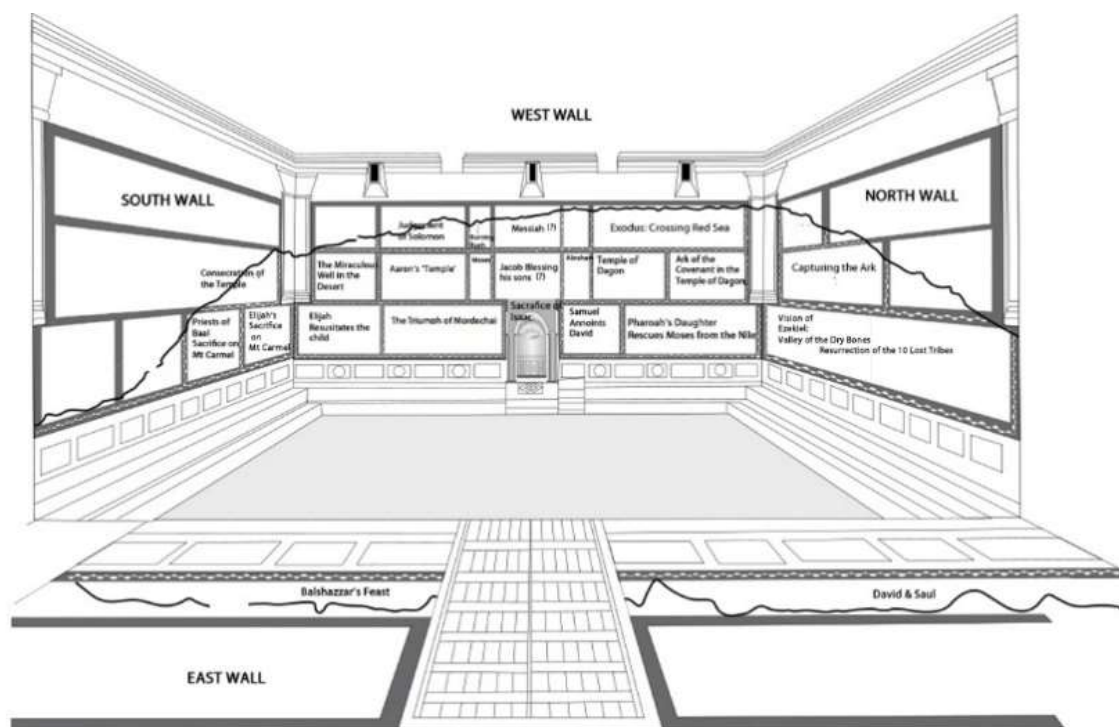
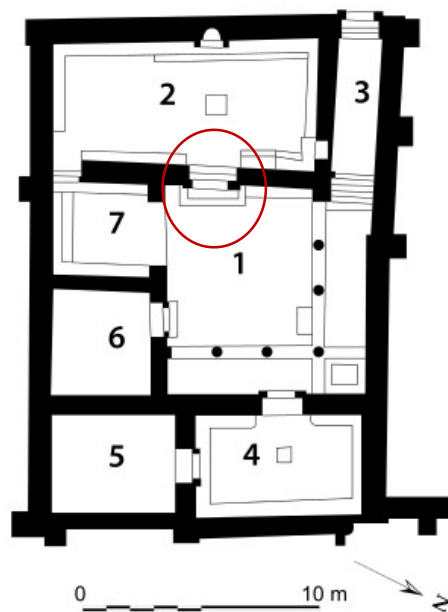


Figure 19a: A diagram of the design of the Dura Europos synagogue showing the extent of murals present at excavation in 1920's. Creative Commons.⁷⁰

Figure 19b: Floorplan of Dura Europos synagogue (2) with Jerusalem orientated niche and east-facing entrance (circled). Creative Commons.

https://www.wikiwand.com/fr/Synagogue_de_Doura_Europos



⁷⁰ https://www.wikiwand.com/fr/Synagogue_de_Doura_Europos

As a comparison with those 4th – 7th century synagogue sites found in the Galilee and Golan area, the Dura site presents archaeological evidence reflecting the messianic hopes of a Jewish community in the 3rd century with a unique level of imagery. This would provide evidence to analyze consistent themes and differences in design, imagery, and orientation in two distinct regions of the post-Temple Jewish diaspora in the Middle East, on the fringes of the Roman Empire.

4.7 The image of the *Messiah ben Joseph* takes centre stage

An additional aspect of studying the synagogue at Dura Europos was the suggestion by Rachel Wischnitzer that the image of the *Messiah ben Joseph* is positioned central to the extensive display of paintings within the Synagogue (1948, 13). This messianic figure continues to be a thread within this thesis from the early Nazoraean movement through to the events portrayed by *Sefer Zerubbabel* in the stories surrounding the figure of *Neḥemiah ben Hushiel* in the second decade of the 7th century.

Here, as in Galilee and Golan, there is an emphasis on the centrality of the Temple cult and the Torah niche within the visual and liturgical structure of the building. Rachel Wischnitzer (1948, 15) makes an important observation that highlights the early use of a physical focus of worshippers towards the city of Jerusalem and the Temple site. To support this, she makes observations of the images on the Torah niche; the Temple façade, the Menorah, the Sacrifice of Isaac, and the Etrog and Lulav (Figure 20a).



Figure 20a: The upper section of the Torah Niche of the Dura Europos Synagogue (Kraeling, Carl H., C. C. Torrey, C. B. Welles 1956, Plate 51)

These images do not primarily focus on the Torah, Moses or Sinai as might be expected for the location of Torah scrolls, but rather they act as a directional focus on the cult of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Dura-Europos synagogue is the earliest example of 'back-wall' orientation with a Torah niche included in the original building (Schenk 2010, 195) (Figure 20b).



Figure 20b: The Jerusalem orientated wall of the Dura Europos Synagogue. Reconstruction. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dara_Europos_replica.jpg

Of the 30 panels of wall paintings preserved, all illustrate Biblical stories including those of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the twelve sons of Jacob; the two sons of Joseph; the leaders of the Exodus, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam; the prophets Samuel, Elijah, and Ezekiel; Kings Saul, David, and Solomon; Queen Esther and the Persian king Ahasuerus and Mordecai

and Haman. The evidence is of extensive Jewish wall paintings of the prophets found in a structured format for the purpose of worship and learning. Unlike the Galilee and Golan sites there is not the evidence of a mixture with pagan imagery (other than allusions to Orpheus charming beasts as a sign of a future heavenly realm) (Henri Stern 1958, 4).

Considering the Torah niche itself, the prime focus of the arch is the image of Abraham and a large menorah. Next to this are the Etrog and Lulav, used at the annual Temple festival of *Sukkot*. The Temple image is placed in the centre of the panel with its arched doorway decorated with a fluted conch radiating upwards. This is replicated in the form of the niche itself at the rear of the aedicula. The background of the picture is blue, a common colour for divinity.⁷¹ To the right of the temple the image of the Sacrifice of Isaac is painted with a ram, a small tree and Abraham with his back turned, holding a knife for sacrifice. Jodi Magness in her article, *Third Century Jews and Judaism at Beth She'arim and Dura Europos* highlights the significance of the images on the niche for supporting the apocalyptic mindset of post-Second Temple Jews:

In other words, the depiction of the offering of Isaac serves as a geographical marker, indicating that this is the Jerusalem Temple and connecting the Temple directly with the Torah Shrine. The depiction of the Jerusalem Temple on the Torah Shrine, which is located on the Jerusalem-oriented wall, attests to the conceptual connection between them. Furthermore, the offering of Isaac alludes to the sacrificial cult in the Jerusalem Temple. (Magness 2010, 158)

Directly above the niche, on the lower panel Jacob is placed reclining on a couch (or deathbed) with his twelve sons, in tunics and trousers, seen standing around him. This could be understood as 'Jacob Blessing His Sons', including his grandchildren Manasseh and Ephraim (Joseph's sons). Joseph is portrayed as a larger figure, also in tunic and trousers, and extends his hands toward his two sons (Figure 21a. lower).

⁷¹ Blue signifies the heavens in Byzantine iconography. The expensive stone Lapis Lazuli was used to create the blue colour (Tantcheva-Burdge 2017).

Finally, Wischnitzer argues, on the highest central panel of the Jerusalem-orientated wall is Joseph, in tunic and trousers seated on a throne with a footstool (Figure 21a). This figure is flanked by two standing figures plus others:

Moving from the aedicula panel upward across the center area triptych, we have seen displayed Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the twelve sons of Jacob, fathers of the twelve tribes; David, father of the Messiah; and Joseph, father of the two leading Israelite tribes and of the Ephraimite Messiah. It is to be noted that Joseph, not David, presides, enthroned, over the array of ancestors. (1948, 99) (Figure 21b)

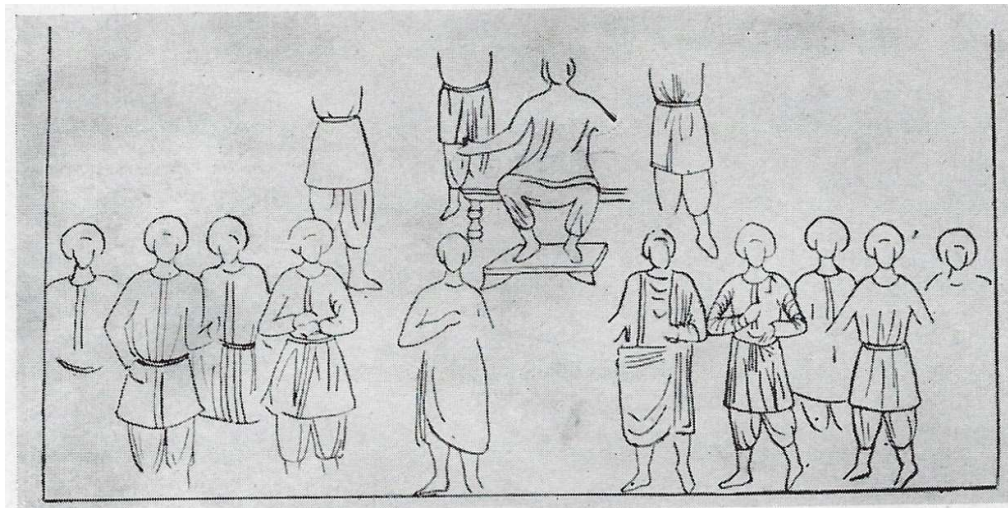


Figure 21a: Dura, synagogue; “Joseph and His Brethren.” (Panel 30.) Sketch by Di Mesnil du Buisson, *Peintures*, Pl. XX. (Wischnitzer 1948, Fig. 47.)



Figures 21b: Dura Europos Synagogue. Wall painting above Torah niche (upper - colour). Joseph enthroned amongst family. Wikimedia Commons.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DuraSyn_Centre_sup_David_King.jpg

In this image Joseph appears to be portrayed as a messianic figure, Wischnitzer suggests. Carl Hermann Kraeling considers the main figure in both panels to be King David as Messiah (Kraeling, Carl H., C. C. Torrey, C. B. Welles 1956), but this could be questioned as David is portrayed elsewhere,⁷² and there is no precedence of a figure presented twice (or three times) as the main focus of a painting. According to Wischnitzer's hypothesis the central figure moves from Jacob to Joseph in these two panels (Figure 21a/b).

4.8 The adaptation of the familiar: the Torah niche and the *miḥrāb*

This chapter studied the use of images in Jewish sanctuaries, orientation and the eastward entrances of synagogues around Sepphoris, Galilee and Golan, and in the wider diaspora in Dura Europos over a timespan from the 2nd century through to the 7th century in Late Antiquity. The earlier Galilean synagogues (2nd and 3rd centuries C.E.) were followed by broad-house synagogues of the 4th century C.E. and finally by Byzantine synagogues with a basilical plan including a structure for the Torah ark in the Jerusalem-oriented wall and developed floor mosaics. This is not a uniform development as can be seen in the 3rd century Dura Europos synagogue with its highly developed Torah niche. This may not be surprising as economics, politics and architectural fashion may influence the styles within sacred art and architecture. Despite the variety, it can be seen that there is among all these synagogues a notable emphasis on orientation, Temple cultic art and eastward-facing entrances. Images within these synagogues of Late Antiquity that link into Abrahamic and messianic prophecies, and particularly into the Temple cult, re-emphasize the importance of the Great Sanctuary in Jerusalem. These images of Abraham and of sacrifice are linked to the Torah niche, which

⁷² David is figured to the right of the Torah niche. See Figure 19a

appears not primarily to be the focus for the Torah scrolls, but the direction of the Temple as a place of future return and restoration:

For, a second outgrowth of the Torah niche will be the eventual focus, within the mosque, toward the *miḥrāb*, a niche in the wall known as the qibla - direction or orientation - wall facing Makka. Its purpose is analogous to that of the church apse and the Torah niche: to orient the faithful toward the central point of contact between earth and heaven. (Soltes 2009, 149)

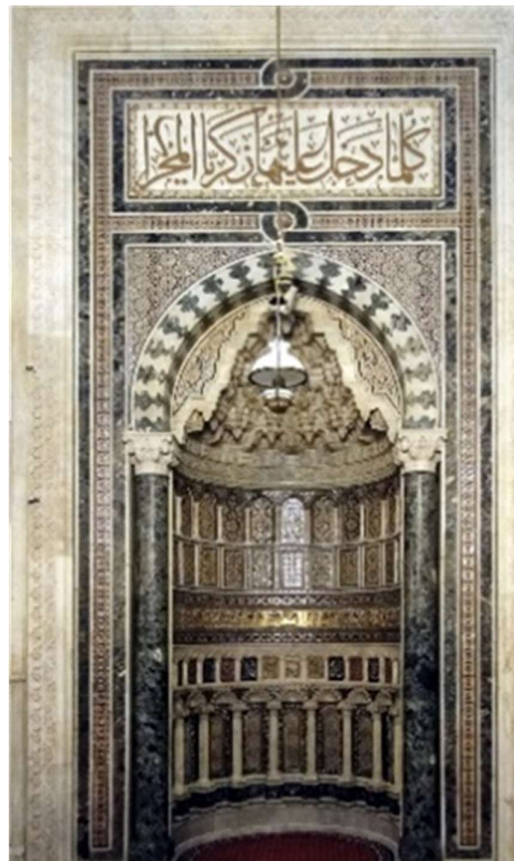
The majority of synagogue sites remaining from Late Antiquity are built with the wall containing the Torah niche facing Jerusalem, unlike early Christian churches that are often pointing East towards the rising sun, as a reminder of the Risen Messiah, the Light of the World. A practice most likely to be an explicit move to distance the Church from its Semitic heritage. It is more probable that the *miḥrāb* developed from the synagogue niche rather than the Christian apse. The lamp that is familiar in either three or two dimensional *miḥrāb* could also be a remnant of the Torah niche lamp, the *Ner Tamid* (see Figure 22 a/b).



Figure 22a: Cambay style gravestone, Yemen 14th-16th Century. Hanging Lamp. Photo taken at the British Museum 15th May 2019.

Figure 22b: Mihrāb in the Great Mosque of Damascus. Hanging Mosque Lamp.
Creative Commons.

<https://af.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihrab>



In *Āyat al-nūr* the Qur'ān reflects this symbol of the niche lamp:

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things. (Q 24:35)

Some authors would say that the *mihṛāb* was a genuine creation of early Islam:

The *mihṛab mujawwaf* thus represented a genuine formal innovation in the mosque. It was first introduced in the Mosque of the Prophet at Medina, built on the site of Muḥammad's house. (Whelan 1986, 211)

Whelan concludes her study of early *mihṛāb* by saying that niches were common forms of decoration, sometimes containing statuary. She discounts that at times they were the setting of royal thrones or a Christian altar (1986, 214). However, there is no reference to the possibility of a Torah niche, a structure, that as we have seen, is likely primarily to have a directional function. This thesis does consider the possibility of the *mihṛāb*, given its style, position, and purpose to have developed from earlier Torah niches. In addition, if this were credible, it would impact on the style, position, and purpose of the *Ḥaṭīm* as part of the earliest Ka'ba structure. Regarding the wall paintings at Dura there is a possible "prototype" here for the alleged images accounted for in the Ka'ba of the 7th century. It could allude to the potential for images of the prophets and messiah figures being used in other sanctuaries. Tessa Rajak suitably describes the significance of the wall paintings at Dura:

They give a glimpse of assertive monotheists positioning themselves in a polytheistic world, of groups jockeying for position, and of a potential fluidity of identities behind the apparent certainties. (2013, 109)

At Dura it appears there was a community of Jews creating a place of worship celebrating Abraham, the *Messiah ben Joseph*, the Temple in Jerusalem, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Festival of Ingathering, *Sukkōt*. Jodi Magness, as does Wischnitzer, observes: "The panels on and around the Torah Shrine are therefore Temple-oriented (with a strong emphasis on the role of the priests in the sacrificial cult) and mystical, eschatological, and

messianic.” (Magneess 2010, 160). As Henri Stern argues, it is important to recognize the flexibility of Jewish thought in Late Antiquity: “The question of who was a Jew in Dura is a complex one, as parameters of ‘Jewishness’ were not necessarily rigid and uniform across regions.” (2011, 481).

4.9 Conclusion to Chapter 4

This chapter has established that the *Messiah ben Joseph* typology could have been represented in synagogue art at Dura Europos and goes further in recognizing that there is evidence of painting of the prophets used on the walls and artwork of synagogues in Late Antiquity. There is visual evidence of the role of Abraham and the Temple cult as a major theme continuous throughout this era, emphasizing the importance of Jerusalem and the festival of *Sukkōt* in maintaining Jewish messianic identity. This is further anchored to the city by the prevalence of Jerusalem-orientated Torah niches, and the presence of eastward-facing entrances in replication of the Temple of Solomon. It is from this foundation that I approached the political, cultural, and religious context of the 7th century Ka‘ba in the earlier chapters.

5 Messiah Son of God or son of Joseph?

5.1 Introduction to Chapter 5

It is part of human need to search for hope when life becomes challenging. It may be founded in the basic instinct in childhood development to cry out for solace, and the satisfaction when wants are resolved. In a similar way, human communities have searched for monarchs, heroes and saviours to resolve their times of struggle. During times of suffering it is not surprising that the Hebrew tribe sought leadership and example in Abraham, Moses and the Prophets.

Within this thesis, I am highlighting particular strands of prophethood, the Ephraimite *Messiah ben Joseph* and the Righteous Teacher, which appear to run through Hebrew scriptures; the life of Jesus as a Jew; the messianic art and architecture in Late Antique synagogues, and the representation of itself in the expectations of Jews in the early seventh century, documented in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*.

To understand the impact of the Jewish messianic milieu in Late Antiquity and thereby its potential influence on the narrative of the 7th century Ka'ba, I will begin with a specific Jewish narrative, the figure of the *Messiah ben Joseph*.

One area of evidence in this research has been the textual source of Jewish writings, from the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 587–6 B.C.E. to the events surrounding the city during the life of Muḥammad in 614 C.E. This textual study requires a consideration of the messianic and apocalyptic writings, from the book of Zechariah through to the impact on Jewish thought of the capture of Jerusalem by Persian and Jewish forces⁷³ in the seventh century C.E., 500 years after Jewish expulsion from the Temple Mount by the Romans.

⁷³ *Khosrau II*: Kaufmann Kohler, A. Rhine. Accessed 4th May 2021.
<https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4356-chosroes-khosru-ii-parwiz>.

5.2 The *Mashiah* typology and Jewish messianism

An often-overlooked Jewish tradition, that of an *Ephraimite* or *Josephite Messiah*, the *Mashiah ben Yosef* (משיח בן־יוסף), is a recurring theme throughout these centuries. This messianic ideal occurred frequently, and particularly as related to belief structures in the time leading up to its crystallization in the sixth to seventh century C.E. Jewish community and in the apocalyptic midrashim. As David Mitchell points out, the Josephite Messiah is understood as a suffering figure, reflecting the struggle of Jews in exile, but he is also a figure of hope as he is resurrected at the “end times” (2016, 153).

The hypothesis within this study is that these religious ideals were very likely to have impacted on Jewish thought, world view and sanctuaries in post Second Temple Palestine and Arabia (Tobi 2013, 349). A scriptural text may not present historical facts according to the academic standards of today, but it does offer some evidence of a Jewish messianic belief system that was prevalent within Jewish communities in the early 7th century C.E., with the restitution of a Jewish presence in Jerusalem after the Persian conquest in 614 C.E.

5.3 The roots of the Josephite messianic typology

The inception of the Josephite messianic typology is found in the Pentateuch. Here we discover the familiar story of Joseph, son of Jacob. Joseph, the blameless brother forced into slavery, and buried in a pit, through his suffering gives Israel a new beginning and hope (Gen. 50:20). Consequently, he was “raised to life”, to governance and to subsequent freedom (Gen. 41:39-45) [Jacob declares: “It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive;” (Gen. 45:28 JPS)]. So too

in Gen. 49:22-26 (JPS) outlining the blessing of Joseph by his father Jacob there are allusions to this messianic role:

Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a fountain; its branches run over the wall.
 The archers have dealt bitterly with him, and shot at him, and hated him;
 But his bow abode firm, and the arms of his hands were made supple, by the hands of
 the Mighty One of Jacob, from thence, from the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel,
 Even by the G-d of thy father, who shall help thee, and by the Almighty, who shall
 bless thee, with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that coucheth
 beneath, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb.
 The blessings of thy father are mighty beyond the blessings of my progenitors unto the
 utmost bound of the everlasting hills; they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on
 the crown of the head of the prince among his brethren.

The problem with this image is that the firstborn of Joseph cannot be Joseph himself, it has to be another figure (Mitchell 2016, 243). The messianic concept is enhanced by the character of Joshua, the Ephraimite prince and servant of Moses (Num. 13:8):

Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher?⁷⁴ So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel. (Joshua 10:12-14 JPS)

Habakkuk (7th century B.C.E.) refers to Joshua as the *mashiah* of God, for there was no other messiah for whom the “sun and moon stood still in their habitation” except for Joshua alone (Hab. 3:11-13; Josh. 10:12-14) (Mitchell 2016, 39). Joshua entered the Promised Land rather than Moses, and this figure provides the typology seen later in a promised *Messiah ben Joseph* of the apocalyptic Biblical, Talmudic and Midrashic writings:

The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah. (Hab. 3:11-13 JPS)

⁷⁴ A lost non-canonical book.

On the death of Moses, Joshua is the one that leads the Hebrew people into their Promised Land. David Mitchell argues that the *Messiah ben Joseph*, “..steps forth from the Pentateuch. He is not a rabbinic idea at all. He is not a Judean or Jewish idea. He is the ancient promise made to the Ephraimites, inherited by the rabbis from Israel’s earliest traditions, from the ancient Blessings on Joseph.” (2016, 26). In his chapter studying the *Pseudepigrapha* Mitchell highlights these moments of early pre-rabbinical formation. Two particular texts stand out: the *Book of Enoch* describes a flawless firstborn white ox that is destined to die but also to return from death (2016, 64). Secondly, the *Testament of Benjamin* 3:8 (2nd century C.E.)⁷⁵ describes:

In thee shall be fulfilled the prophecy of heaven concerning the Lamb of God, and Saviour of the world, that a blameless one shall be delivered up for lawless men, and a sinless shall die for ungodly men in the blood of the covenant, for the salvation of the Gentiles and of Israel, and shall destroy Beliar and his servants.⁷⁶

James Davila stresses caution when considering the authorship of the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* to be of the category of “those often used as Jewish works but which in reality are probably of Christian authorship” (Davila 2005, 57). The reason Davila gives is:

Indeed, a Christian author might have had every incentive to maintain an air of Old Testament verisimilitude, if he (or she) really hoped to pass the work off as an ancient composition from the Old Testament period or even simply wished to maintain an esthetically convincing Old Testament atmosphere. (2005, 54)

Whether the *Testament of Benjamin* in more recent times is thought to be Jewish, of Jewish origin and adapted by Christian editors, or wholly Christian, it might rather be considered as a confluence of the *Messiah ben Joseph* typology with an early interpretation of the mission of Jesus.

⁷⁵ A Pseudepigraphal work from the compendium of apocryphal writings called the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*. It is ascribed to the twelve Hebrew Patriarchs, but their origins are questioned by modern scholars (Charles 1976).

⁷⁶ The Testament of Benjamin. Internet Archive. Accessed 10th May 2021. <https://archive.org/details/pdfy-uCbFrFDzI0iOGdW/mode/2up?q=fulfilled>

Mitchell however presents this reference as a Josephite figure that dies as a sacrifice of atonement. It is noted that there is a likelihood of Christian interpolation in some of this material, but he points to inconsistencies that indicate pre-Christian sources. The key point for the research is that the dying Ephraimite Messiah was a pre-existing concept in Jewish thought at the time, and allusions to this can be seen in the canonical Christian writings that include the suffering servant of Second Isaiah (Isa. 52-53) and the pierced messiah of Zechariah 12:10 (cf. Luke 22:36–38; Acts 8:32-35; 1 Peter 2:19–25 and John 19:36–37; Revelation 1:7). The important aspect to draw from this is a continuity of the Ephraimite messianic tradition running through early Christian writings, whether or not this belief in human Ephraimite Messiah survives in the Nazarene/Ebionite tradition.

5.4 The pierced and suffering messiah from Zechariah onwards

A formulation of this messianic codification appeared to occur in Zechariah 2 (late sixth century B.C.E.) with the concept of the “*four carpenters*”. Traditionally from this source comes the quartet of a messianic tradition of *Elijah*, *Messiah ben Joseph*, *Messiah ben David* and the *Righteous Priest*, who at different times bring hope in despair for the Jewish people. This formulation in early Zechariah was an important waypoint in setting the development of Jewish messianic typologies. In addition, in later Zechariah 14 (third century B.C.E.), there is reference explicitly to an eschatological *Sukkōt* (Zech. 14:16, 19). The significance of *Sukkōt*⁷⁷ as a time of return, drawing all nations to God, and being the major pilgrimage feast in Jerusalem,

⁷⁷ SUKKOT (Heb. סֻכּוֹת ; “booths” or “tabernacles”), the festival, beginning on the 15th day of Tishre, which commemorates the sukkot (*booths/tents*) in which the Children of Israel dwelt in the wilderness after the Exodus. The festival lasts for seven days, of which the first (and the second in the Diaspora) is a yom tov (a festival on which work is prohibited) and the other days *hol ha-mo’ed* (intermediate days on which work is permitted). Immediately after Sukkot, on the eighth day (and the ninth in the Diaspora), is the festival of Shemini Azeret (“the eighth day of solemn assembly”) which is a yom tov. (Skolnik, Fred & Michael Berenbaum 2007, 18.299)

occurred repeatedly in messianic and apocalyptic Jewish thought, art and architecture, and may have impacted on rituals surrounding the pre-Islamic Ka'ba.

Although the origins of the *Messiah ben Joseph* can be found in the Torah, a significant formative time is found in the Zechariah Literature. The context is one of confusion and uncertainty after the fall of the First Temple, and first Zechariah (1-8) is dated from this time (520-518 B.C.E.). Whilst the passages that speak of a messianic figure come from a later writer, second Zechariah (9-14) (cf. M. Jackson-McCabe 2003, 716) and represent a time of reflection on the significance of the capture and devastation of Jerusalem, portents and end times (Zech. 14:1-4 JPS), that echo is of a suffering and dying messiah that will prefigure the Davidic messiah and herald of peace:

Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee.

For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

And his feet shall stand in that day upon The Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and The Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.

This *Messiah ben Joseph* or *Ephraimite Messiah* is a human figure that continues to spark messianic hopes at various stages in the history of Judaism. To some degree he is “the other”, as he has his roots in the “unfaithful” Northern Kingdom that was taken into Assyrian exile in the 8th century B.C.E., never to return. On the other hand, he is the messianic forerunner of the *Davidic Messiah* and the end times.

This Ephraimite Messiah is nurtured in the writings of Zechariah, and permeates Jewish writings and aspirations, even to the 7th century C.E. in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*. This is significant in considering the impact of the *Messiah ben Joseph* typology on the thoughts of the

Nazoraean, and later, the thoughts of Arabian Jews at the end of Late Antiquity. Mitchell states:

Now anyone with the least idea of what divides the Abrahamic faiths must find the existence of such a figure [*Messiah ben Joseph*] in Jewish literature remarkable. Yet there he is. In hundreds of passages, in scores of documents of every flavour: in the Targums and Talmud; in the homiletic and exegetic midrashim; in the apocalyptic midrashim and the *geonic responsa*; in the *hekhhalot* literature and *the Zohar*; in the *rishonim* and the *aharonim*. In short, he features in Jewish literature of every genre and period, in documents written by Jews for Jews, passed down from generation to generation in Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, and Persian, tongues which medieval Christendom could not read, much less write. (2016, 1)

The presupposition in this thesis is that Jesus was a Jew with a message to Jews. It is therefore the nature or method of this study to sustain the paradigm of Jewish inheritance and not reinterpret the Nazarenes with Christianizing lenses. I propose that the figure of Jesus remains within a Jewish milieu, as a human Ephraimite messiah and wholly within the strand of Jewish messianism. Rudolph Bultmann confirms the recognition of the earliest tradition that Jesus was a human prophet:

The [earliest] church proclaimed him [Jesus] as prophet and teacher and beyond that as the coming Son of Man, but not as a ‘divine man’ of the Hellenistic world, who was a numinous figure. Not before the growth of legend on Hellenistic soil was the figure of Jesus assimilated to that of the ‘divine man.’ The Old Testament—Jewish world knew neither ‘Heroes’ in the Greek sense nor *homines religiosi* in the Hellenistic sense. (Bultmann, Rudolf 1951, 35)

David Mitchell begins his book with a succinct resume of the enduring messianic motif of this figure. He says:

There is, in rabbinic literature, a figure called Messiah ben Joseph. This Messiah comes from Galilee to die, pierced by ruthless foes, at the gate of Jerusalem. Upon his death, Israel are scattered amidst the nations. But his death, as we shall see, confounds Satan, atones for sin, and abolishes death itself. And then he is raised to life again. (2016, 1)

The *Messiah ben Joseph* typology is fully present in Jewish literature as a source for Christian literature and the Jewish midrash. Mitchell also argues in his study of the *Qumrân fragment 4Q372* that there is imagery of the Ephraimite messiah within its section on Joseph: “...a sacrificial Josephite Messiah was known in the early second century BCE, the idea

ultimately deriving from the Josephite warrior of Deut. 33:17 who contains in embryo the main characteristics of *Messiah ben Joseph*.” (Mitchell 2009, 181, cf. 2006a, 2006b, 2005a):

And in all this, Joseph [was delivered] into the hand of foreigners, consuming his strength and breaking all his bones up the time of his end. And he shouted [and his call] summoned the powerful God to save him from their hands. And he said: ‘My father and my God, do not abandon me in the hands of gentiles, do me justice, so that the poor and afflicted do not die. You have no need of any people or of any help. [...] An enemy people lives in it and [. . .] and they open their mouth against all the sons of your beloved Jacob with insults for [...] the moment of their destruction of the whole world and they shall be delivered [...] I will arise to do right and just[ice to do] the will of my creator, to offer sacrifices [of thanksgiving...] to my God. And I will declare his compassion [...].’ (The *Apocryphon of Joseph 4Q372* - García Martínez and Watson 1994, 225)

Founded on the story in Genesis, developed in Isaiah and Zechariah, alluded to in *4Q372* there is the typology of *Messiah ben Joseph* among the “primary sources of testimonies” used in canonical Christian literature (Dodd 1953, 107), although not mentioned specifically.⁷⁸ It appears rather that the figure of Jesus is firmly linked to the Messiah “Son of David” who will suffer, die and rise again to advent the end times. The problem for Christian literature is that Jesus had to be the summative figure of messianic hope rather than the developmental figure of Messiah son of Joseph:

...there is no evidence that its identification of the servant [suffering figure of Isaiah 53] as a Davidic king – if indeed it made such an identification – was taken up by others, whether in Egypt or Palestine, until the Jesus movement. (Himmelfarb 2017, 65)

A Davidic Messiah had a different role and does not fit into the suffering messiah framework, but is rather a kingly, victorious figure. This is a contradiction or perhaps a compilation:

The new Messiah – however the conception arose – would naturally come from Joseph, next to Judah the foremost of the Israelite tribes, see especially Gen. 49:22-26 and Deut. 33:13-17; also regularly representing the Northern Kingdom, as Judah represented the Southern; see Am. 5:15, Josh. 18:5, etc. In Zech. 10:6 it is said: ‘I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph’; compare Ez.

⁷⁸ “A prophet like Moses”: Deut. 18:15 (JPS) “A prophet will HaShem thy G-d raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;”. cf. Acts 7:37 (NIV) “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’”

37:16-20, where Judah and Joseph constitute the restored Israel. (Torrey 1947, 255-256)

The literature of the *Messiah ben Joseph* coming from Galilee (not Bethlehem), suffering, pierced and dying and being raised by Messiah ben David as a sign of victory over Evil and the coming restoration of Israel, is the figure present in Jewish literature. The mix of the suffering servant (Isaiah 53) with the Davidic messiah is not from Jewish literature⁷⁹ but from the canonical Christian writings (Himmelfarb 2017, 66). The deduction here is that the *Messiah ben Joseph* paradigm came to be used to give an understanding of the messiah figure of Jesus, and much later Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel.⁸⁰

Maintaining a Jewish origin, development and interpretation of *Messiah ben Joseph*, will bring a clearer sense of continuity to the idea that Nazoraean understanding of Jesus' messiah-hood was solely Jewish and human.

The *Bavli Sukkah* 52 (from the Babylonian Talmud c. 6th century C.E.), refers three times to *Messiah ben Joseph*. The first occasion questions the death of the *Messiah ben Joseph* and whether it should be a time of mourning or celebration. The reason for rejoicing is that Evil has been overcome through this sacrifice:

Apropos the eulogy at the end of days, the Gemara asks: For what is the nature of this eulogy? The Gemara answers: Rabbi Dosa⁸¹ and the Rabbis disagree concerning this matter. One said that this eulogy is for Messiah ben Yosef who was killed in the war of Gog from the land of Magog prior to the ultimate redemption with the coming of Messiah ben David. And one said that this eulogy is for the evil inclination that was killed.

The Gemara asks: Granted, according to the one who said that the lament is for Messiah ben Yosef who was killed, this would be the meaning of that which is written in that context: 'And they shall look unto Me because they have thrust him through; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son' (Zechariah 12:10).

However, according to the one who said that the eulogy is for the evil inclination that

⁷⁹ Although Daniel Boyarin argues that the suffering messiah typology of not unusual in Jewish thought, particularly in the Talmud and midrash (Boyarin 2012, 129-35).

⁸⁰ According to the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, "the Josephite messiah emerges five years later to begin Israel's ingathering and restore the temple in Jerusalem." (Grey 2013, 565). See also for a more literalist interpretation of events from the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, Avi-Yonah, M. 1976. *The Jews of Palestine: A Political History from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 266.

⁸¹ Rabbi Dosa ben Harkinas (1st-2nd century C.E.) – Roman Province of Judaea

was killed, does one need to conduct a eulogy for this? On the contrary, one should conduct a celebration. Why, then, did they cry?

The Gemara answers: This can be understood as Rabbi Yehuda⁸² taught: In the future, at the end of days, God will bring the evil inclination and slaughter it in the presence of the righteous and in the presence of the wicked. For the righteous the evil inclination appears to them as a high mountain, and for the wicked it appears to them as a mere strand of hair. These weep and those weep. The righteous weep and say: How were we able to overcome so high a mountain? And the wicked weep and say: How were we unable to overcome this strand of hair? And even the Holy One, Blessed be He, will wonder with them, as it is stated with regard to the eulogy: ‘So says the Lord of hosts: If it be wondrous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, it should also be wondrous in My eyes’ (Zechariah 8:6). Bavli Sukkah 52a:2-4⁸³

This pierced and suffering “Messiah the son of Joseph” whose death overcomes Evil, also reflects the figure of Zechariah 12:9-11 JPS:

And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.

Bavli Sukkah 52a:2-4 presents a motif of *Messiah ben Joseph* who was known before the middle of the 1st century C.E. from the writings of Rabbi Dosa ben Harkinas, who died about 60 years after the destruction of the Second Temple. In a similar era of reflection, after the destruction of the First Temple Zechariah 12 depicts a picture of bitter lamentation in Jerusalem for a slain hero at the end of Israel’s struggle with the hostile nations of the world. Before this destruction takes place, there is an interlude, in which the Israelites are plunged in grief and remorse, mourning over the death of a leader who has fallen, one for whose fate they feel themselves in some way responsible.

The second reference in the Bavli Sukkah 52a indicates that the *Messiah ben Joseph* must be slain before the Messiah ben David reigns:

⁸² Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (Judah the Patriarch) c.135 - 217 C.E. – see Section 4.4.2

⁸³ *Talmud Bavli Sukkah*. Sefaria.org. Accessed 5th May 2021.

<https://www.sefaria.org/Sukkah.52a.2?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en>

The Sages taught: To Messiah ben David, who is destined to be revealed swiftly in our time, the Holy One, Blessed be He, says: Ask of Me anything and I will give you whatever you wish, as it is stated: 'I will tell of the decree; the Lord said unto me: You are My son, this day have I begotten you, ask of Me, and I will give the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession' (Psalms 2:7–8). Once the Messiah ben David saw Messiah ben Yosef, who was killed, he says to the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, I ask of you only life; that I will not suffer the same fate. The Holy One, Blessed be He, says to him: Life? Even before you stated this request, your father, David, already prophesied about you with regard to this matter precisely, as it is stated: 'He asked life of You, You gave it to him; even length of days for ever and ever' (Psalms 21:5). Bavli Sukkah 52a:6⁸⁴

With reference to this text, after the death of the Ephraimite messiah there would be the victory of the Messiah ben David, who would raise the *Messiah ben Joseph* from the dead and bring on the end times and a return of Jews and Gentiles to Jerusalem.

Finally, Bavli Sukkah 52b mentions *Messiah ben Joseph* as one of four figures of Zechariah 2, the others being Elijah, the Righteous Priest Melchizedek and Messiah ben David:

Apropos the end of days, the Gemara cites another verse and interprets it homiletically. It is stated: 'The Lord then showed me four craftsmen' (Zechariah 2:3). Who are these four craftsmen? Rav Hana bar Bizna said that Rabbi Shimon Ḥasida said: They are Messiah ben David, Messiah ben Yosef, Elijah, and the righteous High Priest, who will serve in the Messianic era. Bavli Sukkah 52b:11⁸⁵

There appears to be a thread of continuity that builds through periods of exile and persecution that embeds the *Messiah ben Joseph* as a precursor to the final stage of redemption. The final stage in the context of the time period of this thesis appears at the beginning of the 7th century C.E. in Mecca/Medina and Jerusalem.

In the next section I will analyze other threads present within the milieu of 1st century C.E. Province of Judaea, amongst the complex mixture of messianic and apocalyptic narratives. Evidence of this is found in the various Jewish movements that were present, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Essenes, the Zealots, the Sicarii and the Nazarenes. It is particularly the close relationship of the Essenes and the Nazarenes that is the focus of the next analysis.

⁸⁴ *Talmud Bavli Sukkah*. Sefaria.org. Accessed 5th May 2021.

<https://www.sefaria.org/Sukkah.52a.6?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en>

⁸⁵ *Talmud Bavli Sukkah*. Sefaria.org. Accessed 5th May 2021.

<https://www.sefaria.org/Sukkah.52b.11?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en>

5.5 Purity and Holiness codes of the communities near Qumrān

There has been well documented and extensive study of the Essene-style communities near Qumrān.⁸⁶ The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1940s led to a greater insight into the nature of this community of ascetic and isolated Jews that existed for four centuries before the First Jewish-Roman War that ended with the destruction of the Second Temple c.70 C.E. The importance of the communities near Qumrān to this thesis is their textual references to some biblical narratives surrounding messiahship and the arguments that John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin and guide, may have been an Essene (Zeitlin 1954, 115; Joseph 2018, 9) and this spirituality of Jewish prophethood could be seen in the Nazoraean movement (Laurin 1963, 43; Joseph 2018, 8).⁸⁷ To present one example of the close similarity to Christian canonical writings is that of the fragment 4Q246, often named the "Son of God" Document. This minute scroll fragment has the particular phrase: "He will be called the son of God, they will call him the son of the Most High." (4Q246, Col.2, 1) (Wise, Michael and Martin Abegg 1996, 346). The phrase in 4Q246, ברה די אל יתאמר, "He shall be hailed (as) son of God" has a close parallel to κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ ("shall be called the Son of God") (Luke 1:35 NIV) in the canonical Gospel of Luke. In addition, "And they shall call him son of the Most High" has a similarity to οὗτος ἔσται μέγας καὶ υἱὸς ὑψίστου κληθήσεται ("He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest") (Luke 1:32 NIV). Whether there is any connection or that these phrases were part of

⁸⁶ Joseph, Simon J. 2018. *Jesus, Essenes, and Christian Origins: New Light on Ancient Texts and Communities*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press; Zeitlin, Solomon. 1954. "The Essenes and Messianic Expectations. A Historical Study of the Sects and Ideas during the Second Jewish Commonwealth." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 45 (2): 83–119; Wise, Michael and Martin Abegg, Edward Cook. 2005. "The Damascus Document (CD)." In *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*. San Francisco: Harper; Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. 1985. "The "Damascus Document " Revisited." *Revue Biblique* 92 (2): 223–46.

⁸⁷ Laurin, Robert B. 1963. "The Problem of Two Messiahs in the Qumran Scrolls." *Revue de Qumrân* 4 (1): 39–52; Schuller, Eileen. 1990. "4Q372' 1: A Text about Joseph." *Revue de Qumrân* 14 (3): 349–76; Elgvin, Torleif. 1997. "4Q474' - A Joseph Apocryphon?" *Revue de Qumrân* 18 (1): 97–108; Schuller, E. 1992. "The Psalm of 4Q372 1 Within the Context of Second Temple Prayer." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1): 67–79.

the Jewish messianic vocabulary at the time is difficult to judge.⁸⁸ The similarity of the texts does point to the utilization and cross pollination of messianic terminology in the 1st century C.E. Nor would this be surprising with a similar narrative between parallel messianic groups such as the Essenes and the Nazarenes.

Another document associated with the Essenes of Qumrān is what is called “*The Damascus Document*” [CD], discovered in the *Genizah*⁸⁹ of a Karaite synagogue in Cairo at the end of 19th century C.E. The document dates from the 10th century C.E. but is likely to have been written before the downfall of the communities near Qumrān in c.70 C.E.⁹⁰ The document speaks of a “Teacher of Righteousness” who is a guide to holiness and purity and the community forms a new covenant in the land of Damascus. The document seems to be one of an Essene movement that went into exile possibly after the destruction of the Temple, as did other Jewish groups. This community was strictly Torah observant:

The Well is the Law, and its ‘diggers’ are the repentant of Israel who went out of the land of Judah and dwelt in the land of Damascus;.... Without these rules they shall obtain nothing until the appearance of one who teaches righteousness in the Last Days. *Geniza A Col. 6:4-5, 10-11* (Wise, Michael and Martin Abegg 2005, 57-8)

This movement of Jews was to set up a new covenant that was strictly under the Law of Moses and looking forward to “one who teaches righteousness in the Last Days”. Against this community there appears an adversary:

Such is the fate for all who reject the commandments, whether old or new, who have turned their thoughts to false gods and who have lived by their willful hearts: they have no part in the household of Law. They will be condemned along with the Men of Mockery, because they have uttered lies against the correct laws and rejected the sure covenant that they made in the land of Damascus, that is, the New Covenant. Neither

⁸⁸ “Since CD, 1QpHab, and 4QpPs 37 do not contain more specific and concrete information about the identities of the chief actors of the scrolls, it is difficult to determine where they fit into the recorded history of the second century and early first century BCE. The literary evidence does witness to conflicts between the Liar, the Wicked Priest, and the Teacher, but nothing more than that....Therefore, one must conclude that it is impossible to say more than has been said above about the history of the Qumran community on the basis of the evidence that is presently available.” (Callaway 1988, 210)

⁸⁹ A *genizah* is a storage room in a synagogue for old, damaged or unused manuscripts that shouldn’t be destroyed.

⁹⁰ “Although the origin of many of the scrolls as ‘sectarian’ or not remains debated, there is a consensus that three texts, the *Halakhic Letter* (4QMMT), the *Damascus Document* (CD), and the *Community Rule* (1QS), are sectarian. These are central for reconstructing the history and identity of the community” (Royalty, Jr. 2013, 38; cf. Davies 1983)

they nor their families shall have any part in the household of Law. Now from the day the Beloved Teacher passed away to the destruction of all the warriors who went back to the Man of the Lie will be about forty years. *Geniza B Col. 20:8-15* (2005, 61)

The community's existence is dependent upon their purity and commitment to the Law, and in other places in the *Damascus Document* [CD], there is guidance on correct practices, much like the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls. J. L. Teicher argued that the Beloved Teacher was Jesus and the man of mockery was St Paul (Teicher 1951) although others, perhaps more accurately see the context in the Maccabean Revolt and Jonathan Maccabeus as the imposter-High Priest (152 B.C.E.) (Murphy-O'Connor 1974, 229). Alternatively, Ben Zion Wacholder considers there is no clear allusion to the Maccabean Revolt in the *Damascus Document* (Wacholder 2002, 9).⁹¹ The belief of a coming "Teacher of Righteousness" may give meaning to a future time for this movement. The movement also presented an ethical motif that is parallel to that of Jesus, John the Baptist, and the Ebionites/Nazarenes:

They must not rob 'the poor of God's people, making widows' wealth their booty and killing orphans' (Isa. 10:2). They must distinguish between defiled and pure, teaching the difference between holy and profane. They must keep the Sabbath day according to specification and the holy days and the fast day according to the commandment; of the members of the new covenant in the land of Damascus, offering the holy things according to their specifications. Each one must love his brother as himself, and support the poor, needy, and alien. *Geniza A Col. 6:16-21* (Wise, Michael and Martin Abegg 2005, 57)

What appears to be a community in exile in the "land of Damascus", had a leader, a Teacher of Righteousness, who was killed and are being threatened by the divergent teaching of the Man of Lies/Mockery. They live a life in strict observance of the Law and a positive ethic towards the outcast. They also have a messianic vision of the reunification of the northern tribes (Ephraim) with Judah, that would have been common, and deep-seated in the Hebrew psyche:

⁹¹ "Yet no one has explained the paradox that in this vast literary tradition which deals at great length with the activities dealing with these allegedly historical figures (who by general consent flourished during the middle of the second century B.C.E.) there exists neither any direct allusion to nor any echo of the Hasmonean Revolt nor the festival of Hanukkah." Ben Zion Wacholder. 2002. "The Righteous Teacher in the Peshierite Commentaries." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 73:9.

When God judged the land, bringing the just deserts of the wicked to them, that is when the oracle of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came true, which says, ‘Days are coming upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house that have never come before, since the departure of Ephraim from Judah’ (Isa. 7:17), that is, when the two houses of Israel separated, Ephraim departing from Judah. All who backslid were handed over to the sword, but all who held fast escaped to the land of the north, as it says, ‘I will exile the tents of your king and the foundation of your images beyond the tents of Damascus’ (Amos 5:27). *Geniza A Col. 7:9-15* (2005, 58)

The Jesuit theologian Joseph Fitzmyer in his article *The Qumrân Scrolls, the Ebionites and their Literature* made a deduction that the Qumrân ethic had an influence on the Ebionite belief system:

It seems that the most we can say is that the sect of Qumran influenced the Ebionites in many ways; Essene tenets and practices were undoubtedly adopted or adapted into the Ebionite way of life. (Fitzmyer 1955, 371)

As I have mentioned above, many Christian writers have interpreted the “Jewish-Christian Church” within the framework of canonical Christian writings or from Early Church interpretations. Fitzmyer does this, too, by indicating that the canonical Christian writings were “definitely the framework and background of the Ebionite way of life” (1955, 344), without any indication of the incongruity of this statement. Firstly, the canon of these Christian writings had not been established at the time the *Damascus Document* is alleged to have had its origins, therefore the Ebionites would not have drawn from these writings. It is also documented that the Ebionites had an aversion to Pauline teachings, to which the canonical Christian writings are majorly indebted. Finally, the Ebionites, if they were a distinct group, were most likely using a text of Jesus’s sayings closer to *Q*, or perhaps the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, rather than the “New Testament” which is a canon of the trinitarian Church. However, it is significant that Fitzmyer does highlight that the communities at Qumrân may have influenced the “Ebionites” and so may suggest a pre-Christian tradition that John the Baptist, Jesus and James assented to, or at least utilized, in some of their teachings and lifestyles.⁹²

⁹² See also a discussion on James as “the Righteous Teacher” in Eisenman, Robert. 2002. *James the Brother of Jesus*. London: Watkins, 128-32.

One aspect of Joseph Fitzmyer's study is his recognition of the similar use of the motif "the Teacher of Righteousness" in the *Pseudo Clementine Literature* to that of the *Damascus Document* 9:68. He sees a resemblance in typology to the "True Prophet" in the *Kērygmata Petrou* (KP) of the *Pseudo Clementine Literature* (PsC) (c. 320 - 380 C.E.), often understood as Ebionite writings:

The function of the True Prophet in *KP* is similar to that of the Teacher of Righteousness in at least in that he too is looked upon as the leader of the group, and the helper of a mankind which is enshrouded in darkness and ignorance, communicating to it knowledge. (1955, 357)

The figure of a *Teacher of Righteousness* refers back to first Zechariah and the fourth carpenter (Zech. 1:20), therefore not an unusual character to prefigure apocalyptic and final times events, whether in Qumrān or Ebionite narratives. Fitzmyer goes further in indicating that Christ is the True Prophet of the PsC [*Pseudoclementines*] (cf. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.18; *Hom.* 3:52-56 PsC) (1955, 356). The conclusion that can be deduced is that there was a recognition of a Teacher of Righteousness that was both present and future in the Qumrān/Ebionite Literature. This figure could have been Jesus (according to Fitzmyer) in the *Pseudo Clementine Literature*, but also some anticipated figure at the end times. It is this paradigm that, if maintained within the Jewish Nazarene/Ebionite movement, would have impacted on the mindset of the Nazoraean community in Medina, who were looking forwards to the coming of a Righteous Teacher/Prophet (see 3.12). Although it has been analyzed in greater depth in earlier chapters, it is important to recognize a sense of anticipation within Muḥammad's wider family. His wife Khadīja's cousin Waraqa, a man familiar with the writings of the prophets and wrote from the gospel in Hebrew, is recounted as meeting with Khadīja and Muḥammad immediately after his first revelation (Lecker 2017, 363-5).

If the Christian narrative is placed to one side, the recognition of a Josephite prophetic lineage within divine revelation is continuous within the Jewish literature and mindset from at least the 6th century B.C.E. through to, and beyond, the 7th century C.E. It is significant to this

thesis to recognize that if the Nazoraeans continued as a movement of purity and holiness, similar to the Essenes of Qumrān, then it would not be astonishing to find these beliefs present in the Jewish Nazoraean community of Medina or the wider family of Muḥammad (see Chapter 3.11). With the backcloth of the events of the Persian conquest of Jerusalem occurring at the time of the revelations to Muḥammad, there would be a coming together of history and hope in viewing the importance of that message to Jew and Gentile.

As has been considered, the Nazoraean community could be recognized as a Torah observant, perhaps Nazirite-style, ascetic community. Both Jewish lifestyles are concomitant with messianic and apocalyptic literature of post-Second Temple Jewish communities of the diaspora. These communities created a rich mixture of Jewish practices but remained under the umbrella of Mosaic Law. These post-Jerusalem Temple movements, together with perhaps the more mainstream rabbinical tradition, continued to recognize themselves in relation to the catastrophe, which was the expulsion from Jerusalem, and therefore the need to rework their messianic aspirations into some future time when Jew and Gentile would return to the holy mountain:

And it shall come to pass in the end of days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established as the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many peoples shall go and say: 'Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the G-d of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

And He shall judge between the nations and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (Isaiah 2:2-4 JPS)

These verses highlight the main themes that remain consistent for all Jews in Late Antiquity and colour other Jewish literature of the time; that the people of the world will gather as one in Jerusalem to worship the one God, war will end, and the nations will be judged.

At this point it is important not to ignore the *Messiah ben Joseph*, or Ephraimite messiah thread that weaves itself within the narrative:

And He will set up an ensign for the nations, and will assemble the dispersed of Israel, and gather together the scattered of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and they that harass Judah shall be cut off; Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. And they shall fly down upon the shoulder of the Philistines on the west; together shall they spoil the children of the east; they shall put forth their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them. And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with His scorching wind will He shake His hand over the River, and will smite it into seven streams, and cause men to march over dry-shod. And there shall be a highway for the remnant of His people, that shall remain from Assyria, like as there was for Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt. (Isaiah 11:12-16 JPS)

At these end times Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom of Israel) and Judah (the Southern Kingdom) will no longer be at odds with each other, and the diaspora will be gathered from exile. The writings in Ezekiel highlight this reconciliation of Judah and Ephraim, and points to a time of ingathering:

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying:
 ‘And thou, son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it: For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions; then take another stick, and write upon it: For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and of all the house of Israel his companions; and join them for thee one to another into one stick, that they may become one in thy hand. And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying: Wilt thou not tell us what thou meanest by these? Say into them: Thus saith the Lord G-D: Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his companions; and I will put them unto him together with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thy hand before their eyes. And say unto them: Thus saith the Lord G-D: Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, whither they are gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all; neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will save them out of all their dwelling-places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them; so shall they be My people, and I will be their God. (Ezekiel 37:15-23 JPS)

For the writer of Ezekiel there will be a future reunification of Ephraim and Judah; the leader of the southern kingdom (the Davidic messiah) would bring peace, but as we have seen,

not without the sacrifice of the Ephraimite messiah as a sign of the beginning of the redemption process.⁹³ Developing from this and the vision of Obadiah (1:17-21), the Midrashic literature (the *Pesikta Rabbati*), encapsulates these two messianic figures, the *Messiah ben Joseph* and the Messiah ben David (Schäfer 2012, 237). The *Messiah ben Joseph* represents the ten lost tribes taken into captivity in the First Exile to Babylon, whilst the Messiah ben David represents the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin. According to the *Pesikta Rabbati*, these two figures are to come before the restitution of the twelve tribes and the establishment of peace on earth. The Josephite messiah will be a warrior but will die in battle before completion of the return. A short time after his death, the Davidic messiah will come and raise him from death. In the period before the resurrection of the Josephite messiah, many Jews will lose faith. It is the task of the faithful Jew to remain firm until the Messiah ben David appears, raises the *Messiah ben Joseph* from the dead and restores all the twelve tribes and the nations to Jerusalem, and rebuilds the third Temple (Ulmer 2013, 122; Cook 2021, 5). In the context of Jewish, Nazoraean and other monotheistic beliefs in the diaspora of the early 7th century with the Persian conquest of Jerusalem as the backdrop, it is important to review the figure of Jesus in the journey of the *Messiah ben Joseph* typology within the Nazoraean movement (Jews who understood their roots within the Northern (Ephraimite) Kingdom).

5.6 Jesus the Jew

According to canonical Christian literature Jesus was born and brought up within a Jewish family in a community of Jews in the northern Roman Province of Judaea. This idea of Jesus as a Jew is not easily resolved given the historical persecution and anti-Semitism of the

⁹³ See *Bavli Sukkah* 52a:2-4

Church towards Jews in the last two millennia.⁹⁴ A resolution of this conflict may centre around the nature of Jesus, his message, his followers and the meaning of the term “messiah” for Jews and Christians (Vermes 1973).⁹⁵ As Magnus Zetterholm observes, “..messianism scarcely constitutes a common ground for Jews and Christians.... [On the contrary,] ‘the Messiah’ has been the most important concept that distinguishes Christianity from Judaism.” (2007, xxiv)

This concept of “messiah” in turn can highlight the nature of Jesus as an historical figure over and above the theological character understood by the visionary Paul. Subsequently, this perception of Jesus developed in Pauline Christianity and spread west after 70 C.E., leaving those Jews who understood Jesus as a Jewish messiah to move east to Pella and beyond (Crone 2015, 226; Pines 1966, 21). Those Jews who understood Jesus as a human Jewish messiah find their tradition within the *Gospel of the Hebrews* and other writings, and the movement called the Nazarenes/Ebionites (the latter likely to be a derogatory name for this community (cf. Maccoby 1986, 175), that I refer to as the Nazoraeans).

What can be deduced from the Synoptic gospels of Jesus’ identity as a messiah? There is very little evidence, and some is found late in the gospels, representing a time of reflection on the events of his life. In Mark 12:35-37 (NIV), Jesus is in discussion with the Pharisees over the meaning of Psalm 110:1(JPS); “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”:

⁹⁴ Murcia, Thierry. 2018. “The Parable of the Twins in the Tosefta: An Underlying Reference to Jesus?” In *Jews and Christians in Antiquity*, 183–90. Leuven: Peeters Publishers; Dunn, James D G and Scot McKnight (eds.). 2005. *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research*. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns; Bertalotto, Pierpaolo with Gabriele Boccaccini and James H. Charlesworth (eds.). 2010. “The Historical Jesus: Contemporary Interpreters and New Perspectives.” *Henoch* 32 (2): 250–330; Holmén, Tom. 2004. “Jesus, Judaism and the Covenant.” *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 2 (1): 3–27; Sanders, E. P. 1993. *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London: Allen Lane; Boyarin, Daniel. 2016. “The Quest for the Historical Metatron: Enoch or Jesus.” In *A Question of Identity*. Oldenbourg: De Gruyter.

⁹⁵ “The positive and constant testimony of the earliest Gospel tradition, considered against its natural background of first-century Galilean charismatic religion, leads not to a Jesus as unrecognizable within the framework of Judaism as by the standard of his own verifiable words and intentions, but to another figure: Jesus the just man, the zaddik, Jesus the helper and healer, Jesus the teacher and leader, venerated by his intimates and less committed admirers alike as prophet, lord and son of God.” (Vermes 1973, 225).

While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, ‘Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

‘The Lord said to my Lord:
Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.’

David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?’ The large crowd listened to him with delight.

It appears that Jesus is unaware that this is a mistranslation of Psalm 110:1 לַדָּוִד מִזְמוֹר נָאִם יְהוָה (“*To David. The psalmist. Saith the LORD*”). It is therefore more likely to be a later Christian interpolation to demonstrate Jesus’ exegetical superiority to the Scribes and his role as the Davidic Messiah: “Some point has been scored that would make sense to the audience.” (Charlesworth 1987, 455). In this passage from Mark 12, Jesus is understood to have placed himself within the context of a Davidic messiah: “It is appropriate for David to call his messianic son ‘Lord’ in view of Jesus’ Installation at God’s right hand.” (1987, 455), and thereby simplify the confusion of the text from Psalm 110. The problem here, as in other references to Jesus as a Davidic messiah in the canonical Christian writings (Matt. 1:1, 20; Matt. 9:27; Matt. 12:23; Matt. 20:30-1; Matt. 21:9, 15; Matt. 22.42; Mark 10:47-8; Mark 12:35; Luke 3:31 – the genealogy of Jesus as Son of David via Judah and not Joseph to present him as a Southern Kingdom Messiah) is that there is no evidence in Jewish literature or scripture of the Davidic messiah dying and rising. It is therefore possible that this is a creative *theologoumenon*⁹⁶ by the canonical writers, and perhaps a misunderstanding of the role of the *Messiah ben Joseph* who was to die and be resurrected by the later coming of the Davidic messiah figure.

The second instance of Jesus’ messiahship in the Synoptics is found in Matthew 22.41-46 (NIV):

Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures:
‘The stone the builders rejected

⁹⁶ *Theologoumenon*: theological thought not derived from divine revelation.

has become the cornerstone;
 the Lord has done this,
 and it is marvelous in our eyes?’

Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.’

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

This appears to be another instance where the Psalms (118:22-3) are used to state Jesus’ position over the Jewish authorities. The final reference is in Mark 13:6 (NIV) and is part of an apocalyptic narrative:

Jesus said to them: ‘Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, “I am he,” and will deceive many.’

If these words are authentic, then the inference is that the disciples were still looking for a messiah figure, as though not recognizing Jesus as that messiah. It is, however, more likely a later interpolation to warn the early Christian community away from distracting messianic figures. Altogether, there is little indication of Jesus’ self-declaration of messiahship in the Synoptics, or in the Source documents *Q*.

It can be deduced from this that the Gospel interpretations of the Jesus figure utilize material from Hebrew writings to present him as the final Davidic messiah, whilst incorporating elements of a Josephite tradition that speaks of a suffering and dying messiah. It has been well known that the placing of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem was a later attempt to site him in the “town of David”, thereby declaring his role as “Son of David” (Sanders 1993, 85-8). It is not the role of this thesis to provide detailed exegesis of Gospel passages. The critical point to be made here is that the development of the Messiah-hood of Jesus (together with birth, death and Resurrection narratives) was a later *post-mortem* interpretation of the life of the individual figure.

The Gospels are faith documents that have a purpose for proselytization (*εὐαγγέλιον* “to bring good news”) but not for historical detail. If there are sources for these Gospels some

scholars argue that they are found in *Q* (*Quelle* for source)⁹⁷. Other scholars have suggested that there was an early Gospel written in Hebrew from which the Gospel of Matthew was sourced⁹⁸. I shall consider these sources later in this chapter.

5.7 Jesus the *Hasid*

It is widely noted in canonical Christian writings that the majority of Jesus' life was focussed on preaching in Galilee, with a few excursions to Jerusalem for festivals. Other than the birth narratives that locate Jesus originating in the "city of David" for messianic purposes, Galilee is the *locus operandi* of the messiah in the canonical Christian literature. However, Galilee is allegedly not the area for the divine agency:

On hearing his words, some of the people said, 'Surely this man is the Prophet.'
Others said, 'He is the Messiah.'
Still others asked, 'How can the Messiah come from Galilee? Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?' (John 7:40-2 NIV)

This has led to the belief expressed by Nathanael: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46 NIV). Although the canonical Christian writings locate Jesus in Galilee, it does not fit well into the Judaean, Davidic image of Messiah-hood. As mentioned in Chapter 5, following the destruction of the Temple and the expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem in the 2nd century there grew a centre for the new diaspora around Sepphoris in northern Galilee, but before that:

Galilee stayed far removed from the world of Torah and observance of the commandments, both before the destruction of the Temple and during the Yavneh period, until the Sanhedrin and its sages moved to Galilee after the Bar Kokhba war. (Safrai 1990, 148).

⁹⁷ Dunn, James D.G. 2003. *Jesus remembered*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans. 192.

⁹⁸ Edwards, James R. 2009. *The Hebrew Gospel and the development of the synoptic tradition*. Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 228.

An image of Galilee is presented there as being spiritually impoverished in the 1st century C.E., maybe in accordance with the dominating view of the failure of Ephraim and the northern tribes. It gave credence to Jewish writers to present Christianity as deviant from Torah observance on account of being from Galilee. Modern Jewish scholars are now deliberating Galilee as being a richer source of Jewish spirituality than has traditionally been considered. The watershed for this change of attitude comes from Gedaliah Alon's book, *Toldot ha-yehudim be-erez Yisrael bi-Tequfat ha-Mishnah ve-ha-Talmud*.⁹⁹ Shemuel Safrai cites a number of teachers that lived in Galilee in the time before and after the Destruction of Jerusalem such as Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Halafta, Rabbi Haninah ben Teradion, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Zadok and Rabbi Jose ben Kisma (Safrai 1990). One of the disciples of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai of Arav (c. mid-1st century C.E.) was Rabbi Ḥanina ben Dosa. Rabbi Ḥanina was therefore a contemporary of Jesus and similarly a charismatic preacher and Torah observant (1990, 175). Rabbi Ḥanina ben Dosa was a *pietist* or *Ḥasid*, together with others of his time: Abba Hilkiyah and a "pietist priest from Ramat Beit Anat". Safrai considers Jesus to be of this tradition, "whose teachings and miraculous acts exemplify several of the characteristic lines that we have found in the teachings and acts of the pietists." (1990, 180).

It will be important to consider the life and role of Rabbi Ḥanina as a "Healer, Miracle-worker, Teacher" and contemporary of Jesus; both were from the same region and both with a similar mission. He also remained halachically observant whilst challenging the spirit of the letter of the Law much as Jesus did. This may shed some light on the nature of Jesus' role and mission within the boundaries of Jewish life. The life of Rabbi Ḥanina should not be seen as historical in the modern sense of the word, and as it is found in the Mishnah (*Berakhot* 5:5;

⁹⁹ "The History of the Jews in the Land of Israel during the Period of the Mishnah and the Talmud" (in Hebrew). 1961. Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuchad. (Safrai 1990, 148fn.)

Soṭah 9:15 and *Pirkei Avot* 3:9)¹⁰⁰ which are recensions of earlier texts. On the quality of Ḥanina's teachings, Géza Vermes expounds the belief that:

Taken together, [...] define religion as inspired by gentle devotion and kindness towards one's fellows. As in the stories, he appears not as an austere ascetic, but as a warm-hearted lover of men, a true Ḥasid. (1972, 48)

It can be deduced from this evidence that charismatic, observant Jewish teaching was present in the Galilee region in the 1st century C.E. through a pietist tradition exemplified by, but not unique to, Rabbi Ḥanina ben Dosa. Vermes concludes on the teachings of Rabbi Ḥanina that they “constitute the most direct insight we possess into the Ḥasidic mind and outlook, since the other much larger collection, that of the contemporaneous teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, is extant only in a foreign language and an alien arrangement.” (1972, 50). It is important to bear this deduction in mind when considering the character of James, Jesus' brother, and the belief system of the Jewish Nazoraeans, who remained a charismatic Torah observant community. They valued the teachings of a human Jewish messiah and waited for the fulfilment of the messianic promise of a return to Jerusalem and a unification of Jew and Gentile at the end times (Segal, A.F. in Charlesworth 1987, 326; Bertalotto 2010, 313; Yoshiko Reed 2018, xvii-xviii).

5.8 The question of *Q*

This study of *Q* forms the backdrop to the possible style and structure of the Hebrew Gospels, as distinct from the Greek canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) (c. 65-130 C.E.). The development of the *Q* hypothesis suggests that there was a source (*Q*) of the sayings of Jesus from which the writers of the Synoptic Gospels drew their material. Within the notable work of John S. Kloppenborg in his book *Formation of Q* (1999) there is the suggestion

¹⁰⁰ *The Mishnah*. Accessed 5th May 2021. <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Mishnah>

of source gospel material not focussed on Jesus' death and resurrection (or birth). He suggests a dating for this material as before the Destruction of the Temple (c. 70 C.E.) because there is no allusion to that event, whilst Schnelle in *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings* suggests a time between 40 and 50 C.E. for composition (1998, 186).

In style, *Q* emphasizes an ascetic or poverty theme. There are various calls to renounce one's life and riches, that the followers of Jesus must "hate" their own families and not worry about their daily needs. They are followers of the Son of Man, who has nowhere to lay his head; and they are not even to go home to bury someone from their own family. Here there may be some cross links to a Nazirite-style tradition as mentioned elsewhere.

The immediacy of the end times is a significant part of *Q*. Schweitzer, Harnack and Bultmann¹⁰¹ all recognize the significance of eschatology to the content of the "*sayings*" hypothesis or *Q*; the urgency of the role of Israel to the eschaton; the preaching of the path by John the Baptist; the final ethical call of the Beatitudes and the Parousia. It presents Jesus as a wandering charismatic, or prophet, preaching an ethical Torah-based Kingdom of God (R. A. Edwards 1971, 267; Meadors 1999, 259; Taylor 2003, 285). Similar to the Synoptics, and logically so, *Q* has little or no reference to Jesus being recognized as a messiah figure:

Furthermore, that Jesus nowhere explicitly identifies himself as Messiah in *Q* is exactly what should be expected in view of similar silence among the sayings of Jesus found elsewhere in the Synoptic Gospels (especially Mark). Indeed, *Q* would be anomalous to its Synoptic environment if it did report Jesus using 'Messiah' as a self-reference. (Meadors 1999, 277)

The significance of *Q* is that it is not an appendix to Pauline teaching; "Q's theology and soteriology are fundamentally different". (Koester 1990, 159). Unlike the Synoptics and Pauline letters, there is no criticism of "the Law", or the existence of "Grace over Works" theology as seen in many of the epistles (Regev 2019, 127).¹⁰² Kloppenborg translates this

¹⁰¹ Schweitzer, Albert. 1910. *The Quest of the historical Jesus: a critical study of its progress from Reimarus to Wrede*. New York: Macmillan; Harnack, Adolf von. 1904. *What is Christianity?: sixteen lectures*. London: Williams and Norgate; Bultmann, Rudolf Karl. 1976. *The history of the synoptic tradition*. New York: Harper and Row. 370.

¹⁰² See Gal. 5:2-4. NIV

passage from Siegfried Schulz's book, *Q: Die Spruchquelle der Evangelisten* (1972, 168), to highlight the original position of *Q* within a Jewish movement:

There is no question that the Palestinian Jewish-Christianity which stands behind the oldest *Q* material was an eschatological and enthusiastic movement filled with a burning expectation of the end, and in this respect was no different from other communities in Israel. This is not altered by the fact that in the oldest *Q* material titles such as 'the true Israel' or 'the new Israel' or, as in the Aramaic-speaking community in Jerusalem, the eschatological title 'the Elect' and 'the Holy Ones' ('the poor'?) are absent. The oldest *Q* community understood itself as the community of the end-time. (Kloppenborg 1987, 289)

This idea of preparation for end times is not one of supernatural interventions as in traditional apocalyptic literature. Kloppenborg suggests there is present in *Q* a "symbolic eschatology", utilising apocalyptic terminology to present an urgency for a change in the here and now, a radical transformation of society under God's rule.

What would the *Q* community consider to be their purpose and their *raison d'être*? Piecing together the form and content of the document as a whole develops the picture of a community with two characteristics. These are, being prepared for a final judgement, and how to live in the present to prepare for this. In other words, "the eschatological future of all Israel, including Jerusalem and the temple" and "claim to be Torah obedient and accept tithing and ritual purity as part of everyday life" (Cromhout 2007, 378). Richard Edwards in his article *An Approach to a Theology of Q* envisions this:

The *Q* community has recognized that the Jesus they knew, who is no longer present with them, is indeed the one who is to come, the Son of Man. Since he is the future judge, his imminent return is the eschatological judgment, at which time those who are prepared for his appearance as Son of Man will be declared the elect. Thus, to prepare for his coming, they have gathered together into a fellowship which continues to teach what he taught. His influence on them continues in the inspiration of prophets within the community who speak his words, both those remembered from the past and those inspired sayings which continue to guide the community as new situations are confronted. (1971, 250)

The *Q* community of observant Jews continued to expect a future restoration: this would have been developed and re-framed within the experiences of the 1st and 2nd century events in Jerusalem. The language of *Q* was undoubtedly Aramaic, the language of the Galilean rural

Jew, although it must have been translated in an urban setting to be usable by the Greek-speaking authors of Matthew and Luke or represents a Greek script of an Aramaic oral tradition (Taylor 2003, 284, 290). Taylor makes a further observation with reference to the relationship to the Jewish Nazoraean movement and *Q*, to consider an even earlier source known to Papias (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiae* 3.39), although he appears open to the idea of an Aramaic source to the *Gospel of the Nazoraeans*:

Such a document or documents, or oral collection/s, may well have been incorporated into the Jewish Christian gospels, particularly that of the Nazoraeans, independently of *Q* and the canonical gospels. Even if the general scholarly assumption, derived largely from Jerome (who is generally not accepted uncritically on other points), is correct, that these documents are dependent on the canonical gospels, and Matthew in particular, the possibility of a tradition of Jesus' teaching independent of *Q* cannot be excluded. The *Gospel of the Nazoraeans* in particular is likely to have used an Aramaic source, should such have been available. (Taylor 2003, 287-8)

This Aramaic source in an oral and/or written form, would develop a basis for the *Gospel of the Hebrews/ Nazoraeans*, which was independent of the canonical gospels. The Galilean community of Jesus is the paradigm of a Jewish movement that considered itself to have been given an ethical wisdom code within the parameters of the Torah and called to prepare for a coming "Son of Man" and the Kingdom of God. Their particular style of living is one of self-renunciation and holiness, as a means of preparation for judgement (Kloppenborg 2008, 97). There appears little to make this Jewish community incompatible with the wider first century Jewish environs and beyond into the post-Temple diaspora.

5.9 A Jewish Gospel and Patristic construal

Beyond the earliest years in Galilee, it is suggested by the Patristic writers that a Jewish community of the followers of Jesus maintained their identity within the synagogues of the

diaspora, initially in Pella and Bercea (Aleppo), and later in “all the synagogues of the East”¹⁰³ (Jerome, *Epistula* 112.4.13). I will consider three Gospels that are presented by Patristic writers as existing in Late Antiquity: *The Gospel of the Hebrews*, *the Gospel of the Nazarenes* and *the Gospel of the Ebionites*. Of course, the source of our knowledge is not without bias and interpretation, as the Byzantine Church by the 4th century C.E. had developed an opinion against Jews and “heretical” material that I will consider later. Another source from which to draw evidence are the canonical and non-canonical writings that were contemporary to these Gospels; the *Letter of James*, *the Gospel of Thomas*, *the Stichometry of Nicephorus*, and *the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions*.

The *Gospel of the Hebrews* has been considered as the Gospel used by the Nazoraeans and is closely aligned to the canonical Gospel of Matthew, but is not dependent on it. This tradition arises from the *Expositions of Oracles of the Lord* by Papias (c.60-130 C.E.) stating: “So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and everyone interpreted them as he was able.”¹⁰⁴ This was embedded in the writings of Jerome (342-420 C.E.), who transcribed a Greek and Latin version of the Gospel of Matthew from its original Hebrew (allegedly the *Gospel of the Hebrews*). Considering the references to an early Hebrew Gospel in early Patristic writings, this Gospel [of the Hebrews] does not show reliance on the canonical Christian literature and presents James as the figure who first witnesses the resurrection (Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* 2).

The *Stichometry of Nicephorus* written by the Patriarch of Constantinople (806-815 C.E.) documents the number of lines in the canonical books of the Christian “Old and New

¹⁰³ Jerome. *Epistula from Jerome to Augustine (A.D. 404) 112.4.13*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 4th March 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102075.htm>

¹⁰⁴ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiae. Book III. Chapter 39 The Writings of Papias*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 5th May 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm>

Testaments”, but adds some texts in the *antilegomena*,¹⁰⁵ including the *Gospel of the Hebrews* and unusually, the *Revelation of John*. This indicates that the *Gospel of the Hebrews* was still accessible to the Byzantine Church in the 9th century, although it may have been a copy of Jerome’s Greek or Latin version.

In the 2nd century, Irenaeus (c.180 C.E.) makes reference to the Ebionites highlighting distinctive practices; a singular Gospel, a rejection of Paul (and Pauline writings?), Torah observance, and reverence for Jerusalem:

Those who are called Ebionites agree that the world was made by God; but their opinions with respect to the Lord are similar to those of Cerinthus and Carpocrates. They use the Gospel according to Matthew only, and repudiate the Apostle Paul, maintaining that he was an apostate from the law. As to the prophetic writings, they endeavour to expound them in a somewhat singular manner: they practise circumcision, persevere in the observance of those customs which are enjoined by the law, and are so Judaic in their style of life, that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God. (Roberts, Alexander, James Donaldson 1999) *Adversus Haereses* 1.26.2¹⁰⁶

There is some question as to whether the Ebionites were a distinct “group”, or rather a derogatory term for “Judaized Christians” as they were perceived to be. Most of the Patristic writers categorize a “heresy” with a named group (Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius),¹⁰⁷ in some cases the followers of a figure, Ebion (Tertullian and Hippolytus).¹⁰⁸ This figure is most likely a personalized development of the social emphasis of the belief to live simply, to be “poor” (אביון) (Rom. 15:26; Gal. 2:10). The Patristic writers play with the title to denigrate the beliefs of this group by speaking of their teachings as being “poor” in rejecting the hope of Christ and retention of the Jewish Law (Tertullian). The “sect” used only Matthew,¹⁰⁹ although as

¹⁰⁵ *Antilegomena*: Disputed texts.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Irenaeus *Adversus Haereses*. Accessed 5th May 2021.

<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.ii.xxvii.html>

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Origen. *De Principiis* 4.3.8; Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiae* 3.27.1-2; Epiphanius. *Panarion* 30.17.1

¹⁰⁸ “This view of the matter could have suited Ebion, who determines that Jesus is a bare man, merely of the seed of David, and therefore not also the Son of God.” Tertullian, *De Carne Christi*, 14. (Tertullian 1956, 50); cf. Tertullian. *De praescriptione haereticorum* 33.3-5, 20 and Hippolytus. *Philosophumena (Refutation of All Heresies)* 7.35.

¹⁰⁹ Irenaeus. *Adversus Haereses* 1:26:2; Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiae* 3:27:4; Epiphanius. *Panarion* 29:9:4; 30:16:4-5; Jerome. *On Matt.* 12:13.

mentioned earlier, this could have been mistaken for the *Gospel of the Hebrews*. They appear to maintain Jewish practices, reading the prophets, circumcision, complying with the Law and “even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God”. They appear to be a Jewish movement with a supplementary text of the sayings of Jesus, mistaken by some Patristic writers for the Greek Gospel of Matthew. In line with the Jewish community of James, they reject the teachings of Paul, as an apostate.

Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho [the Jew]* (c.155-160 C.E.) describes two groups of Jews: one accepts Gentiles without circumcision (who he accepts he can work with), and another group that maintains a stricter code of conversion and circumcision. These he describes in this way:

But if, Trypho, I said, they who are of your race say they believe on this Christ of ours, and in every way compel those who are of Gentile birth and believe on this Christ to live in accordance with the law appointed by Moses, or choose not to have communion with them that have such a life in common-these also in like manner I do not accept. [...] But they that once professed and recognized that this is the Christ, and for some cause or other passed over into the life under the Law, denying that this is the Christ, and do not repent before death, cannot, I declare, in any wise be saved. And in the same way I declare that they of the seed of Abraham who live after the Law, and believe not on this our Christ before the end of their life, will not be saved, and especially they who in the synagogues have anathematised, and still anathematise, those who believe on that very Christ, in order that they may obtain salvation and be freed from the punishment of fire. *Dialogue with Trypho* 47 (Justin Martyr and A. Lukyn Williams 1930, 94)

Here he does not name the group but does consider them to be of Trypho’s “race”, that is Jews and particularly Jews who believe in Christ. Justin will not have anything to do with this group, whilst Jews who do not believe in Christ will not be saved and be condemned to fire. Thereby, some seeds of separation and condemnation are sown that develop into an “epistemic shift” of understanding towards Jews throughout Christian history (Boyarin 2006, 39, 74).

Eusebius in his *Historia Ecclesiae* III 27 (c.324 C.E.) in the section “*The Heresy of the Ebionites*” describes them in an expected polemic for heretics: “The ancients quite properly

called these men Ebionites, because they held poor and mean opinions concerning Christ.”¹¹⁰

Here reworking an older title (אביון) to condemn their error. Eusebius does make some observations of the Ebionites as a “group”, but it is uncertain that this it is from first-hand experience. He describes their belief as:

For they considered him [Jesus] a plain and common man, who was justified only because of his superior virtue, and who was the fruit of the intercourse of a man with Mary. (3.27.2)

Then “others” of the Ebionites, “...did not deny that the Lord was born of a virgin and of the Holy Spirit. But nevertheless, inasmuch as they also refused to acknowledge that he pre-existed, being God, Word, and Wisdom, they... endeavoured to observe strictly the bodily worship of the law.” (3.27.3)

These men, moreover, thought that it was necessary to reject all the epistles of the apostle, whom they called an apostate from the law [Paul]; and they used only the so-called Gospel according to the Hebrews and made small account of the rest. (3.27.4)¹¹¹

It seems Eusebius is taking his information from other sources, however there is consistency from the writings of Irenaeus, which may be one of his references. There appears to be little first-hand knowledge of the Ebionites or Nazarenes other than from the accounts of Jerome,¹¹² where Jerome claims to have visited them in Berœa. However, Eusebius does not make a distinction between the two groups (as does the *Panarion* 29 & 30) but considers them singularly as Nazarenes. As mentioned above, I have considered them a movement within Jewish communities rather than a sect, or a group of “Jewish Christians”.

Similarly, Epiphanius in *Panarion* 30 (310 – 403 C.E.) condemns the Ebionites, personified in a figure called “Ebion”, in no uncertain terms, but does link them to the teachings of the Nazoraeans:

Following these and holding views like theirs, Ebion, the founder of the Ebionites, arose in the world in his turn as a monstrosity with many forms, and practically

¹¹⁰ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiae. Book III. Chapter 27 The Heresy of the Ebionites*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 5th May 2021.

<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm>

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Jerome. *De Viris Illustribus* 2. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 22nd June 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2708.htm>

represented in himself the snake-like form of the mythical many-headed hydra. He was of the Nazoraeans' school, but preached and taught other things than they. (*Panarion* 30.1.1) (Williams 2009, 131)

Within this chapter Epiphanius also makes reference to the Ebionites, who follow the Law of the Sabbath, circumcision, and other observances, including the use of a *mikvah*.¹¹³ After the fall of Jerusalem, he places them with the Nazoraeans in Peraea then, in Pella, a town in the “Decapolis”, which is near Batanaea and Bashanitis. Also, he claims they are found in Cocabe in the district of Qarnaim—also called Ashtaroth—in Bashanitis [Syria].

In Chapter 29 of *Panarion* Epiphanius speaks in detail of the Nazoraeans who have a Gospel (according to Matthew) in Hebrew, but his information appears not to be first-hand but interpretive of the information received (trans. Williams 2009, 123). He is definite in some aspects of his polemic: “But they are Jews in every way and nothing else.” (*Panarion* 29.7.1) (2009, 128). He describes them as using the canonical Christian literature, but does not detail to what extent, other than “the Gospel according to Matthew in its entirety in Hebrew” (29.9.4) (2009, 130). He continues to make a clear statement about their Jewish traditions but appears unaware that the Christian understanding of “Christ” would not be conducive to confessing, “everything in full accord with the doctrine of the Law” (29.7.2) (2009, 128). Epiphanius is emphatic about their Jewishness:

They are perfectly versed in the Hebrew language, for the entire Law, the prophets, and the so-called *Writings* – I mean the poetic books, *Kings*, *Chronicles*, *Esther* and all the rest – are read in Hebrew among them, as of course they are among the Jews. (*Panarion* 29.7.4) (2009, 128)

His condemnation of them comes from the fact they are Jews, rather than heretical Christians:

In this Sect too, my brief discussion will be sufficient. People of their kind are refutable at once and easy to detect and, rather (than being heretical Christians), are Jews and nothing else. (*Panarion* 29.9.1) (2009, 130)

¹¹³ *Mikvah*: A body of natural water that an observant Jew will immerse themselves as part of an act of purification.

He goes on to present that they are condemned by Jews, using a Christian methodology of excluding heterodox groups. He misunderstands that if they “confess everything in full accord with the doctrine of the Law” (29.7.2), then there is no cause for a Jewish community to reject them. Epiphanius explains:

Yet to the Jews they are very much enemies. Not only do Jewish people bear hatred against them; they even stand up at dawn, at midday, and toward evening, three times a day when they recite their prayers in the synagogues, and curse and anathematize them—saying three times a day, ‘God curse the Nazoraean.’ (*Panarion* 29.9.2) (2009, 130)

He would have had little understanding of Jewish communities at this time as the Church had made clear its rejection of Jews and their practices. It is much more likely that the Jewish liturgy would have been cursing the Christian Church which was actively persecuting them.¹¹⁴ Eusebius’ *Life of Constantine* (Book III) (c. 339 C.E.) on the establishment of the date of Easter, declares:

First of all, it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast [Easter] we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. For we have it in our power, if we abandon their custom, to prolong the due observance of this ordinance to future ages by a truer order, which we have preserved from the very day of the passion until the present time. Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd, for we have received from our Savior a different way.¹¹⁵

This, as with other statements from the *Letter*, declare a long-standing departure from “Jewish ways” by the time of the Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.), which fed into further anti-Jewish polemics by the Church throughout Late Antiquity and beyond.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ The *apostynagōgos* of the Fourth Gospel (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) referring to the Jewish threat to expel those who “confess Jesus to be Christ” is often seen as “the parting of the ways” resulting in the blame falling on the Jews for not accepting Christ. It would be unlikely that there were many Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians in the 1st century to curse at that time (Boyarin 2001, 430). By the time of Epiphanius in the 4th century, after the Council of Nicaea, the desire to develop orthodoxy in the Roman Church would be all-consuming, needing a “medicine chest” (*Panarion*) to cure it from all poison (cf. the challenge of Arianism, Apollinarianism, Origenism, etc.).

¹¹⁵ Eusebius. *Life of Constantine. Book III. Chapter 18. He speaks of their Unanimity respecting the Feast of Easter, and against the Practice of the Jews.* Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series.* New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 5th May 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/25023.htm>

¹¹⁶ Eusebius. *Letter on the Council of Nicaea.* Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series.* New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 22nd June 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2804.htm>

In that century, Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386 C.E.) in his “*The Discourse on Mary Theotokos*” recounts a meeting with a monk from Gaza. Then follows a discussion on the *Gospel of the Hebrews* which is a document used by the monk with equal authority to the four canonical Gospels. The *Gospel of the Hebrews* appears to highlight that Mary possessed the δύναις¹¹⁷ of God and gave birth to Jesus. Cyril then argues that the teachings of the Jews can never be linked to the doctrine of Christ and the monk repents of his foolishness. Cyril then burns the monk’s books in a fire. The discussion also highlights the uncertainty of Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection, according to the *Gospel of the Hebrews*:

And that monk replied, ‘It is written in the [Gospel] to the Hebrews... And the Jews became envious of Him, they hated Him, they changed the custom of their Law, and they rose up against Him and laid a trap and caught Him, and they delivered Him to the governor, and he gave Him to them to crucify Him. And after they had ‘raised Him up on the Cross the Father took Him up into heaven unto Himself.’ [...] And that monk said unto him, ‘It is [the gospel] that was written to the Hebrews.’ And saint Cyril answered and said, ‘If thou speakest the truth, O brother, must we not then reject the teaching of the Christ, and follow the misleading doctrine of the Hebrews? God forbid!.... The doctrine of the Jews cannot be joined unto the doctrine of Christ. What connection can there be between the agreement of the [Gospel to the] Hebrews and the agreement of the Holy Gospels?’ (Budge 1915, 637-39)¹¹⁸

Although the Greek word *Dunamis* (δύναις) is used 120 times in the canonical Christian writings, it is never used for the power of God in Mary. The more significant element of this discourse for this present thesis is the phrase that they [the Jews] had, “raised Him up on the Cross the Father took Him up into heaven unto Himself.”. The presence of this phrase in the *Gospel of the Hebrews* appears a close parallel to the words of the Qur’ān:

and said, ‘We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.’ (They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them; those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition: *they certainly did not kill him - God raised him up to Himself*. God is almighty and wise. (Q 4:157-8) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 65)

¹¹⁷ *Dunamis*: strength, power, or ability

¹¹⁸ Budge, E. A. Wallis. 1915. *Miscellaneous Coptic texts in the dialect of Upper Egypt*. London: British Museum. Accessed on 18th May 2021.

<https://archive.org/details/miscellaneouscop00budguoft/page/638/mode/2up?q=heaven>

Although there is the reference to James witnessing the resurrection (Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* 2), this does not preclude that [Jerome's translation] was a later interpolation to establish James' authority over/against canonical versions on the post-empty tomb events. The principal waypoint in understanding the Patristic view of the Nazoraeans is in the writings of Jerome (342 C.E. – 420 C.E.). In his *De Viris Illustribus* (On Illustrious Men) he describes an original Gospel in Hebrew that was then translated into Greek, with an assumption that Matthew was the author (now questioned in modern scholarship):¹¹⁹

Matthew, also called Levi, apostle and aforesaid publican, composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Judea in Hebrew for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek, though by what author is uncertain. The Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library at Cæsarea which Pamphilus so diligently gathered. I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Berœa, a city of Syria, who use it.¹²⁰ *De Viris Illustribus* 3

Jerome indicates the *Gospel of the Hebrews* as an earlier version of Matthew existed in the library in Cæsarea and is still used by the “Nazarenes of Berœa”. Later Jerome states: “The Nazarenes... accept the Messiah in such a way that they do not cease to observe the old Law.” (*On Isaiah* 8:14).¹²¹ By the end of 4th century C.E., Jerome still speaks of a Nazoraean community that is fully compliant with “the old Law” and therefore a Jewish understanding of messiah-hood.

The Patristic writers do not always write from first-hand experience, nor with an objectivity of modern historical methodology. What does appear is that the integrity of their

¹¹⁹ Cf. Davies, William David, and Dale C. Allison. 1988. *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.

¹²⁰ Jerome. *De Viris Illustribus* 3. *Matthew*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 28th April 2021.
[https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2708.htm#:~:text=De%20Viris%20Illustribus%20\(On%20Illustrious%20Men\)%201%201.,4%204.%20Jude.%205%205.%20Paul.%20More%20items](https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2708.htm#:~:text=De%20Viris%20Illustribus%20(On%20Illustrious%20Men)%201%201.,4%204.%20Jude.%205%205.%20Paul.%20More%20items)

¹²¹ “Duas domus Nazaraei, qui ita Christum recipiunt, ut observationes legis veteris non omittant,[...]” from Jerome *Isaiah* 8.14. See also: “We may not exclude the possibility that Jerome's Latin text of the interpretation is a free rendering of the Nazoraean version adapted to the text of the Vulgate.” In Klijn, Albertus Frederik Johannes. 1972. “A Nazoraean Interpretation of *Isaiah*.” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 60 (2): 141-252.

assessment of the “groups” and their respective Gospels is questionable, but it does demonstrate an underlying knowledge of Nazoraean tradition within Jewish communities.

With reference to other gospels, Epiphanius also considers the *Gospel of the Ebionites* a Hebrew gospel, and that it is an abridged version of the Gospel of Matthew (Williams 2009, 131). The existing fragments of this Gospel at that time appear to present a document relating to elements of the Synoptics around the concerns for Jewish identity after the destruction of the Temple. It is considered to have been written in the mid-second century C.E. in Syria or Palestine (Cameron 1982).¹²²

Again, distinct from the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, the *Gospel of the Nazoraeans* is first mentioned by Eusebius as having been referred to by Hegesippus (c. 180 C.E.). It is mentioned by Eusebius (c.324 C.E.); Epiphanius (310 – 403 C.E.) and in the writings of Jerome (c. 400 C.E.), who incorrectly identifies it with the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, although he appears to have first-hand knowledge of the *Gospel of the Nazoraeans*.¹²³

The *Gospel of the Hebrews* is therefore distinct from other Gospels in pre-dating the Gospel of Matthew and appears not to be dependent on the canonical writings.¹²⁴ The uniqueness of the first resurrection appearance to James (Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* 2) indicates that the Jewish community that produced the writing may have understood him as their founder.

¹²² Cf. Myllykoski, Matti. 2007. “James the Just in History and Tradition: Perspectives of Past and Present Scholarship (Part II).” *Currents in Research* 6 (1): 11–98; Hirschberg, Harris. 1942. “Simon Bariona and the Ebionites.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 61 (3): 171–91; Rutgers, Leonard Victor. 1992. “Archaeological Evidence for the Interaction of Jews and Non-Jews in Late Antiquity.” *American Journal of Archaeology* 96 (1): 101–18; Mallek, Raanan. 2006. “On the Development and Underlying Unity of Sectarian Identity in Second Temple Period Judea.” Jerusalem: Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies.

¹²³ Cf. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiae*, 6.25.4; Epiphanius. *Panarion* 30.3.7; Jerome. *De Viris Illustribus* 3. *Matthew*.

¹²⁴ “The Ebionites, according to Irenaeus, read only the Gospel of Matthew. Epiphanius explains that this was not Greek Matthew but a Hebrew text otherwise known by Judaeo-Christian groups as the Gospel of the Hebrews. Otherwise, the Judaeo-Christians presumably continued to read the Hebrew Bible.” (Reynolds 2010, 196)

5.10 Conclusion to Chapter 5

For this thesis, considering the origins and characteristics of the first Jewish community that was reflected in the life of the figure Jesus, there appears little that would distinguish them from other Jews and no reason for them to be excluded either. The later “Jewish” Gospels, may have reflected elements of development, but so too do the canonical Gospels in a more significant way through their association with Paul and the Gentile mission. The Jewish community of *Q* and/or the *Gospel of the Hebrews* appears to have become physically separated from the Pauline mission that spread west. Moving east to Pella and beyond, the Jewish Nazoraeans seemed to continue within Jewish communities for centuries, occasionally being highlighted by Patristic writers into the 4th century C.E. The findings of this chapter point to the continuation of a belief in a human messiah/prophet figure Jesus within a Jewish messianic movement that can be subsumed under the title Nazoraeans. The characteristic of this messiah/prophet figure engages well within a pre-existent *Messiah ben Joseph* typology that anticipated its fulfilment through the coming of a Davidic messiah or Righteous Teacher, who would bring universal peace and a return to Jerusalem for all nations. It is this paradigm that is analyzed further in the thesis when considering the mindset of the Jews of Medina and 7th century Arabia. It is a hypothesis that the Jewish Nazoraean were present in Medina in the late 6th and early 7th century. I have suggested this by analysing some allusions to a Nazoraean narrative that seem to appear amongst the Banū Najjār and the *anṣār* community in Medina (see Chapter 3).

6 The Jewish Nazoraean Movement

6.1 Introduction to Chapter 6

It is my contention and a hypothesis of this study, that the Jews who were of the Nazoraean movement, as were Jesus and James, remained Jews and remained fully observant. They valued the teachings of Jesus as a narrative of a community of the poor, preparing for the righteous figure who will follow, the Davidic messiah who would fulfil the work of, and resurrect the Josephite messiah, return the Israelite tribes and all nations to Jerusalem and bring peace under the oneness of God. They are the thread and carriers of the Josephite Messiah figure into Late Antiquity, waiting for the Davidic messiah to come and return Jerusalem to a unified people, Jew and Gentile.

From the evidence of *Q* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews* there are indications that Jesus appeared to have been a charismatic figure, preaching to Jews the importance of an ethical way of life in preparation for the Kingdom of God. His self-reference as a Jewish messiah is small within the Synoptic gospels and in *Q*, however there are indications of a nazirite, or ascetic (Essene) emphasis on holiness and lifestyle. In this chapter I will assess the possible lifestyle of this Jewish movement called the Nazoraeans. Establishing continuity has been a challenge to many scholars who have seen them as a “Jewish Christian” community existing together or apart from their Jewish neighbours (cf. A. F. J. Klijn 2001; Jackson-McCabe 2012). Within this chapter I will review how the Nazoraeans are understood wholly within the Jewish community, with an emphasis on the Northern Kingdom messiah and an ethic based on purity and the Torah.

6.2 The figure of James

To be able to explore the beliefs and nature of this movement of Jews is important to consider now the life of James, as a figure close to Jesus, but someone who was not included into the myth development of the canonical Christian writings to such an extent. From this study I hope to offer evidence that corroborates the study of the *Gospel of the Hebrews* and provide a link to the development of the Jewish Nazoraean movement into Late Antiquity.

The sources to be considered first are the canonical Christian writings. In the Synoptic Gospels there is an indication that James was the “brother” of Jesus:

οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τέκτων, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς Μαρίας, καὶ ἀδελφὸς Ἰακώβου καὶ Ἰωσήτου καὶ Ἰούδα καὶ Σίμωνος?

Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother (ἀδελφός) of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? (Mark 6:3)

οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τοῦ τέκτονος υἱός? Οὐχ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ λέγεται Μαρίαμ? Καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωσήφ καὶ Σίμων καὶ Ἰούδας?

Is this not the son of the carpenter? Is this not his mother Mary? And his brothers (ἀδελφοὶ) James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? (Matt. 13:55)

Although there have been other views on what is meant by ἀδελφός, such as a cousin, stepbrother, or family member,¹²⁵ I intend to accept the simplest answer that James was Jesus’ genetic brother. This avoids the potential of reinterpreting relationships in the light of later Christian doctrines that would have been alien to the life of Jesus as a Jew.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ It can be suggested that the term “brothers” infers close relatives as in Genesis 13:8 (ἀδελφοὶ), 14:14 (ἀδελφός); Leviticus 10:4 (ἀδελφούς); 1 Chronicles 15:5-10 (ἀδελφοὶ), 23:21-22(ἀδελφοὶ), often translated as “brethren” or “cousins”. Many of the early Greek Patristic writers (Athanasius of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, and John Chrysostom) considered the ἀδελφός to be sons of Joseph by a first marriage. The Latin Fathers (Augustine of Hippo, Jerome) considered them to be “cousins”, to take into account the prevailing belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary_(Cf. *Protoevangelium of James* 4, 7; Origen. *Commentary on Matthew* 2:17; Hilary of Poitiers. *Commentary on Matthew* 1:4; Athanasius. *Discourses Against the Arians* 2:70).

¹²⁶ Cf. Mary as “ever-virgin” (ἀειπάρθενος) Second Council of Constantinople (553 C.E.); Lateran Council (649 C.E.)

Firstly, I wish to consider the *Letter of James* as it is found as a text in the canonical Christian writings. Here the *Letter* is distinct from Pauline Literature found in the corpus, as not seeing Jesus' death, atonement, and the Holy Spirit as essential to its teaching. In contrast, in the *Letter of James*, Jesus is the bringer of God's eschatological judgment reflecting the paradigm of the Jewish messianic literature of the time. E.P. Sanders outlines this tradition:

Those who looked for the restoration of the twelve tribes expected a miracle, since human census-taking would never trace the lost ten tribes. God himself would have to intervene directly in history and reconstitute or re-create the lost tribes. This miracle would result in an earthly kingdom, one in which the land would be divided among the tribes, as it had been centuries before. The future was depicted, as in many other cultures, as a return to the beginning, or to an idealized 'golden age' – not the dissolution of the cosmos. (1993, 185)

As discussed in the previous chapters, the role of a Jewish messiah concerned with *Eretz Yisrael*¹²⁷ is very different to the developing concept of a Christian, divine/ incarnate messiah. The *Letter of James* emphasizes the supremacy of the Law and calls for moral purity in preparation for judgement. His message was to the Jews of the diaspora: “To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.” (James 1:1 NIV), being the message of Jesus for the restoration of Israel (Sanders 1993, 183). This emphasis of *James* is reflected in *Q* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*. In his lecture, *The Question of Uniqueness in the Teaching of Jesus* Sanders again makes it clear that Judaism would never contradict the primacy of the Torah (the Law):

Let me start with the simplest point, whether or not the sayings attributed to Jesus can be read as being contrary to the law. They cannot. They supplement it and heighten it. The person who follows Jesus' commands in these passages will never transgress the law itself. (Sanders 1990, 8)

It could be argued that *James* is here reflecting the earlier teachings of Jesus found in *Q* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, that he has not come to change the Law (Torah) but to

¹²⁷ *Eretz Yisrael*: the Land of Israel.

implement it, in preparation for Israel's restoration.¹²⁸ It is important to bear in mind the potential Josephite messiah theme within the life of Jesus as a sacrificial figure who, through his death, would pave the way for a Davidic messiah who would restore the Jews and all nations under God. This Jewish messianic theme is reflected in the later midrash and eschatological literature and is thoroughly Jewish, as Jerome recognized. As an individual figure there are indications that James was a very devout Jew, possibly a Nazirite and the High Priest:

He was holy from his mother's womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh. No razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath. He alone was permitted to enter into the holy place; for he wore not woollen but linen garments. And he was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God, and asking forgiveness for the people. (*Historia Ecclesiae* 2.23.5-6).¹²⁹

In Eusebius' writings it is unusual, and therefore notable, to highlight James as a Nazirite and an observant ascetic fully engaged in the Temple cult; something very distinct from the experiences of 4th century Christendom. Epiphanius too is writing at a much later date and distinct from the events of 1st century Jerusalem and follows Eusebius in maintaining James' parentage as from Joseph (line of David) by an earlier marriage (Cf. *Panarion* 29.4.2-3) and continues a tradition by describing James as taking a particularly high-profile role in the Temple:

For this James was Joseph's son by Joseph's first wife, not by Mary, as I have said in many other places and dealt with more clearly for you. And moreover I find that he was of Davidic descent because of being Joseph's son, and that he was born a Nazirite—for he was Joseph's first-born, and (thus) consecrated. And I have found further that he also functioned as (high)-priest in the ancient priesthood. Thus he was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies once a year, as scripture says the Law directed the high priests to do. For many before me—Eusebius, Clement and others—have reported this of him. *Panarion* 29.4.1-3 (Williams 2009, 125)

¹²⁸ Matthew 5:18 “For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” (NIV), see *The Critical Edition of Q* (J. M. Robinson et al. 2000)

¹²⁹ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiae. Book II. Chapter 23. The Martyrdom of James, who was called the Brother of the Lord*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 18th May 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250102.htm>

These accounts make James stand out as a senior priestly and ascetic figure for no apparent reason other than perhaps there have been some accuracy in this tradition. Jerome adds to this understanding of James by indicating that in the *Gospel of the Hebrews* James was the first to witness the resurrection of Jesus:

The Gospel also which is called the Gospel according to the Hebrews, and which I have recently translated into Greek and Latin and which also Origen often makes use of, after the account of the resurrection of the Saviour says, but the Lord, after he had given his grave clothes to the servant of the priest, appeared to James (for James had sworn that he would not eat bread from that hour in which he drank the cup of the Lord until he should see him rising again from among those that sleep) and again, a little later, it says 'Bring a table and bread,' said the Lord. And immediately it is added, He brought bread and blessed and broke and gave to James the Just and said to him, 'my brother eat your bread, for the son of man is risen from among those that sleep.' (*De Viris Illustribus* 2)¹³⁰

Here James becomes the first witness to the resurrection and is assisted by a servant of the high priest, and as in the *Gospel of Thomas* he is given primacy.¹³¹ This places the incident within a tradition that differs significantly from the canonical Gospels.

Within the canonical writings other than the *Letter to James*, there are brief references to James. One of the main narratives is the relationship with Paul as documented through Luke in the *Acts of the Apostles*. Paul's first meeting with James, who is described as the leader of the Jesus community in Jerusalem, is three years after his conversion. This is explained in Paul's *Letter to the Galatians* and describes a dispute over acceptance of non-Jews into the community. This is likely to be the Council of Jerusalem that leads to a resolution for non-Jews, found in Acts 15:

¹³⁰ Jerome. *De Viris Illustribus* 2. *Matthew*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 28th April 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2708.htm>

¹³¹ "The disciples said to Jesus, "We know that you will depart from us. Who is to be our leader?" Jesus said to them, "Wherever you are, you are to go to James the righteous, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being." *The Gospel of Thomas*. 12. Translated by Thomas O. Lambdin. Accessed 18th May 2021. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/thomas-lambdin.html>

When they finished, James spoke up. ‘Brothers,’ he said, ‘listen to me. Simon [Peter] has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

‘After this I will return
and rebuild David’s fallen tent.
Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,
that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
even all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things
things known from long ago.’¹³²

‘It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.’ (Acts 15:13-21 NIV)

Within the Jewish mindset of James, as for Jesus, was the restoration of Israel and the restitution of the twelve tribes and the righteous gentiles (cf. Amos 9:11-12). One of the expectations of non-Jews was not to convert, but to live a righteous life, as a proselyte, a Son of Noah (בני נח).¹³³ James remains the leader in Jerusalem, whilst Paul returns to his Gentile mission, to some degree ignoring James’ expectations, by undermining the priority of the Law (Torah) for non-Jews and Jews alike.¹³⁴

However, in the *Gospel of Thomas* 12 (c. 60-140 C.E.), there appears a reference that continues to emphasize the priority of James in Jerusalem and amongst the “believing” Jews:

The disciples said to Jesus: ‘We know that you are going to leave us: who will be greatest over us? Jesus said to them: ‘In the place where you go, you will betake yourselves to James the just, on whose behalf heaven and earth alike were made.’ (trans. Puech, Henri Charles 1959)

This reference in the *Gospel of Thomas* may have developed within the Jewish “believing” community of Palestine.¹³⁵ Some scholars speak of an early composition of the

¹³² Amos 9:11-12

¹³³ *Tosefta Avodah Zarah 9:4*. Sefaria.org. Accessed on June 29th 2021.
https://www.sefaria.org/Tosefta_Avodah_Zarah.9.4?lang=bi

¹³⁴ “Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again, I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” (Gal. 5:2-4. NIV)

¹³⁵ “This idea evidently goes back to that wing of the Church of Jerusalem which regarded James as high priest and representative of the new Israel” (Bruce 1961, 20)

Gospel of Thomas, linking it closely to *Q* (Theissen 1998, 38) pre-dating the canonical Gospels. Other consider a later dating, during 2nd century C.E. (Evans 2004). In either context there remains some reference to the presence of James as the leader of the Jewish Nazoraean community in Jerusalem in the earliest decades of 1st century C.E.

The historian Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities*, also describes James and his death in Jerusalem in 62 C.E.:

But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: (*Antiquities* 20, 9)¹³⁶

The importance of a study of James as brother of Jesus and leader of an observant Jewish movement in Jerusalem in the 1st century C.E. is to suggest the possibility of a continuity of Jewish belief in the Nazoraean movement before the destruction of Jerusalem in the 2nd century C.E. It is also important to this thesis to consider the beliefs of this movement that may have been maintained within synagogues during Late Antiquity, and to 7th century Medina.

6.3 “Parting of the ways” or a rejection of Paul?

As documented in Chapter 1.2f, the destruction of the Temple, and in the 2nd century the razing of the city with the expulsion of Jews and its re-naming as *Aelia Capitolina*, were devastating events for the Jewish communities of Palestine and the diaspora. It may have also

¹³⁶ *The Antiquities of the Jews* (Josephus), translated by William Whiston, 1825. Accessed 19th May 2021. https://www.sefaria.org/The_Antiquities_of_the_Jews.20.6.1?ven=The_Antiquities_of_the_Jews,_translated_by_William_Whiston,_1825&lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en

been a world-changing event for the Pauline Church that had grown in the West, although little indication of this is found in the pages of the canonical Christian writings. How could the Christian churches continue to proselytise to the Roman world with a Jewish framework, now the umbilical cord to Jerusalem had been cut? It appears that by the 4th century there had developed a need to distance the Roman Church from its Jewish origins, setting Jews with heretics and pagans. This may have arisen from the need to ensure a positive Roman slant to its mission, and subsequent denigration of its Jewish roots. The need to remove Rome from the guilt of crucifying the Christian saviour is then appears firmly placed on the Jews:

Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.' When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!'

As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify! Crucify!'

But Pilate answered, 'You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.'

The Jewish leaders insisted, 'We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.' (John 19:4-7 NIV)

Pilate, as Roman governor, appears cleared of responsibility for Jesus' death. The guilt is firmly placed on the shoulders of the Jewish community, with a deicide narrative that has lasted even to today with the term "Christ killers" still used towards Jews.

The separation from Jewish communities that developed in early Christianity has religious and political implications from the 70s C.E. onwards. The catalyst for this is not just the political and violent events of the destruction of the Temple, but also the role Paul took in his writings for setting the foundation for this separation. He would not have been aware of the events of the 70's, nor the Roman violence of the 2nd century, but his vision formulated from the experience on the road to Damascus was very different to the Jewish beliefs of the family of Jesus. The differing viewpoints can be seen in the dynamics of the meetings between Paul and James in Jerusalem:

Then they [*the Jerusalem movement of Nazarenes*] said to Paul: ‘You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.’ (Acts 21:20-5 NIV)

Although written by Luke, a Gentile and colleague of Paul, this passage from the Acts of the Apostles highlights the tension between Paul’s teachings and the Jewish, Mosaic teachings of James and the Jerusalem movement. James requires Paul to show himself a practising Jew by going to the Temple and paying for four Nazirites to end their vows. The other issue that brings Paul’s sincerity as an observant Jew into question is his reputation for bringing non-Jews (“Greeks”) into the Temple:

They [*the Jews of Jerusalem*] stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, ‘Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.’ (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.) (Acts 21:27-9 NIV)

The threat of Hellenization (typecast in the Maccabean revolts in 2nd century B.C.E.) would eventually lead to Jewish revolts against Roman dominance that would lead to the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. the Bar Kokhba Revolt 132-136 C.E.). In this account in the Acts of the Apostles, Paul is represented as the aggrieved figure that is threatened with violence by “the Jews” and is taken into the care of the Romans for his own safety. This, together with his later claim for sanctuary as a “Roman citizen” (Acts 22:25-28) would not have curried favour with the Jewish communities of Palestine. The paradigm of the Acts of the Apostles is that of “the Jews” threat to Paul’s Christian message, which is replicated in differing narratives as the Christian Church became established and distanced itself from its Jewish origins. These events

are important to an understanding of the Nazoraean/ Ebionite rejection of Paul as an apostate and the negative interpretation of this Nazarene movement by Early Church writers.

The underlying judgement could be that the Jewish community of James and the Nazarenes in Jerusalem were holding strictly to the Mosaic Law whilst supporting righteous Gentiles with a Noahide expectation.¹³⁷ They were, and always remained, embedded in their Jewish identity (cf. Maccoby 1986, 176).

Overall, to summarize the nature of the Nazoraean spirituality from what has been said, it is that they saw Jesus as a prophet with a messianic message to the poor, and later recognized him as the Josephite messiah, who had suffered and died before the Davidic messiah would re-establish peace and return of Jew and Gentile to Jerusalem. This would come at some future time. The community held a set of teachings in Hebrew, which may have been in the style of *Q* or the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, that didn't include parts of the canonical Gospels, particularly the birth narratives and the resurrection stories, and the Pauline epistles. This community travelled east in the latter part of the 2nd century, and remained present within Jewish communities, at least until the 7th century.

6.4 A town called Nazareth

Nazareth has no biblical or prophetic significance in Hebrew scriptures before its inclusion in the canonical Gospels, unlike Bethlehem that has prophetic symbolism¹³⁸ as the town of King David and a future messiah. Most modern scholarship would acknowledge that Jesus' birth was placed in Bethlehem by the writers of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke to make a Davidic messianic statement. J. Spencer Kennard Jr. in his article *Nazoraean and Nazareth* argues:

¹³⁷ A system of ethical life for non-Jews based on an essence on the halachically observant life of Jews.

¹³⁸ 2 Samuel 23:13; Micah 5:1-3.

In my view, Jesus had no special historical association with the village of Nazareth. The opinion rests upon the suitability of ‘Nazoraean’ as a designation for members of the movement of John the Baptist. Bultmann and Loisy share that opinion. If the name is derived from נזר, it would indicate a return to the Nazir ideals of the early prophets in preparation for the great Day of God's anger. Such a view meets philological requirements. It conforms too with the spirit of the age in which sects took names designating their quest for blamelessness before God. (Kennard Jr. 1947, 81)

This engages with the proposal that the Nazarenes/Ebionites developed out of an Essene/ Qumrān communities with John the Baptist as a leading figure of a group that Jesus participated in for a time. The term Nazarene is then understood as developing from their charism rather than their original location. Regardless of this view, the underlying message within the Gospels, canonical and non-canonical is that Jesus and his followers spent most of their lives in the Galilee region, the area of the Northern Kingdom.

The term *Nazarene* (from the Hebrew נָצַר *natsár* “to guard”, נָצְרָה *natsrát* or *natséret* “Nazareth” and נֹצְרִי *notsrí* “Nazarene”) is mentioned in the canonical Christian writings as being a title for Jesus and that Paul was understood as being part of the Nazarene (Ναζαρηνός) sect (Acts 24:5). In these writings Nazareth (Ναζαρέθ) is used six times, in Matt 2:21,23; Luke 1:26, 2:51; John 1:45-46; Acts 10:38, 24:10, and twice as Nazara (Ναζαρά) Matt 4:13; Lk 4:16. However, in the light of *Q* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, the birth narratives could be understood as a later interpolation.

The root of Hebrew term נָצַר (*nצר*) indicates the meaning *separated* and is also found in the word *branch*, alluding back to the messianic usage of Isaiah 11:1 (JPS):

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch [נָצְרָה] shall grow out of his roots

Rashi (1040-1105 C.E.) indicates this verse refers to those (the Northern kingdom) exiled by the Assyrians in the 8th century B.C.E.¹³⁹ Although other commentators indicate a

¹³⁹ “**and a twig shall sprout from its roots** and the entire section, and at the end (v. 11), “And it shall come to pass, that on that day, the Lord shall apply His hand again...[from Assyria]...Hence, [it is obvious] that this prophecy was said to console those exiled to Assyria.” (Slotki 1952)

reference to the Davidic King-messiah¹⁴⁰, as do most Christian commentators. It is possible to consider the Nazarenes as a Northern Kingdom Jewish movement, a *branch* or *offshoot* of the root of Jesse, that emphasized an Ephraimite Messiah, precursor to a future Davidic Messiah.

In the Gospel of Matthew, there is a description of the child Jesus relocating to Nazareth because of fear of persecution from Archelaus, son of King Herod: “and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.” (Matt. 2:23 NIV). There is no evidence of any prophetic or scriptural connection to Nazareth in Hebrew scriptures, nor to the term Nazarene (Moran 2006, 322). The question should then be posed as to what was Matthew alluding to in this verse?

In the Gospel of Mark, after the arrest of Jesus and whilst warming himself by the fire, Peter is accused, “You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” (Mark 14:67 NIV). This may indicate the existence of a sect or movement that Jesus and the disciples were part of but does not justify or deny that this movement took its name from Jesus’ place of birth.

Mark also uses the term in a post-resurrection instance where the young man (“angel”) speaks [to *Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome*] in the tomb: “‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here.’” (Mark 16:6 NIV). However, these post-resurrection narratives in Mark are considered later interpolations to the original Markan text.¹⁴¹

The term Nazarene could refer to a place of origin, but this says very little about the groups’ motivation and purpose. More likely, it is an allusion to the Nazarenes’ understanding of themselves as a *branch* from the root of Jesse: “and a shoot from his roots will flourish” [ונצר משרשיו יפרה] (Isaiah 11:1).

¹⁴⁰ Abarbanel (c.1496 - c.1502 C.E.) indicates the roots refer to King David: “Jesse has his roots, and it is said that his roots allude to David” (Kunstadt 1960): ואמר שרשיו בלשון רבים רומז לדוד:

¹⁴¹ “Clement of Alexandria and Origen show no knowledge of the existence of these verses; furthermore Eusebius and Jerome attest that the passage was absent from almost all Greek copies of Mark known to them. The original form of the Eusebian sections (drawn up by Ammonius) makes no provision for numbering sections of the text after 16.8.” (Metzger 2006, 103)

6.5 A Nazirite lifestyle

Considering the *Messiah ben Joseph* tradition, it may be more appropriate to understand Jesus' presence in Galilee as part of the Northern Kingdom. This engages with the typology of a Jewish human messiah/prophet figure of *Q* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*. The question for the purpose of this thesis is whether the term Nazarene indicates the home of Jesus, or a more descriptive term for the movement's purpose or origins.

Some scholars indicate that the term Nazoraean developed from the earlier movement of John the Baptist (Kennard Jr. 1947, 87; Hick 1977, 51, 192), as one of reform and renewal. The term (nזר) נזיר, refers to the nature of early prophets' call to reform before God's judgement, seeking purity and holiness (as in אבני נזר "stones of separation", set apart or consecrated. Cf. Zech. 9:16). In Hebrew scriptures it is not unusual to describe the messiah figure as a moral and holy person, but not as an inhabitant of a location. The nature of a charismatic holiness movement has a long tradition including those contemporary to Jesus, the Pharisees, Essenes, and other groups in the later Talmud, generally within the *Ḥasidim* genre that stretches to modern movements today like the Chabad-Lubavitch movement. Géza Vermes describes this as the nature of Jesus' charisma:

The unsophisticated religious ambience of Galilee was apt to produce holy men of the *knesset* type and ... their success in that province was attributed to the simple spiritual demands of the Galilean nature, and perhaps also to a lively folk memory concerning the miraculous deeds of the great prophet Elijah. (Vermes 1973, 79-80)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Rabbi Ḥanina ben Dosa (1st century C.E.), also pushed the boundaries of the rabbinical code of his time. Vermes argues, "the charismatics' informal familiarity with God and confidence in the efficacy of their words was also deeply disliked by those whose authority derived from established channels." (1973, 80-1).

The absence of reference to the Essenes in the canonical Christian writings may have been a marker to their close association with the teachings of John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, and to Jesus himself who partook of their rituals ("baptism" or *mikvah*) as a sign of purity and fidelity (Kohler, in *Jewish Enc.* 5, 22). The close link between the traditions of the Essene community at Qumrān and the later Ebionite/ Nazarene communities has been studied in depth by many scholars such as Oscar Cullman¹⁴² and Hans Schoeps¹⁴³.

This ascetic spirituality forms the nature of the Jewish Nazoraeans, as I mention previously James presented himself in the style of a Nazirite, and asked Paul to show himself Torah-observant by supporting four Nazirites in the fulfilment of their vows in the Temple (Acts 21:20-5). Some suggest that the Patriarch Joseph was a Nazirite too:

In later rabbinic literature, Joseph is thought to have been a Nazirite in the likeness of Num. 6.1–21, et al.; cf. *Midrash Rabbah Gen.* 98.20 where although the 'crown' (Aramaic כלייל for MT נזיר) of his brethren, Joseph was nonetheless a Nazirite who abstained from wine during his twenty-two years in Egypt. I hold to the modern consensus that נזיר here refers simply to Joseph's distinction over his brethren. (Chepey 2005, 2n)

In addition, the familiar story of Samson, the hero in the book of Judges (Judges 13-16), indicates a long tradition of Nazirite vows. The Nazirite vow is recounted in Numbers 6:1-21, outlining the "separateness" for a purpose of a Nazirite, such as not cutting the hair of the head, drinking wine, or having contact with a corpse and being "separated to God".

The prophet Samuel, appears consecrated to God like a Nazirite. His mother, Hannah (whose "Song" is a typology for Mary's *Magnificat* [I Samuel 2:1-10// Luke 1:46-55]) dedicates him:

And she vowed a vow, and said: 'O HaShem of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thy handmaid, and remember me, and not forget Thy handmaid, but wilt give unto Thy handmaid a man-child, then I will give him unto HaShem all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.' (I Sam. 1.11 JPS)

¹⁴² Cullmann, O. 2011. Die neuentdeckten Qumrantexte und das Judenchristentum der Pseudoklementinen. In Eltester, W. ed. *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter. 35-51.

¹⁴³ Schoeps, Hans. 1954. "Das Gnostische Judentum in den Dead Sea Scrolls," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte: Journal of Religious and Cultural Studies* 6. 1.

The Gospel of Luke uses the Nazirite imagery of Samuel to highlight the dedication of John the Baptist by his mother Elizabeth (Chepey 2005, 156). His portrayal of John the Baptist does not make an absolute correlation with the Nazirite vow and Samuel (Lk. 1:7, 13), but the angelic *logion*, John as a prophet and preacher of repentance are similar typologies.

As mentioned, the root of term נָזִיר (nzi) indicates the meaning *separated* or *to guard*. As with the use of the term nazirite for the example of Samson, the term means consecrated, under a vow or holy. This may have been the author of Matthew's intent when indicating that the prophets had foretold John's birth as being "holy" or consecrated,¹⁴⁴ as with the Nazirite tradition of the prophet Samuel and Samson. Jerome writes in "*On Matthew*" in the *Book of Illustrious Men*:

I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes (*Nazaraeus*) of Berœa, a city of Syria, who use it. In this it is to be noted that wherever the Evangelist, whether on his own account or in the person of our Lord the Saviour quotes the testimony of the Old Testament he does not follow the authority of the translators of the Septuagint but the Hebrew. Wherefore these two forms exist 'Out of Egypt have I called my son', and 'for he shall be called a Nazarene.' *De Viris Illustribus* 3¹⁴⁵

Here Jerome uses the term *Nazaraeus*¹⁴⁶ for Nazarene, meaning a "Nazirite, a man set apart to the service of God". This may be because he lacked first-hand knowledge of the Jewish Nazirite tradition or having claimed to have met them in Berœa, he was using the term as understood by the Nazoraean movement.

¹⁴⁴ Matthew 3

¹⁴⁵ Jerome. *De Viris Illustribus* 3. *Matthew*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 14th May 2021. [https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2708.htm#:~:text=De%20Viris%20Illustribus%20\(On%20Illustrious%20Men\)%201%201.,4%204.%20Jude.%205%205.%20Paul.%20More%20items](https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2708.htm#:~:text=De%20Viris%20Illustribus%20(On%20Illustrious%20Men)%201%201.,4%204.%20Jude.%205%205.%20Paul.%20More%20items)

¹⁴⁶ *Nazaraeus*/Nāzāraeus: Nazaraïos, a Nazarite, a man set apart to the service of God. (Lewis & Short Latin Dictionary) Accessed on 24th May 2021. <https://short-latin-la-en.en-academic.com/37429/Nazaraeus> Cf. Jerome. *The Latin Vulgate* Gen. 49:26: *benedictiones patris tui confortatae sunt benedictionibus patrum eius donec veniret desiderium collium aeternorum fiant in capite Ioseph et in vertice nazarei inter fratres suos*. The blessings of thy father are strengthened with the blessings of his fathers: until the desire of the everlasting hills should come: may they be upon the head of Joseph, and upon the crown of the Nazarite among his brethren. Accessed on 24th May 2021. https://vulgate.org/ot/genesis_49.htm

The thesis has considered the Nazoraeans as a movement of Jews that remained within Torah observant community beyond the Fall of Jerusalem in 2nd century C.E. Bockmuehl suggests that there were significant numbers in Jerusalem to fulfil their sacrificial obligations (Bockmuehl 1998, 568-9). There is evidence of a multitude of movements that were distinct but not excluded from the Jewish community, the *Ναζιραῖοι* reflect the grouping of other movements of the time; the Pharisees (Φαρισαῖοι), Sadducees (Σαδδουκαῖοι), and Essenes (Εσσαιῖοι), and the Zealots and the Sicarii. There is nothing that would indicate that the Nazarenes were separated from the Jewish community if they followed a form of Nazirite code. Bockmuehl considers there are, “unmistakable Nazirite connotations” within the sayings of Jesus: “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” (Mark 1:25 NIV cf. Matt. 26:29) (1998, 571). An interesting point made by Bockmuehl is that the term “fruit of the vine” is an allusion to Numbers 6:2-4 (JPS):

When either man or woman shall clearly utter a vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to consecrate himself unto HaShem, he shall abstain from wine and strong drink: he shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat fresh grapes or dried. All the days of his Naziriteship shall he eat nothing that is made of the grape-vine, from the pressed grapes even to the grapestone.

The phrase *ἀπό πάντων ὅσα γίνεται ἐξ ἀμπέλου* (“that is made of the grape-vine”), refers to all produces of the grapevine including vinegar, seeds and skins. Bockmuehl points out the use of and refusal of a sponge soaked in vinegar by Jesus on the cross (Mark 15:36, Matt. 27:48), and this is an allusion to Psalm 69:21 JPS: “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”. He suggests, Jesus’ refusal to take the vinegar makes the Nazirite link all the more plausible.

As previously discussed, Jesus appears as an early follower of his cousin John the Baptist, who more overtly reflected a Nazirite tradition, as did his brother James. This does not indicate that the term Nazoraeans (נְצֻרֵי נֹצְרֵי *notsrí* “Nazrene” or נְצֻרָת *natsrát* or *natséret*

“Nazareth”) derives from the term nazirite, rather their ascetic charism was of the Nazirite style (נזיר *nizár* “to separate”). The tradition of purity and ethical holiness also affirms a distinct movement within Jewish life, together with Jesus’ criticism of the Pharisees more liberal interpretation of the Torah. Jesus, John the Baptist and James all present a radical *halakhic* lifestyle, as a priority over family ties.

In conclusion to this section, there appear to be patterns established to evidence the originality of the Nazoraean community rooted to documents and individuals that pre-date the canonical Gospels and the writings of Paul. There presents a Jewish community that continued in their Torah observance whilst holding to the teachings of Jesus, who may have been understood as a charismatic teacher, a nazirite, or a Jewish Ephraimite messiah or prophet of his time, seeking a restitution of the twelve tribes and righteous Gentiles to Jerusalem at Judgement Day. This message appears to be maintained within a movement that was named by Patristic writers as the Nazoraeans, which may be similar or identical to a community that was mis-named the Ebionites.

6.6 Just Jews

I have considered some of the Hebrew scriptures and a variety of early writings known to the Jewish community who were followers of Jesus, and some canonical scriptures that have alluded to an earlier tradition that may have been subsumed into what is now known as the “New Testament”. Within the context of these scriptures and allusions found in canonical writings there appears to be evidence of an Essene-style spirituality and Nazirite holiness code within the family of Jesus. The suggestion is that as myth developed around the person and teachings of Jesus there grew two threads that led to a divide between the early Christian and

the continuing Jewish communities.¹⁴⁷ One tradition, developed by the understanding and interpretation of Paul which led to a strain in the relationship during the circumcision debate in Jerusalem (Acts 15). The other event is the destruction of the Temple (c.70 C.E.) and subsequent razing of the city of Jerusalem (135 C.E.) after the Bar Kokhba revolt. These two factors I am suggesting, led to an existential separation between the Pauline Christianity of the mission in the West and Jews, some of whom appeared part of a Nazoraean movement, that became refugees in Pella and Berœa and the East. As I have mentioned before, a core prejudgement in this thesis to maintain the term “Jewish” for this movement and avoid Christianising them by the terms Jewish-Christians or Judeo-Christianity. My proposal is that the Nazoraeans were a movement of, and within, the Jewish communities of the 1st century C.E., as were others like the Pharisees, Zealots or Essenes. As Daniel Boyarin maintains in his approach to the term ‘Jewish-Christian:

My case for abandoning this term [Jewish Christianity] is an argument in three movements. In the first movement, I will present evidence and discuss evidence already given for the claim that there is never in premodern times a term that non-Christian Jews use to refer to their “religion,” that *Ioudaismos* is, indeed, not a religion (this term to be defined), and that consequently it cannot be hyphenated in any meaningful way. In the second movement, I will try to show that the self-understanding of Christians of Christianity as a religion was slow developing as well and that a term such as “Jewish Christian” (or rather its ancient equivalents, Nazorean, Ebionite) was part and parcel of that development itself and thus *eo ipso*, and not merely factitiously, a heresiological term of art. In the third movement, I will try to show that even the most critical, modern, and best-willed usages of the term in scholarship devolve willy-nilly to heresiology. (Boyarin 2009, 8)

The “other” to Pauline Christianity is the Nazoraean movement which remained part of a complex Jewish community possibly using the epithet “Nazarene” (Ναζαρηνός) or “Nazoraean” (Ναζωραῖος) (Smith 1905; Bauckham 2003). This term is supported by the use of the term for Paul as a “ringleader of the Nazarene sect” (πρωτατάτης της των Ναζωραίων αἰρέσεως) in Acts 24:5 NIV. This verse not so much highlights Paul’s leadership, which is the

¹⁴⁷ For a discussion on the development of myth in early Christian literature see: Wiles, Maurice. *Myth in Theology* in Hick, John. 1977. *The Myth of God Incarnate*. London: SCM Press.

intent of Luke as the author of Acts but was rather the naturally assumed title of the Jewish movement “Nazoraeans”. The author, Luke, uses the word αἰρέσεως (*haireseōs*/ sect) (Acts 24.5)¹⁴⁸ which may infer a distancing of the Pauline tradition from the Jewish tradition of James and the Nazoraeans, although the word *haireseōs* in the 1st century C.E. did not mean heresy but rather a sect or special group.¹⁴⁹ Later writers/ heresiologists explain this “sect” followed the law of the Jews particularly circumcision and the Sabbath and read the gospel of Matthew “in Hebrew” and “in Hebrew letters” (as mentioned in chapter 5) and are found “in all the synagogues of the east among the Jews”, and are cursed by the Pharisees, and they are “known commonly as Nazarenes”¹⁵⁰ (Klijn 1973, 20). The image conveyed from Luke in the Acts of the Apostles to Jerome is that of the Nazoraeans being a sect, and after the second century understood as heterodox from the Christian norm.¹⁵¹

It may be that this movement became more estranged from the Christian “norm” through a prevailing negative Jewish and anti-Judaizing polemic from the Church that became embedded as an institution of the Late Roman Empire. St Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.) clarifies a suspicion and dislike of Jews that is replicated by many of the Church Fathers:

¹⁴⁸ “We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect.” (Acts 24:5 NIV) Accessed 20th May 2021.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+24%3A5&version=NIV>

¹⁴⁹ “The word “heresy” comes from the ancient Greek word *hairesis*, meaning a choice, school of thought, sect, or party, which was itself derived from the verb *haireō*, which meant to choose or prefer one thing over another. The word *hairesis* had wide, fairly common, and non-pejorative meanings in the ancient Hellenistic world. The meaning of the word changes, however, from the late first century C.E., when it appears in writings of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus and the Acts of the Apostles to designate what we might call denominations or sects of Judaism, to the middle of the second century, when Christian writers start to employ it with the technical sense of incorrect doctrine, religious deviance, or error.” (Royalty, Jr. 2013, 3)

¹⁵⁰ Jerome. *Epistula from Jerome to Augustine (A.D. 404) 112.4.13*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 4th March 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102075.htm>

¹⁵¹ “Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.” (Acts 15:1-2 NIV); “Then they [James and the elders in Jerusalem] said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.” (Acts 21:20-1 NIV)

Now you may know, Dearly Beloved, that these [*Heathens*] unite their murmurings with Heretics and with Jews. Heretics, Jews, and Heathens have made a unity against Unity. (Augustine, *Sermon 12 on the New Testament*:18)¹⁵²

This has been the challenge in many of the studies of what has been termed the “Jewish-Christian Church”. I am proposing that this misnomer misdirects studies into a presumption of type of Jewish *ecclesia* that may have never existed, let alone left material evidence (Shoemaker in Sanchez 2018, 109)¹⁵³. As I have outlined so far, my methodology has been to study the pre-existing evidence of Hebrew writings and messianic typologies, together with husks of a movement cast aside by what is known as Christianity.

This Jewish movement may have led a strict ascetic *halachic* life, may have understood Jesus as an Ephraimite messiah, whilst waiting for a future Davidic messianic figure to fulfil Jewish prophecies of a return to Jerusalem and peace on earth. They may have held a document of Jesus’ teachings, a singular Gospel in Hebrew without any contradiction to Mosaic Law. In all ways they would have been Jews and participated fully in Jewish identity, as did Jesus their inspiration and guide.

6.7 The Desposyni

A characteristic of the early Nazoraean movement is that it appears to have been led within a familial structure (the *desposyni*).¹⁵⁴ It is known that Jesus’ brothers, James and Simon continued to lead the Jerusalem community. Hegesippus (c.110-180 C.E.) wrote five books of

¹⁵² Augustine. *Sermons on the New Testament*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 18th May 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/160312.htm>

¹⁵³ Some oppose the idea but still wish to redeem Judaism through Christianising lenses; “Accordingly it makes much better sense to me to speak instead of “Torah observant” and “Torah relaxing” communities within early Christianity, or alternatively some other sort of similar terminology that focuses squarely on the differences in practice among various early Christians.” Stephen Shoemaker in: Sanchez, Francisco del Rio. 2018. *Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam. Papers Presented at the Colloquium Held in Washington DC, October 29-31, 2015 (8th ASMEA Conference)*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols. 107.

¹⁵⁴ Δεσπόσυνοι: “of or belonging to the master or lord”

Commentaries on the Acts of the Church, and although these are not in existence now, they are referred to by Eusebius (263-339 C.E.). If these references are accurate, Hegesippus was aware of a continuing line of Jesus' family into the 2nd century C.E.:

Of the family of the Lord there were still living the grandchildren of Jude, who is said to have been the Lord's brother according to the flesh. Information was given that they belonged to the family of David, and they were brought to the Emperor Domitian by the Evocatus. For Domitian feared the coming of Christ as Herod also had feared it. And he asked them if they were descendants of David, and they confessed that they were. But when they were released they ruled the churches because they were witnesses and were also relatives of the Lord. And peace being established, they lived until the time of Trajan. These things are related by Hegesippus. (Eusebius *Historia Ecclesiae* III 20.1.2-8)¹⁵⁵

The Emperor Domitian reigned 81-96 C.E., so it seems unlikely that individual Jews from Jerusalem would have been introduced to him in this manner. However, it does present an underlying tradition of the leadership of the family of Jesus in the early Nazoraean movement. Eusebius goes further in recounting details of the nature of the *desposyni*, and their origins:

For the relatives of our Lord according to the flesh, whether with the desire of boasting or simply wishing to state the fact, in either case truly, have handed down the following account:...A few of the careful, however, having obtained private records of their own, either by remembering the names or by getting them in some other way from the registers, pride themselves on preserving the memory of their noble extraction. Among these are those already mentioned, called Desposyni, on account of their connection with the family of the Saviour. Coming from Nazara (Ναζάραρον) and Cochaba, villages of Judea, into other parts of the world, they drew the aforesaid genealogy from memory and from the book of daily records as faithfully as possible. (Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiae* I 7.11-14)¹⁵⁶

Here he draws on what appears to be an accepted tradition of the Nazoraeans using a genealogy to maintain tradition and uses the Roman province of Judea to situate the villages of

¹⁵⁵ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiae. Book III. Chapter 20. The Relatives of our Saviour*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed on 18th May 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm>

¹⁵⁶ Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiae. Book I. Chapter 7. The Alleged Discrepancy in the Gospels in regard to the Genealogy of Christ*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed on 18th May 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250101.htm>

Nazara (Ναζάρων) and Cochaba.¹⁵⁷ Epiphanius of Salamis (310-403 C.E.), whose emphasis on orthodoxy and doctrine led him to create a compendium of heresies, the *Panarion*, is the first writer to describe Nazoraeans and Ebionites as heretics, although he would also include all Jews under this term as well.

He indicates that their inclusion in the *Panarion* is not so much that they are heretical Christians, but that they “are Jews and nothing else”. (*Panarion* 29.9.1) (Williams 2009, 130). Otherwise, his assessment of their origins and pathway is as that of other Patristic writers, particularly, as we have seen, by Eusebius.

As I have mentioned earlier, the term Ebionite may have been a misnomer, and a development out of the aspect of Nazoraean spirituality, that maybe now be considered to be an “option for the poor”. Jerome (342 C.E. – 420 C.E.) also highlights that the “Ebionites” existed in “all the synagogues of the East”, which supports the suggestion that they moved east whilst the Pauline Church moved west:

Why do I speak of the Ebionites, who make pretensions to the name of Christian? In our own day there exists a sect among the Jews throughout all the synagogues of the East, which is called the sect of the Minei, and is even now condemned by the Pharisees. The adherents to this sect are known commonly as Nazarenes; they believe in Christ the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary; and they say that He who suffered under Pontius Pilate and rose again, is the same as the one in whom we believe. But while they desire to be both Jews and Christians, they are neither the one nor the other. (*From Jerome to Augustine* 112.4.13)¹⁵⁸

There appears a certain Christian orthodoxy in the description of their doctrinal beliefs although this maybe Jerome’s interpretation of their views. It is unlikely that groups holding to Christian doctrines of a divine “Son of God” would be accepted in “all the synagogues of the

¹⁵⁷ “Finally, there is much evidence from the church fathers that locates Ebionites specifically to the city of Cochaba. For example, Epiphanius claims that the Ebionites lived “in Batanea and Panias, and especially in Moabitis and Cochaba. Furthermore, according to Julius Africanus, Jesus’ relatives had spread the gospel throughout Galilee, from Nazareth all the way to Cochaba in the east, connecting the entire region religiously. This would have resulted in even further interaction and connection between the Ebionites of eastern Galilee and the Transjordan and the rest of Galilee proper. Jewish-Christian theology would have easily been integrated into the missionary message of Galilean Christianity, more strongly establishing them as a presence.” (Rainey 2007, 80)

¹⁵⁸ Jerome. *From Jerome to Augustine (A.D. 404)*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 18th May 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102075.htm>

East”. The phrase “Christ the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary; and they say that He who suffered under Pontius Pilate and rose again” has a very credal style.

There is a great deal of literature on what Christians describe as “the parting of the ways” between Christianity and “Jewish-Christianity” (Dunn 1992; Gardner 2008, 216). What I have proposed in this thesis is that the Pauline tradition of Christianity was never fully embedded in Jewish communities, but rather re-formed itself out of a Jewish heritage.¹⁵⁹ The earliest writings of the life and teachings of Jesus, remained within a Jewish movement who, at times were interpreted and defined by the early Christian writers as I have described. Well within the period studied in this thesis, the tradition of what is known as Supersessionism became embedded as a narrative within the Christendom, establishing the belief in the error of Jews and the superiority of the Christian message, leading to the numerous atrocities committed against Jewish communities known in European history. It is therefore unlikely that Jews from any movement including the Nazoraeans would have felt secure within a Christian definition or environs.

6.8 The marginalized Jewish framework of the canonical Gospels

It appears the narrative of the Pauline literature became embedded in the Christian Church, as the Jewish Nazoraean/ Ebionite movement lapsed from Christian commentary. Perhaps the Jewish elements that present themselves in the canonical Gospels become distorted and misunderstood in a growing gentile Church. The animosity within the Pauline message about “the Jews” continues in the canonical Gospel narratives, particularly the Gospel of John. Jonathan Elukin in his article *Judaism: From Heresy to Pharisee in Early Medieval Christian*

¹⁵⁹ On the formation of “sects” in 1st century Palestine: Cf. Boyarin, D. (2007). *Border lines: the partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia, Pa, University of Pennsylvania Press, 49-54.

Literature (2002), describes how the Pharisees become the oppositional figures in the narratives on Jesus' teachings:

At the same time, the accounts in the New Testament of first-century Jewish life emphasize the prominence of the Pharisees. Described by the Gospel authors as almost uniformly hostile to Jesus, the Pharisees are indicted for their hypocrisy and blindness, for being overly zealous protectors of the Mosaic laws, and for waiting to trap Jesus in ritual transgressions. Although not named as part of the group of chief priests and elders that brought Jesus to Pilate (Matt. 27:1), the Pharisees were clearly portrayed as seeking to eliminate Jesus. The Pharisees are accused of adding their own laws to God's revelation; they became the chief corrupters of the Jewish religion. (Elukin 2002, 50)

The Gospel of John maintains a tradition of "for fear of the Jews" (John 7:13; 9:22; 19:38; 20:19), thereby forming the bridge to and *raison d'être* for later suspicion of everything Jewish, and the need for the Church to establish its moral and spiritual superiority. The New Testament scholar James D. G. Dunn assessed the sources and impact of antisemitism in the canonical Christian writings and concludes:

The challenge thus posed to Christian NT scholars in particular cannot therefore be ducked. The depth and uncomfortable sharpness of the issue can be readily demonstrated by noting simply two NT texts which probably more than any others over the centuries have provided foundation and fuel for much of the most virulent Christian anti-Jewish polemic. I have in mind Matt 27:25 – 'All the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children."' – the scriptural warrant for countless denunciation of Jews of later centuries as 'Christ-killers'. And John 8:44 – 'You are of your father the devil and your will is to do your father's desires' – sufficient excuse for many to identify Jews with the power of evil and to seek their destruction. (Dunn 1992, 179)

These passages from the canonical Gospels maybe written to distance the early Church from the rebelling Jews of Palestine and thereby enhance the security of Christian communities of the Roman Empire. Or they may be present as a result of the writers becoming less attached to the Jewish roots of Christianity. Or maybe it is to mask the Jewish origins of the figure of Jesus that conflicted with the new Gospel of the missionary Christ. Overall, the Nazoraeans could be understood to have become another messianic movement within Jewish communities in Syria and the East, possibly Arabia.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Gospels portray the Roman governor Pontius Pilate as reluctant to condemn Jesus but is pressurized by “the Jews” to do so (Matt. 27:19-24; Mark 15:12-15; Luke 13:19-25; John 19:4-16). Within the Church, the New Covenant then became established as superseding the Old, it was argued because of Jewish intransigence and in time, from “divine authority” following the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. This 2nd century event was then interpreted as a punishment exerted on the Jews by God for their rejection of Jesus and part they played in his death. Sadly, these reasons became part of the Christian narrative as rose again and again in history, from the Crusades to the Inquisition and the Russian pogroms to the Holocaust. Elissa Bemporad in her book *Legacy of blood: Jews, pogroms, and ritual murder in the lands of the Soviets*, highlights the role of earlier anti-Jewish tropes that led to the pogroms and subsequently fed into the Holocaust narrative, such as the “Blood Libel” polemic that justified the punishment of Jews for their moral and spiritual crimes (2020, 8-12).

Writing in the 2nd century C.E., Tertullian (155 C.E. – 220 C.E.) was a significant interpreter of the role and position Jews had in relation to the Church of the time. The foundation of this narrative, that still exists today in the anti-Semitic trope “Christ killers” is founded in the canonical Gospels recount of the Jewish crowds calling for Jesus’ crucifixion (Matt. 27:20, Mark 15:11, Luke 23:18, John 19:6-7), and the subsequent fall and expulsion from Jerusalem that was seen as recompense for not believing that Jesus was the Christ. Tertullian defines what is now known as Supersessionism:

The Jews had formerly been in covenant with God; but being afterwards cast off on account of their sins, they began to be without God. *Prescription against Heretics* 8¹⁶⁰

This narrative of the new covenant in Jesus Christ superseding the Hebrew covenant is prescribed here and highlights the assumed superiority of Christianity over Judaism even to the

¹⁶⁰ Tertullian. *Prescription against Heretics* 8. Accessed 25th May 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0311.htm>

modern world in the retention of the term “Old Testament” as a title for the Hebrew Scriptures.

Tertullian continues with this theme in his *An Answer to the Jews* 13:

Since, therefore, the Jews were predicted as destined to suffer these calamities on Christ’s account, and we find that they have suffered them, and see them sent into dispersion and abiding in it, manifest it is that it is on Christ’s account that these things have befallen the Jews, the sense of the Scriptures harmonizing with the issue of events and of the order of the times.¹⁶¹

This inherent distrust and rejection of Jews from the earliest centuries is an important paradigm to consider in suggesting the real break that began to occur between the Christian traditions and Jewish communities as demonstrated in this Church Canon from 8th Century:

Since certain, erring in the superstitions of the Hebrews, have thought to mock at Christ our God, and feigning to be converted to the religion of Christ do deny him, and in private and secretly keep the Sabbath and observe other Jewish customs, we decree that such persons be not received to communion, nor to prayers, nor into the Church; but let them be openly Hebrews according to their religion, and let them not bring their children to baptism, nor purchase or possess a slave. (*The Canons of the Holy and Ecumenical Seventh Council 787 C.E.*)¹⁶²

Once the Christian Church began to be established within the Roman Empire the imaging of all Jews as heretical or in error became the pervading narrative (*contra Iudaeos*) (Fredriksen 2014).¹⁶³

6.9 Other evidence of a Jewish Nazoraean Movement

François de Blois (2002, 25) recognizes that the consideration of “Jewish Christians” in the Middle East is not an area of study undertaken by many. However, he notes some writers have considered the issue of the relationship of “Jewish Christianity” to Islam and cites

¹⁶¹ Tertullian. *An Answer to the Jews. Chapter 13. Argument from the Destruction of Jerusalem and Desolation of Judea*. Trans.: Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace. 1890. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*. New York: The Christian Literature Company. Accessed 14th May 2021. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0308.htm>

¹⁶² Second Council of Nicea (787 C.E.). *The Canons of the Holy and Ecumenical Seventh Council. Canon VIII*. Accessed 14th May 2021. https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/npnf214/npnf2266.htm#P10542_2017858

¹⁶³ “By the second century CE, this contentious way of framing discussions about meaning, together with its stock of insults, challenges, and defences, had passed easily into Christian theological production, thus structuring and organizing Christian anti-Jewish repertoires.” (Fredriksen 2014, 25)

Harnack, Schoeps, Roncaglia and Colpe, who recognized similarities in the teachings of these two traditions and quotes Schoeps in a footnote: “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” (de Blois 2002, 25, 128n).¹⁶⁴ De Blois arrives at this conclusion with the challenge of the more difficult task to “construct a *plausible historical model* for the influence of one upon the other.” (de Blois 2002, 26, my emphasis). Harnack looks at the comparison of christologies particularly, whilst others more specifically locate the Qur’ānic *ṣābi’ūn* with the Elchasaites. All these theoretical studies appear to blur and mix “Jewish Christian” groups and beliefs, and although de Blois does not mention it, I wonder if these writers are still coming from the heresiologist perspective of historically defined “Jewish-Christian” groups.

Guy Stroumsa in his article “*Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins*”, highlighted the Patristic heresiographers use of the words Ebionite and Nazoraeans to define heretical, Judaizing sects in Late Antiquity. He cites Daniel Boyarin who observes that the “storytellers” are the Patristic writers themselves, so that their understanding of Judaism and “Jewish Christianity” cannot be truly valid. On the other hand, Guy Stroumsa claims that the traditional titles such as “Jewish Christianity”, are necessary to understand “the complexity of observable reality”. He does, however, add that they must be used with care, “without forgetting what they are not: they are not truthful representations of historical reality.” (Stroumsa 2015c, 74). He concludes with a clear definition of “Jewish Christianity” that would probably be acceptable to both de Blois and Boyarin:

By Jewish Christianity, I mean the faith of Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah announced by the prophets, but did not give up traditional Jewish religious practice. (2015, 74)

¹⁶⁴ “And thus the paradox of a truly world-historical feature is the fact that, although Jewish Christianity perished in the Christian church, it has conserved itself in Islam and in some of its driving impulses to the present day.” (de Blois 2002, 25, 128n)

The problem with considering the nature and presence of a Jewish community that considered a role for Jesus within their identity is the lack of objective evidence, from literature or archaeology. The majority of writings are from Christian Patristic writers, whose agenda was not to legitimise the Jewish Nazoraean presence but rather place them with “heretics and pagans”. Annette Yoshiko Reed highlights this dilemma:

Within most modern studies of ‘Jewish-Christianity’ after the ‘Parting of the Ways,’ one detects a notable sense of disbelief at the possibility that, after the second century CE, anyone might be attracted to varieties of Christianity that still ‘clung’ to Jewish observance - let alone the possibility that there could be varieties of Judaism that granted some special role to Jesus. (Yoshiko Reed 2018, 21)

The suggestion within this thesis is that it requires careful hermeneutical study of the Hebrew scriptures on messianic identity, and of Christian scriptures that include some non-canonical literature (Cf. *PsC.*) to evidence the continuity of Nazoraean presence.

Throughout this thesis I have avoided the term “Jewish-Christianity” because I see it as a confusion of terms and unhelpful to consider the role of Jesus within Jewish communities. Historically, the study of “Jewish-Christianity” has used Patristic sources primarily as the initial starting point to establish “their” existence and particularly focussed on what is termed Ebionite, or Nazoraean Literature. Now, other literature has been considered such as the Pseudo-Clementine epistles (*PsC*), the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, the *Gospel of the Nazarenes*, the *Gospel of the Ebionites*, and some Hebrew pseudepigrapha (the *Testament of Abraham* and the *Testament of Job*) (Yoshiko Reed 2018, 113). I have attempted to add to this the literary type of the “*Messiah ben Joseph*” motif in Hebrew writings from the Zechariah literature to the events of the Persian conquest of Jerusalem. In addition, the impact of the Qumrān literature from the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, shows the diversity of Jewish practice in the 1st century C.E. and the continuity of thought within the evidence found of Ebionite beliefs. My study of *Q* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews* aimed to shed light on a pre-canonical gospel tradition that appears subsumed under layers of Christian interpretation but may show a Jewish tradition

that valued Jesus as a charismatic preacher within a Jewish community that may have later understood him as a *Messiah ben Joseph* figure, coming from the northern kingdom who suffered and died at the hands of the Romans but would rise when the Davidic messiah comes at some future date.

There appears no good reason for the Nazoraean movement within the “synagogues of the East” to have come to an end. In a compendium of Zacharias of Mytilene’s *Ecclesiastical Histories* (c.465 – 536 C.E.), found in the *Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor* (c. 569 C.E.), there recounts a preparation for battle between the Persian and Roman armies near Dara,¹⁶⁵ where Nazarenes are linked to Jews and their traditions, as distinct from Christian ways:

And Belisarius (500-565) at the head of a Roman force and tribunes came up against them [*the Persians*] to battle; and they arrived in the last week of the fast. And the Persians were found to be as a little flock, and so they appeared in their eyes: and Asthebid their commander was afraid of them, and those who were with him; and he sent to the Romans, asking them to respect the feast, ‘for the sake of the Nazarenes and Jews who are in the army that is with me, and for the sake of yourselves, who are Christians.’ And, when Belisarius the general had considered this, he was willing to agree; but the commanders murmured greatly, and would not consent to wait and respect the day. (Hamilton 1899, 226)

Within the mid-6th century there appears a recognition of an active Nazoraean community around the borders of the Persian and Roman Empires.

In the 10th century C.E. there appeared an anti-Christian polemic, *Tathbīt Dalā’il Nubuwwat Sayyidinā Muḥammad* (The Establishment of Proofs for the Prophethood of Our Master Mohammed) and was written by ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadānī (935 C.E. – 1025 C.E.). This document is significant to this thesis as it might reflect within its sources thought patterns from a Nazoraean community. This may be evident from an existing community or is a reflection of an imbued paradigm from an earlier source that presented signs of existing in early 7th century Arabia.

¹⁶⁵ The battle of Amida (503 C.E.)

The document was studied in the 1960's by Shlomo Pines in his assessment of the literature, in the book, “*The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source*”. Here he considered unique sources within ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s polemic that, “could only derive from a Jewish Christian community and were rather maladroitly and carelessly adapted by ‘Abd al-Jabbār for his own purposes” (Pines 1966, 2). Pines points to a recurrent “*leitmotif*” within ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s work, that of a condemnation of the Christian Church for abandoning the original teachings of Jesus, through the work of St Paul and a desire to be accepted by Rome. The Christian Church rejected ritual purity and turned to pray east when Jesus prayed toward Jerusalem:

They pray to the East, yet Christ, until God took him (*tawaffā*),¹⁶⁶ only prayed to the West, to Jerusalem, as David, the prophets and the Israelites before him. (‘Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Asadābādī, Gabriel Said Reynolds 2010, 159)

Later in part three of the text, ‘Abd al-Jabbār uses a reference from the Gospel of John, when Jesus meets a Samaritan woman who says, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” (John 4:19-20 NIV). ‘Abd al-Jabbār then claims: “Look at the explicit statement and declaration in this! Christ only prayed to Jerusalem [*Ūrashalīm*] – that is, *bayt al-maqdis*.” (‘Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Asadābādī, Gabriel Said Reynolds 2010, 160-1) This may be a deduction of the original text by ‘Abd al-Jabbār, but it reflects an assumption of belief in a Jerusalem orientated prayer tradition that was rejected by the erroneous Christian Church. This would also support Pines’ theory of a “Jewish Christian” source to ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s work and strengthen the understanding of the Nazoraean tradition.

Further aspects of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s work that relates to this thesis is his understanding of the origins of the *’Injīl*, as distinct from the canonical Gospels. In addition, his focus on the negative critique of the teaching of St Paul as misleading the early community, appears a

¹⁶⁶ Al-Jabbar follows the traditional Islamic understanding of Q 4:157 where Jesus is spared death on the cross.

paradigm of the Nazoraean thought pattern (cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1.26.2). I have detailed earlier the nature of *Q* and the *Gospel of the Hebrews* as literature that describe Jesus as a charismatic preacher from lower Galilee. These fragments of early literature lack the birth and Passion narratives and appear to avoid a death event. ‘Abd al-Jabbār holds to a similar understanding of a source text (*’Injīl*) in comparison to what he describes as revisionist Gospels of which there were many:

Those who had made a deal with the Romans gathered and consulted each other over what to adopt in place of the *’Injīl*, since it had passed out of their hands. They came to the opinion that they would produce a Gospel, saying, ‘The *Tawrāt* is only genealogies of the prophets and histories of their lives. We will construct a Gospel accordingly. Let each one of us mention that which he has memorized from the formulations of the *’Injīl* and from what the Christians would say about Christ.’ Thus one group wrote a Gospel. Then another group came after them and wrote a Gospel. They wrote a number of Gospels, yet much of what was in the original was left out. There were a number of them who knew many matters that were in the correct *’Injīl*, but which they concealed in order to establish their leadership. In [the true *’Injīl*] there was no mention of the crucifixion or crucifixes. They claim that there were eighty Gospels. These were continuously transcribed and abridged until only four Gospels by four individuals remained. Each individual made a Gospel in his age. Then another came after him and, finding it imperfect, made a Gospel which according to him was more correct than the Gospels of the others. (‘Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Asadābādī, Gabriel Said Reynolds 2010, 94)

The pre-gentile mission community of Jews that maintained the Jewish messiah-hood of Jesus, are alleged to have had a Gospel written in Hebrew that pre-dated the Gospel of Matthew (Papias, *Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord*; Tertullian, Eusebius, Epiphanius and Jerome, cf. Klijn 1973, 20). Here ‘Abd al-Jabbār appears to define a Muslim tradition of the *’Injīl* as the original untarnished Gospel, that also reflects a Nazoraean typology. In relation to what I presented earlier with regard to an original Gospel in Hebrew, ‘Abd al-Jabbār recounts a view that holds closely to that understanding:

Furthermore, there is no Gospel in Hebrew, the language of Christ, which he and his companions spoke, the language of Abraham the close friend [of God] and the rest of the prophets, the language which they spoke and in which the books of God came down to these and other Israelites. God addressed them [in Hebrew], but these [Christians] abandoned it. The [Muslim] scholars have said to them, ‘O Christians, your turning from the Hebrew language, the language of Christ and the prophets before him – peace be upon them – to other languages, so that no Christian recites

these Gospels in the Hebrew language in any of his [religious] duties, is a plot and a scheme, an attempt to avoid a scandal.' The [Muslim] people have said to them, 'The avoiding of [Hebrew] occurred because of your first companions' attempt to camouflage their accounts, plotting to disguise the lies that they set down in writing and to cover up their plots out of desire for leadership.' This is because the Hebrews were the *ahl al-kitāb* and the party of knowledge in that era. These individuals changed the language, or rather turned away from it entirely, so that the party of knowledge would not understand their teachings and their intention to cover up [their lies], lest they be embarrassed before their teachings could become dominant and their and their [scheme] be completed. ('Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Asadābādī, Gabriel Said Reynolds 2010, 95)

As part of 'Abd al-Jabbār's critique of the Christian Church in the tenth century was that it had rejected the original language of Jesus (Hebrew) that would have been found in the earliest Gospel, but this had been masked by revisions in other languages. This assumption of the original Gospel in Hebrew (now no longer existing), I suggest indicates a tradition that had been maintained by the movement that the Patristic writers called the Nazoraeans/Ebionites. The emphasis on the original language of Jesus, together with the animosity towards Paul shows an awareness of a belief system that is congruent with the Nazoraeans as a Jewish movement from 1st century C.E. In line with the account given by Epiphanius of the Ebionites (cf. *Panarion* 30.1.1), he particularly considers Paul as a cause for the errors of the Christian Church, that he was a "wicked and evil Jew" that claimed the Roman "way" and assimilation as his framework, ignoring the *Tawrāt* and purity codes. There is a significant amount of polemic against Paul that could be just that, however underlying this a figure that drew "the truth" away from Torah observing followers of Jesus is a typology very similar to the Nazoraean/Ebionite tradition expounded by the Patristic writers as mentioned earlier. Overall, the question to be asked of 'Abd al-Jabbār is why does he make reference to the Hebrew language, the original Gospel and the errors of St Paul, as a Muslim theologian? There is little reference to the divine authority of the Qur'ān as evidence in and of itself for the limitations of the Christian understanding as People of the Book. This is not to claim, as Shlomo Pines did, that it wholly has as its source "Jewish Christian" literature, but there is a strong possibility of

this being one source of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s work. In the translation of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s writing in *Critique of Christian Origins* Gabriel Said Reynolds and Samir Khalil Samir claim that although Pines’ deductions were controversial in the mid 60’s claiming a lost Syriac Judaeo-Christian Treatise, this was unlikely in its entirety. They do however acknowledge that; “There are a variety of sources from a variety of religious groups.”(‘Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Asadābādī, Gabriel Said Reynolds 2010, lxxiii). This is the nature of religious literature, where thoughts, beliefs and doctrines wrestle out ideas until a new synthesis is created. Once more the new then becomes the old in a different context and setting, and the process of dialectic engagement starts again to formulate “the new”.

6.10 Conclusion to Chapter 6

The previous chapters bring together a thread of a Nazoraean paradigm that speaks from a wider Jewish messianic typology in a *Messiah ben Joseph*, who would come from Galilee, suffer and die at the gates of Jerusalem. This would be a prelude to the coming of a Davidic messiah who would raise the slain Ephraimite messiah and gather Jew and Gentile to the Sanctuary of the Temple, as re-enacted in the annual festival of *Sukkōt*. This tsunami of expectation within all Jews including the Nazoraean movement continued to gain strength through the art and architecture of Jewish sanctuaries in Late Antiquity only to break on the shores of apocalyptic hope at the beginning of the 7th century with the Persian conquest of Jerusalem.

To understand the pervading focus on Jerusalem and the Temple cult in Late Antiquity, the next chapter makes a study of the events in Jerusalem occurring simultaneously to Muhammed’s mission and migration to Medina in the early 7th century B.C.E.

7 The Jewish mindset of pre-Islamic Arabia

7.1 Introduction to Chapter 7

In the light of the previous chapters considering the extended presence of messianic and apocalyptic expectations amongst a broad strata of Jewish communities in Late Antiquity, I will focus on a significant but often neglected historical event of the Persian conquest of Jerusalem, in the early 7th century C.E. (Conybeare 1910, 502). As in earlier chapters of this thesis, there needs to be a careful review of the literature, recognising that history at this time was written by parties with a vested interest in their own interpretation of events.

Having considered the expression of Jewish messianic belief through art and architecture in Late Antiquity, I will now examine in detail the historical events in Palestine in the early 7th century, and the apocalyptic and eschatological writings of this era, the *Sefer Zerubbabel*,¹⁶⁷ other Midrashic and Talmudic narratives (Reeves 2005).

Throughout Jewish history there have been events that have punctuated the mindset and identity of Jews, and so impacted on the interpretation of their role as God's people. The Destruction of the Temple and the subsequent razing of the city of Jerusalem after the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 C.E. permanently seared a mark on Jewish sense of purpose and identity (Stroumsa 2009). This time also saw the development of rabbinic Judaism and as suggested previously, the divergence between the Nazoraean Jews that fled east, and the spread of Pauline Christianity in the Roman west. The Tannaitic age of rabbinic Judaism, centred around Sepphoris came to an end with the compilation of the Mishnah in the 3rd century C.E. Later, the Palestinian Talmud or *Yerushalmi* arising from the Mishnah, was compiled in the more prosperous and secure era of the 4th century C.E., with the Babylonian Talmud (the *Talmud*

¹⁶⁷ The *Book of Zerubbabel* or the *Apocalypse of Zerubbabel*.

Bavli) being completed by the late 6th or early 7th century C.E.¹⁶⁸ Throughout this time, but particularly in the 5th and 6th centuries C.E. there was a renewed hope of a restoration and return to Jerusalem (Himmelfarb 2017, 103), as I have indicated by the architectural, artistic and textual evidence presented in Chapter 4. As Reuven Firestone observes this recurrent theme in the development of religion, that myths and narratives are utilized and re-enacted in a new dispensation:

Thus it should not be surprising that stories and figures known from the Bible and post-biblical Jewish literature such as Midrash and Talmud would recur in one form or another in *Qur'ān* and Ḥadīth through the medium of Arabian culture, though not necessarily in the forms that they appear in Jewish tradition. (Firestone 2016, 4)

The presence of Jews in Arabia has been well documented but often as “the other” in relation to the rise of Islam in the 7th century C.E. (Sinai 2018, 10fn). Particular focus is often made on the three Jewish tribes in Medina, the *Banū Qaynuqā'*, the *Banū al-Naḍīr* and the *Banū Qurayza*, and their participation in the *Ṣaḥīfah al-Madīnah* (Medina Charter). The subsequent departure of these tribes from Medina and their demise has often been a focus for a “parting of the ways” between Jews and Muslims (Mazuz 2015, 1; Shrentzel 2018, 26; Margoliouth and British Academy 1924, 61). I would propose that the distinction was not so clear, and the presence of Jews in many of the tribes and livelihoods of Arabian communities was always present. Gordon Newby in his chapter, *The Jews of Arabia at the Birth of Islam* highlights this:

Jews at the time of Muhammad and the rise of Islam had a long history in Arabia and were well integrated into both urban and rural environments as urban craftsmen, traders, farmers, and bedouin. Most Arab clans and tribes had Jewish members representing all facets of Arabian life. (Newby 2013, 39)

The closeness of Jewish beliefs and traditions to the non-Jews of the Ḥijāz should not be ignored, particularly in relation to what appears to be an accepted knowledge of Hebrew

¹⁶⁸ “A literary of monumental proportions (5,894 folio pages in the standard printed editions), which draws upon the totality of the spiritual, intellectual, ethical, historical, and legal traditions produced in rabbinic circles from the time of the destruction of the Second Temple in the first century until the Muslim conquest at the beginning of the seventh century. The Babylonian Talmud (*Bavli*) is often described as being a commentary to the *Mishnah of Rabbi *Judah ha-Nasi, but the actual relationship between these two works is far more complex.” (Skolnik, Fred & Michael Berenbaum 2007, 19.470)

biblical stories by Muḥammad, and amongst the *muhājirūn* and the *anṣār*. As I pointed out earlier in the thesis, the matrilineal parentage of Muḥammad had a significant Jewish presence and the clans of the Aws and Khazraj were of Jewish Yemeni heritage (Newby 2013, 44-5; Lecker 1995b, 635-6). The argument is often made that the inclusion of Jews in the Medinan Charter was an attempt by Muḥammad to convert Jews, or include them into the *umma* (Spurling 2017, 8; Denny 1977, 44). If this argument is positively turned about, Muḥammad may have been very close to Jewish communities, recognising their unchanging position on monotheism and the Torah. It is notable that there is no attempt to include Christians into the “Constitution of Medina” at any point despite the many references to them being “people of the book” in the Qur’ān (Albayrak 2008, 302). This absence of any reference to the Christian communities within the *muhājirūn* and the *anṣār* is important for considering a balance to suggestions on Christian influence on Islam, even to the content of the Ka’ba (Serjeant 1978, 4; Lindstedt 2015). Within his mission he may have wished to include Jews and a Jewish universalist tradition, as a sign of the eschatological end time and an imminent return to Jerusalem of all Jews and Gentiles (Donaldson 2008, 500).¹⁶⁹ This is reflected in the writings of Sebêos in 7th century, when speaking of the teachings of Muḥammad to the “Ismaelites”:

So Mahmet legislated for them: not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsely, and not to engage in fornication. He said: ‘With an oath God promised this land to Abraham and his seed after him for ever. And he brought about as he promised during that time while he loved Israel. But now you are the sons of Abraham, and God is accomplishing his promise to Abraham and his seed for you. Love sincerely only the God of Abraham, and go and seize your land which God gave to your father Abraham. No one will be able to resist you in battle, because God is with you.’ (Sebêos, Robert W. Thomson, James Howard-Johnston 1999, 96)

If this was a narrative after the mission of Muḥammad, then it is not surprising that the event of the Persian armies occupying Jerusalem in 614 C.E. would not have raised major hope

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Isa. 1:24-31; 2:2-4; 24:23; 25:6-10a; 29:8; 30:23; 35; 52:7; 60:1-22; 61:6; Jer. 30:11,16; 31:1-25; Ezek. 17:11-24; 20:33-44; 34:11-16; 34:23-31; 40:1-48:35; Joel 2:26; 3:9-21; Mic. 4:1-3; 4:6-7; 5:2-4; Zech. 8:1-23; 14:10-21. 43:7; Amos. 9:13-15.

of a Jewish return and that this, “bears directly upon the earliest stages of Islam.” (Stroumsa 2009, 285). This is the context of the apocalyptic writings of the *midrash* and *piyyut*, that I will examine in this chapter. The texts that are written for the purpose of interpreting events within the Jewish communities of 7th century C.E. and beyond.

Finally, I will analyse the messianic speculation arising from historical fact and literary interpretation, to highlight the concept of the Ephraimite messiah tradition in the figure of Nehemiah ben Hushiel of the *Sefer Zerubbabel*. Although rooted in history (the Persian capture of Jerusalem) much of the Midrashic texts are embroidered in myth. This does not detract from the significance of the belief in the imminent restitution of Jerusalem and renewal of sacrifices at the Temple Mount. The impact on the Jewish mindset of the early 7th century C.E. would have been considerable, with their expectations for, “the process of redemption started with Abraham, was renewed at Sinai and would be finalized in the days of the messiah.” (Van Zile 2017, 415).

7.2 The events surrounding Jerusalem in the early 7th century

The events surrounding the conquest of Jerusalem in 614 C.E. are part of a much larger canvas of conflict between the Byzantine and Sassanid Empires that culminated in the final campaign between 603-630 C.E.

Initially, Khosrau II the Persian Emperor focussed his campaign against Byzantium in the western edges of the Empire, so that by 610 C.E. Armenia and northern Mesopotamia were under Sassanid control. The Romans were struggling after a revolt against Phocas, leading Heraclius to be installed as the Roman Emperor in October 610 C.E. This gave the Persians an opportunity to advance through northern Syria and into Anatolia, with Damascus falling in 613

C.E. allowing Persian control of Palestine. In the following year, the Sassanids were able to attack and capture Jerusalem.

From this position Khosrau II moved on Constantinople in 622 C.E. and this presented a time of significant risk to the stability of Byzantium. Peter Sarris in his book *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500-700* suggests that the fortunes of Heraclius changed through him calling a “holy war” on the Persians:

Outmanoeuvring and defeating each of these in turn [three Persian armies], the Emperor headed towards the Black Sea coast and the kingdom of Lazica, stoking up the rhetoric of holy war against the infidel Persians, and promising martyrdom and eternal fame to those who died in battle: ‘Be not disturbed, O brethren, by the multitude [of the enemy]’, the Chronicle of Theophanes (drawing upon George of Pisidia) records him to have declared, ‘for when God wills it, one man will rout a thousand. So let us sacrifice ourselves to God for the salvation of our brothers.’ (Sarris 2011, 252)

In 627 C.E. Heraclius, marched on the Sassanids and the next year Khosrau II was removed by his son, Kavadh II. The new Persian Emperor immediately sued for peace, allowing Heraclius to ceremoniously enter Jerusalem with the returned fragment of the “True Cross”¹⁷⁰ on 21st March 630. Although Heraclius appears victorious, there would be major changes to the known world for Byzantium and Persia within the next decade:

The established world-order was evidently breaking down, a clear sign to some that the end of time was near. A sense of imminent doom was an important strand in the early preaching of Muhammad, before the Hijra (‘emigration’) to Medina in 622. In the short term Muhammad’s words had a profound, transforming effect only on his immediate listeners at Mecca, but before long they would remould politics as well as ideas in an important region of Arabia, and the consequences of that would affect the whole of western Eurasia. (Sebêos, Robert W. Thomson, James Howard-Johnston 1999, xxvi)

The Persian conquest of Jerusalem lasted only a very short period (614-629 C.E.) but set the scene for changes for years to come including the Muslim conquest within 20 years. There is significant difficulty in clarifying historical fact apart from Christian polemic and Jewish apocalyptic interpretation. As Hagith Sivan argues:

¹⁷⁰ Returned by the Persian Emperor Kavadh II

The difficulty is that Jewish reactions to the critical events of the seventh century are encoded in literary compositions that require careful deciphering. These include apocalyptic visions in prose, exegetical works (midrashim), and synagogal poetry (piyyut). All three genres have remained largely outside the scope of the renewed scholarly interest in the seventh century in general and in Jewish-Christian-Moslem relations in particular. (Sivan 2000, 278)

Both Christian (Byzantine) and Jewish literature need to be considered side by side to draw a picture of the events of the early 7th century. Some facts can be deduced, but perhaps more importantly is the political, social and religious interpretation of the times by the chronologers and scribes. These underlying themes display the motivation and aspirations of Christians and Jews, particularly when considering the mindset of the Jewish tribes in Medina.

7.3 The Christian accounts of the conquest of Jerusalem.

In respect to Christian interpretation there is the documentation of a massacre of Christians and destruction of churches of Jerusalem by Persians and Jews in 614 C.E. This view appears to originate in the early chronicle by Antiochius Strategos (d. 630 C.E.), a monk of Mar Saba. As a result of little archaeological evidence of this occurring (Avni 2010, 35), it can be assumed that this derives from Christian polemics of the time. This expansion of “Jewish violence” would be held as justification of later expulsion of Jews from the city (630 C.E.) and other anti-Jewish polemics.

This interpretation of events takes the themes of the earlier Christian writings of Sebêos, the 7th century Armenian historian, and those of Antiochius Strategos, in an unfiltered trope against Jewish blood thirst and control of wealth (cf. Hoyland 1995, 89). The Christian accounts of the events are also coloured by their own devastation that Jerusalem had been occupied by a Persian (and possible Jewish force) in 614 C.E. and the fragment of the True Cross had been captured. This was only finally resolved by Emperor Heraclius marching in triumph into Jerusalem with the returned True Cross in 630 C.E.

Sebêos is the significant chronicler of this period of time, as he gives the most developed account of the last Byzantine-Persian war and later an insight of the mission and activity of Muḥammad and early Muslim community. In relation to this thesis and the Christian perspective on the capture of Jerusalem, he recounts:

On the 19th day [of the siege], in the month Margats', which was the 28th of the month, in the 25th year of the reign of Apruēz Khosrov [613/614], ten days after Easter, the Persian army captured Jerusalem. For three days they put to the sword and slew all the populace of the city. And they stayed within the city for 21 days. Then they came out and camped outside the city and burnt the city with fire. They added up the number of fallen corpses, and the total of those killed was 17,000 people; and the living whom they captured were 35,000 people. They also arrested the patriarch, whose name was Zak'aria, and the custodian of the Cross. In their search for the Life-bearing Cross, they began to torture them; and many of the clergy they decapitated at that time. Then they showed them the place where it lay hidden, and they took it away into captivity. (Sebêos, Robert W. Thomson, James Howard-Johnston 1999, 69-70)

The removal of the True Cross would have been devastating to the Churches of Byzantium and particularly Heraclius who at the time, was struggling with maintaining his Empire from the onslaught of the Sassanids. The Jewish presence amongst the Persian armies was recognized by Sebêos, although this may have been a further slur on the Persians to have been associating with the Jews. The possibility of freedom from Byzantine restrictions and, more significantly for this thesis, access to the Temple Mount would have created a fervour of hope amongst the Palestinian Jews and the wider diaspora. Sebêos continues:

Then all the land of Palestine willingly submitted to subjection to the Persian king; especially the survivors of the race of Hebrews, rebelling against the Christians and embracing ancestral rancour, caused great harm among the multitude of the faithful. They went to them [the Persians] and made close union with them. (Sebêos, Robert W. Thomson, James Howard-Johnston 1999, 68)

The writings of Sebêos are extensive but may have been written at some distance from the city of Jerusalem. In a more focussed account from a monastery situated near Bethlehem, Antiochus Strategos a monk from Mar Saba describes the events in Jerusalem:

The treatise of the blessed monk Strateg, who lived in the Laura of our father Saba. He told about the devastation of Jerusalem, the capture of the Cross of Christ, which is the tree of our life, and of the burning of the holy churches, and their demolition; the captivity of the patriarch Zachariah, the destruction of priests, of deacons and monks;

about the folk which believed in Christ, and about all that befell Jerusalem and its inhabitants from Babylon, at the hands of Persians and Chaldeans by command of their king Chosro. (Trans. from the Georgian text of Marr: Conybeare 1910, 502-3)

According to Gideon Avni there is little archaeological evidence of extensive burning of churches, however there is evidence of mass graves in the locations mentioned by Strategos (2010, 37). As with many Christian writers there continued an anti-Jewish polemic. In Frederick Conybeare's translation in the "*Antiochus Strategos, the Capture of Jerusalem by the Persians in the year 614*", Strategos maintains this vitriol:

And when the unclean Jews saw the steadfast uprightness of the Christians and their immovable faith, then they were agitated with lively ire, like evil beasts, and thereupon imagined another plot. As of old they bought the Lord from the Jews with silver, so they purchased Christians out of the reservoir; for they gave the Persians silver, and they bought a Christian and slew him like a sheep. The Christians however rejoiced because they were being slain for Christ's sake and shed their blood for His blood, and took on themselves death in return for His death. . . (1910, 508)

The account of Strategos of mass slaughter of Christians by Jews and the burning of churches remained the dominant narrative in the West until 20th century (Horowitz 1998, 10-19), and similarly echoed in Henry Hart Milman's book the *History of the Jews* (1828 C.E.):

It had come at length, the long-expected hour of triumph and vengeance; and they did not neglect the opportunity. They washed away the profanation of the holy city in Christian blood. The Persians are said to have sold the miserable captives for money. The vengeance of the Jews was stronger than their avarice; not only did they not scruple to sacrifice their treasures in the purchase of these devoted bondsmen, they put to death all they had purchased at a lavish price. It was a rumour of the time that 90,000 perished. (cf. Horowitz 1998, 4)

7.4 The Jewish narrative of events in the early 7th century C.E.

The events of the conquest of Jerusalem in Jewish narratives are recounted as describing the Jews of Arabia and Palestine joining the Persian forces in the hope of a restoration of Jerusalem.¹⁷¹ It is suggested that they were led by Benjamin of Tiberias, a Jew of great wealth,

¹⁷¹ *Khosrau II*: Kaufmann Kohler, A. Rhine. Accessed 4th May 2021.
<https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4356-chosroes-khosru-ii-parwiz>

and Nehemiah ben Hushiel, with the Jews from Nazareth and Galilee with some from Arabia, attacked Jerusalem with the Persian army led by General Shahrbaraz (Malamat, Abraham; Ben-Sasson 1976, 362).

What is important for this thesis is the incorporation of this narrative into the myth developed in the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, indicating the conquest by a Jewish-Persian army followed by a Jewish occupation of the city of Jerusalem from 614-19 C.E. (Ben-Gurion 1966, 198). It is not the purpose of this study to consider the historicity of the details, however the indications drawn from the accounts is that there was an occupation of Jerusalem by non-Christian forces in 614 C.E. to an extent that it liberated Jews from earlier Byzantine constraints on access to the sacred site of the Temple Mount. The Jewish sources claimed that Jews participated in the conquest as part of the Persian army, while the Christian sources present them only as taking advantage of the Sasanian conquest.

The Jewish account of the events of 614 C.E. arise from the apocalyptic midrashim, and particularly the *Sefer Zerubbabel*. As the Christian accounts of 614 C.E. are wrapped in anti-Jewish vitriol founded in New Testament accounts of Jews being complicit in the death of Jesus. Likewise, the Jewish accounts written within a framework of apocalyptic aspirations reaching back to the writings of Zechariah and the *Four Carpenters* (Zechariah 2:1–4) as detailed in chapter 5. After considering the account of *Sefer Zerubbabel* there needs to be an evaluation of the core message, the hermeneutical task. The method is even greater when modern scholars intertwine myth and history and present story as a realist fact without reference to the complexity of mixing genre. This mix of myth and history can be seen in F.M. Loewenberg's writing:

Khosru was aided by Babylonian Jewry who supplied 30,000 Jewish soldiers in return for a promise that they would participate in the capture of Jerusalem and that a Jewish governor would be appointed to rule over the city. Once the city was captured, the Persians appointed Nehemiah ben Hushiel as governor, and the new governor lost no time in reestablishing the sacrificial service on the Temple Mount. (Loewenberg 2013, 41)

Similarly, in their book *A History of the Jewish People* Abraham Malamat and Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson write:

The Persians handed Jerusalem over to Jewish settlers, who proceeded with the expulsion of the Christians and the removal of their churches. At the head of Jerusalem stood a leader whom we know only by his messianic name: Nehemiah ben Hushiel ben Ephraim ben Joseph. The sacrificial cult may even have been resumed. Jewish rule in Jerusalem lasted three years. In 617 there was a reversal of Persian policy. For reasons that are not sufficiently clear, the Persians made peace with the Christians. The Jews, on the other hand, did not, and the Persian authorities were forced to fight them: 'And they waged war against the saints and brought down many of them, and Shiroi [the king of Persia] stabbed Nehemiah ben Hushiel, and sixteen of the just were killed together with him' (Malamat, Abraham; Ben-Sasson 1976, 362)

In these cases, as well as others, when myth is mixed with history, the realist typology becomes dominant, and the story becomes an assumed fact. It is important to study the original text of *Sefer Zerubbabel* to consider the story it presents in the light of an apocalyptic tradition that stretches back a millennium. The evidence of a recognized past typology allows for a clearer critique of the purpose of the book and to consider what might be original historical fact within 7th century C.E. In this assessment it should be borne in mind that myth and story have an existential purpose beyond the role of historical fact. Whether Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel was a historical figure may not matter, rather the character plays an important role in echoing stories of the past and reforming them to encourage hope of change in the future. That is the nature of apocalyptic literature.

7.5 The *Sefer Zerubbabel* and other apocalyptic midrashim

The examination of the impact of apocalyptic literature, particularly the *Sefer Zerubbabel* (c. 620 C.E. cf. Himmelfarb 2009, 620) on the beliefs and mindset of the Jewish tribes and peoples of Medina is important to understand the cultural complexities of early 7th century Arabia. It should not be underestimated that the significance of Redemption and Return

had to the Jewish mindset, whether in 1st century Palestine, 3rd century Dura Europos, 4th century Sepphoris, 5th century Himyar (see Chapter 3), or 7th century Medina. The development of this tradition has been described in earlier chapters from the “*four carpenters*” of first Zechariah (c.520-518 B.C.E.) through the communities at Qumrān, and the Nazoraean movement of the 1st century Palestine, as well as the synagogues of Galilee, Golan and Dura Europos. John Reeves makes the significance of these writings clear:

Sefer Zerubbabel’s importance for the history of medieval apocalypticism cannot be overstated. It repeatedly demonstrates how a written text—in its case, the Jewish Bible—has achieved an almost unsurpassed authority in the invention and construction of a special kind of discourse...

It either initiates or significantly enhances several motifs that attain popularity in certain strands of medieval Jewish literature, such as an eschatological role for the figure of Zerubbabel, a linear redemptive scheme that involves the participation of two named messianic heroes (the messiah of the lineage of Joseph [Nehemiah ben Hushiel] and the messiah of the lineage of David [Menaḥem b. ‘Amiel]... (2005, 50-51)

Over against the complexity of Jewish thought and religious heterodoxy in Late Antiquity, developed what were to be the stronger traditions of orthodox/catholic Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism (and of course, Islam). Susanne Bangert and David Gwynn highlights this complex mix, leading to the demise of minority movements:

The process of definition and codification that characterized both Christianity and Judaism in Late Antiquity also sought to exclude those who fell outside the lines that were being drawn. Whether through the deliberate destruction of their works, or through the more passive neglect of writings not selected to be preserved and copied for later generations, little now survives in our literary record from those denounced as Christian ‘heretics’ or from Jewish groups whose practices differed from rabbinic principles. The loss of so much evidence significantly exaggerates the uniformity and dominance of Christian orthodoxy and rabbinic Judaism in the late antique world in which those traditions only gradually emerged, and so in turn distorts our understanding of that world when viewed through the selective texts that now survive. (2010, 4-5)

As the sun was about to set on Late Antiquity, there was a great diversity of thought, belief and practice, not only in the pagan world but also within Christian and Jewish communities. Much has been lost through the porous borders of every institutionalized religion,

nevertheless there may be signs there was still diversity and complexity in Jewish belief at the end of 6th century C.E.¹⁷²

To root this study in the evidence that can be accessed, I will turn to Jewish writings of Late Antiquity, those contributing to or developing from the *Sefer Zerubbabel*. The figure of Zerubbabel is shrouded in time. He may have been an exiled individual returning with the first wave of Jews from the Babylonian exile, or at the time of Cyrus, or Darius in the early 6th century B.C.E. and later. More significant to this study, the text of the Book of Nehemiah identifies a figure Zerubbabel (Nehemiah 12:47) at the time the Prophet Nehemiah rebuilds the Temple and dedicates sacrifices in 5th century B.C.E at *Sukkōt* (the Festival of Booths):

Then the king [Artaxerxes of Persia] said unto me [Nehemiah]: ‘For what dost thou make request?’ So I prayed to the G-d of heaven. And I said unto the king: ‘If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchres, that I may build it.’ (Nehemiah 2:4-5 JPS)

As Nehemiah pleads to rebuild the destroyed city of Judah, Jerusalem, so his archetype returns to re-establish the Temple sacrifices in the 7th century C.E. The imagery would not be lost on the readers of the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, and the Jews of Palestine and the diaspora.

Again the role of Nehemiah is recounted at the time of the Maccabean revolt in 2nd century B.C.E. when the Temple again was repossessed after the Greek desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes IV (2 Maccabees 1:18). The people of Jerusalem and Judea address Aristobulus, teacher of King Ptolemy and the Jews in Egypt:

Since we intend to celebrate the purification of the temple on the twenty-fifth of Cheseleu [Kislev], we thought it necessary to notify you in order that you also may celebrate it, as the feast of tent pitching and of the fire, given when Neemias

¹⁷² “Not all late antique Jews were rabbinic Jews, and it is by no means clear to what extent the rabbis sought to impose their own view of Judaism as the only correct path, or what authority they held. By the end of the 8th C. the rabbinic movement was genuinely dominant in Jewish society, but in Late Antiquity itself the rabbis were only one among a number of possible Jewish power groups. Archaeology has proved essential in overturning the older scholarly consensus and in examining the interaction of Jews with the culture of their pagan and Christian neighbours (as Weiss demonstrates here for the Jews of Sepphoris). The material evidence of buildings, tombs, artefacts and inscriptions offers scholars a broader vision of Jewish society than our rabbinic texts can allow.” (Bangert and Gwynn 2010, 8)

[Nehemiah], who built both the temple and the altar and offered sacrifices. (2 Maccabees 1:18. Trans. Schaper 2007, 505)¹⁷³

All these references link the figure of the Prophet Nehemiah to the restoration and regulation of sacrificial worship in Jerusalem.¹⁷⁴ The enduring importance of this archetype can be seen in later Jewish traditions indicating that the figure of Zerubbabel continued to be linked to events surrounding the advent of the Messiah. An example of this is found in the *'Otiyyot de R. Aqiva* ('Alphabet of R. Akiva', 9th century C.E.) describing how God will give a universalist "new Torah" (חדשה תורה)¹⁷⁵ that the Messiah will expound, and Zerubbabel will recite the Mourner's Kaddish, allowing the response of "Amen" from all people including those suffering in the Afterlife:

The Holy One, blessed be He, will sit in Paradise and expound ... and the Holy One, blessed be He, will expound to them the presuppositions of the new Torah which he will reveal to them in the future via the agency of the Messiah. When He reaches (completes?) the exposition, Zerubbabel b. Shealtiel will stand up and recite 'May He be magnified and sanctified, etc.' His voice will reach from one end of the universe to the other. All the inhabitants of the world will answer 'Amen!' Even the wicked ones from Israel and those righteous Gentiles who remain in Gehenna will respond and say 'Amen!' (Reeves 2005, 7)

Many modern scholars would place the formation of the *Sefer Zerubbabel* in the first quarter of the 7th century in Palestine at the time of the wars between Persia and Rome. The final extinguishing of messianic hopes amongst Jews occurred when Heraclius returned the True Cross to Jerusalem in 630 C.E. (Himmelfarb 2017, 118). Subsequently, Heraclius forced baptism on all the Jews in his empire and banned them from coming within a three-mile radius of Jerusalem:

In the Christian and Jewish artefacts of the seventh and eighth centuries the memory of this [630 C.E.] stands out as an instance of critical importance, one in whose light the meaning of other events must necessarily be evaluated. For the authors of the *'Prophecy and Dream of Zerubbabel'* and the *'Capture of Jerusalem'* this event was the focal point around which other events had to be situated and thus understood. (Wheeler 1991, 73)

¹⁷³ The Greek text used is R. Hanhart's translation which forms part of the Göttingen Septuagint and is the standard critically established text of contemporary Septuagint scholarship (Schaper 2007, 503n).

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Ezra 3:2, 8; 4:2-3; 5:2; Neh. 12:1, 47; Hag. 1:14; Zech. 4:9; Ben Sira 49:11-12; 1 Esdras 6:2.

¹⁷⁵ Hebrew from: Jellinek, Adolph. 1938. *Bet ha-Midrash: Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und vermischter Abhandlungen aus der ältern jüdischen Literatur*. Jerusalem: Bamberger und Wahrmann. 3:27.

It should not be underestimated how these events would have impacted on the Jewish communities across the Middle East. The fact that Jerusalem was occupied, not by the Romans but by the allegedly more sympathetic Persians, meant the creation of an access to the Temple site that had been denied to Jews for 500 years. With this event comes together the messianic hopes and aspirations evident in Jewish communities from Galilee to the Euphrates that the Temple cult will be renewed at the coming of the Jewish Messiah with a possible universalist message to all humanity of a new Torah (cf. *'Otiyyot de R. Aqiva*). All this occurred contemporaneously with the mission of Muḥammad, the *Hijra* to Medina in 622 C.E. and the *Ṣaḥīfa al-Madīna* (Medina Charter) with the Jewish communities there (notably with the absence of Christian communities who are suggested to have a presence in the formation of early Islam cf. Donner 1998, 2010).

The text of *Sefer Zerubbabel* is set during the time of the First Temple and the Book of Nehemiah, and this would be recognized by seventh century C.E. Jews as foretelling the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. and never rebuilt. *Sefer Zerubbabel* develops the theme by emphasising the rebuilding the third Temple in the time of the Persian conquest in the 7th century C.E., by the Josephite messiah figure of Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel.

In the text God carries Zerubbabel to Rome, representing Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire of Late Antiquity. Zerubbabel meets *Menahem ben 'Amiel*, the messiah descended from David. This messiah is imprisoned, suffers and is despised, so much so that Zerubbabel does not recognize him for who he is. The archangel Michael, the *Meṭātrōn* (not Enoch as in other Jewish mystical writings), arrives to answer Zerubbabel's questions. Hephzibah the mother of the Davidic Messiah, Menahem ben 'Amiel, armed with a miraculous staff, defeats two kings (the Romans). This is followed by the appearance of Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel, the Josephite Messiah, who will restore the people to Jerusalem and complete the sacrifices on the Temple Mount:

Concealed there as well is a man whose name is Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel ben Ephraim ben Joseph. Zerubbabel spoke up and said to Metatron and to Michael (*sic*) the prince: ‘My lord, I want you to tell me when the Messiah of the Lord will come and what will happen after all this!’ He said to me, ‘The Lord’s Messiah— Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel— will come five years after Hephshibah. He will collect all Israel together as one entity and they will remain for <four> years in Jerusalem, (where) the children of Israel will offer sacrifice, and it will be pleasing to the Lord. He will inscribe Israel in the genealogical lists according to their families. (quoted in Reeves 2006, 57)

The Archangel Michael takes Zerubbabel to a “house of disgrace and scorn,” (i.e. a church), where he sees a beautiful stone statue of a virgin which, after lying with Satan, gives birth to Armilos (Heraclius), the eschatological opponent of the Jews, who will kill Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel:

He (Armilos) will issue an order to execute him (Neḥemiah) in the Temple of his God, for he had immediately set his foot within the sanctuary. So they will kill Neḥemiah in Jerusalem, and his corpse will be discarded in Jerusalem. Israel will mourn for him, as scripture states: ‘and the land will mourn, every family separately’ (Zech 12:12). From the ninth sign in *’Otot of R. Šim’ōn b. Yōḥai* (Reeves 2005, 113-15)

Then Menahem ben ‘Amiel will arrive with Elijah the prophet, resurrecting the Josephite Messiah (Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel) and all Israel will believe that he is the Messiah. There will then be the general resurrection of the dead, Menahem will kill Armilos, and God himself will descend to fight the eschatological enemies, Gog and Magog and the forces of Armilos (Rome/Byzantium). The third Temple made in heaven will descend to earth, and so come the restoration of Israel:

After all this (has taken place), Menahem b. ‘Amiel will come, accompanied by Nehemiah b. Hushiel and all Israel. All of the dead will resurrect, and Elijah the prophet will be with them. They will come up to Jerusalem. In the month of Av,¹⁷⁶ during which they formerly mourned for Nehemiah (and) for the destruction of Jerusalem, Israel will hold a great celebration and bring an offering to the Lord, which the Lord will accept on their behalf. The offering of Israel will be pleasing to the Lord as it was formerly during her past history (cf. Mal 3:4). The Lord will discern the pleasant aroma of His people Israel and greatly rejoice. Then the Lord will lower to earth the celestial Temple which had been previously built, and a column of fire and a cloud of smoke will rise to heaven. The Messiah and all of Israel will follow them to the gates of Jerusalem. (*Sefer Zerubbabel* cf. 2005, 63)

This reflects the earlier apocalyptic writings of the *Book of Enoch*:

¹⁷⁶ The Hebrew month of Av.

And I stood up to see till they folded up that old house; and carried off all the pillars, and all the beams and ornaments of the house were at the same time folded up with it, and they carried it off and laid it in a place in the south of the land. And I saw till the Lord of the sheep brought a new house greater and loftier than that first, and set it up in the place of the first which had been folded up: all its pillars were new, and its ornaments were new and larger than those of the first, the old one which He had taken away, and all the sheep were within it. (Enoch 90:28-29 cf. Charles, R. H. 2013)

The section of the *Book of Enoch* probably dates from the second century B.C.E. and echoes the restoration of Israel and the Temple after the Maccabean Revolt. It demonstrates with the later *Sefer Zerubbabel* the pervading hope of a coming Ephraimite Messiah who dies and is resurrected with the final restitution of a New Jerusalem (Temple), the conversion of the believing Gentiles and the Resurrection of the Righteous.

In addition, in the '*Otot ha-Mašiah* Neḥemiah, the *Messiah ben Joseph*, is called by Armilos to declare him as God. This parallels earlier demands by foreign powers to turn away from monotheism (cf. Antiochus Epiphanes IV) however in this instance Neḥemiah restates the commandment “you shall have no other Gods before me” (Exod. 20:3). Representing that the declaration of monotheism is a test for righteousness. Armilos makes an error claiming that this statement of monotheism is not found in the Torah, thereby opening himself to be accused for being the false Messiah by Neḥemiah (Spurling 2015; Reeves 2005, 125). Following the death of Neḥemiah at the hands of Armilos there is a time of testing for the Jews (forty-five days) that they remain faithful and not doubt. Only after this valley of darkness the Hebrews will see hope brought by the Messiah ben David. In this way the '*Otot ha-Mašiah* highlights that adherence to the Torah that will ensure a place for the righteous at the end times:

Michael will blow a loud blast (on the *shofar*), and the graves of the dead will split open in Jerusalem, and the Holy One, blessed be He, will resurrect them. The Messiah of the lineage of David and Elijah the prophet will then come and resurrect the Messiah of the lineage of Joseph, the one who expired by the gates of Jerusalem. They will send out the Messiah of the lineage of David for the sake of the remnant of Israel that remains scattered among all the lands. Immediately all the rulers of the nations of the world will lift them up on their shoulders and bring them to the Lord (cf. Isa 49:22). (*Otot ha-Mašiah, the nineth sign*, cf. Reeves 2005, 128)

The sacrifice of Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel as the suffering and righteous servant is now redeemed through the coming of the Davidic messiah (cf. Daniel 12:1) and the subsequent return of the remnant of Israel to Jerusalem, with the defeat of the polytheistic [*one who claims to be God*] false messiah, Armilos (Heraclius).

Some argue for the date of the authorship of the *Pesikta Rabbati* to be in the 7th century C.E. Bamberger uses this quote from the *Pesikta*¹⁷⁷ to argue that all three empires must have been in existence at the same time period:

Said R. Isaac: The year when King Messiah is revealed, all the kings of the nations will be at strife with one another. The King of Persia will war with the King of Arabia, and the King of Arabia will go to Edom to take counsel from them. And the King of Persia will again lay the whole world waste. (Bamberger 1940, 427)

This only assures us that *Pesikta Rabbati* wasn't written earlier, and that it was an interpretation of past events.¹⁷⁸ Although Rivka Ulmer indicates elements from as far back as 1st century C.E. (2013, 116), it does provide an example of literature using the apocalyptic paradigm of inscribing meaning into disastrous events in history. It thereby gives an insight into the use and understanding of the *Messiah ben Joseph* figure during or after the 7th century C.E. Ulmer continues to highlight the uniqueness of the references to the *Messiah ben Joseph* by arguing that they are a response and a critique to the Christian interpretation of the suffering Christ, although she “cannot ascertain whether this textual debate is the outcome of a particular historical exchange” (2013, 124). Earlier I have suggested that this Ephraimite tradition was embedded within Jewish movements, including the Nazoraeans through to the 7th century C.E. There are two sections of the *Pesikta Rabbati* that are important in this context, chapter 1 and chapters 33-37, Ulmer concludes, “Nevertheless, there is the remote possibility that Messiah Ephraim in *Pesik. Rab.* was based upon a version of messianism held by Jewish adherents to a

¹⁷⁷ From a translation by Friedmann, Markus. 1880. *Pesikta Rabbati: Midrash für den Fest-Cyclus und die ausgezeichneten Sabbathes*. Wien: Selbsverlag des Herausgebers (Hebrew).

¹⁷⁸ Sefaria considers the midrash, *Pesikta Rabbati* to have been written in Talmudic Israel, c.600 - c.900 C.E. Accessed 4th July 2021. https://www.sefaria.org/Pesikta_Rabbati

particular messiah. The messianic narratives in *Pesik. Rab.* constitute a series of texts that move forward chronologically from the initial appearance of the Messiah to the time of salvation.” (Ulmer 2013, 122)

Within the *Pesikta Rabbati* there is a summary of the suffering Ephraimite Messiah preceding the Davidic kingly Messiah by seven years:

During the seven-year period preceding the coming of the son of David, iron beams will be brought and loaded upon his neck until the Messiah's body is bent low. Then he will cry and weep, and his voice will rise up to the very height of heaven, and he will say to God: Master of the universe, how much can my strength endure? How much can my spirit endure? How much my breath before it ceases? How much can my limbs suffer? Am I not flesh-and-blood?

It was because of the ordeal of the son of David that David wept, saying *My strength is dried up like a potsherd* (Ps. 22:16), During the ordeal of the son of David, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to him: Ephraim, My true Messiah, long ago, ever since the six days of creation, thou didst take this ordeal upon thyself. At this moment, thy pain is like My pain. (Braude (trans.) 1968, 680)

This indicates that there is evidence of the nature of the Jewish mindset at the time of Muḥammad’s revelation and *Hijra*, indicating a fervour within the Jewish communities of Palestine and the diaspora of an imminent event in Jewish history. This awareness of a messianic edge to Jewish thought could be understood to be echoed in this story from *The Life of Muḥammad*:

‘Āṣim b. ‘Umar b. Qatāda told me that some of his tribesmen said: ‘What induced us to accept Islam, apart from God's mercy and guidance, was what we used to hear the Jews say. We were polytheists worshipping idols, while they were people of the scriptures with knowledge which we did not possess. There was continual enmity between us, and when we got the better of them and excited their hate, they said, ‘The time of a prophet who is to be sent has now come. We will kill you with his aid as ‘Ād and Iram¹⁷⁹ perished.’” (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 93)

For Nazoraean Jews the echoes of an Ephraimite Messiah dying and rising again would resound in their consciousnesses of a coming fulfilment of prophecy. This vision is replicated in the *’Aggadat ha-Mašīah*, a post-rabbinic midrash compiled from a variety of sources in the late eleventh century C.E.:

¹⁷⁹ A lost city and tribe (Q 89:6–14)

R. Huna repeated in the name of R. Levi: This verse teaches that Israel will assemble in Upper Galilee, and there within Galilee the Messiah of the lineage of Joseph will be revealed to them. They will go up from there—he will be accompanied by all Israel—to Jerusalem in order to fulfill what scripture has stated: ‘and the forceful ones among your people will lift themselves up to fulfill the vision, but they will stumble’ (Dan 11:14). He will go up and rebuild the Temple and offer sacrifices, and the fire (for kindling these offerings) will descend from heaven. He will crush all the nations of the world. He will come to Moab and slaughter half its population, whereas the remainder will endure captivity and bring him tax revenue. He will eventually establish an accord with Moab, as scripture says: ‘I shall restore the prosperity of Moab’ (Jer. 48:47), and they will dwell untroubled for forty years, eating and drinking, ‘and foreigners will serve as your farm-laborers and vineyard-tenders’ (Isa. 61:5). (Reeves 2005, 145-46)

The *Messiah ben Joseph*, coming from Galilee, will draw together of the twelve tribes, including the ten lost tribes of the Northern Ephraimite Kingdom and include the Gentile nations (symbolized by Moab):

He will hoist a banner to the nations, and He will collect the dispersed ones of Israel and re-gather the scattered ones of Judah from the four corners of the earth’ (Isa. 11:12). (*Aggadot ha-Mašīaḥ* 2005, 148)

In the mid-eighth century apocalypse (*Secrets of R. Šim’ōn ben Yōḥai*) attributed to the 2nd century writer and opposer of Roman rule in Palestine, comes a tract that again highlights the divine purpose in the coming of the *Messiah ben Joseph* in the events of 7th century Jerusalem:

And after this a king ‘strong of face’ (עוֹז פָּנִים) will arise for three months, and then the wicked kingdom (i.e., Rome) will rule over Israel for nine months, as Scripture says: ‘Therefore He will give them until the time the one laboring in childbirth has borne’ (Mic 5:2). And there shall sprout up for them the Messiah of the lineage of Joseph, and he will bring them up to Jerusalem. He will rebuild the Temple and offer sacrifices; fire shall descend from heaven and consume their sacrifices, as Scripture promises: ‘and the violent ones among your people will arise’ (Dan 11:14). If they are not worthy, the Messiah of the lineage of Ephraim comes; but if they are worthy, the Messiah of the lineage of David will come. (Reeves 2005, 85)¹⁸⁰

By the late 7th century C.E. Islamic writings were reflecting these themes, such as that the End times would come in some believers lifetime (D. Cook 2021, 4). Armilos, the metaphor for the Roman emperor Heraclius in the *Sefer Zerubbabel* is developed into the image of *Dajjāl*,

¹⁸⁰ The 5th century Palestinian *Genesis Rabbah* and the Babylonian Talmud (*Bavli*) refer to a warrior messiah of the patriarch Joseph. The *Bavli* also alludes to the death of this Josephite messiah. (See *Bavli Sukkah* 52a:6 *Talmud Bavli Sukkah*. Sefaria.org. <https://www.sefaria.org/Sukkah.52a.6?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en>)

a satanic figure. This Dajjāl will march upon Jerusalem, but he will be confronted by and slain by ‘Īsā who will descend from heaven in order to accomplish this act. Many of these Islamic apocalyptic writings come from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār (d. 654 C.E.), a Yemeni Jewish convert to Islam. (Reeves 2005, 109).

In Byzantium, after the fall of Jerusalem to Roman troops and the return of the True Cross to Jerusalem by Heraclius in 630 C.E., there ensued a renewed return to Christian orthodoxy focussed on the persecution of “heretics” and Jews. This drive focussed on the Monophysite bishops of Syria who were seen to have been encouraged by the Persians, and the Jews who were seen as the factor in the fall of Jerusalem to the Persians in 614 C.E. (Sharf 1955, 103). This led to, “intense and systematic persecution” of the Jews and forced baptism throughout the Empire. All this stimulated the writings of Jewish apocalyptic literature that have been mentioned, the *Sefer Zerubbabel*, the *’Otot ha-Mašiah*, the *Secrets of R. Šim‘ōn ben Yōḥai* and others.

7.6 Conclusion to Chapter 7

I will conclude this chapter with an example of the use of the concept of *Messiah ben Joseph* in Midrashic literature¹⁸¹ that he offered sacrifices on the Temple Mount. This is found in a Jewish *piyyut* (poem), written by Rabbi Eleazar ben Kallir of Tiberias (c.570 – c.640 C.E.) (as quoted in Loewenberg 2013, 41):

When Assyria [the Persians] came to the city and pitched his tents there,
 the holy people [the Jews] received some relief.
 For he [Assyria] permitted the re-establishment of the temple,
 and they built there the holy altar
 and offered upon it holy sacrifices.
 But they did not manage to build the temple
 for the Messiah had not yet come.

¹⁸¹ See also: Sa‘adia ben Joseph, and Samuel Rosenblatt. 2007. *Saadia Gaon: the book of beliefs and opinions*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press.301-303

In addition to this belief, there are the significant themes of *Messiah ben Joseph*¹⁸² appearing from Galilee, fighting the forces of Rome and victoriously returning the Ten Tribes to Jerusalem as an ingathering are repeated in the other midrashim, and the *Sefer Zerubbabel*. My hypothesis is that it is here that the messianic hope of the Arabian Jews crystallizes into a structure that formulated expectations of end time events in the early 7th century. Whether Nehemiah ben Hushiel was an historical figure, the aspirations of some Jews of an ingathering is evident and this is highly important to the context of Muḥammad and the sanctity of the pre-Islamic Ka'ba:

This [*Persian conquest and the mission of Muḥammad*] may have been the most dramatic, complex, and sustained Messianic metanoia in Jewish history. For the first century and a half after the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, from the first decades of the 600s until approximately 750, various parts of the Jewish world were seized with immediacy, caught up in the ecstasy of hope come home, for he had arrived—so it seemed. (Wasserstrom 1995, 48)

As Late Antiquity went into labour after years of struggle and suffering, the hope of a new day was on the horizon. This expectation of a new birth, a new era, is highlighted in the words of the Qur'ān:

Alif Lam Mim The Byzantines have been defeated in a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory in a few years' time - God is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice at God's help. He helps whoever He pleases: He is the Mighty, the Merciful. This is God's promise: God never breaks His promise, but most people do not know; (Q 30:1-6) (Haleem (trans.) 2004, 257)

There is no proof to be served here, but rather a “principle of non-exclusivity” as Guy Stroumsa considers it (2015, 81-2). This is a time of complexity for religious, social and

¹⁸² Cf. Daniel 9:24-7 (JPS). “Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”

political ideas mixing at a time of cataclysmic shifts of civilisations in Late Antiquity. It would not be unsurprising that this context would have had impact on Jewish aspirations of the end times and on the expectations in early Islam. The familiar story of the conversion of ‘Abdullah ibn Salām points to a continuing epistemological bridge between 7th century Jews and the message of Islam as a prophetic, monotheistic and universalist movement:

I was told the story of ‘Abdullah ibn Salām, a learned rabbi, by one of his family. He said: ‘When I heard about the apostle I knew by his description, name, and the time at which he appeared that he was the one we were waiting for, and I rejoiced greatly thereat, though I kept silent about it until the apostle came to Medina. When he stayed in Qubā’ among the B. ‘Amr b. ‘Awf man came with the news while I was working at the top of a palm-tree and my aunt Khālida d. al-Ḥārith was sitting below. When I heard the news I cried Allah Akbar and my aunt said, ‘Good gracious, if you had heard that Moses b. ‘Imrān had come you could not have made more fuss!’ ‘Indeed, aunt,’ I said, ‘he is the brother of Moses and follows his religion, being sent with the same mission.’ She asked, ‘Is he really the prophet who we have been told will be sent at this very time?’ and she accepted my assurance that he was. Straightway I went to the apostle and became a Muslim, and when I returned to my house I ordered my family to do the same.’ (Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad 1998, 240-1)

Similarly, Waraqa b. Nawfal, first cousin of Khadīja, recognizes the role of Muḥammad as a prophet in the line of Moses and understands this belief to be borne from his knowledge of Hebrew (Lecker 2017, 365-6).

8. Conclusion

*“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be;
and that which is done is that which shall be done:
and there is no new thing under the sun.
Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new?
it hath been already of old time, which was before us.”*
Ecclesiastes 1:9-10 (JPS)¹⁸³

The main question considered in this thesis is why the familiar building which is the direction for prayer for all Muslims may appear to be orientated towards Jerusalem? Arising from this observation that has not been made before came a second focus; why were there paintings of the Hebrew prophets, including Jesus and his mother Mary, within the seventh century Ka‘ba?

Neither question was posed to undermine the reality of Muḥammad’s religious experience, nor the validity of the faith of Muslims today, or in the years since the Revelation. As discussed within the thesis, religious belief is a mix of historical fact and religious story, and to remove one from the other does a disservice to the nature of belief.

The writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes recounts, “there is no new thing under the sun”, and this research, although initiated with an original question, grew into a thesis that embeds the Ka‘ba into its Abrahamic foundations. Drawing from a variety of sources and literature back to the 7th century B.C.E., from diverse origins within Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions, I have attempted to respond with a hypothesis that may answer both of the main research questions.

During this period of research other observations and deductions have developed and these have supplemented the discussion within the chapters. These are the impact of the

¹⁸³ Rabbinical tradition says that the Book of Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon in his old age. Although this is unlikely to be the case it seems a fitting introduction to the concluding chapter and the influence of Solomon’s Temple on this thesis. *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. Jewish Virtual Library. Accessed 5th August 2021. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/kohelet-ecclesiastes-chapter-1>

Josephite messiah typology present and arising at times throughout the period studied; the nature of Jesus as a Jewish messiah/prophet figure of the Northern Kingdom; the continuity of the *'Injīl* with the *Gospel of the Hebrews* source; the continuation within a Jewish paradigm of a Nazoraean movement into 7th century C.E. Arabia; the evidence of Jerusalem orientation in synagogues of Late Antiquity with eastward entrances; the figurative and Temple cult motifs in Jewish sacred art, and the impact on Jewish communities of the apparent messianic events occurring in Jerusalem simultaneously to Muḥammad's mission and the *hijra* to Mecca in the early 7th century C.E.

Some areas that might develop from this thesis are a consideration of the *Messiah ben Joseph* typology on Jewish, Christian and Islamic paradigms; the possible relationship that the *'Injīl* has with Gospel source material; the possible continuity of the form and function of the Torah niche with the *miḥrāb* in early Islamic buildings.

There have been difficulties in this research, particularly that the main object of the study, the Ka'ba, has been out of reach to me as I am not Muslim. In addition, a great deal of the qualitative research has been an analysis of historical and religious texts that by nature are linked to story, myth, and the interest of the writers at the time. This has required careful comparison and the use of Form and Textual Criticism, allowing for reasoned deductions to be made and tested against other writings and studies.

Seeking to reply to the research questions this thesis has provided an academic review of areas that have little previous analysis such as the *Messiah ben Joseph* typology over the specified era, and the challenge to previous assumptions, such as the contradiction in the term "Jewish Christianity", or the concept of *jāhiliyya* as an era of ignorance and idolatry.

Some of the analysis allowed for a reassessment of other broadly accepted conventions. To make an assessment that Jesus was a Jew, allowed for a number of outcomes to fall into place such as the humanity of his Jewish messiahship and the subsequent nature of the

community that remained in Jerusalem, within the context of religious observance and the impact of historical events. In conjunction with this assessment, there allowed the analysis of the Nazoraeans as a purely Jewish messianic movement, similar to the Essene or Nazirite traditions, proposing that Jesus' messiah-hood and early teachings were well within the boundaries of Jewish practice at the time.

The method of this study required an interdisciplinary analysis of various source material, including canonical, non-canonical and pseudepigraphal writings to consider the nature of early leadership (James and the desposyni) of the Jewish Nazarenes/Nazoraeans, and their origins in Nazareth and Galilee of the Northern Kingdom.

This detailed assessment of the Nazoraeans as a wholly Jewish movement required a revisiting of an expansive set of sources including the format of *Q* as pre-canonical gospel text. The analysis led to foundation sources that may have significant similarities to the documented *Gospel of the Hebrews*. As neither writings have extant codices, deductions had to be made with reference to Patristic authors, who, by the genre of their works, were not presenting an objective study. This assessment required further levels of discourse analysis to draw out elements of the belief systems of the Nazoraeans (Ebionites). This was complemented by research into the Qumrān/Essene and Nazirite movements supporting the hypothesis that there was an extension of Jewish Nazoraean presence into Late Antiquity that was known to the people of the *Hijāz* and influenced the art and architecture of the Ka'ba as an Abrahamic sanctuary.

A study into the origins and traditions of the Josephite messiah typology also opened doors to further enquiry. On the one hand it demonstrated a continual thread within Jewish messianism from the patriarch Joseph in the Torah, through the exilic period on to the possible understanding of Jesus' role by the Nazoraeans. The Ephraimite messiah also surfaces in the prophetic art in the Dura Europos synagogue and later at a time contemporaneous to

Muḥammad, in the interpretation of the events of the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in the *Sefer Zerubbabel* in the 7th century C.E. This points to a thread of messianism from Jewish and Nazoraean traditions that would have been heightened at the time of the revelation to Muḥammad, and in the understanding of the Ka‘ba as an Abrahamic sanctuary.

The research benefitted from a survey of synagogues of the Galilee and Golan region that evidenced in Late Antiquity that there was a significant conformity of orientation toward Jerusalem, and most had eastward facing entrances. Further analysis of the Qur’ān, and the Hadīth, together with the works of early Islamic writers indicated that the Ka‘ba had originally included the *Ḥaṭīm* within its structure before the rebuilding c.605 C.E. In addition, Ibn al-Zubayr rebuilt the building to include the *Ḥaṭīm* after the damage caused by the Umayyad war. The *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* indicates Muḥammad’s use of the *Ḥaṭīm* and the whole building as a *qibla*, as Muḥammad still prayed towards Jerusalem, that ‘Ā’isha’s liked this enclosed structure, and that Muḥammad was called from here by the Angel Gabriel before the Night Journey. This supported the response to the research question that the historic Ka‘ba had a foundation as an Abrahamic sanctuary, orientated toward Jerusalem, and an eastward facing entrance, as it does today.

The research into synagogue art in the Galilee and Golan suggested that the use of figurative imagery was widely used in the Jewish diaspora indicating that it would not be unusual for images of the prophets to have been painted on the walls of the Ka‘ba, if it was an Abrahamic sanctuary. This area of study was reinforced by an examination of the Dura Europos synagogue which had to use secondary material as the building is no longer in existence and the images have been relocated into the National Museum in Damascus which was not accessible as a result of the Syrian conflict. This building has been extensively studied and reviewed and its structured figurative paintwork demonstrates the possible continuity of the

Messiah ben Joseph typology, and evidence of the Temple cult on the Jerusalem orientated Torah niche, and an east facing entrance.

Within the design of the artwork and architecture of the synagogues studied there was repeated evidence of the Temple cult and the festival of *Sukkōt* indicating a continual seeking after the destroyed Temple and a future restoration in a messianic era. This artwork was centred around the Torah niche that served at a marker for orientation to Jerusalem as much as a container for the Torah scrolls. In this way the Torah niche appeared to be used in a similar way to the *miḥrāb* of later mosques.

The Islamic concept of *jāhiliyya* as understood as an “age of ignorance” is a traditional interpretation and masks the importance of the variety of religious understanding before the revelation to Muḥammad, and it also detracts from the sanctity of the Ka‘ba in the pre-Islamic era.

Bringing an assessment of the continuity of the *Messiah ben Joseph* typology, with the possible presence of a Jewish Nazoraean community living in Medina in the 7th century C.E., there needed to be an examination of evidence within early Islamic writings. For example, to review the use of the proper noun *naṣārā* within the Qur‘ān, that became habituated to mean “Christian”, whilst its etymology has its root *nṣr* linked to the nominal noun *anṣāra* or “to help”. The early Islamic writings indicate that the *anṣār* were willing helpers of the nascent community after the *hijra*, with the first Pledge of al-‘Aqaba demonstrating Nazoraean typologies. The deduction within this thesis is that the *anṣār* were of the *naṣārā* (the Nazoraean) who recognized the validity of Muḥammad’s revelation and helped him at a pivotal moment in his life (Q 61:14). Although Fred Donner is more circumspect, as he considers the early Believers (*mu‘minūn*) to be less cohesive and at this early stage not formulating their experiences within a context of a pre-existing belief system (Donner 1998, 276). My argument is that most examples of a watershed in belief systems come from a

development from pre-existing beliefs. This can be recognized in the early lives of other prophets and messengers: Christianity from Judaism, Methodism from Anglicanism or Bahá'í from Islam. The early believers rose from a core of their earlier faith. John Hick highlights this human trait to reformulate the meaning of new experience within the structure of known parameters (Hick 2004, 129). So the visions of St Bernadette at Lourdes are framed within a Catholic understanding of Mary, or, in 1995, Hindu statues began to drink milk within the context of an Indian-Hindu framework (Vidal 1998). Religious experience is understood within pre-existing frameworks.

As the research developed, it opened up the possibility of a tangible connection between the Nazoraean movement and their *Gospel of the Hebrews*, with elements of beliefs and practices amongst the *ḥanīfs* and the *anṣār* in Medina. Although there has been many scholarly works on the influence of “Jewish Christianity” on Islam, I believe this thesis is unique in maintaining the solely Jewish nature of the Nazoraeans and the integration of the *Messiah ben Joseph* motif into their understanding of the figure of Jesus and the events in Jerusalem in 614 C.E. Thereby suggesting they too, as with other Jews, were looking for the completion of redemption through the advent of a Davidic figure and Righteous teacher, that would draw Jew and Gentile together and bring unity and peace in Jerusalem. It provides an historical and epistemological bridge between the Jewish messianic belief structure of Jesus and James, and its closest expression outside Judaism in the teachings of Muḥammad, and later Islam.

This focus on Jerusalem as the final scene of redemption is enhanced in my discussion on the historical event of the Persian Conquest of Jerusalem in 614 C.E., and the subsequent Jewish literature that brings the *Messiah ben Joseph* figure onto the main stage. The events occurring in Jerusalem would be of supreme significance to the Jews and Jewish Nazoraeans in Medina and impact on the perception of the Pledges of al-‘Aqaba (621-2 C.E.) and the “Constitution of Medina” (622 C.E.). If the Night Journey occurred in 620 C.E., it could be

seen as anticipation of the Prophethood of Muḥammad, much like the Transfiguration was a prophetic endorsement of Jesus. This event would also endorse the Meccan-Jerusalem axis of sanctity (Rubin 2008).

Within a short time of the death of the *Messiah ben Joseph* figure Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel in Jerusalem,¹⁸⁴ Jews would be looking for the Messiah ben David figure to come to resurrect him and draw all nations to Jerusalem. This would have been debated amongst Jews and Nazoraeans and some would doubt the events, but with the further collapse of the Jewish presence in Jerusalem and the prospect of the city being returned to Byzantium, the hope of a Jerusalem orientated redemption for Jew and Gentile evaporated.

The hypothesis considered that as Jerusalem became “out of bounds” some Jews/ Nazoraeans fell away from the hope of an imminent messianic return, whilst others turned to a more regional sanctuary that they considered to be an Abrahamic foundation.

The Qur’ān endorses the change of orientation of prayer to the Ka’ba and, in 624 C.E., it was under the control of the Meccans. The cleansing of this sanctuary is documented to have occurred in 630 C.E., when, according to later writers, Muḥammad is believed to have found paintings of the prophets including Jesus and Mary within the building¹⁸⁵. If this was the case, these would have been acceptable images as they were not images of idols in the pagan sense. The one unacceptable alteration appears to be that the images of Abraham and the Prophets were overpainted with divination arrows, which was a popular practice of the time, but would have been *halachically* unacceptable to Jews and Nazoraeans. The later recorded presence of paintings of Jesus as the Josephite messiah with the other Hebrew prophets would have been within the norm for the environment of Nazoraean spirituality, known to Muḥammad and others.

¹⁸⁴ See *Otot ha-Mašiah* (Reeves 2005, 127-129)

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter 2.4

The Qur'ān's "effects are momentous: biblical topography is extended into Arabia, and Mecca is established as a new Jerusalem." (Neuwirth 2017, 183). On the Day of Resurrection, the Ka'ba as a bride will be taken to Jerusalem as to her husband and will intercede for the believers (al- Maqdisī 1995, 211). The Ka'ba is reinstated as a monotheistic Abrahamic sanctuary with its source and unity in Jerusalem.

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Appendix A

An approximate timeline of events in the early 7th Century C.E.

Muhammad born	570 C.E.	
Pre-Islamic Ka'ba rebuilt	605	
	608	Khosrau II offers Jews return to Jerusalem
Revelations to Muhammad's begin	609	
	610	Heraclius declares himself Emperor
Muhammad starts preaching	613	
	614	The Persian capture of Jerusalem
	617	Persians sided with the Christians in Jerusalem
	619	Neḥemiah ben Ḥushiel killed (<i>Messiah ben Joseph</i>)
<i>The Night Journey to Jerusalem*</i>	620	<i>'Otot ha-Mašiah / Sefer Zerubbabel</i> around this time
The first Pledge of al-'Aqaba	621	
The <i>Hijra</i> to Medina	622	
Prayers turn towards Mecca/Ka'ba	624	
	628	Jerusalem returned to the Byzantines
Muhammad cleanses the Ka'ba	630	Heraclius in triumph into Jerusalem/True Cross.
Muhammad dies	632	

Appendix B

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a) **Figure 2: The floorplan of the synagogue at Gamla.**

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Rob Fuller

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b) Figure 12c: Floorplan of Umm Al-Qanāṭir synagogue

haim ben david < >

Wed 25/08/2021 14:42

Dear Rob

Yes, for Academic use. Will be happy you receive your Dissertation in the future

All the best

Chaim Ben David

בתאריך יום ד', 25 באוג' 2021 ב-15:28 מאת Fuller, Rob <>

May I have permission to use an image of the Floorplan of the synagogue at Umm el-Qanatir?

This is found on webpage: <https://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/synagogues/umm-el-qanatir/>

and has the title: <https://synagogues.kinneret.ac.il/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/kanaatir.jpg>

I would be using it within my PhD thesis as an illustration considering the orientation of synagogues in Late antiquity.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Rob Fuller



[Umm el Qanatir - The Bornblum Eretz](#)

[Israel Synagogues Website](#)

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synagogues.kinneret.ac.il