THE QUEST FOR THE RELIGIOUS AND HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF A FORGERY: HENRY CORBIN AND THE GOSPEL OF BARNABAS

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Introduction

The present article deals with the publications which Henry Corbin (14 April 1903-7 October 1978) devoted to the Gospel of Barnabas. These publications occupy an interesting place in the ongoing research about this text, and therefore merit scholarly attention. I will first deal with the history of research, the extant manuscripts of the text and their relationship, then I will deal with Corbin's articles on the subject, and then put them in the perspective of trends in recent research into the Gospel of Barnabas.

The Gospel of Barnabas is an anonymous Islamic, pseudographical and polemical text written in the form of a Gospel. It is widely used as polemical instrument by present-day Muslim apologists. In the prologue which precedes the gospel, "Barnabas," pictured as one of Jesus' closest apostles and eye-witness to his ministry, associates Paul with three innovations in the Christian religion: 1. calling Jesus the son of God, 2. the rejection of circumcision, and 3. allowing the faithful to eat and drink impure things. According to the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 15, Barnabas was a companion of Paul until they went separate ways after a difference of opinion. But unlike the mainstream Islamic tradition concerning Paul and his role in the history of Christianity (represented by Sayf ibn Umar al-Tamimi, al-Tabari and others), which pictures Paul as the main figure in the corruption of true message of Jesus, Paul is not pictured as a conscious deceiver, but rather someone who has been deceived. And it is with much regret, therefore, that Barnabas feels obliged to tell us the Truth. This 'truth' is that according to the author of the said gospel, who has hitherto not been identified, Jesus' mission is limited to Israel only, is not the son of God, is not crucified, but replaced on the cross by Judas, who had all of a sudden miraculously adopted his appearance. Jesus is raised unto heaven; where he lives on with God, only returning at the end of time.

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The introduction to the Spanish text reads: "dirijimos, el grande y poderoso Dios aquellos diez pasos en un viaje por su profeta Jezucristo, con grande misericordia y doctrina y el agua, la cual cosa muchos engañados de Satanás, debidos de prender de piedra, predicar injusta doctrina, llamando a Jesús hijo de Dios, y repudiando la circuncisión mandado de Dios en eternos, y confundiendo toda consciencia y bendita mensura, entre los que entraron en el cielo y los que en el cielo son engañados; a quien respeto nuestra aquella verdad que yo he visto y oído en la conversación que he tenido con Jesús, para que sean salvos en eternos y no sean engañados de Satanás y permanezcan en el servicio de Dios." (1:5).

1 On the image of Paul in the Islamic Tradition see Van Koningveld, The Islamic Image of Paul.
In the Gospel of Barnabas Jesus is pictured as the precursor of the true Messiah, Muhammad, and as a manifestation of Elija. The figure of John the Baptist is entirely omitted in this text. Jesus himself, and the faithful in his environment, live as Muslims. Jesus performs the five daily prayers, fasts, gives away alms, etc. There is much stress on circumcision, even to the extent that Jesus in the Gospel of Barnabas states that the uncircumcised cannot enter paradise.

1. The history of the Gospel of Barnabas

The earliest external references to the existence of a Gospel of Barnabas date from the pseudo-Gelasian decree, a forgery dating from the sixth century C.E. The apocryphal writing referred to there, however, has almost certainly nothing to do with the MSS in Italian and Spanish known to us today, for the earliest reference to the existence of manuscripts of the Gospel of Barnabas under discussion here dates from the beginning of the seventeenth century. In about 1634 a Morisco author, presumably Ibrahim Taybili, writing in North Africa and in all probability the Tunisian Morisco village of Testour, refers to a Gospel of Barnabas as a text “in which the light is to be found,” and on account of which some people had converted to Islam. Taybili does not refer to the language in which this Gospel was written.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century a manuscript containing an Italian version turned up in Amsterdam. In that city it came into the possession of J.F. Cramer, counsellor to the King of Prussia, who presented it to Prince Eugène of Savoy. With the rest of the Prince’s library the manuscript came into the possession of the Herzbibliothek in Vienna, where it has been preserved until the present day.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century explicit reference was also made for the first time to a Spanish version by the Arabist George Sale (1697-1736), who said that “of this Gospel the Moriscos in Africa have a translation in Spanish,” and that the Gospel was connected with Moriscos in exile. In spite of the fact that there seems to be evidence about the ‘Sit im Leben’ of the Gospel at such an early stage, efforts to identify the author of the Gospel have hitherto been in vain.

The Spanish version was later lost. Fortunately, A. Fletcher discovered a manuscript transcribed from the manuscript in Sale’s possession in the Nicholson collection of Fisher Library (Sydney) in 1766. The copyist of the Sydney manuscript, very likely John Nickols, whose signature of ownership, accompanied by the date, 1738, appears on the first page, had before him an incomplete Vorlage; as he notices “capitoli 121 a 200 wanting.” This means that about a third part of the text is lacking. Let us now for a moment turn to the manuscripts themselves.

The Italian manuscript

The Italian manuscript was edited firstly by Laura and Lunade Ragg. Their edition served as the basis for translations of the Gospel of Barnabas into Arabic, Urdu, Indonesian and several other modern languages. A further critical study, French translation and palaeographical study of the Italian manuscript was made by L. Cirillo and M. Frénaux. The research of Cirillo drew the attention of Henry Corbin, who between 1973 and 1977, one year before his death on 7 October 1978, devoted three publications to this text. As will be set out in more detail below, Cirillo and Corbin concluded that the Gospel of Barnabas is ultimately based on an unidentified Judeo-Christian source. Corbin’s quest was for the “ideal milieu” of the Gospel of Barnabas, which he associated with the idea of the Verus Propheta, a religious concept that according to Corbin had originated in early Christianity, viz., the Christian community of Jerusalem, was repressed later on by orthodox Christianity and had survived in Sufi Islam, whereas it had found its way into the Gospel of Barnabas. All this will be explained in more detail below.

The Ragg and Cirillo dated the paper of the Italian manuscript to the end of the sixteenth century. In an article on the Islamic image of Paul and the origin of the Gospel of Barnabas, P.S. van Koningsveld draws attention to two hitherto neglected aspects of the Italian manuscript1. First of all, it seems that the binding, covers, the lay-out of the text, the numbers of the folios, the punctuation, the red dots in the text of the type one finds in Arabic and Turkish religious manuscripts, the frame in which the main text was written, all indicate that it was written in an Ottoman milieu. This hypothesis is further enhanced by the appearance of Arabic glosses, which made the Italian text more accessible for non-Italian readers. Secondly, the Italian text and the Arabic glosses were conceived as a unity, and copied out by the same person, presumably the author or someone involved in the forgery.

As Van Koningsveld points out, these glosses, which are sometimes real comments, can be divided into various categories. First of all, many simply translate or summarize passages in the text. Others give some comments. The author of these glosses shows a familiarity with Islamic and Christian traditions concerning Biblical writings and with Islamic teachings concerning Jews and Christians. Elsewhere the glossator gives an explanatory remark about some unusual expressions in the text. For example, when Jesus, before performing a miracle, addresses God with the name “Elimin Sebaah,” the glossator explains that this is a Hebrew name. The glossator also shows that he is also familiar with the Latin language. Thus, when the future coming of a messenger from the south with power is predicted, he adds: “in the Latin tongue: Leo sullabi.” And when Jesus says to the Jewish scribes: “Why did you suppress the Divine precepts, and replace them by your Traditions?”, the glossator adds: “Jesus says to the Jewish scholars: ‘Why do you falsify the rules of God and do you follow a heresy which you invent of your own accord?’ (This is part of the text).” The Arabic has: “Qala: ‘Ishh-ulama’ Bani Izizi: i-nu tuharrifbana akhram Allah wa-tantabi’nakum [sic] bi’dina tuhddibi’nakum [sic] min ‘indikum? Minhu.’” The suffix kum in the two verbal forms quoted here, 1Cirillo and Frénaux, L’Évangile de Barnabé.
2In the next paragraphs I closely follow Van Koningsveld’s argument.
4“‘Ida la tittsitumun’.”
5The a remark often put in the marginals of Islamic Arabic MSS following a gloss. It can be interpreted as a signal to a future copyist, warning him that he must not forget to copy the glosses as well; make these glosses are part of the text.

178
Gerard Wiegers

is, according to Van Koningveld, a reflection of the origin of the glossator in the world of the Romance languages. On the other hand, Cirillo has adduced a whole series of linguistic properties of the Arabic notes which point to the influence of Turkish. Not only do we find an occasional Turkish word (such as taubal, lary, but grammatical and syntactical aspects of these notes reflect the Turkish milieu of the glossator. In conclusion, it seems likely that the glossator was not a native Arabic speaker and writer, but rather a Romance speaker who had learned Arabic later in life, presumably in a Turkish milieu.

Another important category of marginal notes in Arabic consists of a nearly complete series of Arabic chapter-titles (called sizun). The impression is thereby created of a gloss which really deserves to be seen as a worthy precursor of the Qur'an. The original division of the Italian text has a total number of 222 frames for chapter-titles, but the glossator apparently intended to reduce this total number by adding the same Arabic title in the margins of several empty frames.

Cirillo argues, rightly in my view, that the whole manuscript was written in one hand. Indeed, as Van Koningveld points out, on f. 33r a marginal Arabic gloss is found, connected by a red line to the textual passage with which it is connected. This suggests that the glossator was probably identical with the copyist. Now the question arises whether the person who copied out the Italian manuscript was merely a scribe or whether he was the author of the Gospel himself. At this point we need to turn to the Spanish manuscript.

The Spanish manuscript

The Spanish manuscript (MS Nicholson 41 of the Sydney University Library) was edited by Bernalde Pons in 1998, who also made it the subject of a detailed study. This MS is incomplete and lacks the Arabic glosses. It was copied out by a Western copyist, who was active in the 15th century. The first to mention the existence of a Spanish version was George Sale, who, as we have seen above, also stated that “of this Gospel the Moriscos in Africa have a translation in Spanish.” The Spanish MS has an introduction which is lacking in the Italian MS, though the latter leaves 34 blank folios at the beginning, which suggests that a similar introduction was intended for this version as well.

The introduction to the Spanish text gives an account of the discovery of the Gospel. A friar, who makes himself known as Fray Marin, though immediately adding that this is a wrong name, tells us that he discovered it in the library of Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590). He tells us:

Prologue to the reader. From him who is called with a wrong name Fray Marin, to the reader. With no small curiosity have I been racking my brain about the problem of how the Hebrew people were able to remain faithful to their beliefs on the basis of the book called the Bible only, for it is so very obscure, that it is impossible to understand, not only for the simple-minded, but even for the experts in the Scripture, who only with great difficulty were able to understand it. Therefore the thought

Henry Corbin and the Gospel of Barnabas

occurred to me that in the same manner as the People of Israel draw conclusions from their Law, they would have had glossators, who wrote diversely about every canons, for is it not true that in the same vein the philosophers have written explanations of the works of their predecessors, and that the Unbelievers nowadays have glosses not only about the Bible, but also about the decrees of their Popes, and the compendia of their confessors and ceremonies? In my opinion, therefore, the Hebrew people must have had glosses on the entire scripture [as well]. And the more I became convinced of this, the more I realized that these glosses have been abandoned by the Prophets and the Doctors. Reflecting on this line of thought, I concluded that either these glosses were burnt during the many calamities from which the Hebrew people suffered, or that human wickedness had concealed them.

The latter appeared to be the case. As an official involved in papal decisions and the Inquisition so happened that Fray Marin received a visit from a member of the “Christina” family, involved in the Inquisition as well, who brought him four very ancient books, written in Latin. They contained texts written by the old Prophets which, because they contradicted the Christian religion, were considered heretical and useless. For this reason Fray Marin was given the books and was allowed to do what he liked with them. They turned out to be glosses on Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Joel. But they also turned out to be very different from the scriptures available to Fray Marin! They made the author wonder about the New Testament apocrypha, and he then remembered what Jerome had said about Gospels other than the four canonical ones. Shortly afterwards he received some more books, this time from the library of a deceased male member of the “Colonina” family. These included a book written by Irenaeus, disciple of Ignatius, who had argued against Paul, basing himself on the Gospel of Barnabas. Then God brought the author into contact with Pope Sixtus V Montalto. It so happened that when the Pope dozed off, Fray Marin took a book, intending merely to read it to pass the time, but discovered that it was the Gospel of the Apostle Barnabas. When the Pope woke up, Fray Marin left, hiding the heavenly treasure in his sleeve. After a study of two years he reached the conclusion that it was the true Scripture, clearly and unequivocally announcing the coming of the Sacred Messenger, and he converted to the Faith.

The Spanish manuscript also mentions the name of the person who translated it from the Italian: Montuza de Aranda, a Muslim from Andalucia, a place in Aragon known for its dense Moorish population. After the introduction to the text of the

12 Cirillo and Frimoux, Vangelo di Barnaba, p. 48.
13 Cirillo and Frimoux, Vangelo di Barnaba, p. 48.
14 Bernalde Pons, El Evangelio.
15 Maybe he is referring to it in this way, because it is his alleged Christian name.
Gospel itself, we read: "Translated from Italian into Castilian by the honourable Muslim Mostafa de Aranda, inhabitant of Ambel in Aragon, and at present resident in Istanbul."\(^{12}\)

The word here used for resident, *estante*, would seem to imply that Mostafa was not permanently settled there, for in that case one would have expected the term *vico*. Furthermore, we note that although Mostafa apparently was a Spaniard, he is not unambiguously called a "Morisco," but merely "Muslim," and may therefore have been a recent convert to Islam. This small and not entirely conclusive piece of evidence seems to be the only indication of a 'Sitir im Lohn' of the Gospel: the milieu of the Moriscos and converted Muslims in the Diaspora.

The prologue itself is a remarkable example of a literary forgery, though historical reality is not far away. The families referred to, 'Ursina' and 'Colona,' to be read as Ursini and Colonna, were two ancient and noble Roman families, which produced many important people, men of letters, cardinals, even popes. From the papacy of Julius II (1503-1513) onwards they were representing the Roman nobility as the Papal 'throne-attendants,' a religious office for laymen. At the end of the sixteenth century Fulvio (1529-1600), one of the Ursini, made his name as a philosopher, numismatist, historian, and collector of antiquities, including valuable manuscripts. Marinonio (d. 1597), a member of the Colonna family, had an official position in the Vatican library. Fray Marín's reference to ancient manuscripts in the possession of these two families can therefore not be a coincidence. Bernabé Pons draws attention to the fact that the same perhaps holds true for Fray Marín too, who may well be the orientalist and Arabist Fra Marco Marini (1542-1594), a scholar involved in the study and edition of the Targum of Jonathan.\(^{13}\) The same could be said of the figure of Sextus V, to whom we will return below.

Relationship

Many modern students of the Gospel start with the assumption that the Gospel was originally written in Italian and then translated into Spanish, maybe by the same author. This seems indeed likely on the basis of the evidence discussed above, which points to Istanbul as the place of origin of the Gospel of Barnabas. Nevertheless, there are some problems to be solved here. First of all, why is the translator's remark to be found only at the beginning of the Gospel itself, i.e. after the prologue, which is also written in Spanish, as if the Prologue had not been translated from Italian into Spanish, but only the Gospel itself? Did the author perhaps conceive an Italian text first, then the Spanish prologue, and, finally, the Spanish translation of the Gospel itself? Or was only a Spanish text conceived which included the prologue, allegedly translated from Italian (which unlike Spanish) the Popes themselves were used to reading? And did the alleged original come into being later?

Cárdeno argues on the basis of his comparison of the Spanish fragments known to him with the Italian version that the one does not depend upon the other, that both are derived from a "common source." But this conclusion loses its force if we

\(^{12}\) "Traducción de italiano en Castellano por el Honrado Musulmán Mostafa de Aranda, natural de Ambel, en Aragón, estante en Estambul."

\(^{13}\) Bernabé Pons, *El Evangelio*, p. 65....
Gerard Wiegors

object of the writer of the Italian MS, including its Arabic glosses, can be clarified even better when the following gloss is examined. After a certain "prayer of midnight," Jesus says in the main text:

This night shall be in the time of the Messiah, messenger of God, the jubilee every year -that now cometh every year.

The gloss reads:

The saḥdāli-barā'a in old times was performed at the beginning of every hundred years once, but in the time of the messenger it will be (tukana) every year. This is part of the text.

Though, as far as I know, there exists in Islamic religious life no such prayer, the term barā'a itself is well-known. It is mainly used in two contexts. One is the context of the conquest of Mecca, when sūrat al-barā'a (sura 9) was revealed. The other, and that is probably the context referred to here, is the celebration of laylat al-isti'af min shāhān, the night of the middle of the month Shāhān. This night is celebrated in many parts of the Islamic world, and is often called laylat al-barā'a, indicating the belief that in this night God decides about the life and death of people in the coming year. The glossator here draws the attention of his Islamic readership to the fact that already in Jesus' time such a night was celebrated with prayer. The imperfect with future significance used here indicates that the gloss was designed to suggest a 'believing' readership before the time of the Prophet. In other words: the gloss was designed to create the impression that the Gospel of Barnabas was read between the assumption of Jesus and the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. This may very well be the goal of all glosses. In any case this hypothesis explains the entire structure of the glosses and some other aspects of the Italian manuscript. First of all, the use of red dots: these were meant as an equivalent of a well-known feature of manuscripts of the Qur'an, the so-called darwāzā al-ḏiyāt, the dots separating the verses. This also applies to the effort of the glossator to add chapter-titles which are strongly reminiscent of the Qur'anic sūrat, and the terminology of the glosses, which is clearly Islamic. To the examples in the preceding section many could be added. Where the main text speaks about the true Pharisees, for example, the glosses speak about darwāzā [sic]. Indeed, the chapter which in particular deals with them is called Sūrat darwāzā [sic]. The word darwāzā itself is also explained: "Darwāzā signifies in the Hebrew language Pharisee. This is part of the text." Thus the glossator makes it clear that these true Pharisees are to be understood as Islamic mystics.

In conclusion we can say in the first place that there seems to be a close correspondence between the Italian text and the Arabic glosses. Each fulfills its role in making an archaic impression on the reader both in content and form, creating the impression that he has before him a copy of an authentic Gospel, which had been studied before the time of the Prophet by the small group of 'believers' predicted by Jesus in the Gospel of Barnabas itself25. The glossator represents, as

25 See, for example, the reference to a manuscript in chapter 17, headed by the following words: "In this chapter is clearly perceived the substratum of Christians, and the true faith of the believing man (Italian text: manus). A small group of believers is also mentioned by Al-Qayy, who derived this text in his turn from Sayyid al-Tiraz as Von Konigswald and the present author have set out elsewhere, see Von Konigswald and Wiegors, "The Polemical Works of Muhammad al-Qayy," pp. 163-174.

Henry Corbin and the Gospel of Barnabas

it were, the small group of believers, already foretold by the Gospel, who have remained faithful to Jesus' authentic teachings, and are awaiting their saviour, Muhammad, the Messiah. In the second place there appears to exist a hitherto unnoticed correspondence between the Italian text and the glosses on the one hand, and the Spanish text on the other. This may confirm the hypothesis that the same person had a hand in the Italian text, the Arabic glosses and the Spanish translation, or rather adaptation, of the Italian text, which preceded the extant Spanish version.

II. Corbin's contribution

Let us now turn to Corbin's publications about Barnabas and deal with them in order of publication. But before we do, we have to remind ourselves that Corbin wrote these articles at the time Fletcher's re-discovered the Spanish manuscript of the Gospel of Barnabas. It appears that he did not know about its rediscovery.26 As far as I know, Corbin published three articles about the subject, all of them written between 1975 and 1977. On 26 April 1975 L. Cirillo had given a lecture about his research into the Gospel of Barnabas to the Ernest Renan society, the French society for the History and Science of Religions. A few months later, on 4 July 1975, Cirillo would defend his thesis at the Sorbonne. On 20 May 1976, about a year later, Corbin gave a lecture for the same society, which would be published in Studia Iranica 5 (1976) under the title "Theologoumena Iranica."

The article, which is an adaptation of the paper he had presented to the society Ernest Renan, has as goal an analysis of a number of Iranian Twelvesh Shiite theological writings which Corbin considers to be the heirs of the Judeo-Christian prophethood, in particular the concept of the Vera Prophetha that had allegedly originated in the pristine Christian community in Jerusalem. This article is clearly about research in progress. It consists of a number of observations on a number of alleged parallel theological concepts apparently inspired by Cirillo's research into the Gospel of Barnabas.

Point of departure is Cirillo's paper about the Gospel of Barnabas, presented to the Ernest Renan Society a year earlier. After briefly mentioning Cirillo's "monumental" thesis as well, he deals with a Persian translation of the Gospel of Barnabas that had appeared in 1968. This appears to be a translation by Mortadā Kārīmīnā'ī of the Arabic version by Khalīf Sa'āda, under the guidance of Muhammad Rashīd Rāda (1908). Kārīmīnā'ī's edition included a preface in which an Iranian author states that he had allegedly seen a Syriac version of the Gospel of Barnabas in the possession of a friend, a Nestorian priest. Even though Corbin considers this story as a sort of literary fiction, it is according to him not devoid of religious and cultural value. Such stories demonstrate that the Shiite imanology and the early Christian notions of the Paraclete have something in common: they elaborate upon the notion of the Vera Propheta, while they do not conceive of Jesus as God's son either. Moreover, they also allegedly shared anti-Pauline views. Then he deals with his ongoing researches into the writings of Sayyid Ahmad 'Alawi Iṣḥāqīnī (17th century). He draws particular attention to a refutation by this reli-

26 See Corbin, "L'Evangel de Barnabé," p. 171: "Le seul texte dont nous disposions est une version en dialecte venitien."
Thus, the Gospel of Barnabas brings us in contact with the ideas of St James, brother of Jesus and of the Ebionites in Jerusalem, opposed to the Theology of the Cross. This is not historical Christianity, however, but a world in which the sacred and the biblical faith had not yet been dislocated, i.e. before the catastrophic developments in Christian theology which have been the cause of "a metaphysical legalization, the eviction of theology by sociology, which is in fact the phenomenon of the divine incarnation degenerating into a social incarnation, with all its consequences." According to him, the Gospel and other texts invite us to "nous rendre présente la conscience des chrétiens qui furent nos ancêtres, mais qui cependant n'ont jamais professé cette idée d'une consubstantialité humano-divine qui a été l'antéchristologique nécessaire à la socialisation opérée de nos jours. Leurs chrétionologie fut et resta une prophétologie".

We are thus not looking for a historical phenomenon, but a state of mind, or perhaps a spiritual experience, in any case a sacred history of the successive manifestations (theophanies) of the heavenly Anthropos, the eternal Adam-Christ, who is the True Prophet. Gnosis and Theophany lead to the same: the True Priest or Doctor of the Truth. To recognize him, is to put oneself in a state of Truth (my italics, GW).

This religious view was found in the Early Church in the doctrine of James and the so-called pseudo-Clementine literature. It was opposed to the Theology of the Cross which put the doctrine of the original sin and atonement by Jesus, essentially Pauline doctrine, in a central place.

The Gospel of Barnabas is a late witness to this anti-Pauline view: "Et c'est toute la doctrine du Vrai Prophète que formera l'axe de la prophétologie islamique, nommément sous la forme shi'ite".

In what follows a main argument centers again around the concepts of the paraclete/mahdi. As I have explained, in the Gospel of Barnabas Jesus denies being God's son, and that he is the Messiah. Not he, but Muhammad will be the Messiah. Corbin states about this: I do not know any text in which Muhammad is called al-Masih, al-Mahdi. However, if a faithful Shiite would read the words Muhammad al-Mahdi, he would not doubt for a single moment that it would be the 12th imam.

Pauline Christianity refused these Ebionite ideas which are in agreement with the Islamic views about the religious ideas of monotheists, Hanafites, who lived in the Arabian peninsula before the advent of Islam. The title messiah used for Muhammad should be interpreted in the context of chapters 52, 53, 54, 55 and 56 of the Gospel of Barnabas as follows. Chapters 53 and 54 describe the eschatological events, chapter 55 the last Judgment and the General Resurrection of the Dead. Chapter 56 then describes the judgment of Satan and the rejected, and the exaltation of Muhammad whom Jesus describes in the Gospel of Barnabas (chapter 43) as: "God's messenger, whom you call Masih (messiah)", who was made before me,
and will come after me" (chapter 42). This transfer of qualities of being Maṣīḥ, which is also expressed in the term maḥfūz, can be explained only by reference to the islamico-shiite prophethood: "En effet, le rôle du prophète Muhammad comme 'Sceau de la prophétie', n'est pas un rôle eschatologique. Le héros eschatologique, c'est le XIIIm Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, achevant le périrôme de la Haqīqat [sic] mohammadīya."

In other words, the expression in the Gospel of Barnabas that Muhammad is the messiah is not a sunnite concept. The reason for this is that sunnite, by adhering to the doctrine of Muhammad as the last of the Prophets, could not recognize a continuing prophecy. Hence the Gospel of Barnabas fits into an Imami Shiite conceptual framework.

At the end of the article Corbin asks two questions: which place do the texts discussed by him, including the Gospel of Barnabas, have in the process of catastrophes of desacralization mentioned above? And second: which is the community that the Gospel of Barnabas addresses? The answer to the second question is that the text is directed to a small group of readers dispersed and hidden among the three Abrahamic communities, heirs to a long tradition. It can be called the order of Elijah, and can be traced in the EBV itself. They appear as the true Pharisées, discussed above (located on mount Carmel, chapter 148, see p. 199). This order goes back to Elijah himself, and lives on in small groups among the three "Abrahamic" religions, forming an Abrahamic harmony. This is the spiritual milieu to which the message of the Gospel of Barnabas was directed. The way in which Corbin analyses the Gospel of Barnabas here, as he himself admits, is not to be judged as a historical critical analysis (as we will see below, Corbin was highly critical on the historical critical method). This text should be studied under the aspect of the Formgeschichte, "de la forme rédactionelle choisie pour transmettre un enseignement vivant un niveau qui transcende les données empiriques [my italics, PW]. Or précisément l'enseignement vicié ici constitue un thème archétypique, celui d'une communauté idéale de saints et d'élus." There is no clear answer to the first question, except that at the end Corbin asks himself whether it is the separation between Prophetic and mystical religion that led to the dislocation of the sacred. I assume that he means that the declaration of the end of Prophecy lead to a separation between rational and personal inspiration. The remedy he apparently envisions is the eternal continuation and presence of Divine Guidance. We will return to this aspect below.

The concept Harmonia Abrahamicus also serves as the title for the third study which Corbin devotes to the subject, the Introduction to the edition of the Italian manuscript by Crillo and Frémaux, published in 1977. The preface is dated at the end to June 1977.

As for Corbin's preface, it includes of course some friendly words for Luigi Crillo, whose research Corbin has followed from close-by. He and Crillo had shared the same scholarly interests, which had made them into "compagnons de recherche." The remainder of the introduction is nearly the same as the second article, except that the references to the catastrophes of secularization, and the metaphysical backgrounds of that development are omitted. Here, Corbin follows more closely a line of argument that almost seems historical critical.

III. Discussion

In his fascinating study Religion after Religion Steven Wasserstrom demonstrated the close personal and scholarly relationship between Corbin, Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) and Gershon Scholem (1896-1982). Of different backgrounds, they all became world famous historians of religions. Members of the Eranos group that yearly met near the Swiss city Ascona and published the Eranos Yearbooks, they also had a lot in common with regard to their life histories, their philosophies of life and their views with regard to methodological issues in the study of religions.

All three were strongly influenced by the anti-reductionist phenomenological approach, even though they would not reckon themselves among the phenomenologists of religion. The Sacred and the Numinous can, according to them, not be reduced to non-religious, i.e. social, political and psychological factors. Religion, the sacred, is a phenomenon sui generis, i.e. autonomous, a view that they ultimately derived from the influential philosopher of religion, Rudolph Otto (1886-1937). Corbin and Eliade strongly rejected the contribution of the social sciences to the study of religions. Behind all this is their metaphysical conviction that the sacred and the mystic are ontologically real, whereas the objective forms of history in the final analysis are not. In early times, man, according to Eliade, lived in a world that was dominated by the sacred. Only later, the world began to de-sacralize. This process in which the modern world, dominated by a separation between the sacred and the profane and the marginalization of the sacred (i.e. secularization) came about, was judged as negative, catastrophistic. The task the three historians of religions set themselves was to bring back to harmonious state of affairs that had characterized archaic man. Their means to achieve this was to write books, through which modern readers might discover this state of affairs, and initiated by reading these books, find a way to realize the Sacred. Related to his strong anti-reductionist point of view Corbin maintained that the only way to understand the religious is in a religious way. A religious symbol system is tantamount, i.e. can only be understood by reference to itself. Most anthropologists and scholars of religions would rather posit the reverse: that religious symbols cannot be properly interpreted without referring to their social, cultural and historical context. Corbin's approach was esoteric, oriented on the thought of Pasqually, Saint Martin and Martimmon. Corbin was very much opposed to religious aspects of religion, and an enthusiast supporter of its esoteric and spiritual aspects.

Wasserstrom briefly devotes attention to Corbin's views regarding the Gospel of Barnabas. According to him, he was at the end of his life he wrote "more..."
Explicitly, if not virtuoso (my italics) on what he called *Harmonia Abrahamicus* (Abrahamic Harmony) in which he made clear that his Christology was distinguishable from Shi‘i‘i and Sufi Christology.89 The words used here suggest a sort of existential urgency, for which I have no further evidence. Bassett interprets his efforts for this Abrahamic harmony as a personal commitment with existentialist elements.90 It falls outside the scope of the present contribution to go into the details of Corbin's work. With regard to his contributions to the study of the Gospel of Barnabas the following can be said.

There has been a lot of progress in research into the Gospel of Barnabas since Corbin published his contributions. Two trends can be distinguished here. On the one hand, major advances have been made after the discovery of the Spanish manuscript in Sydney in 1976, which opened up new possibilities. A number of studies have since then shed new light on the Morisco environment of the Gospel. I am referring here to studies by M. de Epalza, L. Cardalliac, L. F. Bernabé Pons, García-Arenal, and Van Koningsveld and myself. On the other hand, the line of research into the background of the Italian manuscript has been pursued. Here, studies by Pulcini,91 Joosten and Kuchinsky should be mentioned. Joosten studied the relationship between the Gospel of Barnabas and the Venetian Diatessaron, a medieval Italian adaptation of Tatian's Gospel harmony. A number of recent articles and discussion papers, published on the internet by Kuchinsky argues that the Gospel of Barnabas is closer to a version of Tatian's gospel harmony extant in the so-called Magdalene Gospel, that to the Venetian Diatessaron, as Joosten argued. The authors of these researches into the 'Italian' version of the Gospel do not deny that the extant Italian manuscript is a Muslim forgery, but they contradict the hypothesis of the Spanish Morisco origins of the Gospel. If the hypothesis is correct that the Italian version was made by an author who lived in Italy much earlier than the seventeenth century, the origins of the Gospel of Barnabas cannot be found among the Moriscos.

While Corbin clearly belongs to the second category, his researches stand out because they do not fit into the largely historical critical approach of the other studies. In many respect Corbin's studies belong to the philosophy of religion, with some ideological elements as well.92 Though the metaphysical assumptions are hard to criticize from the point of view of historical criticism, we can critically evaluate Corbin's use of historical critical research. The following points can be raised.

1. With regard to Corbin's interpretation of use of the concept of the paracletic in the Islamic tradition, he seems to neglect the fact that this nearly always serves strongly anti-Christian polemical goals, as is demonstrated by many polemical

89 Ibid., p. 173.
90 Bassett, Henry Corbin, p. 36-31.
91 See for a recent overview of his research: Bernabé Pons, "Los maccanicosus.
92 Pulcini, "In the Shadow of Mount Carmel.
Gospel in Syriac or Aramaic, exactly as Corbin's Persian source does\(^{46}\). I showed that even though Corbin does not deny that the Gospel of Barnabas is a Muslim text, he assumes that it goes back to a text that ultimately can be traced back to pristine Christianity. The same, probably not a coincidence, holds true for the view of Cirillo, even though the latter does not share Corbin's views about the conceptual framework described above. There is no contradiction between what I am arguing here and the use of a Gospel Harmony by our Muslim author. It is evident that the author used older texts, including Gospel texts, and researched into these older texts will help to resolve the problem of the identity of the author.

3. The same sort of criticism may be applied to Corbin's interpretations of Ebionite Christianity, and the pseudo-Clementine corpus, which is the subject of another contribution in the present publication, and which has already been criticized by others, and will be left out of consideration here\(^{47}\).

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