THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME IDRĪS IN THE QUR'ĀN: 
A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF QUMRAN LITERATURE 
ON EARLY ISLAM*

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In 1952, S. D. Goitein published an article entitled “Who Were Muhammad's Most Notable Teachers?: A Proposal for a New Solution to an Old Question.”¹ One may ask what it was that brought this distinguished scholar to reconsider a subject which had already been dealt with so often since the beginning of modern Middle Eastern studies. Goitein admits that he was not prompted by any new discoveries concerning the Jews and Christians in the Arab Peninsula on the eve of Muḥammad’s emergence. He was prompted, rather, by the progress made in the study of Jewish history during the Middle Ages, in general, and the discovery of the Judaean Scrolls, in particular: “Their contents, as will be seen, are not irrelevant to the subject under discussion.”²

When Goitein made these remarks, research on the Judaean Scrolls was still in its infancy; parts were being published sporadically. But since then, the study of the Judaean Scrolls and the related apocryphal Enoch literature has become one of the most important branches of study dealing with the history and theology of Judaism and Christianity during their formative periods. Nowadays, reference to the Qumran scrolls is indispensable for any serious discussion of Judaism and/or Christianity during the period of the Second Temple and the period following its destruction. Yet, despite Goitein’s challenge, studies of the relations between the Qumran Scrolls and Islam have hardly scratched the surface.³ This deficiency is even more striking when one considers the evident influence of the Qumran-Enoch literature on the early Shi‘a, on the one hand, and on Karaism and other Jewish sectarian movements in the eighth and ninth centuries, on the other.⁴ In this paper, I shall try to show that the origins of

* This article is a revised version of a chapter in my M. A. thesis written under the supervision of M. Gil at Tel Aviv University.

¹ S. D. Goitein, Tarbiz (Hebrew) 23 (1952): 146–59. This article was also published in G. Weil Jubilee Volume (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1953), pp. 10–23.

² Idem, “Muhammad’s Teachers,” p. 147.


⁴ On the influence of the Enoch literature on Shi‘ism, see, for example, U. Rubin, “Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shi‘a Traditions,” Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam (JSAI) 1 (1979): 56–59. On the importance of the first patriarchs in Shi‘i doctrine, see E. Kohlberg, “Some Shi‘i Views of the Antediluvian World,” Studia Islamica 52 (1980): 41–66. Two books have been devoted to the
Qur'ānic Idrīs can be traced to Dōrēsh ha-Torah, one of the figures mentioned in the Damascus Covenant (hereafter CD). Thus, in some small way, I hope to contribute to this neglected area of study.

Muslim exegetes who examined the origin and meaning of the name Idrīs were unanimously of the opinion that Idrīs was not an Arabic word (fa-'intindcuhu mina l-I-šarfi dalīlun li-'ajmihi, that is, “it being debarred from taking the tanwin is a proof of its being foreign”). Their assumption was taken for granted by modern scholars seeking the origins of the name. Relying on Arabic sources which had identified Idrīs with Hermes Trismegistos, W. F. Albright suggested that Idrīs was derived from Andris, the last two syllables of Pimandris (πιμανδρις), that is, Hermes Trismegistos. Th. Nöldeke and R. Hartmann, as did Albright, suggested that it came from the Greek but not from hermetic literature. The former suggested that it originated from Andreas (Andrew), one of Christ’s apostles, while the latter proposed the cook of Alexander the Great, Andreas; Andreas was considered righteous enough to attain immortality.

The Qur’ān tells us (sūra 19:55–56) that Idrīs ascended to heaven. Muslim traditionists associated this with the ascension of the biblical Enoch (Gen. 5:24). In Christian tradition, Enoch is often identified with the Prophet Elijah, who also ascended to heaven (2 Kings 2:11). It is not surprising, therefore, that among Muslim traditionists, there were a few who claimed that Idrīs was, in fact, Elijah, despite the fact that Elijah is mentioned in the Qur’ān as Ilyās (sūra 37:127) and Ilyāsin (sūra 37:129). A tradition preserved by Ibn al-ʿArabī claims that Idrīs was a postdiluvian figure. In the ḥadīth of the ʿisrāʾ, it is said that when Muḥammad reached heaven, he was addressed by Adam as al-ibn al-ṣāliḥ (“the righteous son”), while Idrīs addressed him as al-akh.
al-ṣāliḥ ("the righteous brother"). It follows here that had Idrīs been antediluvian, he would have used the same form of address used by Adam. 12

P. Casanova and, later, C. C. Torrey both thought that Idrīs originated from the biblical Ezra, who had come down to the Muslims in Greek as Esdras. This is somewhat problematic since, in Muslim tradition, ʿUzayr is the biblical Ezra, who—according to the Qurʾān (sūra 9:29)—was claimed by the Jews to be the son of God. 13 Because Casanova could not find any Jewish myth describing Ezra as the son of God, he assumed that the Qurʾānic verse about ʿUzayr referred to the sons of God in Gen. 6:2–4. 14 In this myth, embellished by haggadic literature, one of the fallen angels is ʿAzzaʾēl. His name was pronounced ʿUziʾēl, and he is the source of ʿUzayr. 15

Muslim exegetes pointed to the similarity between the name Idrīs and the Arabic root d-r-s, "study." Indeed, according to tradition, Idrīs was a scholar. He devoted himself to the books revealed to his predecessors Adam and Seth and studied God's words. Many of the traditions emphasize the fact that he made decisive contributions to the study of the sciences in order to preserve them for the coming generations. Nevertheless, despite Idrīs's proclivity for learning, the idea that his name derives from an Arabic root has been ruled out, as already noted. Some have suggested, however, that in the foreign language from which it was borrowed, the word had the same meaning as the Arabic root d-r-s. 17

Since Muslim scholars interested in science identified Idrīs with Hermes Trismegistos, 18 it is worthwhile examining just how this name was understood in Islamic hermetic literature. According to Ibn Juljul, Hermes is a title (laqab), like qaṣār (the Roman or Byzantine emperor) or ḥisrā (the Persian king). 19 In one treatise, which could not have been composed before the thirteenth century, an anonymous scholar claims that Hermes is a Syrian appellation, meaning ʿālim ("scholar"). Hermes is identified with Idrīs and Enoch, but his name is really Enoch, while the other appellations merely reflect his scholarly attributes.


16 See n. 9 above.
17 See n. 6 above.
18 See pp. 345–46 below.
20 "Qabas al-qabīs fī tadbīr Harmas al-Harāmis," in A. Siggel, "Das Sendschreiben das Licht über das
Hermes is Enoch, and he is Idrīs, may God have mercy upon him. Hermes is Syriac and it means "the scholar," as Hermes Trismegistos means "the scholar of scholars." This is similar to the way the Hebrews say hibr, that is, "scholar," and hibr al-ḥābār—"the scholar of scholars." The word Hermes is not a name but an attribute of knowledge. Idrīs is also not a name. He was called Idrīs because of his great scientific studies. His real name is Enoch.

The assumption that Idrīs is connected with study and knowledge is well grounded in Islamic tradition, as already noted. Hermes, on the other hand, is a Greek, not a Syriac word, derived from hermēneia, i.e., "interpretation." The Muslims were aware of the tasks attributed to Hermes Trismegistos in the ancient literature: he was a scholar who meditated between heaven and men by transmitting heavenly science and knowledge to the world. Ibn al-Qīṭī speaks about Hermes in a chapter entitled "Idrīs." He had learned from Abū Maṣḥār that the figure of Hermes Trismegistos was a conflation of three different Hermes, the first of whom was Idrīs. This Hermes is described as an antediluvian who had warned his people of the coming flood and whose warning had fallen on deaf ears. He then built the pyramids in Egypt in order to preserve the sciences for future generations: he drew pictures of existing tools and wrote down their history. According to one tradition, he is buried in one of the pyramids.

Although there is a similarity between Hermes Trismegistos and the Idrīs of Islamic literature, both in their deeds and semantically speaking, it is difficult to believe that Idrīs is derived from Hermes, in view of the etymological differences between the two names. Still there may be something to the idea that there could be a similarity of meaning between the Arabic root d-r-s and the origin of Idrīs in the foreign language from which the name was taken.

There is a semantic and etymological resemblance between the Hebrew root d-r-sh and the Arabic d-r-s, but we know that the Muslims identified Idrīs with the biblical Hanokh-Enoch, which bears no resemblance whatsoever to d-r-s. On this point, however, one should note that one of the important figures involved in the eschatological doctrines of the CD was called Dōrēsh ha-Torah, "Interpreter of the Torah." The sect apparently identified him with Hermes-Mercury and attributed to him the deeds of Enoch known to us from the Enoch literature. This is the basis on which I infer that it was Dōrēsh, which comes from d-r-s, which as we have seen, was the source of Idrīs in the Qurʾān.

Let us examine the figure of Dōrēsh ha-Torah in the CD, where he is mentioned twice. The first mention is as follows:


21 It is possible that the Muslims became acquainted with Hermes Trismegistos through Syrian Hermetic literature. On Jewish Aramaic hermetic literature, see J. A. Montgomery, Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur (Philadelphia, 1913), pp. 123–24. See also Milik, Enoch, pp. 132–33.

22 See n. 9 above.


26 On dārash and midrāsh in Qumran literature, see L. H. Schiffman, The Halakhah at Qumran (Leiden, 1975), pp. 54–60.
He raised from Aaron men of understanding and from Israel men of wisdom, and he caused them to hear and they dug the well, “the well which princes dug, which the nobles of the people delved with the staff” (Num. 21:18). The Well is the Torah and those that dug it are they that turned (from impiety) from Israel.

Inasmuch as God called all of them Princes for they sought him...

Like Hermes, Dôrêš ha-Torah means “interpreter.” He interprets the Torah which is compared to a well. He is identified with the legislator and, if we read the entire verse of Isa. 54:16, with the hārāš (“craftsman”), as well as with the vessel. As N. Wieder noted, Moses is referred to as mehōqeq (“legislator”) and kēlī (“vessel”) in Jewish and Samaritan literature. The “craftsman” is a key figure in Jewish eschatology. Certain haggadic texts on Zach. 2:3 stress that four craftsmen are expected: the Messiah ben David, the Messiah ben Joseph, and those who will precede them, Elijah and Melchizedek.

Considering the Dôrêš ha-Torah’s attributes in the CD, which have been mentioned above, i.e., mehōqeq and kēlī, Wieder has concluded that the craftsman expected by the Qumran sect was Moses, although no source is known by us which has identified the hārāš with Moses.

The second mention reads:

Those who held fast escaped to the land of the north as He said, “and I have exiled the Sikkuth of your king and the Kiyyun of your images (and the star of your God), Amos 5:27 from My tent to Damascus. The books of the Torah are the Tabernacle (sukkath) of the king as He hath said: “And I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen” (Amos 9:11). The king is the assembly. And the Pedestals (kene) of the images and the kiyyun of the images are the books of the prophets... and the Star is the interpreter of the Torah who came (or: shall come) to Damascus as it is written, “A star shall step forth out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel” (Num. 24:17).
Here, Dōrēsh ha-Torah is the kōkhāv, that is, the “star.” Wieder was the first to point out that the star is Mercury, whose full name in Hebrew is הַטָּמַם כַּהַנִּים but which is also known simply as kōkhāv. This star was identified in Greek mythology with Hermes. Weider assumed that although the CD was referring to this connection, that is, Dōrēsh ha-Torah as kōkhāv, the author of the document was looking for evidence that Moses was the equivalent of Hermes. In my opinion, Wieder was right to assume that the star was Hermes-Mercury. Nonetheless, it seems to me that Dōrēsh ha-Torah was a figure related to Enoch and the Enoch literature and that he should not be identified with Moses.

The similarity of Enoch, Dōrēsh ha-Torah, and Hermes-Mercury is quite striking. According to the Aggadah, Mercury is the sun’s scribe: “He who is born under Mercury will be of a retentive memory and wise. What is the reason? Because it [Mercury] is the sun’s scribe”. Mercury’s task as scribe was known to Muslim scholars. According to Bīrūnī, Mercury, who is Nabū in the Babylonian religion, is the scribes’ star, and Maqrīzī referred to him as such, that is, as a kātib. In the Enoch literature, Enoch is described as God’s scribe: “And he was taken from amongst the children of men and we conducted him into the Garden of Eden in majesty and honour, and behold there he writes down the condemnation and judgment of the world.” Dōrēsh ha-Torah is “legislator” and “star,” and there is a deep connection between legislator and scribe (safrā). The star referred to by the CD is the star of God (Amos 5:27). It would thus appear that Dōrēsh ha-Torah is, like Enoch and Mercury, the scribe of God.

The resemblance between Enoch and Dōrēsh ha-Torah becomes clearer when we compare the contents of their writing. Since Dōrēsh ha-Torah has been described as a legislator, it means that he is an engraver (mehbāqeq) of laws. According to the Hodayot (“Thanksgiving”) Scroll, nothing can be said without a scribe (sōfēr). On the other hand, the eternal law is engraved (ḥaqiq) before God “with a stylus of remembrance for all the everlasting period.” It would seem that the task of the legislator-engraver is to engrave the eternal law of God. Enoch is also described as the one who

34 T. B. Shabbat 156a; Maimonides, Code, Sēfer maddā‘, yesōde ha-Torah, 3,1; Baraita di-Shemuel ha-Qāṭān, chap. 9.
37 B. T. Shabbat 156a.
40 See n. 29 above. On dōrēsh and sōfēr, see Urbach, Halakha, pp. 70–72.
41 The Hodayot Scroll I: 23–24. See the translation of M. Burrows, The Dead Sea Scroll, p. 400. I have translated pen as “stylus.”
writes the tablets on which God’s eternal law is engraved: “And He said unto me, ‘O Enoch, observe the writings of the heavenly tablets and read what is written thereon’.”

Like Hermes Trismegistos, Enoch, as God’s scribe, transmitted heaven’s knowledge to Man. It was only through this knowledge that the earthly calendar could be coordinated with the order of the stars in heaven: “And he was the first among men that are born on earth who learnt writing and knowledge and wisdom and who wrote down the signs of heaven according to the order of their months in a book, that men might know seasons of the years according to the order of their separate months.” Such knowledge—including wisdom, science and astronomy and the eternal law engraved before God—would appear to be the “interpretation” engraved by Dôresh ha-Torah.

As we already know, the Book of Jubilees was in the library of the Qumran sect. Its calendar was a solar one, and according to the Enoch literature, brought to earth, we have learned, by Enoch. Indeed, the myth of Enoch is linked with the sun from its beginning—as in the 365 years of his life on earth, according to the Bible. According to the Aggadah, as pointed out above, Mercury is the sun’s star. In the Harranian cult, sacrifices were made to Mercury on Wednesdays, the day on which, the Bible tells us, the lights were put in heaven (Gen. 1:14). It seems that for this very reason, Wednesday was the first day of the year in the Book of Jubilees calendar.

The assumption that there is an affinity between Idrîs and Dôresh ha-Torah, Enoch, Hermes Trismegistos, and Hermes-Mercury is strengthened by Muslim traditions. We have already mentioned the belief that the name Idrîs comes from a foreign word with the same meaning as ḍ-ṛ-s and further pointed out the similarity to the Hebrew root ḍ-ṛ-sh. Muslim sources also identify Idrîs with Enoch, Hermes, and ʿUṭārid (Mercury) or Nabû, the scribe, in the Babylonian cult. In quoting from hermetic

42 The Book of Enoch 81:1.
44 The Book of Jubilees 4:17.
45 On the heaven’s knowledge of Enoch one can learn from the Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I, col. 2: 19–26, ed. J. Fitzmyer (Rome, 1966), pp. 44–47. In Baraita di-shemuel ha-qâtân, 9, the task of the transmitting knowledge is incumbent upon Mercury.
48 See n. 37 above.
51 Al-Mas’ûdî, Murûj al-dhâhab, vol. 1, ed. C. A. Barbier and B. M. M. Pavet (Paris, 1861–77), p. 73; Ibn al-Nadîm, Fihrist, pp. 238, 352. On the identification of the prophet with ʿUṭārid, see I. Israeli, Jesod olam, ed. B. Goldberg and L. Rosenkranz (Berlin, 1848), chap. 2, p. 16a: “Nabû shâsh hâm aḥât dâlâlâ ... hâdîn bâdîn melûhî ... hâdîn bâdîn melûhî ... hâdîn bâdîn melûhî ... hâdîn bâdîn melûhî ...” and the same function was discharged into
literature, Muslim scholars never differentiate between Hermes Trismegistos and Hermes-Mercury. 53

There is also a striking similarity between the deeds of Idrīs and those of Enoch and Hermes Trismegistos. Idrīs devoted himself to the study of astronomy, God’s words and revelations, all of which had been given to his predecessors to preserve for generations to come. Some traditions note that Enoch, i.e., Idrīs, was the first prophet to whom revelations were made (although others disagree). 54 All traditions, however, agree that Idrīs was the first to write with a stylus (qalam, derived from κυλαιμος), the emblem of Nabū in Babylonian myth, and apparently refer here to the words of God engraved from the tablets of God with a stylus by Dōresh ha-Torah—the engraver (megebqeq), Nabū and Enoch. 55 E. F. F. Bishop has pointed out the affinity between the tablets of God mentioned in Hodayot and the tablets of God mentioned in the Qurʾān. 56 According to Muḥammad, God’s revelations are from one source, umm al-kitāb (sūra 3:6), and this reminds us of the eternal law engraved before God in the Qumran and Enoch literatures. 57

To sum up, according to Muslim tradition, Idrīs appears to be a bizarre mixture of Enoch, Nabū, Hermes Trismegistos, and Hermes-Mercury. Further, the figure of the Dōresh ha-Torah in the CD casts some light on the enigmatic Idrīs. They both are derived from the same root. Both are identified with Hermes-Mercury, and with regard to their deeds, both are related to the Enoch and hermetic literatures.

The question of how Islam came to be influenced by Qumran literature may now be asked. 58 Although I have no intention of providing a comprehensive answer to this question, I would like to suggest two possible channels through which Qumran-related

ancient Egyptian religion by the God Thoth.” It is worth noting that the God’s star (Amos 5:27) mentioned in CD 7:18 is attached to two Mesopotamian astral deities—Sakkūt and Kawai. See J. L. Mays, Amos: A Commentary (London, 1969), p. 112. Kaywān is one of the Arabic names for Saturn.

53 See, for example, Ibn al-Qiftī, Ta’rīkh, p. 2; al-Maqrīzī, Khiyat, vol. 1, p. 203. The Harranians, whose religion was based on hermetic literature, identified Hermes with Mercury. See n. 63 below.

54 Ibn Hishām, Sīra, p. 1, and al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh, vol. 1, pp. 172–73, claim in the name of Ibn-Ishāq, that Enoch was the first prophet. On discussions in Muslim tradition as to who was the first prophet, see G. Widengren, Muhammad: The Apostle of God, and His Ascension (Uppsala, 1955), pp. 22–24; U. Rubin, “Preexistence and Light,” Israel Oriental Studies (IOS) 5 (1975): 82–83. On Enoch and Hermes Trismegistos as the first revelators, see nn. 22–24 and n. 44 above.

55 On the stylus, the emblem of Nabū, see S. A. Cook, The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archaeology (London, 1930), pp. 65, 103, n. 1; F. G. Bliss and R. A. S. Macalister, Excavations in Palestine during the Years 1898–1900 (London, 1902), p. 41 (fig. 16, no. 2). The stylus ḥaʔūt is mentioned in the Hodayot Scroll (see n. 41 above). The reading of ḥaʔ ḥaʔūt instead of ḥaʔ ḥaʔūt in DSD 10:6.8.10, as suggested by Nötscher, is unacceptable. See F. Nötscher, “Gesetz der Freiheit im NT und in der Mönchsgemeinde am Totem Meer,” Biblica 34 (1953): 193–94. It seems that ḥaʔūt, “the tool” in CD 6:4, means a stylus and a staff at the same time, as does qalam in Arabic. See Qurʾān 3:43. See also al-Qurtubi, Jami’, vol. 4, p. 86: “The Torah was written by the qalam.” Qalam is also qidḥ and saḥm.


57 See the Book of Enoch 81:1; the Hodayot Scroll. In Jubilees, chap. 2, the revelation is made to Moses. The fact that the prophets transmit the same eternal law throughout the generations explains the affinity between Enoch and Moses. See Wieder’s suggestion (n. 31 above) that Dōresh ha-Torah is Moses.

58 One can also find similarities in the religious practices of Qumran and Islam, such as the prohibition to marry one’s niece (CD 5:7–11; Qurʾān 4:22). The same prohibition was found among the Samaritans and Karaites as well. See S. Poznanski, “Jacob ben Ephraim, in antikaräischer Polemiker des X. Jahrhunderts,” Gedenkbuch zu D. Kaufmann (Breslau, 1900), pp. 172–76.
Enoch literature could have entered Islam during its formative period. The first channel is Harrān, the other is Yemen.

All Muslim scholars agree that hermetic literature penetrated Islam primarily through Harrān, one of the rare places in which Islam ruled but where a pagan cult persisted for a very long time. The religion of the Harranians was based on the beliefs of a Mesopotamian cult, combined with Neo-Platonic Greek philosophy and Hellenistic-Egyptian hermetic literature.\(^{59}\) The scholars of Harrān were involved in translating ancient Greek literature into Arabic.\(^{60}\) One of the reasons Harranian paganism survived was that during the reign of al-Ma'mūn, the Harranians called themselves Sābiān, knowing that this entitled them to protection as dhimmīs.\(^{61}\) Although Muslim scholars distinguished between the Sābiān mentioned in the Qur'ān—sūras 2:61, 5:68, 22:16—and the Harranians, the word “Sābiān” became synonymous with Harranians and with paganism in its broader sense.\(^{62}\)

Harrān, according to Muslim scholars, was where Hermes became identified with Mercurius.\(^{63}\) Some Muslim scholars claim that the identification of Hermes with Idrīs (i.e., Enoch) also originated in Harrān.\(^{64}\) The very opposite argument has been made by modern scholars, namely, that Islam was the source of the identification of Hermes with Idrīs in the religion of Harrān.\(^{65}\) If we accept the assumption that Egyptian hermetic literature had already linked Hermes to Enoch,\(^{66}\) we may ask if there was not, perhaps, another channel through which Hermetic literature reached the first Muslims in the Arabian peninsula, before Harrān began transmitting Hermetic literature from the eighth century on.

Dealing with the influence of Qumran on Islam, it is worthwhile to examine if any relation between the pagans of Harrān and Qumran can be traced. One of the Qumran

59 Thoth, the Egyptian deity, was identified by the Greeks with Hermes. See Albright, review of Boylan, Thoth, p. 192. On Thoth, see also Charles, Enoch, n. 52 above; al-Birūnī, Āthār, p. 205, called the Harranian Hermes, “Hermes the Egyptian.” According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Fihrīst, p. 332, Hermes moved from Babylon to Egypt. According to al-Mas‘ūdī, Al-Tanbih wal-‘ishrāf, ed. de Goeje (Leiden, 1894), p. 116, the Harranians are remnants of the Egyptian Sābiān. Mahbūb of Manbij in his Kitāb al-‘unwān, ed. A. Vasiliev, Patrologia Orientalis (PO) 5 (1909): 591–92, claimed that the Harranian cult was based on Manetho the Egyptian.


64 Al-Birūnī, Āthār, pp. 206, 318; Ibn Hazm, Milal, vol. 1, p. 35; Ibn al-Qiftī, Ta‘rikh, p. 5; al-Mas‘ūdī, Murūj, vol. 1, p. 73.


fragments, the Prayer of Nabonidus, provides us with an indirect link between the two sects. Nabonidus, the last Babylonian king (556–539 B.C.), whose family originally came from Harrān, brought about reform in the Babylonian religion. He extolled Sin, the moon-god, and rebuilt his temple in Harrān. At the same time, Nabū, the god after whom Nabonidus was named, also influenced him. Motivated by religious impulses, Nabonidus then journeyed to Tēmā, where he spent ten of his seventeen years as king. The myth of Nabonidus survived for centuries in a variety of forms, circulating throughout the Middle East.

To give one example, King Nebuchadnezzar (in the first chapters of Daniel) is, in fact, Nabonidus. H. Lewy showed that Nabonidus survived in Muslim sources as Kāy Kā'ūs. How Nabonidus acquired this Iranian name in Muslim sources is not precisely known. H. Lewy was inclined to think that Nabonidus was confused with an Iranian prince. The Muslims were aware of Nabonidus’s devotion to the study of astronomy and astrology and of the fact that his contemplation of heaven’s secrets made him attempt an ascension—which failed. They describe his journey to the Arabian peninsula as a journey to Yemen.

The Qumran Nabonidus’s prayer offers striking evidence of the links between the Mesopotamian cult—which was one of the foundations of the Harranian religion—and Qumran. Nabonidus’s interest in astronomy and his efforts to ascend to heaven immediately call to mind the figures of Enoch and Hermes Trismegistos.

Yemen was the other channel through which the Enoch literature could have penetrated Islam. Although the Enoch literature was influential in Yemen, it is hard to accept Rabin’s assertion that the remnants of the Qumran sect settled in Yemen after fleeing from Palestine. On the other hand, Manichaeism in Yemen could have been instrumental in transmitting the Enoch literature to the first Muslims in Arabia, since we know that the Manichaeans already possessed it. Manichaeism also had a decisive influence on the early Shī‘īs and on the Jewish Sectarians from the eighth century on.
Ibn Ḩaqq, whose many traditions had originated in Yemen, in his Kitāb al-mubtada' supplies evidence of the existence of Enoch literature in early Islam. In this book, he mentions the wives of the patriarchs whose names are exactly the same as those in the books belonging to the “Enoch circle,” which is the Book of Jubilees and the Genesis apocryphon found in one of the caves in the Judaean desert. Some Muslim scholars strongly opposed Ibn Ḩaqq, calling him a dajjāl (“devil”). The Yemenis who converted to Islam were the main source of the penetration into Islam of the isrāʾīliyyāt. These traditions were apparently strongly influenced by the Enoch literature. The isrāʾīliyyāt introduced by Kaʿb al-ʻAḥbār, a converted Jew, who claimed that he was basing himself on kitāb dāris [sic] met with hostility from his contemporaries similar to that experienced by Ibn Ḩaqq.

It is evident from the influence of the Enoch literature on the Yemeni Jews of that period, that they were far removed from the mainstream of rabbinical Judaism, which opposed this literature. According to Ibn Ḥazm, the Jews mentioned in the Qurʾān who believed that ‘Uzayr was the son of God were members of the Sadducee sect in Yemen. We know today that the Karaites referred to the Qumranic fragments in their possession as Sadducean literature perhaps because of the important role which the family of the Sadducean priests played there.

Based on the writings of Ibn Ḥazm, we can conclude that the Sadducean literature, i.e., Enoch literature, possessed by the Karaites in Babylonia and Persia from the eighth century on, was also available to the Yemeni Jews in the seventh century.


Schechter, in Fragments, called it a “Zadokite Work” for two reasons: the role of the Sadoqite priests in the document and the fact that al-Qirṣiqānī referred to Kitāb Sādāq quoting extracts similar to CD. On the importance of the Sadoqite
It was Goitein's opinion that there is a Karaite "current" in the Qurʾān and in Muslim tradition, stemming, he believed, from the influence of Jewish sects who followed similar practices.⁸⁵ Considering the decisive influence of the Enoch and Qumran literatures on Karaism in its formative stages, it would appear that these same influences, coming from Yemen, helped shape Islam in the seventh century.⁸⁶

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⁸⁵ "Muhammad's Teachers," p. 158.

⁸⁶ See n. 4 above.