In an article published in 1980, “Islam, Judaeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm,” Patricia Crone sought to find a link between an early Christian heresy and the birth of Islam.\(^1\) More than three decades later, she has returned to the topic of Jewish Christianity, this time in connection with the text of the Qurʾān.\(^2\) Throughout her career, Professor Crone has retained an iconoclastic mind and a passion for challenging scholarly orthodoxies and retrieving ancient heresies. Moreover, as her recently published *magnum opus, The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran: Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism* (Cambridge, 2012), amply shows, she has never forgotten that early Islamic doctrines can only be fully understood in the context of earlier religious trends, in Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. In the following pages, through a renewed reflection on Jewish Christianity and Islamic origins, I wish to pay a modest tribute to an exceptionally brilliant, daring and original scholar, who has put so many in her debt, far beyond the traditional boundaries of Islamic studies.

It is to the Irish freethinker John Toland (1668–1722) that we owe the concept of Jewish (or Judaeo-) Christianity. In 1718, Toland published, in London, *Nazarenus, or Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity*. This text further developed ideas first presented in his French manuscript written in 1710, *Christianisme judaïque et mahométan*, which sought to offer a historical argument, recognizing the Jewish roots of Christianity, in order to promote the toleration of Jews in modern European societies.\(^3\)

Toland based his argument upon the *Gospel of Barnabas*, an apocryphal writing of unknown date, the full text of which we only possess in an Italian

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1. Crone, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm.” For a slightly different French version of this text, see Stroumsa, “Judéo-christianisme et Islam des origines.”
2. Crone, “Jewish Christianity and the Qurʾān” (forthcoming). I should like to express my deep thanks to Professor Crone for having shared with me the draft of her article and for her incisive and useful comments on my own draft. Crone’s conclusion of her detailed research tally with my own: the Jewish Christians are “the most obvious candidates” for the role of transmitters of a number of Qurʾānic themes. I also wish to thank Sarah Stroumsa for her careful reading and for her very useful remarks on this article.
3. On Toland’s conception of Jewish Christianity, see Palmer, *Ein Freispruch für Paulus*.
version of a lost Spanish one. This text announces the coming of Muhammad and makes reference to the *shahāda*, the Muslim profession of faith. According to the *Gospel of Barnabas*, Jesus is a prophet, and not the Son of God, and does not die on the cross. In his stead, it is Judas Iscariot who is crucified. A human rather than a divine Jesus, and a Docetist conception of the Passion: these traits are typical of the figure of Jesus both for the Jewish Christians and in the Qurʾān. For Toland, some of the fundamental doctrines of Islam are rooted in the “most ancient monuments of the Christian religion,” and not in the views of the Nestorian monk Sergius. It is to Toland’s refutation by the Lutheran orthodox theologian Lorenz von Mosheim (1693–1755), *Vindiciae antiquae christianiorum disciplinae*, published in 1720, that Toland’s book owed its fame, and the concept of Jewish Christianity its survival. Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), the founder of the Tübingen school of New Testament studies, made *Judenchristentum* a cornerstone of his conception of Christian origins. For the Hegelian that he was, second century Christianity represented the synthesis or sublimation (*Aufhebung*) of Petrine Christianity and Paulinian (“gentile”) Christianity. For most historians of early Christianity, it is Baur, rather than Toland, who is at the origin of the concept of Jewish Christianity, a phenomenon which would be studied, from Baur on, only in the first Christian centuries. Toland’s intuition, according to which one of the earliest manifestations of Christianity, having survived late antiquity, had a major impact upon the earliest stages of Islam, and hence on the world history of religions, practically disappeared from the horizon of research. The Patristic sources do not speak, of course, of “Jewish Christianity.” From the second to the fourth century, the Patristic heresiographers usually mention the Ebionites (*ebionitoi*), whose name would have come from their imaginary founder, a certain Ebion. In fact, it comes from their insistence upon the spiritual value of poverty: they call themselves *evvyonim* (“poor” in Hebrew), a Biblical term they borrowed from *Psalms*. The Christian heresiographers also mention other names of sects, in particular those of the Nazoreans (*nazoraioi*), who share, at least partly, Ebionite ideas. For the Nazoreans, Jesus was, rather than God’s Son, a prophet, the last of a long chain of true prophets, starting with Adam, in which each prophet is preceded by a false prophet. Moreover, Jesus had not died on the cross; the heresiographers often associate this Docetism with other doctrines of Jewish Christian groups.

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4 On the Gospel of Barnabas, see Cirillo and Frémaux (text and translation), *Evangile de Barnabé*.
5 Toland, *Nazarenus*; see Jones, *Rediscovery of Jewish Christianity*, 139.