

Jews and Christians, or between Jews and Magians—and in all these cases the chains of tradition go back, of course, to the immediate circle of the Prophet. It would seem almost incredible that when the Qur'ān grants special privilege and protection to four communities as true believers, no exact tradition as to the identity of one of these communities should have survived till the time when the Traditionists and Exegetes began their work of compilation. The facts, however, are plain, and if so much uncertainty existed on so important a matter as the identity of a protected community, one can imagine how the case stands with regard to unimportant little details which are of profound interest to the philologist to-day, but which, in the early days of Islām, had no doctrinal or political significance to bring them prominently before the attention of the Muslim savants.

The traditional account of the development of Qur'ānic exegesis,¹ of which this problem of the foreign words forms a part, makes it begin with Ibn 'Abbās, a cousin of the Prophet, whom later writers consider to have been the greatest of all authorities on this subject.²

He is called the ترجمان القرآن, the بحر or sea of Qur'ānic science, the حبر الأمة Rabbi of the Community, and many traditions give wonderful accounts of his vast erudition and infallible scholarship.³ Modern scholarship, however, has not been able to endorse this judgment,⁴ and looks with considerable suspicion on most traditions going back to Ibn 'Abbās. It would seem, however, that he had access to stores of information supplied by Jewish converts such as Ka'b b. Matī⁵ and Wahb b. Munabbih,⁶ so that frequently, although his own interpretation of a word or verse may be of little value, the material he produces from these authorities with the phrase زعم كعب, etc., may be of the first importance. Tradition also credits Ibn 'Abbās with founding a

¹ as-Suyūṭī, *Itq*, 908 ff., gives an account of the earliest exegesis of the Qur'ān. Goldziher, *Richtungen*, chaps. i and ii.

² "Ergilt als Übermensch des tafsīr," as Goldziher neatly expresses it, *Richtungen*, 65.

³ See an-Nawawī, 351-4; Ibn Ḥajar's *Iṣāba*, ii, 802-813 (and *Kāmil*, 566-9, for examples of his authoritative explanation).

⁴ Siddiqi, 12, 13, treats him with more deference than is merited. As illustrating the opinion of modern scholarship, we may note the judgment of three very different savants: Buhl, *ET*, i, 20; Noldeke, *Sketches*, p. 108; Saco, *Credenze*, p. viii.

⁵ Usually called Ka'b al-Aḥbār. See an-Nawawī, 523; Ibn Ḥajar, iii, 633-639; *ET*, ii, 582.

⁶ See an-Nawawī, 619.