

proselytes.¹ It is difficult, however, in face of the polemic of the Qur'ān, to think of them as other than Jews by race as well as religion, and their adoption of Arab customs may well be explained by the Jewish habit of assimilating themselves to the community in which they dwell.²

Whether these Jews had any great familiarity with Hebrew, however, is a different question. One would gather from the Qur'ān that they were far better acquainted with the Rabbinic writings than they were with the Scriptures, and when we find Muḥammad borrowing technical terms of Jewish origin they are generally of an Aramaic rather than a Hebrew form. It would seem from a passage in Ibn Hishām,³ that they had a Beth ha-Midrash which Muḥammad visited on at least one occasion,⁴ though we are left to conjecture what they studied there. Some accounts we have do not speak very highly of their intellectual acquirements.⁵ On the whole, one would judge that much of Muḥammad's knowledge of Judaism was gained from the general stock of information about Jewish practice and versions of Jewish stories and legends that were current among the Arabs who had lived in contact with Jewish communities, for much of this material, as we shall see, can be found also in the old poetry.⁶ Certainly some of his knowledge of Judaism came through Christian channels, as is demonstrated by the Christian form of many Old Testament

¹ Winckler, *MVAG*, vi, 222; Margoliouth, *op. cit.*, 61. Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, p. 3, notes that the Arabs seem to have intermarried freely with them.

² The second essay in Lammen's *L'Arabie occidentale* contains much interesting material on the position of Jews in the Hijāz at the time of Muhammad, though he is inclined to emphasize their influence a little too strongly.

³ p. 383 and Baiḍ, on Sūra, ii, 91. Abū Bakr also visited this Beth ha-Midrash, *vide* Ibn Hishām, 388. Pautz, *Offenbarung*, 39, translates the words *بيت المدراس* by *Synagogue*, but see Geiger, 13.

⁴ There is also a Tradition that Muhammad used to listen to Jabr and Yasar, two Jewish smiths at Mecca, as they read together out of their Scriptures. *Vide* Margoliouth, *Mohammed*, 105.

⁵ This is indeed suggested by the Qur'ān itself, Sūra, ii, 80, though we also gather from the Qur'ān that they had copies of their Scriptures and could write (ii, 73, 169). Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, xxi, 4, has a tradition that the Madinan Jews read the Torah in Hebrew and interpreted it in Arabic. (On their dialect, cf. Cactani, *Annali*, i, 386; Leszynsky, 22 ff.) As to what Scriptures we may reasonably suppose them to have possessed, see Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, 103.

⁶ Torrey, *Foundations*, following Aug. Muller, assumes that these Arabian Jews spoke a Judæo-Arabic dialect, and refers to this dialect all the curious forms found in the Qur'ān, e.g. *زور* for *זור*, etc. The theory is interesting but hardly convincing. Even less convincing is the theory of Finkel, elaborated in an essay in *MW*, 1932, p. 169 ff., that the Jewish material in the Qur'ān comes from non-Talmudic, old Israelitish tradition.