



Collyridianism

Collyridianism (or **Kollyridianism**) was an alleged Early Christian movement in Arabia whose adherents worshipped the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, as a goddess.^{[1][2]} The existence of the sect is subject to some dispute by scholars, as the only contemporary source to describe it is the *Panarion* of St. Epiphanius of Salamis (though some connect it with a Qur'anic verse).^{[1][3]}

According to Epiphanius, certain women in largely-pagan Arabia syncretised indigenous beliefs with the worship of Mary and offered little cakes or bread-rolls.^[4] The cakes were called *collyris* (Greek: κόλλυρίς) and are the source of the name *Collyridians*.^[5] Epiphanius stated that Collyridianism originated in Thrace and Scythia although it may have first travelled to those regions from Syria or Asia Minor.^[4]

Interpretations

The adoption of the mother of Jesus as a virtual goddess may represent a reintroduction of aspects of the worship of Isis. According to Sabrina Higgins, "When looking at images of the Egyptian goddess Isis and those of the Virgin Mary, one may initially observe iconographic similarities. These parallels have led many scholars to suggest that there is a distinct iconographic relationship between Isis and Mary. In fact, some scholars have gone even further, and have suggested, on the basis of this relationship, a direct link between the cult of Mary and that of Isis."^[6] Conversely, Carl Olson and Sandra Miesel dispute the idea that Christianity copied elements of Isis's iconography, saying that the symbol of a mother and her child is part of the universal human experience.^[7]

The theologian Karl Gerok disputed the existence of the Collyridians, describing it as improbable that a sect composed only of women could have lasted for as long as described by Epiphanius.^[1] The Protestant writer Samuel Zwemer pointed out that the only source of information about the sect came from Epiphanius.^[1]

In his 1976 book *The Virgin*, the historian Geoffrey Ashe put forward the hypothesis that the Collyridians represented a parallel Marian religion to Christianity, founded by first-generation followers of the Virgin Mary, whose doctrines were later subsumed by the Church at the Council of Ephesus in 431.^[5] The historian Averil Cameron has been more skeptical about whether the movement even existed and noted that Epiphanius is the only source for the group and that later authors simply refer to his text.^[8]

In Christian–Muslim dialogue

The Collyridians have become of interest in Christian–Muslim religious discussions in reference to the Islamic concept of the Christian Trinity. The debate hinges on some verses in the Qur'an, primarily 5:73 (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2002.02.0006%3Asura%3D5%3Averse%3D73>), 5:75 (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2002.02.0006%3Asura%3D5%3Averse%3D75>), and 5:116 (<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3A>

text%3A2002.02.0006%3Asura%3D5%3Averse%3D116) in the sura Al-Ma'ida, which have been taken to imply that Muhammad believed that Christians considered Mary to be part of the Trinity.^[9] That idea has never been part of mainstream Christian doctrine and is not clearly and unambiguously attested among any ancient Christian group, including the Collyridians.

However, research in Islamic studies claims that "the quranic accusations that christians claim Mary as God can be understood as a rhetorical statement."^{[10][11]} For example, David Thomas states that verse 5:116 need not be seen as describing actually professed beliefs but rather as giving examples of *shirk* (claiming divinity for beings other than God) and a "warning against excessive devotion to Jesus and extravagant veneration of Mary, a reminder linked to the central theme of the Qur'an that there is only one God and He alone is to be worshipped."^[12] When read in that light, it can be understood as an admonition: "Against the divinization of Jesus that is given elsewhere in the Qur'an and a warning against the virtual divinization of Mary in the declaration of the fifth-century church councils that she is 'God-bearer.'" Similarly, Gabriel Reynolds, Sidney Griffith and Mun'im Sirry argue that the verse is to be understood as a rhetorical statement to warn from the dangers of deifying Jesus or Mary.^{[13][14]}

References

1. Block, Corrie (2013-10-08). *The Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Historical and Modern Interpretations* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=NRtGAQAAQBAJ&dq=Collyridianism&pg=PA186>). Routledge. p. 186. ISBN 9781135014056.
2. Angelika Neuwirth: *Qur'anic Studies Today*. p. 301. *The Collyridians, an arabian female sect of the fourth century, offered Mary cakes of bread, as they had done to their great earth mother in pagan times. Epiphanius who opposed this heresy, said that the trinity must be worshipped but Mary must not be worshipped.*
3. "The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Books II and III. *De Fide*" (<https://brill.com/abstract/title/21620>). *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies*. 79 (Second, revised ed.). 2012-12-03 – via Brill.
4. Saint Epiphanius (2013) [c. 375]. *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: De fide. Books II and III* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=tKtzRNP0Z70C&q+=Collyridians>). Translated by Williams, Frank. Leiden: Brill. p. 637. ISBN 978-9004228412.
5. Carroll, Michael P. (1992-05-05). *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=k-W83KeGVUgC&dq=Collyridians&pg=PA41>). Princeton University Press. p. 43. ISBN 0691028672.
6. Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies 3–4 — 2012 Sabrina Higgins: "Divine Mothers: The Influence of Isis on the Virgin Mary in Egyptian Lactans-Iconography"
7. Carl Olson; Sandra Miesel (2004). *The Da Vinci Hoax: Exposing the Errors in The Da Vinci Code*. Ignatius Press. ISBN 978-1-58617-034-9.
8. Cameron, Averil (2004), "The Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Religious Development and Myth-Making", *Studies in Church History*, 39: 1–21, doi:10.1017/S0424208400014959 (<http://doi.org/10.1017%2FS0424208400014959>), S2CID 163960138 (<https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:163960138>), at 6–7.
9. Article "Maryam" by A.J. Wensinck in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, H.A.R. Gibbs and J.H. Kramers eds. (1953, Leiden: E.J. Brill), p. 328.
10. *Qur'anic Studies Today, von Angelika Neuwirth, Michael A Sells*. p. 302: "...the quranic accusations that christians claim Mary as God can be understood as a rhetorical statement".
11. Mun'im Sirry (1 May 2014). *Scriptural Polemics: The Qur'an and Other Religions*. Oxford University Press. p. 47.

12. David Thomas, *Trinity*, *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*.
13. *Scriptural Polemics: The Qur'an and Other Religions*, von Mun'im Sirry. 2014, p. 47 ff. "In more recent scholarship of the Quran, as represented by the works of Hawting, Sidney Griffith and Gabriel Reynolds, there is a shift from the heretical explanation to the emphasis on the rhetorical language of the Quran. When the Quran states that God is Jesus the son of Mary... it should be understood as... statements. Griffith states, 'the Quran's seeming missstatement, rhetorically speaking, should therefore not thought to be a mistake, but rather... a caricature, the purpose of which is to in Islamic terms highlight the absurdity and wrongness of christian belief, from an islamic perspective.' [...] Reynolds persuasively arguments that 'in passages involving christianity in the Quran, we should look for the Quran's creative use of rhetoric and not for the influence of christian heretics'".
14. Neuwirth, Angelika; Sells, Michael Anthony (2016). *Angelika Neuwirth: Qur'ānic Studies Today*, p. 300–304. Routledge. ISBN 978-1-138-18195-3.

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