

*On the original meaning of the Qur'ānic term
al-Shaytān al-Rajīm*

Adam Silverstein

Journal of the American Oriental Society, January 2013

Satan appears in the Qur'an over seventy times, either as Iblis or as al-shaytan, (1) the latter sometimes accompanied by the epithet al-rajim. (2) It will be argued below that the phrase al-shaman al-rajim originally referred to Satan's occupation as a prosecutor in the heavenly court. In time this original meaning of the phrase came to be forgotten and the term rajim was eventually reinterpreted by Near Eastern monotheists to mean either "pelted with stones" or "accursed."

RAJIM MEANING "PELTED WITH STONES"

A commonly held view among early Muslim exegetes, lexicographers, jurists, and others is that the term al-shagan al-rajim means "the stoned Satan," referring to the fact that Satan is physically pelted with stones, both on earth and in the astral sphere. (3) The earthly stoning of Satan takes place during the hajj ritual, on the tenth to twelfth days of Dhu l-Hijja, when pilgrims hurl stones at three pillars at Mind (the ritual of ramy al-jamarat). The practice is believed to re-enact Abraham's pelting of Satan with stones during his pilgrimage to Mecca in the remote past. (4) Anthropologists of religion have interpreted the ritual in other ways, suggesting that it originally signified the expiation of sins by casting them into an abyss. (5) Whatever the case may be, from contexts other than the off it is clear that in pre- or, at the very latest, early Islamic times, stoning a site associated with evil was a common practice. Most famous perhaps is the stoning of Abu Righal's grave (for his guidance to Abraha during the latter's campaign against Mecca), (6) which is well attested already in Umayyad poetry. (7) To this well-known evidence should be added the Biblical case of Achan, who pillaged and concealed booty acquired in the conquest of Jericho, for which "All Israel stoned him with stones ... And they raised over him a great heap of stones, unto this day" (Josh 7:25-26). (8) Other Biblical precedents abound, (9) suggesting that in the pre-Islamic Near East ceremonially pelting one's enemies with stones was practiced. (10)

The astral stoning of Satan is referred to in the Qur'an itself (67:5), (11) where we are told: And verily We have beautified the world's heaven with lamps (masabih), and We have made them missiles (rujum) for the shaytans, and for them We have prepared the doom of flame." (12) If nothing else, it should be recognized that as far as the Qur'an is concerned Satan is in fact physically pelted; (13) thus, whatever the literal meaning of al-shaytan al-rajim turns out to be, it is probably not the Qur'an's preferred answer to the question.

Of considerable significance in this context is the fact that Jews in late antiquity used language that suggested that Satan could be warded off by throwing things at him. Even the Muslim formula of isti'adha, in which refuge from Satan the rajim is sought from God, (14) has Talmudic parallels. In the Babylonian Talmud (hereafter, BT), we repeatedly hear rabbis exclaim: "An arrow in your eye, Satan!" (15) In one instance we are told that a certain Pelimo used to say "An arrow in Satan's eye!" every day, until eventually Satan revealed himself to Pelimo and asked why the latter cursed him so. Pelimo retorted, "What should I be saying [to ward you off]?" to which Satan replied, "[Say] God (rahmana) rebuke Satan!" (16) The Talmud then continues with an account of Rabbi Hiyya bar Ashi, who used to prostrate himself in prayer and exclaim, "God (rahmanii) save us from Satan!" (17) That the isti'adha is associated with Qur'anic recitation

during prayer supports the parallel, though for our purposes the relevant point is that some Jews on the eve of Islam believed that Satan could be warded off by pelting him with objects.

RAJIM MEANING "ACCURSED"

Much of the (largely Jewish) evidence for the idea that on the eve of Islam Satan could be physically pelted has gone unnoticed by modern scholars. (18) Instead, scholars since the nineteenth century have adduced (largely Christian) evidence for the fact that the literal meaning of al-shaytan al-rajim is "Satan the accursed." This argument points to Ethiopic texts in which the root r-g-m (to curse) is attested in relevant contexts. (19) In the Ethiopic Bible, for instance, the cursing of the serpent in Gen 3 is expressed using the root r-g-m (the Hebrew arar in verse 14 is rendered by the Ethiopic ragamt). (20) In later Ethiopic sources the same root is even seen to be used adjectivally with reference to Satan (the phrase saytan regum 'cursed Satan' is attested). (21) The theory, which has much to recommend it on both semantic and philological grounds, has gained widespread support, with such leading scholars as Theodor Noldeke, Franz Rosenthal, Arthur Jeffery, S. D. Goitein, and--most recently--Manfred Kropp adopting this meaning above all others. (22) It would be foolhardy to argue against such scholastic heavyweights, especially considering that there is evidence to suggest that the Qur'anic version of Satan's fall was influenced by Coptic accounts that were transmitted to the Hijaz from South Arabia, (23) and that the story of Satan refusing to follow the angels in prostrating to Adam (where, as we shall see, Satan is declared rajim in the Qur'an) was developed and circulated in predominantly Christian circles. Moreover, in late antique Syriac sources (24) one could be "stoned" with curses, just as one "hurls abuse" or "casts aspersions" in English. (25) In fact, already in the Bible we find stoning and cursing one's enemies to be closely associated: King David's enemy Shimei ben Gera is said to have "kept on cursing [David] as he came and he cast stones at David. ... So David and his men went by the way; and Shimei went along on the hillside over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him" (2 Sam 16:5-6, 13). (26)

RAJIM AS A FIXED "SURNAME"

As the foregoing discussions of "stoned" and "accursed" demonstrate, there is too much suggestive evidence for each option to allow us conclusively to privilege one etymology over the other. The evidence as it stands allows us to offer no better a translation of al-shaytan al-rajim than "Satan, the one physically and metaphorically pelted" (or some more elegant version of this), and it should be borne in mind that the Queanic phrase al-shaytan al-rajim may well have had different resonances among Jewish and Christian audiences respectively. All this being said, the precise etymology or even meaning of rajim might not have concerned Near Eastern monotheists on the eve of Islam, who might have simply appended the phrase rajim (or a cognate thereof) to Satan or to other forces of evil with little concern for the term's literal implications.

A problem with both "stoned" and "accursed" in this context is that they are passive in both form and meaning. (27) Though this is by no means a decisive objection to these options, it does seem odd that Muslims would be told to "seek refuge in God from Satan the pelted [with stones or curses]" (Q 16:98), as it is Satan who should be on the defensive, seeking refuge from the actions of others. The passive meaning of rajim only poses a problem to us if those using this term with reference to Satan were conscious of the term's meaning, whereas in fact it would appear that on the eve of Islam the epithet rajim could be employed as a sort of surname, appended to Satan irrespective of its literal or original meaning. (28) This is supported by Mandaic and Syriac evidence: in the former case, magical incantations against evil forces include the phrase rgima, 'paralysed' or petrified. The incantations appear on magic bowls dating from ca. 600 C.E., and are thus immune to the sorts of criticism leveled at literary sources from this period. (29) A Mandaic reference that is as interesting as it is problematic comes from the Ginza Raba (15.2), (30) where the phrase satana rgimea is found. The problem with this attestation is that it only occurs in one version of the Ginza and may well be a post-Islamic interpolation, influenced by Qur'anic usage.

The Syriac evidence comes from pseudo-Ephrem's Letter to the Mowitainees, (31) where *daggala raima* is used as a fixed phrase. (32)

There are three problems with using these texts for our purposes. First, although some have argued that Ephrem's letter is authentic, (33) a more likely (and, in scholarly circles, common) attribution is to Jacob of Edessa (640-708), who--though himself a seventh-century writer--is post-Qur'anic. Second, even evidence from ca. 600, which predates the Qur'an itself, might still have been influenced by Arabic usage. The assumption that the Arabic used in the Qur'an is no older than the Qur'an itself has been irrefutably challenged by the numerous inscriptions from pre-Islamic Arabia in which Arabic is used as a literary language (to say nothing of the Mill poetry, of course). *Al-shaytan al-rajim* has yet to turn up in either inscriptions or poetry, but the general point about the dating of Qur'anic Arabic must be taken. Third, even assuming that Satan was known as *rajim* before Islam, and without particular reference to the literal meaning of the epithet, we might still wonder what the literal, original meaning of *rajim* was. The theory of an Ethiopic derivation, contrasted with the Queanic evidence of Q 67:5 (where Satan is physically pelted with "missiles") and the Talmudic references in which we find rabbis seeking to ward Satan off by hurling objects at him, suggests that by the time the phrase *al-shaytan al-rajim* was used in the Qur'an, its original meaning had been forgotten, (34) a point made by both Noldeke and Rosenthal. (35) Bearing this in mind, the question to which we will turn in the following is what was the forgotten meaning of the term?

Before turning to this article's ultimate theory, a few stray options--that is to say, possibilities that have not been suggested or, if suggested, meaningfully pursued--deserve our attention.

The first was suggested by Rosenthal. He took a step back from the debate between supporters of "stoned" and "accursed" and wondered, in a few short paragraphs buried at the end of an otherwise well-known article, whether ancient Semitic philology might shed light on the question. (36) Based on the Ugaritic and Akkadian usages of *r-g-m* he noted that the basic meaning of the root appears to have been "to talk" or "to grumble." The relevance of this becomes clear when we realise that in the Qur'an Satan accomplishes much of his mischief through speaking. As Andrew Rippin put it: "Among [Satan's] tools to do this [viz., misguide people] are several vocal attributes: He calls (Q 31:21), simply speaks (Q 14:22; 59:16), promises (Q 2:268), and whispers (Q 7:20; 20:120; see also 50:16; 104:4-5)." (37) However, when Rosenthal traces the development of Semitic *r-g-m* into later periods, in Biblical Hebrew it becomes *r-g-n* and in Aramaic it disappears; *r-g-m* with a vocal meaning seems to hit a dead end long before Islam. One of Rosenthal's examples of *r-g-n* in the Bible comes from Prov 16:28, though he does not go into this passage in any detail. The verse (taken with the preceding one) reads: "An ungodly man (*'ish beliyya'al*) digs up evil, and in his lips there is as a burning fire; A froward man sows strife; and a whisperer (*nirgan*) separates familiar friends." This passage deserves our attention for two reasons. First, the reference to *Beli'al* with fire on his lips is strongly suggestive of a Satanic context; (38) and the mention in the following verse of a deceiving character who does something with the root *r-g-n* compounds the passage's relevance to us. Second, in *Genesis Rabba*, an early fifth-century midrashic elaboration on the book of Genesis, the "froward man" and the "whisperer" of Prov 16:28 are identified as the serpent from the garden of Eden. (39) The serpent is said to have whispered against God (*riggen devarim 'al bore'o*). This ties Satan, who was equated with the serpent of Eden, with the root *r-g-n*, and gives him an active rather than a passive role in the account. *Al-shaytem al-rajim*, thus, would be "Satan, who whispers against God's [commandments]." Rosenthal's ideas thus merit more attention than he himself gave them, and below we shall resume the discussion of ancient Semitic philology's relevance to the meaning of *rajim* and attempt to demonstrate that while the ancient connotations of the root *r-g-m* only endured in the Hebrew Bible through the root *r-g-n*, elsewhere in the Semitic world and in much later periods the root *r-g-m* retained its ancient (specifically Akkadian) meaning.

A second stray option comes from Qur'anic intertextuality. The Qur'an appears to explain the meaning of *rajim* on two occasions. In both God asks Satan (*Iblis*) to bow before Adam and in each case he refuses, on account of his [delusions of] superiority. Q 15:33-35 reads, "[Satan] said:

I am not going to prostrate myself unto a mortal whom You have created out of potter's clay of black mud altered! [God] said: Then go forth from hence, for verily you are rajim. And lo! the curse shall be upon you till the Day of Judgment." In Q 38:76-78 we hear a slightly different account: "[Satan] said: I am better than him. You created me of fire, while him You created of clay. [God] said: Go forth from hence, for lo! you are ralim. And lo! My curse is on you till the Day of Judgment." (40) The pattern of these two passages is (1) Satan refuses to bow because he feels superior to Adam; (2) God evicts him from heaven; and (3) God tells Satan that he is rajim. (41) The intertext comes in Q 7:12-13: "[God] said: What hindered you that you did not fall prostrate when I bade you? [Satan] said: I am better than him. You created me of fire while him you created of mud. [God] said: Then go down hence! It is not for you to show pride here, so go forth! Lo! you are of those degraded (innaka min al-saghirin)." In this case, the pattern is (1) Satan refuses to bow because he feels superior to Adam; (2) God evicts him from heaven; and (3) God tells Satan that he is "of those degraded." According to this, and assuming that the Qur'an is being consistent in its message, rajim is synonymous with "degraded." (42) Another reading of the intertexts might imply that rafim simply means "outcast." which conforms to the context, the root's meaning "to hurl" or "to throw," and the passive form of the word. Hence, al-shaytan al-rajim would mean "Satan, the one who was thrown [out of heaven]." (43) The use of intertexts to fine-tune our understanding of the term rajim undoubtedly contributes to our understanding of the Qur'an's own interpretation of the phrase. And while the intertexts do not shed light on the original meaning of the root r-j-m (as applied to Satan), it does demonstrate that the Qur'an itself may be employing this root with different meanings, in one case (Q 67:5) opting for the meaning of "pelted" and in the other cases preferring "degraded." possibly "outcast." This tallies well with the fact that even among Near Eastern monotheists on the eve of Islam the term was not being used consistently when applied to Satan.

A third stray option comes from the Biblical book of Zechariah, usually dated to the late sixth century B.C.E. Chapter 3 begins as follows:

And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing
before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at
his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said unto
Satan: "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan, yea, the Lord
that has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you; is not this man
a brand plucked out of the fire?"

In this context. Satan is a prosecutor or an "accuser" in the heavenly court whose aim is to bring a man's faults and imperfections (in this case, those of the high priest Joshua) to God's attention. God's formula to ward Satan off is "The Lord rebuke (gaar) you, O Satan!," this being the formula that Satan in the BT is said to have recommended to Pelimo (in preference to "an arrow in Satan's eyes!"). The connection between g-'r and r-j-m is tentative at best, (44) though "Satan the rebuked one" would suit the meaning of rajim in context, (45) and is close in meaning to the Ethiopic option of "accursed." Although this is the weakest of the stray options its importance is that it brings to our attention the corpus of texts through which Satan's "essential" character and the meaning of his fixed late antique "surname" will become clear to us.

RAJIM MEANING "ACCUSER"

Satan first appears on the scene in the Bible, though his character is clearly indebted to ancient Near Eastern precedents. (46) Two Biblical passages from roughly the same period introduce Satan to monotheists: Zechariah 3 and Job 1-2. Zechariah's laconic description of Satan, referred to above, is fleshed out in considerable detail in the book of Job, where Job is said to have been "wholehearted and upright, who feared God, and who shunned evil" (Job 1:1). His devotion to God is detailed in the opening verses of the book (1:2-5), followed by Satan's entrance. The passage (1:6-12) reads as follows:

Now it happened one day that the sons of God (beney ha-'elohim)

came to present themselves before God and Satan was among them. And God said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" To which Satan replied, "From to-ing and fro-ing in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." And God said to Satan, "Have you noticed [my servant] Job, that there is none like him in the land, a whole-hearted, upright man who fears God and shuns evil?" And Satan answered God, saying, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not made a hedge around him and around his house, and around all his possessions, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions are plentiful in the land. But [if] You put forth Your hand and harm (lit, touch) all that he has, surely he will curse You to Your face!" And God said to Satan, "Behold! All that he has is in your power; [the] only [rule is that you must] refrain from sending your hand against him." So Satan went off.

This is followed by repeated tests that Satan visited upon Job, with the intention of tripping him up and causing him to curse God. Despite increasingly challenging circumstances visited upon Job by Satan, Job passes the tests.

A number of important points emerge from the Job (and Zechariah) descriptions of Satan. First, Satan is man's accuser, who seeks to prove to God that even the best of mankind is essentially selfish and unworthy of God's praise. Second, Satan is part of the heavenly assembly--he is one of the "sons of God," who stands to the right of a defendant in God's court. Third, Satan's "powers" come from God Himself, who gives him permission to test mankind, and sets the rules of engagement. Finally, unlike Zoroastrianism's Ahriman, Satan is not inherently evil. He is God's legal functionary, a heavenly district attorney, as it were. Eventually Satan does, of course, "fall," but this, too, implies that he began from a height. Moreover, the Job context suggests that although Satan's occupation as accuser means that he acts brutally and unfavorably towards man, it is through God's goading that he takes the case ("Have you noticed the incomparably pious Job?" ...). Satan did fall, but he could easily argue that God pushed him.

In the centuries following the composition of Job and Zechariah (47) historical developments chiseled Satan into the personification of evil that is familiar to us. The Babylonian exile is said to have played a central role in these developments in two ways: first, the destruction of the temple and dispersal of the Jews raised the theodicy issue in people's minds. Bad things happened to people all the time, because people sinned all the time. But when bad things happen to the entire Jewish nation, and when God's house is destroyed, solutions are sought elsewhere, which brings us to the second role played by the Babylonian exile. Living in Iraq--Iran, Jews during this period came to be exposed to the dualistic ideas that are at the center of Iranian religions. There are good forces and bad forces that are locked in constant combat. Satan in this context came to represent the bad forces and all that is evil in the world is to be attributed to him. Thus, in 2 Sam 24:1 we are told: "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He incited David ... to count the people." Yet in 1 Chr 21:1, written in the post-exilic period, we read that "Satan stood up against Israel and incited David to count the people." (48) Evil actions that had previously been attributed to God were now shifted to Satan. Similarly, although in Genesis (22:1) it is God who tested Abraham and called on him to sacrifice his son Isaac, in the book of Jubilees (17:15-18) it is Satan (Mastemah) who does so. (49) By the time the New Testament was written, Satan was the personification of evil, the chaos monster, the serpent of Eden, and the archenemy of Christ. (50) And certainly by the time the Qur'an was written Satan's association with evil was cemented in the minds of the Near East's inhabitants. Hence, whereas Job blames God Himself for his afflictions (Job 19), in the Qur'anic retelling of the story (Q 38:41-44) it is Satan who is blamed for these afflictions.

And yet, Satan's original function as an accuser in the heavenly court was retained in three ways. First, the terms used to describe him in late antiquity were usually related to Satan's lawyer-like credentials. The Greek translation of Satan, *diabolos*, means "accuser"; (51) one of the New

Testament's terms for Satan, Beelzebub, is derived from the Akkadian *bel dababi*, meaning "prosecutor"; (52) a rabbinic nickname for Satan, *qator* (alternatively, *meqatreg*), comes from the Greek for "accuser" (53) and the phrase *satan meqatreg* "an accusing Satan" occurs frequently in rabbinic sources; (54) and, finally, in the Peshitta, the Syriac translation of *diabolos* is *ake1qarse*, (55) from an Akkadian phrase meaning "accuser." Since my investigation is primarily into the origins of Satan's nomenclature in the Qur'an, it is surely pivotal that Satan was frequently dubbed "the accuser" in late antique monotheistic circles.

Second, there are indirect references to Satan's being adversarial scattered throughout late antique literature. Thus, in *Genesis Rabba* ([section]20) it is stated that the serpent of Eden "is prepared with answers," demonstrating that Satan was still portrayed as a lawyer-like figure with a sharp tongue. Similarly, virtually all accounts of Satan's fall--in Greek, Latin, Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic, Hebrew, and Arabic--depict Satan less as an obstinate rebel against God and more as a misguided lawyer. (56) When God (or, in some versions, the archangel Michael) orders Satan to bow down to Adam, Satan does not object because he hates or rejects God, but because he thinks that the rules of seniority or superiority are not being applied properly. In some versions he objects on the grounds that he is made of fire, which is superior to the clay or mud from which Adam was fashioned; in other versions he protests that he was created before Adam and hence is senior to him. Why should the older figure show respect to the younger one? This is a particularly valid question in a Near Eastern legal context, where the first-born son is entitled to inheritance advantages over his younger siblings. (57) Many stories in the Pentateuch represent God's flouting of the Near Eastern laws of inheritance by favoring the latter-born over the first-born: Shem over his brothers; Isaac over Ishmael; Jacob over Esau; Joseph over his brothers; and so forth. In other words, much as we might not like to admit it, Satan has a pretty good case. (58)

In fact, Satan's accusatory nature can be detected in all references to his mischief, even the Qur'anic accounts of his fall. The Job context is crucial here as it serves as the basis for all later accounts of the fall, and for later characterizations of Satan as a "deceiver," "destroyer," or "tempter." As mentioned, in Job God shows his servant off to Satan and baits the latter to find fault in such a pious man, in the context of Satan's role as accuser. To prove that man cannot in fact be as blameless as God holds Job to be, Satan causes trouble in Job's world, and seeks to lead him astray. Job perseveres and Satan loses the case. But his role as accuser continues throughout history: in the BT alone we hear of Satan opposing the granting of the Torah to Moses, on account of mankind's imperfections, (59) and of Satan arguing with God against Abraham, saying that the latter did not offer God a sacrifice when given a son in old age, (60) among other examples. (61) The Talmudic rabbis were aware of the relationship between Satan's primary function as accuser of man in the heavenly court, and his secondary function as tempter and deceiver of man in an attempt to build a case against him. In their words: "Satan (62) seduces us in this world and accuses in the next." (63)

That Satan's role is to tempt man in order to gather evidence against him is actually supported by the Qeanic accounts of Satan's fall. (64) After God evicts Satan from heaven and declares him to be *rajim*, Satan requests that God delay His punishment so that Satan can prove his case by tempting mankind to sin. Satan argues that he will succeed in swindling all but God's most loyal servants; God argues that Satan will only succeed in winning over the small number of rebellious people. As in the book of Job, Satan and God have placed their bets. The rest of history, with life's ups and downs, is the heavenly wager acted out: Satan is trying to win the bet by leading us astray, and--not being privy to the bet--mankind is only aware of Satan's evil machinations. It is only through scripture and other religious literature that ordinary people are exposed to the bigger picture and made aware of the fact that Satan's essential function is as an accuser in God's court.

One such account is the book of 3 Enoch, or *Sefer Hekhalot*, (65) which dates from ca. the sixth century C.E. and brings us to the third way in which Satan's basic role as a heavenly accuser was retained up to the eve of Islam. (66) This work purports to describe the circumstances of Enoch's journey to heaven. When Enoch was raised up by God, three malevolent angels objected to his elevation; as Enoch tells us:

Then three of the ministering angels, 'Uzza, 'Azza, and Aza'el, (67) came and laid charges (hayu mastinim) against me in the heavenly height. They said before the holy one, blessed be He, "Lord of the Universe, did not the primeval ones give you good advice when they said, Do not create man!?" The holy one, blessed be He, replied, "I have made him and will sustain him." ... [The angels objected] "What right has he to be in heaven?" Again the holy one, blessed be He, replied, ... "I have chosen this one in preference to all of you, to be a prince and a ruler over you in the heavenly heights." (3 Enoch 4:6)

Shortly thereafter, we are told:

Thereupon the ministering angels conspired to bring a complaint (qasheru qator) before the holy one, blessed be He. They said in His presence, "Lord of the Universe, what business have You with men?" (3 Enoch 5:10)

Thus, Enoch joins a distinguished list of God-fearing men--a list that includes Adam, Abraham, Moses, and Job--against whom fallen angels raise objections and accusations in the heavenly court. (68) The point is that the objections are to man in general: if the best specimens of mankind are shown to be undeserving of praise/the Torah/elevation/creation, then no human deserves such things.

Satan himself makes an appearance in 3 Enoch, in a context that confirms his identity as man's accuser in the heavenly court. In a passage explaining the name of the seraphim, it is written:

Why is their name called seraphim? Because they burn the tablets of Satan. Every day Satan sits with Samma'e'l, (69) prince of Rome, and with Dubbi'e'l, prince of Persia, and they write down the sins of Israel on tablets and give them to the seraphim to bring them before the holy one, blessed be He, so that He should destroy Israel from the world. But the seraphim know the secrets of the holy one, blessed be He, that He does not desire that this nation of Israel should fall. What, then, do the seraphim do? Every day they take the tablets from Satan's hand and burn them in the blazing fire that stands opposite the high and exalted throne, so that they should not come into the presence of the holy one, blessed be He, when He sits upon the throne of judgment and judges the whole world in truth. (3 Enoch 26:12)

Although there is some confusion between the malevolent angels who bring accusations against Enoch and Satan himself, it is clear that Satan is man's chief accuser, under whom lesser accusers work in the heavenly assembly.

In other words, Satan began his career, in sixth-century B.C.E. Biblical sources, as man's accuser in the heavenly court. In building his case against man, he spends his earthly existence attempting to lead men astray in order to gather evidence against them, for which reason he became associated in the popular mind with temptation and deception. His essential character as an accuser did not, however, change--a fact that is reflected in his many names and epithets, and in direct and indirect descriptions of his accusatory roles throughout antiquity and beyond. Thus, based solely on Satan's role throughout history, and in conformity with the numerous terms meaning "accuser" used by late antique monotheists to describe him, it would be reasonable to suppose that other names or epithets for Satan used by Near Eastern monotheists on the eve of Islam also made reference to his role as an accuser. My investigation into the original meaning of al-shaytan al-rajim would thus reach a satisfactory conclusion if the root r-j-m meant 'to accuse' in a Semitic language, which is the case.

According to the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (CAD), in Akkadian the verb ragamu has the following six meanings: (1) to call, to call out; (2) to prophesy; (3) to summon, convoke; (4) to lodge a claim, to sue, to bring a legal complaint, to claim something by lawsuit; (5) to sue one another; and (6) to cause someone to bring a complaint. (70) Interestingly, the first meaning is supported by half a column of examples; the second fills one paragraph; the third fills just under one column; the fifth takes up one line; the sixth fills a single paragraph; and the fourth--to us the most relevant meaning--takes up seven columns. This is thus by far the most common use of the verb (and the fifth and sixth meanings are clearly derivatives of it in different verbal patterns or "stems"). On this basis it is not unreasonable to suppose that al-shaytan al-rajim could originally have meant "Satan the accuser."

CONCLUSIONS

Three main points emerge from the foregoing. First, on the eve of Islam (and possibly much earlier), the epithet rgima could be applied to Satan as a fixed "surname," without deliberate reference to the literal meaning of the term. Second, it is very likely that the term's literal meaning was forgotten and reconstructed differently among different peoples in the Near East. Thus, while Christian communities to the south of the Hijaz will have interpreted the phrase as having meant "the accursed Satan," Jews--who continued to repel Satan by throwing things at him--probably understood the phrase to mean "the pelted Satan." The Qur'an itself appears to contain more than one interpretation of al-rajim as applied to Satan(s), preferring "pelted" in one place (Q 67:5) and "degraded" or "outcast" in others. Third, regardless of Satan's evolution from a heavenly prosecutor to the embodiment of evil, his censorious traits were never entirely forgotten among monotheists in the late antique and early Islamic Near East. Furthermore, the existence of an Akkadian derivation for rajim that suits Satan's role as an accuser raises the possibility that this was in fact the original meaning of the phrase al-shaytan al-rajim that was subsequently forgotten, while in the intervening centuries the phrase circulated in Arabia as a fixed phrase the significance of which was open to interpretation. The precise means by which such an Akkadianism endured in the Arabian peninsula (while it fell out of use elsewhere) cannot be traced with any degree of certainty, (71) but it should be recognized that dozens of Akkadian words have contributed to our understanding of Qur'anic phrases--Jeffery lists some sixty in his work. (72) It is the argument of this article that ragamu should be added to the list.

- (1.) Attempts to distinguish between shaytan and Iblis, by arguing that they play different roles or refer to different aspects of misguidance, are largely unconvincing. Already in the New Testament the terms "Satan" and "Devil" (from the same Greek word, *diabolos*, from which Iblis is derived) could be used side-by-side. Thus, in Rev 12:9 we hear of "the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan," and in Rev 20:2 "the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan." On this, see now W. Bicksler, *Job's Spiritual Journey: The Believer and Rationalist with Questions of God and Man* (Bloomington, 2009), 485: "In the NT Satanas and Diabolos can refer to the same supernatural being (Rev 20: 2) and can thus be interchanged (Mk 1: 13 and Lk 4: 2)." Those who argue for a distinction in the Qur'an between the two characters focus on the QuPan's own usage of these terms--nine of the eleven references to *ib/is* concern his refusal to bow to Adam. For this argument see, most recently, G.S. Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext* (London, 2010), 40, 54.
- (2.) On two occasions the phrase is used in the indefinite, viz., *kull shayan rajim* (Q 15:17; 81:25).
- (3.) "[rajm] signifies The throwing, or casting of stones: this is its primary meaning." E. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1863), s.v. *r-j-m*. There is, however, no consensus on the issue and early exegetes also proposed "cursed" (*martin*), an interpretation of *rajim* that--as will be seen below--came to be preferred by some leading modern scholars. On the meaning of this phrase in *tafsir* literature, see now Reynolds, *Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*. 54ff.
- (4.) This, at least, is the most common explanation for the rite offered in traditional sources. On this, and on some alternative explanations proposed by Muslim exegetes, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition* (Leiden, 1960-2004), s.v. *Rajm* (T Fahd), esp. 8: 380b.
- (5.) J. Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough: Reconstructing Arabian Myth* (Bloomington, 2000), 41-49; G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, part 6: *The Scapegoat* (3rd ed., London, 1913; rpt 1980, cited after rpt). 8-30, esp. 24.
- (6.) Already al-Tabari makes the connection between Abu Righal's grave and the *ramy al-jamarat* (*Tafsir al-Tabari: Jami al-bayan fi tafsir ay al-Qur'an* [Cairo, 1954-69], 25: 167).
- (7.) Stetkevych, *Golden Bough*, 41-42; al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l-muluk* (Leiden, 1879-190.1). 1: 937 (and see C. E. Bosworth, *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. 5: *The Sasanids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen* [New York, 1999], 223 n. 552).
- (8.) On the possible connection between the stoning of Satan and the Jewish *tashlikh* ceremony, see A. Silverstein. "Parallels between Some Jewish and Islamic Rituals." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* (forthcoming).
- (9.) See below, re. 2 Sam 16:5-6. 13.
- (10.) It should be noted that stoning was used as a form of capital punishment in the ancient Near East and in Islamic law. In the Bible death-by-stoning is stipulated using both the roots *s-q-l* (e.g., Ex 19:13. 21:28; Deur 13:11. 17:5, 21:21, 22:21) and *r-g-m* (e.g., Lev 20:2. 20:27, 24:16; Num 15:35). However, although the rabbis accepted stoning as one of four legitimate methods of capital punishment, the technical term they use for it is from the *s-q-l* root (*segila*). In Islamic law, the technical term for stoning as a form of capital punishment (for *zina*) uses the root *r-j-m*. All this being said, there is no evidence--from either ancient Near Eastern sources or Islamic ones--for stoning Satan as a form of capital punishment.
- (11.) Strictly speaking this verse (as well as Q 37:6-7 quoted in the following note) speaks of *satans* (*shayatin*), which may compromise the relevance of such references to arguments about Satan. Be this as it may, the physical pelting of Satan (or *satans*) may also have Biblical precedents. Note that in Isa 14:12ff. "Hillel ben Shahar," whose name is tantalizingly translated in the Vulgate as "lucifer" (though the association of the name Lucifer with Satan is much later), is said to have fallen from heaven in terms clearly evocative of Satan's fall in the Judeo-Christian tradition. On the Near Eastern context of these accounts, see P. D. Hanson. "Rebellion in Heaven. Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6-11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 195-233.
- (12.) Also relevant is Q 37:6-7: "Lo! We have adorned the lowest heaven with an ornament, the planets; With security from every rebellious Satan."
- (13.) On this point, see P. J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Mills in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden, 1983), 38.
- (14.) Q 16:98-99: "When you recite the Qur'an, seek refuge in God against *al-thanytan al-rajim*. Indeed, he does not have authority over those who have faith and put their trust in their Lord."
- (15.) E.g., BT Kiddushin, 29b-30a, 81a-b; Menachot, 62a; Sukka 38a.
- (16.) BT Kiddushin 81a.
- (17.) *Ibid.*, 81b. The term for Satan in this instance is *yesser ha-ra*, or "the evil inclination." The identification with Satan is unmistakable, both from other rabbinic sources and from the context in the Talmud itself; this episode is related immediately following other accounts of rabbis' interactions with Satan. And note that already in the NT Satan can be referred to simply as "the evil one" (*ho poneros*, Mt 13:19) or "the tempter" (*ho peirazon*, Mt 4:3). Other Talmudic parallels for the *isti'adha* may be found in BT Berachot 16b and 46a.
- (18.) I am not aware of any treatment of this topic that makes use of the Talmudic materials cited above.

- (19.) Friedrich Ruckert (*Der Koran: Im Auszuge ubersetzt von Friedrich Ruckert*, ed. A. Muller [Frankfurt, 1888], 440) was probably the first to suggest an Ethiopic derivation, and Theodor Noldeke (*Neue Beitrage zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* [Strassburg, 1910], 25, 47) popularized the theory. For a thorough overview of this argument, see now Reynolds. *Qur'an and It's Biblical Subtext*. 54-63.
- (20.) The fact that Biblical exegetes have long associated the serpent of Eden with Satan is particularly significant. The root r-g-m is also used in the Ethiopic rendering of Mt 25:41, with reference to the casting of the condemned into the fire with the devil.
- (21.) For this phrase, see A. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an* (Baroda, 1938), 140; K. Ahrens, "Christliches im Koran: Eine Nachlese," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 84 (1930): 39; and, most recently, Reynolds. *Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, 54ff. The dating of these references, however, is problematic and it can be argued that it is the Qur'anic usage that influenced the Ethiopic rather than vice versa. We shall see an example of this below in which the Qur'anic phrase most probably influenced the reference to satana rgima in the Mandaic Ginza Raba.
- (22.) F. Rosenthal, "Some Minor Problems in the Qur'an," in *The Joshua Starr Memorial Volume: Studies in History and Philology* (New York, 1953), 83; Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 139-40; S. D. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), 77; M. Kropp, "Der athiopische Satan = saytan und seine koranischen Auslaufer; mit einer Bemerkung uber verbales Steinigen." *Oriens Christianus* 89 (2005); 93-102.
- (23.) On this, see W. Bishai, "A Possible Coptic Source for a Qur'anic Text." *JAOS* 91 (1971): 125-28.
- (24.) Cf., e.g., John of Ephesus (d. 586), *Lives of Eastern Saints*, 1: 101 (ed. Brooks, PO 17.1), where it is stated wa-b-hermawhy nergum 'enun ("with his curses he will curse--r-g-m--them").
- (25.) The Qur'an itself (Q 24:3) uses the root r-m-y in the context of accusation, as in yarmuna l-muhsinat. And note that while the Semitic root r-m-y I r-m-h denotes in Arabic "throwing," in Hebrew it refers to "cheating" or "lying." (This point was drawn to my attention by Joseph Witztum.)
- (26.) It is interesting, but probably ultimately irrelevant, that in the same context David's advisor Avishai suggests that the king punish Shimei, to which David responds. "What have I to do with you ... that you should today become a Satan to me?" (2 Sam 19:22).
- (27.) Passive MI is discussed in W. Wright. *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (3rd ed., Cambridge, 1991). 136. Although the form is not alwar, passive in Arabic, it is worth noting that fa'ila is normally passive in Syriac, which might also bear relevance for the meaning of Qur'anic words.
- (28.) The name "Satan" itself underwent just such a development, beginning as it did as a Hebrew noun (whose meaning was probably "obstacle" or "adversary"--cf. Num 22:21) and eventually becoming "fixed" as the name of an accuser of man. Thus, in the NT we find for Satan both a literal translation meaning "accuser" (Gk. diabolos), as well as the fixed term "(holsatanas" (which has no meaning in Greek). On this, see Bicksler. *Job's Spiritual Journey*, 485-90. For a similar fluidity in the use of Satan's synonyms among Jews in the Second Temple period, see M. Mach's statement: "the principal question of whether Mastemah is used as a personal name or as an abstract noun in the Qumran literature as well as in Jubilees is debated" ("Demons," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. L. H. Schiffman and J. C. Vanderkam [Oxford. 2000]. 1: 191).
- (29.) E. M. Yamauchi, *Mandaic Incantation Texts* (New Haven, 1967), 226-29 ([section]), 272-75 ([section]27). It should be noted that Yamauchi renders the term as "stoned," though this translation makes little sense in the context, where "evil mouths" are "muzzled" (blima) and "stoned" (rgima). It seems more likely that rgima is being used here as a fixed phrase referring to adverse powers.
- (30.) See M. Lidzbarski, *Ginza: Der Schatz oder Das grofBe Buch der Mandaer* (Gottingen. 1925), 17 n. 2.
- (31.) In S. Ephraemi Syri: *Rabulae episcopi Edesseni I Balaei aliorumque opera selecta e codicibus Syriacis manuscriptis in Museo Britannico et Bibliotheca Bodleiana asservatis primus*, ed. J. J. Overbeck, 131 l. 11, where it is stated, "Depart from the wilderness. O danala rgima!" Previously in the text (l. 6) daggala appears without rgima.
- (32.) Daggala is obviously a cognate of Ar. dajjal, and probably the origin of both the term and the concept in early Islam. In Syriac it has connotations of deception and is often used in conjunction with msiha, meaning the false messiah or anti-Christ. Though not a precise synonym of Satan, the semantic and theological relationships between Satan and the anti-Christ require little explanation.
- (33.) E.g., A. VOObus, *A Letter of Ephrem to the Mountaineers: A Literary Critical Contribution to Syriac Patristic Literature* (Pinneberg/Hamburg, 1947), who takes a "maximalist" view on the text and sees it as authentically Ephrem, which would put it in the fourth century C.E.
- (34.) It could also be argued that the Qur'an sought to reinterpret the term intentionally (just as it occasionally reinterprets the characters or careers of pre-Islamic figures), though there is no reason to think that it was doing so in this case as there is no discernable polemical motivation for arguing that Satan was pelted rather than accused.
- (35.) See supra, nn. 19 and 22, respectively.

- (36.) Rosenthal, "Some Minor Problems," 83-84. The first two (of the three) problems are the phrases *an yadin* and *al-samad*--his comments on both of these have been pursued by scholars, indicating that the article was not ignored.
- (37.) A. Rippin, "Devil," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden, 2001-2006), 1: 526.
- (38.) *Beli'al* was one of Satan's names in the Second Temple period, and Satan was widely believed to have been made of fire. Cf. M. Mach, "Demons" (*supra*, n. 28), 190-91.
- (39.) *Midrash Bereshith Rahba*, ed. J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck (Jerusalem, 1996), 1: 182-83 ([section]20b).
- (40.) Translations from the Quran are modified from M. M. Pickthall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York, 1930).
- (41.) The fact that in both texts God tells Satan that the curse shall be upon him until the day of judgment after He has told him that he is *rajim* may be crucial if God's second statement is taken as a gloss on *rajim* (*viz.*, "you are *rajim* accursed!" and the curse shall be upon you. ."), as such a reading would lend considerable support to the argument that *rajim* is from the Ethiopic For "accursed." However, the syntax of the texts does not support the idea that this second statement is a gloss.
- (42.) Interestingly, the traditional etymology given for *Iblis* is that it is from *ublisa* ('he was made wretched'). This etymology is transparently popular, and a derivation from *diabolos* is widely accepted. Cf. G. S. Reynolds, "A Reflection on Two Quranic Words (*Iblis* and *Judi*), with Attention to the Theories of A. Mingana," *JAOS* 124 (2004): 680-82.
- (43.) This is the interpretation favored by Reynolds. *Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, 54-63.
- (44.) The theory that tri-literal Semitic roots were originally bi-literal makes the *g-'r / r-j-m* connection thinkable at all, but the complete metathesis, coupled with the existence of much closer cognates in *r-g-n* and *r-g-m*, makes this option all but impossible on linguistic grounds.
- (45.) The prayer recited by the synagogue cantor before the "additional" prayer (*mussaf*) on Yom Kippur includes the verse "Rebuke Satan (*tig'ar ba-satan*), that he may not accuse me!," which attests to the longevity of this particular formula.
- (46.) The origins of the Biblical Satan have been debated--inconclusively--for centuries. For ancient Near Eastern connections, see N. Forsythe, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton, 1987); for the Judeo-Christian context, see E. Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (London, 1995). For a recent discussion of the topic that moreover focuses on the Arabian ritual of "stoning the Devil" during the *hajj*, see Silverstein, "Parallels between Some Jewish and Islamic Rituals."
- (47.) See also Ps 109, which describes Satan's role as an accuser.
- (48.) Census-taking was explicitly prohibited, for which reason it was deemed reprehensible.
- (49.) It is unclear why testing Abraham was seen as being too evil for God to have undertaken, especially considering that by the time Jubilees was written the (happy) outcome was known.
- (50.) Cf., e.g., Rev 12: 9, 20: 2.
- (51.) From the Greek *diahallein*, 'to slander, attack, accuse'. See now G. S. Reynolds, "Two Quranic Words," 680-82. And note that Haman, for his role as an (earthly) accuser of the Jewish nation (as he argues to Ahasweros that the Jews should be punished for being different), is dubbed *diabolos* in the Greek versions of the Book of Esther.
- (52.) S. Kaufmann, *The Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* (Chicago, 1975), 42-43. The figure of the *bet dabahi*, who appears in Babylonian legal texts as both a terrestrial and a celestial accuser/prosecutor, is of some relevance here, not least because scholars from the nineteenth century onward have occasionally seen in this character the precursor to the Biblical figure of Satan. On this, see E. Schrader, *Die Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament*, ed. H. Zimmern and H. Winckler (3rd ed., Berlin, 1902-1903), 461ff.
- (53.) *Jerusalem Talmud*. *Berachot* 1:1, and *Shabbat* 2:6; and *Genesis Rabba*, 38:7. In the New Testament, *kategor* is used of Satan in Rev 12:10 ("And I heard a loud voice saying in Heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night").
- (54.) Cf. A. Kohut, *Aruch Completum* (Vienna, 1878-1892), s.v. *qetigor*.
- (55.) Kaufmann, *Akkadian Influences*. s.v. *akelqars e*.
- (56.) See the versions of Satan's fall in G. Anderson and M. Stone, eds., *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve* (2nd ed., Atlanta, 1999). To these accounts may be added the sixth-century Coptic text "Encomium of Theodosius," in E. A. Wallis Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London, 1915), 904-6, where Satan reverts to numerous (mostly reasonable) arguments in support of his contention that he should not have to bow to Adam.
- (57.) Cf. R. Westbrook, ed., *A History of Near Eastern Law* (Leiden, 2003), *passim*. Virtually all Near Eastern legal systems covered by Westbrook grant a first-born son inheritance advantages.

(58.) Taking this to something of an extreme, in Sufi circles it came to be argued that Satan refused to bow down to Adam on account of his uncompromising monotheism (cf. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*). Satan's logic is echoed in the New Testament, where in Matthew (4:10) Satan asks Jesus to bow down to him and Jesus says, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'worship the Lord your God and serve only Him'."

(59.) BT Shabbat 88b-89a; and Sanhedrin 26b.

(60.) BT Sanhedrin 89b.

(61.) In BT Sanhedrin 38a--b, "the angels" object to the creation of man on account of man's future sins (e.g., building the Tower of Babel, among others).

(62.) The term used here is *yesser ha-ra'* (lit, the evil inclination: see above, n. 17).

(63.) BT Sukka 52b. Their comment is slightly wide of the mark; rather than distinguishing between this world and the next, they should distinguish between Salmi's functions on earth and his functions in heaven.

(64.) Q 7:10-18; 15:26-43; 17:61-65; 18:50; 38:71-83.

(65.) For the Hebrew text, see H. Odenberg, ed., *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch* (New York, 1973: orig. ed. Cambridge, 1928): for the translation, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction by P. Alexander," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. I: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (New York, 1983), 223-315.

(66.) P. S. Alexander. "The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 28 (1977): 156-80.

(67.) These angels are known from other sources to be "fallen" angels, associated with Satan. On their identity and relationship to Satan, see A. Y. Reed, "From Asael and Semihazah to Uzzah, Azzah, and Azazel: 3 Enoch 5 ([section][section]7-8) and Jewish Reception-History of I Enoch," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 8 (2001). On the fallen angels in the Qur'an, see now P. Crone, "The Book of Watchers in the Qur'an," in *Exchange and Transmission across Cultural Boundaries: Philosophy, Mysticism and Science in the Mediterranean*, ed. H. Ben-Shammai, Sh. Shaked, and S. Stroumsa (Jerusalem, forthcoming).

(68.) Even the angels' accusations are the same: in 3 Enoch 6:2ff, they are heard to say, "What is this smell of one born of a woman? Why does a white drop ascend on high and serve among those who cleave the flames?" God's reply echoes his description of Job: "This one whom I have removed from them is the choicest of them all and worth them all in faith, righteousness, and fitting conduct."

(69.) Elsewhere in 3 Enoch Samma'el is described as being "the prince of the accusers (*sar ha-mastinim*), who is greater than all the princes of kingdoms that are in the height" (14:2).

(70.) The *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (Chicago, 1999). 14: 62-67. s.v. *ragamu*. As seen above. Rosenthal did consider the Akkadian option: in the last paragraph of his article he writes, "Or *Rajim* might even be 'slander=diabolos'" ("Some Minor Problems," 84). As Rosenthal was writing in the early 1950s he was unable to take advantage of subsequent developments in Assyriology and he did not pursue in any detail the possibility that *rajim* might originally have meant "slanderer."

(71.) It is, for instance, possible that the Akkadianism was initially reinterpreted among South Arabian Christians as meaning "accursed" and this usage subsequently found its way into the Qur'an. One might also consider the possibility that Akkadianisms found their way into Arabia with the neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus, who in the mid-sixth century B.C.E. spent a considerable period in Tayma', an oasis some 400 km to the north of Medina. For a case-study of an ancient Near Eastern survival in Arabia, see P. Crone and A. Silverstein, "The Ancient Near East and Islam: The Case of Lot-Casting," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 55 (2010): 423-50.

(72.) Jeffery. *Foreign Vocabulary*, 298.

Author's note: This article is based on a paper presented at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, and at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Jerusalem. I would like to thank the audiences at both institutes for their helpful input. Christopher Melchert read a draft of the written version of the paper and made very useful comments on it, for which I am most grateful, as I am for the comments of the JAOS readers.