

**JEWISH APOCALYPTIC LORE IN EARLY ISLAM:
RECONSIDERING KA'B AL-AḤBĀR**

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A potentially fruitful way whereby one can map the cultural interactions among a variety of religious communities of the Near East is to identify and isolate those common interests and shared modes of expression they articulate in their surviving writings and material remains. One feature which several of these religious systems demonstrably share is an intense fixation on and sometimes even an ethnic association with what one might tentatively term an ‘Abrahamic lexicon’ of signs, an admittedly awkward label for verbal, physical, and behavioral expressions of perceived ethnic (Jewish, Muslim) or conceptual (Christian, Manichaean, gnostic) affiliations with prominent characters, locales, practices, and ideas found in and promoted by the various forms of Bible and its affiliated literatures. I would argue that the rubric ‘Abrahamic lexicon’ is preferable to familiar concrete labels like ‘Bible’ or vague ones like ‘written scripture’ because it semantically embraces *every* form of discourse that employs or references characters, places, practices, or ideas that are narratologically associated with Abraham, his forbears, and/or his descendants without granting a temporal priority or canonical privilege to any particular collection of such stories or traditions. ‘Leveling’ the field of study in this way defuses the import and even the relevance of older categorical assumptions about relative age, orthodoxy, and formal religious boundaries. Familiar canonical scriptural works like Jewish Tanakh, the varying Christian Bibles, and Qur’ān all manipulate textual data derived from an Abrahamic lexicon, as do too the massive collections of apocryphal and extra-scriptural works, the rich stores of patriarchal and prophetic legends, and the supplementary commentaries which Jews, Christians, Muslims, and other cognate communities created and used during late antiquity to augment and interpret their respective canons and to forge successively their separate religious identities.

As at least one scholar has suggested, a deeper understanding of the historical and ideological development of the distinct religions we now differentiate by labels like ‘Judaism,’ ‘Christianity,’ ‘Manichaeism,’ and ‘Islam’ might be achieved by viewing them through the lens of a linguistic model; that is, by studying these religions as variant ‘dialects’ which emerge out of a common ‘language’ or core discourse.¹ I would like to bolster that suggestion by observing that an ‘Abrahamic lexicon’ forms the common parlance that undergirds and connects each of these disparate dialect communities.² In other words, Judaism, Christianity, Manichaeism, and Islam represent variant forms of expression and articulation which arise from the preservation, promulgation, or even imposition of distinctive readings and physical realizations of an underlying Abrahamic discourse. If the argument is cogent, it implies that this base discourse gained a widespread hegemony in the Near Eastern world of late antiquity.³ It captured and engaged the hearts and minds of a wide swathe of population groups and intellectual circles, and it stimulated the production and dissemination of a huge corpus of ‘scriptures’ and interpretive literatures consciously exploiting, adapting, and reconfiguring their common substrate in a host of divergent directions. Devoting close attention to the ways in which this Abrahamic idiom is transmitted, articulated, manipulated, modified, and transformed both within and across formal religious boundaries should shed a bright light on the manifold interactions among a number of Near Eastern religions in late antiquity. It may also help illuminate the social contexts that fostered and nurtured their communal relationships, whether irenic or hostile.

In order to advance our understanding of these ideological and social interrelationships, we should perhaps focus initially upon certain conceptual aspects of this seemingly brisk textual commerce and

¹ See Daniel Boyarin, “Semantic Differences; or “Judaism”/“Christianity”,” in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 65-85. Boyarin does not address categories like ‘Manichaeism’ or ‘Islam,’ but I think his argument can be expanded to include all those religious identities which appeal in some way to ‘biblical’ lexemes.

² Note the remarks about ‘semiotic elements held in common’ and the references supplied by Thomas Sizgorich, “Narrative and Community in Islamic Late Antiquity,” *Past and Present* 185 (2004): 11-12, 19-20. The same author has also stated: ‘... [early Muslim scholars] regularly elaborated upon a *koinê* of signs, symbols, and narrative forms with which the other communities of late antiquity had for centuries contested questions of divine revelation, prophetic legitimacy, communal integrity and eruptions of the numinous into the lived experience of individuals and communities ...’ Quoted from his *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 13.

³ Reinforcing this impression is the observation that non-Abrahamic religions (Graeco-Egyptian hermeticism; Ḥarrānian Šābianism; Zoroastrianism) are sometimes compelled to express themselves to outsiders in an Abrahamic idiom.

attempt to retrace some of the paths by which an Abrahamic based idiom germinated, flourished, and then spread to become a kind of religious *lingua franca* during late antiquity. A promising avenue of inquiry involves the close study of the transmission histories of the diverse lore and legendry surrounding key scriptural characters and popular narrative motifs in order to catalog their distinctive features and to chart the movement of integral tales and themes among Near Eastern Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and gnostic communities during the middle centuries and over the latter half of the first millennium of the Common Era. Scholars are certainly cognizant of this wide inter-religious diffusion of ‘scripturally’ affiliated personalities, episodes, and motifs, but they have rarely moved beyond stock explanations which posit ‘borrowings’ or ‘influences’ along linear trajectories and have moreover offered few compelling comparative studies to back up their claims.⁴ Furthermore, almost no one has approached this question of a shared conceptual heritage from the novel interpretive perspective of a ‘common lexicon’ that is voiced, inscribed, and subtly manipulated by distinct and frequently hostile religious communities.

The situation posed by early Islam may prove instructive as a case study for exploring some of the cultural ramifications of a posited common idiom. Early Muslim commentators and traditionists embed and amplify the characters and themes referenced in the Qur’ān within a rich layer of interpretive illustration, much of which demonstrably overlaps with types of Abrahamic discourse visible in Jewish midrash, Christian apocryphal tales, and Manichaean prophetology. For Islam, the figure of Abraham himself assumes a signal importance: the notion of Abraham as an exemplary *ḥanīf* and the concomitant idea of a primal *millat* (or *dīn*) *Ibrāhīm* as connotative of the religious service rendered by the truly pious are rhetorical tropes that are heavily exploited in Muslim literature. But perhaps most important for our purposes is the singling out of certain early traditionists as renowned exponents of so-called *isrā’īliyyāt* (‘Jewish stuff’),⁵ a treasure trove of exegetical and legendary lore from which later chroniclers, commentators, and anthologists such as Ṭabarī, Tha’labī, and Kisā’ī assemble and compose histories, ‘tales of the prophets’ collections, and scriptural commentaries, and wherein these stories and explanations achieve a measure of normative status.

⁴ Notable exceptions to this all too common tendency in the secondary literature are Brannon M. Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 1-9; Michael E. Pregill, “The Hebrew Bible and the Quran: The Problem of the Jewish ‘Influence’ on Islam,” *Religion Compass* 1:6 (2007): 643-59.

⁵ My rendering of “les choses israélites,” which comes in turn from Ignaz Goldziher, “Mélanges judéo-arabes,” *Revue des études juives* 44 (1902): 65.

One of the more intriguing of these alleged mediators is the enigmatic Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, bearing the *kunya* Abū Ishāq, and reportedly a Jewish convert to Islam hailing from the Yemenite kingdom of Ḥimyar.⁶ Biographical details fleshing out this figure are frustratingly sparse.⁷ The name ‘Ka‘b’ is widely viewed as a hypocoristic of the forenames ‘Jacob’ or ‘Aqiba,’ and the qualifier ‘al-Aḥbār’ is usually explained as indicative of his formal status as a *ḥaver* or learned scholar among his erstwhile coreligionists. Supposedly arriving in Medīna shortly after the death of the Prophet, he quickly impressed the nascent Muslim *umma* with his wide-ranging scriptural and exegetical prowess and won the patronage of the caliph ‘Umar (634-44). He accompanied that caliph to Syria during the military campaigns that produced the conquest of that province and eventually retired to the city of Emesa (Hims), where he reportedly died a few years prior to the ‘great *fitna*’ (i.e., civil unrest) associated with the death of the caliph ‘Uthmān (d. 656). A gravestone bearing his name is allegedly visible in Damascus to this day.⁸

A number of anecdotes surround the figure of Ka‘b, most of which center upon his reportedly skillful use of Jewish scriptures and aggadic narratives to endorse the divinely sanctioned status of Islam and its Prophet. In tandem with his contemporary ‘Abdallāh b. Salām (d. 663-64) and the later tradent Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 728?), Ka‘b is frequently credited as the originating source for non-scriptural details about the careers and teachings of those authentic prophets who presaged the advent of Muḥammad. Traditions attributed to Ka‘b will sometimes open with language like ‘I found in the Torah ...’ or ‘it is written in the Torah ...,’⁹ incipits which serve to highlight the scripturalist focus of his alleged exegetical virtuosity. According to an oft-repeated legend that circulates in tandem with his purported vita, Ka‘b’s

⁶ It is unclear why Oleg Grabar would identify Ka‘b (in his *The Dome of the Rock* [Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2006], 43) as ‘a major religious and intellectual figure in Palestine.’

⁷ The information about Ka‘b found in the remainder of this paragraph is culled from traditional biographies like that found in Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-ma‘ārif* (2d ed.; ed. Tharwat ‘Ukkāsha; Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1969), 430, and standard modern encyclopaedia entries. Note also Mark Lidzbarski, *De prophetis, quae dicuntur, legendis arabicis: Prolegomena* (Lipsiae: Guilelmi Drugulini, 1893), 31-40; Israel Wolfensohn, *Ka‘b al-Aḥbār und seine Stellung im Ḥadīth und in der islamischen Legendenliteratur* (Gelnhausen: F. W. Kalbfleisch, 1933), 13-35; Reuven Firestone, “Jewish Culture in the Formative Period of Islam,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (ed. David Biale; New York: Schocken, 2002), 291-98. See too the remarkable fictionalized account of Ka‘b’s ‘life’ produced by Kanan Makiya, *The Rock: A Tale of Seventh-Century Jerusalem* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001); I am grateful to Adam Becker for bringing this novel to my attention.

⁸ Note the references provided by M. Schmitz, “Ka‘b al-Aḥbār,” *ET* 4:316-17. There is a pilgrimage guide that places his tomb in Emesa; see Josef W. Meri, “A Late Medieval Syrian Pilgrimage Guide: Ibn al-Ḥawrānī’s *al-Ishārāt ilā Amākin al-Ziyārāt* (Guide to Pilgrimage Places),” *Medieval Encounters* 7 (2001): 73.

⁹ See M. J. Kister, “Ḥaddithū ‘an banī isrā’īla wa-lā ḥaraja: A Study of an Early Tradition,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): 228-29.

belated recognition of Muḥammad and his conversion to Islam was precipitated by his perspicacious ‘rediscovery’ of ten passages which had been deliberately deleted from Jewish (and Christian) scriptures, and from which his father, or alternatively his teachers, had attempted to shield him by mechanical (physical sealing) or didactic measures.¹⁰ By successfully overcoming these posed obstacles, Ka‘b realizes the essentially flawed nature of what was supposedly divine writ grounded within an Abrahamic lexicon of personalities, places, and events. The startling presence of the same ten missing passages in the newly promulgated Qur’ān thus authorizes its primal revelatory value and the divine mission of the Prophet who sponsored it.

For an emergent Islamic discourse, the rhetorical utility of a figure like Ka‘b is obvious. Unlike his erstwhile co-religionists, who either ignorantly or willfully spurn ‘the truth,’ he exemplifies the proper scholastic response to the ‘new’ revelation. He embraces Islam and shows how its message can still be discerned in earlier scripture despite its formal distortion and effacement. He instructs the nascent *umma* and empowers their re-reading of pre-Islamic ‘history’ and ancestral lore through the lens of the Abrahamic lexicon. Nevertheless, as the Islamic discursive tradition matures and attains broader cultural hegemony, the motives of figures like Ka‘b come to be regarded with suspicion by later tradents. This type of attitude is already foregrounded in those stories which surround Ka‘b’s association with the caliph ‘Umar in the post-conquest reclamation of the Jerusalem Temple Mount wherein Ka‘b is accused of deceptively attempting to incorporate reverence toward a Jewish sanctum among the Muslim devotional practices purportedly instituted there.¹¹ Some of Ka‘b’s scriptural exegeses come under fire as alleged instances of ‘judaizing’ and are reprovably rebuked as surreptitious ways of undermining what is being redefined as an authentically Muslim message. This adjustment of Ka‘b’s role from sagacious authorizer to insidious agent may reflect his negative portrayal in non-Muslim accounts about the genesis of Islam. He is especially prominent in certain Jewish and Christian narratives which were constructed to assert the utter falsity of the Islamic enterprise. Ka‘b for example figures among the so-called ‘Jewish teachers of Muhammad’ and is

¹⁰ Moshe Perlmann, “A Legendary Story of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār’s Conversion to Islam,” in *The Joshua Starr Memorial Volume: Studies in History and Philology* (New York: Conference on Jewish Relations, 1953), 85-99; idem, “Another Ka‘b al-Aḥbār Story,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 45 (1954): 48-58.

¹¹ Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh ar-rusul wa-l-mulūk: Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabarī* (15 vols.; ed. M. J. de Goeje; Leiden, 1879-1901; repr., Leiden: Brill, 1964-65), 1/5:2408.9-2409.19; Englished in *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume XII: The Battle of al-Qādisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine* (trans. Yohanan Friedmann; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 194-97.

occasionally accorded a leading role in forging that ‘false scripture’ which comes to be known as the Qur’ān.¹² Like the alleged crypto-Jew Simon Kepha or the title hero in the medieval tale of the ‘Jewish pope,’ Ka‘b is represented as voluntarily committing himself to work with the enemy in order to confound and deflect their threats to Jewish communal integrity.¹³ Christian polemical texts also exploit the figure of Ka‘b, claiming that he was a Jew who deliberately ‘perverted’ biblical and eschatological teachings in order to sanction the prophetic stature of Muḥammad.¹⁴

This latter contextualization of Ka‘b with eschatology and forgery is telling, for it is in the sphere of apocalyptic book lore that the name of Ka‘b comes to have a particular authority. One interesting early tradition associates Ka‘b with the confiscation and domestication of a book recovered from the tomb of Daniel, the biblical figure perhaps most renowned among Jewish and Christian circles for his ‘prophesying future things’:¹⁵ ‘According to Abū’l ‘Āliya: When Tustar¹⁶ was captured, we found in the treasury of Hurmuzān a book by the head of a corpse upon a bier. We supposed that he was Daniel. We bore it to

¹² See Bernard Chapira, “Légendes bibliques attribuées à Ka’b el-Ahbar,” *Revue des études juives* 69 (1919): 91 n.9; Jacob Mann, “A Polemical Work Against Karaite and Other Sectaries,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 12 (1921-22): 127-29, 139-40 (text); idem, “An Early Theologico-Polemical Work,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 12-13 (1937-38): 419-22, 441-42 (text); J[acob] Leveen, “Mohammed and His Jewish Companions,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 16 (1925-26): 399-406; and note also the fascinating text published by Boaz Cohen, “Une légende juive de Mahomet,” *Revue des études juives* 88 (1929): 1-17. An important list of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim testimonia to Muḥammad’s ‘teachers’ is provided by Shimon Shtober, “Muhammad and the Beginnings of Islam in the Chronicle *Sefer Divrey Yoseph*,” in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of Professor David Ayalon* (ed. M. Sharon; Leiden: Brill, 1986), 347-52.

¹³ See Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (trans. Jacqueline S. Teitelbaum; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 521-22 n.59.

¹⁴ Mss. Sachau 10 fol. 5a-b and 87 fol. 54a-b as cited in Lidzbarski, *De prophetis*, 37-38; both published by Richard Gottheil, “A Christian Bahira Legend,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13 (1898): 212-14. See also Ms. Sachau 10 fol. 21a-22b (*apud* Gottheil, “Bahira Legend,” 240-41). Ms. Sachau 10 fol. 5a-b is quoted in John C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postbiblical Jewish Apocalypse Reader* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 109-10 n.20. For Ka‘b’s role in this legend, see also Sidney H. Griffith, “Muḥammad and the Monk Bahīrā: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times,” *Oriens Christianus* 79 (1995): 164-65. Note also the veiled allusion to Ka‘b as a Jewish teacher of Muḥammad and forger of the Qur’ān in the Karshuni “Apocalypse of Peter” published and translated by Alphonse Mingana in *Woodbrooke Studies III* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1931), 252. See now Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

¹⁵ Josephus, *Ant.* 10.267: ... προφητεύων διετέλει; and see in general idem, *Ant.* 10.266-81 for his sweeping endorsement of Daniel’s prophetic gifts. Josephus’s regard for Daniel has been analyzed by Geza Vermes, “Josephus’ Treatment of the Book of Daniel,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42 (1991): 149-66; also William Adler, “The Apocalyptic Survey of History Adapted by Christians: Daniel’s Prophecy of 70 Weeks,” in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (CRINT 3.4; ed. James C. VanderKam and William Adler; Assen and Minneapolis: Van Gorcum and Fortress Press, 1996), 212-17.

¹⁶ Persian Shushtar, the principal town in Khūzistān, and one of the traditional locations for the tomb of the prophet. See Georges Vajda, “Dāniyāl,” *EF* 2:112-13.

‘Umar. I was the first Arab to read it, for he sent it to Ka‘b, and he transcribed it into Arabic. Contained within it was what will happen; i.e., during the *fitan*.’¹⁷ Early Muslim anthologies of so-called *fitan* (‘struggles’) and *malāhim* (‘[final] battles’) supply colorful descriptions of a sequence of events and detailed catalogs of ‘signs’ which supposedly presage the final ‘Hour,’ the fatal moment that marks the eschaton or Day of Judgment,¹⁸ and a disproportionately large number of these traditions open with *isnāds* which originate with Ka‘b. Presumably these lurid depictions and lists of signs emanate from close readings of relevant scriptures, perhaps including even newly discovered sources such as the apocryphal ‘Daniel book’ which was purportedly recovered from the seer’s tomb.¹⁹

But in addition to these standard chains of transmission, the *fitan* collections occasionally quote from ‘writings’ or ‘books’ reputedly authored by Ka‘b and which seem to enjoy a status equivalent to that of his transmitted ‘pronouncements’ explicating scriptures.²⁰ As some scholars are beginning to recognize, this ‘textualizing’ of Ka‘b’s authority broadly mirrors the conceptual moves that arguably lie behind the enormously popular habit of literary pseudepigraphy as cultivated by scribes in the Hellenistic, Roman, and Sasanian Near East. This ‘pseudepigraphic habit’ (deliberately tweaking Ramsay MacMullen’s famous expression)²¹ generated a kind of pious forgery that formally registers authoritative discourse in ‘books’ allegedly prepared, discovered, or bequeathed by the fictional characters to whom they are ascribed.

¹⁷ Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-ḥitan* (ed. S. Zakkār; Beirut: Dār al-Fikr lil-Ṭibā‘ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī‘, 1993), 18-19. See also Kister, “Ḥaddithū,” 235-36; Georges Vajda, “Dāniyāl,” *EF*² 2:112-13; Said Amir Arjomand, “Messianism, Millennialism and Revolution in Early Islamic History,” in *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America* (ed. Abbas Amanat and Magnus Bernhardsson; London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 109; Brannon M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 281-82; Hayrettin Yücesoy, “Translation as Self-Consciousness: Ancient Sciences, Antediluvian Wisdom, and the ‘Abbāsid Translation Movement,” *Journal of World History* 20 (2009): 523-57, at 548; idem, *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam: The ‘Abbāsid Caliphate in the Early Ninth Century* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 33-34; 120.

¹⁸ See Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1998), 186 n.4; 228-29.

¹⁹ An intriguing parallel to this seventh century discovery and translation of an apocalyptic work by Daniel is contained in the prologue to a thirteenth-century Greek astrological treatise by Alexius of Byzantium. There we learn that when the caliph Mu‘āwīya (661-80) invaded Anatolia, he came across the ‘original Greek book of Daniel’ in the suburbs of Constantinople and had it translated into Arabic. Alexius reputedly translated the Arabic rendering back into Greek as an Ἐποικάλυψις Δανιήλ τοῦ προφήτου. See P[ierre]. Boudreaux, ed., *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum VIII, 3: Codicum Parisinorum* (Bruxellis: H. Lamertin, 1912), 171-79; David Pingree, *From Astral Omens to Astrology: From Babylon to Bīkāner* (Serie Orientale Roma 78; Roma: Istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 1997), 76-77.

²⁰ It is thus unclear why Joshua Finkel would deny any authorial activity, real or imagined, on the part of Ka‘b. See his “An Arabic Story of Abraham,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 13-14 (1937-38): 392.

²¹ Ramsay MacMullen, “The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire,” *American Journal of Philology* 103 (1982): 233-46.

Notable examples of this phenomenon are the cases of legendary sages like Enoch, Moses, or Zoroaster, cognomens whose affiliations with antique persons whether real or imagined have largely eroded away and been replaced by and/or totally subsumed within textual corpora now bearing their name and prophetic authority. The probable operation of this same process in the case of Ka‘b could be a reason why at least one early modern orientalist—the savant Barthélemy d’Herbelot—in his valuable compendium of exotic eastern lore was prompted to equate Ka‘b with a ‘Livre historique entremêlé de plusieurs narrations fabuleuses touchant le Musulmanisme.’²² The emerging notion of Ka‘b as pseudepigraphon (assuming an evolutionary process, which need not be the case) may go some way to explaining the barely disguised hostility which his name begins to provoke in certain discussions of his alleged interpretations or activities: parallel tendentious reactions are readily visible in the sparse references to the name of Enoch in classical rabbinic literature or to the recurrent invocations of ‘books’ of Enoch among diverse Jewish, Christian, and ‘gnostic’ groups over the course of a millennium and a half of scattered citations.

The writings ascribed to Ka‘b, as opposed to isolated exegeses or reports of alleged teachings, appear to be a relatively unexplored aspect of his persona. Wolfensohn’s monographic study makes no mention of them. Fuad Sezgin’s valuable annotated bibliography of Islamic literature lists six ‘Schriften’ attributed to Ka‘b which are presently extant in manuscript or print form.²³ Among these are an excerpt from a lost larger composition devoted to traditions about Adam and Eve,²⁴ a work on the death of Moses, a work explicating the enigmatic qur’ānic character named Dhū’l-Kifl,²⁵ and an ‘Alexander–Book,’ the last being a character and topic enjoying some popularity in oriental apocalypticism.²⁶ His name is also associated with a cycle of parascriptural legends that recount the early years of Abraham as a brave

²² Barthélemy d’Herbelot, *Bibliothèque orientale, ou Dictionnaire universel* (Paris: Compagnie des Libraires, 1697), 219. Note also Lidzbarski, *De prophetis*, 36 n.4.

²³ Fuad Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (12 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1967-), 1:304-305. Sezgin’s list is reproduced by Donner, *Narratives*, 299.

²⁴ Published in al-Hamdānī, *Al-Iklīl: Erstes Buch* (ed. Oscar Löfgren; 2 vols.; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1954-65), 1:23.12-29.9. This excerpt is closely aligned with the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* cycle of traditions about the antediluvian generations and the universal Flood.

²⁵ Q 21:85; 38:48. Regarding this figure, see Georges Vajda, “Dhū’l-Kifl,” *ET* 2:242; Heribert Busse, “Dhū l-Kifl,” *EncQur* 1:527-29; Aviva Schussman, “The Prophet Ezekiel in Islamic Literature: Jewish Traces and Islamic Adaptations,” in *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible* (ed. Michael E. Stone and Theodore A. Bergren; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998), 321-22; 330-31.

²⁶ Donner, *Narratives*, 156. See especially G. J. Reinink, “Alexander the Great in Seventh-Century Syriac ‘Apocalyptic’ Texts,” *Byzantinorossyika* 2 (2003): 150-78; Kevin van Bladel, “The *Alexander Legend* in the Qur’ān 18:83-102,” in *The Qur’ān in its Historical Context* (ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds; London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 175-203.

advocate for the One God in pagan Babylonia during the tyrannical reign of the wicked Nimrod.²⁷ As always unpublished manuscripts house further relevant materials, including at least one example in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris that preserves a so-called ‘Apocalypse of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār’ among its contents pertaining to ‘le commencement et la fin du monde,’²⁸ a work which Armand Abel exploited in some of his important articles on aspects of Islamic eschatology.²⁹ I daresay a closer examination of manuscript catalogues and library holdings than I am presently able to perform would uncover more examples of such works. It will be this aspect of Ka‘b’s reputation—as putative author and oracular exponent of apocalyptic lore—that I wish to probe for the remainder of the present essay.

Let us begin by considering a passage from the *Ta’rikh* of Ṭabarī that describes the caliph ‘Umar’s (634-44 CE) triumphant entrance into Jerusalem and his initial visit to its Temple Mount,³⁰ a locale of interreligious numinous import which he discovers has been systematically trashed by its Christian Roman overlords during their rule. The narrative which Ṭabarī relates on the authority of Rajā’ b. Haywah from individual witnesses who were present at the event states that the caliph himself undertook the laborious job of collecting refuse and removing it from the site, a task in which he was immediately joined by his entourage, among whom was Ka‘b. The Jewish sage excitedly informed ‘Umar that his restorative actions that day served to fulfill an ancient prophecy of consolation addressed to Jerusalem at the time of her desolation. Ka‘b then went on to declare that another prophetic message had also been directed toward Rome at the time of the Temple’s destruction:

²⁷ Note Chapira, “Légendes”; Finkel, “Arabic Story,” 392-95; Haggai Ben-Shammai, “Sippurey Avraham be-aravit-yehudit mi-meqor muslami: Qeta‘im ḥadashim,” in *Hebrew and Arabic Studies in Honour of Joshua Blau: Presented by Friends and Students on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies/The Max Schloessinger Memorial Foundation, 1993), 111-33.

²⁸ Ms. Arab. Paris 2602 fol. 128-35; cf. M. Le Baron de Slane, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1883-95), 471.

²⁹ A[rm]and Abel, “al-Dadjdjal,” *EI*² 2:76-77; idem, “Un ḥadīṭ sur la prise de Rome dans la tradition eschatologique de l’Islam,” *Arabica* 5 (1958): 1 n.2. This is presumably the same work which was recently misread as a no longer extant *Kitāb al-ākhirā* or ‘Book about the Afterlife’ which described the pleasures of Paradise and the torments awaiting the damned in Hell. See Donner, *Narratives*, 299; Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 98-105.

³⁰ For a thorough sampling and discussion of these traditions emanating from both Muslim and non-Muslim sources, see Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099* (trans. Ethel Broido; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 51-74.

He (i.e., God) also sent a prophet to Constantinople, and he stood upon its hill and said: “O Constantinople! What have your people done to My House? They destroyed it, they have made you analogous to My Throne, and they have attributed to Me that which I have not said.³¹ I have already decided about you that one day I will make you bare (lit. ‘bald’).³² No one then will take refuge in you, and no one will use you for shade. By means of the Banū al-Qādhir, Sabā, and Waddān (will this come about).”³³ When evening came, nothing from it (the garbage) was left.

From Rabīʿa al-Shāmī (i.e., another tradent) there is something similar, and he added: ‘*Al-Fārūq* (i.e., ‘the Redeemer,’ a common epithet for ‘Umar)³⁴ has come to you (i.e., Jerusalem) with My submissive army. They will procure your blood-revenge for your people from Rome.’ And he said about Constantinople: ‘I shall leave you bare (lit. ‘bald’) (and) exposed to the sun; no one will take refuge in you, and you will not project shade.’³⁵

According to this interpretative set of traditions, the first of which prominently features Kaʿb as its learned transmitter, Constantinople was destined to suffer a humiliating punishment for its devastation of the site of God’s Throne in Jerusalem. These relatively terse pronouncements of predominantly Islamic tenor can however be augmented with an apocalyptic *ḥadīth* that is explicitly tied to Kaʿb which cleverly weaves biblical tropes into an eschatological oracle of doom upon the imperial capitol:

³¹ Following the translations of *taʿawwalū ʿalayya* suggested by Wolfensohn, *Kaʿb al-Aḥbār*, 27; Uri Rubin, *Between Bible and Qurʾān: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1999), 20.

³² Cf. Ezek 26:4, 14.

³³ Busse and Friedmann follow the critical apparatus in the European edition of Ṭabarī in suggesting Ezek 27:19-22 as the source for these three foes; see below. See also Wilferd Madelung, “Apocalyptic Prophecies in Ḥimṣ in the Umayyad Age,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 31 (1986): 158-59; Rubin, *Between Bible and Qurʾān*, 20-21.

³⁴ For the ‘messianic’ significance of the epithet *Fārūq*, see Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 5; also 154 nn. 18-24; and especially Suliman Bashear, “The Title *Fārūq* and its Association with ‘Umar I,” *Studia Islamica* 72 (1990): 47-70.

³⁵ Compare the translations of Wolfensohn, *Kaʿb al-Aḥbār*, 27-28; Yohanan Friedmann, *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume XII: The Battle of Qādisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 196-97. Regarding the promised ‘baldness,’ see below.

A *ḥadīth* from Ka‘b: Constantinople gloated at the destruction of Jerusalem and became strong and powerful. She was called ‘the overbearing arrogant one,’³⁶ for she said: ‘When the Throne of God was built on the waters,³⁷ I had already been built on the waters!’³⁸ But God promised to punish her before the Day of Resurrection. He said: ‘I shall certainly tear off your jewelry, your silk, and your veil;³⁹ and I will abandon you so that a rooster no longer crows in you. No one shall stand on one of your walls, and no one shall make their dwelling in you except for foxes.⁴⁰ The only plants will be stones and weeds,⁴¹ and nothing will interpose between you and the sky. I shall abandon you to three fires from heaven: the fire of pitch, the fire of tar, and the fire of naphtha.⁴² And I shall leave you mutilated (and) bare, and your clamor will reach even where I am in heaven.’⁴³

This oracle accentuates the arrogant presumption of Rome in assuming that her hegemony was grounded in her hoary lineage and (after the Christianization of the Empire) in a scornful religious triumphalism. As a number of scholars have recognized, its imagery and rhetorical structure are a pastiche of largely scriptural tropes which have been lifted from prophetic works like those of Isaiah and Ezekiel and adapted to this new context. And given Ka‘b’s reputed background, it is in fact just the type of cultural production we might

³⁶ Cf. Ezek 28:2, 5, 17.

³⁷ Cf. Ps 29:10; Q 11:7. These scriptural lemmas should be added to the mythological lore surrounding the ‘foundation stone’ on the Jerusalem Temple Mount advocated by Heribert Busse, “Omar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb in Jerusalem,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984): 92-93.

³⁸ Compare the analogous boastful claims attributed to Pharaoh in Ezek 29:3, 9; note also Zeph 2:15.

³⁹ Cf. Isa 3:18-26.

⁴⁰ Cf. Isa 13:19-22 on the dilapidated state of Babylon after God exacts his vengeance upon her.

⁴¹ These ‘stones and weeds’ are almost certainly reflective of the common Isaianic locution שְׂמִיר וְשִׁית. See Isa 5:6; 7:23-25; 9:17; 10:17; cf. 27:4; 32:13.

⁴² While not an exact parallel for this affliction, compare the three types of fiery projectiles cast from heaven upon the Egyptian army according to the Vatican manuscript of *Frag. Tg. Exod* 14:24 (see Michael L. Klein, *The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch According to their Extant Sources* [2 vols.; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980], 1:169). Note also Isa 34:9 and the three ‘plagues’ which figure in Rev 18:8.

⁴³ Abū Nu‘aym al-Isfahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā’ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā’* (10 vols.; Cairo, 1932-38; repr., Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1967-68), 6:45.4-12. Another translation is in Tor Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles: Studies in Early Islamic Mysticism* (trans. Birgitta Sharpe; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 21-22. He connects this oracle with Revelation 17-18, but also calls attention to Isa 13:22; Jer 50:39. A lengthier variant form of this same *ḥadīth* is included in Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-ḥadīth*, 284; it is translated in David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton, N.J.: The Darwin Press, 2002), 60-61.

expect from a disenchanted Jewish sage who discerned in the advent of Islam the answer to his people's prayers for retribution and redemption.

According to one of the more important assemblages of early Muslim end-time traditions, many of which are attributed to Ka'b—the *Kitāb al-fitan* of Nu'aym b. Ḥammād—a certain Sa'īd b. Jābir reportedly came into possession of a 'page' (or 'scroll' [*ṣahīfa*]) extracted 'from scrolls (*min ṣuḥuf*) authored by Ka'b,' and he discovered thereon this divine pronouncement:

Say to Tyre, the city of Rome, the one who has been given many names. Say to Tyre: How impertinent you have been with regard to My commandments! How haughtily you have exercised your power! Should I exonerate you for your pride with which you exalted yourself over Me by likening (the level of) your sphere to that of My Throne?⁴⁴ No, I am sending My servant nations against you, namely the descendants of Saba' and the people of Yemen,⁴⁵ those who come when God is invoked like birds arriving starved for meat, like herds arriving thirsty for water ... I shall strengthen their hearts and make the voice of every one of them like the roar of the lion at the time of attack: it emerges from the forest and the shepherds yell at it, but their shouts (only) increase its boldness and strength.⁴⁶ I shall make the hoofs of their horses⁴⁷ like a sharp (blade) on stones so that they reach (their goal) on the day of attack,⁴⁸ and I shall tighten their bowstrings.⁴⁹ I shall leave you bald before the sun,⁵⁰ and I shall leave you with no inhabitants except for birds and wild animals.⁵¹ I shall make your stones become like dust⁵² and your smoke will

⁴⁴ Cf. Ezek 28:2, 9; 29:3, 9.

⁴⁵ Compare Ka'b's report cited above about the two prophets whom God sent to Jerusalem and Constantinople respectively at the time of the former's destruction at the hands of the latter in Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ* (ed. de Goeje), 1/5:2409.5-16.

⁴⁶ Cf. Isa 31:4 for the imagery, and see Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 159.

⁴⁷ 'Hoofs of horses' are mentioned in Ezek 26:11; 'hoofs of his horses reckoned as flint' in Isa 5:28 (and note especially the reading here of the IQIsa^a scroll).

⁴⁸ Note Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies," 159.

⁴⁹ Compare the reference to the 'flexing of all his bows' in Isa 5:28. The same passage continues by likening the enemy's shouts to the roaring of lions.

⁵⁰ This promise of 'baldness' echoes Isa 3:24; Ezek 26:4, 14.

⁵¹ Cf. Isa 13:20-22; 34:8-17.

⁵² Ezek 28:18? See also the references to 'dust' in Isa 34:9; Ezek 26:4, 10.

pass (?) beneath the birds of the sky, and I shall make the islands of the sea
hear your cry⁵³⁵⁴

This fascinating oracle presaging the punishment and overthrow of ‘Rome’ in the guise of ‘Tyre’ has not gone unremarked by scholars of Islamic apocalyptic lore. Both Wilferd Madelung and Uri Rubin have commented on certain aspects of its message, and the latter has rightly noticed that portions of it echo biblical prophecies directed against the Phoenician city of Tyre found in Ezekiel 26-28 and in Isaiah.⁵⁵ But surprisingly neither scholar mentions that the blithely asserted identification of the name ‘Tyre’ (*Ṣūr*) with Rome that is trumpeted at the beginning of this oracle is a popular trope of Jewish postbiblical exegesis. Its classical expression surfaces in *Genesis Rabbah*, wherein we read: ‘every biblical verse which spells fully the toponym *Ṣūr* (i.e., Tyre) refers to the city of Tyre; every verse which spells it defectively refers to Rome.’⁵⁶ This midrashic melding of ‘Tyre’ and ‘Rome,’ an assimilation perhaps physically reinforced by these cities’ common reliance upon the sea as a defensive barrier to land-based attackers,⁵⁷ would seem to be based on a pun that exploits the common orthography of the name of the Phoenician city and an etymologically unrelated Hebrew word (*ṣar*) meaning ‘adversary’ or ‘enemy.’ The same clever word-play is however not an available option in the Arabic language: therefore Ka‘b’s ‘oracle’—one which explicitly presumes the rhetorical equivalence of ‘Tyre’ and ‘Rome’ (as well as a number of other unspecified equations in scriptural nomenclature)—is clearly rooted in a lexical mentality that is at home in a Jewish linguistic universe.

This important philological circumstance is naturally suggestive for Ka‘b’s posited ‘rabbinic’ credentialing ‘among the Sages’ (al-Aḥbār), an affiliation the Arabic epithet would seem to promote and endorse. When we combine this alleged social background with these oracles’ skillful manipulation of

⁵³ Cf. Ezek 26:15, 18.

⁵⁴ Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-ḥitan*, 299.

⁵⁵ Madelung, “Apocalyptic Prophecies,” 159-60; Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur’ān*, 21-23.

⁵⁶ *Gen. Rab.* 61.7 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 669): כל צור שכת' במקרא שלם בצור המדינה הכת' מדבר חסר ברומי; *מדבר*. See also *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 7.11 (ed. Mandelbaum, 1:132-33); *Pesiq. Rab.* §17 (ed. Ish-Shalom, 90a); *Tanḥ.* Va’era §13, Bo §4; *Tanḥ.* Buber Va’era §15, Bo §6; *Exod. Rab.* 9.13. Cf. also *Mek. Shira* 2 (ed. Horowitz-Rabin, 124) which numbers Nebuchadnezzar and ‘Tyre’ among the gentile oppressors of Israel; the so-called *Ḥazon Daniyel* (apud Louis Ginzberg and Israel Davidson, eds., *Ginzei Schechter* [3 vols.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1928-29], 1:320, note to line 1); Samuel Krauss, *Studien zur byzantinisch-jüdischen Geschichte* (Leipzig: Gustav Fock, 1914), 100; idem, “Un nouveau texte pour l’histoire judéo-byzantine,” *REJ* 87 (1929): 17-18; Andrew Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 204 n.18; Rashi *ad Gen* 25:23; *Isa* 27:1.

⁵⁷ I.e., provided we read the text’s reference to ‘Rome’ as being to the ‘new Rome’ on the Hellespont. So Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur’ān*, 21; also Cook, *Studies*, 61.

biblical syntagmas and allusions, they do exhibit a calculated approach to the hermeneutical relevance of the ‘earlier scriptures’⁵⁸ for uncovering information about future events. Yet the eschatological event that is envisaged in the Arabic oracles—the military sack of ‘(new) Rome’ or Constantinople—is one that is particularly resonant with early Islamic, and not Jewish, apocalypticism.⁵⁹ Rome to be sure is an enemy whose demise is predicted and anxiously awaited in numerous late antique expressions of Jewish apocalyptic hope, at least in those compositions which can arguably be situated within a pre-Islamic milieu (some piyyutim, perhaps *Sefer Eliyahu*, even a proto-*Sefer Zerubbabel* [?]). But nowhere in these relatively early works do we encounter descriptions of military sorties departing Eretz Israel and advancing against the imperial capital; rather, the movement of armies and ominously aggressive figures or groups revolves around and is directed *toward* sites in the Holy Land. It is only after the coming of Islam that we begin to detect a verbal interest in the *military* subjection and humiliation of the city of ‘Rome’ in Jewish apocalyptic discourse. One occurrence of this relatively new motif is especially interesting in light of the prophecy ascribed to Ka‘b which we just examined.

In a loose collection of Jewish apocalyptic traditions of mixed provenance first published in Salonika in the eighteenth century and then reprinted in the west by Jellinek under the title *Pirque Mashiah*,⁶⁰ we find the following intriguing episode situated immediately after a prediction of the imminent fall of the ‘princes of Edom’:

Ships will embark for Edom⁶¹ from Eretz Israel, and Israel will announce:

‘Who is for us, and who is for Edom?’ For scripture states: ‘Who will bring

⁵⁸ See Q 87:18 for this appellation.

⁵⁹ ‘... the foremost goal of Muslim Syrian apocalyptic’; so Cook, *Studies*, 54. See also the remarks of Suliman Bashear, “Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 1, 2 (1991): 189-91, 201-204; Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 60-71; Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs*, 47.

⁶⁰ Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash: Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und vermischter Abhandlungen aus der jüdischen Literatur* (6 vols.; Leipzig, 1853-77; repr., Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1938), 3:68-78. See also Yehudah Even-Shmuel, *Midreshey Ge’ullah* (2d ed.; Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1954), 332-44; Reeves, *Trajectories*, 149-71.

⁶¹ ‘Edom’ and ‘Esau’ are the most popular ciphers for ‘Rome’ in Jewish literature. This symbolism has been masterfully expounded by Gerson D. Cohen, “Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (ed. Alexander Altmann; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 19-48.

me to the fortified city (מצור)? Who will lead me unto Edom?' (Ps 60:11).⁶²

Israel will go and encamp against Tyre (צור) for forty days, and at the end of forty days they will stand up at the time for the recitation of the *Shema* and say: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God; the Lord is One!' (Deut 6:4). Then the walls of the city will collapse, and the city will be conquered by them. They will leave within it all the gold, silver, and the rest who are despoiling it and (proceed) from there to Rome. They will procure the Temple vessels, and King Nehemiah the Messiah will come out (from there) with them, and (then) they will come to Jerusalem.⁶³

Bearing in mind the threads of our previous discussion, I would like to propose that this Jewish text is of suggestive import for both the foreground and the background of the 'destruction of Tyre' fantasy found inscribed in Ka'b's 'scrolls.' It projects a Jewish military expedition whose ostensible object is the siege and sack of the city of 'Tyre,' but it concludes with a sudden uncontested journey to 'Rome' which results in the recovery of the Temple vessels and the emergence of the Messiah of the lineage of Joseph. This imaginary twofold sequence of conquest (first 'Tyre,' then 'Rome') might reflect simple geographical or historical concerns. I would suggest, however, that it has been scripted by a strictly literal reading of the two parallel lines of the verse from Psalms, breaking what the Psalmist constructs as a single itinerary ('to the fortified city ... [that is] Edom') into two sequential stages.⁶⁴ Moreover, the description which this Jewish text provides for an assault against 'Tyre' closely mimics the depiction of the final conquest of Byzantium in a number of Muslim apocalyptic traditions. Therein too both western cities—Christian Constantinople and the pagan city of Rome—are ravaged by Muslim armies and various holy objects are recovered by the conquerors and restored to Jerusalem.⁶⁵ The proudly recited *Shema*, the reverberation of which crumbles the walls of 'Tyre,' has its precise parallel in these same texts where shouts of the *takbīr*; i.e., *Allāhu akbar* ('God is great!'), its arabophonic equivalent, bring down the seemingly impregnable

⁶² Compare the doublet verse in Ps 108:11, where עיר מבצר in the first half of the stich is interpreted by the targumic tradition as a reference to Constantinople.

⁶³ Jellinek, *BHM* 3:71.16-22; cf. Even-Shmuel, *Midreshey Ge'ullah*, 336; Reeves, *Trajectories*, 156.

⁶⁴ Compare *Tg.* Ps 60:11: 'Who will bring me to the ravaged city of Tyre (לקרתא חרובא דצור)? Who will lead me unto Edom?' A sequential conquest of 'the cities of unbelief' is also found in Muslim *aḥādīth*, at least one of which is traced to Ka'b. See El Cheikh, *Byzantium*, 69; Cook, *Studies*, 58-59.

⁶⁵ See Cook, *Studies*, 54-66; Even-Shmuel, *Midreshey Ge'ullah*, 300.

walls of Constantinople.⁶⁶ It would thus seem that in this Jewish text, as in Ka‘b’s oracle, ‘Tyre’ operates as a semantic marker for Constantinople. And given the crucial importance of ‘lexical’ cues for authorizing the identity and the sequencing of eschatological events, it even seems possible that the Jewish apocalypse—even though its textual crystallization is likely to be later than the Muslim oracles examined above—may harbor traces of Ka‘b’s scriptural reasoning for the imagined expedition against ‘Tyre.’

The figure of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār offered a fertile site for the germination and growth of a vibrant apocalyptic fervor within nascent Islam. Insofar as the fabrication of *aḥadīth* or the proliferation of pseudepigrapha were burgeoning enterprises among scribal circles conversant with an Abrahamic lexicon of characters, events, themes, and motifs, it should not seem surprising that early Muslim literature associates a character infamous for his obsession with Jewish scriptural lore and eschatological redemption with a series of traditions about the restoration of Zion and the *malāḥim* against Rome. Yet there is an important question which needs to be pondered before we take our leave of this fascinating multi-faceted personage. Who is invested, so to speak, in Ka‘b? Who profits and who loses? It can be argued that the role which Ka‘b plays in early Islam ‘domesticates’ Islam by providing what is perceived as essential institutional recognition for the new revelation. The rhetorical utility of Ka‘b in contemporary and later Jewish and Christian polemical texts is largely a function of this imagined imprimatur, save that Ka‘b is exposed therein as part of a secret effort to undermine and deliberately discredit Islam, or as a corrupt and jealous opportunist attempting to accrue wealth and fame at the expense of a gullible citizenry. In light of the common scriptural idiom shared by Jews, Christians, Muslims, and other allied communities, perhaps Ka‘b is best viewed as a manipulative agent—real or fictive—operating in the service of fomenting or disrupting a discursive hegemony in late antiquity.

⁶⁶ Note the traditions cited by El Cheikh, *Byzantium*, 68-69. An eerily similar scenario is envisioned by yet another Hebrew apocalyptic text (the so-called *’Aggadot ha-Mashiah*) where an advancing Jewish army is commanded by a heavenly voice to treat Rome (רומי) ‘the same way that Joshua treated Jericho!’ After circumambulating the city seven times and blowing on *shofars*, a loudly shouted *Shema* suffices to bring down Rome’s walls and incapacitate its resistance. See Jellinek, *BHM* 3:142.23-26; Even-Shmuel, *Midreshey Ge’ullah*, 105; Reeves, *Trajectories*, 147.