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AN ARABIAN QUR'ĀN: TOWARDS A THEORY OF PENINSULAR ORIGINS

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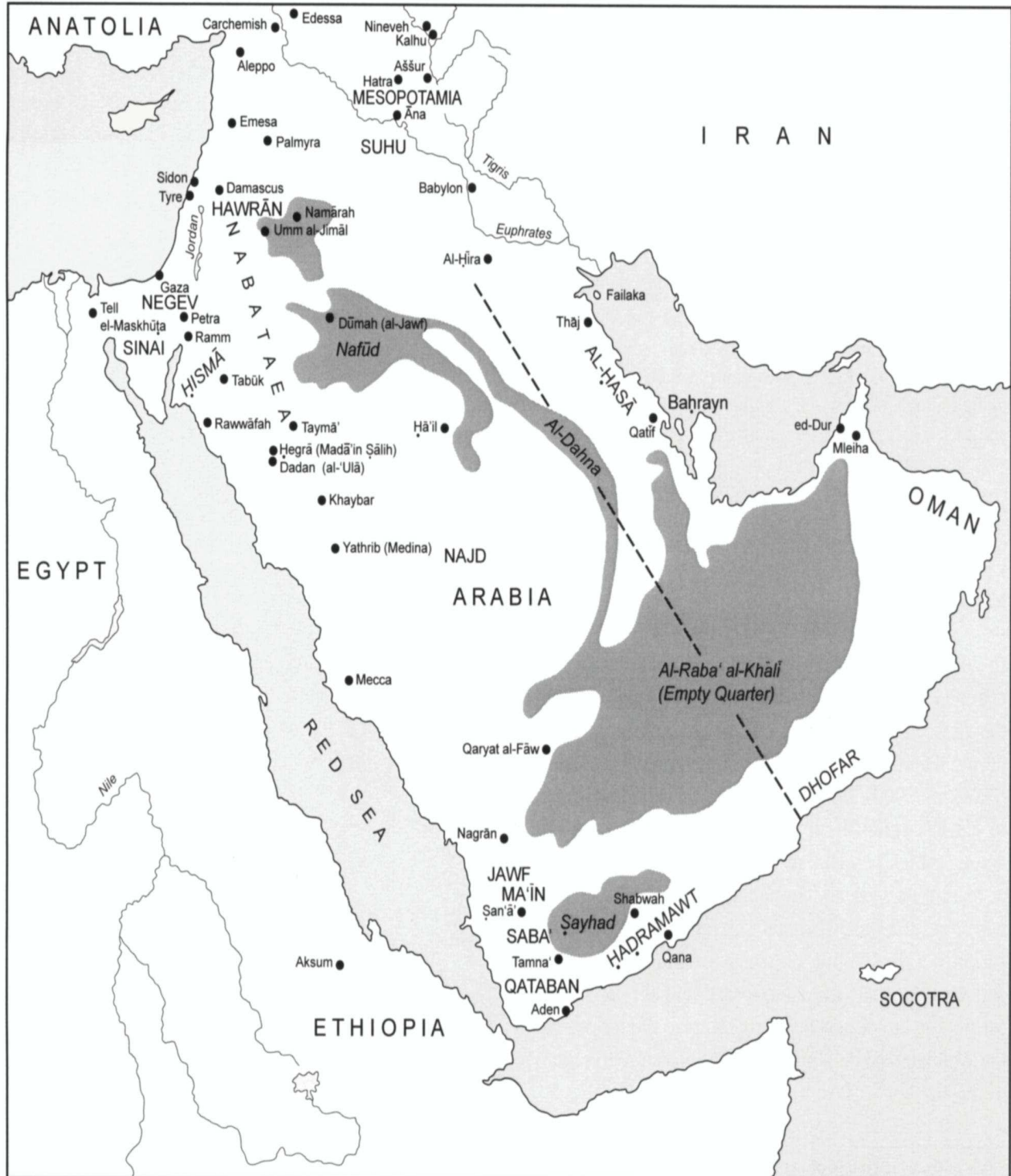
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Figure 1. Map of Arabia Before Islam (source: M.C.A Macdonald, "Ancient Arabia and the Written Word", *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, Vol. 40, pp. 6)



## Sigla of Editions of Inscriptions

**BynM** – Inscriptions of the Museum of Baynūn

**CIAS** – Beeston, Pirenne & Robin, *Corpus des inscriptions et antiquités sud-arabes*, 1977-1986

**CIH** – *Corpus Inscriptionum Himyariticarum*, CIS pars IV

**CIS** – *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, 1881-

**Fa** – Ahmed Fakhry, *An Archaeological Journey to Yemen (March-May 1947)*, 1952

**FB-Ḥawkam** – Francois Bron, *Trois Nouvelles Dédicaces Qatabanites à Ḥawkam*, 2009

**FB-Maḥram Bilqīs** – Francois Bron, *Une Nouvelle Inscription Sabéenne du Règne de Laḥay ‘ athat Yarkham, roi de Saba’ et dhū-Raydān*, 2012

**FB-as-Sawdā’** – Francois Bron, *Nouvelles Inscriptions Sudarabiques*, 2010

**Gar Sharahbil** – Giovanni Garbini, *Una nuova Iscrizione di Šarahbi’ il Ya’ fur*, 1969

**Hu.** – Taymanitic, Hismaic and Thamudic inscriptions copied by C. Huber and renumbered in van den Branden, *Les Inscriptions Thamoudéens*, 1950

**Ingrams** – Harold Ingrams, *From Cana (Husn Ghorab) to Sabbathath (Shabwa): the South Arabian Incense Road*, 1945

**Ir** – Muṭahhar al-Iryānī, *Fī Ta’ rikh al-Yaman*, Cairo, 1973

**Ja** – Albert Jamme, *Sabaeen and Hasaeen Inscriptions from Saudi Arabia*, 1966

**JS** – Jaussen & Savignac, *Mission Archéologique en Arabie*, Paris, 1909-1914

**MAFRAY** – Inscriptions from the MAFRAY/CNRS Survey

**RES** – *Répertoire d’Épigraphie Sémitique*, Paris, 1900-

**Ry** – Gonzague Ryckmans, *Inscriptions Sud-Arabes*, 1927-

**YM** – Inscriptions of the National Museum of Yemen, Ṣan’ ā’

**ZM** – Inscriptions of the Museum of Zafār

Sigla of Lexicons

**BDB** – *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1906-

**Biberstein-Kazimirski** – Albert Kazimirski de Biberstein, *Dictionnaire Arabe-Français*, 1860

**CAD** – *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, 1964-

**Jastrow** – Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 1886-1890

**Lane** – Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1863

**Leslau** – Wolf Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez*, 1987

**Payne Smith** – Robert Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary, an abridgement and translation of Smith's Thesaurus Syriacus*, 1903



## Introduction

In 1833, when Abraham Geiger wrote his short work, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen* (*What did Muhammad Borrow from Judaism*)<sup>1</sup>, he could have hardly known that he had initiated a parlance of unidirectional borrowing that was to dominate the field of Qur'ānic Studies for at least a century. From that time on, it was clear to the scholars of Islam and scholarly dilettantes of colonial administrations that were well versed in Judeo-Christian scriptures and extra-biblical materials that Muhammad, as the composer of the Qur'ān and the founder of the new dispensation, must have “borrowed” his ideas from somewhere. The “dependence”<sup>2</sup> of the Qur'ān on Judaism and Christianity was obvious. The “origins”<sup>3</sup> of the Qur'ān had to be sought in its Biblical subtexts. The Qur'ān had “original sources”<sup>4</sup>, either Jewish or Christian, that awaited discovery. As such, Geiger’s work, brilliant though it was, was not an end to the debate of from where Muhammed borrowed. Rather it was the beginning of a series of works that were produced in the following century by a remarkable set of scholars.

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham Geiger, *Was Hat Mohammed Aus Dem Judenthume Aufgenommen. Eine von Der Königl. Preussischen Rheinuniversität Gekrönte Preisschrift* (Bonn: F. Baaden, 1833); translated into English by F. M. Young tr, *Judaism and Islam. A Prize Essay* (Madras: Printed at the M. D. C. S. P. C. K. press and sold at their depository, Vepery, 1898).

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit Des Qorans von Judentum Und Christentum* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Tor Andrae, *Der Ursprung Des Islams Und Das Christentum.*, vol. v. 23-25, *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift v. 23-25*, n.d.

<sup>4</sup> William St. Clair Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qur'ān* (London, New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; E. S. Gorham, 1905).

It must be conceded that the discourse of borrowing, influence, origins, dependence and many other similar terms laid a simple yet methodologically sound background for further investigation. This was the result of the assumption that the Qur'ān is the work of an historically accessible figure who singlehandedly composed a patchwork of a text and all that was left to the critical scholar was to identify its original sources. Yet, this task proved to be more complicated than it looked. First of all, as Nöldeke observed, the Qur'ān does not have any verbatim quotation from any other source, Biblical or otherwise, other than the oft-cited example of 21:105, a borrowing from Ps. 37:29.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, even though the figures and themes that the Qur'ān mentions are mostly Biblical, some of them cannot be identified from the Torah and the Canonical Gospels. Even if the majority of Biblical figures and their stories can be traced back to the Bible, the Qur'ānic versions of their *Heilsgeschichte* show peculiarities that can either only be accounted for through intermediary sources between the Bible and the Qur'ān or seem altogether unique to the Qur'ān. Nöldeke diagnosed this problem very early:

“There can thus be no doubt that Muḥammad’s prime source of information was not the Bible but uncanonical liturgical and dogmatic literature. For this reason the Old Testament stories in the Koran are much closer to Haggadic embellishments than their originals; the New Testament stories are totally legendary and display some common features with the reports of the apocryphal Gospels.”<sup>6</sup>

The multifaceted nature of Qur'ān's “sources” made the discourse of borrowing more entrenched but at the same time betrayed the firmness of any one confessional source as the

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<sup>5</sup> Theodor Nöldeke Behn, Wolfgang, *The History of the Qur'ān* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

ultimate point of departure for the Qur'ān. Is the Qur'ān, along with the accompanying religion, a predominantly Christian composition? Does the ubiquity of Old Testament characters betray the Jewish origins of the Qur'ān? Or does the obvious existence of both Jewish and Christian material in the Qur'ān in their extra-canonical and apocryphal versions point to a heterodox Jewish-Christian sect? These questions set the tone for the field of Qur'ānic studies from its very beginning.

### Qur'ānic Studies until the WW2

A full description of a century of influence-hunt that began with Geiger (1833) and, in my opinion, ended with Heinrich Speyer (1935), can be found elsewhere<sup>7</sup> but an over-simplified and somewhat picturesque representation of it for the purposes of a literature review should be made here. The scene reminds one of a trench battle: a set of very erudite scholars with varying degrees of confessional agenda manning the ranks to argue for a Jewish or Christian origin of the Qur'ān. At times, their analyses went beyond the Qur'ān to encompass post-Qur'ānic material due to the deplorable terseness and brevity of the Qur'ān. In many cases, the very titles of their works gave away their stance as in the case of Geiger and others: *Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kur'an* (sic)<sup>8</sup>, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*<sup>9</sup>, *Christliches im Qoran*<sup>10</sup>, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*<sup>11</sup> to name a few. Notwithstanding the

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<sup>7</sup> A good summary is found in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, vol. 10, Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ;New York: Routledge, 2010), 3–22.

<sup>8</sup> Alphonse Mingana, *Syriac Influence on the Style of the Qur'ān*, vol. v. 11, John Rylands Library, Manchester. Bulletin (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 1927).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment; the Gunning Lectures, Edinburgh University, 1925*, vol. 1925, Gunning Lectures ;1925 (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1926).

<sup>10</sup> K. Ahrens, "Christliches Im Qoran," *ZDMG* 84 (1930): 15–68, 148–90.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Cutler Torrey, ... *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, The Hilda Stich Stroock Lectures ... at the Jewish Institute of Religion (New York: Jewish institute of religion press, 1933).

informed and sophisticated arguments on both sides, the general leaning of a given scholar was easy to tell. For instance, Nöldeke<sup>12</sup>, Lammens<sup>13</sup>, Andrae<sup>14</sup>, Mingana<sup>15</sup>, Bell<sup>16</sup> and Tisdall<sup>17</sup> observed that the balance of influence was tipped towards Christianity whereas Geiger<sup>18</sup>, Schapiro<sup>19</sup>, Horovitz<sup>20</sup> and Torrey<sup>21</sup> produced works that emphasized the Jewish coloring of the Qur’ān. From the clearly polemical work of Tisdall to the scholarly solid *Koranische Untersuchungen* of Horovitz, there appears a large spectrum of methods, data and conjecture that were put to use. The names and stories of Biblical figures, proper names that are not attested in the Bible, religious terminology that looked familiar from pre-Qur’ānic sources and possible foreign loanwords from other languages were all scrutinized to identify the likely origins of the Qur’ān. On both sides of the debate there were excellent scholars that had a thorough knowledge of the canonical Jewish and Christian Bible, the vast rabbinic literature, apocryphal and extra-canonical sources, patristic works and Eastern Christian poetic and homiletic tradition. However, they arrived at rather irreconcilable results through their examination of similar source material.

Examples from two authors that wrote towards the end of the debate could be helpful here. For Richard Bell, the predominance of Jewish material in the Qur’ān was certain but

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<sup>12</sup> Theodor Nöldeke, “Hatte Muḥammad Christliche Lehrer?,” *ZDMG* 12 (1858): 699–708.

<sup>13</sup> Henri Lammens, *L’Arabie Occidentale Avant L’hégire / c H. Lammens*. (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1928).

<sup>14</sup> Andrae, *Der Ursprung Des Islams Und Das Christentum*.

<sup>15</sup> Mingana, *Syriac Influence on the Style of the Qur’ān*.

<sup>16</sup> Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment; the Gunning Lectures, Edinburgh University, 1925*.

<sup>17</sup> Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qur’ān*.

<sup>18</sup> Geiger, *Was Hat Mohammed Aus Dem Judenthume Aufgenommen. Eine von Der Königl. Preussischen Rheinuniversität Gekrönte Preisschrift*.

<sup>19</sup> Israel Schapiro, *Die Haggadischen Elemente Im Erzählenden Teil Des Korans, von Dr. Israel Schapiro. 1. Heft., Schriften, Hrsg. von Der Gesellschaft Zur Förderung Der Wissenschaft Des Judentums*. (Leipzig: G. Fock, G.m.b.H., 1907).

<sup>20</sup> Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (W. de Gruyter & Co., 1926); Josef Horovitz, *Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1964), <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/5795677.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Torrey, ... *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*.

based on non-Jewish evidence he concluded that even the apparently Jewish material “may really have come through nominally Christian channels”<sup>22</sup>. A quite different conclusion with a similar reservation is put forward by Torrey: “I trust that it will appear, as our discussion proceeds, that *while Muhammad’s Islam was undoubtedly eclectic*, yet both in its beginning and in its later development by far the greater part of its essential material came directly from Israelite sources”<sup>23</sup> (my emphasis).

Regardless of the camp that these scholars adhered to, the underlying assumption in their work is easy to infer: Qur’ān’s relationship with its urtext, if such a thing existed at all, or the larger Judeo-Christian logia is one of dependence while the evidence of actual intertextual parallels is rather elusive and hardly homogenous. This assumption, however, engendered more questions than heuristic benefits. First of all, the Qur’ānic versions of Biblical narratives allude to a plethora of possible parallel texts that hail from a wide variety of dates and provenance. A few examples would be enough to make this point: the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba can only be attested in the Second Targum on Esther<sup>24</sup>, the story of Joseph is heavily edited through Haggadic extrapolations in its journey from the Genesis to the Qur’ān<sup>25</sup>, the Babylonian angels Hārūt and Mārūt appear to be of Indo-Iranian origins<sup>26</sup>, the figure of Luqmān is shrouded in similar mystery as his supposed Biblical

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<sup>22</sup> Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment; the Gunning Lectures*, Edinburgh University, 1925, 1925:15.

<sup>23</sup> Torrey, ... *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Q 27:16-44, a translation of the relevant parts of Targum Sheni can be found in Tisdall, op. cit. 84ff. The Biblical version of the story is found in 1 Kings 10:1-10 and 2 Chr. 9:1-9.

<sup>25</sup> Schapiro, *Die Haggadischen Elemente Im Erzählenden Teil Des Korans*, von Dr. Israel Schapiro. 1. Heft., 25-28.

<sup>26</sup> The story of Shemhazai and Uzziel that is considered to be the subtext for this is found in Midrash Yalkut chapter 44. Tisdall mentions Horot and Morot as Armenian deities who were assistants of the goddess Spandaramit or the Avestan Spenta Armaiti. The story is found in the Iranian mythology with the names Khurdād and Murdād as two ministers of Ahura Mazda.

counterpart Ahikar<sup>27</sup>, the accounts of Mary and Jesus in the Qur'ān have striking parallels with Infancy Gospels<sup>28</sup>, the Seven Sleepers' story is found in Christian texts from the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD at earliest<sup>29</sup> and a provisional North Arabian origin is assumed for the so-called Arabian prophets of the Qur'ān<sup>30</sup> that do not show up anywhere else.

Secondly, the confessional coloring of certain themes and narratives is hard to determine within the elliptical language of the Qur'ān. For sure, the Patriarchs and other Old Testament figures appear in their Biblical outline in the Qur'ān with very conspicuous Midrashic additions. However, by the time of the Qur'ān, the patristic literature was already on par with parallel rabbinic productions<sup>31</sup> and thus many of the Qur'ānic figures like Abraham, Joseph, Moses or Solomon were as Christian as they were Jewish. On the other hand, parts of the Qur'ān dealing with the life of Jesus and apostolic period are very brief to argue for a whole-scale Christian project. One should just remember at this point that the Qur'ān refers to Christians in a rather unusual term, i.e. al-Naṣārā, and seems completely unaware of sectarian divisions that reached a peak during the reign of Heraclius, who would be contemporary to the traditional date of Qur'ān's composition. Besides, Qur'ān's contact

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<sup>27</sup> F. C. (Frederick Cornwallis) Conybeare ed, J. Rendel (James Rendel) Harris joint ed, and Agnes Smith Lewis joint ed, *The Story of Aḥīkar from the Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Old Turkish, Greek and Slavonic Versions*, 2d enlarged and corrected. (Cambridge: University Press, 1913). The figure of Ahikar who shares many of his wisdoms with Luqmān of the Qur'ān is also found in the Book of Tobit and the geographer Strabo refers to him briefly.

<sup>28</sup> Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qur'ān*, 156.

<sup>29</sup> The best treatment of the pre-Qur'ānic material is in Michael Huber, *Die Wanderlegende von Den Siebenschläfern: Eine Literargeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1910). Sidney Griffith's insightful article about the Seven Sleepers can be found in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān (London ;New York: Routledge, 2008), 109–37.

<sup>30</sup> Ṣāliḥ and Hūd are two figures that cannot be identified with any Biblical figures although there were attempts to identify Hūd with Eber of Gen. 10-11 and 1 Chr. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J. R. Baskin's article in William Scott Green, *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, vol. no. 1, , Brown Judaic Studies No. 1, Etc. (Missoula, Mont.: Published by Scholars Press for Brown University, 1978), vols. 5, 53–80.

with the canonical gospels is very tangential compared to its apparent parallels with Christian Apocrypha.

Thirdly, even when the possible subtexts are reasonably identified, anchoring them securely to a pre-Qur'ānic date and arguing for tangible textual exchanges prove to be difficult. Particularly problematic is the rabbinic material. For example, the exegetical midrash called *Pirqe d-Rabbi Eliezer* continued to be relied on by a string of Qur'ān scholars<sup>32</sup> who perceived almost verbatim parallels between its retelling of Biblical stories and their Qur'ānic versions although Leopold Zunz convincingly argued that this text, at least in its final redaction, should certainly be post-Islamic.<sup>33</sup> The problem is further complicated by the fact that the rabbinic materials, certain Midrashim in particular, contain several historical layers of oral transmission and redaction, the final product of which can be really late. In a way, explaining the Qur'ānic logia through Midrashim juxtaposes two predominantly oral traditions thereby exacerbating the problem at hand.

Christian materials pose a different challenge since their dating is less of an issue. However, with the exception of Najrān, about which we know very little in any case, a substantial presence of Christian communities and texts around the supposed provenance of the Qur'ān has never been fully demonstrated. Imagining a community that might have used extra-canonical sources like the Gospel of James within the reach of Hijāz is fanciful yet lacks any substance.

A final problem that arises from an infelicitous yet necessary reference to *e silentio* argumentation should be mentioned here. The literature on the Qur'ān and its Judeo-

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<sup>32</sup> Geiger and Tisdall, in particular, saw no problems in using it. Torrey (p. 84) finds it problematic that Ishmael's wives are called Fatima and Ayesha in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and *Pirqe d-Rabbi Eliezer*

<sup>33</sup> Leopold Zunz, *Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge Der Juden Historisch Entwickelt. Ein Beitrag Zur Altertumskunde Und Biblischen Kritik, Zur Literatur- Und Religionsgeschichte.* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1966), 283ff.

Christian subtexts intended to account for what is there in the Qur'ān and one can argue that the whole enterprise reached a celebrated success with the work of Heinrich Speyer.<sup>34</sup> His work more or less finalized the efforts of a century of scholarly generations that began with the essay of Abraham Geiger. It is clear, however, that the amount of Biblical allusions in the Qur'ān is like a drop in the ocean when compared to the total corpus of Biblical and extra-biblical material from which it is purportedly borrowing. It is possible that the absence of certain figures and themes can be explained away within the general discursive direction of the Qur'ān. For example, it is possible that a pietistic mood around the theme of exilic separation from the holy presence of deity as in the Jewish literature did not strike roots in the Qur'ān because of the latter's rather demystified understanding of God even though similar elements were present in the sacred history of Islam and the life of the Prophet. Yet, one can hardly understand the exceptional inclusion of Jonah of all Minor Prophets in the Qur'ān next to a complete silence about Daniel, who would fit the strict anti-polytheistic bent of the Qur'ān more than any other Biblical figure. The examples of what is not there in the Qur'ān can easily be proliferated but they will not take us beyond any basic conclusion that could arise from absence of evidence. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that scholars of the Qur'ān before the end of WWII were not as interested in accounting for what is missing in the Qur'ān as they were for what is there in it. As such, any reconstruction of the Qur'ān from its subtexts had to rely on connecting a small number of dots within the large landscape of Biblical material with the hope of arriving at a coherent picture.

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<sup>34</sup> Heinrich Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen Im Qoran*, 2., unveränderte Aufl. (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1961). The original edition is from 1931 but this is probably not correct. The book was published in 1935 and 1937 in two parts but dated to 1931 to avoid Nazi censure.



## From Speyer to Wansbrough: The Qur'ān and the Biblical Studies

I mentioned Speyer's work as the final specimen of a series of studies on the Biblical subtexts of the Qur'ān because his *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* summarizes and almost exhausts the possible parallels between the Qur'ān and the Bible in a systematic way. Another rather comprehensive work in a different yet related line of scholarship, i.e. that of foreign loanwords in the Qur'ān, was published a few years later by Arthur Jeffery.<sup>35</sup> As a result, both a scholarly over-production and a disillusionment that is caused by the problems enumerated above might have led to stagnation in the field in the post-war years. However, the *coup de grace* came during the 1940s by the war itself when examinations into the manuscript tradition of the Qur'ān and its recitational variations came to an unhappy end through a line of disastrous events during the WW2. A critical edition of the Qur'ān with marginal apparatus similar to the Bible of Kittel was in preparation for some time through the efforts of Bergstrasser and Pretzl but the project had to be dropped when British bombs allegedly destroyed the archive of manuscripts gathered by the two German scholars even though it appeared later that this was not true.<sup>36</sup> In the meantime, the general outline that Muslim sources offered for the life of Muhammad and for the emergence of the Qur'ān gained further ground with the authoritative works of Watt.<sup>37</sup> Even though earlier authors had used Muslim sources extensively and rather uncritically, threads of skepticism had

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<sup>35</sup> Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran* (Lahore: al- Biruni, 1977).

<sup>36</sup> Bergsträsser disappeared while mountaineering in 1933 and Pretzl died in a plane crash during the war. Pretzl's student and successor Anton Spitaler announced that the collection of manuscripts in Munich was destroyed by allied bombardment but he confessed to Angelika Neuwirth before he died that he had hidden the collection and gave it to the custody of Neuwirth. A more detailed description of these events can be found in Reynolds' Introduction to Reynolds, *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, 1–6.

<sup>37</sup> W. Montgomery (William Montgomery) Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953); W. Montgomery (William Montgomery) Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford, Eng.: At the Clarendon Press, 1956).

appeared here and there until Watt's two-volume biography of Muhammad largely based on *sīra* clenched the authority of the traditional understanding of Islamic history.

One larger issue that beset the advance of the Qur'ānic studies in contrast to the full-fledged study of Bible should be mentioned here: the methods of Biblical studies that were forged by generation after generation of brilliant scholars appeared useless when they were applied to the Qur'ān. This was particularly the case for the three major cornerstones of Biblical criticism: *Formgeschichte* (form history, sometimes referred as *Gattungsgeschichte*, genre history), *Redaktionsgeschichte* (redaction history) and *Traditionsgeschichte* (tradition history). First of all, the text of the Qur'ān does not allow for a rigorous examination of form history or genre history since the literary units that make up the final composition of the Qur'ān are not as distinctly unique as the parts of the Bible. The only meaningful category based on Muslim tradition is that of Meccan and Medinan verses but even in its extended version by Nöldeke this category fails to inform a workable form-history of the Qur'ān. After all, if the traditional Muslim narrative is taken seriously, the whole text was produced in less than the passing of a generation. Later on, the content of the Qur'ān was studied thoroughly whereby the exegesis of the text, the biography of the Prophet and his sayings were connected in the web of a strong tradition that offered very little opportunities for outside corroboration.

Secondly, any attempt towards a redaction-history had to limit itself to whatever is available in Muslim sources due to the paucity and late date of the available early Qur'ān manuscripts. Here a category of post-Uthmanic and pre-Uthmanic recensions was in use for a long time based on Muslim understanding of the codification of the Qur'ān but this has

very limited scientific use in the absence of any real pre-Uthmanic copies.<sup>38</sup> As a result, variant readings are confined to the ones that are related by narrative Muslim sources and have little or no representation in the manuscript history. The only meaningful area of research for the Qur'ān that was in line with the Biblical studies was tradition history, i.e. identifying the change or continuity of Biblical and extra-Biblical narratives and themes from the Bible to the Qur'ān. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, works on the tradition history of the Qur'ān did not yield a workable historical context to pursue other lines of research.

These two problems that made the study of the Qur'ān lag behind Biblical studies were to be overridden through two independent developments in the 1970s. The first of the two was the publication of John Wansbrough's *Qur'ānic Studies*,<sup>39</sup> a breakthrough in many respects but also a most misunderstood book due largely to the inaccessible language of the author. A large part of its inaccessibility has to do with the technical vocabulary that Wansbrough borrowed from Biblical Studies and used in a foreign environment. However, the premise of his work can be gleaned through his treatment of Muslim sources: what if the relationship between the Qur'ān and early works of exegesis, history, and grammar is organic rather than sequential? In the absence of any Islamic written sources before the 9<sup>th</sup> century and considering the circularity of exegetical tools in the Qur'ān, *sīra* and *tafsīr*, can one argue that Muslims back-projected the Qur'ān along with its auxiliary sciences in a conscious effort of retrospective *Gemeindebildung*? To put it more simply, what if the whole Muslim theological world-view, including its foundational text, was shaped in a place other than Hijāz (presumably the Talmudic centers of Iraq) and at a later time than what is

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<sup>38</sup> But see below for the discovery of the Sana'a manuscripts.

<sup>39</sup> John E. Wansbrough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, vol. v. 31, London Oriental Series v. 31 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

presumed in Muslim sources? These were the questions that Wansbrough's complex book entertained with admirable erudition yet with an awfully convoluted language.

Wansbrough's method provides an ingenious circumvention of the form-criticism problem in the Qur'ānic studies: if the Qur'ān is too limited to offer a clear demarcation of formal development, one can add works of different genres to the equation to create a form-historical scheme similar to what we have for the Bible or the Mishna and Talmud. As such, the Qur'ān is not taken as a text separated from its interpretive context temporally and spatially but it is treated as part of a larger unit that comprises a complete package of sacred history that is largely self-righteous. In this scheme, the Qur'ān still has a unique place as the centerpiece that contains the seeds of exegetical, haggadic and halakhic material that is only to reach full bloom in the works of *sīra*, *tafsīr* and *fiqh* under the heavy influence of Babylonian rabbinic tradition. Furthermore, Basran and Kufan schools of grammar play a central role in this scheme in their capacity to normalize the Arabic of the Qur'ān as the *lingua franca* of Muslim sources even though at best it must have been a *koine* or a local dialect in its native western Arabia.

It must have been clear by now that Wansbrough's original scheme rests on very shaky grounds since he assumes that Muslim sources altogether hail from a later period than it is generally thought, an assumption that could hold up well until 1970s to a certain extent. Such a skeptical outlook was given further impetus the same year with the publication of *Hagarism*<sup>40</sup> by Crone and Cook, students of Wansbrough. *Hagarism's* bold attempt to reconstruct Muslim history without using Muslim sources obviously went hand-in-hand with Wansbrough's skepticism promising a whole range of possibilities to entertain

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<sup>40</sup> Patricia Crone and Michael. joint author Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge ;New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

about the origins of Islam and the Qur'ān. However, 1970s also witnessed the discovery of the Sana'a manuscripts changing the tools available to the student of the Qur'ān and forcing scholars to reconsider their assumptions.

The story of the discovery and subsequent events was treated elsewhere<sup>41</sup> so I will limit myself to its implications for Qur'ānic studies. The preliminary research on these manuscripts, which contain thousands of fragments mostly identified to be parts from the Qur'ān, was done by Gerd Puin in 1980s. He announced that some of these manuscripts, and especially the *scriptio inferior* of the palimpsests, appear to be earlier than the earliest Qur'ān manuscripts that were available back then. This observation might have been revolutionary in itself but the controversy around Puin's claim that the study of these manuscripts would prove the "cocktail-like" nature of the Qur'ānic text and show that the Qur'ān also has a history like Bible received more interest.<sup>42</sup> Ensuing years of controversy, public media interest and cautionary stance on the part of Yemeni authorities hampered satisfactory research on the manuscripts. Puin himself, although he was the first director of the project until 1986, did not publish anything substantial until very recently. Works of Puin's wife, Elisabeth Puin<sup>43</sup> and Behnam Sadeghi of Stanford University (one co-authored with Bergmann<sup>44</sup> and another with Mohsen Goudarzi<sup>45</sup>) are the most recent treatments of the manuscripts and I'll focus on the latter for the purposes of my paper.

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<sup>41</sup> England). Conference (3rd : London Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation (London England), Yūsuf Ībish, and Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation., *The Conservation and Preservation of Islamic Manuscripts: Proceedings of the Third Conference of Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation : 18th-19th November 1995*, vol. no. 19, Publication / Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation (London: al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1996), 131.

<sup>42</sup> Toby Lester, "What Is The Koran?", *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1999 (January), Volume 283, Number 1, p. 44.

<sup>43</sup> E. Puin, "Ein Früher Koranpalimpsest Aus Ṣan' ā' (DAM 01-27.1)", in M. Groß & K-H. Ohlig (Eds.), *Schlaglichter: Die Beiden Ersten Islamischen Jahrhunderte*, 2008, Verlag Hans Schiler: Berlin, pp 461-493.

<sup>44</sup> Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet," *Arabica* 57, no. 4 (2010): 348-54.

Sadeghi and Bergmann, in their 2010 Arabica article, made a detailed description of one of the identifiable codices, which they call *Ṣan' ā' I*, that came out of the whole pile. The codex consists of a few palimpsests that were carbon-dated to 669 CE at the latest with a 95% probability.<sup>46</sup> Sadeghi and Bergmann, after an analysis of the chapter order and the variants of the codex and comparing them with the variants that are found in Muslim narrative sources, conclude that *Sana'a 1* represents a pre-canonical copy of the Qur'ān, which is likely to have been produced before the attempt of Uthman to standardize the Qur'ānic consonantal text.<sup>47</sup> These conclusions are significant in at least two ways: first, the text of the Qur'ān, albeit with divergences from the Uthmanic canonical text, was in existence long before the available manuscripts had shown earlier. Secondly, one can now begin to talk about a redaction history based on pre-Uthmanic/post-Uthmanic distinction with actual documentary evidence against which the data in Muslim narrative sources could be used to corroborate. All in all, the discovery of the *Sana'a* manuscripts removed the clog of the study of Qur'ānic redaction history but its confirmation of the early date of the Qur'ān made the scheme of Wansbrough untenable for a form-critical study. It was clear by now that the context of the composition of the Qur'ān was not the same with the context of the interpretation of the Qur'ān. Wansbrough was right that the Qur'ān owed its exegetical, haggadic and halakhic embellishments to Iraq but the text itself seemed much earlier than the foundation of Baghdad.

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<sup>45</sup> Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, "Ṣan' ā' I and the Origins of the Qur'ān," *Der Islam* 87, no. 1–2 (2012): 1–129.

<sup>46</sup> Sadeghi and Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet," 348–54.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

## A New Solution for Form Criticism: The Qur'ān as a Late Antique Text

Wansbrough's *Qur'ānic Studies* achieved in bringing the methods and terminology of Biblical and rabbinic studies to the study of the Qur'ān but the premise of his whole book turned out to be flawed. If the Qur'ān is the earliest discursive text composed in Arabic and if its context of composition is considerably distant from its interpretive context, there remains little room to argue for what amounts to a Qur'ānic "documentary hypothesis". As such, a formal or generic development of the Qur'ān from earlier texts cannot be followed and the Qur'ān altogether appears as a *sui generis* work with little traceable connection to the literary developments of its time. Furthermore, the contextual shift from the composition of the Qur'ān (early 7<sup>th</sup> c. Hijāz) to its interpretation (early 9<sup>th</sup> c. Baghdad) puts the interpretive capacity of Muslim narrative sources in great suspicion. As a result, the developments in the last several decades of Qur'ānic studies tried to find a solution to these two post-Wansbrough problems: that of genre and that of contextual shift.

Nothing showcases the prevalence of the genre problem in Qur'ānic studies better than two articles by two leading scholars of the Qur'ān, Angelika Neuwirth and Gabriel Reynolds, in a recent collection of conference papers edited by Neuwirth herself and her two colleagues.<sup>48</sup> Both scholars urge to reconsider the Qur'ān in a larger context of Late Antique religious environment and they share a similar distrust of Muslim sources for the contextualization of the Qur'ān. For both of them, when it is put in the rich continuum of religious texts of the Late Antique world, the Qur'ān appears less isolated and its discursive capacity becomes more appreciated. Yet, when it comes to identifying the Qur'ān's genre within the Late Antique religious production, they diverge radically. For Neuwirth, the

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<sup>48</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, vol. v. 6, Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān (Leiden :Boston: Brill, 2010).

Qur'ān promises a unique psalmic experience especially in the Meccan chapters with its semi-poetic style and its strong ethical bent. As such, Qur'ān's early chapters say little about the life of the Prophet and they must be considered as literary constructs in the line of Jewish liturgical material that reflects the process of *Gemeindebildung* as Wansbrough had argued earlier.<sup>49</sup> Reynolds, however, argues that the Qur'ān's dictum is predominantly homiletic with its elliptical allusions to Biblical figures and its rhetorical style.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, its closest relatives must be sought for in the Eastern Christian homilies written mostly in Syriac.

Indeed, there is a need to map the literary history of the Qur'ān on the larger context of the Late Antique sacred literature and the recent works of Angelika Neuwirth made a convincing case to treat the Qur'ān as a text that reflects the *topoi*, concepts, expectations and anxieties of the time.<sup>51</sup> In the absence of a solid redaction and tradition history of the Qur'ān, however, and with the notorious ambiguity concerning the date, provenance and the agency of the Qur'ān, many questions will remain unanswered simply due to contextual uncertainty.

Coming to our day in the story of the Qur'ānic studies, it is not hard to see that the recent works of these two experts of the Qur'ān offer a classic situation of *plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose*. Even though the language of influence and borrowing was dropped off mostly after Speyer and a hunt for sources gave way to proper historical, form-critical and literary research, attempts to identify the genre of the Qur'ān are still limited to what Jewish liturgy or Syriac homily might offer. Indeed, such reductionism due to a lack of proper

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<sup>49</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, "Qur'ānic Readings of the Psalms" in *Ibid.*, v. 6:733–78.

<sup>50</sup> Gabriel Reynolds, "Reading the Qur'ān as Homily: The Case of Sarah's Laughter" in *Ibid.*, v. 6:585–92.

<sup>51</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran Als Text Der Spätantike: Ein Europäischer Zugang*, 1. Aufl. (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010).



contextualization of the text can be observed in the works of many scholars from Geiger to our day in various degrees but it is not totally unwarranted. The Qur'ān was supposedly born in Western Arabia but the puzzlingly swift expansion to the lands of Byzantine and Sasanian Empires put the Qur'ān in places with predominantly Christian and Jewish worldviews. If modern scholars turn their face to the north of the Arabian Peninsula to make sense of the Qur'ān, it is because their Muslim counterparts in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and onwards also did the same. Numerous parallels between Tabari's extrapolations of Qur'ānic verses concerning Biblical figures and their haggadic embellishments in the Midrashim show that early Muslim scholars were likewise biased towards a "northern" reading of the Qur'ān and they quickly synchronized the Qur'ānic prophetic logia with its Judeo-Christian equivalents. Furthermore, a lack of documentary evidence from the immediate environment of Qur'ān's origins left little room for the scholars and reducing the content and language of the Qur'ān to its better-known relatives became the norm.

Such an imbalance in the scholarship of the Qur'ān owing largely to the contextual shift in the history of the Qur'ān could be sustained as long as Western Arabia in particular and the Peninsula in general did not offer better alternatives for contextualization. Yet, a heuristic bias that was of some limited use in the absence of positive evidence was taken to its extremes in certain cases. One such case is found in the notorious work of Christoph Luxenberg called the *Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*.<sup>52</sup> A number of scholars reviewed this work judiciously so I will confine myself to the philological fallacy of the book, which went rather unnoticed. Reading the consonantal skeleton of the Qur'ān as a Syriac text rather than an Arabic one, as Luxenberg does, could work at a time when Wansbrough was writing.

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<sup>52</sup> Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran*, 1st ed. (Berlin: H. Schiler, 2007).

The supposed late date of the Qur'ān and its Iraqi origins could fit his scheme pretty well even though we would still have to admit the unlikely scenario that Muslims one day discovered a consonantal text written in Syriac and tried erroneously to understand it in Arabic. In other words, a complete disregard for the oral tradition, a late date for the Qur'ānic text, a northern Mesopotamian origin for it and a total communal amnesia would be the necessary conditions for Luxenberg's theory to work. Yet his work received some, if not a lot of, recognition due to the north-centric orientation of the scholarship that gives to Syriac language and Syriac Christianity an undue weight for the interpretation of the Qur'an.

#### Research Plan: Revisiting Peninsular Sources

The imbalance in the Qur'ānic studies that I tried to underline until this point is not to say that no scholar attempted to contextualize the Qur'ān in its supposedly original environment. It is true that pre-Islamic Arabic epigraphy and paleography does not provide us with ample sources but the southwest corner of Arabia was the home of a long-lived literate civilization in a "happier" (*Arabia Felix*) climate of the Peninsula. Thousands of inscriptions in various dialects of Old South Arabian (henceforth, OSA) languages with their unique script have survived and many of them have been studied from the early nineteenth century onwards. They are attested roughly from the 10<sup>th</sup> c. BCE to the 6<sup>th</sup> c. CE providing a large body of documentary evidence for South Arabian civilizations.

One of the scholars that saw the potential of these inscriptions to inform us about the pre-Islamic history of the Peninsula was David Margoliouth.<sup>53</sup> In a series of lectures at the British Academy in 1921, Margoliouth argued among other things that the Qur'ānic monotheism preserves many elements that can be traced to the South Arabian monotheistic religion around the cult of God Rḥmn (corresponding to al-Raḥmān of the Qur'ān). One of the key pieces of evidence that Margoliouth used was a Sabaic (one of the OSA languages) inscription that mentions “forgiveness of the sins, acceptance of sacrifice, association in the sense of polytheism (*shirk*), a near and distant world, ascription of both good and evil to God”<sup>54</sup> with almost identical Qur'ānic terminology. Margoliouth's excitement about the potential of such a discovery deserves a lengthy quotation:

“The inferences to be drawn from this tablet seem so far-reaching that some hesitation is felt about eliciting them all. Was Mohammed's theology not, as the Qur'ān so emphatically represents it, a fresh start in Arabia traceable, as the tradition suggests, to contact of the Prophet with Jews and Christians on his travels, or at Meccah, but merely the introduction into North Arabia of a system which had possibly for some centuries been, if not actually dominant, yet at least current in the South?”<sup>55</sup>

Unfortunately though, the main aim of Margoliouth's lectures was almost an attempt to rewrite the whole history of Semitic peoples through Old South Arabian inscriptions and his promising contribution to the contextualization of the Qur'ān remained a sideline to his bold and untenable claim.

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<sup>53</sup> D. S. (David Samuel) Margoliouth and London British Academy, *The Relations between Arabs and Israelites prior to the Rise of Islam*, vol. 1921, Schweich Lectures 1921 (London: Pub. for the British academy by H. Milford, Oxford university press, 1924).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 1921:68.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

One would think that the promising potential of documentary evidence from the Peninsula itself would redress the imbalance in the field of Qur'ānic studies but this has not been the case. Studies in Ancient North Arabian (so-called Thamudic, henceforth ANA), Nabataean and OSA have grown significantly but their contribution to a better understanding of the Qur'ān remained limited. It must be conceded that the evidence gathered from these sources would have certain limitations since they do not contain any literary-discursive material comparable to the Qur'ān. After all, most of them are dedicatory inscriptions or personal graffiti with no more than a few lines. Besides, it is very difficult to do a complete survey of the available inscriptional sources as they are mostly published in articles here and there and new discoveries are constantly added to the corpus. Finally, the languages of these inscriptions are generally checked against Classical Arabic for their morphology and lexicon and thus there is always the risk of running into circular arguments.

Despite the problems with the nature of these sources, even in the lexicographic studies of the Qur'ān, where they could have been of utmost help, there is a surprising absence of OSA and ANA material. A telling example of this is the aforementioned work of Arthur Jeffery on the loanwords in the Qur'ān where the representation of OSA is very small compared to Syriac and Hebrew while ANA does not even show up. Although both the OSA and ANA have been very lively fields of scholarship, their contact with the Qur'ānic studies has been sporadic and limited to the works of scholars like Francois de Blois<sup>56</sup>, Hani

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<sup>56</sup> Francois de Blois, "Islam in its Arabian Context" in Neuwirth, Sinai, and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, v. 6:615–24.

Hayajneh<sup>57</sup> and, most recently by Ahmad al-Jallad<sup>58</sup>, who are not primarily interested in the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, several monographs and articles were devoted to the subject recently in order to bring the studies of Arabian epigraphy in line with the Qur'ānic studies.

A meaningful first step towards a reference work was taken by Martin Zammit who wrote a comparative Semitic lexicon of the Qur'ān adding OSA, but not ANA, to the list of Semitic languages that share cognates with the Arabic of the Qur'ān.<sup>59</sup> The article by Hayajneh in the second volume of the *Qur'ān in its Historical Context* edited by Reynolds addressed the lexical possibilities to make better sense of some Qur'ānic words through OSA and other Arabian languages.<sup>60</sup> Neuwirth's edited volume of conference proceedings, *the Qur'ān in Context*, has at least three articles that promise a rapprochement between the fields of Arabian epigraphy and Qur'ānic studies. However, one will observe that two edited volumes by Reynolds and another one by Neuwirth that aim to shed light on the context of the Qur'ān still assign a marginal role to the peninsular sources indicating the evergreen imbalance in the field.

Having laid out the problems in the field, my dissertation project aims to read the Qur'ān in light of sources from the Peninsula for a proper contextualization of the Qur'ān. As such, it is aimed as a contribution to the *traditionsgeschichte* of the Qur'ān with a special focus on lexical and thematic continuity from pre-Qur'ānic Arabian texts to the Qur'ān. Given the advances that the field of Qur'ānic studies made since Wansbrough, I will assume that the

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<sup>57</sup> Hani Hayajneh, "The Usage of Ancient South Arabian and Other Arabian Languages as an Etymological Source for Qur'ānic Vocabulary" Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, 10:117–46.

<sup>58</sup> Ahmad M. Jallad, "The Linguistic Landscape of pre-Islamic Arabia – Context for the Qur'ān" in M. Shah and M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'ānic Studies* (forthcoming)

<sup>59</sup> Martin R. Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic*, vol. v. 61, Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section One, the Near and Middle East (Boston: Brill, 2002).

<sup>60</sup> Hani Hayajneh, op.cit.

consonantal skeleton of the Uthmanic text of the Qur'ān is more or less intact since the mid-7<sup>th</sup> c. and, hence, represents the earliest layers of documentary evidence for the new dispensation that came to be known as Islam. In other words, I will build my project upon the latest developments in the redaction history of the Qur'ān. By doing this, I aim to make a clear distinction between the Qur'ān, which I will primarily treat as a primary material source, and other Muslim narrative sources of early Islam, which cannot prove to appear earlier than the mid-8<sup>th</sup> c. at the earliest. In other words, I will avoid using the works of *sīra*, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* and pre-Islamic poetry unless any information in them can be corroborated with documentary evidence. A similar caution will hold for Judeo-Christian sources that have ambiguous dating including most of the Midrashim.

These cautions leave me with two distinct primary source materials. First is the large corpus of inscriptions and graffiti from the Peninsula written in various languages and dialects. Some problems with these sources have already been noted: they are generally short, formulaic, non-discursive, limited in vocabulary and difficult to read occasionally. However, they provide a large pool of material that is soundly datable to pre-Islamic period and work as a corrective to lexical and onomastic studies. Second is a group of Jewish and Christian sources that did not attain canonical status but were clearly at the background of Qur'ānic prophetic logia. Most important of these are apocryphal works that gained a semi-canonical status in Ethiopian Christianity with a possibility of making an impact on the southern Arabian monotheism of all sorts. The Book of Jubilees, the Book of Enoch and a few apocryphal gospels will be examined in this regard. Yemenite rabbinic tradition, exemplified in *Midrash HaGadol*, will also be considered along with other rabbinic material that pertains to the Peninsula. This second group of sources will pose challenges different than the first

set but the elements of Qur'ānic discourse on Biblical figures can only be followed through these intermediary sources between the Qur'ān and the Bible as long as their date and presence in the vicinity of the Peninsula are authenticated. To this end, peculiar statements of the Qur'ān about Judaism and Christianity will be re-examined in light of pre-Qur'ānic sources that are closest to the supposed provenance of the Qur'ān.

## Chapter 1- Gods of the Qur'ān – Idols of Arabia

### Introduction

Along with the methodological guidelines laid out in the introduction, this chapter attempts to use the Qur'ān as a primary source for the study of religion, and more particularly, of divine nomenclature, in the qur'anic milieu. Instead of using Arabic literary sources that antedate the Qur'ān, - a method amply used for the study of pre-Islamic Arabian religion- I will examine non-Arabic, mostly non-literary sources that securely predate the Qur'ān. As Patricia Crone complains in her 2010 article about the qur'anic *mushrikūn*, the line between the primary and the secondary information concerning the qur'anic data has been constantly blurred by exegetical readings into the text and as such, in her words, “few historians know the Qur'ān as a primary source.”<sup>1</sup> This chapter, with the whole dissertation in view, is an effort to re-historicize the Qur'ān, bypassing the seemingly unbreakable unity of the text with its exegetical addenda through the corroboration of non-Arabic pre-Islamic sources.

To put it differently, by jettisoning the Qur'ān's interpretive burden, I aim to de-contextualize it, to leave it in limbo without an assumed provenance, and then to re-contextualize it with the information in the Qur'ān itself and in any other pre-qur'anic source that supports it. As such, this chapter is not a rewriting of the pre-Islamic Arabian

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Crone, “The Religion of the qur'anic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities,” *Arabica* 57, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 153. The complete quotation in its context is as follows: “The primary and secondary information must always be kept separate. This rule has been so consistently violated for so long in the case of the Qur' ān and the tradition that reading the Qur' ān on its own is deeply de-familiarising, at least to somebody coming to the book from history rather than Qur' ānic studies. Few historians know the Qur' ān as a primary source.”



religion but quite the opposite of it: rewriting the religion of the Qur'ān's interlocutors in order to see whether their description fits the data from the supposed origins of the Qur'ān.

The sources that inform such a study need to be extensive, and thus I will consider a large variety of inscriptional material from Old South Arabian, Ancient North Arabian, Nabataean, Palmyran, "Sinaitic" and also, in a rather limited fashion, Greek, Latin and Syriac. Greek and Latin literary sources are indispensable, but I will strictly limit myself to the information that is of immediate concern to the qur'anic data. However, using the Qur'ān itself poses the greater problem since even the aides for an accurate rendering of the text, like diacritics and vowels, are dictated by interpretive exigencies. Fortunately, almost all the inscriptional material that will be used in this chapter is written in consonantal scripts without vowels and thus can be overlapped with the consonantal skeleton of the Qur'ān that has reached us through the earliest extant manuscripts. Nevertheless, of all the texts that I use in this study, the Qur'ān is the most defectively written; and referring to the Sanā' a codex (probably the earliest datable collection of several *maṣāḥif*) for the consonantal text will only partially solve the problem.

Finally, the following examination of divine beings is limited to various names and titles of the qur'anic God and *nomina propria* of rejected gods or idols that are mentioned in the Qur'ān. References to angels (*malā'ika*) and "demons" (*jinn*), albeit most pertinent to the question of divinity in the Qur'ān, will be mentioned in passing at best. This leaves us with only a small group of elements to consider, but pre-qur'anic material about them is extensive and needs to be exhausted for a meaningful analysis. I will start with two groups of gods found in Q 53:19-20 and Q 71:23 and then discuss the solitary attestation of al-Ba' l in Q 37:125. This will exhaust the gods that are mentioned with their proper names in the

Qur'ān with the exception of the qur'anic God. Then, I will examine the lexical overlap of divine vocabulary in the Qur'ān and in the inscriptional material. The name Allāh and al-Raḥmān along with other titles of the qur'anic God will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

### Arabian Goddesses: Al-Lāt, al-' Uzzā and Manāt the Third

"He claimed to be an Arab prophet and he was. We shall see him consciously borrowing - he is quite frank about it. But to begin with, the materials which he uses, though they may remind us ever and again of Jewish and Christian phrases and ideas, are in reality Arab materials."<sup>2</sup>

The Qur'ān is so parsimonious when it comes to the beliefs and practices of its so-called pagan addressees that textbook depictions of pre-Islamic idolatry in the Kitāb al-Aṣṅnām of Ibn al-Kalbī can only claim a few verses from the Qur'ān as evidence. Of some twenty-odd idols that Ibn al-Kalbī lists in his book, only eight of them are found by name in the Qur'ān, concentrated in two clusters of verses, with no further description or specification. The first cluster is found in Chapter 53 called The Star (*al-najm*), a chapter generally considered to be composed in the early Meccan period:

"Have you considered al-Lāt and al-' Uzzā? And Manāt, the third, the other? What, have you males, and He females? That is indeed an unjust division. They are naught but names yourselves have named, and your fathers; God has sent down no authority touching them. They follow only surmise, and what the souls desire; and yet guidance has come to them from their Lord."<sup>3</sup>

These three names are unanimously regarded in the Islamic tradition as belonging to three major goddesses that were revered by the interlocutors of Muḥammad, with their cults tied to certain localities and images in the vicinity of Mecca. As such, much

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment; the Gunning Lectures, Edinburgh University, 1925*, vol. 1925, Gunning Lectures ; 1925 (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1926), 69.

<sup>3</sup> Q 53:19-23. The translations are from Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted* with my updated transliterations.

information about them can be found in the Muslim exegetical and historical tradition. Many scholars reproduced in Western languages the accounts about these three goddesses and other deities found in Muslim sources.<sup>4</sup> In the following pages, instead of reiterating these accounts, I will survey pre-Islamic literary and inscriptional evidence for each of these three goddesses and discuss the larger context of these verses in the Chapter of the Star and in the Qur'ān in general.

### Al-Lāt

"They [Arabs] believe in no other gods except Dionysus and the Heavenly Aphrodite; and they say that they wear their hair as Dionysus does his, cutting it round the head and shaving the temples. They call Dionysus, Orotalt; and Aphrodite, Alilat."<sup>5</sup>

Of the three goddesses, al-Lāt is by far the best attested one in the pre-Islamic materials across various languages and locations. It appears in so many different forms that one would be hesitant to consider all its attestations as possible evidence for the qur'anic al-Lāt; a consonantal *lt* or ' *lt* form suffixed or prefixed with a definite marker pervades all attestations making them comparable to the consonantal qur'anic form ' *llt*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> To this day the best summary of Muslim sources on the matter is found in Julius Wellhausen, *Reste Arabischen Heidentums*, 2. Ausg. (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1897). Ludolf Krehl's translation of Yākūt's account on pre-Islamic religion is also very helpful and is found in Ludolf Krehl and al-Ĥamawī, Mu'jam al-buldān Yākūt ibn ' Abd Allāh, *Über Die Religion Der Vorislamischen Araber*. (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1972), original printing in 1863. A more recent work on the same lines is Hüseyin Ilker Çinar, *Die Religionen Der Araber Vor Und in Der Frühislamischen Zeit*, Arabisch-Islamische Welt in Tradition Und Moderne, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 3, Ch. 8. "Διόνυσον δὲ θεῶν μούνον καὶ τὴν Οὐρανίην ἠγέονται εἶναι, καὶ τῶν τριχῶν τὴν κουρὴν κείρεσθαι φασὶ κατάπερ αὐτὸν τὸν Διόνυσον κεκάρθαι: κείρονται δὲ περιτρόχαλα, ὑποξυρῶντες τοὺς κροτάφους. ὀνομάζουσι δὲ τὸν μὲν Διόνυσον Οροτάλτ, τὴν δὲ Οὐρανίην Ἀλιλάτ." Translation is from A. D. (Alfred Denis) Godley 1856-1925, *Herodotus*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1960), <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/1201101>.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Codices of Madina 1a and Sayyida Zaynab. Obviously the letter t is represented by a grapheme shared by other letters but since it is a final letter the only other possibilities are th and b. The correct reading can only be provided by the tradition.

The reason for the widespread dissemination of the deity is most likely etymological in origin since al-Lāt can be taken to mean “the goddess” as the female counterpart of Allāh but it is clear that it was treated as a proper name very early on. Muslim scholars largely ignored this probably long lost connection and tried to derive the name from the verbal root l-t-t meaning “to mix, or knead, barley meal”.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the lexical development from *al-ilāha* (goddess) to *al-lāt* is very problematic even if we assume that the transformation occurred within Arabic. Healey argues that the reconstructed proto-Semitic \*hal-ilat (which appeared as ἁλιλάτ in Herodotus) gave way to \*hallat and then to \*allat, which was later lexicalized into al-Lāt in analogy to its perceived masculine form Allāh.<sup>8</sup> A more likely explanation is a proto-Arabic development where \*al-ilat lost its initial alif and acquired a long /a:/ with an analogical extension based on *allāh*.

Regardless of its etymology, the goddess al-Lāt had a long history before she found her way into the Qur’ān. Before locating her through a historical and geographical survey of inscriptions, the most striking reference to the goddess in classical literature, that of Herodotus, needs to be dealt with. In the context of Cambyses II’s expedition against Egypt, Herodotus mentions that some Arabs who inhabited the arid lands of northern Sinai provided guidance and water to the marching army. As a passing note, he says that Arabs believe only in two gods, both of them of Greek origin but with local names: they believe in Dionysus under the name of Orotalt and in Aphrodite Ourania, whom they call Alilat. Orotalt<sup>9</sup> will not be discussed here, but it suffices to say that the strange name has elicited

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<sup>7</sup> T. (Toufic) Fahd, *Le Panthéon de l’Arabie Centrale À La Veille de l’Hégire*, Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique. (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1968), 112.

<sup>8</sup> John F. Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2001), 113.

<sup>9</sup> One should note that other variations of this name as Orotal, Oratal or Ouratalt exist in certain manuscripts.

many interesting explanations.<sup>10</sup> Alilat, however, seems to be a neat Greek transliteration of the goddess al-Lāt corresponding to centuries of attestations in the inscriptions and later in the Qur’ān and the Muslim tradition. In a rather overlooked passage in the first book of his *Histories*, Herodotus repeats that Arabs believe in Aphrodite as Alilat while Assyrians call her Mulitta and Persians Mitra.<sup>11</sup> As a result, both passages associate the cult of Alilat with Aphrodite, a point that I will take issue with later in this chapter.

Herodotus wrote in the fifth c. BCE while Cambyses II’s contact with the Arabs of northern Sinai occurred in the sixth c. BCE. Roughly around the same time, the Qedar confederation of Arab tribes was roaming the large territory lying between Taymā and Ḥawrān. Three votive vessels made of silver dedicated by the members of this tribe to *hn’ lt* found their way into the Tell el-Maskhūṭa shrine in Lower Egypt. Inscriptions on the vessels are in Aramaic, and all three of them mention the deity *hn’ lt*. Two of them include the name of the dedicators, one of whom is called the king of Qedar.<sup>12</sup> Isaac Rabinowitz, who published the inscriptions with a commentary, identifies this “North-Arabian goddess Han-ilat” (as he calls it) with the Alilat of Herodotus, but he admits that the “Arabs” of Herodotus must have been different from the Qedar of the Aramaic inscriptions since they did not use the same definite article. A few years later, Rabinowitz published another inscription on a silver vessel

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<sup>10</sup> Franz Karl Movers (*Die Phönizier* (Bonn: E. Weber, 1841), Vol 1, 337) argued that it must be derived from *Orath El*, meaning “the fire of God” while Franz Cumont wanted to link it with the Nabataean king-turned-god Obodas. Cf. Franz Cumont, “Le Dieu Orotalt d’Herodote,” *Revue Archéologique* 40 (1902): 297.

<sup>11</sup> Book 1, ch. 131: “τούτοι σι μὲν δὴ θύουσι μούνοισι ἀρχῆθεν, ἐπι με μαθήκασι δὲ καὶ τῆ Οὐρανίη θύειν, παρά τε Ἀσσυρίων μαθόντες καὶ Ἀραβίων. καλέουσι δὲ Ἀσσύριοι τὴν Ἀφροδίτην Μύλιττα, Ἀράβιοι δὲ Ἄλιλάτ, Πέρσαι δὲ Μίτραν.” “From the beginning, these are the only gods to whom they have ever sacrificed; they learned later to sacrifice to the “heavenly” Aphrodite from the Assyrians and Arabians. She is called by the Assyrians Mylitta, by the Arabians Alilat, by the Persians Mitra.”

<sup>12</sup> Isaac Rabinowitz, “Aramaic Inscriptions of the Fifth Century BCE from a North-Arab Shrine in Egypt,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 15, no. 1 (1956): 2. Plate IIIB: *l-hn’ lt* “Brought-in-offering to han-’ ilat”, Plate VA and B: *zy qrb šḥ’ br’ bd’ mrw l-hn’ lt* “That-which Sēḥā’ bar’ Abd-’ Amru brought-in-offering to han-’ ilat”. Plate VIIA and B: *zy qynw br gšm mlk qdr qrb l-hn’ lt* “That-which Qainu bar Gešem, king of Qedar, brought-in-offering to han-’ ilat”.

from the same Tell el-Maskhūṭa hoard, and this time the identification of Han-ilat as a proper name was complete because the inscription referred to her as “Han-ilat the goddess”.<sup>13</sup>

At this point, both the literary and the inscriptional evidence lead to the conclusion that as early as the fifth c. BCE al-Lāt was known among the Arabs residing in the regions northwest of the Arabian Peninsula. These two sets of occurrences probably constitute the earliest datable references to al-Lāt if we exclude some possible but highly dubious Akkadian references to the goddess.<sup>14</sup> Going forward from the fifth c. BCE the evidence for al-Lāt becomes unmanageably large and diverse, while accurate dating of sources related to al-Lāt proves more and more difficult. One relatively visible area under the light of historicity, however, is the Nabataean realm where al-Lāt was a major deity. In addition, juxtaposition of al-Lāt with Hellenistic divine figures reached completion among the Nabataeans, who were in close contact with the Romans during their ascendancy until the Romans fully absorbed them in 106 CE.<sup>15</sup>

The origins of the Nabataeans and their connection with the Biblical Nebaioth<sup>16</sup> are much debated, but it is clear that as early as the fourth c. BCE they were active in the former

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<sup>13</sup> Isaac Rabinowitz, “Another Aramaic Record of the North-Arabian Goddess HAN-’ ILAT,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 2 (April 1959): 154. Plates II and III: ḥrbk br psry qrb l-hn’ lt’ lht’ “Ḥarbak bar Pasiri brought-(it)-in-offering to han-’ ilat the goddess.”

<sup>14</sup> Knut Leonard Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta: mit einem götterverzeichnis und einer liste der prädikativen elemente der Sumerischen götternamen* (Helsingforsiae: Societas Orientalis Fennica, 1938), 259, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/2118525>.

<sup>15</sup> For a concise but learned history of Nabataeans see G. W. (Glen Warren) Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 1st Harvard University Press paperback (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Nabaioth are mentioned in Gen. 25:13 and Is. 60:7. For a discussion of a possible connection between the Nabataeans, the biblical Nabaioth and Nabaiati of Assyrian records see Edwin C. Broome, “Nabaiati, Nebaioth and the Nabataeans: The Linguistic Problem,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 18, no. 1 (1973): 1–16.

areas of Edomite control in southern Jordan.<sup>17</sup> Later, they extended their territories further south into the Ḥijāz and north towards Damascus, which they managed to capture for a short period. They left us impressive funerary monuments in Petra and Madā'in Šāliḥ and clearly written Aramaic inscriptions in a script that became the forefather of the Arabic alphabet, as we know it today.<sup>18</sup> Based on these inscriptions, we know that Nabataeans worshipped a god called Dushara (*dwšr'* in Nabataean script, *dhū sharā* in the Arabic sources with a final y and *Dusares* in Latin), a deity unknown to the Qur'ān but mentioned by Ibn al-Kalbī,<sup>19</sup> along with many other deities including al-Lāt ('lt), Manāt (*mnwtw*) and al-'Uzzā ('l'z'). However, among these deities, al-Lāt seems to have been accorded a special position as the consort of Dushara. Both Starcky and Healey, two major experts on Nabataean religion, argue that Nabataeans only had one god and one goddess that constituted its *paredre*, while all the other gods mentioned in the inscriptions are “mostly titles describing particular attributes or aspects of the deity.”<sup>20</sup> Al-Lāt was therefore “the goddess” par excellence of the Nabataeans, but her local manifestations were numerous.

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<sup>17</sup> One of the earliest references to Nabataeans is found in Diodorus of Sicily (*Bibliotheca Historica*, ch. 19.94.2 ff). Diodorus refers to them simply as Arabs and describes them as nomadic husbandry men who love their freedom, contempt earthly possessions, avoid agricultural activities and abhor the consumption of wine. Some of his observations about these Arabs will be discussed in the following chapters of this dissertation.

<sup>18</sup> The continuity from the Nabataean script to the early Arabic script is best argued by Beatrice Gruendler, *The Development of the Arabic Scripts: From the Nabatean Era to the First Islamic Century according to Dated Texts*, vol. 43, *Harvard Semitic Studies* ; (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1993), <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/5879772>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn al-Kalbī and Nabih Amin Faris, *The Book of Idols, Being a Translation from the Arabic of the Kitāb Al-Asnām*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 33, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/216071>. But as expected Ibn al-Kalbī does not mention Nabataeans in his account and notes that Dushara was the idol of a tribe belonging to the Azdī confederation.

<sup>20</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 80. One should also remember at this point that both Herodotus and Strabo observed that Arabs had only two gods while later on Tertullian argued that every region had its own single god, Arabia having Dusares and Syria having Atargatis.

Healey even thinks, taking his cue from Starcky, that al-‘ Uzzā and al-Lāt were one and the same goddess for the Nabataeans and were only later split into two distinct divinities.<sup>21</sup>

It is clear from the material evidence that al-Lāt played a major role in the Nabataean pantheon, regardless of how small or large their pantheon was. One inscription from Ṣalkhad even suggests that she was regarded as the mother of other gods.<sup>22</sup> She was “the great goddess who is in Iram”<sup>23</sup> and the patron-deity of Boşra in Boşran coins.<sup>24</sup> Her identification with Greek deities, however, is much more problematic. Herodotus had thought that Arabs’ Alilat was equal to Greeks’ Aphrodite, but the large amount of Athena tetra-drachmas found in the shrine of Tell el-Maskhūṭa next to the silver bowls dedicated to al-Lāt suggests her affinity with Athena.<sup>25</sup> Other Nabataean and later Palmyran evidence points to this latter connection. Al-Lāt, under Hellenistic-Roman influence, gradually loses her aniconic character and begins to be portrayed with the symbols of Athena, assuming the characteristics of a warlike goddess. A strong proof for this is that the Nabataean/Palmyran proper name *Wahballāt* (*whb’ lt*, meaning “the gift of al-Lāt” similar to the theophoric name Yahu-natan) is transliterated as *ουαβάλλαθος*<sup>26</sup> and translated into Greek as

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 110. The inscription reads: ‘ *lht’ rbt’ dy b’rm*. It is also mentioned in Peter. Alpass, *The Religious Life of Nabataea*, vol. volume 175, *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* ; (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 136 fn. 136, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/9290231>. See Q 89:5-8 for the mention of Iram. For its identification with the Iram temple of al-Lāt belonging to the tribe of ‘ Ād, see Chapter 3.

<sup>24</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 110.

<sup>25</sup> Rabinowitz, “Aramaic Inscriptions of the Fifth Century BCE from a North-Arab Shrine in Egypt,” 4.

<sup>26</sup> Note the doubled *l*, which indicates that the name of the goddess was pronounced in Nabataea similar to its pronunciation in Arabic. Attestations of *Wahballāt* are numerous in coins with Latin inscriptions since one of the Palmyran kings was called *Wahballāt* or in his Latinized name *Lucius Julius Aurelius Septimius Vaballathus Athenodorus*, the son of *Lucius Septimius Odaenathus* (‘ *dynt* in Aramaic corresponding to the Arabic *Udhaynah*) and the famous *Zenobia*, the Queen of Palmyra.



Ἀθηνῶδωρος (gift of Athena) in a bilingual inscription.<sup>27</sup> Towards the north, in Palmyra, al-Lāt became fully integrated into the Hellenistic world of syncretism and shared the symbolism of Athena along with Mesopotamian Ishtar and Syrian Atargatis.<sup>28</sup> One striking example of this is a Palmyran statue of al-Lāt sitting in between two lions, similar to Athena and Atargatis.<sup>29</sup> Finally, a third c. CE dedicatory inscription in Greek from Cordoba (Spain) mentioning al-Lāt alongside Athena shows how far and wide the cult of the goddess had spread in the Roman world.<sup>30</sup>

There is no doubt that the cult of al-Lāt was fused with that of Athena in the northern parts of Nabataea under Roman influence, but this fusion was somewhat limited to Petra and northwards, whereas the Ḥijāz, another major center of Nabataean kingdom, was largely untouched by the Romans. Healey, even after citing many examples of al-Lāt's association with Greek and Mesopotamian deities, emphasizes the Arabian background of the goddess since she is, along with al-ʿUzzā, “clearly best attested in Arabia.”<sup>31</sup> He even extends this judgment to the entirety of the Nabataean pantheon, saying that “certain other deities worshipped by some or all of the Nabataeans have an Arabian background and, negatively, are unknown in the world of traditional Syrian religion except as imports.”<sup>32</sup>

This “Arabian” background vaguely put forward by Healey and others who were otherwise proponents of the Jewish and Christian backgrounds of the Qurʾān<sup>33</sup> can be best

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<sup>27</sup> Vassilios Christides, “Religious Syncretism in the Near East: Allāt-Athena in Palmyra,” *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 1 (2003): 66.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>29</sup> Gawlikowski, M., “Les dieux de Palmyre”, ANRW II 18. 4 (1990) 2641 pl. XIX, 42.

<sup>30</sup> Franz Cumont, “Une Dédicace À Des Dieux Syriens Trouvée À Cordoue,” *Syria* 5, no. 4 (1924): 342–345.

<sup>31</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 108.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>33</sup> Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment; the Gunning Lectures, Edinburgh University, 1925*, 1925:69; Charles Cutler Torrey, ... *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, The Hilda Stich Stroock Lectures ... at the Jewish

seen in the thousands of graffiti left by the Bedouin and the dwellers of the North Arabian oases in the scripts that are called Ancient North Arabian. A brief history and classification of these graffiti can be found in Michael MacDonald's seminal article in which he separates them into two basic classes: those found in the major oases like Taymā, Dedan (modern al-'Ulā) and Dūma (ancient Adummatu, Dūmat al-Jandal in Muslim sources) and those dispersed in the north of Saudi Arabia and the south of Syria (Safaitic, Thamudic, Hismaic etc.).<sup>34</sup> Further details about Ancient North Arabian languages can be found MacDonald's article and I will discuss here the numerous attestations of al-Lāt in these languages.

To correctly read and date ANA inscriptions is challenging, and the field is still far from reaching maturity; but the presence of al-Lāt in these inscriptions as a major deity is beyond doubt. By far the largest self-contained set of inscriptions is written in the Safaitic script and found in the southern deserts of modern Syria, northeastern Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia.<sup>35</sup> Dated generally between the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE to 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE, Safaitic inscriptions show that al-Lāt (written either as *lt* or ' *lt* and as *h' lt* in theophoric names) was the most popular divinity within the Safaitic linguistic landscape. In most cases, these inscriptions bear the name of the inscriber and a vocative addressing the deity ("O al-Lāt") ending with a request of safety (*slm*), relief (*rwḥ*) or booty (*qḥnm*). Winnett, based on his survey of more than five thousand Safaitic inscriptions found near fifty funerary cairns, concluded that al-Lāt was mostly asked for safety and security instead of victory and booty as found in the cult of al-

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Institute of Religion (New York: Jewish institute of religion press, 1933), 126. Torrey's remark is as follows: "Around all these Koranic narratives there is, and was from the first, the atmosphere of an Arabian revelation, and they form a very characteristic and important part of the prophet's great achievement."

<sup>34</sup> Michael CA Macdonald, "Reflections on the Linguistic Map of Pre-Islamic Arabia," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 11, no. 1 (2000): 28–79.

<sup>35</sup> *EI* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), "Safaitic".

Lāt-Athena.<sup>36</sup> Another compilation of Safaitic inscriptions from Jordan published by Winnett confirms al-Lāt's single-handed majority within the Safaitic pantheon.<sup>37</sup> Unlike the Nabataean royal pantheon, where gods were referred to as the “god of such-and-such king”<sup>38</sup>, the Safaitic al-Lāt was very personal and was evoked for day-to-day requests by the Bedouin, such as relief from a sickness, safety while herding goats, or curses upon whomever obliterates the said inscription.<sup>39</sup> Aḥmad al-Jallād's recent monograph on clinches the idea that al-Lāt, indeed, was the major deity of the people that left us the Safaitic inscriptions.<sup>40</sup>

In the oasis of Dedan, the stronghold of the Lihyanite kingdom, al-Lāt was at best secondary to the main god Dhū Ghāba and was mostly mentioned in theophoric personal names.<sup>41</sup> This is why Caskel argues that the goddess must have been introduced to Dedan from the north.<sup>42</sup> Two Nabataean inscriptions found in Dedan mentioning al-Lāt may confirm Caskel's argument.<sup>43</sup> An inscription from Dūmat al-Jandal shows that the goddess existed in this oasis as well.<sup>44</sup> Finally, a few unclassified, so-called Thamudic<sup>45</sup> inscriptions

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<sup>36</sup> F. V. (Frederick Victor) Winnett, *Inscriptions from Fifty Safaitic Cairns /*, Near and Middle East Series ; (University of Toronto Press, 1978), 30.

<sup>37</sup> F. V. Winnett, *Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan* ([Toronto]: University of Toronto Press, 1957), <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/2120346>.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. “al-Lāt, mother of the gods of our lord Rabel” identified with Rabel II, the last king of Nabataeans who ruled between 70 and 106 CE. Dushara, in particular, was often referred to as ‘lh mr’ n’ “the god of our Lord” (H 11 and H 26), the Lord mostly referring to the Nabataean ruler on the throne.

<sup>39</sup> Winnett, *Inscriptions from Fifty Safaitic Cairns /*. See inscriptions ns. 159, 181 and 582.

<sup>40</sup> Ahmad Al-Jallad, *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions*, Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 80 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2015), 299.

<sup>41</sup> Alexander. Sima and Alexander Sima., *Die lihyanischen Inschriften von al-‘ Udayb (Saudi-Arabien)* (Rahden/Westf: Leidorf, 1999), 90, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/4287819>.

<sup>42</sup> Werner Caskel, *Lihyan und Lihyanisch*. (Köln: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1954), 46, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/2120336>.

<sup>43</sup> F. V. (Frederick Victor) Winnett, *Ancient Records from North Arabia* ([Toronto]: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 148, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/2120345>; Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 112.

<sup>44</sup> Winnett, *Ancient Records from North Arabia*, 77.

<sup>45</sup> Thamudic is a misnomer referring to all Ancient North Arabian inscriptions other than those known as Safaitic and Lihyanite (which was later called as Dadanitic). As such, it includes a large body of inscriptions that were not properly classified based on dialect or geography.

from various parts of the Arabian Peninsula<sup>46</sup> and Jordan mention al-Lāt, although her preponderance in the Safaitic milieu is not matched anywhere else.

All these inscriptions point to a northerly provenance for al-Lāt with respect to the supposed origins of the Qur'ān. Yet, I should mention that a few inscriptions from Yemen written in Sabaic and Qatabanic dialects indicate that the cult of al-Lāt (written as *lt*, *hn' lt* or *ltn*) had a place in the large pantheon of pre-Islamic southern Arabia.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, based upon a few dedicatory objects and their inscriptions, some scholars have suggested that al-Lāt's cult among female dedicators in Saba and Qataban came closest to the Qur'anic expression of the three goddesses (al-Lāt, al-' Uzzā and Manāt) as "the daughters of God."<sup>48</sup> It is known that a cult of *bnt' l* or *bnyt' l* was popular among women in ancient South Arabia.<sup>49</sup> Amulets belonging to women and bearing the name of al-Lāt and al-' Uzzā together suggest that these two goddesses were regarded as patron-protectors of women.<sup>50</sup> Compared to her preponderance in northern Arabia and the Nabataean kingdom, however, it seems that al-Lāt was part of a limited popular cult in South Arabia, and her presence there seems minuscule compared to both her numerous attestations in the Nabataean and Safaitic milieux and to the well-established South Arabian pantheon.

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<sup>46</sup> Gerald Lankester Harding and with the collaboration of Enno Littmann. by G. Lankester Harding, *Some Thamudic Inscriptions from the Hashimite Kingdom of the Jordan* (Leiden: Brill, 1952), <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/2120338..>

<sup>47</sup> Alessia Priolella, "The Sabaic Inscription A-20-216: A New Sabaeo-Seleucid Synchronism," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 41 (2011): 283–94; Alessandra Avanzini et al., "Materiali per Il Corpus Qatabanico," *Raydān* 6 (n.d.): 17-36-158.

<sup>48</sup> Q 53:21-22: "For you the males and for him the females? This indeed is an unjust division", also related is Q 16:57: "And they ascribe daughters to Allāh, glory be to Him; and for themselves what they desire".

<sup>49</sup> Mohammed Maraqtan, "Women's Inscriptions Recently Discovered by the AFSM at the Awām Temple/Maḥram Bilqīs in Marib, Yemen," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 38 (2008): 241.

<sup>50</sup> Jacques Ryckmans, "UZZĀ ET LĀT DANS LES INSCRIPTIONS SUD-ARABES: A PROPOS DE DEUX AMULETTES MÉCONNUES," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 25, no. 2 (1980): 193–204.

## Al-‘ Uzzā

In many respects al-‘ Uzzā is comparable to al-Lāt, especially in terms of her geographic distribution and her Hellenistic appropriation outside of the Arabian Peninsula. We have seen that she even shows up alongside al-Lāt in a South Arabian amulet as mentioned above. Identifying her in non-literary sources is easier than identifying al-Lāt since al-‘ Uzzā is only spelled in two forms, ‘ zy or ‘ z’ , with a prefixed or suffixed definite article identical to the Qur’anic form either in writing, ‘ l’ zy, or in pronunciation, al-‘ uzzā. As in the case of al-Lāt, the name al-‘ Uzzā is less a proper name than a title. “Al-‘ Uzza” means “the Mighty One,” but its usage as a theonym is clear from inscriptional sources as from the Qur’ān.

Al-‘ Uzzā has a widespread appearance in the Nabataean milieu as a major goddess. She is known from the inscriptions as the goddess of Boşra,<sup>51</sup> and she is represented by stone betyls that are characterized by a pair of stylized eyes in Wādi Ramm.<sup>52</sup> Interestingly enough, however, she is not known in Madā’ in Şāliḥ, the Ḥijāzi center of the Nabataeans, and is never evoked together with al-Lāt among the Nabataeans. Al-Lāt’s absence in Petra and al-‘ Uzzā’s absence in Ḥegra made some scholars like Starcky and Healey think that al-‘ Uzzā might originally be a title of al-Lāt rather than a separate deity.<sup>53</sup> As such, they argue, al-Lāt and al-‘ Uzzā represent two faces of the one and only goddess of the Nabataeans and that is why they alternately appear in Nabataean inscriptions. Another interesting suggestion to account for their alternation in Nabataean sources is that al-Lāt was the goddess of the Safaitic-writing Bedouins whereas al-‘ Uzzā was a native Nabataean deity and

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<sup>51</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 115.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Patrich, “ Al-‘ Uzzā’ Earrings,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 34, no. 1 (1984): 40.

<sup>53</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 113.

Nabataeans made a concession in central Arabia by adopting a local goddess and dropping al-‘ Uzzā.<sup>54</sup> It is also interesting that al-‘ Uzzā was popular in Sinai with the testimony of Nabataean inscriptions there whereas al-Lāt does not even appear in theophoric names.<sup>55</sup>

With the complexity of al-‘ Uzzā’s relationship with al-Lāt in the Nabataean realm in view, however, bilingual (Nabataean-Greek) inscriptions and Greek literary sources suggest that al-Lāt and al-‘ Uzzā were identified with two different Greek goddesses. We have seen above that the cult of al-Lāt was merged in Palmyra with that of Athena while al-‘ Uzzā was associated with Aphrodite. The only direct evidence for this association is from a bilingual Nabataean-Greek inscription found on the island of Cos (an Aegean island close to the shores of south-western Anatolia) and dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Nabataean king Aretas IV, corresponding to the year 9 CE.<sup>56</sup> There *θεά Αφροδίτη* (to the goddess Aphrodite) is found next to *ll’ z’ ’ lht’* (to al-‘ Uzzā the goddess). Other indications of al-‘ Uzzā’s connection to Aphrodite are secondary. For instance, iconography of three earrings found in the Nabataean metropolis of Mamshit is matched with the imagery of al-‘ Uzzā in betyls and, in turn, identified with jewelry of Aphrodite.<sup>57</sup> In all likelihood, in the areas north of the Nabataean heartlands, al-‘ Uzzā found her Hellenistic counterparts in Aphrodite and even in Isis<sup>58</sup> but there is no evidence that the Hellenization of al-‘ Uzzā penetrated into the Arabian Peninsula.

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<sup>54</sup> Susanne Krone, *Die Altarabische Gottheit Al-Lāt*, Heidelberger Orientalistische Studien. (Frankfurt am Main ; New York: P. Lang, 1992), 92.

<sup>55</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 116.

<sup>56</sup> Franz Rosenthal, *Die aramaistische Forschung seit T. Nöldeke’s Veröffentlichungen*. (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1939), 91; Joseph Patrich, “ Al-‘ Uzzā’ Earrings,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 34, no. 1 (1984): 43–44.

<sup>57</sup> Patrich, “ Al-‘ Uzzā’ Earrings,” 44.

<sup>58</sup> Marie-Jeanne Roche, “Le Culte d’Isis et L’influence Égyptienne À Pétra,” *Syria*, 1987, 220.

Related to her identification with Aphrodite, whose Roman equivalent is Venus, al-‘Uzzā was thought by scholars to be the deified form of the planet Venus. Wellhausen discusses Syriac Christian sources in particular that problematize the Venus worship among the Arabs. The most significant of these sources is a homily of Isaac of Antioch (d. 460), who mentions the worship of ‘Uzzī and *kawkabtā* (literally “the Star”, but generally identified with Venus) among the idolatrous cults of the Arab tribes that invaded the city of Beth Ḥur.<sup>59</sup> Greek and Latin sources beginning with Nilus of Sinai<sup>60</sup> and Jerome’s *Vita Hilarionis*<sup>61</sup> indicate that there was a cult of the morning star, i.e. Venus, as Lucifer<sup>62</sup> among the Saracens of Sinai and of Elusa. Indeed, Healey thinks that the name of the city of Elusa (modern al-Khalaṣa), where there was a temple of Venus, might be derived from al-‘Uzzā.<sup>63</sup> Post-Islamic polemical sources reiterate this identification with greater certainty. John of Damascus asks Saracens why they kiss and venerate a stone in the Ka‘ba, which is, in his opinion, the head of Aphrodite known to Arabs as Khabar (χ α β α ρ).<sup>64</sup> An undated Byzantine book of abjuration directed to the converts from Islam to Christianity anathematizes “the worshippers of the morning star, i.e. Lucifer and Aphrodite, which is called Khabar in the language of the Arabes meaning ‘great’”.<sup>65</sup> Byzantine authors took the cult of morning star

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<sup>59</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 119; Fahd, *Le Panthéon de l’Arabie Centrale À La Veille de l’Hégire*, 168; Wellhausen, *Reste Arabischen Heidentums*, 40.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites.*, New ed. , vol. 1888–89., Burnett Lectures [Aberdeen University] 1888–89 (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1894), 362, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/1717085>.

<sup>61</sup> Ch. 25.

<sup>62</sup> Jerome: “*Colunt autem illam ob Luciferum cuius cultui Saracenorum natio dedita est.*”

<sup>63</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 116.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Joseph Henninger, “Über Sternkunde Und Sternkult in Nord- Und Zentralarabien,” *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 79 (1954): 103.

<sup>65</sup> Ed. Montet, “Un Rituel d’Abjuration Des Musulmans Dans l’Eglise Grecque,” *Revue de l’Histoire Des Religions* 53 (1906): 154.

*cum* Aphrodite among Arabs so seriously that as late as the 10th century in a manual written for his son the emperor Constantine VII says:

“And they [Saracens] also pray towards the star of Aphrodite, which they call *Koubar* and in their prayers they exclaim *Alla oua Koubar*, meaning “God and Aphrodite”. For they call their god *Alla* and use *oua* as the conjunction “and” and they call the star “*Koubar*” hence saying *Alla oua Koubar*”.<sup>66</sup>

Based on these sources, Healey does not hesitate to equate al-‘ Uzzā with Venus<sup>67</sup> while Fahd generalizes the cult of Venus to all three goddesses. He argues that Manāt is Venus itself and al-Lāt and al-‘ Uzzā represent the two faces of Venus, the morning and the evening star.<sup>68</sup> However, as MacDonald notes in his article on al-‘ Uzzā in the EI, equating al-‘ Uzzā with Venus requires other equations based on mostly non-Arabian sources and her portrayal in the Ancient North Arabian and Old South Arabian inscriptions is at best silent about her identification with Venus. Al-‘ Uzzā is only found in theophoric names in Safaitic<sup>69</sup> but it appears that the Lihyanites worshipped her in Dedan.<sup>70</sup> Once again, although the evidence does not suggest it, Caskel equates *hn-‘ zy* of the Lihyanite inscriptions with the morning star “*nach Wellhausens sicherer Deutung*”.<sup>71</sup>

Unlike al-Lāt, al-‘ Uzzā has a readily visible existence in the pantheon of Ancient South Arabia. J. Ryckmans counts ten direct references to the goddess under the name ‘ zzyn, six Sabaic and four Qatabanic, and one possible reference in an inscription from

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<sup>66</sup> Constantine and Gyula Moravcsik, *De Administrando Imperio*, New, ed. (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1967), <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/1194178>. ch. 14, my translation of: “Προσεύχονται δὲ καὶ εἰς τὸ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ἄστρον, ὃ καλοῦσι Κουβάρ, καὶ ἀναφωνοῦσιν ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ αὐτῶν οὕτως· «Ἀλλὰ οὐὰ Κουβάρ», ὃ ἐστὶν ‘ὁ θεὸς καὶ Ἀφροδίτη’. Τὸν γὰρ θεὸν ‘Ἀλλὰ’ προσονομάζουσι, τὸ δὲ ‘οὐὰ’ ἀντὶ τοῦ ‘καὶ’ συνδέσμου τιθέασιν, καὶ τὸ ‘Κουβάρ’ καλοῦσι τὸ ἄστρον, καὶ λέγουσιν οὕτως· «Ἀλλὰ οὐὰ Κουβάρ.»

<sup>67</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 117.

<sup>68</sup> Fahd, *Le Panthéon de l’Arabie Centrale À La Veille de l’Hégire*, 118–19.

<sup>69</sup> Winnett, *Inscriptions from Fifty Safaitic Cairns* /, 30.

<sup>70</sup> Caskel, *Lihyan und Lihyanisch.*, 45.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*



Qaryat al-Faw written in South Arabian letters but with the Arabic spelling ' l ' zy.<sup>72</sup> In the largely astral-oriented pantheon of ancient South Arabia al-' Uzzā's relation to Venus is much more problematic than in north Arabia. First, there is strong evidence that Venus and its various phases are represented in the south by the male-god Athtar, a god common to all peoples of South Arabian *Kulturkreis*.<sup>73</sup> This disagreement of gender must be understood against the backdrop of the fact that al-' Uzzā is clearly a female deity in all sources available to us while, as Wellhausen noted, the morning star is generally taken to be masculine in pre-Islamic poetry.<sup>74</sup> Besides, based on secondary evidence, both Jamme and G. Ryckmans consider al-' Uzzā as a solar deity in the ancient South Arabian pantheon.<sup>75</sup> In Jamme's schema, al-' Uzzā is the title of the female solar deity, which is the spouse of the male lunar deity corresponding to the genders of the sun and the moon in Classical Arabic.<sup>76</sup> Regardless of the exact identification of her astral counterpart, there is no doubt that the cult of al-' Uzzā had a heavenly aspect and we will come back to this aspect later in the chapter after the discussion of the third goddess Manāt.

### Manāt

Manāt is the third of the deities mentioned in Q 53:19-20 and the most interesting one for the purposes of orthography. Most of the earliest Qur'ān codices have the form *mnwt*, the final *t* being a *tā marbūta* except *Ms. Paris BnF Arabe 331*, which has *mn' t* corresponding to the

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<sup>72</sup> Ryckmans, "UZZĀ ET LĀT DANS LES INSCRIPTIONS SUD-ARABES," 197.

<sup>73</sup> A. (Albert) Jamme, *Le Panthéon Sud-Arabe Préislamique D'après Les Sources Épigraphiques*, Universitas Catholica Lovaniensis. Sylloge Excerptorum E Dissertationibus Ad Gradum Doctoris in Sacra Theologia Vel in Iure Canonico Consequendum Conscriptis, t.15, v.2 (Louvain, 1947), 88.

<sup>74</sup> Wellhausen, *Reste Arabischen Heidentums*, 44.

<sup>75</sup> Jamme, *Le Panthéon Sud-Arabe Préislamique D'après Les Sources Épigraphiques*, 106; G Ryckmans (Gonzague), *Les Noms Propres Sud-Sémitiques*, Bibliothèque Du Muséon. 2 (Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1934), Article on ' Uzzay.

<sup>76</sup> Jamme, *Le Panthéon Sud-Arabe Préislamique D'après Les Sources Épigraphiques*, 107.

traditional Arabic pronunciation as *manāt*. The long *ā* written with a *waw* in the Qur'ān is already recognized as an Aramaicism<sup>77</sup> as attested in other words like *ṣalāt*, *zakāt* or *ḥayāt*. The case of *Manāt* must be similar since we will see below that the Nabataean and Palmyran forms of the word confirm the qur'anic orthography.

*Manāt* is generally thought to be derived from the trilateral root *m-n-y* that is often associated with counting, apportioning and eventually reckoning the days of one's life and death across Semitic languages.<sup>78</sup> Fahd is adamant to see in *Menutum*, a pre-Sargonic title of *Ishtar*, the earliest attestation of *Manāt*, finding her Hellenistic counterparts in the Greek *ΤΟΥΧΑΙ* and Latin *Fortunae* based on the meaning of the root.<sup>79</sup> However, unlike in the case of *al-Lāt* and *al-ʿUzzā*, there is no direct bilingual evidence to equate *Manāt* with another divinity. Furthermore, the lack of the definite article separates *Manāt* from *al-Lāt* and *al-ʿUzzā* and it might indicate that *Manāt* is the proper name of the goddess instead of an adjectival title.

In the Nabataean realm, *Manāt* is restricted to North Arabia and mentioned in five tomb inscriptions from *Madāʿ* in *Ṣāliḥ*, spelled in all cases as *mnwtw*.<sup>80</sup> It is interesting that in four of these inscriptions, *Manāt* comes immediately after the main Nabataean god *Dushara*. In one of these inscriptions, *Manāt* is mentioned after *ʿlt mn ʿmnd*, which Healey translated as “*Allat (sic) of ʿAmnad*”.<sup>81</sup> This is the only direct reference to *al-Lāt* in *Ḥegra* while *al-ʿUzzā* is completely absent there. It thus appears that *Manāt* was well known in the

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<sup>77</sup> Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran* (Lahore: al-Biruni, 1977), 198.

<sup>78</sup> Fahd, *Le Panthéon de l'Arabie Centrale À La Veille de l'Hégire*, 125.

<sup>79</sup> EI (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), “*Manāt*”.

<sup>80</sup> See for example CIS II 197=JS I 8=H 8. Others are H 16, 19, 31 and 34. John F. Healey and Sulaymān Dhiyib, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Madaʿin Salih*, *Journal of Semitic Studies*. Supplement 1 (Oxford [England: Oxford University Press on behalf of the University of Manchester, 1993), 252.

<sup>81</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 154.

Ḥijāzī territories of the Nabataean kingdom and replaced al-Lāt and al-‘ Uzzā there, while she was largely unknown in Nabataea par excellence. A Nabataean inscription from Taymā has a dedication to a goddess called *mnwh*, which is titled as ‘ *lht* ‘ *lht* ’ , “goddess of the goddesses”.<sup>82</sup> Both Healey and al-Theeb<sup>83</sup> take this goddess as another spelling for Manāt.

Her preponderance in the north of the Arabian Peninsula is confirmed by Ancient North Arabian inscriptions as well, but she is found more in theophoric names than in independent religious formulae. This is most certainly the case in Dadanitic inscriptions where more than ten different forms of personal names that have Manāt (spelled *mnt*) in them are attested, whereas the goddess is only mentioned once by herself in JS 177.<sup>84</sup> In Safaitic inscriptions, only two personal names based on Manāt are found indicating that the cult of Manāt did not penetrate further north than the oases of the Nafūd desert. However, the word *mny* seems very common in Safaitic inscriptions and al-Jallād interprets it as a deification of “fate”.<sup>85</sup> Only in Thamudic inscriptions from across the peninsula is Manāt clearly invocated outside of theophoric names. In one of these inscriptions (Hu. 193), she is described as “the lady of peace” (*st slm mnwt*),<sup>86</sup> and in another one (Hu. 286) she is addressed in the vocative to converse with the author of the graffito.<sup>87</sup>

Although she was not well known in the northern centers of the Nabataean kingdom, Manāt resurfaces in the Palmyran inscriptions with seven attestations. She is mentioned

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<sup>82</sup> Solaiman Abdal-Rahman al. Theeb, *Aramaic and Nabatean inscriptions from North-west Saudi Arabia* (Riyadh: King Fahd National Library, 1993), 33, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/1684275>.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>84</sup> For a list of these personal names see Krone, *Die Altarabische Gottheit Al-Lāt*, 524.

<sup>85</sup> Al-Jallad, *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions*, 328.

<sup>86</sup> Albertus van den Branden, *Les Inscriptions Thamoudéennes*, Bibliothèque Du Muséon (Louvain-Heverlé: Bureaux du Muséon, 1950), 110. Susanne Krone, however, disagrees with this reading and translates the inscription as “Freude und Friede ist Manāt” Krone, *Die Altarabische Gottheit Al-Lāt*, 525.

<sup>87</sup> *Hmnh klm nqd*: “O Manāt, speak to PN”.

three times next to the Carthaginian and Palmyran god Baalhamon (*blḥmwn*), and Fahd likens her iconography to that of Nemesis based on a tessera where Manāt is sitting with a scepter in her hand.<sup>88</sup> A Latin inscription from Várhely, Hungary in Roman Dacia written by a certain *Theimes* (probably the Palmyran personal name *tym'*) mentions *Manavat* next to *Bebellahamon* along with two other deities.<sup>89</sup> All in all, the Palmyrans knew Manāt, and her cult travelled with the Roman army; but her presence in the north of the Arabian Peninsula was much stronger. In the ancient South Arabian context, however, Manāt is virtually non-existent.

#### “Do not Abandon your Gods”: Noahic Idols in Southern Arabia

From the well-studied domain of three Arabian goddesses we now move to another set of deities found in the Qur’ān about which pre-Islamic non-Arabic sources tell much less than they do about al-Lāt, al-‘Uzzā and Manāt. Chapter 71 of the Qur’ān, dedicated to the story of Noah and his people’s stubbornness in disbelief, refers to these deities in the following verses:

“Noah said, 'My Lord, they have rebelled against me, and followed him whose wealth and children increase him only in loss, and have devised a mighty device and have said, "Do not leave your gods, and do not leave Wadd, nor Suwa‘, Yaghūth, Ya‘ūq, neither Nasr.”<sup>90</sup>

According to Chapter 71, this “device” (*makr*) of Noah’s people put him in great despair, and he asks God not to spare any disbeliever on the face of earth since they would only produce more disbelievers. In an interesting thematic and lexical continuity, rather unusual for the Qur’ān, Noah’s people’s plan of not leaving their gods (*lā tadharūnna ālihatakum*) is mirrored

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<sup>88</sup> Fahd, *Le Panthéon de l’Arabie Centrale À La Veille de l’Hégire*, 125.

<sup>89</sup> Krone, *Die Altarabische Gottheit Al-Lāt*, 529; Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 135.

<sup>90</sup> Q 71: 21-23.

in the adversarial supplication of Noah demanding God not to leave (*lā tadhar*) any disbelievers alive. This rather short and coherent chapter picks up a Biblical theme (like many others in the Qur'ān), but treats it in a unique way that hardly uses any Biblical or even extra-Biblical exegetical reference to the story of Noah. In fact, there is no mention of the Flood in this chapter, although it is recounted elsewhere in the Qur' ān along the lines of its biblical synopsis.<sup>91</sup> As a result, the whole chapter appears to be a homiletic enrichment of the story of Noah for the immediate addressees of the Qur'ān, who might have known about these five goddesses that are otherwise nowhere to be found in the biblical tradition.

There is no doubt that these five gods have nothing to do with the biblical Noah, rather they were local Arabian deities, as the evidence below suggests. Early Muslim authors were at a loss to account for the presence of Arabian gods in the story of Noah, and a legendary story that connected the Flood to the so-called reformer of the pre-Islamic Arabian pantheon, ' Amr b. Luḥayy, had to be invented. According to this story, waters of the Flood had dragged the idols of Noah's people to the shores of Jidda only to be discovered by ' Amr and distributed to various tribes of pre-Islamic Arabia.<sup>92</sup> The story closes with Muslims destroying each idol in its respective cultic site during the rise of Islam.

Unlike the Qur' ānic al-Lāt, al-' Uzzā and Manāt, the five Noahic deities cannot all be followed through inscriptions, not least because evidence about them is rather limited to ancient South Arabia. Of these five, Wadd is by far the best attested. The qur'anic form of Wadd in the earliest manuscripts is unanimously *wd'* pointing to an indefinite *tanwīn* ending and corresponding perfectly to the regular Old South Arabian form *wd<sup>m</sup>*. Jamme takes

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<sup>91</sup> See especially Q 11:25-48

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Maurice Gaudery-Demombynes, *Mahomet*. (Paris: A. Michel, 1957), 40–41.

it to mean “love” in Old South Arabian<sup>93</sup> as it does in Arabic while the Qur’anic god is titled as *wadūd* from the same root twice in the Qur’ān.<sup>94</sup>

A male deity like the other four, Wadd was the lunar god of the Minaeans,<sup>95</sup> a people known to Greek geographers and historians as eminent frankincense traders from their capital at Qarnaw.<sup>96</sup> Dedications to Wadd in Minaic, a dialect of Old South Arabian, are abundant,<sup>97</sup> and he is often addressed as “the father” (*wdm’ bm*) in magical inscriptions on amulets.<sup>98</sup> However, his cult was not confined to Ma’ in as he is mentioned in Sabaic<sup>99</sup>, Hadramitic<sup>100</sup> and Qatabanic<sup>101</sup> inscriptions, making Wadd’s cult common to all peoples of ancient South Arabia. Minaeans had trade colonies in the northern parts of the Arabian Peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean according to Strabo’s testimony,<sup>102</sup> and the knowledge of Wadd seems to have travelled to these colonies with his worshippers. In fact, one inscription suggests that a temple in Dedan, another Minaean colony, was consecrated to Wadd.<sup>103</sup> Van den Branden argues that Wadd was worshipped by the people of Thamūd and Liḥyān,<sup>104</sup> but evidence for that is meager. Only in one Dadanitic inscription is there a reference to a certain “‘ Abd Wadd the priest of Wadd” (*‘ bdwd’ fkl wd*) and his son *zdwd*

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<sup>93</sup> Jamme, *Le Panthéon Sud-Arabe Préislamique D’après Les Sources Épigraphiques*, 73.

<sup>94</sup> Q 11:90 and 85:14.

<sup>95</sup> Jamme, *Le Panthéon Sud-Arabe Préislamique D’après Les Sources Épigraphiques*, 73.

<sup>96</sup> Strabo, *Geographica*, 16.4.4

<sup>97</sup> Cf. RES 2774, 2778, 2804, 3345, 3346, 3350, 3351 etc.

<sup>98</sup> RES 3704, in Sabaic CIH 472, 473, 478, 481 etc.

<sup>99</sup> CIH 33, 470, 483 *inter alia*.

<sup>100</sup> RES 2775

<sup>101</sup> RES 3643, 3644, 3645, 3902

<sup>102</sup> Strabo, *ibid*.

<sup>103</sup> RES 3695

<sup>104</sup> Albertus van den Branden, *Les inscriptions dédanites*, vol. 8, Publications de l’Université libanaise. Section des études historiques, (Beyrouth, 1962), 22, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/2120333>.

(Zayd Wadd?),<sup>105</sup> but the actual dedication in the inscription is to the Lihyanite god Dhū Ghābat. In the absence of any other direct Ancient North Arabian reference to the cult of Wadd, Christian Robin asks whether the author of this inscription might have hailed from Yemen.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, Wadd appears as part of a few theophoric names in North Arabia<sup>107</sup> and copiously as a personal name in Sinai.<sup>108</sup>

No other deity among the five Noahic gods is as clearly verifiable as Wadd. Nasr, meaning “eagle, vulture”, is found in Old South Arabian inscriptions as a minor deity with five attestations.<sup>109</sup> According to one of these attestations, he might have been sharing a sanctuary with the Venerean deity ‘ Athtar.<sup>110</sup> If the deity *nswr* is treated as a derivative of Nasr, as it was by Jamme<sup>111</sup> and Maraqtan<sup>112</sup>, the number of references to the deity increases including a few inscriptions that were dedicated by women.<sup>113</sup> Wellhausen<sup>114</sup> and Fahd<sup>115</sup> discussed whether the cult of Nasr the god could be reflected in the cult of the eagle among Arabs, based upon the testimonies of the *Doctrine of Addai*<sup>116</sup> and the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> JS 49: “bdwd’ fkl Wd w-bn-h Slm w-Zdwd hwdqw ...l- d Ġbt ...”

<sup>106</sup> EI (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), “Wadd”

<sup>107</sup> Branden, *Les inscriptions dédanites*, 8:22. And JS 49

<sup>108</sup> CIS 1635, 1712, 1833, 1955 etc.

<sup>109</sup> CIH 552, RES 4084, lines 2 and 4, CIH 189, Ry 196.

<sup>110</sup> Ry 196: ‘ *ttr/wnsrm/b’ ly/bn* ’ : “Athtar and Nasr, two lords of Bn’ ”

<sup>111</sup> Jamme, *Le Panthéon Sud-Arabe Préislamique D’après Les Sources Épigraphiques*, 130.

<sup>112</sup> Maraqtan, “Women’s Inscriptions Recently Discovered by the AFSM at the Awām Temple/Maḥram Bilqīs in Marib, Yemen,” 242.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Wellhausen, *Reste Arabischen Heidentums*, 22.

<sup>115</sup> Fahd, *Le Panthéon de l’Arabie Centrale À La Veille de l’Hégire*, 133.

<sup>116</sup> George Phillips, *The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle* (London: Trübner & Co., 1876), 24, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/3634796>. The relevant part from the *Doctrine of Addai* reads as follows (Phillips’ translation): “Who is this Nebo, an idol made which ye worship, and Bel, which ye honour? Behold, there are those among you who adore Bath Nical, as the inhabitants of Harran your neighbours, and Taratha, as the people of Mabug, and the eagle, as the Arabians, also the sun and the moon, as the rest of the inhabitants of Harran, who are as yourselves.”

Regardless of whether the cult of Nasr had any aspects of zoolatry, it is clear that a god with that proper name existed in ancient South Arabia.

Coming to Suwā' , Yaghūth and Ya' ūq we are on much less firm grounds. Of the three, only Suwā' seems to have a glimmer of an appearance as a deity in one Sabaic inscription from Jabal Jihāf,<sup>118</sup> but the reading of the text proves to be problematic. Hartwig Derenbourg argued immediately after the publication of the text in 1905 that it contains the first attestation of the Noahic god Suwā' in South Arabian inscriptions.<sup>119</sup> Later in the same year, Eduard Glaser published a booklet about the same inscription arguing that Derenbourg's reading was entirely mistaken and his celebrated discovery of the Suwā' in an inscription was nothing but imaginary.<sup>120</sup> Even if Glaser is not correct in his judgment, this possible attestation still remains as a *hapax* among Old South Arabian material, and no other corroboration for this reference to the god Suwā' has been discovered. Fahd, dismissing the work of Derenbourg, argues that "*l'absence du nom de Suwā' des inscriptions semitiques en confirme le caractere proprement higazien.*"<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Tractate Avodah Zarah, XIb: "Said R. Hanna b. Hisda in the name of Rab (some have it, 'Said R. Hanan b. Raba in the name of Rab'): There are five appointed Temples of idol-worship. They are: "The temple of Bel in Babel, the temple of Nebo in Kursi, Tar'ata which is in Mapug, Zerifa which is in Ashkelon, and Nishtra which is in Arabia." The translation is from Isidore Epstein et al., *The Babylonian Talmud; Seder Nizikin, Translated into English with Notes, Glossary and Indices under the Editorship of Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein* (London: The Soncino press, 1935), <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/1857237>. It is interesting that the account in the Babylonian Talmud is very close to the one in the Doctrine of Addai, which might be an indication that the anti-idolatry fervor was shared by the Eastern Christians and their Babylonian Jewish neighbors.

<sup>118</sup> Found in a report by Lieutenant G. U. Yule written in the *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, v. 27, 1905, pp. 153-155. Lieutenant Yule wrongly described the text as a Himyaritic inscription but did not translate it. However, he provided a photograph and a tracing.

<sup>119</sup> Hartwig Derenbourg, "Le Souwā' Dans Le Coran et Sur Une Inscription Sabeenne Recemment Decouverte," *Boletin de La Real Academia de La Historia* 47 (1905): 72-78.

<sup>120</sup> Eduard Glaser, *Suwā' und al-'Uzzā und die altjemenischen inschriften* (München: Lukaschik, 1905). Glaser was particularly harsh on Derenbourg about his alleged discovery of the qur'anic Suwā' in the aforementioned inscription: "Ein Mann mit so gottbegnadeter Dichterphantasie gehört wirklich eher in die Académie Française, in der alle erlauchten Geister Frankreichs sitzen, als in die schrecklich nüchterne Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres oder gar in die noch nüchterneren Real Academia de la Historia zu Madrid." (p. 14)

<sup>121</sup> Fahd, *Le Panthéon de l'Arabie Centrale À La Veille de l'Hégire*, 154.



The forms of Yaghūth and Ya' ūq signify an imperfect verbal formation that is not uncommon to Arabic and Semitic nomenclature. However, neither in their present form nor in the form of their respective roots do these two appear significantly in inscriptional material as deities. Yaghūth is attested as an anthroponym in Sabaic<sup>122</sup> and possibly in Safaitic,<sup>123</sup> and Fahd wants to associate it with the Biblical Jeush,<sup>124</sup> the oldest son of Esau.<sup>125</sup> A personal name from the root *gh-w-th* is also attested in Thamudic.<sup>126</sup> The only possible identification of Yaghūth as a deity comes from Nabataea where two inscriptions mention the possibly theophoric name *mr' y' wt*<sup>127</sup>, which seems to be a combination of *mr'* (“man” in Arabic, cf. Imru al-Qays) and an Aramaicized form of Yaghūth. As Robin notes, however, the second element in such name formations does not necessarily refer to a deity.<sup>128</sup>

Our evidence regarding Ya' ūq is even more limited, but what is available is very intriguing. Two possible references to what resembles the literal form of the deity appear in a late Sabaic inscription near Ṣan' ā'.<sup>129</sup> The inscription is found on an architectural structure that is referred to in the inscription once as *mkrbn y' q* (line 4) and then as *mkrbn y' wq* (line 9). The word *mkrb* is known from late Sabaic texts<sup>130</sup> with the meaning “shrine, temple, synagogue, assembly hall,”<sup>131</sup> and Robin argues that it is generally used in a Jewish

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<sup>122</sup> RES 5002.

<sup>123</sup> Winnett, *Inscriptions from Fifty Safaitic Cairns* /, 625.

<sup>124</sup> Gen. 36:5, 14, 18.

<sup>125</sup> Fahd, *Le Panthéon de l'Arabie Centrale À La Veille de l'Hégire*, 132.

<sup>126</sup> Branden, *Les Inscriptions Thamoudéennes*, 240. The text in question is Hu. 813.

<sup>127</sup> J Cantineau, *Le nabatéen* (Osnabrück: O. Zeller, 1978), vol. ii, 64, 104.

<sup>128</sup> EI (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), “Yaghūth”

<sup>129</sup> Ry 520 published in Gonzague Ryckmans, “Inscriptions Sud-Arabes. Onzième Série,” *Le Muséon* 67 (1954): 99–105.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. CIH 151+152, Ja 856, Ry 534.

<sup>131</sup> A. F. L. (Alfred Felix Landon) Beeston, *Dictionnaire Sabéen (Anglais-Français-Arabe)*, Publications of the University of Sanaa, YAR (Louvain-la-Neuve :Beyrouth: Editions Peeters ;Librairie du Liban, 1982), 78.

context.<sup>132</sup> In this text, *y' q* or *y' wq* is most certainly the name of the sanctuary dedicated to the god *rḥmnn* who is identified as *b' l s'myn*, “the Lord of the heaven” (line 5), and who is asked for a righteous life and a righteous death (lines 6-7, *ḥyy ḥyw ṣdqm w-mwt mwt ṣdqm*). It is interesting to note at this point that Ibn al-Kalbī attributes the absence of *Ya' ūq* from theophoric nomenclature to the fact that it was the god of Ḥamdān who were converted to Judaism under pressure from Dhū Nuwās and thus *Ya' ūq* was long forgotten before the rise of Islam.<sup>133</sup> Whether or not there is any truth to this report, it is curious that the cult of *Ya' ūq* resurfaces in a Himyarite monotheistic (and possibly Jewish) context alongside the cult of *rḥmnn*.

#### Ba' al of Elijah: the Only Biblical God of the Qur'ān

Having surveyed the three goddesses of the Chapter of the Star and the five Noahic deities, before we move to discussing the qur'anic God a brief note on another god mentioned in the Qur'ān is necessary. Ahab and Jezebel's *Ba' al* (found as such in the Hebrew Bible but as *ba' l* in the Qur'ān) appears on the qur'anic stage very briefly in Chapter 37 within an ensemble of soteriological stories of prophetic figures from Noah and Abraham to Elijah:

“Ilyās too was one of the Envoys; when he said to his people, 'Will you not be godfearing? Do you call on *Ba' l*, and abandon the Best of creators? God, your Lord, and the Lord of your fathers, the ancients?’”<sup>134</sup>

The account is very concise, but the connection with the Biblical Elijah story recounted in the Book of Kings<sup>135</sup> is unmistakable. Due to the brevity of the mention, it is hard to tell whether the Qur'ān takes its cue from the Bible itself or from an intermediary source. The

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<sup>132</sup> Christian Robin, “Le Judaïsme de Ḥimyar,” *Arabia* 1 (2003): 97–172.

<sup>133</sup> Quoted in EI (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), “*Ya' ūq*”

<sup>134</sup> Q 37:123-126

<sup>135</sup> 1 Kings 17:1 ff.

form of Elijah's name with a final *s*, however, points to a Christian provenance.<sup>136</sup> It should also be noted that Ilyās appears along with Zachariah, John the Baptist and Jesus in Q 6:85, reinforcing the Christian background to the qur'anic mention of Elijah and Ba' l.

Not much can be extracted out of such a brief mention, but it must be noted that this reference to Ba' l was regarded by qur'anic scholars as an imprint of biblical influence on the Qur'ān. Patricia Crone is certain that "this name undoubtedly comes from the biblical tradition rather than the Messenger's contemporaries."<sup>137</sup> Hirschfeld is of the same opinion.<sup>138</sup> Smith readily dismisses the possibility that Ba' l could be an Arabian deity,<sup>139</sup> whereas Nöldeke and Wellhausen argue that it does not have to be borrowed from the North.<sup>140</sup> It is beyond doubt that Ba' l in its qur'anic usage belongs to the biblical context of Elijah's story. However, one should note that in Sinai theophoric names based on ' *lb' ly* are copious,<sup>141</sup> and in some Sinaitic and Nabataean inscriptions it appears as an independent theonym.<sup>142</sup> Whether this al-Ba' l, written with an Arabic definite article unlike Ba' l in the Qur'ān, is a borrowing and belongs exclusively to a Sinaitic cult is not totally clear. Jamme identifies divine epithets in Old South Arabian based on Ba' l,<sup>143</sup> and Jeffery gives examples to this end.<sup>144</sup> In later monotheistic inscriptions it is used in compounds for the attributes of

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<sup>136</sup> Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, 68.

<sup>137</sup> Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans," 155–56.

<sup>138</sup> Hartwig Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Quran*, Asiatic Monographs (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902), 63.

<sup>139</sup> W. Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (Cambridge: University Press, 1885), 179, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/2019341>.

<sup>140</sup> Wellhausen, *Reste Arabischen Heidentums*, 146. Nöldeke quoted in Wellhausen.

<sup>141</sup> CIS 1474: *grm' lb' ly*, CIS 1482: ' *bd' lb' ly*, CIS 1841: ' *ws' lb' ly*

<sup>142</sup> CIS 1479: *qdm' lb' ly* (*coram al-Ba' li*), for Nabataean see Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 143.

<sup>143</sup> Jamme, *Le Panthéon Sud-Arabe Préislamique D'après Les Sources Épigraphiques*, 122.

<sup>144</sup> Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, 81.

the god *rḥmnn* like *b' l s'myn*.<sup>145</sup> All in all, even though Ba' l of the biblical Elijah story is found in the Qur'ān in its original context, some knowledge of it as a deity or a part of divine epithets must have existed in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>146</sup>

#### From Arabian Idols to the qur'anic God

The lengthy survey above is meant to bring the Arabian milieu of the qur'anic divine landscape to the forefront as an attempt to variegate the sources that shed light on the origins of the Qur'ān. It is beyond any doubt that the Qur'ān is in constant discursive exchange with the Judeo-Christian scriptural and extra-scriptural tradition and that it is the product of a late antique Hellenistic worldview that provided the Qur'ān with its distinctive contours of theology, cosmology and ethics. Yet, to determine the actual currents and agents of this Judeo-Christian late antique *Weltanschauung* that directly touched the Qur'ān and its interlocutors one needs to narrow down the circle around the context of the Qur'ān to the scale of visible and tangible units. The result of this survey on the divinities that the Qur'ān mentions is that neither post-qur'anic Muslim scholarly tradition that flourished in the central lands of Judaism and Christianity nor the late antique Judeo-Christian logia can tell us sufficiently about what the addressees of the Qur'ān believed in. The cult of Arabian deities, especially the three goddesses, can only be considered to have had a limited Hellenistic presence; yet their presence is very strong in the north and the south of the Arabian Peninsula, even with the paucity and unrepresentative nature of the sources.

Even with the corroboration of these Arabian sources, however, there is very little to extract from the Qur'ān about the religious world of its immediate context. No deity other

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<sup>145</sup> See above Ry 520.

<sup>146</sup> Ba' l in the sense of "husband" is already well established in the Qur'ān. Cf. Q 2:28, 11:72 and 24:31.

than those nine that are discussed in this chapter is mentioned in the Qur'ān, and there is virtually no hint about the theology and ritual of folks to which the Qur'ān was addressed. Therefore, Patricia Crone's amazement at the scarcity of information on *mushrikūn* in the Qur'ān in contrast to the colorful portrayal of pre-Islamic polytheism in later Muslim texts seems well justified.<sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, some information can be gleaned through material and literary evidence about the Qur'ān's intended polemical exposé of its native religious context.

Most importantly, it appears that the Qur'ān speaks from a theoretically, and maybe even geographically, equidistant locus with respect to the religious world of both the north and the south of the peninsula. The reference to the three goddesses in a chapter laden with astral significance demonstrates the Qur'ān's awareness of a Nabataean and Ancient North Arabian divine heritage that was readily translated into a Hellenistic divine *lingua franca* with its well-established, heavenly equivalences. Indeed, one wonders whether the concept of "the star" that governs the whole chapter of *al-Najm* is a reminiscence of *kawkabtā* in Isaac of Antioch's polemic,<sup>148</sup> or an amalgam of Venus/Aphrodite/al-'Uzzā that became prominent from inscriptions and Greek literary sources. The Qur'ān's rejection of astral worship is very clear from other verses,<sup>149</sup> but this chapter in particular embodies a very symbolic picture of revelation that evokes the imagery of a heavenly body in its most characteristic movements: it appears on the higher horizon, draws near and suspends, comes closer than two bow's lengths away, reveals a revelation and finally reappears in a second descent. However, this imagery quickly gives way to a polemic about the three

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<sup>147</sup> Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans."

<sup>148</sup> See above note 59.

<sup>149</sup> See Q 41:37 in particular but also Abraham's extra-Biblical conversion story in 6:76-79 and the worship of sun among the people of the Queen of Sheba mentioned in 27:24.

goddesses that are condemned as “names that are named” with no real content. The dominance of Allāh, to whom belongs the first and the last and the permission of intercession as the chapter suggests, governs the rest of the chapter, but we are brought back to the original astral content of the chapter with Allāh’s identification as the Lord of Sirius at the end. Coupled with Abraham’s extra-biblical conversion story in Q 6:76-79 and the condemnation of sun-worship among the people of the Queen of Sheba mentioned in Q 27:24, the Chapter of the Star posits astral worship as an associationist (*shirk*) attribute and puts the worship of the three goddesses in the same context. It is no wonder that this unusual swerve in the Chapter of the Star with a tacit association of revelation with astral movements and a later rejection of three astral goddesses was evaluated as an actual swerve in the life of Muḥammad by later Muslim scholars in the famous episode of the Satanic verses.

Five Noahic gods, on the other hand, are most probably from the pantheon of Yemen even though their representation in epigraphy is not as strong as the three goddesses. Their juxtaposition with the story of Noah outside the context of the Flood seems to be an attempt to bring biblical history closer to the Qur’ ān’s context by associating it with local divine elements. As such, the figure of Noah is almost interchangeable in Chapter 73 with any other biblical figure that seeks the salvation of his or her people. Yet, this awareness in the Qur’ān of a religious milieu stretching to both ends of the Arabian Peninsula is very limited. Just by way of *ex silentio* speculation, although the three goddesses of the Qur’ān have their best attestations in the Nabataean inscriptions, the main Nabataean god Dushara has no place in the Qur’ān. The same goes for Hubal, which looms large in later Arabic works about pre-Islamic religion as the major god of the Ka’ ba, but appears in only one extant Nabataean

inscription.<sup>150</sup> The Qur'ān's sample of Ancient South Arabian gods is even less representative, if such a sample was ever the intention in the first place. In sum, what we have in the Qur'ān about the divine landscape of its context is at best a passing reminiscence, while the qur'anic god Allāh dominates the scene even in the parts dealing with non-Jewish and non-Christian subjects in the Qur'ān.

If the local cults of Arabia (both from the north and the south of the peninsula) are rather marginally represented in the Qur'ān, it is because the cult of Allāh overshadowed all others, while adjectival divine attributes, which may or may not have been at some point individual deities in proper theonyms, were appended to his cult. The Qur'ān's hypothetical exchange with its addressees in various places<sup>151</sup> indicate that according to its own narrative, Allāh was worshipped by everybody as the creator god and the god that people turned to in times of immediate danger. However, other gods, whether or not they are the ones named in the Qur'ān, were worshipped alongside the more distant Allāh as partners or associates. This view of the central qur'anic deity is strongly emphasized in Crone's recent article in which she argued that, "the Messenger and his pagan opponents worshipped the same God" but "their error was *shirk*, 'associationism.'"<sup>152</sup> In a way, it appears that the qur'anic god assumes for himself a proper name to the detriment of others and incorporates to his persona many divine attributes that were earlier evoked as individual deities. This qur'anic reformation of the former symbol-less and cult-less *deus otiosus* Allāh into an all-powerful supreme deity that absorbs other divinities in his persona created the real tension

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<sup>150</sup> CIS 198.

<sup>151</sup> See for instance Q 39:38, 31:25, 29:61, 29:63, 43:87, 10:31.

<sup>152</sup> Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans," 163.

between the Qur'ān and its opponents. As we will see below, this tension also left its traces in the usage of divine names, especially al-Raḥmān.

### Allāh and al-Raḥmān in Epigraphy and the Qur'ān

Allāh is very clearly “the God” of the Qur'ān with its numerous titles. Its etymology has been a matter of debate since the days of early Arab grammar schools, the Kufans taking it as a compression of the definite article and the word *ilāh* and Basrans deriving it from the middle weak root *lyh*. Arthur Jeffery, in his discussion of Allāh as a loanword, places the emphasis on the Syriac *alāhā* as its origin. However, this rather taken-for-granted explanation was put into question recently by David Kiltz who argues that Allāh can be explained through inner-Arabic development and that the direction of the borrowing might be quite the opposite.<sup>153</sup> I will leave the discussion of the relationship between Allāh and *Alāhā* to Kiltz's article for the moment and examine the documentary evidence for the cult of Allāh before the Qur'ān.

Due to the ubiquity of the word *ilāh* in inscriptional material, tracing Allāh as a proper name is highly complicated. It is fairly clear that many theophoric names are formed out of it, especially in Nabataean and Sinaitic inscriptions; and the initial *alif* seems to be consistently preserved in these proper names.<sup>154</sup> Bilingual inscriptions testify to the classical Arabic rendering of the word since *whb' lh*, for example, is transcribed as *ο υ α β α λ λ α ς*. Other than theophoric names, Healey notices only one possible self-standing reference to Allāh in the Nabataean realm, which appears in an inscription found in Ruwāfah dedicated to ' *lh* ' ' *lh* (“*Alāhā*, god of ...”). Thus, he concludes, “Allāh's cult was reportedly

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<sup>153</sup> David Kiltz, “The Relationship Between Arabic Allāh and Syriac Allāhā,” *Der Islam* 88 (2012): 33–50.

<sup>154</sup> CIS 1476: *tym' lhy*, CIS 1523: *whb' lhy*, CIS 1603: ' *bd' lhy*, CIS 1761: *m' n' lh*.



introduced to Mecca from the North, but from Liḥyān, not from Nabataea.”<sup>155</sup> Healey is not alone in pointing to Liḥyān since the origins of Allāh’s cult were ascribed to this ancient kingdom of Dedan earlier by Winnett and Caskel.<sup>156</sup> Thamūdīc and Safaitic inscriptions also provide examples of invocations to Allāh along with a plethora of personal names derived from it.

Ancient North Arabian references to Allāh, however, are not entirely unambiguous. In Dadanitic, for example, both separate invocations and theophoric names have the form *lh* without the initial *alif*.<sup>157</sup> Of three Dadanitic inscriptions in which Allāh was possibly invoked, two (JS 8, JS 260) are in the vocative (*h-lh*) and one (JS 61) is with a preposition (*l-lh*), which might be why the initial *alif* is elided. Some Thamudic B inscriptions provide a few attestations with an initial *alif*,<sup>158</sup> but the content of the inscriptions is complicated. In five Thamudic B inscriptions *’lh* is qualified as *’btr*, which was translated by Winnett as «without offspring», by Grimme as «*kinderloser*»<sup>159</sup> and by G. Ryckmans as “isolé”.<sup>160</sup> It is interesting that this word, which is a *hapax* in the Qur’ān found only in Q 108:3 as an insult (“Surely who he hates you, he is the *cutoff*”), is used in Thamudic inscriptions as a divine title. Safaitic inscriptions provide a very small selection of Allāh-references compared to the breadth of the corpus, and all references have the form without the initial *alif* similar to

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<sup>155</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 92.

<sup>156</sup> F. V. Winnett, “Allah Before Islam,” *The Muslim World* 28, no. 3 (July 1938): 239–48; Caskel, *Liḥyan und Liḥyanisch*, 46.

<sup>157</sup> A good specimen for our purposes is JS 8 which reads: *’ bdmnt ’ ṣdq frḏh hlh ws’ dh* (Winnett’s translation: «‘ Abd Manāt the trustworthy. Grant him a long life, O Allāh, and good luck!»). This form without the initial *alif* can be compared to the pre-Islamic attestations of Allāh as *Lāh* found in the alternative form *Lāhumma*.

<sup>158</sup> JS 287, JS 305, JS 409, Hu 99, Hu 643, Hu 644. Other inscriptions that Winnett identified as references to Allāh are dubious: JS 277, JS 285.

<sup>159</sup> Hubert Grimme, *Die Lösung Des Sinaischriftproblems, Die Altthamudische Schrift* (Münster i. W.: Verlag der Aschendorffschen verlagsbuchhandlung, 1926), 66.

<sup>160</sup> Gonzague Ryckmans, “Notes Epigraphiques. Deuxieme Série,” *Museon* 50 (1937): 333.

Dadanitic.<sup>161</sup> There are many theophoric names with *lh* in Ancient North Arabian sources, the majority of which are attested in Dadanitic.<sup>162</sup> Safaitic and Hismaic provide only a few examples, and only two Old South Arabian attestations have been recorded so far.<sup>163</sup> Therefore we can say that only in Liḥyān and Nabataea did Allāh appear frequently as a theophoric element in proper names.

Based on these inscriptional sources Winnett concluded that worship of Allāh was introduced to Arabia by the Liḥyanites who were Arabs settled in Dedan and who had a small kingdom that flourished after the Roman annexation of Nabataea in 106 CE.<sup>164</sup> Similarly, Caskel thought that the main god of the Liḥyānites, Dhū Ghābat, (literally “that of the forest”) and other divine names were but titles for their actual god Allāh who was more visible in theophoric names than in invocations.<sup>165</sup> One wonders whether the same can be said about the Nabataean supreme god Dushara (sometimes translated as “that of the thicket” or “of vegetation”) since Allāh is ubiquitous as a theophoric element in Nabataean personal names as well. Healey thinks that the Nabataeans had only one god and one goddess “in a kind of dyotheistic pairing”,<sup>166</sup> and it is not implausible that their only god was Allāh with the title Dushara and their only goddess was Allāt based on the evidence above. It should be remembered that the qur’anic God is sometimes mentioned with similar appellatives like *dhū faḍl* (Q 2:243) or *dhū l-jalāl* (Q 55:27) but the topographic element in Nabataean and Liḥyānite seems to be transformed into complete abstraction in the Qur’ān.

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<sup>161</sup> Cf. DM 239, DM 242, DM 539a, L 128. See also Al-Jallad, *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions*, 299.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. *grmlh* (JS 355, JS 361), *mr’ lh* (JS 75, JS 188), *whblh* (JS 56, JS 63, JS 188, JS 229), *zdlh* (JS 41, JS 60)

<sup>163</sup> CIH 74 (Sabaic) and JS 181a (Minaic)

<sup>164</sup> Winnett, “Allah Before Islam,” 246.

<sup>165</sup> Caskel, *Liḥyan und Liḥyanisch.*, 46.

<sup>166</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 114.

If Allāh as the proper name of the qur'anic God is the product of northern parts of the Arabian Peninsula, the most common of his titles, i.e. al-Raḥmān, very probably was transferred from the south. The large pantheon of ancient South Arabia dwindled around the fifth and the sixth centuries CE in favor of the monotheistic cult of the god *rḥmnn*, probably under the influence of, but surely at the same time with, the rise of Judaism and Christianity in the area. Late Sabaic inscriptions show that *rḥmnn* was both the title of the Jewish god and of the Father in the Christian trinity. To give but a few examples, Ja 1028, the inscription that commemorates *Yws'f ' s' r Yt' r*'s attack on Christians in Najrān, refers to *rḥmnn* as *rbhd*, “Lord of the Jews”, a title that is found in Ry 515 as *rbhwd* and in CIH 543 as *rbyhd*. On the other hand, Christian texts like Istanbul 7608bis and CIH 541 (which is a long account of Abraha's raids in Yemen) mention *rḥmnn* along with *bn-hw krs'ts'*, «his son Christ», *ms'h-hw*, “his Messiah”, and *rḥ qds'*, “the Holy Spirit”. Of the more than fifty attestations of the god *rḥmnn* in Old South Arabian inscriptions, however, only a few are of clearly Jewish or Christian provenance and other attestations may point to a separate Sabaean monotheistic cult of *rḥmnn*.

Given that the final *n* in Sabaic inscriptions is a marker of definiteness, the consonantal ductus of the qur'anic al-Raḥmān is matched with that of the Sabaic *rḥmnn*. As such, Jeffery treats it as a loanword from Old South Arabian, but he also mentions other possible alternatives of influence.<sup>167</sup> Hirschfeld wanted to see the origins of al-Raḥmān in rabbinic Jewish sources and Palmyrene inscriptions, but the evidence there is meager compared to the Sabaic evidence.<sup>168</sup> For instance, it appears as an adjective in the Tell

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<sup>167</sup> Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, 141.

<sup>168</sup> Hartwig Hirschfeld 1854-1934., *Beiträge Zur Erklärung Des Korān*, Morgenländische Forschungen. 9 (Leipzig: O. Schulze, 1886), 28.

Fakhariyeh inscription (‘ *lh rḥmn zy tšlwth tḥh*, “merciful god to whom prayer is good”) and in the Palestinian Talmud (Ber. 9a, 21: “just as I am merciful in heaven...”), and as a substantive in the Babylonian Talmud (Ber. 63a, 33: “a thief calls the Merciful one”). Its usage in the rabbinic sources as a divine title is clear but only as an adjective, unlike in Sabaic inscriptions and in the Qur’ān as we will see below. Healey, based on Palmyrene evidence, suggests that the worship of *rḥmn*’ in Syria should be considered as a possible alternative source for the cult of al-Raḥmān, but he also points out that it is often used as a title of Baalshamin and other deities in Palmyra instead of the name of the single monotheistic god.<sup>169</sup>

Taken as a whole, the evidence suggests that the balance is tipped towards an origin for “al-Raḥmān” in ancient South Arabia if we are to concede that al-Raḥmān is not native to the context of the Qur’ān. An analysis of al-Raḥmān within the qur’anic discourse suggests indeed that al-Raḥmān is a theonym rather than an attribute and that its usage as another name for Allāh is not without contention. First of all, as Jacques Jomier points out in his exhaustive analysis, al-Raḥmān is always found with the definite article in the Qur’ān.<sup>170</sup> Its cognate al-Raḥīm from the Basmala, on the other hand, is found with and without the definite article throughout the Qur’ān.<sup>171</sup> Secondly, al-Raḥmān is never paired with another divine name other than with Allāh and Raḥīm in the Basmala while many other divine attributes in the Qur’ān, including Raḥīm, are often joined together.<sup>172</sup> Finally, al-Raḥmān is

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<sup>169</sup> Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans*, 190.

<sup>170</sup> Jacques Jomier, “Le Nom Divin Al-Raḥmān Dans Le Coran,” in *Mélanges Louis Massignon*, vol. 2 (Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1957), 362.

<sup>171</sup> See for example Q 2:199, 2:226, 3:31, 4:106 etc.

<sup>172</sup> *Ghafūr* and *Raḥīm* many times cf. Q 4:106, 5:74, 6:145, 7: 153 etc. *Tawwāb* and *Raḥīm*: Q 2:37, 2:54, 4:64. *Tawwāb* and *Ḥakīm*: Q 24:10. ‘ *Alīm* and *Ḥakīm*: Q 2:32. ‘ *Azīz* and *Ḥakīm*: Q 2:209.

exclusively used for the deity even though other divine names are used for non-divine entities.<sup>173</sup>

These three points testify to the uniqueness of al-Raḥmān within the attributes of the qur'anic god, but Crone insists that “God and al-Raḥmān were interchangeable” since “nothing is said about the latter which is not said about the former as well”.<sup>174</sup> It is true that al-Raḥmān in the Qur'ān is often a synonym for Allāh, but two verses in particular contain the residue of a tension between the two. Q 25:60 reads: “when they are told ‘bow to al-Raḥmān’, they say ‘what is al-Raḥmān (*wa mā al-raḥmān*)? Shall we bow to what you command us?’” Whether this brusque question is out of the ignorance of the deity or a refusal to worship it through «feigned ignorance» as in pharaoh’s response in Q 26:23<sup>175</sup> is unclear, and Crone inclines to the latter. However, the verse just before Q 25:60 describes al-Raḥmān as the creator God and urges the listener to ask about it to anyone informed: “*al-raḥmān*” *f-as’ al bihī khābīr<sup>an</sup>*”. It seems that the inclusion of al-Raḥmān into the nominal pantheon of the only god’s names was at least met with surprise if not with total rejection. The Qur'ān tries to resolve this tension in 17:110 by saying, “Say: call upon Allāh or call upon al-Raḥmān, whatever you call upon, his are the most beautiful names.” Here, the Qur'ān takes a stance against associationist god-naming where idols like Allāt, al-‘ Uzzā and Manāt are but empty names that people named (*asmā’ un sammaytumūhā*)<sup>176</sup> even though the god to be invoked is one and the same and all these names including Allāh and al-Raḥmān are nothing but beautiful names that refer to it.

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<sup>173</sup> For example *Ḥakīm* in Q 3:58, *Ra’ ūf* and *Raḥīm* for the Messenger in Q 9:128, *Ḥalīm* in 37:101 for Abraham’s son, *Mu’ min* for God in 59:23 etc.

<sup>174</sup> Crone, “The Religion of the qur’anic Pagans,” 168.

<sup>175</sup> “And the pharaoh said: ‘What is the lord of the worlds?’”

<sup>176</sup> Q 53:23 just after the verses about three goddesses but also 7:71 and 12:40.

This discourse of properly naming God occupies a very central and rather overlooked place in the Qur’ān. Q 7:180 reiterates Q 17:110 with the injunction to call Allāh with his most beautiful names and abandon those who blaspheme his names (*alladhīna yulḥidūna bi-asmā’ ih’*) while two other verses repeat that the most beautiful names belong to Allāh (cf. Q 20:8 and 59:24). This discourse even penetrates biblical stories in the Qur’ān when Joseph asks his fellow convicts: “which is better: many lords at variance or Allāh, the one, the omnipotent? That which you worship apart from him is nothing but names you named”.<sup>177</sup> Finally, the Qur’ān makes sure that misnaming God is an error of associationists since “they ascribe associates to Allāh”<sup>178</sup> as part of their devising (*makr*, see above about the device of Noah’s people in the context of Q 71:23) but they fail to name them (*wa ja’ alū lillāhi shurakā’ a qul sammūhum*).

Appellative practices of the Qur’ān regarding the only God, however, appear less than straightforward since Allāh and al-Raḥmān are both proper names hailing from two ends of the Arabian Peninsula just like the three goddesses and five Noahic deities color the two ends of the geographic spectrum. According to Nöldeke’s chronology of the Qur’ān’s chapters, al-Raḥmān is most common to the middle Meccan chapters and Nöldeke considers this as a sign of Muḥammad’s aborted attempt to call his God al-Raḥmān for a while.<sup>179</sup> Indeed, it is curious that al-Raḥmān is completely absent from the Medinan chapters while it is so dominant in some early and middle Meccan chapters like the chapter of al-Raḥmān and

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<sup>177</sup> Q 12:39-40.

<sup>178</sup> Q 13:33

<sup>179</sup> Theodor Nöldeke Behn, Wolfgang, *The History of the Qur’ān* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 99.

the chapter of Maryam.<sup>180</sup> Regardless of Muḥammad's agency in the process Allāh remained as the prevailing proper name of the only god in the Qur' ān. Qur'anic association of the only god with Allāh was so convincing that by the time the early Muslim shahāda was being translated into Greek, Allāh was to be rendered as *ho theos* with the controlling attribute *wahdahū* (*monos*) while al-Raḥmān is already reduced to an adjectival epithet and translated as *eleēmon* (merciful) in conjunction with al-Raḥīm translated as *philandrōpos* (amiable).<sup>181</sup> However, as it was shown above, unlike al-Raḥīm, al-Raḥmān is far from being an attribute based on the trilateral root designating «mercy».<sup>182</sup>

### Qur'anic Divine Attributes as Distinct Deities In Epigraphy

In the Qur'anic arrangement of divine nomenclature, then, two proper names for the single god are appended by adjective-like epithets that later constituted the lore of God's most beautiful names. Al-Raḥīm and many others like it are found in the Qur'ān in pairs or groups in the contexts that uphold their semantic origin, and they rarely serve as a substitute for Allāh as al-Raḥmān often does.<sup>183</sup> Some pairs are more common than others based upon their affinity of meaning like *al-ghafūr* and *al-raḥīm* while some others constitute

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<sup>180</sup> 16 of 54 non-*Basmala* occurrences of al-Raḥmān are in chapter of Maryam and particularly in the pericope of Mary's annunciation and her giving birth to Jesus. Allāh is not mentioned in the chapter of Raḥmān at all. Chapter 78 also lacks any references to Allāh while al-Raḥmān is mentioned twice.

<sup>181</sup> Carl Heinrich Becker et al., *Papyri Schott-Reinhardt I: Mit unterstützung des Grossherzoglich badischen ministeriums der justiz, des kultus und unterrichts* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1906), 103, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/3657708>. Cf. Matthew 5:7 and Hebrews 2:17 for the use of *Eleēmon* in the New Testament in both cases translated into Syriac as *mrḥmn'*.

<sup>182</sup> A very lucid example of al-Raḥmān's independence of its original root is found in Q 19:45 where Abraham warns his father about the punishment (*al-'adhāb*) that would come down from al-Raḥmān. Similarly, al-Raḥmān assumes the divine past and present of Allāh through being betrayed by Satan (Q 19:44) and by sitting on his throne (Q 20:5)

<sup>183</sup> Following is a very short list of such pairings: Q 2:160: *al-tawwāb al-raḥīm*, 2:173: *ghafūr<sup>mn</sup> raḥīm<sup>mn</sup>*, 9:117: *ra' ūf<sup>mn</sup> raḥīm<sup>mn</sup>*, 26:9, 68, 104, 122, 140, 159: *al-'azīz al-raḥīm*, 3:18: *al-'azīz al-ḥakīm*, 6:96: *al-'azīz al-'alīm*, 67:2: *al-'azīz al-ghafūr*, 38:9: *al-'azīz al-wahhāb*, 85:8: *al-'azīz al-ḥamīd*, 59:23: *al-malik al-quddūs al-salām al-mu' min al-muhaymin al-'azīz al-jabbār al-mutakabbir*

lists of divine attributes with little or no semantic unity.<sup>184</sup> In a way, naming and defining the qualities of the single god is a major preoccupation of the Qur’ān in a purported setting where such qualities are being subsumed under individual deities in the practice of *shirk* – a practice that the Qur’ān relentlessly refuses. It is clear by now that qur’anic idols and both Allāh and Raḥmān had a pre-qur’anic Arabian existence; but further, even some of the so-called “beautiful names” can be found referring to separate divinities in the Arabian Peninsula. Even though this does not necessarily mean any direct dependence between these deities and the qur’anic God, it shows the commonality of the vernacular concerning the divine names and epithets in the Qur’ān and the Arabian epigraphy.

Old South Arabian inscriptions provide two clear examples of such gods. *Sm’*, tentatively vocalized by Ryckmans and Jamme as *Samī’*, is a south Arabian deity identified by G. Ryckmans as a local stellar deity and by Nielsen as a lunar god.<sup>185</sup> In RES 3398, it is mentioned along with Wadd (see above), ‘Athtar (male deity representing Venus) and Dhāt Ḥimyam (a title of the solar deity). Both Ryckmans and Jamme translate *s’m’* as “le dieu qui exauce” (the god that hearkens to prayers or grants wishes), and this meaning is supported by a later monotheistic inscription from Shabwa in which *rḥmnn* is asked to listen to the inscriber’s prayer: *l-ys<sup>1</sup>m’ n rḥmnn šlts<sup>1</sup>*.<sup>186</sup> Al-Samī’ as a title of the qur’anic God is very common especially next to al-‘Alīm.<sup>187</sup>

*Ḥlm*, on the other hand, is recognized by Jamme as a deity that was detached from the astral arrangement of the South Arabian pantheon. Identified as “le dieu ‘bon’ sabéen” and

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<sup>184</sup> See the opening of the chapter 57 or the end of the chapter 59.

<sup>185</sup> Jamme, *Le Panthéon Sud-Arabe Préislamique D’après Les Sources Épigraphiques*, 70. Ryckmans, *Les Noms Propres Sud-Sémitiques*, Article on Samī’.

<sup>186</sup> W. Llewellyn Brown and Alfred Felix Landon Beeston, “Sculptures and Inscriptions from Shabwa,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland (New Series)* 86, no. 1–2 (1954): 61.

<sup>187</sup> For example see Q 2:127, 137, 181, 224, 256; 3:34, 121; 6:115, 7:200. But also with al-Baṣīr in Q 4: 58, 134.



transcribed by Jamme and Ryckmans as *Ḥalīm*, this deity is mentioned only once in a Sabaic inscription (CIH 40). It appears that *ḥlm* was the god of two tribes, Muha' nif and Bakīl, and it had sanctuaries in two places called *yf'* and *mtb' m*.<sup>188</sup> In the Qur'ān, the title *halīm* is used for God many times<sup>189</sup> but also for Abraham in Q 9:114 and Q 14:75 and for Ishmael in Q 37:101.

Al-Raḥīm, the epithet paired with al-Raḥmān in the *basmalā*, however, is hard to find in Ancient North Arabian material and in Yemen, while it seems to have a very vivid presence in the pantheon of Palmyra if we take the god *rḥm* of Palmyrene inscriptions as an equivalent of the Qur'anic attribute. Javier Teixidor, at least, asserts this equivalence and detects the reverse development of an attribute turning into an individual god in Palmyra: “*rḥm* may be the epithet given to their god by some Arab tribes of the oasis long before they settled there [i.e. Palmyra]. The attribute, later on, would have personified and treated as a distinct deity, a phenomenon which is not rare in the Semitic pantheons.”<sup>190</sup> In Palmyra, *rḥm* shared a sanctuary with Shamash and Allāt (see CIS 3955), and its association with Allāt (*'lt*) is confirmed by a relief inscription from Khirbat al-Ṣāna', which is a dedication to Allāt (*'lt*) and *rḥm*.<sup>191</sup> Another relief statue from the temple of Bel in Palmyra has an inscription, which mentions *rḥm* alongside Gad (god of fortune) and Arṣu, but the statue representing *rḥm* is missing.

The only possible occurrence of al-Raḥīm in South Arabia is CIH 40, the same inscription that mentioned the god *ḥlm* (see above). In this inscription, *ḥlm* is found next to

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<sup>188</sup> Jamme, *Le Panthéon Sud-Arabe Préislamique D'après Les Sources Épigraphiques*, 128. CIH 40 is dated to 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE and it comes from the village of Madhāb near Jabal Ḍurān.

<sup>189</sup> Q 2:225, 235, 263; 3:155; 4:12; 5:101; 22:59; 33:51; 64:17.

<sup>190</sup> Javier Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 63, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/335071>.

<sup>191</sup> Jean Cantineau, “Tadmorea,” *Syria* 14, no. 2 (1933): 181. Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra*, 63.

‘ Athtār and another god that reads *rkhm s'jh*. Considering that both the forms *rhm* and *rkhm* have similar meanings in Arabic, Jamme translates this deity as “the gentle one”. The following word *s'jh* has a similar connotation in the infinitive “to be gentle, forgiving”. All in all, it seems that this *hapax* deity in the Old South Arabian inscriptions represents an element of gentleness and forgiveness similar to al-Raḥīm in the Qur’ān. It is interesting to note at this point that, according to Muslim sources, a female rival of Muḥammad had the name Sajāḥ, a prophetess that later joined the forces of Muḥammad’s major rival Muslim b. Ḥabīb, better known as Musaylima. Given that Musaylima was portrayed by Muslim sources as claiming to receive revelations from al-Raḥmān, or even as calling himself al-Raḥmān, one wonders whether the whole story about these two Arabian rivals of Muḥammad could have been an elaborate topos based on this lexical wordplay taking its cue from a South Arabian deity.

Another qur’anic divine title, *al-‘ azīz*,<sup>192</sup> can be compared to the Palmyran deity ‘ zyzw (also written as ‘ zyz, transcribed as ‘ Azizu) that often appears in the epigraphy with its twin ‘ ršw (Aršu)<sup>193</sup>. In CIS 3974, a relief inscription with two statues representing ‘ zyzw on a horse and Aršu on a camel, ‘ zyzw is titled ‘ lh’ ṭb’ wrḥmn’, “the good and merciful god”.<sup>194</sup> Rostovtzeff argues that these two deities were the protectors of caravans based on their imagery<sup>195</sup> but it seems that ‘ zyzw had a well-known astral aspect. Julian the Emperor, in his oration at Antioch known as the *Hymn to King Helios*, remarks that the inhabitants of

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<sup>192</sup> Only in 12:30 and 12:51, the title *al-‘ azīz* is used for the Egyptian official who bought Joseph as a slave into his household and in 12:88 for Joseph himself on the same pattern. All other attestations are for the qur’anic God.

<sup>193</sup> The identity of Aršu is unclear but Teixidor, among others, thinks that it is the North Arabian god *Rwd* corresponding to the Assyrian *Ruldaiu*, which in turn might have been the deity behind Herodotus’ *Orotalt*. See Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra*, 70–71.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 69–70.

<sup>195</sup> M. I. Rostovtzeff, “The Caravan-Gods of Palmyra,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 22, no. 1 (January 1932): 108, doi:10.2307/297093.

Emesa (modern-day Homs in Syria) believe in two gods called Monimos (compare Arabic *mun'im*) and Azizos along with Helios, the sun-god. Monimos, for him, should be an equivalent of Hermes and Azizos of Ares since Ares' warlike character suits the semantics behind Azizos.<sup>196</sup> Ares' Roman and planetary equivalent is Mars but Teixidor thinks that Greek Azizos and Palmyran 'zyzw must be a male deity representing Venus similar to its female Venerean counterpart al-'Uzzā.<sup>197</sup>

### Conclusions

Pre-qur'anic Arabian materials, when read without the preconceptions of the later Muslim tradition as I tried to do above, point to interesting conclusions, some of which run counter both to the accepted wisdom about the origins of the Qur'ān and to the Muslim understanding of *jāhili* religion. Some of these conclusions that I will enumerate below are more certain than others, while some of them require a thorough comparison of Islamic narratives with the epigraphic material in order to be argued more securely.

One of the more certain conclusions of this research is that the divine nomenclature of the Qur'ān is very uniquely Arabian with the geographical distribution of the Qur'ān's divinities being concentrated in the area that encompasses the Arabian Peninsula, Sinai and southern Syria. The biblical sphere of divinities, including both the monotheistic God and his rivals, can hardly capture the whole gamut of the Qur'ān's gods, even when the biblical and Arabian spatial axes run parallel as in the accounts of, say, Isaiah, Jeremiah or even Job.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Julian and Wilmer Cave France. Wright, *The Works of the Emperor Julian* (London: W. Heinemann, 1913), 150d, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/1201124>.

<sup>197</sup> Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra*, 71.

<sup>198</sup> Babylonian captivity along with Nabonidus' long sojourn in Taymā brought the world of north Arabian oases closer to the realm of biblical figures like Isaiah and Jeremiah. As such, Qedar as a tribe and Taymā as a major town show up in biblical narratives. Yet, little is said in these accounts about the religions or divinities of

Indeed, even certain qur'anic rescensions of biblical stories are stamped with local elements as we have seen in the case of the five Noahic gods. As such, the Arabian context of the Qur'ān provides the text with a distinct divine vocabulary that can hardly be accounted for through a biblical lens. Classical and late antique narrative material, on the other hand, can be helpful at times for corroboration, as in the case of Herodotus' well-known reference to Alilat; but they can mostly penetrate into the religious world of Arabia through Hellenized versions of the Nabataean and Palmyran pantheons.

Secondly, one naturally perceives a certain balance in the Qur'ān's portrayal of Arabian divinities in the sense that the northern Arabian and Yemeni divinities constitute two divergent sets in the Qur'ān, the three goddesses being predominantly northern and five Noahic gods being from the south; or, Allāh being a northerly name for the only god and al-Raḥmān hailing from a late, monotheistic period in ancient South Arabia. Therefore, the naming of the gods in the Qur'ān looks hardly accidental and a pattern that locates the Qur'ān in an almost equidistant position from Nabataea on the one end and Yemen on the other seems to emerge. Such a conclusion is not evident from later Muslim sources since all the gods mentioned in the Qur'ān are reported by scholars like Ibn al-Kalbī to have existed in the immediate vicinity of Mecca and Medina.

As the evidence above suggests, the naming practice for the qur'anic God is also not entirely arbitrary. Allāh, a name that was known to the Nabataeans and the residents of north Arabian oases like Liḥyān, is readily adopted as the proper name of the only true god in the Qur' ān while al-Raḥmān, itself a proper name instead of an appellative title, served as an alternative that seemed to have been undesirable among the addressees of the Qur'ān.

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these areas. As a result, no other qur'anic God other than Ba' al can find a significant place in the Bible and later Judeo-Christian logia.

Later tradition certainly kept some examples of resistance to the name al-Raḥmān, especially around its association with the false prophet Musaylima. In the Qur'ān, however, this resistance is hard to see except in a few verses that I mentioned earlier.

Finally, this strongly Arabian background to the divine nomenclature of the Qur'ān can also be followed through the religious vocabulary that governed the realm of relations between the deity and its subjects in the Qur'ān, even when these subjects are Christian or Jewish. Accordingly, the next chapter of this dissertation will build upon the elements of the Qur'ān's Arabian context that were laid out in this chapter in order to explore the religious terminology of the Qur'ān with the perspective of Arabian epigraphy in addition to the Judeo-Christian/Semitic basis.

## Chapter 2 - “Praise Your Lord and Do not Associate Partners with Him”: Religious Vocabulary of the Qur’ān and its Arabian Background

### Introduction

I argued in the previous chapter that the divine nomenclature, i.e. names and attributes of gods and the only Qur’ānic God, in the Qur’ān had their origins more likely in the cults of the Arabian Peninsula than in the Biblical tradition. In the present chapter, this argument will be extended from the *nomina propria* of deities to the entire lexical plain that governs the relationships between the deities and the human being. In other words, I will investigate whether the religious vocabulary of the Qur’ān displays commonalities with the expressions of divine-human relations that are found in the epigraphy from the Arabian Peninsula.

Some caveats concerning the nature of this lexical inquiry need to be mentioned beforehand. I am aware that such an investigation bears on many yet-to-be-answered questions such as the transformation of Arabic as a language from the margins of Ḥijāz into a *lingua franca*, its connection to the epigraphic languages of the ancient North and South Arabia, inclusion of foreign lexical items in the Qur’ān etc. As such, I have to point out that I do not intend to make a larger linguistic argument about the development of Arabic and other languages attested in the epigraphy. Nor is this an attempt to define historical etymological limits for individual words in the Qur’ān. Works to those effects have already been published, albeit with little or no concern for their historical and religious implications for the Qur’ān.<sup>1</sup> To put it simply, my aim in this chapter is to draw attention to the parallels

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<sup>1</sup> The most important of these works would be Martin R. Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur’ānic Arabic*, vol. v. 61, Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section One, the Near and Middle East (Boston: Brill, 2002). Nabia Abbott worked on the development of the script and the language in Nabia Abbott, *The Rise of the North Arabic*

between the religious vocabulary of the Qur'ān and of other Arabian languages so as to show that the articulation of religious ideas and practices in the Qur'ān shares more similarities with the idioms of its immediate context than with the Biblical religious idiom. The method for such an inquiry, then, would be to read the Qur'ān “as if it were an epigraphic text from the early seventh century”<sup>2</sup> as Jan Retsö suggests for a historically minded reading of the text.

### State of the Research: “The Etymological Fallacy”

Once again, the main argument of this chapter is directly contrary to the accepted wisdom in the scholarship about the Qur'ānic vocabulary. Beginning with the “fremdwörter” literature of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and coming to more recent works on the subject, Western scholars of the Qur'ān often pointed out the indebtedness of the Qur'ān to the religious vernacular of the Bible and later Judeo-Christian literature. Earlier works on the Qur'ānic language presumed a certain expressional inadequacy on the part of Arabic or Muḥammad, or even the society that brought up the Qur'ān –an inadequacy that forced the composer of the text to borrow certain words and expressions from languages of Biblical learning such as Hebrew, Greek, Syriac and Classical Ethiopic. A few fundamental works should be mentioned here to give an idea about the research dedicated to the loanwords in the Qur'ān.

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*Script and Its Qur'anic Development, with a Full Description of the Qur'an Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute*, Oriental Institute Publications 50 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939). Another work on the script is that of Gruendler, Beatrice Gruendler, *The Development of the Arabic Scripts: From the Nabatean Era to the First Islamic Century according to Dated Texts*, vol. 43, Harvard Semitic Studies ; (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1993). For the relationship of Arabic to the other “languages” and scripts of the Arabian Peninsula see Macdonald, “Reflections on the Linguistic Map of Pre-Islamic Arabia”; Michael CA Macdonald, “Ancient Arabia and the Written Word,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 40 (2010): 5–27. For a more recent and Qur'ān-related work see Ahmad Al-Jallad, “The Linguistic Landscape of Pre-Islamic Arabia - Context for the Qur'ān,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies* (Oxford: OUP, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, vol. v. 6, Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān (Leiden :Boston: Brill, 2010), 284.

Sigmund Fraenkel, on his part, focused in his Latin dissertation on the Aramaic loanwords in Arabic in general and in the Qur'ān in particular although he referred to loanwords from other languages as well.<sup>3</sup> A few years later, Dvorak's *Ueber die Fremdwörter im Koran*, a work specifically dedicated to the loanwords in the Qur'ān, appeared with a similar premise.<sup>4</sup> In 1910, Theodor Nöldeke's celebrated *Neue Beiträge* was published with a section devoted to the Ethiopic borrowings in the Qur'ān. Alphonse Mingana's long article, *Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kur'an*, argued for the supremacy of Syriac as the source language for most of Qur'ān's religious vocabulary. Mingana considered the Qur'ān to be "the first book in Arabic" and, thus, "[its author] had to adapt new words and new expressions to fresh ideas, in a language that was not yet fixed by any grammar or lexicography".<sup>5</sup> This is why, he argued, Muḥammad borrowed considerably from Hebrew, Ethiopic and Syriac, the last one bearing the bulky seventy percent of the new lexical burden.<sup>6</sup> It is also interesting to note that Mingana opened his article by "setting aside as irrelevant the South Arabian and other inscriptions."<sup>7</sup>

The epitome of the "fremdwörter" literature is, no doubt, the *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*<sup>8</sup> by Arthur Jeffery published in 1938. The significance of this work for the more

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<sup>3</sup> The original work from 1880 is in Latin and titled *De vocabulis in antiquis arabum carminibus et in Corano peregrinis*, a German translation appeared in 1886. See Sigmund Fraenkel, *Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im arabischen* (Brill, 1886), <http://archive.org/details/diearamischenfr00fraegoog>.

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Dvořák, *Ueber Die Fremdwörter Im Korân* (Wein: C. Gerold's sohn, 1885), <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/012478444>.

<sup>5</sup> Alphonse Mingana, *Syriac Influence on the Style of the Qur'ān*, vol. v. 11, John Rylands Library, Manchester. Bulletin (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 1927), 78.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 11:80.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 11:77.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran* (Lahore: al-Biruni, 1977), originally published in 1938. A year later after the publication of the book, Margoliouth published an article by way of proposing a few additions to the list of Jeffery, David Samuel Margoliouth, "Some Additions to Professor Jeffery's Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland (New Series)* 71, no. 1 (1939): 53-61.



recent paradigmatic developments in the Qur'ānic studies is exemplified by the fact that Brill republished it in 2007<sup>9</sup> and a larger revision of the book, albeit as an independent monograph, was published in French by Catherine Pennacchio in 2014.<sup>10</sup> Jeffery argued in the introduction to his book that the “Arabian paganism”, the alleged belief system of the Qur'ān's birthplace, is only marginally represented in the Qur'ān whereas his real inspiration came from “the great monotheistic religions which were pressing down into Arabia in his day”.<sup>11</sup> As a result, “not only the greater part of the religious vocabulary, but also most of the cultural vocabulary of the Quran is of non-Arabic origin”.<sup>12</sup> Based on his analysis of 200-odd words from the Qur'ān, Jeffery, too, arrived at the conclusion that Syriac is the principal language from which the author of the Qur'ān derived his technical, religious, and cultural vocabulary.<sup>13</sup>

Despite being a work of great philological acumen, Jeffery's book reflected the now-defunct presumptions of his time about the origins of Islam and the Qur'ān. Jeffery relied heavily on Muslim sources when it was convenient for his argument, identified Muḥammad almost as the solitary agent for the “borrowing” process and completely neglected the historical-linguistic process behind the lexical shift, which, he argued, happened in Arabic through the composition of the Qur'ān. Some of his arguments, such as the development of

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<sup>9</sup> Arthur. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, Brill eBook Titles 2007 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/8211242>.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Pennacchio, *Les Emprunts A l' Hébreu et au Judéo-Araméen dans le Coran* (Paris: Jean Maisonneuve, 2014). See also Pennacchio's article on the issue, Catherine Pennacchio, “Les Emprunts Lexicaux Dans Le Coran. Les Problèmes de La Liste d'Arthur Jeffery,” *Bulletin Du Centre de Recherche Français À Jérusalem*, no. 22 (2011), <http://bcrfj.revues.org/6620>.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

Kufic Arabic script from Syriac<sup>14</sup> and the contact of Arab tribes with Syriac-speaking Christians<sup>15</sup>, are also highly questionable based on more recent studies. The claim that the ideas and practices of Arabian paganism did not make it into the Qur'ān is also largely based on the image of pre-Islamic Arabia derived from much later Muslim sources.

The line of research that Jeffery epitomized only slightly changed to this day. Several scholars attempted to uncover the “otherwise obscure” layers of Qur'ānic terminology through atomistic lexical studies hoping that the etymological provenance of specific words in the Qur'ān would signal the original background of the text. Walid Saleh recently produced a remarkable summary and a critique of etymological studies about the Qur'ān<sup>16</sup> and, therefore, I will limit myself here to works that he did not mention. One observes in Pennacchio's recent book, for example, that the philological ground is much more stable compared to Jeffery's but the methodological flaws of Jeffery and the historical assumptions, such as the existence of Jews in Medina and the contact of the Prophet with the Jews of Ḥijāz,<sup>17</sup> are still largely there. Her disinterest in the epigraphy of the Arabian Peninsula<sup>18</sup> is also reminiscent of Mingana and Jeffery, who prioritized the role of literary languages on the vocabulary of the Qur'ān but paid little attention to the inscriptions that came from the vicinity of the Qur'ān.

More significantly, the primacy of Syriac as the substratum of the Qur'ānic language lingered on and actually dominated the discussions in the field of Qur'ānic studies in the last decade or so. Aside from Christoph Luxenberg's sub-academic work, which was,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>16</sup> Walid Saleh, “The Etymological Fallacy and Qur'anic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity,” in *The Qur'ān in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 649–98.

<sup>17</sup> Pennacchio, *Les Emprunts À l' Hébreu et au Judéo-Araméen dans le Coran*, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

nevertheless, successfully reviewed and criticized by many, there has been a re-awakening of Mingana's dream to submit the language of the Qur'ān to a misunderstood Syro-Aramaic *Mischsprache*. Gabriel Said Reynolds,<sup>19</sup> Munther Younes, Gerd Puin<sup>20</sup> and others have tried to explain certain words and passages from the Qur'ān treating them as reflecting a Syriac subtext. This line of work, still finding the Qur'ān inaccessible and Arabic lexically incapable, has come under harsh criticism for its lack of concrete methodology and its disregard for historical linguistic foundations of Arabic.<sup>21</sup>

The connection between the religious parlance of the Qur'ān and of the Arabian epigraphy, therefore, has been largely ignored with a few worthy exceptions. Hubert Grimme (d. 1942) is probably the earliest scholar to sense the tremendous potential in a comparative study of the qur'ānic vocabulary and the Arabian inscriptions. During his career in Freiburg and Münster, he worked on a large array of inscriptional materials from Sinitic<sup>22</sup>, Safaitic<sup>23</sup> and Old South Arabian.<sup>24</sup> He stated his conclusions clearly in the 1904 monograph, *Mohammed: die weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung Arabiens*, saying that Muḥammad owed most of the religious ideas in the Qur'ān including his peculiar concept of God, the

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<sup>19</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, vol. 10, Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ;New York: Routledge, 2010), 130, 143, 198.

<sup>20</sup> Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin, *The Hidden Origins of Islam: New Research into Its Early History* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2010), 347, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/7934703>.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Angelika Neuwirth's review of Reynolds' *The Biblical Subtext of the Qur'ān* in the *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies*, vol. 14, pp. 131-138. Also Walid Saleh's aforementioned essay, Saleh, "The Etymological Fallacy and Qur'anic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity."

<sup>22</sup> Grimme, *Die Lösung Des Sinaischriftproblems, Die Altthamudische Schrift*.

<sup>23</sup> Hubert Grimme, *Texte Und Untersuchungen Zur Šafatenisch-Arabischen Religion, Mit Einer Einführung in Die Šafatenische Epigraphik*, Studien Zur Geschichte Und Kultur Des Altertums ... 16 Bd., 1 Hft. (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1929).

<sup>24</sup> Hubert Grimme, "Über Einige Klassen Südarabischer Lehnwörter Im Koran.," *Zeitschrift Für Assyriologie Und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 26, no. 1-3 (1912): 158-168.

other world, prayer rituals and *zakāt*, to the monotheism of South Arabia.<sup>25</sup> His brilliance in identifying the Arabian epigraphic counterparts to several Qur'ānic views is indeed commendable but his reduction of the Qur'ānic doctrines entirely to the elements of South Arabian religion and his unwillingness to concede an underlying Judeo-Christian component to the Qur'ān and Islam earned him a scathing review from the authors of the *Geschichte des Qorans*.<sup>26</sup>

D. S. Margoliouth also deserves mention as a proponent of the South Arabian influence on the formation of Islam even though his primary concern was not the Qur'ān. In a short monograph dedicated to the relations between Arabs and Israelites before Islam, Margoliouth cast doubts on the presence of any sorts of Judaism in Arabia prior to Islam while asserting that the new dispensation of Muḥammad betrayed the elements of South Arabian worship of Raḥmān instead of Judaism.<sup>27</sup> He was particularly excited about a Sabaic inscription published two decades earlier by Müller and Mordtmann<sup>28</sup> as a testimony to the continuity of certain South Arabian religious concepts into Islam.<sup>29</sup> His work suffered from the same reductionism as Grimme but it was meritorious for its active use of epigraphic evidence to explain the rise of Islam as an alternative to the oft-trailed road of biblical and rabbinic sources.

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<sup>25</sup> Hubert. Grimme, *Die Weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung Arabiens. Mohammed*, Weltgeschichte in Charakterbildern; Hrsg. von F. Kampers, S. Merkle Und M. Spahn, 2. Abt. Mittelalter. (München: Kirchheim'sche verlagsbuchhandlung, 1904), 47, 48, 49, 50, 60, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009013989>.

<sup>26</sup> Nöldeke, *The History of the Qur'ān*, 379. "The channels by which knowledge of the old revealed religions reached Mecca were as numerous and manifold as the meanderings of trade to this centre of commerce and pilgrimage. Grimme's attempt to eliminate this diversity in favour of the one "South Arabian" trail cannot be justified and must be considered a total failure."

<sup>27</sup> D. S. (David Samuel) Margoliouth and London British Academy, *The Relations between Arabs and Israelites prior to the Rise of Islam*, vol. 1921, Schweich Lectures 1921 (London: Pub. for the British academy by H. Milford, Oxford university press, 1924), 69.

<sup>28</sup> J. H. Mordtmann and David Heinrich Müller, "Eine monotheistische sabäische Inschrift," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 10 (1896): 285–92.

<sup>29</sup> Margoliouth and British Academy, *The Relations between Arabs and Israelites prior to the Rise of Islam*, 1921:68.

Little has been done by way of bringing the Qur'ānic Studies closer to the study of Arabian epigraphy since these early attempts. Franz Rosenthal rightfully lamented the divorce of the linguistic study of the Qur'ān and the larger field of Semitics after the Second World War when Islamicists no longer saw the need in the study of Hebrew, Syriac or other major Semitic language, let alone the more out-of-way languages like Safaitic or Old South Arabian.<sup>30</sup>

It must be conceded, however, that there has been a recent pique of interest in the utility of Arabian inscriptions to provide a complement to the Judeo-Christian background of the Qur'ān. In the second conference on the study of the Qur'ān in Notre Dame University, Hani Hayajneh analyzed ten lexical items in the Qur'ān which can be better understood and translated by recognizing their semantic range in Old South Arabian dialects.<sup>31</sup> He also provides an orderly summary of relatively recent works on the relationship between the Qur'ān and Arabian epigraphy written by Andrew Rippin, Christian Robin, Mahmoud Ghul and others.<sup>32</sup> Most recently, Ahmad al-Jallad underlined the importance of Arabian epigraphy for a better understanding of the linguistic context of the Qur'ān with a few preliminary examples.<sup>33</sup> A thorough comparison of the Qur'ānic religious vocabulary with the languages of the Arabian epigraphy, however, is still a desideratum.

The present chapter is an attempt to address this desideratum with an extensive study of Qur'ānic religious vocabulary through individual lexical items and their

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<sup>30</sup> Dirk Hartwig, *“Im vollen Licht der Geschichte”: die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung*, vol. Bd. 8, Ex oriente lux ; (Würzburg: Ergon, 2008), 114.

<sup>31</sup> Hani Hayajneh, “The Usage of Ancient South Arabian and Other Arabian Languages as an Etymological Source for Qur'ānic Vocabulary” in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in Its Historical Context 2*, vol. 2, Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (London ;New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:123.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Jallad, “The Linguistic Landscape of Pre-Islamic Arabia - Context for the Qur'ān.”

counterparts in the Arabian epigraphic sources. The principal argument advocated here would be that there is a clear continuity of the semantic pool of religious concepts that define the divine-human axis from the epigraphic Arabian languages to the Qur'ānic Arabic. This continuity is more readily visible in the case of monotheistic South Arabian inscriptions (from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> c. CE) as we will see below but even the sources from earlier centuries indicate a gradual transformation of the same polytheistic religious formulae into the Qur'ān with necessary adjustments.

It must be remembered that the aim here is neither to derive the doctrine of the Qur'ān from earlier Arabian religions (like Grimme did) nor to present the words that are discussed in this chapter as loanwords borrowed into the Qur'ān from Arabian epigraphy (like Grimme, Dvorak and Jeffery did). Both of these arguments would require much more evidence than we have today about the historical development of the Qur'ānic Arabic and the interactions of the Qur'ān's addressees with their neighbors. The following presentation is meant to further clinch the historical and linguistic context of the Qur'ān to the Arabian Peninsula by showing the commonalities of religious expression in Arabian epigraphy and the Qur'ān and by occasionally demonstrating their dissimilarity from the biblical, rabbinic and early Christian idiom.

To this end, the chapter will have three major sections. I will begin with a discussion about the portrayal of pre-Islamic polytheism in the Qur'ān and whether this portrayal matches the descriptions in the epigraphy. Then I will trace the reflections of non-monotheistic notions and ritual practices in the Qur'ān and their renewed usage in the context of the Qur'ānic God instead of 'Almaqah, 'Athtar and other pre-Islamic Arabian

deities. The final part will be devoted to a comparison of the South Arabian religious vocabulary related to the cult of Rḥmnn and the religious vocabulary of the Qur'ān.

### Jāhili Religious Terms and Practices in the Qur'ān and Epigraphy

I had mentioned in the first chapter that the Qur'ān offers very little information about the beliefs and practices of the *mushrikūn*. The embellished details of the Meccan paganism, the alleged backdrop of the Qur'ānic milieu, have to be picked up from much later sources, the most important of them being *Kitāb al-Asnām* (The Book of Idols) of Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 819) and *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (The Book of Songs) of Abu-l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 967). The Qur'ān, for one thing, mentions only a tiny proportion of the pagan deities that Ibn al-Kalbī listed with no further information about their locations, cults and ritual personnel. In a recent article Patricia Crone listed all references to pagan beliefs and practices in the Qur'ān and expressed her surprise about the absence, in the Qur'ān itself, of the well-known portrayal of *jahilī* religious life found in the Muslim historical and exegetical works.<sup>34</sup> (Verses 5:3, 5:103, 6:121, 136-145, 16:35, 56, 115f.)

One of the interesting points Crone made in her article is that the references to idol worship among the pagans are only confined to regulations and restrictions about the use of agricultural surplus, cattle and livestock – perhaps not surprising for the ritualistic principles of any pre-modern agrarian society but hardly fitting for the image we have of the pre-Islamic Mecca from later Muslim sources. In 6:136 and the following verses the Qur'ān condemns the pagan practice of consecrating (*ḥijr*) the sacrificial animals (*al-an'ām*) and plants (*al-ḥarth*) for Allāh and other associates (*al-shurakā'*) and restricting their use for certain classes and genders:

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<sup>34</sup> Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans," 171.

“They appoint to God, of the tillage and cattle that He multiplied, a portion, saying, 'This is for God' -- so they assert -- 'and this is for our associates.'... They say, 'These are cattle and tillage sacrosanct (*hijrun*); none shall eat them, but whom we will'-- so they assert -- 'and cattle whose backs have been forbidden, and cattle over which they mention not the Name of God.' All that they say, forging against God; He will assuredly recompense them for what they were forging. And they say, 'What is within the bellies of these cattle is reserved for our males and forbidden to our spouses; but if it be dead, then they all shall be partners in it...’”

The practice of putting aside livestock of certain qualities for ritualistic purposes is also considered to be the context for the otherwise opaque verse 5:103: “God has not appointed *baḥīra*, *sā’ iba*, *waṣīla* and *ḥām* but the unbelievers forge against God falsehood and most of them have no understanding.” The exact meaning of these four words is far from clear since early exegetes and medieval lexicographers took pains to make sense of them.<sup>35</sup> That they are technical terms referring to specific types of domesticated animals that are set aside for their unique characteristics is often found in lexicons and exegetical works with little or no etymological or historical explanation.

Old South Arabian inscriptions show that dedicating animals, lands, meadows and plants to deities and limiting their usage through royal and divine decrees were common practices in Arabia. In fact, the expression of such practices in epigraphy appears to be in parallel with the Qur’ān’s language. A complete Middle Sabaic inscription (RES 4176) mentions the dedication (*hjr*) of a valley and all of its crops to the patron deity *T’ lb* with a decree (*hg*) that was addressed to the tribe of *Sm’*. In other inscriptions, such reserved lands

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<sup>35</sup> Lane’s long exposé for the word *baḥīra* with its references to earlier historians and exegetes is enough to show the complexity of the matter (p. 157). Lane provides at least five possible contradicting meanings for the word *baḥīra*, all of which have to do with a she-camel with extraordinary qualities such as being the tenth consecutive female offspring of the same she-camel.



are called *mḥgr* and grazing animals in a delineated *mḥgr* is subjected to a fine.<sup>36</sup> The verb form *yḥgr* is attested in a Middle Sabaic inscription with the same context where a cistern is consecrated to the deity *Nws<sup>2</sup>m* with any transgressor to be penalized by fifty strokes.<sup>37</sup> Similar reservations could be made for non-ritual reasons as well since we have at least one example of a family building walls around a grazing land to reserve it for their horses and announcing the reservation with an inscription.<sup>38</sup>

This South Arabian practice is in line with the verse 6:138 where the *mushrikūn* claim that certain animals and parts of the harvest are *ḥijr* and their usage is restricted to the idols (see 6:136) and the privileged in the society. Another practice related to the sacrificial use of cattle is found in 5:3, where the Qur’ān prohibits the consumption of flesh that was consecrated to and sacrificed for the sake of *nuṣub* (*ma dhubiḥa ‘ alā n-nuṣubi*). The word, *nuṣub*, which appears three times in the Qur’ān<sup>39</sup> and twice in chapter 5, is recognizable from Sabaic as a memorial or funerary image with a short inscription. Most of these self-titled *nuṣub* are funerary stelai with relief inscriptions that are erected for the memory of a person including a stylized image.<sup>40</sup> A few depict elaborate scenes of hunting and agricultural activity involving the person that was mentioned in the inscription.<sup>41</sup> It is interesting that none of them indicates any connection to a particular deity. Judging by more than twenty such examples of Sabaean *nuṣub* one would think that the Qur’ānic injunction against eating the flesh of *nuṣub* sacrifices has to do with a sacrificial ancestor

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<sup>36</sup> See the inscription “Mafray-al-‘ Adan 10+11+12” (called this way because it was broken into three pieces), where an oracle (*ms’ l*) of the patron deity *T’ lb* led to the special reservation of a meadow to the deity.

<sup>37</sup> al-Mašamayn 1, translated by C. Robin and J. Ryckmans.

<sup>38</sup> Mafray-Ḥāšī 5.

<sup>39</sup> 5:3, 5:90 and 70:43. The word *naṣaba* in the sense of “to erect, to fix” is found in 88:19 in the context of mountains.

<sup>40</sup> B 9578, CIH 23, CIH 709, CIH 712.

<sup>41</sup> CIH 705, CIH 706, CIH 707, CIH 713.

cult that must have been prevalent among the addressees of the Qur'ān rather than with a practice connected to idols.

Many scholars and translators of the Qur'ān took the word *nuṣub* (and its plural *anṣāb* in 5:90), however, as referring to the idols of Qur'ān's interlocutors.<sup>42</sup> Crone made a connection with the Hebrew *maṣṣebot* claiming that *anṣāb* were not idols but the altars on which sacrifices to idols were performed.<sup>43</sup> The overwhelming evidence in early and middle Sabaic from Southern Arabia works against this identification but two curious *nṣb* specimens from the Greek island of Delos, one in Hadramitic and the other in Minaic, could justify the interpretation of *anṣāb* as sacrificial altars. RES 3952, the Hadramitic one, is a partly corrupted inscription incised on an altar dedicated to the sun-god *s'yin* and the word *nṣb* seems to be used in this inscription as a verb (“*ḡlḡm... erected [this altar] for S'yin*”) instead of a noun contrary to what we find in Sabaic *anṣāb*. The Minaic altar and its inscription from Delos (RES 3570) are in a much better shape and the inscription reads as follows: “Ḥn' and Zyd' l, the two of the clan Ḥḍb, erected the altar of Wdm (*nṣb mḍbḥ wdm*) and of the gods of Ma' īn in Delos (*w- ' l' lt m' n b-dlt*).” A Greek addition to the inscription confirms the identification of this altar with the Minaic and Qur'ānic god Wadd<sup>44</sup>: *οδδου θεου μιναίων*, “To Wadd, the god of the Minaeans”.

These two altar inscriptions suggest that *nṣb* does not mean “an altar” but the act of erecting and dedicating an altar to a deity is denoted with the verb *nṣb*. Therefore, the Qur'ānic *nuṣub* could be related to two concepts both of which can be derived from Old South Arabian inscriptions. It is either a funerary image of a revered ancestor to whom an animal

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<sup>42</sup> Pickthall: “that which hath been immolated unto idols”, Arberry: “things sacrificed to idols”, Hamidullah: “*qu'on a immolée sur les pierres dressées*”, Khoury: “*was auf Opfersteinen geschlachtet worden ist*”.

<sup>43</sup> Crone, “The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans,” 169.

<sup>44</sup> See 71:23 and Chapter I of this dissertation for a discussion of the deity Wadd.

sacrifice is dedicated or an erected pillar on which a sacrifice to a deity is performed. In either case the closest counterpart to the rather vague concept of Qur'ānic *nuṣub* seems to come from Old South Arabian evidence.

I had mentioned earlier that some of the cattle that were set aside for their particularities or for sacrificial use are given a name and a special status according to 5:103 but little is known about their names (*baḥīra*, *sā' iba*, *waṣīla* and *ḥām*) and functions. Old South Arabian inscriptions can provide hints towards identifying these terms of technical ritual import as well. An early Sabaic inscription (CIH 563+CIH 956), albeit in its incomplete form, mentions a decree that commands the people of Marib to set aside (*yhbḥr*) the flesh (*bs<sup>2</sup>r*) of bulls (*ṭwr*) and cattle (*b' r*) to be given to the priests of gods (*' rs<sup>2</sup>wt ' l' ltn*) for expiatory sacrifices. The inscription notes also that the priests and the ritual are connected to a *ḥaram*, a temple or a designated area of worship with restricted access, mirroring the Qur'ānic word for “sanctuary”<sup>45</sup> and the ubiquitous *masjid al-ḥarām*.<sup>46</sup> *Baḥīra*, then, seems to be a title for cattle that are set aside for sacrifices in a temple. Etymologically, the word is clearly connected to the Hebrew *bāḥar*, Syriac *bḥar* and Akkadian *bēru* with the meanings “to choose, to test, to try”.<sup>47</sup> 2 Sam. 21:6 and Ps. 105:6 (and their Aramaic translations in the Targum) provide the closest form to the Qur'ānic one, *bḥīr*, meaning “the chosen one” in the context of Saul and Abraham. However, the ritual “picking-out” of sacrificial animals seems to be unique to Sabaic and is reflected in the enigmatic Qur'ānic word of *baḥīra*.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> 28:57 and 29:67.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. inter alia, 8:34, 9:7, 17:1. The temple in the inscription is called *ḥrmm ḥrnm yṭ' ' mr w-s<sup>1</sup>b'* and it is in the city of Marib.

<sup>47</sup> See Jastrow, p. 105 and Payne Smith, p. 41.

<sup>48</sup> Except maybe Ez. 24:5, where the word *mibḥar* is used in the sense of the “the choicest of the flocks” (*mibḥar ḥaṣ-ṣōn*) but the same construction if used for objects other than flocks such as “vows” (Dt. 12:11), “trees” (Is. 37:24) and “bones” (Ez. 24:4).

The remaining three words are more difficult to ascertain from epigraphy. Both *sā' ība* and *waṣīla* seem to have connotations of a “ceremonial gift” as it is attested in CIH 140 (*syb*) and CIH 575 (*ṣlt*) respectively. Arabic *sayb* has a similar meaning as well.<sup>49</sup> *Ḥām*, on the other hand, is recognizable from Sabaic<sup>50</sup> and Minaic<sup>51</sup> as a “protected tract of irrigated land”, a concept very close in usage to *mḥjr*, but its semantic range does not seem to allow any sacrificial connotations. Arabic lexicographers define *ḥām* as “a camel that has prohibited or interdicted his back to riders”.<sup>52</sup>

#### Approaching the Divine Properly: From *ʿlmqh* to *al-Rahmān*

As we have seen, the Qur’ān’s description of pre-Islamic rites, notwithstanding its brevity, shares a fair amount of common vocabulary with the Arabian epigraphy. That the Qur’ān represents a sharp rupture from the beliefs and practices of pre-Islamic “ignorance” is often correctly argued and is vindicated by Qur’ān’s hostility towards such beliefs and practices. It is only natural then that the Qur’ān’s deliberate act of distancing itself from the past of its interlocutors would have led to the emergence of a distinctive vocabulary that comprehends the exigencies of the new dispensation. It is also expected that this new dispensation, admittedly rising on the shoulders of Judeo-Christian precedents, appropriated many elements from the already rich vocabulary of biblical and extra-biblical materials. The abundant existence of such elements in the Qur’ān, like *ṣalāt*, *zakāt*, *baraka*, *tasbīḥ*, *nabī* etc., is in fact the reason why most of the Qur’ānic scholarship is bent to explain the emergence of the Qur’ān as a biblical apocryphal event in a new language, i.e. Classical Arabic.

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<sup>49</sup> See Lane, p. 1491: “A gift...a voluntary gift by way of alms”.

<sup>50</sup> There are two attestations in Sabaic and both of them are from RES 3945, a very long early Sabaic text written to commemorate the irrigation projects and battles of *Krb’ l Wtr*.

<sup>51</sup> This is from an expiatory inscription that concerns a violation of irrigational rights.

<sup>52</sup> Lane, p. 655.

Qur'ān's biblical background, then, is a *sine qua non* to the study of its religious vocabulary. Yet, one also perceives with a quick glance at the text that the Qur'ān's religious vocabulary cannot entirely be reduced to the massive summation of previous Judeo-Christian literature. Many scholars, who were otherwise keen on locating the Qur'ān within the continuum of Jewish or Christian apocrypha, had to concede that there is a distinctly Arabian element in the language of the Qur'ān.<sup>53</sup> A more recent and interesting example would be Gabriel Reynolds, the author of the book *Biblical Subtext of the Qur'ān*, who expressed his surprise at the absence of the root *ḥmd*, a root that produced many important words in the Qur'ān including the name of the prophet, in Syriac, “the language which so often unlocks the sense of qur'anic vocabulary”.<sup>54</sup>

I argue that it is at this very point that the languages of Arabian epigraphy could prove to be useful for the study of the Qur'ān's religious vocabulary. As it will be clear from the exposition below, the Qur'ān, just like in its presentation of pre-Islamic rites, displays commonalities with Arabian inscriptions regarding some of the most central concepts of Islam. Some of these concepts are encountered in a polytheistic setting and were used in the Qur'ān with a modified sense but most of them are identical in their semantic scope. We will also see that after the emergence of monotheistic inscriptions in Southern Arabia the lexical overlap becomes increasingly flagrant. In fact, one is compelled to think that even some of the practices and ideas that were thought to have been borrowed into the Qur'ān directly from a central Judeo-Christian source might have reached Arabic and the Qur'ān with the intermediation of South Arabia. The rest of this chapter, then, will be devoted to the

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<sup>53</sup> Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment; the Gunning Lectures, Edinburgh University, 1925*, 1925:69. Torrey, ... *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 126.

<sup>54</sup> Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, 10:198.

investigation of Qur'ānic words that have their cognates and counterparts in the Arabian epigraphy and that are hard to explain from a biblical angle. It is nothing but appropriate that I start my investigation with the word that puzzled Gabriel Reynolds.

ḥmd, “praising God”:

The codex of the Qur'ān as we have today opens with the phrase *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi rabbi l- ' ālamīn*, “the praise belongs to Allāh, lord of the worlds”. The prophet and the believers are often commanded to utter this phrase in its various forms<sup>55</sup> and several biblical figures are portrayed to have praised God with this construction.<sup>56</sup> In fact, the Qur'ān tells us that the last prayer of the believers that reached the paradise will be *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi rabbi l- ' ālamīn*. Human beings are actually imitating the nature and the supernatural beings in their *ḥamd* since everything that exists (17:44), including the lightning (*al-ra' d*, 13:13), the angels that are around God's throne (39:75) and the angels that carry the God's throne (40:7) all extol God in his praise (*yusabbiḥūna bi-ḥamdihi*). *Al-hamīd*, the praiseworthy one, is a title of God that is attested seventeen times in the Qur'ān<sup>57</sup> and is often paired with another title such as *al- ' azīz* or *al-ghanī*. The same root provided the name of the prophet as well, which is found four times in the Qur'ān as *muḥammad*.<sup>58</sup> In one instance, Jesus foreshadows the coming of a prophet after himself whose name would be *aḥmad* – a reference that is easy to connect with the person of Muḥammad as well.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> 17:111, 23:28, 29:63 etc.

<sup>56</sup> David and Solomon: 27:15, Abraham: 14:39.

<sup>57</sup> 2:267, 4:131, 14:1, 8, 22:24, 64 etc.

<sup>58</sup> 3:144, 33:40, 47:2 and 48:29.

<sup>59</sup> 61:6.

The centrality of *ḥamd* to the Qur’ānic discourse, then, is obvious. The Qur’ān time and again teaches the believers that *ḥamd* belongs to the only God and the word’s frequent association with *tasbīḥ* indicates that the two are in a close semantic connection. Unlike *tasbīḥ*, which has cognates in other Semitic languages as a term of religious import, however, *ḥamd* is rather unique to the Qur’ān and to Old South Arabian. Therefore, a survey of how the word and its various forms are used in the epigraphy can be helpful to trace the development of the concept of *ḥamd* from South Arabian religions to the Qur’ān.

The first thing one notices about the word *ḥmd* in Old South Arabian is its ubiquity. The perfect verb form, *ḥmd* (“he praised”) and *ḥmdw* (“they praised”) appear in more than one hundred inscriptions and the use of the root in all its attested forms can easily go up to five hundred specimens. Second, almost all of the attestations are from Sabaic with only a few examples from Qatabanic. This is why one often encounters the word in the context of a Sabaeen deity. Third, *ḥmd* is found in a wide variety of inscriptions in a long period from Middle Sabaic to Late Sabaic. Therefore, its usage comprises the Sabaeen pantheon during its long phase of polytheism and the later adoption of the *rḥmnn* worship.

’*lmqh*, the Sabaeen moon-god, is the deity to which most of the *ḥmd*-formulae are directed. Dedicatory inscriptions that are erected as a result of a victorious battle or a certain favor from ’*lmqh* often include a passage in which the dedicator expresses his praise and gratefulness for the deity attached to the reason of the praise. The inscription Ja 629, which is a fairly lengthy text commemorating the dedication of a bronze statue to ’*lmqh* by a Sabaeen king called *Mrṭdm Yhḥmd* and his son *Drḥn*, contains several of such formulae. The dedication is made “in praise because He [’*lmqh*] granted and bestowed favours to His servant *Drḥn*” (*ḥmdm b-ḏt hws<sup>2</sup>‘ w-hwfyn ‘ bd-hw Drḥn*) when the latter went on an

expedition. Later in the text *Mrṭdm* and *Dṛhn* praise the might and authority of ' *lmqh* (*w-ḥmdy Mrṭdm w-Dṛhn... ḥyl w-mqm ' lmqh*) because (*b-dt*) He let them gain a victory against the king of Ḥadramawt. The same formula is repeated twice later in the text to praise ' *lmqh* who helped *Dṛhn* and his allies to attack and pursue the Ḥadramis and the nomad Arabs and who made the Sabaeen army return home at Marib (*mryb*) safely.

Ja 629 provides a good outline of *ḥmd* formulae that are attested in the pre-monotheist era of Sabaic inscriptions. Most of them are directed to ' *lmqh*,<sup>60</sup> they are often praises of his power and authority (*ḥyl w-mqm*)<sup>61</sup> and they almost always include the reason of his praise. By far the most common formula is the adverbial one where *ḥmdm*, “in praise, by way of praise”, is followed by *b-dt*, which introduces the content and the reason of the praise.<sup>62</sup> Some exceptions to these basic patterns for the use of the *ḥmd* formulae include the dedications to deities other than ' *lmqh*. *T' lb Rymm*<sup>63</sup>, ' *ttr*<sup>64</sup> and ' *rnyd*'<sup>65</sup> are other South Arabian gods that are addressed with these praise formulae. Only in one occasion, in the letter called Ghul A written in the minuscule script, we find the praise of ' *lmqh* and ' *ttr* together.<sup>66</sup>

Already in the pre-monotheist period we find proper names produced from the root *ḥmd*. Ja 738, for example, honors the dedication of a bronze statue to ' *lmqh* by *Yḥmd* and his

<sup>60</sup> See, *inter alia*, Ja 560, Ir 5, Ja 644, Ja 656, Ja 670, CIH 397, FB-Maḥram Bilqīs 2, Ja 739.

<sup>61</sup> See CIAS 39.11/o 3 n° 9, CIH 397, FB-Maḥram Bilqīs 2, Ir 13, Ir 24, Ir 5, Ja 644.

<sup>62</sup> There are up to three hundred attestations I have able to find of this formula in more than two hundred different inscriptions. A few examples would be CIH 104, CIH 155, CIH 308, CIH 353, CIH 365, Ja 562, Ja 565, Ja 592, Ja 603.

<sup>63</sup> CIH 334, CIH 336, CIH 344, CIH 353, CIH 357.

<sup>64</sup> CIH 429, CIH 104,

<sup>65</sup> FB-as-Sawdā' 1

<sup>66</sup> Peter Stein, “Die Sabäischen Briefe Ghul Document A und B. Ein erster zusammenhängender Interpretationsversuch” pp. 459-487 in Amida Sholan, Sabina Antonini and Mounir Arbach (eds). *Sabaean Studies (Dirāsāt Saba' iyya)*. Archaeological, epigraphical and historical studies in honour of Yūsuf M. ' Abdallāh, Alessandro de Maigret, Christian J. Robin on the occasion of their sixtieth birthdays. Naples: Università degli studi di Napoli l'Orientale. 2005.



brother *Mḥmdm*, who praised the deity because He gave them a healthy child (*wldm*, it is not clear to which one of the two the child was given). The former, *Yḥmd*, in particular, seems to be a widespread name with more than twenty attestations in Sabaic and Qatabanic.<sup>67</sup> The name *Yḥḥmd* that I already mentioned above in Ja 629, a name probably based on the causative form of the verb *ḥmd*, is also very common as it was the name of a Sabaeen ruler.<sup>68</sup> The forms closer to the name of Qur’ān’s messenger, *Muḥammad*, and the *hapax* form *Aḥmad*, are also detectable from the epigraphy. In CIH 420, the inscription on a funerary monument, we find the name *Mḥmd bn ḏt Ws<sup>1</sup> t<sup>69</sup>*, a name that is attested in another inscription as well.<sup>70</sup> *ḥmd* is much more common as several people with the name are found in more than ten inscriptions.<sup>71</sup>

Extant inscriptions from the monotheistic period indicate a change both in the content of the *ḥmd* formulae and in their divine addressee. CIH 541, a lengthy inscription dated to 547 AD that describes the expeditions of Abraha, the Abyssinian viceroy of the Ethiopian king, opens with the phrase “by the power, help and mercy of *Rḥmnn*, of his Messiah and of the Holy Spirit”<sup>72</sup> and reserves *ḥmd* only for *Rḥmnn*. The construction used in this inscription, *b-ḥmd Rḥmnn*, “with the praise (or help) of *Rḥmnn*” is unique to the monotheistic period. The same construction is observed in an earlier inscription, dated to

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, CIH 343, Ja 656, Ja 690, MM 10, Ja 623, Ja 713.

<sup>68</sup> See Ir 5, Ja 626, Ja 628, Ja 630, Ir 49, RES 3958, Ja 822.

<sup>69</sup> Yves Calvet and Christian Robin, *Arabie heureuse, Arabie déserte: les antiquités arabiques du Musée du Louvre* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1997), 136. The full text is as follows: *nfs<sup>1</sup> Mḥmd bn ḏt Ws<sup>1</sup> t w-l-yqm<sup>1</sup> n<sup>1</sup> ttr ḏ-ys<sup>2</sup>trn-hw*, “Funerary monument of Mḥmd, son of ḏt Ws<sup>1</sup> t; and may ttr overthrow the one who will destroy it.”

<sup>70</sup> Ry 574: *ṣwr Mḥmd bn ḏt Ws<sup>1</sup> t*: “The image of Mḥmd bn ḏt Ws<sup>1</sup> t”

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Ir 27, Ja 612, Ja 587, Ja 690, Ja 623, Ir 26.

<sup>72</sup> *b-ḥyl w-[r]d<sup>1</sup> w-rḥmt Rḥmnn w-Ms<sup>1</sup>h-hw w-Rḥ [q]ds<sup>1</sup>*

510 AD, this time identifying Rḥmnn as the master of the heavens (*b-ḥmd Rḥmnn b' l s<sup>1</sup>myn*).<sup>73</sup> Two other attestations follow a similar pattern<sup>74</sup> and, therefore, it seems that *ḥmd* is never used as a verb in the monotheistic period similar to the Qur'ān<sup>75</sup> and unlike in the pre-monotheistic Sabaic inscriptions.

Personal names based on the root continue to appear in the Late Sabaic inscriptions too as we find the name *Yḥmd* twice, once in a short and incomplete wall inscription<sup>76</sup> and the other in a dedicatory text to *Rḥmnn*.<sup>77</sup> A more curious example of a name or a title derived from *ḥmd* is found in Ja 1028, an inscription with a clear Jewish background dated to 518 AD. This inscription recounts the exploits of the Jewish ruler of Ḥimyar, *Yws<sup>1</sup>f' s<sup>1</sup>' r Yt' r*, who, as he claimed in the inscription, burnt the church of the Abyssinian Christians in *Zafār* (*k-dhr qls<sup>1</sup>n w-hrg' ḥbs<sup>2</sup>n b-Dfr*) and then attacked the Christians in Najrān (*w- ' ly ḥrb w-mqrnt Ngrn*).<sup>78</sup> The inscription ends with the following dedication to *Rḥmnn*: *dn ms<sup>1</sup>[ndn] wtf w-s<sup>1</sup>tr w-qdm ' ly s<sup>1</sup>m Rḥmnn wtf Tmmm d-Ḥdyt rb-Hd b-mḥmd*, “This inscription was placed, written, executed in the name of *Rḥmnn*. Tmm of Ḥdyt placed it, by the Lord of Jews, the Praiseworthy one.” The use of *mḥmd* as a title of *Rḥmnn*, “the Lord of Jews”, is noteworthy

<sup>73</sup> Iwona. Gajda, *Le royaume de Ḥimyar à l'époque monothéiste: l'histoire de l'Arabie du sud ancienne de la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'ère chrétienne jusqu'à l'avènement de l'Islam*, vol. [nouv. sér.] t. 40, Mémoires de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres ; (Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 2009), 228.

<sup>74</sup> CIH 537+RES 4919 and Robin-Viallard 1.

<sup>75</sup> The only exception to this in the Qur'ān is in 3:188, where the form *yuhmadu* is found, but in this case the object of praise is not divine.

<sup>76</sup> BR-Yanbuq 14.

<sup>77</sup> CIH 537+RES 4919.

<sup>78</sup> This *Yws<sup>1</sup>f*, known as *Yūsuf dhū Nuwās* in Muslim sources, is considered to be the perpetrator of the infamous attack against the Christians of Najrān leading to an Axumite invasion of South Arabia. The chain of events that followed the attack against the Christians is recorded in various sources in Greek, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic while epigraphic sources such as the one above seem to confirm it. See Jacques Ryckmans, *La Persécution Des Chrétiens Himyarites Au Sixième Siècle.*, vol. 1, Uitgaven van Het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut Te İstanbul 1 (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in het Nabije Oosten, 1956); bp. of Ruṣāfa Sergius supposed author and Axel Moberg ed, *The Book of the Himyarites. Fragments of a Hitherto Unknown Syriac Work*, Skrifter Utg. Av Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet I Lund ... VII (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup; [etc., etc.], 1924); Joëlle Beaucamp, “La Persécution Des Chrétiens de Nagrān et La Chronologie Ḥimyarite,” *Aram* 11–12 (2000 1999): 15–83.

since this title in the pre-monotheistic period was strictly limited to persons. This sole attestation in a Jewish inscription along with other monotheistic *ḥmd* formulae seems to signal a shared language between the cult of *Rḥmnn* in all its formulations, be it Christian, Jewish or unmarked monotheist, and the cult of the Qur'ānic God as deities worthy of *ḥmd*.

By way of summarizing the usage of *ḥmd* and its derivatives in the Qur'ān and Old South Arabian, one can say that the words from this root prove to be equally significant for the expression of praise and thankfulness for the deity in both the Qur'ān and the epigraphy. In the monotheistic period, the construction of *ḥmd* formulae seems to parallel certain Qur'ānic usages more closely (*fa-sabbih bi-ḥamdi rabbika* and *b-ḥmd rḥmnn*) but one observes overlaps with the Qur'ān even in the pre-monotheistic period. Proper nouns and divine attributes derived from the root are also attested both in the Qur'ān and several Sabaic inscriptions. Most importantly, however, Old South Arabian epigraphy provides the only recognizable cognate to the very important concept of *ḥmd* in the Qur'ān.

Before moving to the next lexical item an excursus to discuss the use of the word *mqm* in the epigraphy seems apt here due to its ubiquitous appearance next to *ḥmd*. As Beeston informs us, this word in the context of a deity often means “power” or “authority” in Sabaic instead of “place, location, position”, connotations that are identifiable from the Arabic and Hebrew cognates of the word.<sup>79</sup> The word *maqām* in these latter connotations is fairly common in the Qur'ān as well.<sup>80</sup> However, three usages of the word in the context of the Qur'ānic God deviate from the usual connotations of the word *maqām* and come closer to its meaning in Sabaic. 55:46, which closely parallels 79:40, reads, “and for the one who has feared the *maqām* of his Lord are two gardens” and 14:14 has a similar construction only

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<sup>79</sup> See BDB, 879 for the attestation of the word *maqām* in the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>80</sup> See, for example, 5:107, 17:79, 19:73, 26:58, 27:39 and others.

with the first person for God, “whoever fears my *maqām* and fears my threat”. In these three verses the word *maqām* could be better interpreted as “authority” similar to the Sabaic instances of the word *mqm*.

šrk, “associating partners with god”:

If *ḥamd* is one of the central tenets of Qur’ān’s prescription for the human-divine relations, *shirk* or, as it is often translated, “associating partners with God” is the exact opposite of it as an act that the Qur’ān pungently vetoes. More than a hundred verses in the Qur’ān denounce the practice of serving anything other than the true deity or putting the only God in the company of its alleged subordinates. God absolves every sin except *shirk* (4:116), he forbids paradise to those who associate partners with him (5:72), he identifies, through the words of Luqmān, *shirk* as a “grave injustice” (31:13) and the Prophet is commanded to take allegiance from the believers on the condition that they do not commit *shirk* (60:12). Righteous figures before the Prophet preached against it: Abraham in 3:67, Hūd in 11:54, Joseph in 12:38 and even Satan himself in 14:22! Although *mushrikūn* or those who commit *shirk* (*wa-l-ladhīna ashrakū*) constitute a distinct group within the addressees of the Qur’ān next to the Christians and Jews<sup>81</sup>, the latter two are not sheltered from the accusation of *shirk* as well.<sup>82</sup>

The injunction against associating partners with God is obviously not an invention of the Qur’ān but the language of the Qur’ān in the delivery of this message is rather unique. First of all, as Martin Zammit pointed out, there are no Semitic cognates to *šrk* that reflect the meaning of “sharing, taking part, being partners” other than in Old South Arabian and

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<sup>81</sup> See 5:82 and 22:17.

<sup>82</sup> 9:30-31, the polemic in the first verse is directed against the alleged beliefs of Christians and Jews in a son of God, Jesus in the case of Christians and ‘ Uzayr in the case of Jews. The second verse makes a further point by saying that the Christians and Jews take their scholars (*aḥbār*) and monks (*ruhḃān*) as lords (*arbāb*).

possibly in some subgroups of Ancient North Arabian.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, the root is nowhere used in the context of absolute monotheism other than the Qur'ān. Secondly, Qur'ān uses the term *shirk* and other terms derived from it to denounce the practices of its addressees while the same term and its derivatives are also commonly used in the context of personal and commercial partnerships in the Qur'ān in particular and in Classical Arabic in general.<sup>84</sup>

In Old South Arabian, too, the primary meaning of the words derived from *s<sup>2</sup>rk* in the pre-monotheistic period has to do with making partnerships especially in crop sharing agreements as the context of the inscriptions suggests. RES 3951, “a decree compelling the population of Ṣirwaḥ and the neighboring countryside to supply with provisions the royal soldiers stationed there”, contains four attestations of the root in both verbal and nominal forms all of them in the context of taxation arrangements among sharecroppers.<sup>85</sup> A Ḥaḍramitic inscription dedicated to their god *S<sup>1</sup>yn*, mentions the partnership (*s<sup>2</sup>rk*) among the notables (*kbr*) of the tribe *Rmy* in the town of *Mḍbm* to restore and enlarge a well (*b' r*) within their jurisdiction.<sup>86</sup> Another similar inscription from *Mḍbm* commemorates the restoration of a building's façade once again with the participation of the tribal confederation of *Rmy* (*s<sup>2</sup>rk Rmy*).<sup>87</sup>

That the root *šrk* has the connotations of a tribal *regroupement* in the form of a larger body like a confederation or a military unit is attested in Nabataean as well. A bilingual

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<sup>83</sup> Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic*, v. 61:238. Zammit indicates that there are, indeed, Syriac, Aramaic, Hebrew and Ugaritic cognates but all of them have the semantic range of meanings such as “to adhere, to stick, to hold fast” etc.

<sup>84</sup> See 17:64, 37:33, 43:39 in the Qur'ān, for the whole range of meanings for the root *šrk* see Lane's *Lexicon*, pp. 1551-1553.

<sup>85</sup> A. F. L. Beeston, “Two South Arabian Inscriptions. Some Suggestions,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1937, 72.

<sup>86</sup> CT 4.

<sup>87</sup> CT 10.

(Nabataean-Greek) inscription from Rawwāfah, located now in the north eastern corner of Saudi Arabia, mentions *šrkt tmwdw*, which is found in the Greek version as *Θαμουδηνῶν ἔθνος*, “the nation” or “people of Thamūd”. The discussion of this inscription and its historical context will be found in the third chapter but it suffices to say here that the word *šrkt* in this inscription represents a conglomeration of people in the form of a superior tribal body or a specialized military unit derived from the tribe of Thamūd.<sup>88</sup>

The use of *šrk* as a term of religious import is found only in Late Sabaic, i.e. in the monotheistic period of pre-Islamic South Arabia, and only in one highly intriguing but problematic inscription. This inscription, later catalogued as CIH 539, has first caught attention in 1896, when Mordtmann and Müller published an article in WZKM announcing the discovery of “*eine monotheistische sabäische Inschrift*”. The eerie resemblance of its content to the language of the Qur’ān made Margoliouth to write the following a few decades after its discovery:

The inferences to be drawn from this tablet seem so far-reaching that some hesitation is felt about eliciting them all. Was Mohammed’s theology not, as the Qur’ān so emphatically represents it, a fresh start in Arabia traceable, as the tradition suggests, to contact of the Prophet with Jews and Christians on his travels, or at Meccah, but merely the introduction into North Arabia of a system which had possibly for some centuries been, if not actually dominant, yet at least current in the South?<sup>89</sup>

The inscription, in fact, is only six lines long and each line seems to have some lacunae at its beginning and end although the first editors Mordtmann and Müller treated it as a complete

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<sup>88</sup> For a discussion of the Rawwāfah inscription and the significance of the word Michael CA Macdonald, “On Saracens, the Rawwāfah Inscription and the Roman Army,” in *Literacy and Identity in Pre-Islamic Arabia* (Ashgate Variorum, 2009), 1–26.

<sup>89</sup> Margoliouth and British Academy, *The Relations between Arabs and Israelites prior to the Rise of Islam*, 1921:68.

text.<sup>90</sup> It opens by imploring *Rḥmnn* to forgive the sins of the dedicators (*ykfṛn ḥbḥmw*, both cognates to Qur’ānic words<sup>91</sup>) and to accept their offerings (*yqbln qrbnhmw*). The second line only has the legible phrase “in the far and close worlds”<sup>92</sup>, which was taken as a reference to the transient world and the hereafter by the first editors. The word *s<sup>2</sup>rk* appears in the third line but the lacunae at the beginning of the line do not allow us to determine the complete meaning: ... *w-bs<sup>2</sup>rn w-bn s<sup>2</sup>rk l-mr’ m b-b’ s<sup>1</sup>m*, “and the human beings, and from *s<sup>2</sup>rk* to a lord as an evil act”. The context seems to be one of a protective prayer against the harms of human and non-human entities and against the danger of associating another deity (*s<sup>2</sup>rk l-mr’ m*) to *Rḥmnn* whose name appears in the next line. In the fourth line, the dedicator asks “satisfaction” (*mrḍym*, see below) in the name of *Rḥmnn* (*l-s<sup>1</sup>m Rḥmnn*) while the fifth line asks the goodwill (*rḍw’*) of the dedicators’ overlords (*rḍw’ mr’ -hmw’ mlkn*). The final line, still with the lacunae, closes with a plea of protection from “plague, malaise and drought” (*’ ws<sup>1</sup>m w-ḍllm w-mḥlm*).

Even with the lack of context for the word *s<sup>2</sup>rk* in the inscription, it is clear that the language of the text is reminiscent of the Qur’ān in many ways. Mordtmann and Müller, therefore, translated the phrase *s<sup>2</sup>rk l-mr’ m* as “*Beigesellung an einen Herrn*” thereby equating it to the Qur’ānic concept of “associating partners with God”.<sup>93</sup> Considering the pre-monotheistic connotations of the word *s<sup>2</sup>rk* and its more technical Qur’ānic counterpart, this translation seems plausible especially against the backdrop of a rare inscription with an

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<sup>90</sup> For Mordtmann and Müller, the complete text translates as follows: “*Und er möge fortfahren zu verzeihen ihre Sünde und anzunehmen ihre Gabe, u. z. in der fernen (zukünftigen) und nahen Welt. Und er gewähre Offenbarung und frohe Botschaft und halte fern Beigesellung an einen Herrn, der Unheil hervorbringt und Heil stiftet, an den Namen des Raḥmān, dieweil gewährt hat der Raḥmān die Gnade ihrer Fürsten, der Könige, ... und Schönheit und Frische und Kraft und Unversehrtheit ?*”. The translation is erroneous and sloppy especially at the end, see below.

<sup>91</sup> For *kaffara* as “forgiving” see 2:271, 3:193, 4:31, 5:12 etc. For *ḥūb* as “sin” see 4:2.

<sup>92</sup> *w-b-’ lmn b’ dn w-qrbn*

<sup>93</sup> Mordtmann and Müller, “Eine monotheistische sabäische Inschrift,” 287.

entirely religious content. CIH 539 also neatly shows the transition to a purely mundane sense of “partnership” in the word *sʿrk* to a predominantly religious term from early Sabaic specimens into the Qur’ān.

ʿwn, “seeking God’s assistance”:

Still in the opening chapter of the Qur’ān, after the praise for God, al-Raḥmān, the Merciful one, believers say, *iyyāka naʿ budu wa iyyāka nastaʿ īn*, “it is you we worship and you we ask for help”. The verb *istiʿ āna*, to seek help, is attested in three other verses in the Qur’ān, all of them in the imperative form, *istaʿ īnū*.<sup>94</sup> One of the attributes of the Qur’ānic God is derived from the same form: *al-Mustaʿ ān*, “the one sought for help”. Jacob calls God with this title when he is faced with the ruse of his sons against his favorite Joseph (12:18) and the Prophet seeks the help of al-Raḥmān against his intractable addressees: “He said: My lord, judge in truth! Our Lord, al-Raḥmān is the one whose help is sought (*rabbunā al-raḥmānu l-mustaʿ ān*) against that which you describe”.<sup>95</sup> Other attestations of the word in the fourth (*aʿ āna*) and in the sixth form (*taʿ āwana*) are in the context of non-divine help: Dhū l-qarnayn asks for help to build a dam against the attacks of Gog and Magog (18:95), the Prophet is accused of getting help for his composition of the Qur’ān (25:4) and believers are exhorted to help each other in righteousness and piety (*al-birr wa t-taqwā*) as opposed to sin (5:2).

A cognate to this Qur’ānic word seems to be only attested in Old South Arabian<sup>96</sup> and possibly in Safaitic inscriptions. Sabaic verb *hʿ n*, corresponding to the fourth verbal form in Arabic, is attested both in the pre-monotheistic and monotheistic periods and its use

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<sup>94</sup> 2:45, 2:153, 7:128.

<sup>95</sup> 21:112

<sup>96</sup> Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur’ānic Arabic*, v. 61:300.



appears to be restricted only to religious contexts. Ry 542, a Middle Sabaic inscription, commemorates the dedication of a bronze statue to ‘*lmqh* so that the deity would help (*yh’ nn*) and save (*mt’ n<sup>97</sup>*) the dedicators against harm. Similar dedications and pleas for help from ‘*lmqh* are attested in other inscriptions as well.<sup>98</sup> *T’ lb* is another deity whose help is sought in Middle Sabaic inscriptions.<sup>99</sup> An interesting reference is found in RES 4084, where the deity that is asked for help is *Ns<sup>1</sup>rm*, a Sabaeen deity that corresponds to the Noahic god *Nasr* in the Qur’ān.<sup>100</sup>

The tenth form of the verb, *isti’ āna* meaning “to seek help”, is also found in Old South Arabian inscriptions. A well-preserved Ḥaḍramitic inscription from the temple of *S<sup>1</sup>yn* in Shabwa contains three attestations of the word, each time in the context of the dedicator seeking help from the deity *S<sup>1</sup>yn*.<sup>101</sup> The fourth form (*s<sup>1</sup>’ n*, initial *h* of Sabaic later replaced *s<sup>1</sup>* in Ḥaḍramitic) is attested twice in this inscription as well. Similar constructions are found in Qatabanic dedications to the deity *Ḥwkm*. In one inscription, the dedicator asks *Ḥwkm* to continue to help him (*w-l-yz’ Ḥwkm s<sup>1</sup>’ nm*) and seeks the help of *Ḥwkm*’s priests to be his intercessors (*w-s<sup>1</sup>t’ n rs<sup>2</sup>w Ḥwkm*).<sup>102</sup> Another Qatabanic inscription incised on the skirt part of a bronze human figure tells the story of how the dedicator asked the help (*s<sup>1</sup>t’ n*) of the deity ‘*m* for the sickness of his son.<sup>103</sup> The only Sabaic attestation of the word I was able to

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<sup>97</sup> This root, too, is a shared cognate between Arabic and Sabaic but its meaning seems to differ slightly from the epigraphy to the Qur’ān. In the Qur’ān, the root and its derivatives have the semantic range of “pleasure, enjoyment, furnishing” etc. while Sabaic clearly has the connotations of “protection”.

<sup>98</sup> See Ja 558 and Ja 668.

<sup>99</sup> CIH 313 and MAFRAY-Mahazza I

<sup>100</sup> Q 71:23, the discussion of this deity can be found in Chapter I of this dissertation.

<sup>101</sup> Christian Robin and Serguei A. Frantsouzoff, “Une Inscription Ḥaḍramawtique Provenant Du Temple de Siyān Dhū-Alīm a Shabwa (Yémen),” *Semitica* 49 (1999): 155–60.

<sup>102</sup> FB-Ḥawkam 2.

<sup>103</sup> YM 23212.

find is in a dedication to *ʿlmqh* where the dedicator seeks the help of the deity for good omens.<sup>104</sup>

The noun form of the root *ʿn*, corresponding to *ʿawn* in Classical Arabic, seems to be absent in Old South Arabian inscriptions but evidence from northern Arabia suggests that it existed in Safaitic. In one graffito the author asks the deity *S<sup>2</sup>hqm* to bring him and his two brothers help against harm (*f-s<sup>2</sup>ʿ hqm ʿ ly l-hm ʿ n m-bʿ s<sup>1</sup>*).<sup>105</sup> In another inscription the deity that is addressed is *al-Lāt*: *...y bn mty w-rʿ y h-ʿ bl w-h-lt ʿ n*: “...y son of Mty and he pastured the camels and O Lt, help!”<sup>106</sup>

In the monotheistic period *Rḥmnn* becomes the only source of divine help. In a Late Sabaic inscription<sup>107</sup> dedicators thank *Rḥmnn* for the houses they built and ask help from the deity against all harm (*w-l-yhʿ nn-hmw Mrʿ s<sup>1</sup>myn bn kl bʿ s<sup>1</sup>tm*). It is interesting that *Rḥmnn* is once again styled as the lord of the heavens (*Mrʿ s<sup>1</sup>myn*, similar to the Qurʾānic *rabb al-samāwāt*) and that the dedicators demand from him a “righteous death” (*mwt ṣdqm*). The latter demand is repeated in another Late Sabaic inscription in which the dedicators ask *Rḥmnn*, styled again as the lord of the heavens, to grant a righteous life and a righteous death to their sons and wives (*w-Rḥmnn bʿ l s<sup>1</sup>myn l-ḥ mr-hmw w-ʿ ḥs<sup>2</sup>kt-hw w-wld-hw Rḥmnn ḥyy ḥyw ṣdqm w-mwt mwt ṣdqm*).<sup>108</sup> It appears that by the time of these Late Sabaic inscriptions, *Rḥmnn* has acquired many of the titles and attributes that are recognizable from the Qurʾānic God including being the one whose help is sought, the one that is praised for and the one that makes the creation live and die.

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<sup>104</sup> Ja 633.

<sup>105</sup> Al-Jallad, *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions*, 289.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 243. The inscription in question is CIH 5182, the end is damaged but the reading is fairly clear.

<sup>107</sup> ZM 5+8+10.

<sup>108</sup> Ry 520.

tw´ , “obeying God”:

A central tenet of the Qur’ān’s theology is its insistence on obedience to not only God but also to the prophet that carries God’s message. In more than twenty occasions, the Qur’ān commands men to obey God and the messenger in the imperative form (*aṭī´ ū*) either directly or indirectly by the words of the past prophets.<sup>109</sup> In fact, the Qur’ān stipulates that whoever obeys the messenger would automatically obey God: *man yuṭī´ i r-rasūla fa-qad aṭā´ a l-lāh* (4:80). The believers are also exhorted to obey those who are in charge or in the position of command: *wa-aṭī´ u r-rasūla wa-uli l-amra minkum*. Those who are not to be obeyed are the ones that are given the book (most probably a reference to Jews and Christians, 3:100), the devils (*al-shayāṭīn*, 6:121), those whose hearts are heedless to the remembrance of God, unbelievers and hypocrites (25:52, 33:1, 33:48), transgressors (26:151), those parents who associate partners with God (29:8) and liars (68:8). That obedience is not restricted to the divine-human relations is also understood from 4:34, where women are asked to obey their husbands. Inanimate creation of God such as the earth and the heavens is also asked to surrender to God either willingly or unwillingly (*ṭaw´ an wa karhan*, 3:83, 13:15, 41:11) but they prefer to do it in obedience (*ataynā ṭā´ i´ īn*, “we came in obedience”, 41:11).

The root *tw´* , once again finding its sole cognate in Old South Arabian, seems to have gone through an interesting semantic shift in the latter. The word *ṭw´* is quite common in Middle Sabaic inscriptions and it often occurs along with a set of recurring words at the end of dedicatory inscriptions in the part where the dedicators seek protection from the deity. Ja 614, for instance, ends with a plea of protection from *´ lmqh: w-l-ḥryh-hmy´ lmqh-Ṭhwn-b´ l-*

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<sup>109</sup> See, for example, 3:32: *qul aṭī´ u l-lāha wa-r-rasūl*: “Say: obey God and the messenger.” 3:132: *wa-aṭī´ u l-lāha wa-r-rasūla la´ allakum turḥamūn*: “And obey God and the messenger so that you may obtain mercy.” 4:59: *yā ayyuha l-ladhīna amānū aṭī´ u l-lāh*: “O those who believe, obey God.” 26:108 (Noah speaking): *fa-ttaqu l-lāha wa-aṭī´ ūni*: “So fear God and obey me”. Same words are uttered by Hūd (26:126, 131), Ṣāliḥ (26:144, 150), Lot (26:163) and Shu´ ayb (26:173).

' *wm bn ṭw' w-nd' w-s<sup>2</sup>sy w-tt' t s<sup>2</sup>n' m*, “and may ' *lmqh Ṭhwn*, Lord of ' *wm*, deliver the two from the subjection and the maleficence and the malice and the calumny of the enemy.” It is clear here that the word *ṭw'* does not denote the same concept as the Qur'ānic *ṭā' a* (4:83, 24:53, 47:21), i.e. “obedience” but it refers to “subservience or subjection (to the enemy)”- obviously something to be avoided. Similar demands of protection against subservience are easily found in Sabaic in the pre-monotheistic period. The exact same formulation as that of Ja 614, but in a different order, is found in Ja 616+Ja 622 and in Ja 719, both with ' *lmqh* as the beseeched deity. Similar constructions are also attested in BynM 1, Ir 17, Ja 647, Ja 651, Ja 652, Ja 706, Ja 736, Ja 826+Ja 667 and RES 4962. In all these cases ' *lmqh* is the deity from whom the protection against the subjection to the enemy and other misfortunes is demanded.

At least two attestations of the word from Late Sabaic inscriptions indicate that in the monotheistic period the words from the root *ṭw'* came closer in meaning to their Qur'ānic counterparts. The first attestation is from one of the so-called Abraha (' *brh*) inscriptions, in which Abraha, the Abyssinian governor of Saba' and *dhū Raydān (mlk S<sup>1</sup>b' w-ḏ-Rydn)*, recounts his battles against the rebels to his rule and the reparations of the famous Marib (*mryb*) dam that he financed and oversaw.<sup>110</sup> One of his many expeditions is against *Yzd bn Kbs<sup>2</sup>t* (Yazīd ibn Kabasha of later Muslim sources), who rebelled against Abraha with his forces from the tribe of *Kdt* (Kinda of Muslim sources). The inscription narrates his rebellion by saying that *Yzd* gathered the soldiers of *Kdt* that were obedient to him and attacked Ḥaḍramawt: *w-Yzd gm' ḏ-hṭ' hw bn Kdt w-ḥrb Ḥḍrmwt*. The word *hṭ'* here, corresponding to the fourth form *aṭā' a* in Arabic, is the only verbal attestation of the root in Sabaic and it

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<sup>110</sup> CIH 541.

denotes obedience in the political context. In the late Sabaic inscription ZM 5+8+10, on the other hand, we see the use of the word *ṭw'* in the religious context. This inscription, already mentioned above in the discussion of “seeking God’s help”, is dedicated to *Rḥmnn* for his grace and help to the dedicators in their construction project. At the end of the inscription the dedicators ask *Rḥmnn*, the Lord of the heavens, to bestow them a life with good actions and obedience of their souls to God: *ḥyw b-‘ ml-hmw ’ ks<sup>3</sup>ḥ ṭw’ ’ fs<sup>1</sup>-hmw*. According to this inscription, *ṭw'* as obedience or subjection to *Rḥmnn* becomes a desirable attribute for the dedicator as opposed to the negative connotations of the word in pre-monotheistic Sabaic inscriptions.

*nsr*, “divine assistance and victory”:

I had already discussed the words from the root *‘awn* in the context of “divine help”. Another word that the Qur’ān uses for “help” or “assistance” is *naṣr*, which seems to differ from *‘awn* in the sense that *naṣr* is mostly restricted to “divine help against an enemy” or “help to gain a victory”. To begin with, the constructions *naṣru l-lāh* or *naṣruḥū* and *naṣrunā* with the deity being the reference of the pronominal suffix are very common in the Qur’ān<sup>111</sup> and it is repeated that *naṣr* comes only from God: *wa mā n-naṣru illā min ‘ indi l-lāh* (3:126, 8:10). That *naṣr* should be taken as help against enemies is indicated by the fact that the prophets and the believers ask help from God against unbelievers, deniers and corrupting people.<sup>112</sup> More importantly, the word is used in the context of Muḥammad’s battles against his opponents in Badr and in Ḥunayn: *wa-la-qad naṣarakumu l-lāhu bi-badrin*

<sup>111</sup> 2:214 (twice), 3:13, 12:110, 29:10 (*naṣrun min rabbikum*), 30:5, 48:3, 61:13 (*naṣran min allāh*), 110:1.

<sup>112</sup> 2:250, 2:286, 3:147, 23:26, 23:39, 29:30.

(3:123) and *la-qad naṣarakumu l-lāhu fī mawāṭina kathīratin wa yawma ḥunayn* (“God helped you in many battlefields and on the day of Ḥunayn”, 9:25). Finally, God is often styled as *naṣīr*, “helper”,<sup>113</sup> but this is a title given in the Qur’ān to non-divine entities as well.<sup>114</sup>

Until now, the epigraphic evidence that I discussed about the cognates of Qur’ānic vocabulary came predominantly from the pre-monotheistic period of Old South Arabian inscriptions with a few specimens from the monotheistic period. The evidence about *nṣr*, however, is rich and almost exclusively from Late Sabaic inscriptions. The verb form is attested in a well-known inscription that narrates an episode in the persecution of Najrān’s Christians at the hands of the Jewish king of Ḥimyar, *Ys’f ’ s’ r* (Yūsuf dhū Yazan of Muslim sources).<sup>115</sup> The inscription, dated to 523 AD, ends with a prayer for the king: *w-’ ’ lhn d-l-hw s’myn w-’ rḏn l-yṣrn*<sup>116</sup> *mlkn Ys’f b-’ ly kl ’ s’ n’ -hw*, “and may the deity, to whom belongs the heavens and the earth grant victory to the king Yūsuf against all his enemies”. That the deity in question is *Rḥmnn* is clarified in the next line.

Demands for help and victory from *Rḥmnn*, however, are attested much earlier than the reign of *Ys’f ’ s’ r* in the monotheistic period. Already at the time of *S’rḥb’ l Y’ fr* (Shuraḥbīl Ya’ fur of Muslim sources), in the second half of the fifth century, construction and reparation projects for the Marib dam are commemorated in Sabaic inscriptions with a gratitude to the *nṣr* of *Rḥmnn*.<sup>117</sup> In another inscription, still from the time of *S’rḥb’ l Y’ fr*, the help (*nṣr*) is attributed to *’ lhn b’ l s’myn w-’ rḏn*, “God, the Lord of the heavens and the

<sup>113</sup> 2:107, 2:120, 4:45, 4:123, 4:173, 9:116, 25:31, 29:22, 33:17, 42:31.

<sup>114</sup> Most importantly to the apostles of Jesus in 3:52 and 61:14. This is probably why the Qur’ān calls Christians *al-Naṣārā* but see chapter 5 for the discussion of the word *naṣārā*.

<sup>115</sup> Ry 508.

<sup>116</sup> Note that the first root letter of *nṣr* is dropped in the prefix form so that we have *yṣrn* instead of *yṣrn*.

<sup>117</sup> CIH 45+44: *b-nṣr w-rd’ w-mqm Rḥmnn*: “with the help, assistance and power of *Rḥmnn*”.

earth”, an epithet belonging to Rḥmn: *b-nṣr w-rd’ ’ lhn b’ l s¹myn w-’ rdn*.<sup>118</sup> Constructions like *b-nṣr rḥmnn*<sup>119</sup> or *b-nṣr w-rd’ rḥmnn*<sup>120</sup> or even *b-nṣr w-rd’ w-mqm rḥmnn*<sup>121</sup> abound in Late Sabaic inscriptions but, similar to the Qur’ān, non-divine entities can provide *nṣr* as well. Construction projects are often completed with the *nṣr* of Rḥmn and the ruler of the time as in the case of CIH 45+44, *w-b-nṣr mr’ -hmw S²rḥb’ l Y’ fr mlk S¹b’ w-d-Rydn*, and Fa 74, *w-b-nṣr w-rfd mr’ -hmw Mrtd’ ln Ynf mlk S¹b’ w-d-Rydn*.

Pre-monotheistic attestations of the word, on the other hand, are rare and restricted to the realm of non-divine entities. In Sabaic, two attestations of the word *nṣr* refer to the help received from a tribe and a king of Ḥaḍramawt.<sup>122</sup> Verbs from the root such as *hnṣr* and *s¹ṣr* are also rare and outside of the religious context.<sup>123</sup> Only two examples from Ḥaḍramitic are available and they seem to indicate that the word *nṣr* in Ḥaḍramitic meant to be an administrative rank such as a military assistant or a *garde du corps*.<sup>124</sup> Evidence for the root *nṣr* in Ancient North Arabian seems to be limited as well. Two attestations of the word *nṣr* in the verbal form from Safaitic are noted by al-Jallad, who was not satisfied with the meaning “to help” and indicated that the word in Safaitic should be taken as an intransitive verb meaning “to be in need”.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> CIH 540.

<sup>119</sup> DhM 87, RES 4069, Robin-Viallard 1.

<sup>120</sup> DhM 87, Fa 74

<sup>121</sup> Gar Sharahbil A, Gar Sharahbil B

<sup>122</sup> Ja 647 and Ja 640.

<sup>123</sup> See CIH 308, MAFRAY-al-Mi’ sāl 4, CIH 314+954.

<sup>124</sup> Ja 1006 and Ingrams 1, the translation “garde du corps” is by Jacqueline Pirenne. Albert Jamme translates it as “bodyguard”. See Jacqueline Pirenne, *Les témoins écrits de la région de Shabwa et l’histoire*, vol. t. 134, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique / Institut français d’archéologie du Proche-Orient ; (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1990), 120. A. Jamme, *The Al-’Uglah Texts.*, vol. 3, His Documentation Sud-Arabe, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 61.

<sup>125</sup> Al-Jallad, *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions*, 332.

Epigraphic evidence about the word *naṣr*, then, suggests that the extensive use of the term in Late Sabaic inscriptions is very much in parallel to its Qur’ānic usage as a concept of divine assistance against the enemy and for major undertakings. However, it is difficult to trace the development of the term from pre-monotheistic inscriptions to the Qur’ān as the majority of the evidence about *nṣr* is from Late Sabaic inscriptions.

As a rather appropriate excursus to the discussion of *nṣr* in the epigraphy and the Qur’ān, I need to mention here two similar words that are *hapaxes* in the Qur’ān but are found commonly in Old South Arabian. The word *rd’* in Sabaic has virtually the same meaning as *nṣr* and is frequently found next to the latter in Late Sabaic texts.<sup>126</sup> In the Qur’ān, it is only attested in 28:34, where Moses asks God to have his brother Aaron as *rid’ un*, an assistant, and only in Ethiopic<sup>127</sup> and Old South Arabian are there cognates for this Qur’ānic *hapax*.

Another word used next to *nṣr* is *rfd*, which is translated as “support” or “help” and used only for non-divine entities.<sup>128</sup> The word *rifd* is found only once in the Qur’ān next to its passive participle *marfūd* in 11:99: *wa-utbi’ ū fī hadhīhī la’ natan wa-yawma l-qiyāmati bi’ sa r-rifdu l-marfūd*. Here, *rifd* is translated as “gift” or “offering” by many translators of the Qur’ān<sup>129</sup> and Edward Lane defines the word as a “gift” or a “gratuity”.<sup>130</sup> The only possible

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<sup>126</sup> See notes 120 and 121 above.

<sup>127</sup> See Wolf Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge’ ez (Classical Ethiopic): Ge’ ez-English, English-Ge’ ez, with an Index of the Semitic Roots* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1987), 462.

<sup>128</sup> Fa 74, see above.

<sup>129</sup> Arberry: “And there was sent following after them in this world a curse, and upon the Day of Resurrection - evil the offering to be offered!” Pickthall: “A curse is made to follow them in the world and on the Day of Resurrection. Hapless is the gift (that will be) given (them).” Yusuf Ali: “And they are followed by a curse in this (life) and on the Day of Judgment: and woeful is the gift which shall be given (unto them)!” Hamidullah: “*Et ils sont poursuivis par une malédiction ici-bas et au Jour de la Résurrection. Quel détestable don leur sera donné!*” Khoury: “*Und der Fluch verfolgte sie im Diesseits und (so auch) am Tag der Auferstehung - welch schlimmes Geschenk, das ihnen geschenkt wird!*”

<sup>130</sup> Lane, pp. 1125.



parallel to this Qur'ānic *hapax* I could find is in a Middle Sabaic text, where *rfdm* seems to mean a “votive object” and is translated as such by A. Beeston.<sup>131</sup> All other attestations of the root in Sabaic have to do with the meaning “help” or “support”.<sup>132</sup>

The Language of Ritual Purity: *ghsl, njs, hyd, thr*

Although the ritual and legal content of the Qur'ān is very limited compared to the Hebrew Bible, there are a few initial steps in the Qur'ān toward the regulation of ritual and sumptuary codes that reached full bloom in the following centuries with the development of Islamic law. Stipulations about ritual purity are part of these codes that were greatly elaborated later on under the influence of Jewish law but some of the most important terms that later became ubiquitous concepts in Muslim legal treatises are derived from the Qur'ān's language about ritual purity. It is noteworthy, however, that the Qur'ānic vocabulary of ritual purity in matters such as ritual ablution, cleanliness in sacred space and the status of female menstruation seems to reflect the language of Old South Arabian laws and practices instead of Jewish law.

It is mentioned twice in the Qur'ān that the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) must be preceded by a ritual washing although the word *wuḍū'*, which became the technical term for ritual ablution in Islamic law, is not found in the Qur'ān. In 5:6, the believers are told to wash (*ghasala*) their faces, arms, heads and feet, and in 4:43, they are prohibited from approaching the prayer (*lā taqrabū ṣ-ṣalāta*) unless they wash themselves (*ightasala*). According to the Qur'ān, getting in contact with a woman causes ritual impurity for a man and requires washing before he can pray (4:43). Women are considered impure during their menstruation

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<sup>131</sup> The inscription in question is BR-M. Bayḥān 1. For the definition see, Beeston, *Dictionnaire Sabéen (Anglais-Français-Arabe)*, 115.

<sup>132</sup> Fa 74, CIH 643, RES 3911, Robin-Kāniṭ 20.

(*maḥīd*) and men are prohibited from approaching them until they are clean (*ḥattā yaṭhurna*). Those who associate partners with God (*mushrikūn*) are also considered unclean (*najas*) and they are not allowed to enter *al-masjid al-ḥarām* because of their impurity (9:28).

Two Old South Arabian inscriptions from the Haram region provide strikingly similar practices of ritual purity with their wording that mirrors the Qurʾān closely. CIH 523 (also known as Haram 40) is a short and complete inscription that expresses the confession and penance of an individual who had sexual intercourse (*qrb mrʾ tm*) with a woman during her period (*hyd*). The text indicates that this action put the man in a state of ritual impurity (*ḡr ṭhr*) and his impure state continued as he did not wash himself (*lm yḡtsʾl*), stayed in his impure clothes (*yʾ b b-ʾ ksʾwthw ḡr-ṭhr*) and he sprinkled his clothes with semen (*nḏḥ ʾ ksʾwthw hmr*). Then he showed submission and regret and agreed to pay a fine (*f-ḥḍrʾ w-ʾ nw w-yḥlʾ n*).

CIH 533, another Haramic<sup>133</sup> inscription, has a similar content but this time the dedicator of the inscription is a woman. The text begins similarly with the confession of the dedicator and her willingness to do penance to the deity *d-Sʾmwy*. The reason of her confession is that a man approached her on the third day of the pilgrimage while she was on her period (*qrb-h mrʾ ywm tlt ḡtn w-hʾ hyd*). Then the man went away and did not wash himself (*w-msʿy w-lm yḡtsʾl*). The inscription is broken after this point and it is not entirely clear why the woman has to pay a fine for this action. In any case, the transgression here

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<sup>133</sup> The small corpus of Haramic inscriptions hails from the town of Haram in the Jawf valley. These inscriptions have been noted for frequent Arabicisms in their language and, thus, the relationship of the Haramic dialect with Old South Arabian languages and Arabic is not entirely clear. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the classification of the Haramic is not the primary concern as my aim here is to demonstrate the epigraphic evidence for the Qurʾānic lexemes without making any claims about the direction of linguistic development. For a discussion of the Haramic dialect and its classification see Peter Stein, “Materialien Zur Sabäischen Dialektologie: Das Problem Des Amiritischen (‘haramitischen’) Dialektes,” *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 157 (2007): 13–47.

seems to be two-fold: sexual intercourse during the pilgrimage while the woman involved was menstruating. It should be noted here that the Qur'ān also prohibits sexual intercourse during the period of pilgrimage.<sup>134</sup>

As for the word *najas*, “impurity”, it only occurs once in the Qur'ān as a characteristic of polytheists that bars them from entering *al-masjid al-ḥarām* <sup>135</sup> and the evidence for it is found in another Haramic inscription. Just like in the Qur'ān the context has to do with access to a sanctuary - the sanctuary of *Ḥlfn* in modern-day Kharibat Ḥamdan in the northeast corner of Yemen. The inscription is entirely legal in content and it stipulates that whoever comes to the sanctuary (*mḥrmn*, note the parallelity with *al-masjid al-ḥarām*) with a weapon or clothes that are defiled by blood will pay a fine to the priests of the deity ‘ *ttr: hn l-yngs'n s'lh-hw w-dmwm b-s'y' -hw l-yzl' n l' lt ' ttr w-' rs²wwn ' s²r ḥy' lym*. That blood is a defiling agent and that its presence on one's clothes makes him/her impure are instructed in later Muslim law although there is no indication of these stipulations in the Qur'ān other than the impermissibility of consuming blood.<sup>136</sup>

An inscription that was recently discovered in the temple of *Ḡrw* and published in Arabic reflects a similar concern about entering a sanctuary with impure clothing albeit with a slightly different wording. In this inscription the author confesses that he had entered the sanctuary (*mḥrmn*) with an unclean belt (*dwlml d- l kyn ṭhrm*) and he touched a woman while he was there (*w-b-dt bh' mḥrm w-ms¹ ' ttm*).<sup>137</sup> Another Haramic inscription

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<sup>134</sup> 2:197: *al-ḥajju ashhurun ma' lūmatun fa-man faraḍa fihinna l-ḥajja fa-lā rafatha wa-lā fusūqa wa-la jidāl fi l-ḥajj*: “The pilgrimage is during well-known months. So whoever obliged himself in these months to do the pilgrimage, there is no sexual relations, no disobedience and no dispute during the pilgrimage.”

<sup>135</sup> 9:28.

<sup>136</sup> See 2:173 and 5:3.

<sup>137</sup> Ibrāhīm al-Ṣilwī and Fahmī al-Aghbarī, “Naqš Jadīd Min Nuqūš Al-I' tirāf Al' alanī Min Ma' bad ḠRW,” *Adūmātū* 25 (2013): 51.

(CIH 532) contains the confession of a woman who committed sins in her house and in the sanctuary and entered into the temple courtyard in an impure state (*wḍ' t ' dy mwṭnn ḡyr ṭhrm*). All these inscriptions show that the laws regulating access to sanctuaries and the terminology governing these rules showed little change from the temple of ' *ttr* in *Ḥlfn* to *al-masjid al-ḥarām*.

' *dhb*, "God's punishment":

Divine threat of punishment for those who disbelieve plays a central role in the Qur'ān as a concept often posed against God's mercy for the believers.<sup>138</sup> The noun ' *adhāb* is attested more than three hundred times in the Qur'ān and it almost exclusively refers to God's punishment both as a threat in this world and as a consequence of disbelief in the hereafter although some exceptions to the restriction of ' *adhāb* as a divine prerogative are found in the Qur'ān as well. For example, in 14:6 Moses reminds Israelites the torment they suffered in the hands of the Pharaoh and in 27:21 Solomon threatens the hoopoe in his retinue with punishment due to its absence from his court. In all other instances ' *adhāb* is God's punitive response to disobedience, sometimes denoted as ' *adhābu l-lāh*<sup>139</sup> ("God's punishment"), sometimes qualified with an adjective (' *adhāb alīm*<sup>140</sup>, ' *adhāb ' aẓīm*<sup>141</sup>, ' *adhāb ghalīẓ*<sup>142</sup>, ' *adhāb shadīd*<sup>143</sup>) and sometimes mentioned with the locus of punishment (*adhāb al-jahīm*<sup>144</sup>, *adhāb jahannam*<sup>145</sup>, *adhāb al-ḥarīq*<sup>146</sup>). The verbal form (*adhhaba*, "to punish") and its active

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<sup>138</sup> See 7:156 for example.

<sup>139</sup> 6:40, 6:47, 7:156, 12:107.

<sup>140</sup> 2:104, 2:174, 2:178, 3:21, 3:77, 3:91 etc.

<sup>141</sup> 2:7, 2:114, 3:176 etc.

<sup>142</sup> 11:58, 14:17, 31:24, 41:50.

<sup>143</sup> 3:4, 3:56, 6:124, 7:164, 14:2 etc.

<sup>144</sup> 40:7, 44:56, 52:18.

<sup>145</sup> 67:6

and passive participles are also found many times in the Qur'ān but not nearly as often as the nominal form.<sup>147</sup> That the word has to do with corporal chastisement instead of an abstract damaging recompense is understood from some of the sensory verbs that are associated with it (3:106: *fa-dhūqu l-adhāba*, “then taste the punishment!”, 19:45: “*an yamassaka adhābun min ar-raḥmān*”, “that a punishment from al-Raḥmān would touch you.”)

The words from the root ‘-*dh-b* in the Qur'ān, then, denote punishment and almost exclusively divine punishment. Two verses in the Qur'ān, however, provide an entirely different word from the root ‘-*dh-b*. In 25:53 and 35:12, the Qur'ān talks about two bodies of water, one fresh and sweet (‘ *adhbun furātun*) and the other salty and bitter (*milḥun* ‘ *ujājūn*) that are separated by God as a sign of divine omnipotence and bounty.

In the absence of cognates for this root in other Semitic languages<sup>148</sup>, Old South Arabian inscriptions provide only possible parallels to words from the root of ‘-*dh-b* that are found in the Qur'ān albeit with a slight difference of semantic range. Evidence from Middle Sabaic and Late Sabaic inscriptions show that the words from the root ‘-*dh-b* in Old South Arabian have the meaning of “reparation” or “amends” both in the concrete sense, i.e. reparations for, say, a malfunctioning water course, and in the abstract sense, i.e. reparations for a sin or fault committed. Interestingly, the abstract sense, which comes closer to the concept of ‘ *adhāb* found in the Qur'ān, is attested largely in Early Sabaic and Middle Sabaic inscriptions whereas in the monotheistic period the semantic scope of the words from this root is restricted to physical reparations of structures.

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<sup>146</sup> 3:181, 8:50, 22:9, 22:22, 85:10.

<sup>147</sup> Around forty times in total for the verbal form, some examples would be 2:284, 3:56, 3:128-129, 4:173, 5:18, 5:40. The active participle (*mu* ‘ *adhhib*) is found in 7:164, 8:33, 17:15, 17:58 and the passive participle (*mu* ‘ *adhhab*) is found in 26:138, 26:213, 34:35, 37:59.

<sup>148</sup> Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur'ānic Arabic*, v. 61:283–84.

For instance, CIH 504, a Middle Sabaic penitential inscription, is dedicated to the deity *ḏt B' dnm* by a woman, who erected the inscription, *' ḏbm*, “as a penalty” because her daughter drew water from a well while she was impure: *b-ḏt s'lb̄t bt-h' b' ly bn mb̄hr' dn w- l' zyt*. In another Middle Sabaic inscription, Ry 31, the deity *ḏw S'mwy* “fines and inflicts penalty on his tribe for all the sins they have committed against him”: *w-ḏw S'mwy f-nkr w- ' ḏbn b- ' ly s<sup>2</sup>' b-hw b-kl ḥty' ḥḥt' w b-hw*. In CIH 568, another Haramic inscription written in the form of a confession, a woman asks forgiveness for her sin and agrees to pay a fine as a penalty.<sup>149</sup> The verb *s't' ḏb*, “to demand penalty, reparations” is also attested once but the inscription in which it is found, CIH 563 + CIH 956, is incomplete. Nevertheless, it is clear that the text contains a demand for reparations for those who transgress an edict proclaimed by the temple of *Ḥrnm Yt' ' mr: ḏ-(y)' dwn b- ' ly ḏn m̄hrn w-l ys't' ḏb-hw*, “whoever commits an offense against this decree, may a penalty be demanded against him.” Solitary examples from Minaic and Qatabanic inscriptions also point to the meaning of the word *' adhb* as penalty.<sup>150</sup>

As I mentioned above, there happens a contextual and semantic change for the root *' ḏb* in the Late Sabaic inscriptions. In the well-known Abraha inscription (CIH 541), for instance, the reparation for the Marib dam is expressed as *l- ' ḏbn' r̄mn*, “for the reparation of the dam”, where the word *' rm* is a cognate to the hapax *' arim* of the Qur'ān in 34:16.<sup>151</sup> The same inscription mentions the reparations made on an anchoring wall with the word *' ḏb* as well.<sup>152</sup> Earlier reparations of the dam at the time of the king *S'rḥb' l Y' fr* are

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<sup>149</sup> *f- ' ḏb mn-h fh̄t' t w-thl' n*.

<sup>150</sup> Minaic: YM 26106, Qatabanic: RES 3566.

<sup>151</sup> See chapter 3 for a discussion of Marib Dam in the Qur'ān.

<sup>152</sup> CIH 541, line 102.

commemorated in CIH 540 with the same language.<sup>153</sup> These and other examples from Late Sabaic inscriptions<sup>154</sup> indicate that a century before the emergence of the Qur’ān the Old South Arabian cognate of the Qur’ānic ‘*adhāb*’ had already changed its meaning from “reparations or penalty for ritual transgressions” to “structural reparations” – a semantic shift that runs counter to the transformations that are seen in the words I have discussed so far.

*twb*, “divine recompense”:

The concept of divine punishment in the Qur’ān is positioned against God’s reward for those who believe in him. That this reward is understood as God’s re-payment or recompense for the believer’s actions can be gleaned from the use of the word *tawāb* in the Qur’ān, the cognate of which denotes “returning” or “turning back” in some other Semitic languages.<sup>155</sup> In the Qur’ān, however, the word *tawāb* and other words from the same root are stripped entirely of their motional sense and they are used strictly in the sense of “divine recompense”. According to the Qur’ān, the divine recompense can be worldly (*tawāb al-dunyā*, 3:145, 3:148) or other worldly (*tawāb al-ākhirā*, 3:145, 3:148). It is mostly a positive recompense, i.e. a “reward” (5:85, 48:17, 3:195, 18:31, 18:44, 2:103, 5:60) but God can repay someone with distress (*qhamm*, 3:153) or with punishment as a result of disbelief (*tuwwiba al-kuffār*, 83:36).

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<sup>153</sup> CIH 540, line 7: *w-‘ db-hw* and line 20: *w-‘ db-hmw*. Seven other attestations are found in CIH 540.

<sup>154</sup> See CIH 325, *Gar Sharahbil A*, *Gar Sharahbil B*.

<sup>155</sup> See Hebrew *šūb*, Aramaic root *šwb* and Syriac *tāb*. The Ugaritic and Syriac cognates have the related meaning of “replying” and “declaring”. See Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur’ānic Arabic*, v. 61:114. The sense of “returning” is better evident in Arabic in the other cognate *tāba*, which means to “repent” in the sense of “returning to God” after a transgression. The sense of “recompense” is found in the Hiphil form of the Hebrew verb but it is still in the context of mundane transactions, see Ex. 21:34.

In Sabaic inscriptions the root *twb* is found in two distinct sets of meanings. In many Early and Middle Sabaic texts, the words from this root denote “completion, execution and reparation” of a construction.<sup>156</sup> In some Haramic inscriptions, however, the sense of “divine recompense” is more common. A good example for this use of the root *twb* is found in CIH 547, in which two clans that worship the deity *Ḥlfn* confess their transgression of not performing the ritual hunt in its proper month and postponing it to another month.<sup>157</sup> At the end of the inscription, the clans promise not to repeat that transgression and ask for a favorable recompense from the deity *Ḥlfn*: *w-Ḥlfn l-ytwbn-hmw twb yn' m*. A similar construction is found at the end of another Haramic inscription but this time the reward of favor is asked from the deity *ḏ-S<sup>1</sup>mwy*: *w-ḏ-S<sup>1</sup>mwy f-l ytwbn-hmw w-qn-hmw w-byt-hmw n' mtm*, “May *ḏ-S<sup>1</sup>mwy* reward them, and their property and their house with favor”.<sup>158</sup> In CIH 523, an inscription already discussed above in the context of ritual purity, the dedicator ends the text with the simple supplication “may he (*ḏ-S<sup>1</sup>mwy*) be rewarding”: *w-l-ytwbn*. Finally, CIH 546 ends with a similar prayer directed to *Ḥlfn*: *w-Ḥlfn l-twbn s<sup>2</sup>' b-hw w-hgr-hw twb yn' mn*, “may *Ḥlfn* reward his tribe and his city with the reward of being favorable”.<sup>159</sup>

In Minaic, I was able to detect only one (and incomplete) inscription that has the root *twb* in it. Although the overall context is almost entirely missing, the use of the root in this inscription seems to follow the Haramic precedent: *' l' lt M' n ... twb-s<sup>1</sup>m twb n' m*, “May the deity of *M' n ...* reward them with the reward of favor”.<sup>160</sup> In Qatabanic, however, the

<sup>156</sup> Beeston, *Dictionnaire Sabéen (Anglais-Français-Arabe)*, 151.

<sup>157</sup> *' l hwfy-hw mtrd-hw b-ḏ-Mwšbm... w-ns<sup>1</sup>' w mtrdn' d ḏ- ' ttr*, “they did not perform for him his hunt during (the month of) *ḏ-Mwšbm* and they postponed the hunt until (the month of) *ḏ- ' ttr*.”

<sup>158</sup> YM 10.703. Sima translates the phrase as follows: *ḏ-Smwy möge es ihnen und ihrem Besitz und ihrem Haus mit Gunst vergelten*.

<sup>159</sup> Robin’s translation: “Et que *Ḥlfn* accorde à sa tribu et à sa ville la récompense d’être favorable”.

<sup>160</sup> RES 3706.



direction of reward seems to be the opposite in the sense that the root *twb* is used in Qatabanic inscriptions for the gift that the devotee offers to the deity. The identical construction *mṭbm twbw l-ʿ l-sʿm*, “the gift they offered to their deity”, is attested in four Qatabanic inscriptions, twice for the deity Ḥwkm<sup>161</sup> and twice for the deities ʿ m ḍ-Rymtm and ḍt Rḥbn.<sup>162</sup> With the exception of the Qatabanic examples, therefore, Old South Arabian usage of the root *twb* is in parallel with its Qurʾānic usage.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I provided a selection of lexical items from the Qurʾān’s religious vocabulary and their attestations in Arabian epigraphy. As we have seen, some of the most central concepts for the Qurʾān’s theological outlook have their solitary parallels in the religious, social and political idiom of the Arabian inscriptions. In some cases, there are exact lexical overlaps between the two sets of texts, i.e. the Qurʾān and the epigraphy, and, in some cases, the qurʾanic equivalents of certain pre-Islamic concepts are given new semantic dimensions in line with the Qurʾān’s doctrinal stance. It is also worth noting that the Qurʾān’s description, albeit very short and elliptical, of pre-Islamic religious milieu can be largely followed through epigraphic evidence.

I limited myself here to religious terminology but it goes without saying that the Qurʾān has much greater lexical parallels with Arabian epigraphy. I already mentioned in this chapter and others a few qurʾanic hapaxes that find their unique cognates in Old South Arabian inscriptions such as *rifd*, “gift”, *nasaʿ a*, “to delay, intercalate”, *naḍaḥa*, “to sprinkle”,

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<sup>161</sup> al-ʿ Ādī 21 and Ja 2898.

<sup>162</sup> RES 4329 and Ry 497.

*ṭūd*, “mountain”. A complete study of qur’anic lexical parallels with Arabian epigraphy is still a desideratum even though small steps towards that aim have already been taken.

## Chapter 3 – History and Historical Geography in the Qur’ān: From Biblical to Arabian

### Introduction

Hartwig Hirschfeld opens his book on the Qur’ān by saying that the Qur’ān is “in reality nothing but a counterfeit of the Bible” albeit in a “chaotic condition.”<sup>1</sup> This chaotic condition, which is partly the result of the Qur’ān’s rather mechanical process of redaction and compilation, disappoints the reader who comes to the book from the Bible expecting a reasonable narrative that conforms to a linear sense of time with easily identifiable events, figures and places. The Qur’ān’s method of storytelling, in particular, has proven to be peculiar as, in the words of Jaroslav Stetkevych, “rarely do we sense in the Qur’ān a self-sufficient and self-justifying joy in storytelling,” instead it leaves the reader with “rhetorically subordinated motifs”<sup>2</sup> in lieu of a full-fledged narrative. Much earlier Nöldeke had arrived at a similar judgment about the Qur’ān’s capacity (or incapacity for that matter) to narrate historical or even imaginary events. Completely unimpressed with the Qur’ān’s style, he argued that “superfluous verbiage” and “a lack of steady advance in the narration”<sup>3</sup> prevented the Qur’ān from being able to tell stories. Where Nöldeke saw a stylistic failure on the part of Muḥammad, others have seen an intentional avoidance of historicity. Fred Donner, for example, argues that the qur’anic story-telling has a uniquely moral dimension;

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<sup>1</sup> Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran*, ii.

<sup>2</sup> Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Muḥammad and the Golden Bough: Reconstructing Arabian Myth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Theodor Nöldeke and J. Sutherland Black, *Sketches from Eastern History* (London and Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1892), 34–35.

and he describes the Qur'ān as a text that is not “concerned with history in the sense of development and change” simply because the identity of the Qur'ān's addressees is “not historically determined, but morally determined.”<sup>4</sup> Angelika Neuwirth has made a similar remark concerning “history” in the Qur'ān, noting that even though “the Biblical narrative is acknowledged as historical narrative...the Qur'ān in general has been denied any serious interest in history.”<sup>5</sup>

One particular reason for denying any historical value to the Qur'ān has to do with Qur'ān's unusual portrayal of biblical narratives. Even though most of the “historical” characters in the Qur'ān are recognizable through their Biblical counterparts, their stories are told in the Qur'ān without necessary links and in disconnected episodes. As a result, they largely lose their temporal and spatial dimensions unless, as Nöldeke observed, one already knows them from “better sources”.<sup>6</sup> One can explain this lack of context in qur'anic narratives by pointing to the homiletic style of its pericopes or its process of revelation in distinct episodes of *Gemeindebildung* among a people that were already well read in Judeo-Christian literature. Yet, it is clear that the Qur'ān's use of biblical material is still uniquely selective<sup>7</sup> and that the biblical context is at best secondary to the original context of the Qur'ān. Medieval Christian polemic, as well as modern scholarly polemical literature is full of references to the Qur'ān's (or rather Muḥammad's) supposed “mistakes” in its portrayal

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<sup>4</sup> Fred McGraw Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press, 1998), 84.

<sup>5</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, “Qur'an and History—a Disputed Relationship: Some Reflections on Qur'anic History and History in the Qur'an,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 2003, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Nöldeke and Black, *Sketches from Eastern History*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> See chapter 4 for the Qur'ān's selectivity of Jewish and Christian source materials.

of biblical figures and events such as its misidentification of Hāmān<sup>8</sup> or its inability to correctly account for the fertility of Egypt<sup>9</sup>, to name but two. It is also worth noting that the missing context and details of biblical stories in the Qur’ān were filled out with confidence by later Muslim scholars who were presumably closer to the centers of Jewish and Christian learning than the original provenance of the Qur’ān was.<sup>10</sup> Even then, Muslim scholars assumed the historical timeline, places and genealogies of biblical sources to be definitive when they elucidated the extremely elliptical passages of the Qur’ān concerning biblical figures. As a result, the biblical substratum of the Qur’ān itself, albeit constituting the majority of the Qur’ān’s narrative sections, is hardly informative about the historical and geographical context of the Qur’ān.

As a result, parts of the Qur’ān that cannot be matched with a Judeo-Christian precedent (assuming that such parts do exist) are very important for the contextualization of the Qur’ān. What constitutes the non-biblical background of the Qur’ān, however, is difficult to determine. The so-called “Arabian prophets” and their communities, anonymous communities that were referred to as “the companions of so-and-so” or possible *nomina propria* from the immediate surroundings of the prophet (Yathrib, Quraysh, Muḥammad etc.) initially come to mind mostly because the Judeo-Christian literature has little to offer for their clarification. Yet, looking at the Qur’ān without the lens of later exegesis the change of

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<sup>8</sup> The Qur’ān speaks of Hāmān as an assistant to the Pharaoh that rejected Moses’ message in six different places (28:6, 8, 38; 29:39; 40:24, 36). Haman of the Book of Esther is a vizier to the Iranian king Ahasuerus, often associated with Xerxes I (see Esther 3:5). For a discussion of Hāmān in its biblical and qur’anic context see Torrey, ... *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 117.

<sup>9</sup> The reference here is to the story of Joseph, see Nöldeke and Black, *Sketches from Eastern History*, 30.

<sup>10</sup> Two great examples of Muslim historians’ dependence on biblical and rabbinic material to fill the details of qur’anic narratives can be found in Israel Schapiro, *Die Haggadischen Elemente Im Erzählenden Teil Des Korans, von Dr. Israel Schapiro. 1. Heft.*, Schriften, Hrsg. von Der Gesellschaft Zur Förderung Der Wissenschaft Des Judentums. (Leipzig: G. Fock, G.m.b.H., 1907); Abraham Isaac Katsh, *Judaism in Islām: Biblical and Talmudic Backgrounds of the Koran and Its Commentaries*, 3d ed., vol. no. SHP 5, Judaic Studies Library No. SHP 5 (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1980).

terrain from the biblical to non-biblical looks almost seamless. The stories of the Arabian prophets and their recalcitrant peoples, already embedded into the ensemble of biblical salvation stories, mostly follow the qur'anic pattern of message, rejection and retribution.

Franz Rosenthal, in his EQ article on the history in the Qur'ān makes a similar point:

“However great our ignorance of details, it is obvious that the qur'ānic vision of history has fully succeeded in flawlessly incorporating its *post-biblical Arabian phase* [my emphasis] into the large picture of a succession of prophets and their rejection that was always accompanied by devastating occurrences.”

That is to say, it is difficult to draw a line as to where the biblical history with its familiar characters in the Qur'ān ends and where the Arabian phase starts by just looking at the Qur'ān itself. Luckily, the Judeo-Christian background of the Qur'ān has been researched well enough so that parts of the Qur'ān that cannot be reduced to its biblical substratum, albeit with certain caveats, may still inform us about the Qur'ān's original context.

This chapter is an analysis of the Qur'ān's “Arabian” narrative phase based upon pre-qur'anic epigraphic and literary material. The hypothesis to be tested here against this evidence is that once the biblical background of the Qur'ān is bracketed, the history and historical geography in the Qur'ān reflect primarily “local” events, places and personalities. As an extension of this hypothesis, I will also argue that the qur'anic representation of local phenomena differs considerably from its portrayal of the Judeo-Christian phenomena that largely mirror their original sources. To this end, I will discuss several qur'anic stories, persona and toponyms including the people of Saba, Thamūd and 'Ād; the “Arabian” prophets Ṣāliḥ, Hūd and Shu'ayb; and the peoples that the Qur'ān refers to as the *aṣḥāb* (companions) of various entities. Before discussing the non-Biblical content of the Qur'ān, however, I will problematize the Qur'ān's depiction of some biblical characters in ways that

run counter to the Judeo-Christian literature and that blur the line between the biblical and non-biblical in the Qur'ān.

### Biblical Figures in their Arabian Garb: The Cases of Noah, Abraham and Lot

In Chapter I, I argued that the story of Noah in the Qur'ān has two versions, one largely following the well-known biblical synopsis and the other placing the names of South Arabian deities in Noah's mouth in a stereotypical salvation story with little emphasis on the ark and the flood. The second version, which seems anomalous from the biblical point of view, is found only in the chapter entirely dedicated to Noah whereas the first one is recounted at least twice (7:59ff and 11:25ff) in a series of soteriological narratives. However, even in these two biblically informed rescensions, there is a peculiarity that has drawn little scholarly attention. The story of Noah, in both chapter 7 and 11, is followed by, and modeled onto, the stories of Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shu'ayb, who are all considered as the Arabian prophets due to the difficulty of assimilating them to any biblical precedents.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Noah and his community are often mentioned with, and sometimes only with, the peoples of these Arabian prophets as exemplars of foregone nations that were punished for their disbelief.<sup>12</sup> In fact, in 7:69 Ṣāliḥ warns his people by citing the example of the people of Noah. In 11:89 Shu'ayb does the same, but this time he mentions the people of Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Lot in addition to the people of Noah.

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<sup>11</sup> See below, though, for attempts to find Biblical counterparts to them.

<sup>12</sup> 9:70, 14:9, 22:42, 40:31, 50:12.

The association of Noah with non-biblical prophets, on the one hand, and the mention of Arabian deities in the salvation narrative of Noah's people, on the other, are altogether indicative of an idiosyncrasy of the qur'anic Noah compared to other biblical figures in the Qur'ān. It seems that Noah was considered as a timeless character that was felt closer home with a story evidently disconnected from those of the prophets of Banū Isrā' īl. In a way, his story provided the typos of an unheeded prophet creating a pattern that was applied to other prophetic figures in the Qur'ān. Yet, Noah is not the only character that is mentioned alongside the Arabian prophets in chapters 7 and 11. Chapter 7 briefly mentions Lot and ends with a lengthy narration of Moses' story, while chapter 11 contains the stories of Lot and Abraham with a brief reference to Moses at the end. Interestingly enough, the sequence of personalities and stories that are narrated at length in chapter 11 is found in 9:70 with the exclusion of Moses:

“Has there not reached them the news of those before them: the people of Noah and ' Ād and Thamūd and the people of Abraham and the companions of Madyan [i.e. people of Shu' ayb] and the towns overturned [i.e. Sodom and Gomorrah, see below in the section on Lot]?”

This sequence, with slight modifications, is often found in stories of punishment, shown in Table I (at the end of the present chapter). In most cases, lists of perished peoples also include the people of the Mosaic *fir' awn* (22:44; 50:13; 38:12 etc.) while the companions of *al-rass* (25:38; 50:12, see below for a discussion of *aṣḥāb al-rass*) and the people of *tubba'* (50:14, see below) are added in some cases as well.

At first glance, this arrangement of prophets is understandable. After all, they are all punishment stories with an underlying message to the addressees of the Qur'ān about not



rejecting the prophet that came to warn them. There are, however, other common, and also divergent, threads to the qur'anic portrayal of these stories that provide clues to the relative historical and geographical position of Qur'ān's community vis-à-vis the doomed communities.

First of all, the Qur'ān assumes that its audience already has some information concerning these peoples, with the exception of the people of Moses (see 9:70 above and 14:9). Inclusion of Mosaic Egypt in almost all destruction narratives but its exclusion from the list of peoples in 9:70, the news of which reached the audience of the Qur'ān, is peculiar. On the other hand, in 11:49 after the narration of the story of Noah the Qur'ān tells the prophet that neither he nor his folk knew about these “news of the unseen” (*anbā' al-ghayb*) before (*min qabl*). It should also be remembered that elsewhere the prophet is told that he was unaware of the story of Joseph until it was revealed to him through the Qur'ān (12:3). Such claims of ignorance on the part of the prophet or his people are not found in the Qur'ān concerning the stories of 'Ād, Thamūd or the people of Shu'ayb. It seems that the Qur'ān posits a difference between the so-called “familiar” figures and those that are only known to the prophet and his community through the communication of revelation. Moses and Joseph, in this pattern, stand outside of the Qur'ān's immediate climate whereas Noah, Abraham and Lot are figures that share both a biblical and an Arabian background. Arabian prophets, on the other hand, are considered to be already well known to the prophet and to the early Muslim community.

Second, there seems to be a certain level of chronological and geographical awareness about these familiar figures in the Qur'ān. For example, in addition to constantly putting Noah, 'Ād and Thamūd in the same order, the Qur'ān explicitly mentions that Noah

preceded the other two in 51:46 and 53:52. Similarly, as mentioned above, Ṣāliḥ, the prophet of Thamūd talks about the people of Noah and Shu‘ ayb talks about the people of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Lot while an anonymous believer (*mu‘ minun*) of Moses reminds his people of the cases of Noah, Hūd and Ṣāliḥ in 40:31 in the very same order. A reference to generational transition of time in the case of the people of ‘ Ād, Thamūd and al-Rass is found in 25:38 (*wa-‘ ādan wa-thamūda wa-aṣḥāb al-rassi wa-qurūnan bayna dhālika kathīran*). As a result, in the absence of solid chronological indicators that relate other biblical figures to one another except through genealogy (like Abraham>Isaac or David>Solomon), the Qur’ān aligns the figures of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Abraham, Lot, Shu‘ ayb and Moses through narrative sequences and clauses of temporality like *min qabl* or *min ba‘ d*. This chronological arrangement probably reflects the historical memory of the Qur’ān’s immediate addressees even if it might not correspond to biblical chronology.

Clues for the extent of the Qur’ān’s topographical layout can be gleaned through stories of retribution as the Qur’ān refers to the traces of divine punishment on the face of the earth as a lesson for the following generations. The Qur’ān often exhorts its interlocutors to wander around the earth (*sīrū fī l-arḍ*) in order to witness the fate of unbelievers (cf. 27:69; 30:42, also 40:21, 40:82). In some cases, proximity to the ruins of foregone nations or to locally significant events is expressed explicitly or implicitly thereby hinting at the limits of the qur’anic landscape. A well-known example is the beginning of the chapter of al-Rūm where an elliptical reference is made to the defeat of Byzantines “in the nearer part of the land” (*fī adnā l-arḍ*, 30:3). Similarly, the destruction of the Sabeans is referred to as having occurred in a nearby place (*makānin qarībin*, 34:51). Shu‘ ayb, in his message to his intractable people in the chapter of Hūd, reminds them what happened to the

people of Noah, Hūd and Šāliḥ and adds that the people of Lūt are not far away from them (11:89, *wa mā qawmu lūtin minkum bi-ba' īdin*). In the same chapter, the story of Hūd is concluded with the phrase *bu' dan li-' ādin qawmi hūdin* (11:60). This phrase, commonly translated as “away with ' Ād, the people of Hūd”,<sup>13</sup> is in fact a plea for distancing from the people of Hūd. The same phrase is used in the cases of the people of Šāliḥ (11:68) and Shu'ayb (11:95, *bu' dan li-madyana kamā ba' idat thamūdu*) as well. That this phrase is meant to implore removal of or distancing from these communities is confirmed by its usage in another verse (43:38) where one who followed the ways of Satan regretfully says: *ya layta baynī wa baynaka bu' da l-mashriqayni wa bi' sa l-qarīnu*, “Would there had been between me and you the distance of the two Easts! An evil comrade!” Three other instances of the same phrase (11:44, 23:41, 23:44) are pleas for distance from unjust and unbelieving peoples. Interestingly, all three of them are mentioned in the context of the people of Noah without naming them unlike in the cases of Hūd, Šāliḥ and Shu' ayb.

Third, proximity to locally significant events stimulates a unique discourse in the Qur'ān with greater details being accorded to the phenomena of the Qur'ān's immediate topography. Some of these details even seem to derive from first-hand observations. For example, narration of Thamūd's demise in chapter 27 includes the final state of their dwellings: *fa-tilka buyūtuḥum khāwiyatun bimā ḡalamū*, “Those are their houses, all fallen down because of the evil they committed” (27:51).<sup>14</sup> Their houses are mentioned again in 7:74, 15:83 and 26:149 as skillful examples of rock-hewn dwellings. Another verse says that the fate of ' Ād and Thamūd is clear to the observers through their houses (29:38: *' ādan wa*

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<sup>13</sup> Translated as such by Arberry. Compare Khoury: “weg mit Aad, dem Volk von Hud” and Hamidullah: “Que s'éloignent (périssent) les 'Aad, peuple de Hūd!” Pickthall prefers “a far removal”.

<sup>14</sup> 28:58 provides another example of this but without naming any community: “Those are their dwelling-places (*tilka masākinuḥum*), undwelt in after them, except a little; Ourselves are the inheritors.”

*thamūda qad tabayyana lakum min masākinihim*). In shorter descriptions of ‘Ād and Thamūd elsewhere (89:6-9), we are told that the people of ‘Ād were known for their columns the likes of which were never created while Thamūd hollowed the rocks in the valley (*jābū ṣ-ṣakhra bi-l-wadi*). Even though the Sabaeans do not show up in the sequences of punished peoples and are treated separately (unless one counts them as the people of *tubba’* mentioned in 50:14, for this identification see below on *tubba’*), descriptions of their dwellings reflect some knowledge of local scenery and even flora. Their houses were surrounded by gardens on two sides until a dike-flood (*sayl al-‘arim*) swept them away leaving them with disease-carrying tamarisk trees<sup>15</sup> and a few cedars. In the same chapter on the people of Saba’, the Qur’ān adds a rather unusual piece of information concerning the settlement structure of the Sabaeans:

“And We set, between them and the towns (*al-qurā*) which We had blessed, towns easy to be seen, and We made the stage between them easy, (saying): Travel in them safely both by night and day. But they said: Our Lord! Make the stage between our journeys longer.” (34:18-19)

Regardless of whether this description reflects realities of urban settlement among Sabaeans or not, it is a curious indication of immediacy between the provenance of the Qur’ān and the whereabouts of the Sabaeans.

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<sup>15</sup> 34:16, here the Qur’ān uses two words that are both hapaxes: *khamṭ* and *athl*. The latter is the common name for the tamarisk bushes that can grow even in the most arid climates. Gen 21:33 mentions Abraham planting them (*eshel* in Hebrew) in Beer Sheba. Known also as the salt cedar, *tamarix aphylla* is native to the coastal plains and valleys of southwestern Yemen. The word is attested in Sabaic inscriptions as well (cf. CIH 605bis, RES 4646). *Khamṭ* is more difficult to account for and lexicographers tried to make sense of the word through this verse saying that it refers to trees with poisonous fruits (cf. Lane p. 815). In Sabaic, it is used twice in the same text (IR 37) and is translated by Beeston as “pestilence”. See Beeston, *Dictionnaire Sabéen (Anglais-Français-Arabe)*, 61.

Finally, when it comes to the stories of these familiar figures, the Qur'ān, otherwise extremely parsimonious with *nomina propria*, does not shy away from naming places. Thamūd is associated with al-Ḥijr (15:10), 'Ād with Iram (89:7), Shu'ayb with Madyan (7:85, 9:70, 11:84, 11:95, 29:36) and al-Ayka (if, indeed, this is a place name, see below, 15:78, 26:176, 38:13, 50:14) while Abraham is said to have built a sanctuary in a place called Bakka (3:96). For Noah, the *apobaterion* of his ark is given the location *al-jūdī* (11:44) and the destroyed towns of Lot's people are identified as *al-mu'tafikāt*, which, as will be discussed below, must be an adjective and not an actual place name. Joseph and Moses are known to have inhabited Egypt (2:61, 10:87, 12:21, 12:99, 45:51), but no further geographical identification is provided for these two until Moses arrives in Madyan (20:40, 28:22) and becomes a more recognizable figure through the juxtaposition of his story with that of Shu'ayb.

The preceding four points are meant to demonstrate that there is, indeed, a core local Arabian subject matter to the Qur'ān in the people of 'Ād, Thamūd, Saba' and the community of Shu'ayb but even presumably biblical figures, the stories of whom would be assumed to follow pre-qur'anic Judeo-Christian precedents, are sometimes juxtaposed with non-biblical locally recognizable characters. As such, it is difficult to draw a strict line between biblical and non-biblical figures in the Qur'ān. Noah, most particularly, appears almost as an Arabian prophet in the line of Hūd and Ṣāliḥ. Indeed, Arthur Jeffery, looking at the qur'anic portrayal of Noah, argued that Muḥammad might have “imagined that the people of Noah like those of 'Ād and Thamūd were dwellers in Arabia.”<sup>16</sup> Abraham's identification in the Qur'ān as the forefather of qur'anic believers and a non-Jewish, non-

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<sup>16</sup> Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, 107.

Christian *ḥanīf* (cf. 3:67-68)<sup>17</sup> also puts him in a position of ambiguity. Lot, on the other hand, is mentioned alongside Ṣāliḥ, Hūd and others probably because the common fate of all these peoples was visible to the addressees of the Qur’ān in their immediate environment.

Yet, the principle question remains: what do we mean by the immediate environment of Qur’ān’s interlocutors? Where does it start and where does it end? If there is a local history and topography familiar to the community of the Qur’ān, as I have argued above, what can the qur’anic and pre-qur’anic material tell us about the limits of this historical geography? In the remainder of this chapter I will try to identify the characters, places and events mentioned above as parts of the local topography and history in the Qur’ān through pre-qur’anic epigraphic and literary material. Beginning the survey with the “Arabian” figures and people, I will move on to the information in the Qur’ān about liminal figures like Noah, Lot and Abraham.

#### Thamūd, Ṣāliḥ, al-Ḥijr, God’s She-camel

Chapter 15 of the Qur’ān is named al-Ḥijr based on the solitary mention of a certain *aṣḥāb al-ḥijr*, described as carving houses from mountains (15:82). Based on other descriptions of Thamūd as dwellers of rock-cut houses (7:74, 26:149), the people of *al-ḥijr* can easily be associated with Thamūd while, in turn, al-Ḥijr would be the inland town of ancient Hegra, known today as Madā’in Ṣāliḥ.<sup>18</sup> Pliny the Elder (d. 79 CE), in his list of peoples and cities in the vicinity of the Nabataeans, mentions the town of Hegra as part of the dominion of

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<sup>17</sup> See M. Sirry, “The Early Development of the Quranic Hanif,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 56, no. 2 (September 1, 2011): 345–66, doi:10.1093/jss/fgr007.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Vidal’s EI article on al-Ḥidjir

Tamudaei.<sup>19</sup> A similar reference is found in Ptolemy (d. 168), who refers to a city called Egra in the interior of Arabia Felix.<sup>20</sup> Strabo (d. 24 CE) talks about Egra as well during his account of Aelius Gallus' expedition to South Arabia. Healey<sup>21</sup> and Vidal take al-Ḥijr to be the Hegra of Pliny and Egra of Strabo but Strabo's Egra seems to be a coastal town on the Arabian side of the Red Sea.<sup>22</sup> Euting has provided examples from Targumim, Mishna and Talmud for the attestations of Ḥagrā' as a place name but none of those references seem to explicitly signify the Nabataean Hegra.<sup>23</sup> Most importantly, Nabataean inscriptions refer to the town as ḥgr' matching the determinate Arabic form.<sup>24</sup> The word in the *nisba* form, meaning "the person from Hegra" (ḥgry' ), is found once in the inscription JS 150. A Safaitic inscription that includes the word ' ḥgr may refer to the town, but the form ' ḥgr is difficult to

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<sup>19</sup> Book VI, ch. 32. "Nabataeis Thimaneos iunxerunt veteres, nunc sunt Taveni, Suelleni, Araceni, Arreni oppido in quod negotiatio omnis convenit, Hemnatae, Avalitae, **oppida Domata, Haegra, Thamudaei**, oppidum Baclanaza, Chariattaei, Toali, oppidum Phodaca, Minaei, a rege Cretae Minoe, ut existimant, originem trahentes, quorum Carmei": "Up to the Nabataei the ancients joined the Thimanei; at present they have next to them the Taveni, and then the Suelleni, the Arraeni, and the Areni, whose town is the centre of all the commerce of these parts. Next come the Hemnatae, the Aualitae, **the towns of Domata and Hegra, the Tamudaei**, with the town of Badanatha, the Carrei, with the town of Cariati, the Achoali, with the town of Foth, and the Minæi, who derive their origin, it is supposed, from Minos, king of Crete, and of whom the Carmæi are a tribe." Town of Domata should be the oasis of Dūma, early Islamic Dūmat al-Jandal which lies today at the edge of Nafūd desert in the Sakākah region of Saudi Arabia. Hegra, though, is quite distant from Dūma to be mentioned together. Taymā' lies between the two and Pliny's Thimanei must be a reference to the inhabitants of this oasis town.

<sup>20</sup> Book 6, ch. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Healey and Dhīyib, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih*, 126.

<sup>22</sup> Book 16. 4. 24. Strabo was a close friend of Aelius Gallus and his description of Arabia follows the route of Gallus' expedition. His mention of Egra is found in the account of army's return to Alexandria by ship and it is unlikely that their trajectory would include a far inland town like Hegra. In this case, though, it is difficult to identify where this coastal town of Egra would be located on the western side of the peninsula. Modern day al-Wajh could be a likely candidate. Cf. Steven E. Sidebotham, *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa 30 B.C.-A.D. 217*, vol. 91, Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Supplementum ; (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 126. Also see Richard J. A. Talbert and Roger S. Bagnall, "Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World" (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 1194, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/4242215>.

<sup>23</sup> Julius Euting, *Nabatäische Inschriften aus Arabien* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1885), 52–53. A full list of possible rabbinic references to Hegra can be found in Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Press, 1989), 425.

<sup>24</sup> JS 9, JS 38. Euting thinks that the Aramaic form is derived from Arabic: "wahrscheinlich Aramaisierung des al-ḥijr mit Ersetzung des arabischen Artikels durch den aramäischen status emphaticus", Euting, *Nabatäische Inschriften aus Arabien*, 52–53.

explain.<sup>25</sup> Finally, in an old Arabic inscription written in Nabataean script and dated to 267 CE, the word shows up in the form ' *l-ḥgrw*.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, identifying qur'anic al-Ḥijr with Hegra or modern Madā'in Ṣāliḥ makes ample sense. Hegra was second only to Petra as a major city center of the Nabataeans, and it enjoyed considerable urban development in the first century CE. It was at the center of a north Arabian oasis hub that connected southern oases like Yathrib and Khaybar to Taymā' , Dedan, Baclazana (Tabuk) and eventually to Roman Palestine. In the Nabataean period many family tombs with well-ornamented façades, similar to those in Petra, were carved into the rocky hills just outside the town. The Qur'ān's reference to rock-cut dwellings (*buyūt* or *masākin*, as mentioned above) fits the picture perfectly with the exception that these carved niches do not seem to have functioned as living areas.<sup>27</sup> After the Roman annexation of the Nabataean kingdom in 106 CE, the town seems to have lost its importance, as the number of new tomb-caves diminishes abruptly.<sup>28</sup> Inscriptions in the Nabataean script can be found as late as the 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE but Hegra seems never to have recovered the grandeur it possessed under Nabataean rule. By the time Islam emerged, it provided an observable specimen of past glory reduced to rubble.

Associating al-Ḥijr with Thamūd as the Qur'ān does, though, require further scrutiny. Thamūd, as an Arabian tribal conglomeration, is known from various sources; but whether they inhabited or controlled al-Ḥijr is not clear. The earliest reference to Thamūd is from

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<sup>25</sup> Al-Jallad, *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions*, 265.

<sup>26</sup> John F. Healey and G. R. Smith, "Jaussen-Savignac 17 - The Earliest Dated Arabic Document," *Atlat* 12 (1989): 77-84.

<sup>27</sup> Hirschfeld considers this as a mistake on the part of Muḥammad. Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran*, 66.

<sup>28</sup> Healey and Dhīyib, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih*, 27.



Sargon II's annals, dated to 715 BC,<sup>29</sup> where it is described as a tribe subdued by the Assyrian king. However, any further, datable references to them do not appear until the classical authors. Pliny is the only author that explicitly locates Thamūd in Hegra as mentioned above. According to Diodorus the Sicilian (fl. 49 BC), the northwestern coast of the Arabian Peninsula is inhabited by Arabs who are called Thamoudēnoi. He places them just north of a coastal city that he calls Charmuthas, which, based on his description, may refer to the coast lying to the west of Yathrib known today as Sharm Yanbu'.<sup>30</sup> He also mentions that Nabataeans inhabited Ayla (near modern Aqaba) and a big part of inland territory that might have included Ḥegra as well.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, his description puts Thamūd anywhere between modern-day Rawwāfa and Yanbu' on the eastern side of the Red Sea. Ptolemy, the most recent of these authors, provides the greatest details but the information he provides is difficult to sort out. What scholars (maybe except Irfan Shahīd<sup>32</sup>) overlooked about Ptolemy's reference to Thamūd is that he actually mentions two distinct groups, Thamyditae and Tamudeni, who inhabit two different places. He locates Thamyditae on the shores of southern Sinai, whereas Tamudeni occupy the interior of the northern Ḥijaz, neighboring what he calls Oaditae (see below in the discussion of 'Ād) and Saraceni.<sup>33</sup> The latitude and longitude that he provides for cities of Arabia indicate that Tamudeni must have been located somewhat near Taymā' but closer to Nafūd than to Hegra.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "Thamūd", EI., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

<sup>30</sup> Bibliotheca Historica, 3.44.6.

<sup>31</sup> 3.43.4.

<sup>32</sup> Irfan Shahīd, *Rome and the Arabs: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), 128-29.

<sup>33</sup> Book 6, ch. 7.

<sup>34</sup> This information is based on numerical data that Ptolemy provides and it is not always accurate. Latitudinal numbers put Tamudeni outside of the northern Arabian oasis system that includes Taymā', Dedan, Khaybar

In all likelihood, the Thamūd of classical sources seems to have populated the area from the north of the Ḥijāz to the Sinai, possibly including the city of Hegra. Inscriptions from this particular area confirm their presence and suggest that Thamūd might have been an overarching tribal confederation or even a Roman military unit. Around the time of Ptolemy's death (168 CE), the *Thamoudenoi* dedicated a temple in Rawwāfah to three Roman emperors, and a bilingual (Nabataean-Greek) dedicatory inscription was incised on the foundation stone.<sup>35</sup> Identification of Thamūd in both versions of the inscription is obvious, but the way the people of Thamūd were referred to in Nabataean and Greek has caused a lot of scholarly disagreement. The form *shrkt tmwdw* in Nabataean was translated as “la fédération des Thamoudéens” by Milik, who took the first word as an Arabic loanword in Nabataean corresponding to Arabic *shirka*, meaning “association, company, congregation.”<sup>36</sup> In the Greek version, the form is found as *τοτωνθαμουδηνωνεθνος*, translated by Milik as “la nation des Thamoudéens”. Graf and O’connor agreed with Milik’s translation and saw in the word *shrkt* the long-sought origin of the word “Saracen”, arguing that the word meant “association in the politically restricted sense of federation.”<sup>37</sup> In this case, Thamūd would be a federative ally of the Roman army mobilized as auxiliaries in the recently established Arabian province. Irfan Shahīd first presented his doubts about this interpretation in 1984<sup>38</sup> and then offered an alternative reading to the text in his EI article

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and Hegra but also locates them much farther than Dūma (*Altuma* of Ptolemy), which does not correspond to the actual location of these towns.

<sup>35</sup> Henri Seyrig, “Antiquités Syriennes,” *Syria*, 1957, 260. T. J. Milik, “Inscriptions Grecques et Nabatéennes de Rawwafah,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology* 10 (1971): 54–58. Seyrig only provides the Greek without translation. Milik has both versions with translations and transliterations.

<sup>36</sup> Milik, “Inscriptions Grecques et Nabatéennes de Rawwafah,” 56–57.

<sup>37</sup> D. F. Graf and M O’Connor, “The Origin of the Term Saracen and the Rawwāfā Inscriptions,” *Byzantine Studies. Etudes Byzantines* 4 (1977): 65.

<sup>38</sup> Shahīd, *Rome and the Arabs*, 128.

on Saracens.<sup>39</sup> Most recently, Macdonald has written an article where he agrees with Milik's reading but offers another interpretation of the word *shrkt* saying that "I would therefore suggest that *Θαμουδηνῶν ἔθνος* and *šrkt tmwdw* in the Rawwāfah inscription do not refer to a 'nation' or 'confederation' of Thamūd, but to a military unit bearing the name of, and presumably originally drawn from, this tribe."<sup>40</sup> That people of Thamūd composed a military unit in the Roman army is confirmed by a late Roman document called *Notitia Dignitatum*, "The List of Offices".<sup>41</sup> Dated to the late 4<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> c., this document is a list of Western and Eastern Roman administrative and military units among which two cavalry regiments bear the name of Thamūd, one called *Equites Saraceni Thamudeni* and the other *Equites Thamudeni Illyriciani*. The former was attached to the Egyptian *limes* probably corresponding to the *Thamyditae* of Sinai in Ptolemy, while the latter is a unit from the Ḥijāz at a time when the Ḥijāz was an extension of the new province of Palaestina Tertia, which had replaced the earlier *Provincia Arabia*.<sup>42</sup>

Regardless of the particular details concerning the identity of Thamūd, their centuries-long existence in the northwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula looks certain. Their ubiquity in epigraphic and classical sources, in addition to the Qur'anic verses about them, has led some scholars like Lidzbarski and van den Branden to name a large group of undifferentiated north Arabian inscriptions after Thamūd.<sup>43</sup> In the current state of

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<sup>39</sup> Shahīd argued that the word must be read *shrbt*, meaning "tribe", instead of *shrkt* but both attestations of the word in the inscription indicate that Milik's reading is correct.

<sup>40</sup> Macdonald, "On Saracens, the Rawwāfah Inscription and the Roman Army," 11.

<sup>41</sup> For a complete 19<sup>th</sup> c. edition see Eduard Böcking, *Notitia dignitatum et administrationum omnium tam civilium quam militarium in partibus Orientis et Occidentis* (Bonnae: apud Adolphum Marcum, 1839).

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of the Arabian units in *Notitia Dignitatum* see Irfan Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1989), 465–70.

<sup>43</sup> Albertus van den. Branden and Beirut (Lebanon), *Histoire de Thamoud*. (Beirut: al-Jami'ah al-lubnaniyah, 1960), 16, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/1931688>.

scholarship on Ancient North Arabian epigraphy, the category of “Thamūdīc” is only applied with strict reservations, and its connection to the tribe is Thamūd is no longer accepted.<sup>44</sup> References to Thamūd as a tribe in these so-called “Thamūdīc” inscriptions are also rarer than what one would expect, with only four contestable attestations.<sup>45</sup> A more certain reference to Thamūd is found in a Safaitic inscription dated to the otherwise indecipherable “year Thamūd made war with gs<sup>2</sup>m” (*snt ḥrb g[s<sup>2</sup>]m ’ l tmd*).<sup>46</sup> References to individuals from Thamūd do exist in Old South Arabian inscriptions,<sup>47</sup> and they indicate Thamūd’s status as a tribal group (Ma’ īn 93c: ’ *hl tmd*; RES 3902 bis n. 130: *bny tmd*); but they are not enough to indicate a substantial presence of people from Thamūd in Yemen.

By way of summarizing all the information enumerated above, one can say that pre-Qur’anic references to Thamūd in epigraphic and historical sources more or less overlap with the Qur’ān especially concerning their location. However, even when the Qur’ān’s Thamūd and al-Ḥijr are historically recognizable, their prophet Ṣāliḥ finds little corroboration outside of the Qur’ān. Searching for the name Ṣāliḥ in the Bible and in epigraphy does not yield convincing results,<sup>48</sup> and there is no reference to such a personality datable to pre-Islamic times. In fact, due to his perceived absence in history and his generic attributive name meaning “pious” in Arabic, some scholars such as Horovitz<sup>49</sup>, Hirschfeld<sup>50</sup> and Speyer<sup>51</sup> have argued that Ṣāliḥ is the character of an allegorical story with

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<sup>44</sup> Macdonald, “Reflections on the Linguistic Map of Pre-Islamic Arabia,” 33.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 66 footnote 39.

<sup>46</sup> Al-Jallad, *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions*, 292.

<sup>47</sup> A discussion of these inscriptions are found in Branden and Beirut (Lebanon), *Histoire de Thamoud.*, 15–16.

<sup>48</sup> For a list of possible attestations see Brannon Wheeler, “Arab Prophets of the Qur’an and Bible,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, 2006, 35–36.

<sup>49</sup> Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (W. de Gruyter & Co., 1926), 79.

<sup>50</sup> Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran*, 62.

no connection to any historical figure. In its totality, however, the qur'anic story of Thamūd seems to be a *mélange* of actual historical entities (like the tribe of Thamūd or the city of Hegra), topographical observations (like the deserted “houses” of Hegra) and literary topoi and embellishments that are modeled upon other stories of divine retribution. Therefore, once the recurring literary undertone of the story is bracketed, the historical glimpses of information in the Qur'ān about Thamūd more or less align with what is found in epigraphic, classical and late antique literary sources, pointing to a northern Hijāzī provenance for the people of Thamūd.

Later Muslim sources confirmed what the Qur'ān had to say about Thamūd's location and expanded their story into a mythical cycle that incorporated Muḥammad into the picture.<sup>52</sup> They also embellished the qur'anic story by adding details where the Qur'ān remained silent. For example, the she-camel of God (*nāqatullāh*, 7:73 etc.), which was sent as a trial (*fitnatan*, 54:27) to the people of Thamūd according to the Qur'ān, was given a miraculous character by Muslim exegetes: a huge beast that came out of a rock and that consumed twice the water and fodder of a regular camel, causing distress to the people of Thamūd, who eventually failed the test and slaughtered the animal. It is worth noting that many Ancient North Arabian rock graffiti depict she-camels with a proprietary note attached to the drawing, and some of them even threaten or curse those who would attempt to obliterate them.<sup>53</sup> In a way, the trial of Thamūd through a she-camel that comes out of a

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<sup>51</sup> Heinrich Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen Im Qoran*, 2., unveränderte Aufl. (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1961), 119. Speyer thinks this holds for the names of Hūd and Shu'ayb as well, which are all coming from Muḥammad's imagination: “Demnach scheinen die Namen Hūd, Ṣāliḥ und Shu'ayb Mohammeds eigener Phantasie zu entstammen”.

<sup>52</sup> For a brilliant study of Muḥammad's connection to the story of Ṣāliḥ see Stetkevych, *Muḥammad and the Golden Bough*.

<sup>53</sup> A great number of examples of such graffiti are found in Mohammad I. Ababneh, *Neue Safaitische Inschriften Und Deren Bildliche Darstellungen* (Aachen: Shaker, 2005). Some examples would be: p. 94: *l-bdn bn ' zz hbktrn*: “By

rock, that belongs to God and that has its own sumptuary rights<sup>54</sup> that conflict with the rights of others runs parallel to the societal image that emerges from these graffiti hailing from a drought-stricken land. Therefore, one wonders whether the strange story of Thamūd's downfall due to the slaughter of a she-camel takes its cue from an everyday reality that could be witnessed in hundreds of graffiti from the northwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula.

### ‘Ād and the Columns of Iram

The story of Thamūd in the Qur’ān is always preceded by the story of ‘Ād, a people warned by their prophet Hūd and punished for their rejection of his message. Their position between the people of Noah and Thamūd is further emphasized as they were made successors to the people of Noah (7:69: *khulafā’ a min ba’ di qawmi nūḥin*) just like Thamūd were made successors to them (7:74). About their location, however, there is little information in the Qur’ān. One verse tells us that their prophet warned them in *al-aḥqāf* (46:21), a hapax in the Qur’ān that is usually translated as “sand-hills”<sup>55</sup> when it is not taken to be referring to a place name. Another verse puts *iram dhāt al-‘imād* (iram of columns) in apposition to ‘Ād, thus Iram probably refers to a place name associated with the people of ‘Ād. Their depiction in the Qur’ān has little peculiarity (compared to the deluge of Noah’s

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bdn son of ‘zz are these two young she camels” (inscribed next to the drawing of two young she-camels), p. 98: *l-g’ wn hbkt*: “By G’ wn is this she-camel”.

<sup>54</sup> 26:155, *lahā shirbun wa-lakum shirbu yawmin ma’ lūmin*, “to her a drink and to you a drink, on a day appointed”

<sup>55</sup> So it is found in Arberry. Pickthall translates as: “wind-curved sand-hills”. Khoury has: “bei den Dünen”. Hamidullah leaves it as a proper place name.

people or the camel of Thamūd) other than the fact that they were prolific builders with the hope of living eternally (26:128-129).

Muslim geographical tradition locates the people of ‘Ād in southern Arabia around Ḥaḍramawt, putting *al-aḥqāf* around the interior desert in the depression between Ḥaḍramawt and Abyan.<sup>56</sup> However, association of ‘Ād with eastern Yemen seems to have no qur’anic precedent, and the Muslim historian al-Ḥamdānī (d. 945), himself a native of Yemen, offered alternative reports about the location of the people of ‘Ād, including the vicinity of Damascus as a possible candidate. Sprenger was the first to problematize the Yemeni provenance of ‘Ād, and after summarizing the position of Muslim tradition about ‘Ād in detail,<sup>57</sup> he argued that locating ‘Ād in Ḥaḍramawt seems to be doubtful.<sup>58</sup> Instead, he argued, Ptolemy’s Oaditai perfectly fit the qur’anic depiction of ‘Ād.<sup>59</sup> According to Ptolemy, Oadites occupied the northernmost region of Arabia in the vicinity of Aramaia where the rocky hills separate the larger Arabia Felix from the desert of Nafūd. The Oadites of Ptolemy are neighbored by Thamūd to the south and by Aramaeans to the north thereby locating ‘Ād in the modern frontier between Jordan and Saudi Arabia very close to the area that is called Wādī Ramm today.

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<sup>56</sup> al-Ḥasan ibn Aḥmad Ḥamdānī, *The Antiquities of South Arabia: Being a Translation from the Arabic with Linguistic, Geographic, and Historic Notes of the Eighth Book of Al-Ḥamdānī’s Al-Iklīl, Reconstructed from Al-Karnalī’s Edition and a MS in the Garrett Collection, Princeton University, Library*, vol. v. 3., Princeton Oriental Texts (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1981), 29, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/425112>. C. Edmund Bosworth, “The Nomenclature of the Persian Gulf,” *International Society for Iranian Studies* 30, no. 1/2 (Winter-Spring 1997): 84. The association of ‘Ād with Ḥaḍramawt is so prevalent in Muslim historical tradition that a university in the city of Tarim in the region of Ḥaḍramawt is named after *al-aḥqāf*.

<sup>57</sup> Aloys Sprenger 1813-1893., *Das Leben Und Die Lehre Des Mohammad, Nach Bisher Grösstentheils Unbenutzten Quellen Bearbeitet*, 2. ausg. (Berlin: Effert, 1869), vol. I 505-518.

<sup>58</sup> Aloys Sprenger, *Die alte Geographie Arabiens als Grundlage der Entwicklungsgeschichte des Semitismus* (Huber, 1875), 199. The position of Buhl is similar in his article on ‘Ād in the first edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 119. “Das Omikron nimmt im griechischen Alphabet die Stelle des ‘ Ayn ein; es ist also Oaditen = ‘ Āditen”

Sprengrer's identification of Iram with Wādī Ramm based on Ptolemy is further strengthened by a Nabataean inscription that refers to the foundation of a temple dedicated to Allāt in Wādī Ramm. In this inscription Allāt is titled "the great goddess who is in Iram" (' lht' rbt' dy b' rm). After the discovery of this inscription in the early 1930s by the team of Savignac and Horsfield, the site of qur'anic Iram was thought to be definitively discovered. Harold Glidden wrote an article to that end arguing that the Iram of the Qur'ān, Aramaia of Ptolemy and ' rm of the Nabataean inscription all referred to Wādī Ramm with a still active spring (mentioned in 26:134) and long-deserted settlement with broken columns.<sup>60</sup> Most recently, Healey confirmed the association of Iram with the temple of Allāt in Wādī Ramm and mentioned a Thamudic inscription that was discovered in 1997 in the central *cella* of the temple that mentions ' l ' d, which he takes to be a reference to the people of ' Ād.<sup>61</sup>

Identification of the qur'anic ' Ād with the inhabitants of Wādī Ramm, therefore, seems fairly well established but little by way of putting them in chronological perspective can be done with the material at hand. Healey has argued that they must have preceded Nabataeans in the region,<sup>62</sup> but if Ptolemy's Oadites is indeed the ' Ād of the Qur'ān, it must have existed long after the end of Nabataean control in Wādī Ramm. That they came before Thamūd as the Qur'ān says is also difficult to tell, since Ptolemy mentions them together as neighbors.

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<sup>60</sup> Harold W. Glidden, "Koranic Iram, Legendary and Historical," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 73 (February 1939): 15, doi:10.2307/3219027. Excavations were resumed in late 1950s and the columns of the temple were better visible with the destruction of the tenements that were built later. For the report on the excavations of 1959 see Diana Kirkbride, "Le Temple Nabatéen de Ramm," *Revue Biblique* 67 (1960): 65-92.

<sup>61</sup> John F. Healey, *The Religion of the Nabataeans: A Conspectus*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2001), 57.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*



The identity of their prophet, Hūd, is also difficult to trace, as is Ṣāliḥ of Thamūd. Composite names such as Ammihud (Numbers 1:10, 2:18 etc.) and Abihud (1 Chronicles 8:3) are attested in the Hebrew Bible, but Hūd as a proper name in itself is not. As the later Muslim tradition regarded ‘Ād to have inhabited Yemen, Muslim historians saw in the character of Hūd the founder of the Yemeni Arab lineage through his son Yoḡṡān (Gen. 10:25) or Qaḡṡān (as it is found in Muslim sources). This formulation would equate Hūd to ‘Ēber of the Hebrew Bible, the great-grandson of Noah. This identification found ready acceptance in the Muslim tradition since the Qur’ān seems to suggest that the people of ‘Ād replaced the people of Noah. The Arabic name, then, would be derived from the root *hāda*, meaning “to become Jewish, Judaize”, as ‘Ēber would also be the ancestor of the Jews (Hūd=‘Ēber and Yahūd=‘Ibrī). Geiger propounded this identification,<sup>63</sup> but Hirschfeld found it untenable, arguing that Hūd, just like Ṣāliḥ, is an allegorical figure with a name meaning “penitent”.<sup>64</sup> However, as the assumption of Muslim scholars about the provenance of ‘Ād seems faulty, their association of Qaḡṡān with Yoḡṡān and his father ‘Ēber with Hūd remains dubious as well. Therefore, it is hard to match any biblical or historical figure with Hūd of the Qur’ān even if the people of ‘Ād could be assigned a historicity.

In short, despite the paucity of information that we can glean from the Qur’ān about ‘Ād, it is fairly clear that they were a people hailing from northern Arabia with close connections to Nabataeans and Thamūd, hence the Qur’ān’s insistence on mentioning ‘Ād and Thamūd together at all times. Once again, their description in the Qur’ān is the sum of historical memory and topographical observations modeled on the familiar configuration of

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<sup>63</sup> Abraham Geiger and F. M. Young tr, *Judaism and Islam. A Prize Essay* (Madras: Printed at the M. D. C. S. P. C. K. press and sold at their depository, Vepery, 1898), 85.

<sup>64</sup> Hirschfeld, *New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran*, 62.

perished peoples. The Qur'ān indicates (11:89) that already at the time of Shu' ayb, ' Ād and Thamūd had become proverbial for their destruction along with the people of Noah and Lot. The addition of Shu' ayb into the picture will further clinch the north Arabian provenance of ' Ād and Thamūd as we will see below.

### Madyan, al-Ayka and Shu' ayb

Shu' ayb is the third of the “Arabian” prophets and the last of them in chronological order according to the Qur'ān. Compared to the scantiness of historical hints in the Qur'ān about Hūd and Ṣāliḥ, the qur'anic depiction of Shu' ayb is somewhat richer and closer to the biblically familiar landscape but it is also riddled with conflicting points that require explanation.

First of all, the Qur'ān associates the figure of Shu' ayb with two peoples or places. 26:176 makes him a prophet sent to the people of *al-ayka'*, which is mentioned three other times in the lists of perished peoples without any reference to Shu' ayb (15:78, 38:13, 50:14). In other verses (7:85, 11:84 etc.) one finds that he was sent to the people of *madyan*, which occurs in total ten times in the Qur'ān.<sup>65</sup> It is also unclear whether these two words denote the name of peoples, or toponyms, or even objects. A study of the figure of Shu' ayb, then, needs to start by identifying these two terms, which, in turn, will help elucidate the Shu' ayb of the Qur'ān.

Madyan obviously brings to mind the Midianites (*midyānīm*) of the Hebrew Bible especially because it is cited twice in the Qur'ān as the place where Moses fled after the murder he committed (20:40; 28:22-3) just like in the Hebrew Bible (Ex. 2:11-15). These

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<sup>65</sup> 7:85; 9:70; 11:84, 95; 20:40; 22:44; 28:22, 23, 45; 29:36

biblical people are named after a son of Abraham called Midyān and are first mentioned in the context of Joseph when a group of Midianites rescue Joseph from the pit into which he had been thrown (Gen. 37:28, 36). Later, Moses seeks refuge among the Midianites during his self-exile (Ex. 2:11-15) but then turns against them after the exodus from Egypt and fights them with the command of God (Num. 25:17; 31:2). They later appear as overlords of Israelites in Judges until Gideon saves the Israelites from their yoke (Judg. Ch. 6). We hear of them again in the Deuterocanonical Book of Judith when Nabuchadnezzar embarks upon a world conquest but this time the Septuagint refers to them as Madiam (*Μαδιὰμ*, Judith 2:26) with a final *m*.

Midian of the Bible is strictly a demonym and its connection to any particular location is uncertain even though incidental data in the Bible points to southeast of Sinai in the vicinity of Moabite lands as the homeland of the Midianites.<sup>66</sup> The existence and location of a town related to the Midianites is once again found in Ptolemy, who names two cities, Modiana and Madiama, in the northwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Based on the coordinates he provides, the former is a coastal town lying on the Red Sea shore one degree (111 km) south of ‘Aqaba, corresponding to a place between ‘Aynunah and al-Wajh today. Madiama, on the other hand, is further inland but on the same latitude with Modiana, which puts it just south of Wādī Ramm, very close to what Muslim geographers knew as Madyan Shu‘ayb.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, it is highly probable that Madiam of the Septuagint and Madiama of Ptolemy are the same, and they might correspond to Madyan of the Qur’ān.<sup>68</sup> Modiana, then,

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<sup>66</sup> See “Midian and Midianites” in *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

<sup>67</sup> “Madyan Shu‘ayb”, EI, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.

<sup>68</sup> See the reconstructed maps of Ptolemy at the end of Nigel Groom, “Eastern Arabia in Ptolemy’s Map,” in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* (JSTOR, 1986), 65–75, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41223239>.

might be an error on the part of Ptolemy, who did not know that the major coastal road from Eilat to Ḥijāz passed inland near Madiama to avoid the mountainous seashore.<sup>69</sup>

Madyan, therefore, is easily recognizable, if not completely identifiable, from biblical and classical sources; but *al-ayka* poses greater problems. Arabic dictionaries generally do not treat it as a proper name and provide the meanings “thicket; tangled or luxuriant or abundant and dense trees.”<sup>70</sup> Taking his cue from this denotation, Alfred Beeston argued that *aṣḥāb al-ayka* referred to the Nabataean believers of Dushara since the latter literally meant “the god of vegetation” and *ayka* might have been a “dialectal synonym”<sup>71</sup> of *sharā* (see chapter I for the discussion of Dushara). His analysis, however, does not account for why Madyan is mentioned alongside *al-ayka* in the story of Shu‘ ayb, and the etymology of Dushara that he propounds is far from being certain.

Another option is to take it as a place name. We find in Lane that some reciters of the Qur’ān accepted the variant reading *layka*, “according to which, this is the name of the town (in which the people here mentioned dwelt)”.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, three out of seven canonical systems of recitation read verse 26:176 as *aṣḥābu laykata* instead of *aṣḥābu l-’ aykata*.<sup>73</sup> Already in the nineteenth century Wetzstein speculated that, once read that way, *layka* can be identified as a place name corresponding to the Nabataean coastal town of Leuke Kome (literally, “the

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<sup>69</sup> David Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (BRILL, 1998), 155–58.

<sup>70</sup> Lane, p. 137. Lisān al-‘ Arab: *al-shajar al-kathīr al-mutlaff*. Kazimirski: “bois, forêt d’arbres touffus et entrelacés”. Translations reflect this meaning as well: Arberry: “the dwellers in the Thicket”, Pickthall: “the dwellers in the wood”, Khoury: “die Gefährten des Waldes”, Paret: “die Leute des Dickichts”.

<sup>71</sup> A. F. L. Beeston, “THE ‘MEN OF THE TANGLEWOOD’ IN THE QUR’AN,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 13, no. 2 (1968): 253–255.

<sup>72</sup> Lane, p. 137.

<sup>73</sup> These are Nāfi‘, Ibn Kathīr and Ibn ‘ Āmir. What is curious, though, is that other three attestations of *al-ayka* in the Qur’ān are read as such and not as *layka* even by these three reciters. See <http://corpuscoranicum.de/lesarten/index/sure/26/vers/176> for a complete list of seven canonical readings on the verse 26:176.

white village”).<sup>74</sup> More recently, Puin revived Wetzstein’s idea, arguing that this “white village” in Greek must have been on the site of the present-day Ḥawrā’ near Tabuk.<sup>75</sup> That *layka* can be identified with Leuke Kome is highly possible since a Nabataean port on the eastern shores of the Red Sea would still be in the historical area of Madyan. The exact location of Leuke Kome, however, is still disputed, and a discussion of its whereabouts can inform us about the qur’anic Shu’ ayb.

There are two major texts that provide information about the site of Leuke Kome. The first one is the *Periplus of the Red Sea* (Περί πλοῦς τῆς Ἐρυθράς Θαλάσσης), an anonymous navigation guide for the Indian-Roman trade written in Greek and dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE. According to the *Periplus*, Leuke Kome was a major Nabataean emporium with inland trade connections to Petra, and to the south of it lay Arabia proper before arriving to Arabia Felix. It laid *en face* of the Egyptian port of Berenike so that a vessel embarking from Berenike and sailing east would pass south of Aqaba and arrive at Leuke Kome. The *Periplus* adds that the Nabataeans who control the port have a king named Malichus, a name that probably corresponds to Malichus II who ruled from 40 to 70 CE.<sup>76</sup>

Strabo’s *Geography*, which must be dated to a few decades earlier than the *Periplus*, provides a similar report about the location of Leuke Kome. Still in the context of Aelius Gallus’ failed expedition to South Arabia, Strabo notes that Leuke Kome used to be the major unloading point for aromatics that were destined for Petra and then for Phoenicia, but Strabo adds that in his own time this route lost its upper hand in the aromatics trade in the

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<sup>74</sup> J. G. Wetzstein, “Nordarabien und die syrische Wüste nach den Angaben der Eingebornen,” *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Erdkunde* 18 (1865): 442ff. “Es ist wohl möglich, dass der Prophet Muhammed und mit ihm ein gut Theil seiner Landsleute das für sie nicht sagende Fremdwort Leuca (sic) wie El-Eika aussprachen...”

<sup>75</sup> Ohlig and Puin, *The Hidden Origins of Islam*, 344–46.

<sup>76</sup> Lionel Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 143–45, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/9228670>.

favor of the Nile-Alexandria route.<sup>77</sup> According to Strabo, Aelius Gallus rested his army at the end of his expedition in Leuke Kome and stayed there for a few months waiting for the ill of the army to recover. This piece of data alone implies that Leuke Kome must have been a large port with a hinterland that can accommodate a large army.

Lionel Casson, the editor and translator of the *Periplus*, has argued that these two testimonies about Leuke Kome point almost exactly to the modern-day coast of ‘Aynūnah. This identification seems to be the scholarly consensus right now, especially after the discovery of extensive Nabataean pottery in the region.<sup>78</sup> The existence of a trade route between Leuke Kome and Petra strengthens the identification since even today the Saudi highways pass the flat area north of ‘Aynūnah to go through Maghā’ir Shu‘ayb (the possible site of Madyan near the city of al-Bad‘) and reach the Gulf of Aqaba. Interestingly, Ptolemy, writing at least a century after both Strabo and the author of the *Periplus*, did not know Leuke Kome, but mentions a place called Onne or Omne near Aqaba, which might correspond to ‘Aynūnah.<sup>79</sup> Otherwise, its absence in Ptolemy might suggest that the decline of Leuke Kome that was foreshadowed in Strabo and the *Periplus* turned into the complete obsolescence of the city by the time Ptolemy wrote.<sup>80</sup>

With the loose threads of information mentioned above brought together, it appears that *aṣḥāb madyan* and *aṣḥāb al-ayka* (or *aṣḥāb layka*) probably refer to the same group of

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<sup>77</sup> 16.4.24.

<sup>78</sup> Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 143. Before Casson, Sir Laurence Kirwan had argued for ‘Aynūnah as the site of ancient Leuke Kome and Sidebotham confirmed, see Sidebotham, *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa 30 B.C.-A.D. 217*, 91:125. David Frankfurter agrees with this identification as well, see Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, 233. More recently, see the dissertation by Walter David Ward, *From Provincia Arabia to Palaestina Tertia: The Impact of Geography, Economy, and Religion on Sedentary and Nomadic Communities in the Later Roman Province of Third Palestine* (ProQuest, 2008), 153.

<sup>79</sup> M.L. Ingraham, “Saudi Arabian Comprehensive Survey Program: Preliminary Report on a Reconnaissance Survey of the Northwestern Province,” *Atlat* 5 (1981): 76–77.

<sup>80</sup> On the decline of Leuke Kome see Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Gorgias Press LLC, 2004), 24.

mercantile people that exploited the large amount of Indian trade that passed through Leuke Kome and ended up in Petra until Leuke Kome lost its upper hand to Egyptian ports. Two different appellations could be referring to their two major centers, one on the shore and the other acting as the inland entrepôt. Indeed, it is no wonder that both *aṣḥāb madyan* (in 7:85) and *aṣḥāb al-ayka* (in 26:181-183) are accused of fraudulent trade practices in the Qur'ān that eventually led to their collapse.<sup>81</sup> In other words, their fall from commercial superiority that took place in the vicinity of Qur'ān's addressees in the relatively recent past is given a theological tint by the Qur'ān.

The analysis above places the people of Shu' ayb in more or less the same area and period with ' Ād and Thamūd, in a distinct geography that shares a lot with Ptolemy's North Arabia. This is, after all, expected since the Qur'ān often juxtaposes them as sharers of a common destiny, and in the Qur'ān Shu' ayb actually speaks about the people of his two predecessors. Once again, there is not much evidence available to examine in order to pursue the historical Shu' ayb, similar to the case for Hūd and Ṣāliḥ. Brannon Wheeler has examined words from the root ṣ' b in Safaitic and Old South Arabian inscriptions, but none of these examples, including those that denote a personal name, can exactly correspond to a historical figure similar to Shu' ayb of the Qur'ān.<sup>82</sup> Muslim tradition has wanted to equate him with Jethro, Moses' father-in-law,<sup>83</sup> since Madyan is also identified as the land of exile for Moses in the Qur'ān (20:40; 28:22, 23, 45).<sup>84</sup> This identification, however, has no grounds

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<sup>81</sup> Faulty measurements and banditry seem to be the two major crimes that the people of Shu' ayb committed based on the verses cited above.

<sup>82</sup> Wheeler, "Arab Prophets of the Qur'an and Bible," 35.

<sup>83</sup> However, the name of Moses' father-in-law is not clear in the Bible, Ex. 2:18 introduces him as Reuel but Ex. 3:1 names him Jethro.

<sup>84</sup> Ṭabarī and Ehsan. Yar-Shater, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī: An Annotated Translation*, Bibliotheca Persica (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), Vol. I, 365.

in the Qur'ān, and the qur'anic depiction of the people of Shu' ayb points to a group that existed much later than Moses. It seems, therefore, that Shu' ayb, just like Hūd and Šāliḥ, is associated with a people that can be recognized outside of the Qur'ān, whereas his own identity remains obscure or allegorical at best.

### Al-Mu' tafikāt and al-Rass

When Shu' ayb warns his people about what happened to earlier disbelieving communities, the last one he alludes to is the people of Lot who, he adds, are not far away from his own people (*wa-mā qawmu lūṭin minkum bi-ba' idin*, 11:89). The story of Lot in the Qur'ān follows the biblical synopsis very closely (see 7:80ff, 11:77ff, 15:61ff etc.), but the Qur'ān does not provide any geographical information about them other than the allusion in the verse cited above. However, the word *al-mu' tafikāt* (9:70, 69:9, in the singular in 53:53) seems to refer to the people of Lot since it is always mentioned along with other punished communities, and in 9:70 the people of Lot, the only missing group in the list, is represented by the word *al-mu' tafikāt*.<sup>85</sup>

The word *al-mu' tafikāt* in Arabic is derived from the *ifta' ala* form of the root ' *fk* and classical Arabic dictionaries assign it the meanings like “to be overturned, subverted, submerged,”<sup>86</sup> generally referring to the cities of Lot based on three qur'anic verses. Modern Western translations of the Qur'ān treat the word similarly as well.<sup>87</sup> Identification of the

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<sup>85</sup> Issa J. Boullata, *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qu'ran* (Routledge, 2013), 102.

<sup>86</sup> Lane, p. 69. Lisān al-' Arab has: *madā' in lūṭ... summiyat bi-dhālika li-inqilābihā bi-l-khasf* “cities of Lot... they are named as such for their overturn with disgrace”. Kazimirski translates: “les (cités) renversées de fond en comble”.

<sup>87</sup> Arberry: “the Subverted Cities”, Yusuf Ali: “the Cities Overthrown”, Hamidullah: “les Villes renversées”. Note that all three translators write it in capital letters to indicate its connection to actual cities of Lot's people.



Qur'anic *al-mu' tafikāt* with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is fortified by the fact that the Hebrew Bible recounts the punishment of Lot's people with a Hebrew word that is cognate to the Arabic one.<sup>88</sup> It is interesting that the Qur'ān uses an adjectival substantive for Sodom and Gomorrah instead of actual place names as we would find in the cases of ' Ād, Thamūd and Madyan. It seems that as we move away from the "Arabian" figures of the Qur'ān to a more distant biblical figure, biblical parlance supercedes and the level of historical and geographical detailing decreases while a sense of geographical proximity still keeps the figure of Lot and his people within the discourse of foregone nations in the vicinity of the Qur'ān's context.

Having covered the people of ' Ād, Thamūd and Madyan, and before discussing the Qur'anic references to peoples from South Arabia, a community that is found twice in punishment sequences needs to be touched upon: *aṣḥāb al-rass*. Mentioned in 25:40 next to ' Ād and Thamūd and in 50:12 along with other perished peoples, *aṣḥāb al-rass* proves to be the most obscure of all. Muslim exegetes were at a loss about the meaning or the origin of *aṣḥāb al-rass* and came up with fanciful suggestions.<sup>89</sup> Modern translators are not sure whether it should be treated as a common noun meaning "pit" or "well,"<sup>90</sup> or as a place

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Rudi Paret has: "die (Bewohner der nachmals) zerstörten (w. umgekehrten) (Städte Sodom und Gomorrha)". However, Pickthall has: "the communities that were destroyed" and Khoury: "die verschwundenen Städte".

<sup>88</sup> Gen. 19:25: *wayyahāpōk 'et-he'ārīm* "and he overthrew those cities". The same word is used in the context of Jonah and his city Nineveh in Jonah 3:4 with the imperfect conjugation: *nehpāket* "[Nineveh] shall be overthrown".

<sup>89</sup> Wensinck summarizes these suggestions in his EI article: "Some take al-Rass to be a geographical name (cf. Yākūt, s.v.); some hold that these people, a remnant of Thamūd, cast (rassa) their prophet Ḥanẓala into a well (rass) and were consequently exterminated. It is also related that the mountain of the bird ' Anḳā' [q.v.] was situated in their region. Al-Ṭabarī mentions the possibility of their being identical with the Aṣḥāb al-Ukhūd [q.v.]; otherwise he does not know anything about them; just as little do we." See also James A. Bellamy, "Textual Criticism of the Koran," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121, no. 1 (January 2001): 5–6, doi:10.2307/606724.

<sup>90</sup> Even when treated as a common noun the meaning of the word *rass* is not clear. Kazimirski is the only lexicographer that connects the word *rass* with a community through exegesis: "puits comblé, nom d'un puit chez la tribu des Thamoud ou fut jeté le prophete qui était venu pour les convertir."

name.<sup>91</sup> The obscurity of the term led James Bellamy to suggest that the word *al-rass* is “nothing but Idrīs misspelled”.<sup>92</sup> His idea, ingenious as it is, does not take into account the fact that Idrīs is never treated in the Qur’ān as a figure with a disbelieving community, and the inclusion of *aṣḥāb idrīs* in this context would be unusual.

Having established that the Ptolemaic configuration of North Arabian historical geography mirrors the Qur’ān almost perfectly in the cases of ‘Ād, Thamūd and the people of Shu‘ayb, it also seems plausible that a trace of *aṣḥāb al-rass* is found *chez* Ptolemy. Indeed, Gerd Puin has argued that Arsai of Ptolemy (6.4.7 in *Geography*) might be compared to *al-rass* of the Qur’ān.<sup>93</sup> Arsai, according to the Ptolemy, were the southernmost of five peoples occupying the northwestern shores of the Arabian Peninsula, the other four being Thamuditai, Sidenoi, Darrhai (or Darae) and Banubaroi. Apart from the first one, there is not much known about these peoples, although Banubaroi has been identified as *Banū Bi’r* (“sons of the well”) by Charles Forster with little supporting information.<sup>94</sup> The data that Ptolemy provides locates Arsai in the vicinity of Iambia (which corresponds to modern Yanbu‘) and Iathrippa (or Lathrippa, corresponding to Yathrib). However, considering that the north-south calculations of Ptolemy were often incorrect<sup>95</sup>, it is possible that Arsai inhabited farther north of modern Yanbu‘ and al-Madīna but still south of the gulf of

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<sup>91</sup> See Arberry: “the men of Er-rass”, Pickthall: “the dwellers of ar-Rass”, Yusuf Ali: “the companions of the Rass”, Hamidullah: “les gens d’Ar-Rass”, but Khoury: “die Leute des Brunnens” and Paret: “die Leute des Brunnens (?)” with a question mark. Interestingly, Richard Bell leaves it untranslated.

<sup>92</sup> Bellamy, “Textual Criticism of the Koran,” 6.

<sup>93</sup> Ohlig and Puin, *The Hidden Origins of Islam*, 346. Note that Puin, with no particular reason, uses the Latinized name Arsae even though in the Greek original the word appears as Arsai.

<sup>94</sup> Charles Forster, *The Historical Geography of Arabia: Or the Patriarchal Evidences of Revealed Religion, a Memoir... and an Appendix Containing Translations... of the Hamyaritic Inscriptions Recently Discovered in Hadramaut* (Duncan et Malcolm, 1844), 127.

<sup>95</sup> Ptolemy thought that the earth was much longer in the east-west direction than the north-south direction. Therefore, the latitudinal information that he gives is often correct but the longitudinal numbers need to be adjusted.

‘ Aqaba. In the absence of any qur’anic enrichment about the people of al-Rass except two brief references, identifying them with any historical group amounts to a shot in the dark. However, their association with ‘ Ād and Thamūd in both attestations and their Northwestern Arabian provenance in Ptolemy make the identification plausible as Puin has recently and enthusiastically argued.

### “Arabian” Prophets against “Arabian” Goddesses

As we have seen, the qur’anic reports about the people of the “Arabian” prophets Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shu‘ ayb locate them in the northwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula in an area triangulated by major oasis towns, Nabataean settlements and Red Sea ports. Putting them into an historical timeline, however, is at best conjectural, mainly because the Qur’ān only speaks about their temporal existence in relative terms and abruptly inserts them into the chronological plane of known biblical figures. Nevertheless, indirect information inferred mostly from inscriptions and classical historians indicates that their heyday was coeval with Nabataean control of the area. This conclusion should not necessarily be interpreted as a solid argument of historicity in the Qur’ān concerning the perished peoples of ‘ Ād, Thamūd and Madyan. One can argue that the Qur’ān, by mentioning the names, cities and fates of these people, reflects the memory of a community that looked up to the heritage of their well-known neighbors and theologized their disbelief on the pattern of biblical communities that perished. In any case, the recollections of the North Arabian/Nabataean past loom large in the Qur’ān’s discourse and act as a supplement to the biblical memory that found its way into the Qur’ān.

We have already seen in the first chapter that the cult of “Arabian” goddesses of the Qur’ān was attested largely in Nabataean lands, especially in al-Ḥijr or Madā’in Ṣāliḥ of the Qur’ān. It is noteworthy that the whereabouts of the “Arabian” prophets of the Qur’ān overlap with the provenance of the “Arabian” goddesses. In fact, if one can talk about a cultural and commercial center that the community of the Qur’ān orbited around, this center might as well be Nabataean considering the fact that the inception of the Arabic writing tradition owed a lot to the Nabataean script and writing conventions.<sup>96</sup> Yet, as in the case of the Arabian deities, the imprint of North Arabian historical memory on the Qur’ān is balanced with the other major center of culture and commerce at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula. The peoples, places and events related to South Arabia in the Qur’ān are more limited than those of North Arabia. Yet, and luckily for us, a non-literary documentation of South Arabian history is possible through inscriptions, and it appears from these inscriptions that the exposition of historical geography in the Qur’ān is not limited to the north of the Arabian Peninsula. The following discussion of South Arabian historical elements in the Qur’ān will start with the people of Tubba’ and Saba’ and will continue with more obscure references in the Qur’ān to events in the wake of Islam that might have to do with South Arabia.

#### People of *tubba’* : Kings of Himyar?

Another community that was introduced in the Qur’ān by two brief references is the people of *tubba’* . 44:37 compares the ancestors of the disbelievers with the people of *tubba’* and those other communities that came before them: “Are they better or the people of

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<sup>96</sup> See chapter I for a discussion of the Arabian goddesses and the development of the Arabic script from the Nabataean script.

*tubba'* and those before them whom we destroyed?"<sup>97</sup> 50:14 adds them to the list of perished people next to 'Ād, Thamūd, al-Rass, al-Ayka and others. At first glance, they appear to be yet another one of those peoples that were destroyed following their rejection of God's message. However, the Qur'ān names them in both cases as *qawmu tubba' in* instead of the more common and expected *aṣḥābu tubba' in*. Therefore, it is not entirely clear whether *tubba'* is a proper name referring to a place or a community, or the whole construction means something completely different.

Due to the ambiguity of the term, Manfred Kropp has argued that *qawm tubba'* should not be treated as a quasi-historical community like 'Ād or Thamūd, but rather that it is a simple substantive meaning "people who follow their example, people who stick to them, people of their kind".<sup>98</sup> This interpretation, which does not make a lot of sense from the perspective of Arabic grammar, also overlooks the fact that the word *qawm* is often used in the Qur'ān in the sense of the community of a prophet or a leader: for the pharaoh in 7:127, Mūsā in 7:148, for 'Ād and Nūh in 9:70, for Lot and Ṣāliḥ in 11:89, and for Abraham in 22:43. Regardless of what *tubba'* means, therefore, it might as well refer to a community based on a proper name.

If *tubba'* is taken as a proper noun what does it mean? Muslim tradition considers it as a title given to the kings of the Himyarites, who were the dominant rulers of former Sabaean territories from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. to the early 6<sup>th</sup> c. CE.<sup>99</sup> Al-Ṭabarī provides a few of their

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<sup>97</sup> *al-hum khayrun aw qawmu tubba' in wa-lladhīna min qablihim ahlaknāhum*

<sup>98</sup> Manfred Kropp, "'People of Powerful South Arabian Kings' or Just 'People of Their Kind We Annihilated Before'? Proper Noun or Common Noun in Qur'ān 44:37 and 50:14," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 39 (2009): 238.

<sup>99</sup> A.F.L. Beeston, "Tubba' ", EI., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

names and describes their legendary feats, which seem to have been inspired by the Alexander Romance.<sup>100</sup>

Gerd Puin rejected the identification of *tubba'* with Himyarite kings and argued for an emendation in the vocalized text saying that *tubba'* should be read *yabbu'*. When read that way, he argued, this word is a reference to the city of Yanbu' lying to the west of Yathrib on the coast of the Red Sea. His proposition, however, is untenable for quite a few reasons. First of all, as we have seen above, the word *qawm* in the Qur'ān is strictly used for the communities of a person and not of a place name unlike *aṣḥāb*, which is used for both. Secondly, the assimilation of *nūn* to *bā* to assure the reading *yabbu'* is unusual in Arabic. The reading *yambu'* would make sense, and *Iambia* is actually the name of the city in Ptolemy; but in that case the consonantal skeleton needs to be completely different. Finally, there is no evidence suggesting that Yanbu' was a major area of settlement before Islam unlike Ḥegra, Leuke Kome or Madyan, which all find their way into the Qur'ān because of their long-lost glory.

Words from the root *tb'* are very common in South Arabian inscriptions, and some of them are personal names in theophoric or compound constructions. The only certain attestation of *tb'* as a personal name is from a late Sabaic inscription,<sup>101</sup> and the name *tb' 'l* is attested in Sabaic<sup>102</sup> and Qatabanic<sup>103</sup>. That the word is used as a royal title cannot be argued with certainty, but at least one Minaic inscription has the name *tb' krb*,<sup>104</sup> which

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<sup>100</sup> Ṭabarī and Yar-Shater, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 4, 79. See also the note 227 of the translator on the same page.

<sup>101</sup> Fahmī al-Aghbarī, “Nuqūš Saba' iyya Ġadīda Taḥṭawī' alā' Aqdam Naqš Tawḥīdī Mu' arrah,” *Raydān* 8 (2013): ins. no. 5.

<sup>102</sup> CIH 256, RES 4020

<sup>103</sup> François Bron, “Nouvelles Inscriptions Sudarabiques. 2,” *Semitica et Classica* 6, no. 1 (2013): 192.

<sup>104</sup> RES 2980bis, *Yṯ' 'l Rym w-bn-s' Tb' krb mlky M' n*: “Yṯ' 'l Rym and his son Tb' krb, kings of Ma' in.”

happens to be a very popular personal name in Sabaic<sup>105</sup> and Qatabanic<sup>106</sup>. Himyarite and Sabaean kings used the word *mlk* for their title along with the names of regions that they controlled (Saba' , dhū Raydān etc.), and *tb'* does not really appear to be a royal title. However, it is possible that the common name *tb' krb* was reanalyzed in the Arabic tradition based on other similar names of kings such as *mlkkrb* and *' bkrb*<sup>107</sup> so that *tb'* would be viewed as a title added to personal names of kings. Therefore, the pre-Islamic evidence about the people of *tubba'* is tantalizing but not certain enough to support their identification with the Himyarites.

### Saba' of the Qur'ān and the Targum Sheni

Even though we are not entirely confident about the South Arabian provenance of the qur'anic *qawmu tubba'* , we at least know that the legendary beauty and *richesse* of Arabia Felix found its way into the Qur'ān through the Sabaeans. There are two pericopes dedicated to the Sabaeans in the Qur'ān, one found in the chapter of Saba' and the other in the context of the famous encounter of Solomon with the Queen of Sheba in chapter 27. In the chapter of Saba' , the Qur'ān describes their glorious days as follows:

“For Saba' also there was a sign in their dwelling-place (*fī masākinihim*) -- two gardens, one on the right and one on the left: 'Eat of your Lord's provision, and give thanks to Him; a good land, and a Lord All-forgiving (*baldatun ṭayyibatun wa-rabbun ghafūr*).”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> The Sabaic attestations are numerous, some examples would be CIH 365, Ja 2871, CIH 430,

<sup>106</sup> See for example, RES 3530, RES 3939.

<sup>107</sup> For a brief history of these kings see Scott Johnson, *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (OUP USA, 2012), 266–67.

<sup>108</sup> 34:15, chapter 34 is called the Chapter of Saba' in the Muslim tradition.

In the same chapter we find that their settlements were conducive to secure travel with well-measured stations.<sup>109</sup> Their splendor is restated in the report of the hoopoe to Solomon about what he saw in the land of Sabaeans: “I found a woman ruling over them and she has been given everything and she possesses a mighty throne”.<sup>110</sup> The aftermath of their story, however, bifurcates into different paths in two separate qur’anic accounts because, as I will argue below, there are two different backgrounds to these stories.

Like the story of Noah, the qur’anic portrayal of Saba’ follows two synopses: one that is strictly biblical and rabbinic, the other that derives from the historical memory of local developments. Abraham Geiger recognized from very early on that the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in the Qur’ān (27:22-44) runs almost completely parallel to the Second Targum on the Book of Esther.<sup>111</sup> These two accounts, which are both enrichments of 1 Kings 10:1-10 and 2 Chr. 9:1-9, start with the disappearance of a bird in the retinue of Solomon that brings information about a far away kingdom ruled by a woman.<sup>112</sup> The exchange of letters between two royal heads, the visit of the Queen of Sheba to the court of Solomon, and Solomon’s ruse with a glass-tiled palace are all shared by the Qur’ān and the Second Targum on Esther. Obviously, the Qur’ān supposes an entirely different motivation for the encounter, namely that Solomon wants to convince the Queen of Sheba to stop worshipping the sun (27:24) and believe in the only god, “the Lord of the mighty throne” (27:26, *rabbu l-‘ arsh al-‘ azīm*, note the parallel with the throne of the Queen). The end of the

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<sup>109</sup> 34:18: And We set, between them and the cities that We have blessed, cities apparent and well We measured the journey between them: 'Journey among them by night and day in security!'

<sup>110</sup> 27:23

<sup>111</sup> Geiger and Young, *Judaism and Islam. A Prize Essay*.

<sup>112</sup> Torrey, ... *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 80. A translation of the account in the Second Targum on the Book of Esther is found in pp. 84ff.



story is also typically qur'anic as the Queen of Sheba accepts to submit to God, Lord of all beings, along with Solomon (27:44).<sup>113</sup>

Geiger, Torrey and Speyer have regarded the resemblance between these two accounts as a direct influence of the Second Targum on the Qur'ān, but the matter is much more complicated due to the problems about dating the Second Targum. Scholars have argued for periods ranging from the fourth c. to the eleventh c. CE as possible dates of Second Targum's composition, and their inclinations depend largely on whether the qur'anic account was derived from the Second Targum or vice versa.<sup>114</sup> In any case, for the purposes of this work the intricacies of chronology are secondary. What is certain is that both the Qur'ān and the Targum Sheni expand upon a biblical narrative, and therefore the Qur'ān's image of Saba' in chapter 27 is biblically informed albeit suited to the Qur'ān's message. The Saba' of chapter 27 is not one of many perished nations, nor did it leave any traces for the addressees of the Qur'ān.

In chapter 34, however, Saba' emerges as an archetypal doomed community, and the memory of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba is out of the picture. Topographical details about the settlement patterns of Saba' are mentioned as God's grace on Saba', but their ingratitude leads them to demise.<sup>115</sup> In addition, the Qur'ān explains their downfall with an

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<sup>113</sup> In the Second Targum, Solomon's intention for the encounter is to subdue her kingdom. At the end of the story the Queen of Sheba accepts Solomon as her overlord and pays tribute to him. See "An Explanatory Commentary on Esther : With Four Appendices Consisting of the Second Targum Translated from the Aramaic with Notes : Mithra : The Winged Bulls of Persepolis : And Zoroaster : Cassel, Paulus, 1821-1892 : Free Download & Streaming," *Internet Archive*, 285, accessed June 5, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/explanatorycomme00cassrich>.

<sup>114</sup> For a discussion about estimates for the date of the Second Targum, see "Esther" in *Jewish Encyclopedia*. A full treatment of Jewish and Muslim sources (qur'anic and Post-qur'anic) is found in the remarkably rich book of Jacob Lassner, who also touches upon the issues of intertextuality and influence: Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/1558584>.

<sup>115</sup> Q 34:18-19: "And We set, between them and the cities that We have blessed, cities apparent and well We measured the journey between them: 'Journey among them by night and day in security!' But they said, 'Our

inundation and break of a dam that appears in Arabic as *sayl al-‘ arim* (34:16). This event is often associated with the break of the Ma’rib dam, which was a huge, man-made dike constructed to ensure irrigation in and around Ṣan‘ ā’ , the latter-day capital of the Sabaeans.<sup>116</sup> Old South Arabian inscriptions record several instances of breaks and subsequent repairs of the dam at the time of the king Shuraḥbil Ya‘ fūr (*S<sup>2</sup>rḥb’ l Y‘ fr* in the inscriptions) and the Axumite viceroy Abraha.<sup>117</sup> The huge monument that Abraha left at the site of the Ma’ rib dam, with the inscription CIH 541, is a testimony to the importance of the dam and the tedious task of maintaining it. CIH 541, which is a large, chronicle-like description of Abraha’s campaigns, narrates how the news about the break of the anchoring wall and the sluices of the dam (‘ *rm*) reached Abraha while he was at war with the Abyssinians and the Himyarites.<sup>118</sup> As a response, he sent messengers to the tribes (‘ *s<sup>2</sup>‘ bn*) in the vicinity of the dam to start repairs.<sup>119</sup> When he made it back to Ma’rib he joined the preparations, but this time the work was impeded by a plague (*ḍllm*, Line 72). The work was further delayed by the visit of envoys from Persia, Constantinople, Axum and other regional

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Lord, prolong the stages of our travel'; and they wronged themselves, so We made them as but tales, and We tore them utterly to pieces. Surely in that are signs for every man enduring, thankful.”

<sup>116</sup> Torrey, ... *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 65. For a discussion of the events in South Arabia including the several breaks of the dam and repairs see Sidney Smith, “Events in Arabia in the 6th Century AD,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 16, no. 3 (1954): 425–468.

<sup>117</sup> Iwona Gajda, *Himyar Gagné Par Le Monothéisme (IVe-VIe Siècle de L'ère Chrétienne), Ambitions et Ruine D'un Royaume de l'Arabie Méridionale Antique* (Aix-Marseille 1, 1997), 46–49, <http://www.theses.fr/1997AIX10027>.

<sup>118</sup> Lines 41–46 of CIH 541.

<sup>119</sup> Lines 55–61

powers.<sup>120</sup> Finally, the repair work was reprised after the end of diplomatic missions and was finished with the participation of a considerable work force in the year 548 CE.<sup>121</sup>

The word *ʿ arim*, used for the “dam” in the Qurʾān in 34:16, is a *hapax legomenon*; and the same word is used for the Maʿrib dam in Sabaic inscriptions.<sup>122</sup> The more common word for a dam in Arabic, *sadd*, is found in early Arabic inscriptions<sup>123</sup> indicating that the sole attestation of the word *ʿ arim* in the Qurʾān is of South Arabian provenance referring particularly to the great dam of Maʿrib. Therefore, it seems that the final break of the Maʿrib dam, happening sometime around the 550s, signaled the end of the centuries-long prosperity of Arabia Felix and found its way into the Qurʾān as a significant event of local history. Indeed, the break of the dam and the downfall of Sabaʿ constitute a brief period comprising a larger series of events that changed the whole religious and political setting in Yemen until the rise of Islam. These events include the rise of Judaism in the region, the persecution of Christians in Najrān, Abyssinian intervention in Yemen as a response to the persecution, control of South Arabia by the Abyssinian regent Abraha, Abraha’s rigorous military campaigns all the way into the heart of Arabia, the end of Abraha’s rule, the fall of

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<sup>120</sup> Line 87-92. Bowersock calls this event an “international conference” on the crisis of South Arabian politics after the persecution of Najrānī Christians and the subsequent invasion of Yemen by Christian Axumite forces. See G. W. Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2013), 113–14.

<sup>121</sup> Lines 97-136. Many scholars discussed the content of this inscription and its importance for the history of South Arabia is paramount. For a more detailed treatment of CIH 541 see Norbert Nebes, “A New Abraha Inscription from the Great Dam of Mārib,” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 34 (2004): 228. Ryckmans, *La Persécution Des Chrétiens Himyarites Au Sixième Siècle*. Gajda, *Himyar Gagné Par Le Monothéisme (IVe-VIe Siècle de L’ère Chrétienne)*, *Ambitions et Ruine D’un Royaume de l’Arabie Méridionale Antique*, 125–45.

<sup>122</sup> Beeston, *Dictionnaire Sabéen (Anglais-Français-Arabe)*, 19. Beeston says that the word as a verb means “to violently overthrow” and as a noun means a dam. Attestations of the word *ʿ rm* is abundant in Sabaic inscriptions including CIH 540, 541, Gar Sharahbil A, all from the Late Sabaic period and often referring exclusively to the great dam at Maʿ rib.

<sup>123</sup> G. C. Miles, “Early Islamic Inscriptions Near Ṭaʿif In The Hijaz,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* VII (1948): 236–42. The Muʿ awiya inscription reads: “*hādihā al-sadd li-ʿ abdillāh bin muʿ awiya...*”. See also Robert Hoyland, “New Documentary Texts and the Early Islamic State,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 69, no. 3 (2006): 413.

the dam and a short intermission of Sasanian control in Yemen ending in the Muslim conquest of the region. Certain episodes of these developments can also be followed through inscriptional and literary evidence.<sup>124</sup>

Muslim tradition holds that some of these events, in addition to a clear reference to the Ma'rib dam, are alluded to in the Qur'ān. The most famous of these allusions would be the so-called Companions of the Trench (85:4, *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*), who are identified with the Christians of Najrān persecuted by the Jewish king Dhū Nuwās.<sup>125</sup> That a systematic oppression of Christians in South Arabia at the hands of a Jewish ruler took place is supported by pre-qur'anic sources,<sup>126</sup> but the qur'anic account of *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* is too short and elliptical to support a positive identification of them with the Christians of Najrān despite Hayajneh's recent attempt to argue to that effect.<sup>127</sup> Similarly, Muslim exegetes interpret the People of the Elephant (*aṣḥāb al-fīl*) mentioned in Chapter 105 as a reference to the army of Abraha who supposedly embarked on an expedition to Mecca with the intention to destroy the Ka'ba with the help of an awe-inspiring elephant.<sup>128</sup> The memory of this event marked a central point in Arab historiography as it became the *Anno Domini* of their

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<sup>124</sup> A good summary of events in this period around the central event of the Christians of Najrān can be found in Beaucamp, "La Persécution Des Chrétiens de Nagrañ et La Chronologie Himyarite." Also see Smith, "Events in Arabia in the 6th Century AD."

<sup>125</sup> See the EI article of Rudi Paret on *Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd*.

<sup>126</sup> Especially the Book of Himyarites, which only exists in fragments, see Sergius and Moberg, *The Book of the Himyarites. Fragments of a Hitherto Unknown Syriac Work*. The details of the event and its historiography can be found in Ryckmans, *La Persécution Des Chrétiens Himyarites Au Sixième Siècle*. Sidney Smith also summarizes the event in Smith, "Events in Arabia in the 6th Century AD."

<sup>127</sup> In his article in the edited text of Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qur'an*, 2:134–35. Following is Arberry's translation of the verses about *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* (85:4–9): "Slain were the Men of the Pit, the fire abounding in fuel, when they were seated over it and were themselves witnesses of what they did with the believers. They took revenge on them only because they believed in the All-mighty, the Al-laudable, God to whom belongs the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and God is Witness over everything."

<sup>128</sup> For the narration of the event in Ibn Ishāq see ' Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq, and Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 20–30. For Ṭabarī see Ṭabarī and Yar-Shater, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, vol. V 266.

calendar and taken as the year Muḥammad was born.<sup>129</sup> It is interesting that the Muslim historians noted the name of the aggressor exactly as it is found in Sabaic inscriptions<sup>130</sup>; but the assumption that Abraha actually made an expedition to Mecca cannot be corroborated through epigraphic sources. Besides, that the Companions of the Elephant refer to an event that involved a military campaign against the birthplace of Muḥammad also depends completely on later exegetical works. Therefore, the identification of *aṣḥāb al-fīl* with the campaign of Abraha is not entirely impossible, but it finds little evidentiary support outside the Muslim historical and exegetical tradition.

To sum up, the qur'anic material on Saba' is limited but highly informative about the biblical and non-biblical content of the Qur'ān. The story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in the Qur'ān remains largely in the biblical landscape and the mention of Saba' in this context is at best incidental. As a people that left their imprint in the historical recollection of the qur'anic audience, however, Saba' of Chapter 34 is in the same camp as 'Ād, Thamūd and Madyan. Their story is contextualized in "a nearby place" (*makānin qarībin*, 34:51) with topographical details, and it ends with a natural disaster that the Qur'ān reinterprets as a divine punishment. Other possible allusions in the Qur'ān to South Arabian events can also be matched with epigraphic evidence but only if one accepts the details that the Muslim sources accorded to them. Based on the methodology that I assumed at the beginning of this project, however, I do not consider them as definite references to local history in the Qur'ān.

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<sup>129</sup> Ṭabarī and Yar-Shater, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī*, vol. V 266.

<sup>130</sup> CIH 541.

## Historical Geography of the Qur'ān: From Yemen to Sinai

The historical geography of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament is vast, and when the Qur'ān is viewed as a biblical apocrypha composed in Arabic, one would expect the biblical landscape to leave its traces in the narratives of the Qur'ān. It is surprising to find, however, that the historical and topographical information that I have discussed above constitutes almost the entirety of the Qur'ān's historical geography. As can be seen in Map 2, the spatial extent of explicitly stated toponyms in the Qur'ān does not go beyond the Sinai (see the exception of *miṣr* below) in the north and, quite naturally, beyond western Yemen in the south. The historical geography of the Qur'ān that emerges out of references to “Arabian” figures is, in fact, within the limits of Ptolemy's Arabia (see map 1) ranging from lands that were under Nabataean control to the fringes of Sabaean territory in the south. Rock-cut marvels of Ḥegra or the residue of beautiful gardens in Saba' are part and parcel of this observable geography and hence found their way into the Qur'ān.

Outside of this “familiar” territory, the references grow vague, key personalities of narratives become ambiguous and topographical details disappear. For example, the Qur'ān tells its audience about Jonah and the miraculous story of his escape from a gigantic sea creature (37:39ff), but the detail that he was a resident of Nineveh has to be learned from later Muslim tradition. The kingdom of David and Solomon is well known to the Qur'ān (2:251), but not once does the Qur'ān mention the seat of their rule, Jerusalem, by name.<sup>131</sup> Jacob, Isaac, Job, Elijah, Zachariah, Jesus, and John the Baptist, to name but a few, are all placeless figures in the Qur'ān. Even Moses, by far the most important biblical figure in the

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<sup>131</sup> The reference in 17:1 to *masjid al-aqṣā*, which is understood as a place of worship on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, can only be associated with Jerusalem through the works of Muslim exegetes.

Qur'ān, is not accorded any geographical detail other than three sweeping mentions of *miṣr*, Egypt, in 2:61, 10:87 and 43:51 (this last one in the context of the Pharaoh). The qur'anic Moses becomes more familiar and visible with his connection to Madyan and with the story of retribution that the Pharaoh and his people shared with all other perished peoples. This is probably why we often find the story of Moses and the incredulous Pharaoh inserted at the end of punishment sequences that begin with 'Ād and Thamūd. Yet, no geographical details about the wanderings of his people or his encounter with the divinity are provided in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān does mention Mount Sinai twice (23:20 and as Ṭūr Sīnīn for rhyme purposes in 95:2) but only as a natural wonder and never as the place where Moses received the tablets.

Going back to the original question of this chapter about biblical and Arabian phases of history in the Qur'ān, one perceives that the Qur'ān does not only admit a select potpourri of biblical figures and add an Arabian layer to it. It also particularizes biblical history, favors certain characters and stories over others, and often arabicizes the biblical logia. Those figures that supposedly cross the boundaries of the Qur'ān's historical geography such as Noah, Abraham and Lot receive special attention, and they are given a new chronology among themselves in defiance of the received biblical timeline. Noah of the Qur'ān is put in the Arabian Peninsula to convert his people who believed in Arabian deities, and his ark sits on the "highest peak in the neighborhood."<sup>132</sup> The Qur'ānic portrayal of Abraham, as the grandfather of Banū Isrā'īl through Isaac and Jacob, is very biblical. As the builder of the holy sanctuary in Bakka (3:96-97, 22:26-28, see chapter 4 for Bakka), however, he leaves the

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<sup>132</sup> The reference here is to the word *al-jūdī* in the Qur'ān (11:44), which is given as the apobaterion of Noah's ark. Mingana thought that this word was a misunderstanding of *qardū* in Syriac but Nöldeke and Jeffery rightfully argue that this should be an Arabian toponym. See Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, 106-107.

biblical landscape and becomes an Arabian figure. “The overthrown cities” of Lot are often mentioned alongside ‘Ād, Thamūd and Madyan due to their proximity to the historical geography of the Qur’ān as Shu‘ayb reminds his people (11:89).

At the same time the Arabian material in the Qur’ān is embedded in the larger biblical discourse so that the message and the messenger of the Qur’ān could partake in the biblical continuum. As we have seen, however, traces of local historical and geographical memory in the Qur’ān lead to more profound depictions of the Arabian material than those of the already restricted and selective biblical material. The process of integrating the local history into the biblical timeline, which is only partial in the Qur’ān, is made complete by the efforts of later Muslim historians and exegetes but only to the detriment of the Qur’ān’s internal chronology. To that end, Shu‘ayb anachronistically became Moses’ father-in-law, Hūd becomes identified with Eber and thus given a mistaken South Arabian provenance, and Ṣāliḥ becomes associated with the biblical Shelah, a figure from a mere three generations after Noah.

### Conclusion

The most important conclusion of this chapter, then, is that there is a distinctly Arabian phase of historical perception in the Qur’ān that can more or less be matched with the epigraphic and literary material from, or about, the Arabian Peninsula. The Qur’ān has a unique historical geography that gives priority to local peoples, places and events while secondarily adopting biblical history as part of its discourse but not of its native context. In other words, without the filter of post-qur’anic Muslim historiography, which largely developed in the centers of scriptural learning, the details of biblical history in the Qur’ān remain very limited.



Secondly, I argue that this Arabian phase goes beyond the stories of Arabian prophets and encroaches upon the territory of biblical history in accordance with the exigencies of the qur'anic discourse. This is why Noah, Abraham and Moses are so often put in narrative sequences along with Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shu'ayb. Therefore, I agree with Neuwirth on her assessment of the biblical subtext of the Qur'ān: the trend of the “self-biblicization” of the Qur'ān's community occurs simultaneously with the “arabicization” of the biblical worldview.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, the bifurcation between the biblical and the local historical perception in the Qur'ān is nonetheless real, as the two different versions of the story of Saba' demonstrate.

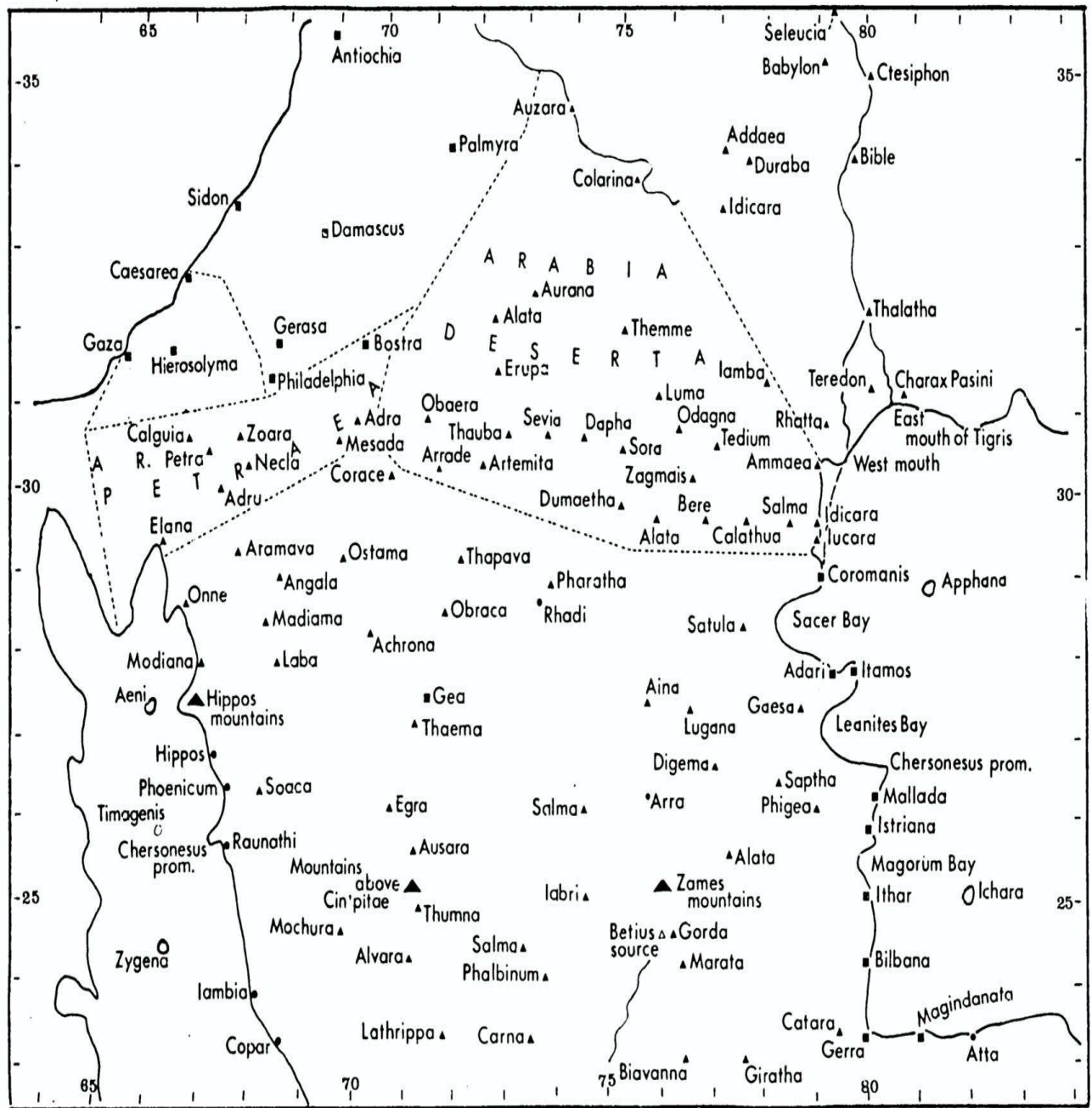
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<sup>133</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, “Qur'anic Studies and Historical-Critical Philology: The Qur'ān's Staging, Penetrating, and Eclipsing of the Biblical Tradition”, Keynote Address, International Qur'anic Studies Association Conference, Delivered on 21 November 2014.

Table 1. Punishment Sequences in the Qur'ān

	Noah	'Ād	Thamūd	Shu'ayb	Lot	Abraham	Moses	Al-Rass	Tubba'
7:59ff	X	X	X	X	X		X		
9:70	X	X	X	X	X	X			
11:25	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
14:8ff	X	X	X			X	X		
22:42	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
25:38	X	X	X				X	X	
29:14	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
38:12-13	X	X	X	X	X		X		
40:31	X	X	X				X		
41:13		X	X				X		
50:12-14	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
51:24	X	X	X		X	X	X		
53:51-53	X	X	X		X				
54:9ff	X	X	X		X		X		
69:4ff	X	X	X		X		X		
85:18			X				X		
89:6		X	X				X		

Figure 2. Ptolemy's Northeastern Arabia (Reconstructed Map in Nigel Groom, "Eastern Arabia in Ptolemy's Map", *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, Vol. 16, 1986, pp. 73)



## Chapter 4 – Qur’anic Prophetology in Light of Enochic and Jubilaic Traditions

### Introduction

Examining qur’anic prophetology is a difficult task for many reasons. Considering that the Qur’ān was a growing corpus in synchronization with the emergence of a new community of believers, one would expect that the qur’anic descriptions of prophets and their role might have changed, evolved or re-adapted along the way. Following the chronological development of qur’anic prophetology could be a feasible task if we had a solid and reliable internal chronology of the Qur’ān. Even then, however, it is highly doubtful whether a coherent image would emerge considering the plethora of puzzling terms and concepts about prophets, messengers and angels in the Qur’ān. I should also add that it is almost impossible to bracket Muslim interpretive tradition about Islamic prophetology in order to investigate the qur’anic position within itself. The agents of this interpretive tradition had a close contact with their Jewish and Christian counterparts and their stance on the Qur’ān’s prophetology was clearly inflected by what they learned about the large Judeo-Christian literature.

In addition to these analytical difficulties, a larger problem about defining Qur’anic prophetology stems from the fact that a large majority of the Qur’an’s prophets are biblical figures who have been subject to various interpretations within Jewish and Christian prophetology. As a result, one may be inclined to view qur’anic prophetology as a function or version of biblical prophetology among many other historical versions of it. In fact, attempts (albeit very feeble I must say) have been made to bring Qur’ān’s position about

biblical prophets/figures in line with the position of certain Jewish and Christian groups such as the Ebionites or the Qumran community.<sup>134</sup> None of these attempts, however, has been convincing enough to establish an indisputable background to Qur'ān's rather unique take on the biblical prophetic past. Looking for textual interdependence by searching parallel narratives in the Qur'ān and other texts has also been largely disappointing since the Qur'ān's "biblical subtext" has an unusually wide range including the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, apocryphal gospels, the Talmud and several midrashic sources.

With these caveats in mind, is it possible to talk about a qur'anic prophetology that is not conditioned by later interpretive tradition and not reduced to a variety of biblical prophetology? In this chapter, I will attempt to lay the foundations for a positive answer to this question. Building on some of the observations about Qur'ān's portrayal of certain biblical figures in the previous chapter, I will argue that the Qur'ān, when read both as a whole corpus and in its chronological development, displays a unique position about biblical prophetology, modes of prophetic revelation and divine-human covenants. This unique position is centered on the portrayal of key biblical figures such as Noah, Abraham and Moses, and I will further argue that their narratives in the Qur'ān and their role in qur'anic prophetology show interesting parallels with their depiction in certain extra-biblical sources that have not been deemed interesting for the study of qur'anic prophetology so far. Two of these sources will be examined in particular for the proximity of their area of circulation to the context of the Qur'ān: the Book of Jubilees, a summary of Genesis and Exodus considered canonical in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Book of Enoch, a Jewish apocalyptic text from the Second Temple Period that gained prominence in Ethiopia. Before fully

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<sup>134</sup> G. R. (Gerald R.) Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam from Polemic to History*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization. (Cambridge, UK ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 34.

discussing the qur'anic prophetology, however, I need to lay down an overview of basic concepts related to prophetic mission in the Qur'ān.

### Prophet, Messenger, Angel

In the absence of any full-fledged work on Qur'anic prophetology, it is necessary to discuss and define some important words in the Qur'ān concerning prophets and their mission. The first thing that strikes the reader of the Qur'ān in this matter is the ubiquity of different appellations about the people with a prophetic message. The word *nabī*, corresponding to the word “prophet” in many other Semitic languages, also resonates with the original Greek word *προφήτης*, “one who foretells”, as the Arabic word *naba'* is found in the Qur'ān with the meaning of “news” and especially “news about future events”.<sup>135</sup> The word *nabī* is attested, along with its plurals, seventy five times in the Qur'ān in addition to the term *nubuwwa*, “prophecy”, which is found five times.

Another qur'anic term for the “prophet”, and found much more commonly than *nabī*, is *rasūl*. This term seems to be a reflection of *ἀπόστολος*, “one sent on a mission or with a message”, since the Arabic word *arsala* also has the meaning of “sending someone as a messenger”. Its usage is parallel to the word *mursal*, “the one that is sent as a messenger”, which occurs thirty times in the Qur'ān. In one rare occasion in the Qur'ān where a reference to the apostles of Jesus is plausible, the word that is used in lieu of “apostle” is, in

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<sup>135</sup> The most pertinent example here is 78:2.

fact, *mursal*.<sup>136</sup> Although attempts have been made in the Muslim tradition and the critical works to distinguish between the uses of *nabī* and *rasūl* in the Qur'ān, they might refer to one single concept, “a prophet sent by God”, and they are used for the same person in a few cases.<sup>137</sup> As Uri Rubin suggested, the Qur'ān sometimes appears to make the rank of a *rasūl* greater than that of a *nabī* and Muslim exegetes wanted to make a distinction between a prophet who comes with a new *sharī' a* or a scripture, i.e. *rasūl*, and one that follows the dispensation of an earlier one, i.e. *nabī*.<sup>138</sup> However, from the Qur'ān itself it is difficult to draw any clearcut differences between a *nabī* and a *rasūl*.

Angels, *malak* (*malā' ika* in the plural, corresponding to the Hebrew *mal' ak* and Greek *ἄγγελος*), could be considered as a completely different genre of God's message carriers but the Qur'ān sometimes calls them *rusul* blurring the whole matrix of prophetic appellations.<sup>139</sup> Yet, there seems to be a clear distinction in the Qur'ān between instrumentally minded angels, who are non-mortal, non-responsible beings, and mortal and humanly prophets, who bear the burden of the message as responsible entities. Among the angels, and sometimes next to them, is the reference to *rūḥ* or *rūḥ al-quds*, which is mentioned in the context of Mary's impregnation (2:87 and 5:110, in 19:17 mentioned as *rūḥanā*, “our spirit”) and which is one of the angels that descend on the night of *qadr* (97:4). Muslim commentators thought it to be the angel Gabriel but the evidence from the Qur'ān

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<sup>136</sup> 36:13: “And present to them an example: the people of the city, when the messengers (al-mursalūn) came to it”. This verse and the following parable is often taken to refer to two Christian apostles who arrived to the city of Antioch even though their exact identity, or the subtext to the story, is not quite known.

<sup>137</sup> For Moses in 19:51, for Ishmael in 19:54 and possibly for Muḥammad in 7:157.

<sup>138</sup> “Prophets and Prophethood”, EQ

<sup>139</sup> 35:1 in particular.

itself is not enough to substantiate it.<sup>140</sup> Connection to the Syriac *ruḥā d-quḏshā* (spirit of holiness) and to Old South Arabian *rḥ qds<sup>1</sup>*, among other possible Semitic cognates, is clear. The Qur'ān seems to accord a unique rank to *rūḥ* and even the addressees of the Qur'ān do not quite know what is meant by it.<sup>141</sup>

### A Brief Summary of the Qur'ān's Prophetology Based on Qur'anic Evidence

The lack of complete clarity in the fundamental elements of qur'anic prophetology has to do partly with the fact that many prophetic figures and their classifications depend on the biblical and para-biblical precedents while some of these figures are also employed as *typoi* for the mission of Muḥammad. A short glance at the qur'anic prophets with biblical precedents in the Qur'ān indicates that there is a great emphasis on pre-exilic figures (so no Daniel, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah or Malachi) and among them a greater emphasis on the patriarchs (*'ābōt*) and Moses in the Qur'ān. Jonah is the only prophet that gets attention among the minor prophets whereas, among the *nabī' im rišōnīm* ("former prophets"), only Samuel and Joshua are possibly alluded to without their names. In fact, most of the major figures that the Qur'ān recognizes as *nabī* or *rasūl*, such as Noah, Abraham, Jacob or Moses, are not considered as "prophets" in the Jewish or Christian tradition.

This particular representation of the biblical past in the Qur'ān feeds into its unique prophetology. The Qur'ān depicts biblical history as a cyclical salvation history with little or no bearing to actual chronology instead of the history of a particular people. As a result, major characters of the Israelite history are leveled into typical messengers with parallel

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<sup>140</sup> But note that the Qur'ān explicitly states that the angel that brings down the revelation to Muḥammad is Gabriel (2:97).

<sup>141</sup> 17:85: "And they ask you, about the soul. Say, "The soul is of the affair of my Lord. And mankind have not been given of knowledge except a little."



stories of homiletic quality. As I argued in the previous chapter, stories of some of these biblical figures such as Noah, Abraham and Lot are embedded into qur'anic punishment sequences along with their Arabian counterparts whose monotheistic message was met with obstinate disbelief. More interesting, however, are the kerygmatic insertions into the stories of biblical figures that otherwise have no prophetic import in the Jewish and Christian tradition. Joseph, for example, seizes the opportunity to talk to his fellow inmates about the superiority of one all-powerful god over several disparate gods.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba is reinterpreted in the Qur'ān as the Queen's initiation to the monotheistic belief through the efforts of the messenger Solomon.<sup>143</sup>

Leveling of biblical figures into typical bearers of the monotheistic message has other distinctive ramifications for the qur'anic prophetology. First, several para-biblical scenarios that support the portrayal of biblical figures as the champions of faith have found their way into the Qur'ān. The story of Abraham's conversion<sup>144</sup> and the depiction of his early life as an iconoclast<sup>145</sup> are best examples for such scenarios. In another scene, the biblical and para-biblical idea of earthly corruption at the time of Noah is translated into the spread of polytheistic beliefs in Arabian deities against whom an anachronistically depicted Noah fights a useless battle.<sup>146</sup> In another scenario, Aaron's involvement in the golden calf incident is minimized in the Qur'ān and a Samaritan has to bear the burden of leading the Israelites astray.<sup>147</sup> Finally, as I have mentioned earlier, Solomon's role as a messenger, and

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<sup>142</sup> 12:39: *yā ṣāḥibayī s-sijni a-arbābun mutafarriqūna khayrun ami l-llāhu l-wāḥidu l-qahhār?*

<sup>143</sup> 27:44: *wa-aslamtu ma' a sulaymāna li-llāhi rabbi l-' alamīn*

<sup>144</sup> 6:79

<sup>145</sup> 21:58

<sup>146</sup> See chapter I for the discussion of Noahic deities.

<sup>147</sup> 20:85.

not as an earthly king is, clinched in the Qur'ān with a para-biblical story that has its parallels in the Second Targum on Esther.

Another unique trend in Qur'ān's prophetology is the attempt to relocate biblical figures as prophets that are recognizable in the local context of Qur'ān's Arabian addressees. I had already mentioned the case of Noah in Chapter I and III. An even more interesting case is, of course, that of Abraham. Abraham becomes a central figure in the Qur'ān as the temple builder and the pioneer of pilgrimage rites associated with the temple in Arabia. Qur'anic Abraham, through his purely personal contemplative conversion and through his Ishmaelite progeny, represents a non-Jewish, non-Christian and, therefore, gentile (*ummi*) inflection of Arabian monotheism.<sup>148</sup> As I will argue below, the figure of an Arabian Abraham is the pinnacle of the Qur'ān's unique prophetology.

Assuming that what I enumerated above constitutes the basic parameters of qur'anic prophetology, what could be the reason or reasons for Qur'ān's particular take on biblical characters and narratives? One plausible angle to approach this question is to seriously consider the effects of a Christian accentuation of the biblical past on Qur'ān's reformulation of some major biblical figures and their stories. In fact, this has been the major route of research in the recent years with an unprecedented concentration on the possible influence of Syriac Christianity on the qur'anic interpretation of biblical narratives. Problems with this approach, at least on linguistic grounds, have been discussed earlier in this dissertation and, other scholars have pointed them out as well. It is still reasonable that the Qur'ān represents a biblical past that was deflected by one or multiple Christian interpretations but no distinct irrefutable trajectory of dependency has been proposed so far.

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<sup>148</sup> Most poignantly in 3:67: "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian but he was a *hanīf muslim* and not one of the associationists."

One revealing aspect of qur'anic prophetology that runs parallel to the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament is its typological rendition of biblical narratives. In some cases, typologies and typological expectations from the future are explicitly indicated in the Qur'ān. For example, the creation of Adam typologically overlaps with the creation of Jesus according to the Qur'ān,<sup>149</sup> similar to what Paul describes in Romans 5:14. More significantly, Abraham's prayer after completing the construction of al-bayt provides an etiological explanation for the existing rites of pilgrimage and foretells the coming of a messenger, interpreted unanimously as Muḥammad.<sup>150</sup> Although it is never explicitly stated, Qur'ān's numerous retellings of Moses narratives also indicate that the story of Moses and the Israelites provides an appropriate model for the various stages of Muḥammad's relationship with his community.<sup>151</sup>

Another aspect of qur'anic prophetology that builds upon biblical precedents, but with a new understanding, is the idea of a divine covenant (*mīthāq* in the Qur'ān). According to the Qur'ān, God made a covenant (or more like, "took their covenant", *akhadha mīthāqahum*) both with the Israelites<sup>152</sup> and the Christians<sup>153</sup> but they did not fulfill the requirements of their covenants. It is not clear whether their covenants are the same as the covenants that God made with the prophets (3:81), especially with Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad (33:7). These figures, with the exception of Noah, also have the

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<sup>149</sup> 3:59: "Indeed, the example of Jesus for Allah is like that of Adam. He created Him from dust; then He said to him, "Be," and he was."

<sup>150</sup> 2:129. Angelika Neuwirth discusses the hermeneutical potential of Abraham as the typos of Muḥammad in the Qur'ān. See Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text*, Qur'anic Studies Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2014), 67.

<sup>151</sup> Angelika Neuwirth emphasizes this typology in Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran Als Text Der Spätantike: Ein Europäischer Zugang*, 1. Aufl. (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010), 669–71.

<sup>152</sup> 2:83, 5:12 and others.

<sup>153</sup> 5:14.

distinction of having some sort of scripture even though there does not seem to be a direct connection between a new covenantal dispensation and a new scripture in the Qur'ān. In some cases, Adam is also included among the chosen few<sup>154</sup> with a covenantal agreement ('*ahd*) that he quickly violated.<sup>155</sup> This multiple covenantal scheme that the Qur'ān proposes makes up the backbone of the qur'anic prophetology and highlights the position of Muḥammad as the last link in a line of prophetic covenants from Adam to the time of the Qur'ān.

### Qur'anic Prophetology and its Context

As the characterization of qur'anic prophetology above suggests, the Qur'ān does not really adopt a preset biblical or para-biblical model for its portrayal of the biblical past but rather it reinterprets in its unique pattern biblical narratives that must have already been in public domain by the time of its emergence.<sup>156</sup> In that regard, the Qur'ān represents a highly discursive and independent layer in the larger development of late antique biblical interpretation. This new angle that the Qur'ān offers for the shared biblical past is accompanied by an alternative genealogy in a biblically peripheral territory. In a way, the Qur'ān has to, and does, change the focus of biblical stage/scene (as I argued in the previous chapter) in order to highlight the presumed origins of a new Ishmaelite dispensation around a new *bayt*, proclaimed by a new prophet in a new language.

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<sup>154</sup> 3:33: "Indeed, Allah chose Adam and Noah and the family of Abraham and the family of 'Imran over the worlds

<sup>155</sup> 20:115.

<sup>156</sup> The idea of these stories having been existed in the context of the Qur'ān as part of the traditional lore has been suggested by John C. Reeves, *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, vol. no. 24, Society of Biblical Literature, Symposium Series (Leiden ;Boston: Brill, 2004), 43.

The materials for this new, what I call ‘Arabian’, angle would naturally show better parallels, not with the canonical renditions of the earlier scriptures (which the Qur’ān dismisses as corrupted, see 4:46, 5:13 and 5:41), but with the non-canonical strands of Judeo-Christian literature. One scholar summarized Qur’ān’s relationship with these materials as follows:

“To the extent to which the Qur’ān recounts biblical material and embodies a mass of Jewish and Christian lore, the ultimate sources of its substance must be looked for not in Scripture itself but rather in the post-canonical periphery of scripture: in the Agada, the Targum, the Midrash of the Jews, and the apocryphal, patristic, homiletical and liturgical literature of the Christians.”<sup>157</sup>

Qur’ān’s preference for what Obermann calls “the post-canonical periphery of scripture” is both intentional and natural. It is intentional because the Arabian reformulation of the biblical past has distinct points of separation from the scriptural formulations. Often times the specific message that the Qur’ān wants to convey happens to be in parallel with a para-biblical interpretation. It is also natural because by the time of the Qur’ān’s emergence several apocryphal, midrashic, patristic and liturgical interpretations of biblical narratives and figures were already in wide circulation in various languages. As far as the latest evidence we have is concerned, the Qur’ān is the earliest documentation of the biblical heritage in Arabic, and, therefore, has no precedent that could securely lead us to any of the pre-qur’anic biblical traditions in Arabic. In other words, if the Hebrew Bible represents a core traditum that later flourished into several traditio, as Michael Fishbane argued, the

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<sup>157</sup> Julian Obermann, “Islamic Origins: A Study in Background and Foundation,” in *The Arab Heritage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 96.

Qur'ān represents another node in the larger web of traditio - a relatable yet distinct form of biblical interpretation.<sup>158</sup>

At this point the critical question about the subject of this chapter, qur'anic prophetology, is whether one can speak about particular strands in the development of prophetology from earlier interpretations into the Qur'ān. In other words, can we identify any textual or doctrinal continuity in the formation of Qur'ān's unique prophetology from earlier representations of biblical prophetology? In the remainder of this chapter, I will closely examine some of the central tenets of Qur'ān's prophetology that I already summarized above and discuss them in comparison with a particular conduit of para-biblical interpretation embodied in works such as the Enochic literature, the Book of Jubilees and the First Epistle of Clement. The threads that unite these works are that they all present a novel and largely homiletic interpretation of the biblical past and they all occupy an elevated status in Ethiopic Christianity. References will also be made to *Didascalia Apostolorum*, another text that has its roots in the Apostolic Fathers literature like the First Clement and, like the latter; it is part of the narrow canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

#### Parallels to Qur'ān's Prophetology: Looking from the South

Numerous biblical and para-biblical parallels to Qur'ān's portrayal of biblical stories and figures have been suggested until now and, a near-exhaustive study of these parallels can be

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<sup>158</sup> Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford [Oxfordshire]: Clarendon Press, 1985), 5-19.

found in Heinrich Speyer's *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*.<sup>159</sup> The sources that I will examine together with the Qur'ān in this chapter, however, have been largely overlooked. Their absence from the debates of Qur'ān's subtext is understandable because some of them, including the Book of Enoch and the Jubilees, had only recently been "rediscovered" at the time when the scholarly search for Qur'ān's possible sources of inspiration was at its peak, as I will show below. Works in the genre of "Apostolic Fathers" literature have also not been mined for clues to the Qur'ān's religious discourse mostly because there could be no reasonable point of contact between these sources and the Qur'ān. One exception to this is Holger Zellentin's recent work on the parallels between Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum* and the Qur'ān with respect to their legal culture.<sup>160</sup>

I will argue in this chapter that the Qur'ān displays, in its prophetology and, to a more limited extent, angelology and demonology, unmistakable parallels with the sources that I will discuss. I will argue, based on an analysis of the Qur'ān and these sources, that the Qur'ān's community had a very close contact with the apocryphal textual tradition that enjoyed canonical status among Ethiopian Jews and Christians. Since there is no substantial evidence for the penetration of texts and ideas from Abyssinia to the Arabian Peninsula, the parallels I will draw have to remain at the level of comparative textual analysis. Nevertheless, epigraphic evidence suggests that Judaism and Christianity have left their mark in southern Arabia, and the region remained under nominal Abyssinian control for a few decades before the rise of Islam. In any case, I will focus exclusively on textual parallels and try to avoid speculating about direct contacts of influence.

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<sup>159</sup> Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen Im Qoran*.

<sup>160</sup> Holger M. Zellentin, *The Qur'ān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

In my discussion of qur'anic prophetology, the Book of Jubilees will occupy a very important place and a brief introduction to this work could be useful here. The Book of Jubilees is a narrative re-telling of Genesis and almost half of Exodus, thereby covering the biblical history from the creation of the world up until the Mosaic covenant. Most recent evidence suggests that the text was written in Hebrew by an unknown author around 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE in Palestine and was certainly translated into Greek and Ethiopic and possibly into Syriac, Coptic and Latin. Until the mid-1800s, the text was deemed as lost and there were only fragmentary references to it in Greek, Latin and Syriac sources. With the efforts of Christian missionaries and scholars such as Heinrich Ewald it was found out that what Greek sources called *ta iōbēlaia* (“the Jubilees”) or *hē leptē genesis* (“the Little Genesis”) actually existed as a complete text in Ethiopic titled *Maṣḥafa Kufālē*, “the Book of Division”. The first edition of the text was published by August Dillmann in 1850-51 and since then several editions of the Ethiopic text and translations have been published. In the meantime, it was also discovered that some sections of the Qumran documents included parts of the Hebrew Jubilees confirming the origins of the text. The only complete copies of the Jubilees exist in Classical Ethiopic as the text is considered part of the biblical canon for Beta Israel (congregation of Ethiopian Jews) and for Ethiopic Orthodox Church.

As one of the leading scholars of Second Temple writings James Vanderkam argued, the Book of Jubilees is at times a very faithful reproduction of the Genesis and Exodus accounts but it differs from the Masoretic Text in crucial points.<sup>161</sup> It also has an ideological and narrative frame that does not exist in Genesis. This frame is centered around the dictation of God’s pre-ordained laws and judgments by an angel to Moses from heavenly

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<sup>161</sup> James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 11.



tablets – a concept that is shared by 1 Enoch (*Mashafa Henok* in Ethiopic) as well, which is another non-canonical text that only survived in Ethiopic copies. More importantly, it presents a unique interpretation of the Israelite past that prevailed in the Hellenistic period. This interpretation slowly disappeared in later Jewish and Christian writings, as Vanderkam showed, but it remained alive in the Ethiopian apocryphal tradition.<sup>162</sup> I will argue below that the qur’anic representation of prophetic history is very much in line with the Jubilaic and, to some extent the Enochic, interpretations.

In the following discussion, I will try to note conceptual, doctrinal and linguistic similarities between the Qur’ān and these sources but, as I have pointed out time and again in this dissertation, my intention is not to promote the possibility of a direct textual interdependence. Substantial evidence for Qur’ān’s borrowing from other texts is next to nothing and I view the Qur’ān as an active interlocutor in Wansbrough’s “sectarian milieu” rather than a haphazard collage of biblical material. However, I disagree with him on the point that the Qur’ān’s sectarian position was the result of its exposure to Judeo-Christian lore in a Palestinian or Babylonian milieu. Instead I will argue that the Qur’ān, without the lens of its later, northerly-infused interpretation, represents a significant node in an apocryphal tradition, the traces of which can be followed in the Ethiopic tradition.

### The Heavenly Tablets as the Source of Prophetic Message

An important aspect of qur’anic prophetology is the great concern with the primordial locus of the divine/prophetic message and the medium of its delivery. With its own testimony, the

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 13.

Qur'ān is kept in a guarded tablet (*fī lawḥin maḥfūzin*, 85:22) and in a well-protected book (*fī kitābin maknūnin*, 56:77). In another place, God speaks in the royal “we” and proclaims that the Qur'ān is in Arabic so that people would understand and that it is in “the mother of the book” (*fī ummi l-kitābi*, 43:4) that exists in the presence of God (13:39). These statements about the Qur'ān are often found in the early Meccan sūras and at the opening verses of the middle Meccan chapters at a critical point where the Qur'ān asserts its authority and the hermetically sealed protection of its message.

The message of the Arabic (or Arabian) Qur'ān comes from the heavenly record but it is only a small part of it. Surely the Qur'ān is part of a clear book (*kitābun mubīnun*) but this larger clear book contains information about everything, big and small (10:61, 34:3), moist and dry (6:59). This divine register has the record of every creature on earth (11:6), and the count of everything is noted in it (32:39, 36:12). This register also contains earthly laws that are imposed upon human beings: the concept of legal retribution (or *lex talionis*, *al-qīṣās*) is “written upon” believers (*kutiba ‘alaykumu l-qīṣāsu*, 2:178) just like fasting (2:183) and fighting in the name of God (2:216, 246) are “written upon” them. Those who follow these laws and bear witness to the message of the prophets are “written” by God or his agents as witnesses (3:53, 5:83). The divine register keeps a record of the wicked (*kitāb al-fujjār*, 83:7) and the righteous (*kitāb al-abrār*, 83:18) in an inscribed book (*fī kitābin marqūmin*, 83:9, 20). Individualized reports of worldly deeds are presented to their owners at a day of reckoning (69:19, 69:25, 84:7-10) and these reports are filled in by noble scribes (*kirāman kātibīna*, 82:11).

Even this brief summary about the qur'anic concept of heavenly registers shows that the idea of pre-ordained, well-preserved laws and scriptures is central to the Qur'ān, and it is part of a larger discourse about God's omniscience and absolute control over its creation

through an enormous effort of record keeping. The prophetic message and its written form (*al-kitāb*) represent only one, but very important, aspect of this heavenly record. Scriptures, including the Qur'ān, are written down in honored sheets (*ṣuḥufin mukarramatin*, 80:13) by the hands of noble and dutiful scroll-scribes (*bi-aydī safaratin kirāmin bararatin*, 80:15-16). In short, the idea of scripture as a fixed heavenly record is entrenched in the Qur'ān together with the idea of a larger heavenly writing endeavor that aims to pre-ordain and take note of everything including laws, worldly events and otherworldly judgments.

The concept of heavenly tablets as a repository of laws and commandments is certainly an extension of the Mosaic tablets but the Old Testament itself, and the traditions that grew out of it, has not greatly elaborated on the idea of heavenly records with the exception of a few specimens from the second temple literature. And among those specimens the Book of Jubilees would be the only source that developed the idea of heavenly tablets into a full-fledged theological conception. As Leslie Baynes argues, “heavenly books... populate the book of Jubilees in a way unprecedented in any and all other ancient Jewish texts that employ the motif.”<sup>163</sup> The idea of heavenly tablets as the source of prophetic messages, scriptures, laws and human destiny is central to the Book of Jubilees and there is a fairly large secondary literature on the subject.<sup>164</sup> However, the possible connection between the Jubilees' motif of heavenly tablets and the Qur'anic understanding of revelation, scripture and predestination has not been investigated so far.

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<sup>163</sup> Leslie Baynes, *The Heavenly Book Motif in Judeo-Christian Apocalypses 200 BCE-200 CE* (BRILL, 2011), 109.

<sup>164</sup> See note 2 in *Ibid.* for examples of works on the heavenly tablets in the Jubilees but also Baynes' statement about the pervasiveness of the motif in the Jubilees: “So pervasive is the appeal to heavenly writing in Jubilees that a monograph could be devoted to its analysis there. It is no accident that there may be more scholarly work devoted to the concept of heavenly books in Jubilees than about the motif in all other early Jewish literature combined.”

Jubilees presents itself as a dictation of “the angel of presence” (*mal’ aka gaṣṣ* in Ge’ez) directly from heavenly tablets to Moses at Mount Sinai concerning the history “from the time the law and testimony were created... until the time of the new creation”, ‘*em-’ ama feṭrata ḥegg wa-la-sam’ ...’ em-’ elata feṭrat ḥaddās* (BoJ 1:29). As such, Jubilees is a meticulously devised chronology from the initial creation to the time of Moses with a few final remarks on eschatology. According to the first chapter this chronological account is entirely based on the heavenly tablets with verbatim precision. According to VanderKam, Jubilees’ appeal to heavenly tablets constitutes a fundamental aspect of its claim of authority that outweighs even the authority of the Mosaic scripture.<sup>165</sup> The book posits itself as the ultimate word of God delivered to Moses through the mediation of a respected angel at the navel of earthly prophetic focus, i.e. Mount Sinai, from an eternal source. In the formulation of prophetic authority, then, one perceives a complete overlap between the Qur’ān and Jubilees.

The notion of heavenly tablets (*ṣellāta samāy*) in Jubilees, however, is not restricted to what the angel dictates to Moses on Mount Sinai. In other words, the heavenly tablets comprise the Jubilees but they are not equal to it. Heavenly tablets also record the judgments of every responsible being:

“The judgment of them all (*kʷannanē kʷellomu*) has been ordained and written (*tašar’ a wa-taṣeḥfa*) on the heavenly tablets (*ṣellāta samāy*); there is no injustice. (As for) all who transgress from their way in which it was ordained for them to go — if they do not go in it, judgment has been written down for each creature and for each kind. There is nothing, which is in heaven or on the earth, in the light, the darkness, Sheol, the deep, or in the dark place — all their judgments have been ordained, written, and

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<sup>165</sup> VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 86.

inscribed. He will exercise judgment regarding each person — the great one in accord with his greatness and the small one in accord with his smallness — each one in accord with his way. He is not one who shows favoritism nor one who takes a bribe, if he says he will execute judgment against each person. If a person gave everything on earth he would not show favoritism nor would he accept (it) from him because he is the righteous judge (*mak<sup>w</sup>annena şedq*). (BoJ 5:13-16)

This passage comes exceptionally close in its wording to the qur'anic understanding of *umm al-kitāb* or *kitāb mubīn* (see above), and it seems to be in congruity with the Enochic concept of heavenly tablets which contain “all the deeds of men, and all who will be born of flesh on the earth for the generations of eternity” (BoE 81:2). Recorded judgments based on mankind's earthly deeds will be presented on the day of judgment (*' elata dayn* in Ge'ez, BoJ 10:17, compare with *yawm al-din* in Arabic) to both the wicked and the righteous. This understanding of heavenly bookkeeping in Jubilees leads to a unique position about an exclusively spiritual afterlife without bodily resurrection:

“Then the Lord will heal his servants. They will rise and see great peace. He will expel his enemies. The righteous will see (this), offer praise, and be very happy forever and ever. They will see all their punishments and curses on their enemies. Their bones will rest in the earth and their spirits will be very happy. They will know that the Lord is one who executes judgment but shows kindness to hundreds and thousands and to all who love him. (BoJ 23:30-31).

Although the implications of pre-ordaining and writing down the deeds of human beings as part of an eventual day of judgment are similar in the Jubilaic and qur'anic worldview, the

Qur'ān seems to favor bodily resurrection unlike the Jubilees.<sup>166</sup> The Book of Enoch, too, has a vision similar to Jubilees and the Qur'ān. Enoch utters the following after he studies the heavenly tablets:

“Blessed is the man who dies in righteousness and goodness,  
Concerning whom there is no book of unrighteousness written,  
And against whom no day of judgment shall be found.  
...  
Let thy heart be strong,  
For the good shall announce righteousness to the good;  
The righteous with the righteous shall rejoice,  
And shall offer congratulation to one another.  
But the sinners shall die with the sinners,  
And the apostate go down with the apostate.” (BoE 81:4-8)

According to Jubilees, heavenly tablets also contain certain laws that have existed primordially. However, the list of primordial laws that Jubilees mentions is much larger than the Qur'ān. *Lex talionis* (law of retribution) is the only law that the Jubilees and the Qur'ān both contain as “written down”.<sup>167</sup> The underlying point between the Qur'ān and Jubilees, however, is that the divine law has everlasting validity by virtue of being engraved in the heavenly tablets. Jubilees emphasizes this point by portraying Adam, Noah, Abraham and other pre-Mosaic figures with unique narratives that involve their compliance to the

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<sup>166</sup> The notion of *ḥashr* (“gathering”, but terminologically “bodily resurrection”) is exceptionally prevalent in the Qur'ān and seems to have no direct Semitic or Judeo-Christian equivalent. See 2:203, 3:158, 5:96 and others. For the calling of human beings from their graves and for the recomposing of human body out of dead bones see 36:52 and 36:78.

<sup>167</sup> See 2:178, 5:45 and BoJ 4:32.

regulations about food consumption, purity and sacrifice long before these regulations were laid down in the Mosaic law.<sup>168</sup> In the Qur'ān, the timeless validity of law is expressed with the unchanging nature of God's *sunna*: "This is the *sunna* of those that we had sent before you as messengers, you will not find in our *sunna* any alteration (17:77)" and "this is the *sunna* of Allāh with those who have passed on before and the command of Allāh is a decreed destiny (*qadaran maqdūran*)" (33:38).

In short, both in the Qur'ān and the Book of Jubilees, scriptural authority is derived from the primordial existence of their content in heavenly tablets. Both are verbatim expressions of God himself but the delivery of the revelation takes place indirectly through the dictation of an esteemed and trustworthy angel.<sup>169</sup> Book of Jubilees even suggests that the Torah and the commandments were given to Moses not directly by God but by the angel of presence, the same angel that dictated the Book of Jubilees itself (BoJ 30:12). The idea of heavenly tablets, in which everything is written down, also feeds into the characteristics of the Jubilaic and qur'anic God in a similar way. He is absolutely omniscient (unlike the God of Genesis) as a direct corollary of pre-ordaining and recording everything that existed or will exist. God's judgment is categorically just because the deeds of all human beings are meticulously chronicled even though God's mercy often tips the balance in favor of salvation.

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<sup>168</sup> To give but a few examples, Adam applied the laws of purity before letting Eve into the Garden of Eden (BoJ 3:10 and he was the first one to sacrifice to God after his expulsion from the garden (BoJ 3:27). Noah was given commandments about not consuming blood (BoJ 6:7), and the feast of weeks is instituted at his time (BoJ 6:15-16).

<sup>169</sup> See 81:19-21 in the case of the Qur'ān. Muslim scholars often argue that this angel must have been Gabriel even though there is not enough qur'anic evidence for that identification except a convincing allusion to Gabriel's task as the messenger of the Qur'ān in 2:97. In the Book of Jubilees, the mediatory angel enjoys even greater attention and authority.

## Creation of Adam, Fall and Earthly Corruption Before Noah

Having examined an important cornerstone of qur'anic prophetology in view of Enochic and Jubilaic heavenly tablets, I can now discuss prophetic figures in the Qur'ān beginning with Adam and the story of his creation. The story of Adam's creation and his fall is recounted many times in the Qur'ān and the qur'anic retellings of Adam narratives differ greatly from the overall picture in Genesis. For instance, in the Qur'ān Adam's creation is separated from the primordial work of creation in six days, the initial planning of his creation and the objection of angels are brought to the forefront, Satan or Iblīs, not the serpent, plays a key role in Adam's fall and Adam instantaneously makes amends after his fall through repentance. Some of these qur'anic digressions from the Genesis account have their parallels in rabbinic and patristic sources but the Adam narratives of the Qur'ān are still largely idiosyncratic.<sup>170</sup> In the following section I will discuss the qur'anic story of Adam with respect to its implications for qur'anic prophetology.

In the Qur'ān, Adam is not only the first human being created but also the first link in the sequence of corruption-guidance-rejection-punishment that lays the ground for qur'anic prophetology. As I will show below, the qur'anic version of Adam's creation and fall provides a unique interpretation of prophetic mission and this interpretation has substantial correspondences with the Enochic and Jubilaic versions of initial creation and corruption saga.

According to the Qur'ān, God's plan to create Adam was met by criticism from part of the angels on the basis that the newly created being would cause corruption (*yufsidu*) and shed blood (*yusfiku d-dimā'*) on the earth (*fī l-arḍi*). God silences the discontent of the angels

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<sup>170</sup> For a detailed discussion of Qur'ān's Adam narrative and its parallels in Judeo-Christian literature see Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen Im Qoran*, 40ff.



through Adam's ability to name things perfectly but this passage still offers an etiological explanation or foreshadowing for the later corruption of mankind. The divine assembly witnesses another discord when Iblis refuses to prostrate before Adam as a result of which Iblis demands respite from God until the day of resurrection in order to divert humankind from the straight path.<sup>171</sup> Thus, the Qur'ān sets the stage for earthly corruption as a result of a division in the divine assembly. Prophets and scriptures are sent to undo the corruption and the bloodshed<sup>172</sup> that the human beings would cause with the instigation of Iblīs/Satan and his forces.

The Qur'ān shares the anxiety about mankind's corruption on earth with the Genesis account<sup>173</sup> but the focus in the Qur'ān is shifted from the major corruption of the deluge generation (*dōr ham-mabul*) to a concern in primordial divine assembly and from God's personal regret to an angelic prediction. In fact, many of the features of pre-Noahic corruption are transferred in the Qur'ān to the story of Adam's creation and the gravity of the deluge generation's acts is diluted as one of many recurrent corruption stories. The Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees provide a different narrative from Genesis about the buildup to the corruption of the deluge generation, - a narrative that the Qur'ān slightly modifies and fully integrates into the creation and fall of Adam.

To begin with, the involvement of angels in the assessment of earthly corruption and the separation of a group of angels from the divine assembly as satanic facilitators of corruption are both shared by the Qur'ān, the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees. Both Enoch I and Jubilees attribute the reason of corruption to the descent of some angels to the

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<sup>171</sup> 7:11-18.

<sup>172</sup> See 2:213 for an allusion to this initial corruption before which mankind was "one single nation" (*umma wāḥida*).

<sup>173</sup> See Gen. 6:6 in particular.

earth under the guidance of Azazel and Shemhazai, who taught mankind charms and incantations and fornicated with them. Then, according to Enoch I, angels Michael, Uriel, Raphael and Gabriel “look down from heaven and see much *blood being shed* upon the earth” and “all *lawlessness being wrought upon the earth*”.<sup>174</sup> In the Jubilees, the story is narrated from the voice of “the angel of the presence”, who says that “[God] bade us [i.e. angels] to bind them [i.e. corrupted angels under the guidance of Azazel and Shemhazai] in the depths of the earth”.<sup>175</sup> In short, what the angels posit as a potential danger in the creation of Adam in the Qur’ān is observed and resolved by them directly in Enoch I and Jubilees.

Shedding blood as the possible future crime of mankind gets further accentuated in the Qur’ān and the Book of Jubilees as the act that Cain turned into reality with legal consequences reflected in the heavenly tablets. In both the qur’anic and Jubilaic accounts of Abel’s murder, the anthropomorphic deity of Genesis 4:9-10 is out of the picture, and in both texts the crime of Cain has ramifications for the whole of mankind. Jubilees summarizes the event as follows:

“When he killed him in a field, his blood cried out from the ground to heaven — crying because he had been killed. The Lord blamed Cain regarding Abel because he had killed him. While he allowed him a length (of time) on the earth because of his brother's blood, he cursed him upon the earth. For this reason it has been written on the heavenly tablets (*baenta zentu taṣeḥfa westa ṣellāta samāy*): 'Cursed is the person who beats his companion maliciously'. All who saw (it) said: 'Let him be (cursed). And let the man who has seen but has not told be cursed like him'.” (BoJ 4:3-5)

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<sup>174</sup> Enoch 9:1ff: “*ḥawwaṣu mikā’ ēl wa-’ ure’ ēl wa-rafā’ ēl wa-gabre’ ēl ’ em-samāy wa-re’ yu bezuxa dama za-yetka’ āw ba-diba medr wa-k’ello ’ āmaḏā*”.

<sup>175</sup> BoJ 5:6.

Here, Jubilees inserts a Deuteronomic injunction (Dt. 27:24) to the Genesis account as a stipulation from the heavenly tablets about murder. The Qur'anic version also ends with a legal injunction that God “decreed upon the Israelites” (*katabnā ‘ alā banī isrā’ īl*, 5:32). The stipulation that the Qur’ān inserts to the story, however, is more encompassing, and it is more appropriately committed to the original storyline of angels’ prediction about corruption (*fasād*) and bloodshed: “Because of that, we decreed upon the sons of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul (*bi-ghayri nafsin*) or for corruption in the land (*aw fasādin fī l-arḍi*)- it is as if he had slain mankind entirely.” (5:32)

In Jubilees the bloodshed that the generation of the deluge caused gets further attention, and Noah commands his children to avoid the consumption of blood because “whoever sheds man’s blood and whoever eats the blood of any flesh shall all be destroyed from the earth” (BoJ 7:28, a reflection of Gen. 9:4). Although the Qur’anic ban on the consumption of blood is stripped out of a context that involves Cain or Noah, we observe that the story of Abel and Cain is narrated in Chapter 5 (*sūrat al-ma’ ida*), - a chapter that begins with a catalogue of sumptuary laws including one about the consumption of blood (5:3).

It appears that Satan’s deal with God in the Qur’ān to be given time to corrupt human beings also has Jubilaic parallels but once again the Qur’anic narrative takes place in the primordial assembly whereas the Jubilaic version moves the story to the time of Noah. According to the Qur’ān, Satan’s refusal to prostrate before Adam is followed by his expulsion from the divine presence and he runs the risk of perishing under punishment. Then he beseeches God to be reprieved until the day of resurrection (*andhirnī ilā yawmi yub’ athūn*, 7:14) and God agrees to it. In Jubilees, Noah demands after the flood that the

fallen angels (“watchers” as they are known in Enoch I and Jubilees), who lead his sons astray, be completely wiped out, and accordingly God orders the angel of presence to bind all of them. Mastema (“hatred, hostility”, a Second Temple Period appellation for Satan found in Jubilees), the chief of the watchers, beseeches God after the deluge to keep one tenth of his retinue saying:

“Lord creator, leave some of them before me; let them listen to me and do everything that I tell them, because if none of them is left for me I shall not be able to exercise the authority of my will among mankind. For they are meant for (the purposes of) destroying and misleading before my punishment because the evil of mankind is great”. (BoJ 10:8)

In addition to Satan/Mastema’s awareness of his final judgment and his request of time and aides for corruption, it seems that Noah’s concern for the survival of corrupting souls, too, is common to both the Qur’ān and Jubilees. In the Qur’ān Noah prays: “My Lord, do not leave upon the earth from among the disbelievers an inhabitant. Indeed, if you leave them, *they will lead astray your servants (yuḍillū ‘ibādaka)* and not beget except wicked ones and disbelievers” (71:26-27). Noah of the Jubilees has the same worry about the retinue of Mastema:

“You know how your Watchers, the fathers of these spirits, have acted during my lifetime. As for these spirits who have remained alive, imprison them and hold them captive in the place of judgment. May they not cause destruction among your servant's sons, my God, for they are savage and were created for the purpose of destroying. May they not rule the spirits of the living for you alone know their punishment; and may they not have power over the sons of the righteous from now and forevermore'.” (BoJ 10:5-6)

As a counterpart to the parallels between the Jubilaic-Enochic and qur'anic versions of Adam and Noah narratives, I should also mention a very fundamental point of divergence. Although the portrayal of earthly corruption until the time of Noah is very similar in Jubilees, Enoch I and the Qur'ān, the Qur'ān makes sure that the angels, or even fallen ones among them, do not directly prefigure in the corruption of mankind as they do in Jubilees and Enoch I. However, the Qur'ān does mention an episode of fallen angels in an entirely different context but with a clearly Enochic subtext. In 2:102, as part of an opaque polemic against the Jews, the Qur'ān talks about two angels called Hārūt and Mārūt that lived during the reign of Solomon (‘ *alā mulki sulaymān*). These two angels, similar to Shemhazai and Azazel of Enoch I, would get into contact with human beings and teach them magic (*al-sihr*). In Enoch I, Azazel is accused of teaching mankind all sorts of sciences and crafts including the working of metals, stones and cosmetic herbs.<sup>176</sup> Shemhazai is credited with the teaching of charms and enchantments.<sup>177</sup> To be sure, the qur'anic account of two fallen angels is inserted in a passage directed against the Jews of the time and their magical practices that they “purchased” from these two angels. The Qur'ān also locates Hārūt and Mārūt in Babylon at the time of Solomon and their names point to an Iranian or Armenian origin through Avestan mythology.<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, as Patricia Crone pointed out,<sup>179</sup> the

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<sup>176</sup> BoE Ch. 8: “And Azâzêl taught men to make swords, and knives, and shields, and breastplates, and made known to them **the metals** 〈of the earth〉 and the art of working them, and bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of antimony, and the beautifying of the eyelids, and all kinds of costly stones, and all coloring tinctures.”

<sup>177</sup> See BoE Ch. 7 and also Ch. 8 where Shemhazai is specifically mentioned in the context of all watchers and what they taught the mankind.

<sup>178</sup> William St. Clair Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qur'ân* (London, New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; E. S. Gorham, 1905), 99. Tisdall, to my knowledge, was the first scholar to argue for an Irano-Armenian origin of the story. He pointed out that the Armenian deities Horot and Morot were assistants

short passage about Hārūt and Mārūt in the Qur’ān seems to mirror the narrative of fallen angels in the Enochic and Jubilaic literature.

Finally, the qur’anic idea that Adam repented of his sin immediately after his fall is pointed out in the Book of Jubilees, albeit a bit differently. According to Jubilees, as soon as Adam was expelled from the Garden of Eden he approached God with a sacrificial offering, which was meant both as a token of repentance and as a moment of sacrificial christening for the earth on which Adam and his progeny would live from then on.<sup>180</sup> Adam’s post-fall offering is reflected in another episode of post-catastrophic offering in the Book of Jubilees in which Noah “makes atonement for the earth” after the flood by a sweet-smelling sacrifice that reaches God.<sup>181</sup> In the Qur’ān, Adam’s repentance is expressed as a verbal plea, the content of which Adam learned from God himself: “Then Adam received from his Lord words (*kalimāt*), and He accepted his repentance (*fā-tāba ‘alayhi*). Indeed, it is he who is the accepting of repentance, the merciful.”<sup>182</sup> Jubilees does not mention any explicit verbal teaching from God about repentance but, unlike Genesis, it indicates that Adam received instruction about tilling the land while he was still in the Garden of Eden.<sup>183</sup>

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of the goddess Spandaramit or Avestan Spanta Armaiti. They appear in Avesta as Haurvatat and Ameratat and in Middle Persian as Khūrdād and Mūrdād.

<sup>179</sup> Patricia Crone, “The Book of Watchers in the Qur’ān,” in *Exchange and Transmission Across Cultural Boundaries* (Jerusalem, 2013), 27–29.

<sup>180</sup> BoJ 3:27: “And on that day on which Adam went forth from the Garden, he offered as a sweet savor an offering, frankincense, galbanum, and stacte, and spices in the morning with the rising of the sun from the day when he covered his shame.”

<sup>181</sup> BoJ 6:1-4.

<sup>182</sup> 2:37.

<sup>183</sup> See BoJ 3:15 and 3:35.

## Enoch as a Prophet in the Qur'ān

Enoch is the main protagonist in Enoch I and he is a major figure in the Book of Jubilees. In view of the remarkable parallels between Enochic-Jubilaic literature and the Qur'ān, one would expect to find Enoch in the Qur'ān at least as a prophetic figure. The name Enoch does not appear in the Qur'ān but the qur'anic Idrīs is most probably the same person as Enoch of Genesis, Enoch I and Jubilees as John Reeves argued.<sup>184</sup> The only piece of information about the figure of Idrīs in the Qur'ān comes from 19:56-57: “Mention in the book Idrīs. Surely he was a righteous man, a prophet (*innahū kāna ṣiddīqan nabīyyan*). And we raised him to a lofty place (*wa-rafa' nāhu makānan ' aliyyan*).”

This short reference is in line with Genesis 5:24 where Enoch is described as having walked with God and later being “taken by him”. Both in Jubilees and Enoch I, however, references to Enoch's ascension are closer to the qur'anic phrase. Jubilees portrays Enoch as the first human being to learn writing, establish a calendar and write a testimony against the corruption of the watchers. Later on, he was “taken from amongst the children of men” and was brought up to the Garden of Eden in order to write down the judgment of worldly beings.<sup>185</sup> Enoch I's account of his ascension, on the other hand, is almost completely identical with the qur'anic one. In a first person narrative Enoch recounts what happened to him after the apocalyptic visions that he had: “And those three [white men of apocalypse] that had last come forth grasped me by my hand and took me up, away from the generations of the earth, and *raised me up to a lofty place*”.<sup>186</sup> Later Muslim sources made the connection

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<sup>184</sup> Reeves, *Bible and Qur'ān*.

<sup>185</sup> BoJ 4:23: “And he was taken from amongst the children of men, and we conducted him into the Garden of Eden in majesty and honor, and behold there he writes down the condemnation and judgment of the world, and all the wickedness of the children of men.”

<sup>186</sup> BoE 87:3.

of Enoch with the qur'anic Idrīs even stronger by arguing that Idrīs was the first man to write with *qalam*, - a quality attributed to Enoch in the Book of Jubilees.

### Abraham the Monotheist: The Pinnacle of Qur'anic Prophetology

As I mentioned earlier Abraham plays a major role in qur'anic prophetology not only as the father of many generations of righteous prophets but also as an autodidactic monotheist, who reached God with cosmological reasoning. Narratives about Abraham's individual path to one God provide the Qur'ān with leverage to make him the perfect typos for Muḥammad and to disengage Abraham's self-gained monotheistic awareness from Jewish and Christian claims. The Qur'ān often calls Abraham a *ḥanīf*<sup>187</sup> and exhorts its singular addressee, i.e. Muḥammad, to follow the *millat* of Abraham as a *ḥanīf*.<sup>188</sup> Much ink has been spilled on the meaning of the word *ḥanīf*, its use in later Muslim sources and its possible connection with the Syro-Aramaic *ḥanpā*,<sup>189</sup> but looking from the qur'anic evidence itself the theological and semantic associations of the word appear to be rather transparent.

Qur'ān describes Abraham as a *ḥanīf muslim* and denies that he was either a Jew, a Christian or one of the associationist (*mushrikūn*).<sup>190</sup> The words *ḥanīf* and *muslim* in the Qur'ān, then define the religious inclinations of both Abraham and Muḥammad with the asserted exclusion of Jews, Christians and polytheists.<sup>191</sup> Indeed, *islām* as the title of the new

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<sup>187</sup> See 3:67, 6:79, 16:120.

<sup>188</sup> 2:135, 6:161, 16:123.

<sup>189</sup> Two most recent works on the subject would be François De Blois, "Naṣrānī and Ḥanīf: Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 2002, 1–30; Sirry, "The Early Development of the Quranic Hanif."

<sup>190</sup> See 3:67, 16:120.

<sup>191</sup> See 22:78 in particular as a direct address to the community of Muḥammad as the followers of *millat ibrahīm*, whom God called Muslims: "*huwa sammākumu l-muslimīna min qabl*".



dispensation of Muḥammad appears in 3:19 as “the” religion in the sight of Allāh, *inna d-dīna ‘ indallāhi l-islām*. It is interesting to note that in the codex of Ibn Mas‘ūd the latter verse is rendered as *inna d-dīna ‘ indallāhi l-ḥanaḥfiyya*, “the religion in the sight of Allāh is Ḥanīfism”, marking the close affinity between the two terms that connected the pure monotheism of Abraham with Muḥammad’s gentile (*ummī*) prophecy.

In order to underline this perennial monotheistic connection the Qur’ān resorts to a set of narratives about Abraham that became popular in the Second Temple period. Abraham’s early years in his native hometown is not given any substantial space in the Hebrew Bible and it is even hinted that he might have been a polytheist before his covenant with God.<sup>192</sup> Beginning with the Second Temple period, and most probably with the initiative of Jubilees, narratives about Abraham’s pre-Canaan life were brought to the fore. Vanderkam argues that this addition of Jubilees to the Abrahamic lore is in line with the text’s general tendency to further enhance righteous biblical figures and to degrade the villains.<sup>193</sup> It can be argued that the Qur’ān has a similar tendency as well, and the portrayal of Abraham as a young iconoclast in both Jubilees and the Qur’ān is a reflection of this tendency. In this section, I will discuss comparatively the pre-Canaan episode of Abraham’s life in its qur’anic and Jubilaic versions.

Genesis introduces the figure of Abram with the well-known *leḳ-ləḳā* pericope<sup>194</sup> in which an already middle-aged Abram receives the divine command to leave his father’s land and go to a land that God would show him. Jubilees follows this storyline after BoJ 12:22 but

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<sup>192</sup> See Josh. 24:2: “And Joshua said unto all the people: ‘Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel: Your fathers dwelt of old time beyond the River, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor; and they served other gods.’”

<sup>193</sup> VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 110.

<sup>194</sup> Gen 12:1 lasting till Gen. 17:27.

precedes it with a fairly long narrative about Abraham's birth, his youth and the conditions that led to his journey out of *la patrie*. This narrative is framed in the context of another widespread corruption and bloodshed that was caused by Mastema and his hosts.<sup>195</sup> Jubilees thereby tells us that Abram was born into a world of perversion and polytheism and that he quickly (at the age of fourteen to be precise) "understood the errors of the earth that all went astray after graven images and after uncleanness".<sup>196</sup> In this period Abram also learns writing, spiritually separates himself from his father and starts praying to "the Creator of all things". To underline the fact that Abram was not only a devout monotheist before God but also a respected person among his people, Jubilees tells the story of how Abram got his people rid of the birds that were devouring the seeds in their fields and destroying their produce.<sup>197</sup>

Already established as a monotheist, Abram of the Jubilees then preaches in a lengthy sermon to his father Terah about the futility of idol worship: they provide no help or profit, they are dumb forms, and it is the God of heaven who created everything with his word and he is the one that deserves worship.<sup>198</sup> Terah acknowledges the truth of what his son says but reminds Abram about his people's strong connection to the idols and asks his son to

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<sup>195</sup> BoJ 11:4: "And the prince Mastema exerted himself to do all this, and he sent forth other spirits, those which were put under his hand, to do all manner of wrong and sin, and all manner of transgression, to corrupt and destroy, and to shed blood upon the earth."

<sup>196</sup> BoJ 11:15. Note that the association of polytheism with uncleanness is also important in the Qur'ān, see 9:28: "Indeed, the polytheists are unclean (*innamā l-mushrikīna najasun*) and see chapter 2 for a discussion of Qur'anic vocabulary about ritual purity and cleanliness.

<sup>197</sup> BoJ 11:17-23.

<sup>198</sup> BoJ 12:2-5: "'What help and profit have we from those idols which thou dost worship, And before which thou dost bow thyself? For there is no spirit in them. For they are dumb forms, and a misleading of the heart. Worship them not: Worship the God of heaven, Who causes the rain and the dew to descend on the earth, and does everything upon the earth, and has created everything by His word, and all life is from before His face. Why do ye worship things that have no spirit in them? For they are the work of (men's) hands, and on your shoulders do ye bear them, and ye have no help from them, But they are a great cause of shame to those who make them, And a misleading of the heart to those who worship them: Worship them not.'

keep his silence on the matter. Abram abides by his father's advice for decades, according to the reckoning of the Jubilees, but then burns down the house of the idols one night leading to his expulsion from Ur to Haran together with his father. It is in Haran that Abram experiences his astrological epiphany as a result of which God reveals him the command of *lek-lākā*:

“In the sixth week, during its fifth year, Abram sat at night — at the beginning of the seventh month — to observe the stars from evening to dawn in order to see what would be the character of the year with respect to the rains. He was sitting and observing by himself. A voice came to his mind and he said: 'All the signs of the stars and signs of the moon and the sun — all are under the Lord's control. Why should I be investigating (them)? If he wishes he will make it rain in the morning and evening; and if he wishes, he will not make it fall. Everything is under his control!.'” (BoJ 12:16-18)

This narrative about the life of Abra(ha)m before the *lek-lākā* has become popular in the Second Temple period and different variations of it can be found in various recensions in apocryphal and pseudepigraphic texts such as the Apocalypse of Abraham, Genesis Rabba, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and, much later, Midrash HaGadol.<sup>199</sup> In the Qur'ān, Abraham's early life is treated in separate sections but the overall image of his self-studied monotheism is very much in line with the Jubilaic Abram. As I will show below, some qur'anic narratives about Abraham directly mirror the account in Jubilees, and in some others the Qur'ān develops a thread found in Jubilees into a distinct narrative that matches other apocryphal texts.

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<sup>199</sup> Etsuko Katsumata, “Abraham the Iconoclast: Different Interpretations in the Literature of the Second Temple Period, the Texts of Rabbinic Judaism, and the Quran,” *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions: JISMOR* 8 (2012): 37–58.

In the Qur'ān, too, Abraham's argumentative debate about idolatry with his father is accorded a large space but in some of the qur'anic retellings of the narrative Abraham's people are also involved in the debates possibly as a direct reflection of Muḥammad's relationship with his own community. In Chapter 19 (Sūrat Maryam) Abraham is introduced as a truthful prophet (*ṣiddīqan nabiyyan*, 19:41) and then his conversation with his father is recounted. Abraham, in a tone and wording very similar to the one we find in the Jubilaic account, asks his father why he worships things that do not see, hear or provide any benefit: *idh qāla li-abīhi yā abati li-ma ta' budu mā lā yasma' u wa-lā yubṣiru wa-lā yughnī ' anka shay' an.*<sup>200</sup> He continues his address with three more phrases each beginning with the sympathetic vocative *yā abati*<sup>201</sup> so as to show his concern for the disbelief of his father. His father, however, rejects his teachings and threatens him with stoning if he does not stop preaching. Abraham, then, leaves his father saying that he will keep asking forgiveness for him. In this passage, the Qur'ān introduces Abraham's dialogue with his father without the involvement of his community and without his astrological epiphany.

Abraham's reasoning through his observation of the heavens is introduced in chapter 6 (Sūrat al-An'ām) and here, too, he begins by addressing his father about the errors of idolatry.<sup>202</sup> This time, the Qur'ān mentions the name of Abraham's father as 'Āzar.<sup>203</sup> Here

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<sup>200</sup> 19:42

<sup>201</sup> This form of address is also attested in the Qur'ān when the bound son (Ishmael or Isaac) talks to his father Abraham (37:102), when Joseph speaks to his father Jacob (12:4, 100) and when the daughters of Shu'ayb address their father (28:26).

<sup>202</sup> 6:74: "Do you take idols as deities? Indeed, I see you and your people in manifest error."

<sup>203</sup> 6:74. This appellation has attracted much scholarly attention since Abraham Geiger. Geiger's explanation for the divergence from the biblical name Terah is that the qur'anic name of Abraham's father was inflected by a Greek subtext, possibly that of Eusebius, which corrupts the name Terah into Thara and then into Athar. See Geiger and Young, *Judaism and Islam. A Prize Essay*, 98. Although this transformation seems cumbersome, I have not seen a better explanation for why the name Terah is found in the Qur'ān as 'Āzar. I should note that later Muslim scholars introduced the name Ṭārah for the father of Abraham under the influence of Judeo-Christian literature.

the Qur’ān significantly modifies and enlarges Abraham’s self-argumentation that we find in the Jubilees (BoJ 12:16-18, see above). Instead of directly realizing that the stars, the moon and the sun are all creations of one God, Abraham in the Qur’ān initially worships each one of them (in the same order as it is found in Jubilees) and becomes disappointed by their inability to persist. Then he says: “I turned my face towards the one who created the heavens and the earth (*faṭara s-samāwāti wa l-arḍi*) as a ḥanīf and I am not one of the associationists (*mushrikūn*)”. I should note that this designation of God as the creator (*faṭāri* in Ge’ez and *fāṭir* in the Qur’ān) in Abraham’s description after his epiphany is a shared feature in the Qur’ān and in Jubilees. At the end of his individual reflection Abraham is confronted by his people (*qawmuhū*, 6:80) against whom he successfully defends his non-associationist position.<sup>204</sup>

Qur’ān’s enrichment of the Jubilaic account of Abraham’s astrological epiphany should be considered one among many other re-interpretations of the story. In another apocryphal text that only survived in Old Slavonic, the so-called “Apocalypse of Abraham”, this episode of Abraham’s life is mentioned in a first-person account with a very similar logic to what is found in the Qur’ān.<sup>205</sup> However, only in Midrash haGadol, a medieval Jewish midrash from Yemen, do we find an almost verbatim retelling of the qur’anic story:

“When Abraham came forth from the cave his mind was inquiring into the creation of the world and he thought to bow down to all the luminaries of the heavens and to serve them in order that he might discover whether any of them was a god. He saw the moon whose light shone at night from one end of

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<sup>204</sup> 6:81-83.

<sup>205</sup> Apocalypse of Abraham 7:7-9: “More venerable among the gods, I say, is the sun, for with its rays it illuminates the whole universe and the various airs. Nor will I place among the gods the one who obscures his course by means of the moon and the clouds. Nor again shall I call the moon or the stars gods, because they too at times during the night dim their light.”

the world to the other and whose retinue of shining stars was so numerous. He thereupon said, 'This is God'; and he worshipped the moon at night. But when at day-break he saw the glow of the rising sun and the moon's light faded away and her strength had failed, he declared, This is not the moon's light but that of the sun and he understood that the world only existed through the sun's light. He then worshipped the sun at day. At night the sun also set and his power failed; and the moon, the stars and constellations came forth again. He said, Verily there is a Lord and a God who guides all these things."<sup>206</sup>

This story in Midrash haGadol is noteworthy as it allows us to follow the textual development of Abraham's conversion from its earliest narrative core in Jubilees to the Qur'ān and to other apocryphal traditions including the Yemeni Midrashim. As it was important to Jubilees to point that Abraham followed the law and was written down as a righteous person in the heavenly tablets long before God called him to Canaan, it was equally important to the Qur'ān to argue that Abraham was the perennial monotheist who was the ultimate typos for the Qur'anic prophet. Abraham's early conversion story through astrological reasoning served the purpose perfectly for both Jubilees and the Qur'ān, and, accordingly, this narrative gained a life of its own in apocryphal texts.

#### "We gave Jacob to Abraham": A Mistake in the Qur'ān or a Jubilatic Insertion?

Abraham's early conversion story in the Qur'ān is often followed by the confirmation of God's grace on him by giving him a line of righteous descendants.<sup>207</sup> The family of Abraham,

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<sup>206</sup> Solomon Schechter, *Midrash ha-gadol ' al ḥamishah ḥumshe Torah: Sefer Bereshit*, 1902, p. 189ff. Translation in George Herbert Box, *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1918), 92.

<sup>207</sup> See 6:84, 19:49-50, 21:72-73.

or *Āl Ibrāhīm* as the Qur'ān calls it<sup>208</sup>, is given a special status in the Qur'ān as a chosen progeny equaled only by the family of ' Imrān. God's promise to Abraham to make a great nation out of his seed is reflected in the Qur'ān with God's bestowing him a number of prophets from his offspring (*dhurriyya* in the qur'anic rendering). One curious aspect of Abraham's *dhurriyya* in the Qur'ān, however, is that there is a seeming confusion about the minutiae of Abrahamic genealogy and chronology, which led to many polemical disputations against the Qur'ān for its outward misplacement of biblical figures. Here I will discuss the patriarchal genealogy in the Qur'ān as part of qur'anic prophetology and I will argue that the Qur'ān deliberately distorts the Abrahamic genealogy for the point it needs to make and that the Qur'ān takes its cue in this distortion from the alternative accounts about the patriarchs in the Jubilees.

Immediately after the story of Abraham's astrological epiphany in Chapter 6, the Qur'ān talks about the progeny of Abraham: "And we gave to him Isaac and Jacob".<sup>209</sup> In Chapter 19, too, we find a similar assertion: "So, when he went apart from them and that they were serving, apart from God, we gave him Isaac and Jacob, and each we made a prophet."<sup>210</sup> The exact same information is found in 21:72 as well. In addition to these three instances there is an even more curious verse in the Qur'ān that further complicates the relationship between Abraham and Jacob. In 2:132, the Qur'ān mentions Abraham giving advice to his sons, and the wording of the verse implies that Jacob was in the audience as well: *wa-waṣṣā bihā ibrāhīmu banihi wa-ya' qūb*. Muslim scholars and many modern translators of the Qur'ān found the possibility of Jacob appearing in the audience of

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<sup>208</sup> 3:33 and 4:45.

<sup>209</sup> 6:84.

<sup>210</sup> 19:49.

Abraham feeble. Therefore, they opted for taking this mention of Jacob as a reference to Jacob's similar advice to his own sons much later in time. Accordingly, they vowelized the word *ya' qūb* as a nominative, i.e. *ya' qūbu*, implying that Jacob was mentioned as another figure that gave advice to his own sons; instead of putting the word in the accusative, i.e. *ya' quba*, which would mean that Jacob was one of the advisees just like the sons of Abraham.<sup>211</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that there was at least some hesitation among the schools of qur'anic recitation on this issue since one non-canonical reciter, Ṭalḥā b. Muṣarrif, is mentioned as reading *ya' qub* as an accusative.<sup>212</sup>

Nineteenth century polemicists, beginning with Geiger<sup>213</sup>, took these verses as a sign of the Qur'ān's (or, more precisely, of its author's) confusion about biblical genealogy and they argued that Muḥammad, at the early stages of his career, must have wrongly considered Jacob as the son of Abraham or of Ishmael. It is also worth noting that the Qur'ān does not name the son of Abraham that was bound to be sacrificed even though Ishmael seems to be the one intended by virtue of being his first son. Other verses in the Qur'ān seem to resolve these genealogical confusions<sup>214</sup> and later Muslim tradition fully outlined the progeny of Abraham based on Judeo-Christian literature. Nevertheless, it is curious that the Qur'ān mentions Jacob alongside Abraham, highlights the figure of Ishmael and remarkably

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<sup>211</sup> To give but a few examples from the translations: Sahih International: "And Abraham instructed his sons [to do the same] and [so did] Jacob, [saying], "O my sons, indeed Allah has chosen for you this religion, so do not die except while you are Muslims." Arberry: "And Abraham charged his sons with this and Jacob likewise: 'My sons, God has chosen for you the religion; see that you die not save in surrender.'" Hamidullah: "Et c'est ce qu'Abraham recommanda à ses fils, de même que Jacob: «O mes fils, certes Allah vous a choisi la religion: ne mourrez point, donc, autrement qu'en Soumis!» (à Allah)." Khoury: "Und Abraham hat es seinen Söhnen aufgetragen, er und auch Jakob: «O meine Söhne, Gott hat für euch die (reine) Religion erwählt. So sollt ihr nur als Gottergebene sterben."

<sup>212</sup> Recorded in Ibn Khālawayh's *Mukhtaṣar fī shawādh al-qur'ān*.

<sup>213</sup> Geiger and Young, *Judaism and Islam. A Prize Essay*, 108–9.

<sup>214</sup> See 14:39, for example, where Abraham praises God for having given him Ishmael and Isaac at an old age. Some verses list the patriarchs in a genealogical order, see 2:136 and 2:140: Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob are mentioned in this order.



sidelines Isaac. In its priorities for the patriarchal genealogy, too, the Qur'ān appears to follow an apocryphal interpretation that Jubilees promoted, albeit for a different objective.

In Jubilees, Abraham gets directly involved with the issue of which son of Isaac would inherit the birthright. He prefers Jacob to Esau and tells about his preference to Rebecca (BoJ 19:15-18). Then he invites Jacob to his presence, kisses him, blesses him and prays for him so that the spirits of Mastema would not turn him from God (BoJ 19:26-28). Later on, Jacob appears in the audience of Abraham's final advice to his sons and their children. Most importantly, Jubilees accords a large space for Abraham's final moments during which he exclusively asks for Jacob and gives him some advice, calling himself Jacob's father and calling Jacob his son (BoJ 22:16). Abraham dies, according to Jubilees, while Jacob is lying on his bosom (BoJ 23:2).

As Vanderkam argues, the Book of Jubilees accords the largest effort of character-enhancement to Jacob<sup>215</sup> and it introduces Abraham himself to the scene to assure that Jacob is the one most deserving to inherit God's promise to Abraham. Many of his deficiencies as a trickster in Genesis are wiped out in Jubilees so as to make him the true father of the Israelites. All the while Isaac's role in finding out the better heir is minimized. Furthermore, Jacob occupies the central place in Jubilaic cosmology since he comes as the 22<sup>nd</sup> generation as a symbol of God's celebration of the Sabbath after 22 works of creation<sup>216</sup> and, as some scholars argued, as an occultic reference to the 22 letters of the Hebrew

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<sup>215</sup> VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 112.

<sup>216</sup> BoJ 2:23: "There (were) two and twenty heads of mankind from Adam to Jacob, and two and twenty kinds of work were made until the seventh day; this is blessed and holy; and the former also is blessed and holy; and this one serves with that one for sanctification and blessing."

alphabet.<sup>217</sup> For this essential role that he would play, the Jubilees implies a strong corporal and spiritual connection between the self-studied initiator of the chosen seed, i.e. Abraham, and the navel of patriarchal genealogy, i.e. Jacob.

The Qur'ān picks up on the Jubilaic connection between Abraham and Jacob, and Jacob's family<sup>218</sup> enjoys a special status as a prophetic line that extends to Zakariyyā and ' Isā in the Qur'anic reckoning.<sup>219</sup> It is also plausible that the scene of Abraham's final advice in 2:132, where Jacob shows up in the audience, is inspired by its Jubilaic counterpart in Chapter 20. In this scene Jubilees and the Qur'ān make a significant amendment to Genesis by having all the progeny of Abraham near his deathbed listening to his exhortation against idolatry.<sup>220</sup> In both texts all sons of Abraham, including Ishmael, enjoy his blessing although Jacob is the one who is entrusted with the auspicious seed. Most importantly, Jubilees makes sure that Ishmael is there before his father's death, gets gifts from him before leaving to Paran and attends the funerary rites of his father. The Qur'ān, then, shares with Jubilees the polishing of Jacob's character, his strong connection with Abraham, the undermining of Isaac's role and the resurfacing of Ishmael as a significant branch of the Abrahamic family tree.

Obviously, the Qur'ān further elaborates on the importance of Ishmael as the co-builder of the temple with his father Abraham at the site of Muḥammad's message (referred to as "a secure city", *baladan āminan*, 2:126 or *al-balad al-amīn*, 90:1). Abraham and Ishmael

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<sup>217</sup> James M. Scott, *On Earth As In Heaven: The Restoration Of Sacred Time And Sacred Space In The Book Of Jubilees* (BRILL, 2005), 168.

<sup>218</sup> *Āl Ya' qūb* in 12:6 and 19:6, and *Banū Isrā' il* in many other places.

<sup>219</sup> See 19:6.

<sup>220</sup> BoJ 20:8: "And make not for yourselves molten or graven gods; for they are vanity, and there is no spirit in them. For they are work of hands, and all who trust in them, trust in nothing. Do not serve them, do not worship them, but serve the most high God, and worship him continually."

inaugurate the new temple by praying to God to provide a messenger to the inhabitants of the “secure city”<sup>221</sup> – an attempt to link Muḥammad to Abraham through Ishmael. It is only in the later Muslim tradition, however, that we observe the confident connection of the Arabs and Muḥammad to an Ishmaelite line. Jubilees foreshadows this connection with a side note saying that the sons of Ishmael and Keturah (the widow of Abraham) mingled together and they were called Arabs.<sup>222</sup> The Qur’ān, however, prefers to provide Abraham as a prophetic typos to Muḥammad instead of a genealogical forefather and posits the temple that Abraham and Ishmael built as a prototype for the sanctuary around which the prophet of the Qur’ān preached.

#### “Earlier Scriptures” and “the Scripture of Abraham and Moses”

I already mentioned the strong emphasis that the Enochic and Jubilaic traditions put on writing as a tool to safeguard the eternal laws and record the deeds of human beings. I also pointed out that the Qur’ān provides a similar portrayal of divine bookkeeping in the context of heavenly tablets. As a corollary of this obsession with writing in the Jubilees and Enoch I, we observe that the major figures in both texts are depicted as literate and as having scriptures or some sort of sacred writing at their disposal. The Qur’ān appears to follow the Book of Jubilees and the Book of Enoch in its understanding of pre-Mosaic scriptural writing.

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<sup>221</sup> 2:129

<sup>222</sup> BoJ 20:13.

In the Enochic and Jubilaic literature, Enoch himself is at the onset of the writing enterprise since he is depicted as the first human being that learned how to write<sup>223</sup> - a quality that Muslim exegetical tradition attributed to Idrīs, the Qur'anic Enoch. Jubilees implies that the written traditions of Enoch were inherited by generation after generation until they reached Noah.<sup>224</sup> Noah himself wrote down revelations that came through the angels concerning medical characteristics of herbs and entrusted all his books to his oldest son Shem.<sup>225</sup> Among the immediate descendants of Noah Jubilees mentions a son of Arpachshad called Kainan who learned how to write from his father, discovered a rock inscription left by the Watchers, and sinned by using the astrological teachings recorded in the inscription.<sup>226</sup>

In Jubilees Abraham, once again, turns out to be an important figure in the context of written scriptures. We are told that he learned how to write when he was very young (BoJ 11:16) and he was taught Hebrew, “the language of the creation”, by the angel dictating Jubilees until he was able to copy his father’s books.<sup>227</sup> In fact, Jubilees asserts that “the angel of presence” had a six-months-long instruction session with Abraham during which he helped Abraham study earlier books by and explained to him whenever he was unable to

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<sup>223</sup> BoJ 4:17-18: “He [Enoch] was the first humankind who was born on the earth who learned (the art of) writing, instruction and wisdom and who wrote down in a book the signs of the sky in accordance with the fixed pattern of their months so that mankind would know the seasons of the years according to the fixed patterns of each of their months. He was the first to write a testimony.”

<sup>224</sup> BoJ 7:38-39: “For this is how Enoch, your father's father, commanded his son Methuselah; then Methuselah his son Lamech; and Lamech commanded me everything that his fathers had commanded him. Now I am commanding you, my children, as Enoch commanded his son in the first jubilees. While he was living in its seventh generation, he commanded and testified to his children and grandchildren until the day of his death.”

<sup>225</sup> BoJ 10:13-14.

<sup>226</sup> BoJ 8:1-3.

<sup>227</sup> BoJ 12:25-27.

understand – a process similar to the instruction of Muḥammad alluded in 75:16-19.<sup>228</sup> That Abraham had the books of Enoch and Noah in his disposal is also mentioned during Abraham’s final advice to Isaac: “because this is the way I found written in the book of my ancestors, in the words of Enoch and the words of Noah.”<sup>229</sup>

As one would expect, Jubilees presents a literate Jacob, who was preferred to Esau partly because the former learned how to write whereas the latter did not.<sup>230</sup> Jubilees also suggests that Jacob had a book that contained the teachings of Abraham and that he would read from this book to his children. Joseph was able to push back the advances of Potiphar’s wife because “he remembered the Lord and what his father Jacob would read to him from the words of Abraham”.<sup>231</sup> I should note here that the Qur’ān also offers a similar reason for Joseph’s resistance to his sexual urges by saying that he would incline to her had he not seen the proof of his Lord: *wa-hamma bihā law lā an ra’ ā burhāna rabbihi* (12:24).<sup>232</sup> Joseph, however, did not inherit the writings of his father and the written teachings were passed down through the priestly line of Levi. Jubilees is not clear on the point of whether Moses had access to these books but it makes sure that he is mentioned as a literate person who was destined to become the scribe of the Book of Jubilees.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> “Do not move your tongue with it (*lā tuḥarrik bihi lisānaka*), to hasten with the recitation of the Qur’ān! Indeed its collection and recitation are upon us. So when we recited it, follow its recitation! Then, its clarification is upon us (*thumma ‘alaynā bayānahū*).” Jubilees also indicates that Abraham’s tongue was trained by the angel. Similarly, in the Qur’ān (20:27), Moses asks God to “unloose the knot from his tongue” (*wa-ḥlul ‘uqdatan min lisāni*).

<sup>229</sup> BoJ 21:10.

<sup>230</sup> BoJ 19:14.

<sup>231</sup> BoJ 39:6.

<sup>232</sup> These Jubilaic and qur’anic additions to the story in the Genesis are starkly different from the version in the Babylonian Talmud according to which the reason for Joseph’s resistance was that he saw the image of his father as soon as he felt an inclination towards Potiphar’s wife, see TB Tractate Sotah 36b.

<sup>233</sup> BoJ 47:9.

To summarize, then, the Book of Jubilees presents a written scriptural tradition that goes back to Enoch and gets handed down through generations of literate figures. Jubilees thereby insists that this tradition is much older than the laws of Moses. The Qur’ān also recognizes the existence of “earlier scriptures”, *ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*<sup>234</sup>, prior to and in addition to Tawrāt and Injīl. Qur’ān’s mention of these scriptures often occurs in early Meccan chapters, and in two cases these scriptures are referred to as belonging to Abraham and Moses. Chapter 53, one of the earliest chapters according to the traditional chronology, mentions the *ṣuḥuf* of Abraham and Moses and even seems to provide some of their content.<sup>235</sup> Chapter 87, another early Meccan chapter, ends with the phrase “this is surely in the earlier scriptures, scriptures of Abraham and Moses”, *inna hādihā la-fī ṣ-ṣuḥufi l-ūlā, ṣuḥufi ibrāhīma wa-mūsā*. In addition to these explicit references to pre-Mosaic written revelations, the Qur’ān asserts that the revelatory tradition that Muḥammad belonged to goes back to Noah.<sup>236</sup>

I should also add that, as many scholars have pointed out, the word *ṣuḥuf* (plural of *ṣaḥīfa*) that the Qur’ān uses in the early chapters for “scripture” reflect an Old South Arabian and Classical Ethiopic substratum.<sup>237</sup> In later parts of the Qur’ān, the word *kitāb* seems to have eclipsed *ṣuḥuf* as the appellation for sacred writing. It is interesting to note, however, that from the earliest times of the Qur’ān’s collection, a qur’anic codex was named as a

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<sup>234</sup> 20:133 and 87:18.

<sup>235</sup> 53:36ff.

<sup>236</sup> 4:163: “Indeed, we have revealed to you as we revealed to Noah and the prophets after him. And we revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the tribes, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David we gave the book [of Psalms].”

<sup>237</sup> Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran* (Lahore: al- Biruni, 1977), 192–94. Theodor Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge Zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strassburg: K.J. Trübner, 1910), 49–50. Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 69. For examples of the words from the root *ṣḥf* in Old South Arabian see CIH 314+CIH 954, Ir 69 and CIH 99.

*muṣḥaf*, cognate with the Ethiopic *maṣḥaf*, even though this word does not appear in the Qur'ān.

In short, the Qur'ān and the Book of Jubilees share the concept of a written scriptural tradition that predates Moses and centers around the figure of Abraham. Later Muslim tradition elaborated on the qur'anic understanding of *al-ṣuḥuf al-ūla* by adding that these *ṣuḥuf* belonged to Adam, Seth, Idrīs and Abraham. Idrīs being the qur'anic name for Enoch it is worth noting that the Muslim tradition accords a scripture to Enoch. Even though the Qur'ān has little to say about Enoch and his importance for the pre-Mosaic scriptural tradition, later Muslim sources seem to have recorded the Enochic and Jubilaic portrayal of Enoch as the person who invented writing and had his own scripture.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I attempted to answer two questions: i) how can we define qur'anic prophetology within and outside the confines of biblical prophetology (or, more properly, “prophetologies”) and ii) can we identify any specific sources or textual traditions that displayed parallels with the Qur'ān's unique take on biblical prophetology? For the first question, my answer is conditioned by the observations in the previous chapter about the “Arabianization” of biblical prophetic figures. I argue that the Qur'ān has a distinctive understanding about sacred space, historical decay and restoration, prophetic communication and eschatology. As a result, even though the qur'anic prophetic figures are mostly well-known biblical persona, their characters and stories are presented in light of the Qur'ān's unique prophetology.

Accordingly, I identified a few key aspects of this unique prophetology. I argue that the Qur'ān presents biblical persona as more or less interchangeable prophetic figures that follow one another in an endless cycle of corruption and exhortation. Their genealogical ties and historical significance are played down in order to emphasize their role as the messenger that simply brings a warning (*nadhīr*). To make sure that they are well suited for this task, their characters are enhanced and their defects are largely erased from their qur'anic retellings. Certainly, some figures such as Noah, Abraham and Moses are given a special status for their capacity as typological templates for the qur'anic prophet but a qur'anic messenger has a largely flattened character with predictable traits. In some cases (especially in the cases of Abraham and Jesus) their childhood or early life are highlighted to show that their righteous nature is pre-ordained and that in no part of their lives did they engage in “unprophetlike” behaviors. Finally, some biblical figures are portrayed with an Arabian historical and geographical bias in addition to the occasional peppering of narratives about non-biblical Arabian figures into biblical narratives.

For the second question I took into consideration a series of para-biblical sources that were elevated into a canonical status in Ethiopic Christianity. As an alternative to the oft-trailed path of rabbinical and patristic influence on qur'anic prophetology, I argued that the Enochic and Jubilaic interpretations of biblical figures could provide a direction as to why the Qur'ān had its distinctive prophetology. In this line I identified several points that the Qur'ān shares with the Enochic and Jubilaic traditions: the centrality of heavenly tablets as a trove of prophetic revelations, laws and destinies; role of prophetic figures as bulwarks against idolatrous corruption, significance of the Abrahamic line and Abraham's personal stance about idolatry and the concept of an ever-existent written scriptural tradition.



The implication here is that the context of the Qur'ān's composition might have been exposed to apocryphal and para-biblical textual traditions from Abyssinia possibly through the intermediary of their South Arabian vice-regency. Indeed, one can argue for the existence of contact between Western Arabia and Abyssinia in the pre-Islamic period and, most importantly, during the early years of Muḥammad's career. There is no substantial evidence, however, for the circulation of textual sources in the context of the Qur'ān's emergence, nor can we surely identify any textual interdependence between the Qur'ān and the sources that predate it. Therefore, I confined myself to conceptual similarities between qur'anic prophetology and the prophetology of para-biblical sources that gained prominence among Ethiopian Christians. One tangible connection between the qur'anic language and Ethiopian Christian idiom, however, is the religious vocabulary that pertains to some Christian terminological keywords in the Qur'ān. In the following appendix I will present a brief discussion of these keywords.

## Appendix - Jesus and His *Anṣār*: A Re-evaluation of Some Ethiopic Loanwords in the Qur'ān

After August Dillmann's pioneering work in Classical Ethiopic, Theodor Nöldeke, not so surprisingly, was the first scholar to offer a discussion of Ethiopic loanwords in other Semitic languages. He devoted a section of his *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* to loanwords in and out of Ethiopic (*Lehnwörter in und aus dem Äthiopischen*), and a smaller part of this section treated Ethiopic loanwords in Arabic.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, Wellhausen had already mentioned a few religion-related borrowings into Arabic from "Abyssinian" in a footnote of his *Reste Arabischen Heidentums*<sup>2</sup> but Nöldeke not only significantly enlarged Wellhausen's list but also took issues with some of Wellhausen's identifications.

Many words that Nöldeke discussed are found in the Qur'ān although he was not primarily interested in the qur'ānic loanwords. He identified around twenty qur'anic loanwords from Ethiopic many, but not all, of which could be classified as technical religious terminology: *injīl, jahannam, shayṭān, rajīm, jibt, ṭāghūt, ḥawārī, munāfiq, faṭara, tābūt, mā' ida*. Arthur Jeffery later on confirmed most of Nöldeke's suggestions and noted that Muḥammad must have learned "many words of religious significance" from people of Abyssinian origin – a point that Aloys Sprenger had hinted at earlier.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, works within the

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<sup>1</sup> Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge Zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, 46ff.

<sup>2</sup> "Abessinisch sind z. B. *ḥawārī, mā' ida, mi' rāj, minbar, munāfiq, shayṭān, rajīm.*"

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran* (Lahore: al- Biruni, 1977), 13. Aloys Sprenger, *Mohammed Und Der Koran. Eine Psychologische Studie* (Hamburg: J.F. Richter, 1889), 54. Indeed, Muslim sources suggest that Muḥammad had some knowledge of classical Ethiopic. They even narrate a heartwarming story of the prophet's encounter with a girl among the children of Abyssinian emigrants who showed him a yellow dress that she got during his family's exile in Abyssinia. Muḥammad responded by saying "sana, sana" meaning "nice, nice" in Ethiopic (*šannay*).

Qur'anic *fremdwörter* genre often pointed out possible words of Ethiopic origin in the Qur'ān although none of these works were as detailed as Nöldeke's treatment of Ethiopic loanwords.

In this early period of burgeoning Western scholarship on the Qur'ān, the significance of the Ethiopic connection to the Qur'ān and to the rise of Islam was taken for granted but not much work has been done to explore this connection since then. All the while, scholarship on Ethiopian languages and Ethiopic Christianity has grown and, as a result, some of the findings of Nöldeke and his peers have been largely outdated. Wolf Leslau's monograph *Arabic Loanwords in Ethiopic Semitic*, for instance, suggests that for some of the words that Nöldeke identified as Ethiopic borrowings into Arabic the direction of borrowing was actually the opposite.<sup>4</sup> Recently, Manfred Kropp, in his conference proceeding at Notre Dame University, talked about an exciting project about Ethiopian influence on the Qur'ān's language and provided some preliminary notes from his research.<sup>5</sup>

It is difficult to gauge how much religious and cultural contact has existed between the Qur'ān's Arabia and Christian Ethiopia even though there is considerable evidence for a politico-military contact. Therefore, any evaluation of the Qur'ān's "indebtedness" to Ethiopian Christianity can only be possibly done through an analysis of textual and lexical interdependence. However, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, the documentary evidence for Ge'ez religious texts earlier than late middle ages is very scarce and, this makes it very difficult to present any meaningful study of religious interaction between Arabia and Ethiopia during and before the rise of Islam.

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<sup>4</sup> Wolf Leslau, *Arabic Loanwords in Ethiopian Semitic* (Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1990), 58ff. Most important examples here are *shayṭān* and *jahannam*, which Leslau thinks came to Ge'ez from Arabic.

<sup>5</sup> Manfred Kropp, "Beyond Single Words: Mā' ida-Shayṭān-Jibt and Ṭāghūt. Mechanisms of Transmission into the Ethiopic Bible and the Qur'ānic Text," in *Qur'ān in Its Historical Context* (Routledge, 2008), 204–16.

We can, nevertheless, safely assume that the Christian biblical canon and some important non-canonical works such as the Book of Jubilees, the Book of Enoch, Clementine literature and works of church orders might have already been translated into Ge'ez before the emergence of the Qur'ān and reached the Arabian peninsula with the Abyssinian invasion of Saba' and Ḥimyar. Pre-Islamic inscriptions confirm the introduction of Christian religious formulae into southern Arabian language but the very nature of these inscriptions is a hindrance to having a greater insight into the spread of Christian religious idiom in the Arabian Peninsula. In this excursus, I will look closely into some of the Qur'ān's Christian terminology to argue that the Qur'ān shares a great deal of its Christian technical vocabulary with Ethiopic to the exclusion of other languages that were used by the Christians of the time. I hope the following discussion will demonstrate that the qur'anic idiom concerning Christian notions betrays the circulation of Ethiopic religious vocabulary in the qur'anic milieu.

ḥawāreyā, ḥawārī, “Disciple of Jesus”

The word *ḥawārī* (pl. *ḥawāriyyūn*) in the Qur'ān is a perfect example of technical Christian vocabulary as it is only used in the context of Jesus and his companions. To be precise, the singular form *ḥawārī* is never found in the Qur'ān, and all five attestations are in the nominative and oblique forms of the plural, i.e. *ḥawāriyyūn*<sup>6</sup> or *ḥawāriyyīn*<sup>7</sup>. In three of these attestations the context is Jesus' appeal to the apostles asking them, “Who are my helpers (on my way) to God?”, *man anṣārī ilā l-llāh*. The apostles answer and say that they are the

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<sup>6</sup> 3:52, 5:112, 61:14.

<sup>7</sup> 5:111, 61:14.

helpers of God, *naḥnu anṣārullāh*. This episode, otherwise unparalleled in Christian tradition, seems to be an aetiological remark for why Christians are called *al-naṣārā* in the Qur’ān. Other two attestations are found in a curious episode during which apostles ask Jesus to demand a table (*mā’ ida*) from God to feast and enjoy themselves. I will discuss this episode below in the section about the word *mā’ ida*.

Scholars of the Qur’ān quickly noticed that the word *ḥawārī* in the Qur’ān is an Ethiopic borrowing.<sup>8</sup> The Ethiopic original *ḥawāreyā* developed out of the agent noun for the verb *ḥora*, “to walk”, whereby the word *ḥawāreyā* would come to mean “traveler, messenger, envoy, apostle”.<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that the Qur’ān uses this word to specifically denote apostles of Jesus instead of either *mursal*, a uniquely qur’anic word that is used elsewhere for “apostle or envoy”, or any other word related to the Aramaic and Syriac *šliḥā*. Obviously, *ḥawāreya* is a translation for the Greek ἀπόστολος and is found as such in the Ge’ez translations of the Greek texts. For instance, the Ethiopic version of Didascalia Apostolorum (*Temherta Didesqelyā za-’ Abaw*) opens with the phrase “We are the twelve apostles”, *neḥna emuntu ‘ āšartu wa-kel’ ētu ḥawāreyāt*. That the Qur’ān means the close circle of twelve apostles by *ḥawāriyyūn* will be clearer with the discussion of *mā’ ida* or the Last Supper below.

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, 116. Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge Zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, 48.

<sup>9</sup> Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge’ ez (Classical Ethiopic)*, 249. The Ge’ez verb *ḥora* (to go) is cognate with the Arabic *ḥāra*, “to return” and it is used in this meaning elsewhere in the Qur’ān. However, the word *ḥawārī* is clearly a calque from Ethiopic that came into Arabic without passing through the Arabic *ḥāra*.

*mā' edd, mā' ida*, “Table, Eucharistic Offering, Last Supper (?)”

Chapter 5 of the Qur'ān, Sūrat al-Mā' ida, is named after a story mentioned towards the end of the chapter and recounted as follows:

“And when the Apostles said, 'O Jesus son of Mary, is thy Lord able to send down on us a Table out of heaven? (*an yunazzila ' alaynā mā' idatan mina s-samā*)' He said, 'Fear you God, if you are believers. They said, 'We desire that we should eat of it and our hearts be at rest; and that we may know that thou hast spoken true to us, and that we may be among its witnesses.' Said Jesus son of Mary, 'O God, our Lord, send down upon us a Table out of heaven (*rabbānā anzil ' alaynā mā' idatan mina s-samā*), that shall be for us a festival (*takūnu lanā ' iydan*), the first and last of us, and a sign from Thee. And provide for us; Thou art the best of providers.' God said, 'Verily I do send it down on you; whoso of you hereafter disbelieves, verily I shall chastise him with a chastisement wherewith I chastise no other being.'”  
(5:112-115)

This passage appears to be the Qur'ān's unique take on the Last Supper but in order to make that connection we need to further examine the word *mā' ida* here. Dillmann and others noted that the word *mā' ida* is cognate with the Ethiopic *mā' edd*, which Dillmann translated into Latin as *mensa*, “table”. It is used with this meaning in the famous money changers' narrative in Matt. 21:12, Mark 11:15 and John 2:15, as a translation of the Greek *τράπεζα*. Its connection with food and feasting is evident in the Ethiopic version of Isa. 21:5 and Ez. 23:41 as a translation of Hebrew *šulḥān*. In the Book of Jubilees, Isaac blesses Jacob's son Levi with the prayer that his table may always be filled, *tekun mā' eddeka mel' eta*.<sup>10</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>10</sup> BoJ 31:16

Ge'ez renders “the great feast” that Abraham held for the weaning of Isaac in Gen. 21:8 as *mā' edda ' abiya*.<sup>11</sup>

That the word *mā' edd* is associated with the Holy Communion and, in turn, with the Last Supper is indicated by the Ge'ez renderings of 1 Cor. 11:23 and Acts 20:7. In the former, Paul explains the spiritual basis of the Eucharist and describes how Jesus took bread and broke it during the last supper saying that it was his own flesh. In the latter, Paul breaks bread with the faithful of Troas in Macedonia. In both cases, the act of breaking bread (*κλάσαι ἄρτον*) is rendered in Ge'ez as the “blessing of the table”, *bāreko mā' edd*.

It is clear that the Qur'ān does not faithfully reproduce here the proceedings of the Last Supper. The event is described as a “festival”, *' īd* (a word used only here in the Qur'ān), indicating that the Qur'ān was aware of the ritualistic implications of the feast but there is no reference to the Eucharistic symbolism that grew out of it. One is tempted to think that the Qur'anic wording of “table from the heaven” could be understood as a euphemistic reference to the Eucharist as an act of feasting on the flesh of God. However, it seems that the Qur'ān noticeably avoids any doctrinal undertone and mentions this event as a miracle (*āya*) of Jesus.

#### *manāfeq, munāfiq, “Hypocrite, Doubter, Heretic”*

*Munāfiq* is a unique term in the Qur'ān that appears exclusively in the Medinan verses possibly as a result of new confessional definitions and alignments within the Qur'ān's community. Like *al-ḥawāriyyūn*, the word always appears as definite and in the plural form, twenty-five times in the masculine and five times in the feminine. The diminutive verbal

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<sup>11</sup> More properly *gabra mā' edda ' abiya*, “he made a great feast” as a translation of *mište gādōl*.

form (*nāfaqa*) is much rarer and appears only twice<sup>12</sup> whereas the nominal form (*nifāq*) is attested three times, all of them in Medinan verses.<sup>13</sup> *Munāfiqūn* are mentioned in the Qur’ān along with people who have a disease in their hearts (*fī qulūbihim maraḍun*<sup>14</sup>); they try to deceive God (*yukhādī‘ ūna l-lāha*<sup>15</sup>) and they often mingle with the unbelievers (*al-kāfirūn*) and associationists (*al-mushrikūn*).<sup>16</sup> They feign to accept the message of the Qur’ān but God knows that they are liars.<sup>17</sup>

Nöldeke argued that the verbal form *nāfaqa* and its agent noun *munāfiq* could not be derived from the Arabic root n-f-q and that the origin for this faith-related word should be sought in the Ethiopic *nāfaqa*.<sup>18</sup> In Ge’ez, the verb *nāfaqa* means “to divide” but it is more often used in religious terminology as “to hesitate, to doubt, to act in hypocrisy, to pretend and to be incredulous”.<sup>19</sup> As such, words from this root denote many different but related words in Greek such as *ὑπόκρισις*, “hypocrisy” in 1 Peter 2:1, *ἀσθενής*, “weak in belief” in 1 Cor. 8:10, *ἄπιστος*, “disbelief, incredulity” in John 20:27 (in the context of Thomas’ incredulity) and *διαλογισμός*, “dissension” in 1 Tim. 2:8. The agent noun, *manāfeq*, on the other hand, is found as a translation of *αἰρετικός*, “heretic” especially in the Clementine literature and the Didascalia Apostolorum.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> 3:167, 59:11.

<sup>13</sup> 9:77, 97, 101.

<sup>14</sup> 8:49, 33:12, 60.

<sup>15</sup> 4:142.

<sup>16</sup> 33:1, 48, 73.

<sup>17</sup> 63:1.

<sup>18</sup> Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge Zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, 47–48.

<sup>19</sup> Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge’ez (Classical Ethiopic)*, 388. See also Dillmann, 710.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Pell Platt, *The Ethiopic Didascalia* (London, 1834), 45, 81.



Unlike *ḥawārīyyūn* and *mā'eda*, the Qur'ānic word *munāfiqūn* obviously does not belong to the Qur'ān's Christian religious vocabulary, it rather denotes a confessional category that the Medinan believer community had to face due to the increasing number of dishonest intruders. In that regard, a uniquely Ethiopian cognate that denoted a similar category within Christian religious terminology seems to be conveniently adopted in the Qur'ān. I should add that compared with the rather cumbersome Syriac idiom for "hypocrisy" *nsiybūt afē*, literally "adopting of faces, outward appearances", Ethiopic *manāfeq* offers other semantic possibilities that have to do with "dividing" a community and causing "schisms", making it a better fit for the circumstances of the early qur'anic community. Jeffery argued that this word did not leave any traces in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and, therefore, it must have been borrowed by Muḥammad himself.<sup>21</sup> It is difficult to tell, however, whether the word was already known among pre-Islamic speakers of Arabic or not and, unfortunately, South Arabian epigraphy does not provide any lead on the issue.

*tabāhala, ibtahala, "to speak with one another, debate"*

The three words that I discussed above have already been recognized as Ethiopic borrowings in the Qur'ān and I tried to give the context of their usage both in the Qur'ān and Ethiopic texts. The next word I will discuss, however, has not received any attention from scholars as a possible loanword. I will argue here that the qur'anic hapax *ibtahala* (appears as *nabtahil*, in the first common plural subjunctive, in 3:61) is a cognate of Ethiopic *tabāhala*, meaning "to speak with one another, debate, discuss".

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<sup>21</sup> Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, 272.

The word *nabtahil* appears in the chapter of the Family of ‘ Imran within the context of Christological polemics:

“Truly, the likeness of Jesus, in God's sight, is as Adam's likeness; He created him of dust, then said He unto him, 'Be,' and he was. The truth is of God; be not of the doubters. And whoso disputes with thee concerning him (*fa-man ḥājjaka fīhi*), after the knowledge that has come to thee, say: 'Come now, let us call our sons and your sons, our wives and your wives, our selves and your selves, then let us humbly pray (*thumma nabtahil*) and so lay God's curse upon the ones who lie (*fa-naj' al la' nata l-lāhi ' alā l-kādhībīn*). This is the true story. There is no god but God, and assuredly God is the All-mighty, the All-wise.'” (3:59-62)

In this clear rejection of Jesus' divinity in spite of his miraculous birth, the Qur'ān urges the Prophet to ask his presumably Christian opponents to gather themselves and their families in order to perform the action of the verb *ibtahala* and, then, declare the curse of God on the liars. This is already an enigmatic episode and it is further complicated by the fact that the word *ibtahala*, or any other word from the root *b-h-l*, does not appear anywhere else in the Qur'ān.

Later Muslim tradition tried to make sense of this episode by equating it with a visit of Najrānī Christians to Medina so as to dispute with Muḥammad concerning his proclamations about Jesus and his divinity. At the end of their meeting, which apparently happened to be a stalemate, Muḥammad challenged the group for a performance of mutual cursing (*mubāhala*). Regardless of the validity of this claim, it is clear that the text is concerned with Christological arguments but the word *ibtahala* proved to be elusive for exegetes and lexicographers alike. There were two main lines of interpretation for this word

among Muslim exegetes. One group deduced its meaning from the following section about the curse and simply declared that *nabtahil* means *nalta' in*, “let us curse (one another)”. Tha' ālabī and Ibn Kathīr followed this line. Bayḍāwī and Zamakhsharī further claimed that *buhla* as a noun means *la' na*, “curse”. They also indicated that *nabtahil* should be understood as *natabāhal* since the action appears to be reciprocated. A second group of exegetes, on the other hand, took the word to mean “to pray earnestly, humbly”, *najtahid fī al-du' ā' , nukhliṣ al-du' ā' ilā allāh*. Ibn ' Abbās, Muqātil and al-Rāzī belonged to this camp. Naturally, lexicographers and translators of the Qur'ān followed one of the two lines in their interpretations of the word *nabtahil* in particular and the whole episode in general.<sup>22</sup> In other words, a solitary attestation in the Qur'ān determined the range of meanings that the lexicographers accorded to the word *ibtahala*.

From a comparative perspective, the root b-h-l is not common Semitic and only in Akkadian and Ge'ez do we find cognates for it. Akkadian *ba' ālu* means “to pray, to beseech”<sup>23</sup>, often followed by the name of a deity or a king. In Ge'ez, the root is very common since it means “to say” and “to speak”. The verbal form *tabāhala* is also fairly commonly attested in the sense of “to speak with one another, debate, discuss, argue, contradict one another”. For example, the conversation among the builders of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11 is preceded in Ge'ez with the phrase *tabāhalu aḥadu mesla kāle' u*, “one (man) conversed with the other”, as a translation of the Hebrew *wayyōmārū ' iṣ' el-rē' ēhū*, “and they said to one another”. Similarly, Moses and Aaron are described as “those who

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<sup>22</sup> The translation I provided above, “then let us humbly pray” is Arberry’s. Pickthall and Yusuf Ali have a similar translation. Edward Lane gives the meaning of *mubāhala* as “the act of cursing each other” and does not mention the “praying humbly” sense. According to Biberstein-Kazimirski, the eighth form (*ibtahala*) of the verb *bahala* means “to be humble and supplicant in one’s prayer” and “to implore and invoke God in fervor”. That the root *bahala* has an unrelated meaning (“to let free” a camel) in Arabic is indicated by Lisān al-‘ Arab, Lane and Kazimirski.

<sup>23</sup> CAD, B, p. 2.

conversed with the pharaoh” in Ex. 6:27 and that phrase is rendered in Ge’ez as *’ella yetbāhalewwo la-fare’ ōn*. The sense of “debate” or “dispute” is most evident in the Ge’ez translation of Mark 9:34, where twelve apostles of Jesus debate over who would be the greatest among them: *διελέχθησαν ἐν τῇ ὁδοῦ τίς μείζων*. Greek *διελέχθησαν* is rendered here as *tabāhalu ba-baynātihomu*.

Judging from the Ethiopic cognate, the context of the verse 3:61 and the prior mention of Christological disputation in Chapter 3, I propose that the Qur’anic hapax *ibtahala* does not mean “to pray humbly” or “to curse” but rather it simply means “to debate, to speak to one another”, in this case possibly in the form of a prearranged disputation. The whole verse, then, would be translated as: “And whoever disputes (*hāj̄jaka*) with you concerning him [Jesus], after the knowledge that has come to you, say: ‘Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then let us debate (*thumma nabtahil*) and call the curse of God upon liars”. The session between the Prophet and his Christian opponents, then, is not a session of mutual cursing, as Muslim sources would have it, but a session of disputation that is safeguarded by the divine curse on whomever does not tell the truth.

One problem for this interpretation would be the form of the verb *ibtahala* (form VIII) as it does not correspond directly to the reciprocal verb of Ethiopic *tabāhala*. As I mentioned earlier, however, exegetes pointed out the necessity to understand *nabtahil* as *natabāhal* (form VI) since they perceived that the action mentioned in the verse must be reciprocal. I should also add that the eighth form in Arabic is used to indicate reciprocity and group action in some cases such as *iq̄tatala*, “to fight one another”, *ikhtaṣama*, “to dispute”, *istabaqa*, “to race”.



## Epilogue - The Origins of the Qur'ān and the Problem of Sources

It should now be clear to the reader that this dissertation is directly engaged in the recent debates around the rise of Islam as a historical and source-critical problem. When we talk about the context of the Qur'ān or its emergence as a scripture that was widely circulated in the books and tongues of various peoples across a wide geography we often need to talk also about the expansion of Islam as a religion and a new political dispensation, spread alongside Arabic as the unifying language of the new rulers destined to monopolize bureaucratic and religious idiom, and the evolution of an orally delivered text into a fully vocalized and studied scripture between two covers. Yet, we also realize that the initial moment that gave rise to the Qur'ān and Islam offers us a very short window of time, with a deplorable paucity of sources by which to study it with sensible contextualization and corroboration. This leads scholars of the Qur'ān and early Islam to either resort to an isolationist explanation (a fashion that died out once we accepted the rise of Islam as a late antique event) or to search for the origins of the Qur'ān in times and places with which they are more comfortable working.

To put it differently, the scholars of the Qur'ān's origins and early Islam need to work with a virtually dark age from the historian's point of view – a period that only emerges into daylight after the earliest snippets and near-complete copies of the Qur'ān were produced around late 7<sup>th</sup> c., after Mu' āwiya left inscriptions in his name on his building and restoration projects in 670s and, finally, once the earliest great monument of Islam, the Dome of the Rock, gave the message to everyone in the region that Muslims knew who they were and that they were there to stay. When studying the period before this clearer

emergence, however, historians of Islam have to grapple the possibility of a volatile confessional identity among the early members of the Qur'ān's community (*pace* Donner), a foundational text written in a defective script with undatable copies, as well as a swift political conquest that is hard to account for. The origins of the Qur'ān, by which I mean its composition and its first attestations in writing, constitute the earliest stages of this dark age along with the obscure career of its proclaimer. In order to shed some light upon Islam's Big Bang moment one needs to put every potential piece of evidence to use. My conviction has been that once pre-Islamic epigraphic and literary materials, however small and limited in scope they might be, are analyzed along with the Qur'ān we no longer need reductionist (e.g. "the Qur'ān is a Syriac-inflected text") or isolationist hypotheses to explain the emergence of the Qur'ān.

We also need to remember that for the last couple of decades scholars working on the "dark age" have largely abandoned the use of narrative Muslim sources as the primary channel through which to compose the history of Islam's early years. There are good reasons to be suspicious about these much later sources that portray their subject matter at a remove of at least a century with a strong motive to be biased. However, the move away from Muslim narrative sources has been detrimental to our understanding of the very basics of early Islamic history. In the atmosphere of revisionist historiography all that was solid about the life of the Prophet and the composition of the Qur'ān melted into air –often including some waypoints that could otherwise be corroborated by non-Muslim sources. Through a summary of my arguments in this dissertation and through defining the problem of sources that beleaguers the field of Islam's and the Qur'ān's origins, I want to offer here a

somewhat panoramic view of what we know, what we can know and what we cannot know about the Qur'ān's original context from the sources available to us.

### The Ḥijāz Between the Nabataeans and the Himyarites

The study of Islamic origins is the perfect example of a case where history can be almost fully reduced to historiography. Once the Muslim narrative sources are bracketed – and maybe even before that – most of what we can know about the context of the Qur'ān is limited by the medium and the nature of the available sources and by our constraints in interpreting them. On the one hand, the Ḥijāz proper, and especially the cities of Mecca and Medina, offer next to nothing by way of documentary evidence. We should remember that Patricia Crone and Michael Cook's initial revisionist critique achieved its impact in part from the observation that Mecca might as well have been non-existent from the way the pre-Islamic sources construed central Arabia. Medina or ancient Yathrib, however, has long been part of an oasis network that connected Yathrib through Fadak, Khaybar, Dedan and Taymā to Madā'in Ṣāliḥ or the ancient Hegra, a major Nabataean city.

This oasis network is important for a few reasons. First, textual attestation of the existence of this ancient agricultural and commercial network is found as early as the Neo-Babylonian imperial registers. Nabonidus claimed to have subdued all the cities in this hub in the sixth c. BCE, and the southernmost station of his expedition was Yathrib, which happens to be one of the rare actual toponyms found in the Qur'ān as well. Second, some oases in this network, particularly Taymā, Dedan and Duma, provide us with precious inscriptional evidence from northern and central Arabia that we classify today under the rubric of Ancient North Arabian inscriptions. Third, and most importantly, Yathrib used to connect to the major urban centers of the Nabataean kingdom such as Petra, Bostra and



Ḥegra through the intermediary stations of these oases. From the Nabataean center of Petra, Egypt, Jerusalem, and Babylonia were in easy reach.

But who were the Nabataeans and why do they matter for the origins of Islam, especially since we know that they were absorbed by the Roman Empire four centuries before the rise of Islam in 106 CE? There are enough specimens of Nabataean inscriptions to construe a rough sketch of their language and history, and their close contact with the Roman Empire provides us with invaluable literary materials in Latin. They left impressive rock-carved structures in Petra and Ḥegra together with monumental inscriptions in an Aramaic dialect that betrays Arabic influences. We know that they worshipped al-Lāt, Manāt and al-‘Uzzā while Hubal and Dushara, not mentioned in the Qur’ān but known to early Muslim historians, were also part of their pantheon. They were busy traders, and in their heyday they controlled a large area from Madā’ in Ṣāliḥ in the Hijāz to Palmyra in central Syria. Although they surrendered their commercial empire to the Romans in the early second century it seems that their cultural influence lived on. The area north of Madā’ in Ṣāliḥ was peppered with Nabataean inscriptions dated to as late as the fourth century CE.

The most salient point of the Nabataean connection to our question, however, has to do with the development of the Arabic script. Nabataean cursive script slowly evolved into the script in which the earliest copies of the Qur’ān were written, and we have “intermediary forms” of this evolving script from the fourth century CE to immediately before the rise of Islam. The famous Namara inscription from 328 CE, commissioned by the self-sylized “king of the Arabs” Imru al-Qays, offers the earliest glimpses of a recognizably Arabic text written in a latter-day Nabataean cursive that would eventually become the script of the Qur’ān. However, intermediary forms stretching chronologically between the

Namara inscription and the Qur'ān are so few (possibly less than twenty extant inscriptions discovered to date) that a meaningful analysis of pre-Islamic Arabic in writing is impossible. Nevertheless, the Nabataean inscriptions provide our only seamless connection, as far as pre-Islamic written materials go, to the language of the Qur'ān.

Ancient North Arabian inscriptions that are found in the oasis towns of Taymā, Dedan, Duma and in the large area south of modern-day Syria provide another point of contact for the Ḥijāz in terms of written culture, but there the connection is problematic and discontinuous. Of some ten thousand extant inscriptions, only the so-called Safaitic ones are substantial enough for consequential linguistic and historical analysis for our purposes; but most of these inscriptions are personal graffiti with no dates and no significant information. They are written in a script that seems to have been derived from the South Arabian monumental script and their production appears to have abruptly ended around the fourth century CE. Oddly enough, however, the tradition of personal graffiti inscribed in the remote parts of northern Arabia reemerges with Arabic specimens in the early days of Islam, possibly as early as the time of ' Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb in 640s. While Safaitic inscribers asked al-Lāt for safety and riches, Muslim inscribers mostly asked God for forgiveness. In addition to what we can glean from the Nabataean and Ancient North Arabian inscriptions, we learn from Ptolemy and other Greek and Latin sources that tribal groups like Thamuditai (Thamūd), Arsai (al-Rass) and Oditai (' Ād) had been roaming the area between Yathrib and Petra at the same time of, or immediately after, Nabataean ascendancy.

“The city of the Prophet,” in other words, has always been on the radar of larger and more significant northern settlements. It has been mentioned in inscriptions as *ytrb*, in Strabo as *Iathrippu* and in Nabonidus' registers as *Iatribu*. Incidentally, later Muslim

historians remember Yathrib and other nearby oases such as Fadak and Khaybar as the major centers of Jewish populations in Arabia, although there is no other evidence to corroborate this. To find indisputable evidence for Jewish and Christian presence in the vicinity of the Ḥijāz one needs to look at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

South of the Ḥijāz we find the home of a continuous civilization with a tradition of writing since at least the eighth century BCE, stretching right down until the rise of Islam. Its history can be reasonably documented through thousands of monumental and dedicatory inscriptions left by local rulers, aspiring kings, and religious officials. Moreover, the shores of Yemen were at a day or two of sailing distance from Axum, which was ruled by a Christian kingdom from the fourth century CE onward. A complex irrigation system centered on the famous Marib dam helped sustain the glory of Saba' , the major kingdom of the area, with its large pantheon and its lush gardens, descriptions of which can even be found in Qur'ān. This happier part of the Arabian Peninsula whetted the appetite of the Roman imperial machine and, thanks to their military intervention, we have a fair description of south Arabia in Strabo's Geography as part of Aelius Gallus' expedition there in 26-24 BCE.

We learn from Sabaic inscriptions that a century or so before the supposed date of Muḥammad's birth, Sabaeans downsized their pantheon in favor of a single deity called *rḥmnn* in the inscriptions. We also learn from these inscriptions that a series of political events and catastrophes in the first decades of the sixth century CE unbreakably bound the destiny of southern Arabia with the eventual rise of Islam. It is at this critical juncture that the pre-history of the Qur'ān gradually becomes more tangible. In the early 520s there occurred a Jewish persecution of Christians in Najrān and Ḥafar documented both by epigraphic South Arabian and literary Syriac sources. Accordingly, inscriptions begin

speaking of *rḥmnn* as *rb yhd*, “Lord of the Jews”. The Martyrs of Najrān soon become a hagiographical entry in Christian sources and made their way into Qur’anic exegesis through the interpretation of the opaque *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* (companions of the trenches) pericope in the chapter 85 of the Qur’ān. Before long Christian Axum invaded southern Arabia to protect their co-religionists, leading to a short period of Abyssinian vice-regency in the area under a deputy named Abraha. In Abraha’s inscriptions *rḥmnn* became the Christian god mentioned next to Christ and the Holy Spirit. All the while, the great dam of Ma’rib began to cause problems as we see the inscriptions getting increasingly devoted to the repairs on the dam.

Old South Arabian inscriptions do not go further than the reign of Abraha, the last of the inscriptions dating from the 550s. Was this the end of the South Arabian glory that allegedly even attracted the attention of Solomon the king? The Qur’ān reminds its listeners about the horrible fate of Saba’ with the flood of the dyke (*sayl a-‘ arim*) or as the Sabaeans called it in their inscriptions *‘ rm myrb*, “dyke of Marib”. Abraha’s name did not resurface from the debris of the flood until Muslim commentators associated him with “the companions of the elephant” (*aṣḥāb al-fīl*) episode in the Qur’ān. He lives in the Muslim imagination as the ultimate Yemeni villain whose unsuccessful attack on Mecca announced the glad tidings of Muḥammad’s birth, thereby opening the gates for the new dispensation. Looking from the south, then, there is nearly a century-long gap that is virtually sourceless for the historian stretching from the end of Abraha’s reign to the first appearance of Arabic documentary evidence in the 640s.

#### Contributions of The Present Work

It is in this medium of unvocalized epigraphic material, doubtful historical associations and fragmentary chronology that historians need to work on the puzzle of Islam and the

Qur'ān's origins. Here the Qur'ān's own testimony as a primary source becomes all the more important especially since recent analyses have demonstrated its relatively early date.

In this dissertation, I aimed to demonstrate the Qur'ān's relationship to its supposed native context through a fragmentary but indispensable array of sources that I enumerated above. In chapter I, I argued that the Qur'ān shares its nomenclature of both approved and disapproved deities and divine attributes with demonstrably Arabian, or I shall say "peninsular", pantheons attested in the Nabataean, Safaitic and Sabaic inscriptions. Outside of the Qur'ān, al-Lāt, Manāt and al-'Uzzā had their followers in the north in Petra and Madā' in Ṣaliḥ and five "Noahic" deities of chapter 73 had their counterparts in the Old South Arabian inscriptions. 'lh of Liḥyān in the north and rḥmnn of Ḥimyar in the south found their way into the Qur'ān as the names of the single qur'anic god, to whom was ascribed many other attributes that are found ascribed to other deities in the area.

Chapter 2 demonstrated that despite the limited range of lexical data one can retrieve from personal and dedicatory inscriptions, we can still observe that the Qur'ān's religious vocabulary often had its solitary parallels in epigraphic materials from the Arabian Peninsula. To give but a few examples, looking from the angle of these materials, the name of the Prophet Muḥammad (and whether it could be read as other than a person name) ceases to be a puzzle – a puzzle that has occupied revisionist historiography for quite some time. Many qur'anic concepts that had no meaningful cognates elsewhere can be traced through epigraphic evidence. Qur'anic *hapax legomena* in the context of ritual purity find their equivalents in Sabaic and Haramic inscriptions.

The Qur'ān's awareness of its "local" Arabian history also gives us an insight into its context. I showed in Chapter 3 that outside of the biblical historical plane that the Qur'ān

inherited there is an aspect of immediacy about the Qur'ān's portrayal of local history and historical geography. The Qur'ān exhorts its listeners about the stories of perished communities on both ends of the Arabian Peninsula with uncommon details of topography, chronology and proper names. Al-Ḥijr, Thamūd, al-Rass, 'Ād, Saba' , al-Ayka, Iram are but a few of the terms in the Qur'ān's local historical geography that can be followed through in epigraphy or in the writings of Ptolemy, Strabo or Diodorus Siculus about Arabia. I also argued that in some cases even biblical narratives are juxtaposed with locally recognizable events and persona as in the case of five Noahic deities and two distinct narratives about Saba' , one biblical and the other noticeably local. The Qur'ān thereby fused its Arabian context with its Judeo-Christian heritage.

I devoted the rest of the dissertation to the latter topic: the Qur'ān's oft-debated biblical and Judeo-Christian heritage. It is obvious that the epigraphic materials from the Arabian Peninsula are mostly useless when it comes to addressing the questions of i) why the Qur'ān is infused with biblical and parabiblical materials and ii) how these materials made their way into arguably the earliest Arabic exposition or commentary of the Bible. I should also mention that much of the scholarly battle about the Qur'ān's origins has been fought on this battlefield and many attempts have been made to deracinate the Qur'ān from its Ḥijāzī Arabian soil and look for other geographic, temporal and linguistic bedrocks at its foundation. The most recent trend in this line has been the use of Syriac Christian sources as the key to the Qur'ān's biblical subtext, reinforced with the revival of John Wansbrough's revisionist outlook on the Qur'ān's origins.

Having argued in the first three chapters that the qur'anic and epigraphic evidence point to an Arabian provenance for the Qur'ān, I attempted to account for the biblical

content of the text through channels that have been seldom visited but that could explain the distinctive nature of qur'anic biblical data. To that end I analyzed the Qur'ān's prophetology in chapter 4 as an idiosyncratic formulation of biblical and sometimes non-biblical prophetic themes and figures. I argued that the Qur'ān's prophetology cannot be ultimately reduced to any Jewish or Christian derivative, rather it shows striking parallels to the retellings of biblical narratives in the Book of Jubilees and the Enochic literature –two sets of texts from the Second Temple Period that were deemed canonical in Ethiopic Judaism and Christianity. Having fully survived only in Classical Ethiopic, these texts share the Qur'ān's vision in many aspects such as the concept of heavenly tablets, human corruption on the earth, divine intervention through unblemished figures of angels and prophets, the Abrahamic monotheistic heritage, and the idea of written scriptures as the unalterable word of God.

To be sure, I do not want to argue that the Qur'ān's biblical heritage ultimately draws directly upon Classical Ethiopic sources; but I do want to provide an alternative to the oft-trod path of searching the Qur'ān's Judeo-Christian subtext in “northerly” sources. We should remember that Muslim historiography also provides some hints about a possible Ethiopic connection to the context of the Qur'ān. Although none of the following can be verified through other sources, we are told that Muslims emigrated to Abyssinia to escape persecution in Mecca before the community moved to Medina, and Muḥammad had as a very close companion an Abyssinian freed slave who also happened to be responsible for the call to prayer in the Medinan period. Just as Yathrib was connected to the north of the Peninsula through a network of oases, Mecca was in the vicinity of the coastal town of Jidda

and the city of Najrān which had maritime and land connections to southern Arabia and from there on to Abyssinia.

I aimed to further press the point of the Ethiopic connection in the Qur'ān by showing examples of the Qur'ān's Christian vocabulary and its Classical Ethiopic counterparts. I find it remarkable that the qur'anic renderings of certain key Christian terms such as "apostle," "last supper," or "hypocrite" find their equivalents in Ethiopic rather than in Syriac as the Syriacist school of the Qur'ān's origins would have us believe. In the appendix I limited myself to a few crucial examples mostly because scholars of Classical Ethiopic from Nöldeke to Leslau have already pointed out other parallels between the religious idiom of the Qur'ān and that of Ge'ez.

The image of the Qur'ān this dissertation draws, then, challenges Wansbrough's conclusions and the more recent findings of the Syriacist school about the Qur'ān's origins. I argue that the Qur'ān sustains a thematic and lexical continuity from the pre-Islamic Arabian sources that are available to us, and it owes more to the religious culture of Ancient South Arabia and Abyssinia than modern scholarship has evaluated so far. As I discussed in the introduction, this imbalance in the modern scholarship mirrors the imbalance in the early Muslim study of the Qur'ān. As a result of Muḥammad's move northward from Mecca to Medina and the northward expansion of the nascent Muslim community, the exegetical foundations of the Qur'ān were laid down in a much different environment than that of its composition. In a matter of a few decades the budding scholars of the new dispensation were studying the Qur'ān in Palestinian and Babylonian centers of learning next to Jewish and Christian experts on rabbinic and patristic texts. Kufan and Basran scholars organized the grammar of the Qur'ān's Arabic while the masorah of the Qur'ān was completed in Baghdad



in the early tenth century. Only a very small minority of early Muslim scholars hailed from the south of the Ḥijāz, and the link that connected Muḥammad to Abraha and then to Christian Abyssinia was dwarfed by the sheer magnitude of biblical and para-biblical materials that suddenly became available to Muslim exegetes and historians. I hope that this dissertation offers some redress to this double imbalance without falling into the trap of making a reductionist argument of its own about the Qur'ān's origins.

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