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The Fragment and the Whole

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The Making of Religious Texts in Islam:

The Fragment and the Whole

Edited by Asma Hilali and S. R. Burge

Gerlach Press

First published 2019
by Gerlach Press
Berlin, Germany
www.gerlach-press.de

Cover Design: Frauke Schön, Hamburg
Set by Anne Jeschke, Gerlach Press
Printed and bound in Germany

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data.
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Bibliographic data available from Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
http://d-nb.info/1184044678

ISBN: 978-3-95994-070-2 (hardcover)
ISBN: 978-3-95994-069-6 (eBook)

Contents

Acknowledgements vii

Preface ix

Introduction 1
Asma Hilali

1 Exploring the Fragment 9
Asma Hilali and S. R. Burge

2 Conceptualising Books in Mesopotamia: The Composition of Extispicy Treatises in the Old-Babylonian Period 27
Jean-Jacques Glassner

3 Modelling the Paleo-Qurʾān: Declamations, Reiterations, Fragments and Collations 35
Aziz Al-Azmeh

4 The Mobility of the Fragment: The 'Qurʾānic Variants' as an Example 77
Asma Hilali

5 Compilation Criticism: Reading and Interpreting *Ḥadīth* Collections Through the Prism of Fragmentation and Compilation 87
S. R. Burge

6 The Synchronic and the Diachronic Qurʾān: *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, Lot's People, and the Rabbis 111
Holger Zellentin

7 Isolated Qurʾānic Fragments: The Case of the Three Papyri from the Mingana Collection 175
Alba Fedeli

8 Fragmentation and Variation in the First Islamic Graffiti (1-2 C. AH) 199
Frédéric Imbert

Bibliography 221

About the Contributors 245

Acknowledgements

This volume derives from a seminar entitled *Fragmentation and Compilation: The Making of Religious Texts in Islam – A Comparative Perspective*, an interdisciplinary workshop that took place at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London in 2012 and 2013. Neither the workshop nor the volume would have been possible without the academic, human and financial support of the Institute of Ismaili Studies and the Department of Academic Research and Publications. More particularly, we would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, the head of the Qurʾānic Studies Unit at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, who actively took part in the emergence and development of the idea of the workshop, in its academic conception and the practical logistics. He has been a great support throughout. We would like also to thank Dr Farhad Daftary, the Director of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, our colleagues in the Department of Research and Publications at the Institute, and in particular our colleagues and friends in the Qurʾānic Studies Unit.

Not all of the contributions to the two workshops have been included in this volume; and so we would like to thank all the participants who took part in the discussions and debate, who accepted the risk of engaging in common interdisciplinary reflection, namely Aziz al-Azmeh, Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, Mehdi Azaiez, the late Viviane Comerro, who will be greatly missed, Jean-Jacques Glassner, Frédéric Imbert, Stefan Leder, Paolo Sartori, Guy Stroumsa, and Holger Zellentin.

The logistic aspects of the workshop were expertly administered by a number of people at the Institute and we would like to thank in particular Hena Miah, Naushin Sharif, Julia Kolb and Naz Jiwa. The preparation of this volume has also been facilitated by some of the editors of the Institute, and special thanks go to Russell Harris and Lisa Morgan, Eleanor Playton, and also to Reza Shah-Kazemi for his comments. From outside the institute, our thanks also go to David Hollenberg for his assistance and to Alba Fedeli who did not take part in the workshop, but made a valuable contribution to the volume.

Asma Hilali, Paris
Stephen Burge, London

6

The Synchronic and the Diachronic Qurʾān: *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, Lot's People, and the Rabbis

Holger Zellentin

Any scholarly attempt to understand the Qurʾān should at least include, if not be based on, the meaning of the text as it was meant to be first heard, and how it was meant to be first read. The Qurʾān was first heard from the mouth of the prophet, and it was first read when it was put to writing – first as individual passages, then as rudimentary and eventually completed sūras, and finally as the completed *Muṣḥaf*, the final edition of the collated text, which displays an increasing sense of literary self-awareness as a written text.[1] For the enterprise of retrieving the meanings of this original Qurʾān, it is tempting to try to exclude the entirety of the s*īra* and *tafsīr* literature, the lives of Muhammad and the traditional Muslim interpretation of the Qurʾān. It has often been pointed out that this literature was written over a hundred years after the prophet's death, and therefore reflects its own time more so than that of the Qurʾān. However, the attempt of excluding this literature will always be a circular, incremental, and ultimately incomplete process – the Muslim tradition, after all, has transmitted both the text of the Qurʾān and much of its meaning, often based on an impeccable philological basis. Any attempt to reconstruct the Qurʾān's original meaning, hence, can take leave from tradition only in local and tentative ways, investigating, piece by piece, the traditional understanding of each word, each semantic unit and each sūra in the Qurʾān, sifting what is historically verifiable from that which is not.

Especially over the past decade, some headway has been made in this respect by including more fully the Semitic linguistic, literary, and cultural context of the Qurʾān. Aspects of this method, which I have called elsewhere the "Syriac turn" in Qurʾānic studies, have long been pursued by traditional Muslim exegetes.[2] Some philological excesses, however, were also committed, and we have to insist on due caution when trying to understand to what extent the Qurʾānic community stood in dialogue with the Rabbis and the Church Fathers of its time.[3]

Simultaneously, we have recently seen clear advances in establishing a critical basis for a *diachronic Qurʾān*, based on the Qurʾān's inner chronology: the sequence of its sūras in their entirety or of individual segments within them.[4] Yet the very fact that nearly all modern attempts to establish a critical chronology of the Qurʾān resemble some of the traditional sequence of the sūras as presented by Muslim tradition has so far obviated any agreement on the subject matter.[5] What could serve as a basis of a critical chronology, or even of a critical reassessment of the Qurʾān's putative original composition in "Mecca" and "Medina"?

Given that the "Medinan" sūras present a rich social and legal framework, whereas the "Meccan" ones focus on eschatology, a development of the Qurʾān's earliest community roughly parallel to that of the first Christians seems more than plausible: after the success of the initial "Meccan" preaching that the end of time might come at any moment, it became evident in "Medina" that respite had been given, and therefore necessary to organise for the time being. My recent monograph on the Qurʾān's legal culture confirms and develops Goitein's suggestion that legal considerations entered the Qurʾān's early community at a late stage, but then remained part of it.[6] It therefore seems reasonable enough in this chapter to use the traditional terms and the division of the sūras into a "Meccan" and a "Medinan" phase, even if one temporarily excludes from consideration the historicity of actual localities involved (and that includes even the event of the Hijra and the Ḥijāzī context of the Qurʾān, plausible as these facts may be). I will use the terms "Meccan" and "Medinan," henceforth without quotation marks, to designate two textual layers, withholding any judgment on their geographical provenance. (I will not, however, base any argument on this separation of the two layers.[7]) At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that the only undeniable artefact we have at our disposal is the Qurʾān in its collected and redacted form, the *Muṣḥaf*, whose compositional meaning, I want to reiterate, must remain the point of departure for any inquiry.[8] Our only evidence is the final result of the process of collecting and editing the Qurʾān which culminated at the end of the Medinan period: the text as its oldest and best manuscripts have preserved it.[9] By its edition, this diachronic collection of texts has been turned into a *synchronic Qurʾān*, the *Muṣḥaf*, in which the discrete utterances (especially from the Medinan) period have been dissolved into edited sūras and these finalized sūras (from both Mecca and Medina) have in turn been rearranged according to a largely formal order (rather than according to their original chronology).[10] While we must keep returning to this relatively safe basis, it would be wrong never to leave it. Hence, I consider the use of the dia- and the synchronic approach to the Qurʾān as two complementary tools of research. It seems that the current debate between scholars exclusively subscribing to either synchronicity or diachronicity enshrines the two divergent methodological approaches to the text as if they had any value in and of themselves, above and beyond the results they provide – a view I challenge by pointing to the potential of combining the approaches.

How can we overcome the impasse dividing the field into a diachronic and a synchronic "camp"? I propose an alternative approach to the issue that, if taken up by others, may eventually lead to a broader basis for the discussion, and may hopefully be integrated into the sound philological methods that have already been established. My suggestion is as follows. If we cannot yet agree on the chronology of the Qurʾān either as a whole or within the two periods of composition, we can at least provisionally gain a better of sense of the possibility of appreciating the sychronic and diachronic aspects of specific Qurʾānic passages that emerge when reading the Qurʾān on its own, when hearing it in dialogue with other texts, and by combining these two aspects.

I first argue for the viability of a strictly synchronic *reading* of the *Muṣḥaf*. Second, I do *not* want to establish a new chronology, but I want to point to a variant possibility of establishing the sequence of certain Qurʾānic passages by considering their relationship to external texts, especially when *hearing* the text in its original setting of prophetic utterance.[11] Finally, I will discuss the difficulties of combining a synchronic reading with such a diachronic approach, introducing the notion of the Qurʾān's "secondary synchronicity.", This secondary synchronicity is created when the Qurʾān dissolves its own sūras into its own self-referential meta-historical literary reality – a reality that includes aspects of previous biblical, rabbinic and Christian tradition. I hope to be able to point to the fruit one can reap by employing and combining the literary tools of synchronic and diachronic reading strategies at the same time as minimising the *a priori* necessity of "buying into" too circular a theory of what the Qurʾān is and how it came to be--persuasive as aspects of some of these theories may be.

In detail, in order to evaluate the literary richness of the Qurʾān, one should ideally follow three interlinked interpretational steps: one, an inner-Qurʾānic and *synchronic* reading, based on an adaption of literary strategies that have proven useful related fields such as Biblical and, more directly relevant, Talmudic studies.[12] In this first step, a passage should first be defined and then read as a self-reflective unit, with special attention given to literary structure created through the repetition of words and concepts. The result of this " internal" reading should furthermore be placed in the broader context of the sūra in which the passage is recorded, as well as in the (secondary) *synchronic* context of relevant passages ("simultexts") in the entire Qurʾān.

Two, the passage under consideration should then be *heard* by placing in an "external", i.e. cross-cultural, dialogue with Late Antique Biblical culture: the Scriptural as well as the rabbinic and Syriac Christian traditions with which the Qurʾān makes its audience increasingly – i.e. sequentially – familiar. The external diachronicity, according to my hypothesis, will equally reveal aspects of the Qurʾān's internal and primary diachronicity. For all agree that the text was not pronounced all at once in the order in which we have it, yet the Qurʾān's original diachronicity in its current

literary form is superceded by its secondary synchronicity and can only be accessed incrementally and hypothetically.

Three, the results of the first two steps should then be compared and combined in the difficult attempt to begin to develop a reading that combines the internal and the external as well as the synchronic and the diachronic approach to the Qurʾān.

Ideally, these three steps would be applied to a single text. The limits of our knowledge of the Qurʾān's historical context, and more importantly those of my own analytical acumen, however, have forced me to adjust the ideal to the real. In this preliminary study, I will consider not one, but a number of interrelated text from the perspectives outlined in steps one, two and three. Moreover, in the reality of an academic "hearing" and "reading" of the Qurʾān, neat distinctions between the indicated three steps can become mere signposts, and one has to take one's liberty in adjusting method to praxis. The following discussion integrates the three steps slightly differently: an inner-Qurʾānic and *synchronic* study of Q36 *Sūrat Yā Sīn* is presented in part I, a cross-cultural and *diachronic* reading of the Qurʾānic and rabbinic Lot narratives in part II, and a contextualisation of *Sūrat Yā Sīn* in the Qurʾānic and rabbinic Lot narratives, combining the results of part I and II and attempting to integrate a synchronic and diachronic approach, in part III. The results can be summarized as follows.

In its first part, the study analyses Q36 *Sūrat Yā Sīn* with a special focus on verses 13-30, the simile of the destruction of a profligate town. I suggest that the thematic and lexical integrity, as well as the tight literary structure of this sūra suggests that it is best read as a *synchronic* composition. I present this simile first in light of its own literary structure, then in its function in the entire sūra Q36, and finally, tentatively, within the Qurʾān "as a whole" – an internal and synchronic reading. I argue that the story should be read in intimate dialogue with all of the Qurʾānic legends of God's destruction of towns, the so-called "punishment stories," with a special focus on the destruction of Lot's town (which is known, outside the Qurʾān, as Sodom). This first part of this study concludes that the simile in *Sūrat Yā Sīn* alludes in many ways to stories such as that of Lot and of the Thamūd, yet it remains a simile. It constitutes a meta-historical parable that uses historical "scriptural" specificity to establish a general (Meccan) matrix through which to understand God's destruction of towns in the Scriptural past, in the eschatological future, and in the present of the Qurʾān's contemporary Meccan audience.

In its second part, the study illustrates that throughout the Qurʾān's ten versions of the story of Lot, all from the Meccan period, one can hypothesize an incremental process of biblicising and, markedly, rabbanising of the Qurʾānic narrative. My hearing of these Qurʾānic passages is both "diachronic" and "external." The posited sequential increase of rabbinic materials allows for a simple (yet very partial) corroboration of scholarly claims about the internal sequence of *specific passages* within the Meccan sūras. Like any other hypothesis on the Qurʾān's chronology, the suggested arrangement is

circular, proving no more than it posits. Paying close attention to the literary content of the influx of the rabbinic material, and to its subsequent "qurʾānisation," will serve as control values.

In detail, the influence of *written* rabbinic texts on the Qurʾān, however, seems unlikely. Instead, we can reconstruct part of rabbinic oral discourse reflected in the Qurʾān by considering the Qurʾān's Lot narratives in comparison and contrast with, on the one hand, the Hebrew and Aramaic Biblical stories about Lot and the end of Sodom, and, on the other hand, in comparison and contrast with the Jewish and Christian exegetical tradition of this biblical story throughout Late Antiquity. The Qurʾān perpetuates the polemical employment of the Sodom stories against contemporary opponents as established by the prophets of the Hebrew Bible and reiterated in an eschatological context in the New Testament. It also teaches its audience an increasing number of biblical details, spread out over separate passages. These two combined processes I suggest calling the "Biblicisation" of Qurʾānic narrative. Likewise, the Qurʾān increasingly reflects rabbinic traditions, especially those attested in the Palestinian rabbinic Midrash *Bereshit Rabbah*, leading to what I will call the "Rabbanisation" of Qurʾānic narrative. Surprisingly, however, material found in the Syriac tradition, as iterated in Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* and Jacob of Serugh's *Homilies on Sodom*, proves only marginally pertinent to this particular narrative cycle in the Qurʾān. This fact points to the importance of the rabbinic oral tradition – in addition to the Syriac in other sūras – for any contextual approach to the Qurʾān in its own time, already in the Meccan period. At that same time as illustrating the influx of Biblical and rabbinic elements, I point to their integration into the Qurʾān's own theological context, a process I will call the "Qurʾānization" of the Biblical and rabbinic tradition.[13]

Part III of this study points to the prevailing difficulties in linking the first and the second part, integrating the synchronic and the diachronic as well as the internal and the external approach: here, the distinction between hearing and reading does not apply. In as far as the simile of the profligate townspeople in *Sūrat Yā Sīn* evokes, among other Biblical narratives, the story of Lot as told in the Qurʾān (as illustrated in part I), a contextualisation of *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* within the chronology of the Qurʾānic Lot stories (as illustrated in part II) is fruitful, though of limited precision. The margin of error within part I and II of this study is manageable; the combination of the results, however, also combines the inherent vagueness of my philological and literary analyses. A diachronic and external study of *Sūrat Yā Sīn* allows us to consider the confluence of syn- and diachronicity in more detail. Intriguingly, the simile in *Sūrat Yā Sīn* displays internal affinity not only with the specific subset of Qurʾānic Lot stories, but also with two external traditions. The Qurʾān's simile, on the one hand, has some surprising similarities with a rabbinic parable about the Sodomites' hope for intercession, yet, on the other hand, it also shares a number of

details of structure and content with a parable told by the Syriac church fathers that is original known from the Gospels, namely the story of the evil workers in the vineyard known from Matthew 21:33-46. We thus have to extend our integration of a syn- and a diachronic study of two sets of Qurʾānic texts – the simile of the proflicate townspeople and the Lot stories – to include the external and diachronic relationship of both of them. The combination of internal and external and synchronic and diachronic reading strategies thereby allows us to corroborate that the simile of the profligate townspeople in *Sūrat Yā Sīn* is exactly what it purports to be: not a recasting of a specific Jewish or Christian narrative, but a meta-historical parable whose broad echoes of rabbinic and gospel traditions show clear traces of an ongoing qurʾānisation of Jewish and Christian traditions. I will call the result of this process the Qurʾān's "secondary synchronicity," the sense it gives to its readers of being a text that always affirms and reflects all of its other parts. This process begins early on in the history of the text, yet finds its completion only with that of the Qurʾān, that is, of the *Muṣḥaf*. At the same time, the vagueness of the attempted combination in part III of the relatively clear results obtained in parts I and II shows how much work remains to be done regarding the Qurʾān's chronology, its relationship to rabbinic and Christian text, and ultimately the best literary and historical strategies to retrieve its original meaning. The tripartite approach to inner-Qurʾānic, cross-cultural, and integrative analysis, and the combination of a synchronic and a diachronic perspective therefore proves fruitful, yet only as a starting point that will need to be modified according to the requirements of each Qurʾānic passage.[14] The method here presented may thus inspire a fruitful discussion, yet it remains in need of substantial improvements which such a discussion will hopefully help to produce.

Introduction: The Destruction of Towns from the Bible to the Qurʾān

The Destruction of Towns in the Bible and the New Testament

In the Hebrew Bible, God sometimes metes out collective punishment. The destruction of the generation of the flood is followed by a promise to Noah that such acts shall cease, yet they persist on a smaller scale: victims such as the firstborns of Egypt and the members of Pharaoh's army are killed simply because they were at the wrong place at the wrong time. The story of Sodom addresses an ethical conundrum underlying such stories of collective punishment: would God destroy the righteous along with the wicked, as Abraham asks in Genesis 18:23? The Sodom narrative offers an effective narrative answer to this problem of theodicy: there actually was only one righteous family in Sodom, that of Abraham's nephew Lot, and God saved him before the destruction, just as He had saved Noah and his family from the flood.[15]

The main story of Lot and Sodom is told in Genesis, yet allusions to the narrative of the destruction of Sodom recur throughout the Hebrew Bible. Most pertinently for the Qurʾān, the prophets often employ the example of Sodom and Gomorra in religious polemics. Isaiah, for example, addresses his fellow Israelites with the words "Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah" (in 1:10); similar language can be found repeatedly in the Pentateuch and the Prophets.[16] We shall see that the Qurʾān addresses its Meccan audience in terms that equally evoke the destruction of Lot's hometown.

The Biblical paradigm of punishment presupposing guilt and rescue presupposing righteousness, built on stories such as that of Noah and Lot, had been well received among the Late Antique heirs of Biblical discourse. The Gospel of Luke, here in the rendering of the Peshitta (an Aramaic Gospel translation in closer chronological and cultural proximity to the Qurʾān than the Greek original),[17] prophesizes as follows:

> "Just as it happened in the days of Noah, such will it be in the days of the "son of man". For they were eating and drinking, and marrying women, and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed every man. And again, just as it happened in the days of Lot (*lwṭ*); they were eating and drinking, and buying and selling, and planting and building; but in the day when Lot went out of Sodom, the Lord sent down rain (*ʾmṭr*) of fire and sulphur from heaven, and destroyed them all. Such will it be in the day when the son of man appears. In that day, he who is on the roof and his clothes in the house, will not come down to take them; and he who is in the field will not return back. Just remember Lot's wife. He who desires to save his life shall lose it; and he who loses his life shall save it."
>
> Gospel of Luke, 17.24-37

Luke here connects Noah and Lot as the ones whose righteousness saves them from the fate of their wicked contemporaries; likewise, he uses the destruction in the Biblical past as a template for the future that may come to pass at any moment.

While the prophets of the Hebrew Bible spoke to apply past lessons to the present, Luke makes both future and past explicitly relevant for his contemporaries. He fuses the examples of Noah and Lot. In line with the prophetic scriptural interpretation found in Qumran and prevalent throughout the first century before and after the Common Era, Luke establishes a meta-historical equation of the Scriptural past with the eschatological future in order to change the ways of his audience. This is a strategy which we find in the Qurʾān as well.[18] Luke's strategy, of course, can be found throughout the New Testament writings. Likewise, the Second Epistle attributed to the apostle Peter, in its employment of the memory of Sodom in a heresiological

polemic against its contemporaries, preserves an even more specific aspect of the Hebrew Bible which we encounter equally in the Qurʾān. 2 Peter makes the case that God will judge the wicked and save the righteous in the following words (again based on the Peshitta):

> "And [God] did not spare the old world, but saved Noah the preacher of righteousness, with his family, eight in all, when He brought the flood upon the wicked people; and set afire the cities (*qryt*) of Sodom and Gomorrah, and condemned them with an upheaval (*hpwkyʾ*), making them an example to those who hereafter should live ungodly, and delivered righteous Lot, mortified by the filthy conduct of the lawless. For while that pious man dwelt among them, in seeing and hearing their unlawful deeds, his righteous soul was vexed from day to day. The Lord knows how to deliver from distress those who revere him, and he will reserve the wicked to be punished at the judgment day, and especially will he punish those who follow after filthy lusts of the flesh, and have no respect for authority."
>
> 2 Peter 2:5-10

Lot here appears as a righteous, even a "godly" man, whereas the sinfulness of the Sodomites is expressed with reference to sexual mores alone. We find these two tendencies towards both Lot and the Sodomites developed in far greater detail in the Qurʾān. Whereas Lot is morally somewhat ambiguous in the Hebrew Bible and the rabbis shed even more doubt about the integrity of his character as we will see, he becomes a beacon of righteousness in the Christian tradition, just as the Sodomites become an example of evil – the very concepts that mark the views about them in the Qurʾān, as Dowid Künstlinger has argued many years ago.[19]

Just as important as Lot's righteousness, however, is the fact that 2 Peter uses the example of the Sodomites for polemical purposes. While Isaiah evokes the example of Sodom in an Israelite context, in 2 Peter, the entire passage is directed against those whom he considers sexually deviant perhaps in a real, but certainly in a metaphorical way. In effect, in the opening of the cited passage, "Peter" uses the charge of sexual deviance in order to accuse the "false prophets among the people", and the "false teachers among you, who shall bring in damnable heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). Indeed, the sinfulness of the Sodomites has shifted by the time of Peter's epistle: In Genesis, their wickedness is depicted in terms of violating hospitality and threatening the angels with sexual violence. 2 Peter here equates sexual deviance, "filthy lusts of the flesh", with the doctrinal deviance of the false teachers, those who "have no respect for authority" (2 Peter 2:10). We will see that likewise, the Qurʾān, as well as the Late Antique Christian and the Rabbinic tradition, all evoke the sins of Sodom in

its polemic against religiously diverging contemporaries, equally threatening them both with the past punishment of the people of Sodom and with the eschatological "judgment day."

The Destruction of Towns in the Qurʾān

The Aramaic word for town, including the town of Sodom, is *qrytʾ* (a term shared with Jewish and Christian Aramaic which we saw in the Peshitta verses above). There is nothing specific to this term, yet it remains noteworthy that the Qurʾān, when presenting its persistent theme of the destruction of a town, usually designates it with the cognate Arabic term *qarya*. Yet the Qurʾān's narratives of destruction follow a more narrowly defined narrative paradigm than the Biblical ones.

In Q28:58, the Qurʾān has God rhetorically ask "how many towns have we destroyed", a question repeated in Q18:59, Q21:6, 11, and 95, Q22:45, Q46:27, and Q47:13. In Q15:4, the Qurʾān goes as far to assert that in due course, every town will be destroyed at some point before the end of time, a point repeated in Q17:58. The centrality of the theme of destruction of towns should be understood in light of the Qurʾān's prophetology. There is a messenger for every nation (Q10:47), and before the destruction of each town, a messenger is sent to warn it. More often than not, the citizens reject and persecute him, as epitomised especially in the recurring refrain of Q26 *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ*:

105 The people of Noah impugned the apostles,
106 when Noah, their brother, said to them,
"Will you not be wary [of God]?
107 Indeed I am a trusted apostle to you.
108 So be wary of God and obey me.
109 I do not ask you any reward for it;
my reward lies only with the Lord of the worlds.

The very same words are repeated almost verbatim in the case of four further prophets: Hūd, the apostle to ʿĀd (Q26:123-7); Ṣāliḥ, the apostle to the Thamūd (Q26:141-5); Lot, the apostle to "his people" (Q26:160-4); and Shuʿayb, the apostle to the inhabitants of Ayka (Q26:176-80). This suggests that the Qurʾān, at least initially, operated with a much more formulaic and rigid pattern through which it presented all its prophets, as Sidney Griffith recently stated.[20] Apostles tend to be presented as autochthonous: "Your Lord would not destroy the towns until He had raised an apostle in their mother city" we learn in Q28:59, a doctrine repeated in Q6:131, Q11:117 and Q26:208. God, according to the Qurʾān, is indeed committed to the sending of warning messengers as well as to the destruction of towns should their warnings not

be heeded (see Q17:16). A representative summary of the corresponding narrative matrix can be found in the opening verses of the Meccan sūra Q7 *Sūrat al-ʾAʿrāf*:

3 Follow what has been sent down (*mā ʾunzila ʾilaykum*) to you
And do not follow any masters besides Him.
Little is the reminder (*tadhakkarūna*) that you take!
4 How many a town (*qaryatin*) have we destroyed (*ʾahlaknāhā*)
Our punishment came to it at night
Or while they were taking a midday nap.
5 Then their cry,
When Our punishment overtook them,
Was only that they said:
"We have indeed been wrongdoers!"
6 We will surely question those
To whom (the apostles) were sent (*ʾursila*),
And We will surely question the apostles (*al-mursalīna*).

The consistent themes of "sending down" (*nzl*), or "sending" (*rsl*), to a town, the presence of a messenger and of a warning or reminder, succeeded by the ultimate swift and complete annihilation, emerges as a core theme in the Qurʾān, especially in the earlier, Meccan sūras.[21] At the same time, the Qurʾān presents ample narrative variants on this core theme – the narrative pattern is structurally ubiquitous, but by no means fixed. Sometimes, respite is given to the town (Q22:48), sometimes, other narratives are interwoven, as we will see with the destruction of Lot's town in Q11, Q15, and Q29 – yet the basic matrix of warning through a messenger, followed by swift destruction, remains the same. The following discussions first of *Sūrat Yā Sīn* in part I, in a synchronic perspective, and then of the Qurʾān's Lot and Sodom narratives in part II of this study, in a diachronic perspective, as well as the attempted combination of both in part III illustrate how the Qurʾān develops its narrative matrix in dialogue with itself, in dialogue with rabbinic traditions, and in dialogue with the Christian Gospels tradition.

Part I: *Sūrat Yā Sīn*

The Simile of the Profligate Townspeople

A uniqe example of the narrative of destruction of a town in the Qurʾān is the simile of the profligate townspeople in Qurʾān Q36 *Sūrat Yā Sīn* 13-30, which we will study first within the context of the sūra, and then within the context of the (Meccan) Qurʾān. After

presenting the simile, I will first illustrate how the simile relates to the sūra's introductory lines (Q36:1-12), and how the sūra guides its audience towards an appreciation of its message by repeating key themes and words.[22] In the following transliteration and translation of the simile, I italicize such repeated key words and themes.

Q36 *Sūrat Yā Sīn*	**Ali Quli Qara'i (modified)**
13. wa-ḍrib lahum	And cite for them
maṯalan ʾaṣḥāba l-qaryati	The *simile* of the inhabitants of the town
ʾidh jāʾaha *al-mursalūna*	*When* the *messengers* came to it.
14. *ʾidh ʾarsalnā* ʾilaihimu ṯnaini	*When* We *sent* to them two,
fa-*kadhdhabūhumā*	They *accused them of lying*.
fa-ʿazzaznā bi-ṯāliṯin	Then we reinforced them with a third,
fa-qālū ʾinnā ʾilaikum *mursalūna*	And they said: 'We have indeed been *sent* to you!'
15. qālū mā ʾantum ʾillā basharun miṯlunā	They said, 'You are nothing but flesh, similar to us,
wa-mā ʾanzala al-raḥmānu min *shaiʾin*	And the *Merciful One* has not *sent down anything*
ʾin ʾantum ʾillā *takdhibūna*	And you are only *lying!*'
16. qālū *rabbunā yaʿlamu*	They said: 'Our *Lord knows*
ʾinnā ʾilaikum *la-mursalūna*	That we have indeed been *sent* to you.
17. wa-mā ʿalainā ʾilla al-balāġu *al-mubīnu*	And it is upon us to communicate *clearly*.'
18. qālū ʾinnā *taṭayyarnā* bikum	They said: 'Indeed we take you for a *bad omen*.
la-ʾin lam tantahū la-narjumannakum	If you do not relinquish we will stone you,
wa-la-yamassannakum minnā ʿadhābun ʾalīmun	And surely a painful punishment will visit you from us.'
19. qālū *ṭāʾirukum* maʿakum	They said: 'Your *bad omens* attend you –
ʾa-ʾin dhukkirtum	What! If you are reminded....
bal ʾantum *qaumun* musrifūna	Rather, you are a profligate *people*!'
20. wa-jāʾa min ʾaqṣa al-madīnati rajulun	And a man came from the outskirts of the city
yasʿā	Hurrying.
qāla yā-*qaumi ttabiʿu al-mursalīna*	He said: 'Oh *my people! Follow* the messengers!
21. *ttabiʿū* man lā yasʾalukum ʾajran	*Follow* them who do not ask for any reward
wa-hum muhtadūna	And are rightly guided!
22. wa-mā liya lā *ʾaʿbudu* lladhī	Why should I not *serve him*
faṭaranī	Who has originated me?
wa-ʾilaihi turjaʿūna	And to whom you should be brought back?
23. ʾa-ʾattakhidhu min dūnihī ʾālihatan	Shall I take gods beside Him?
ʾin yuridni *al-raḥmānu* bi-ḍurrin	If the *Merciful One* wanted to cause me any distress,
lā tuġni ʿannī shafāʿatuhum *shaiʾan*	Their intercession will not avail me *anything*,
wa-lā yunqidhūni	Nor will they rescue me.
24. ʾinnī ʾidhan la-fī ḍalālin *mubīnin*	Indeed then I would be *clearly* in error.
25. ʾinnī ʾāmantu bi-*rabbikum*	Indeed I have faith in *your Lord*.
fa-smaʿūni	So listen to me!'

26. qīla dkhuli al-jannata	He was told: 'Enter the Garden!'
qāla yā-laita *qaumī yaʿlamūna*	He said: 'Alas! Had *my people* only *known*
27. bi-mā ġafara lī *rabbī*	that *my Lord* forgave me.
wa-jaʿalanī mina'l-mukramīna	And made me one of the honoured ones!'
28. wa-*mā ʾanzalnā* ʿalā *qaumihī* min baʿdihī	After him We did not *send down* on his people
min jundin mina'l-samāʾi	A host from the heavens,
wa-mā kunnā *munzilīna*	Nor what We used to *send down.*
29. ʾin kānat ʾillā ṣaiḥatan wāḥidatan	It was but a single cry,
fa-*ʾidhā* hum khāmidūna	*When* they were stilled.
30. yā-ḥasratan ʿala *l-ʿibādi*	How regrettable of these *servants*!
mā yaʾtīhim min *rasūlin*	There did not come to them any *messenger*
ʾillā kānū bihī yastahziʾūna	But that they used to deride him

The Qurʾānic verses *Sūrat Yā Sīn* 13-32, the simile henceforth called that of the profligate townspeople, forms a centre-piece of the entire sūra. The sūra's other parts relate to the simile both structurally and thematically, often by means of repeated words or phrases. To begin with a very brief example, the simile should be appreciated in line of the sūra's introductory passages. In verses Q36:1-12, the Qurʾān directly addresses its own messenger as one of "the apostles" (*al-mursalīna*, Q36:4), lamenting the obstinacy of his people (which God imposed on them). It relates that the Qurʾān is "sent down" (*tanzīl*), "that you may warn a people (*li-tundhira qawman*) whose fathers were not warned (*mā ʾundhira*, Q36:5-6)." The sūra thus introduces the terms "sending down," "warning," and "people;" these also turn out to be the key words of the simile under consideration, and of the sūra as a whole, as we will see.

Surely, the theme of God's warning to an obstinate people by his messenger, constitutes the core of the entire Qurʾān, especially of those sūras of Meccan provenance.[23] The ubiquity of the Qurʾān's central terms, however, does not preclude the possibility – or even the necessity – of availing ourselves of these terms in a structural analysis for which the Qurʾān's careful modulation and repetition of its key themes allows. Indeed, the Qurʾān's individual sūras generate meaning by repeating key themes in varying contexts, thereby inviting the audience to associate the contexts with each other within each sūra as well as between sūras.

On Method

Using repetition such as that of the roots *rsl*, *nzl*, and *ndhr* as a hermeneutic guide within a specific sūra is a useful and uncontroversial method. The following reading is largely based on using repetition of words and themes as hermeneutic signposts – as "trigger words" that invite the audience to consider jointly the various contexts in which these words occur within the same passage or sūra. Yet I will also use material

from other Meccan sūras to explain *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, regardless of whether they were first uttered earlier or later. (Medinan materials largely exclude themselves from consideration here, simply because they are far less relevant for the subject matter discussed.) This procedure, of course, has the disadvantage of flattening out the subtle development of certain themes throughout the Qurʾān; synchronic readings should not be the only means through which one reads the Qurʾān. Reading the entire Qurʾān as one self-referential text, however, can be defended as a partial method on grounds of the Qurʾān's homogeneity in its edited (i.e. late Medinan) stage, culminating in the *Muṣḥaf.* This homogeneity is constituted by the literary, thematic, and lexical coherence of the Qurʾān: no matter what our model of collection, collation, and edition of the text, at least its most rudimentary inner cohesion is apparent to any proficient reader. It is this cohesion that allows us to posit a conceptual stability at least throughout each of the two compositional periods of the Qurʾān (if not through both). This stability that suffices to explain earlier passages through later ones.[24]

A similar method of purposely – and, ideally, provisionally – bracketing the palpable diachronic features of a text is well established in Talmudic studies. Scholars as Jeffery Rubenstein have long read Talmudic passages, which contain material that also occurs elsewhere, as attempts at the "recycling" of narrative material regardless of the passages' original compositional sequence. Zvi Septimus has more recently put forward the helpful notion of the Talmud as composed of "simultexts" evoked through "trigger words" – notions that, *mutatis mutandis*, are helpful for the Qurʾān as well.[25] The Talmud, of course, is a much more heavily redacted text than the Qurʾān; recent readings of the Talmud moreover increasingly emphasize the necessity of understanding the editorial hand in terms of a degree of "authorship."[26] Yet even if the Qurʾān's editorial process is still beyond our full grasp, the text's emphasis on its supernatural cohesion (see e.g. Q4:82) is more than mere rhetoric: it goes along with the establishment, through the constant repetition of earlier themes, of what I suggest calling a sense of "secondary synchronicity". Alongside the Qurʾān's open discussion of being a successive revelation (see e.g. Q25:32), secondary synchronicity describes the creation of a *sense* of synchronicity that is already as much real as it is alleged for the simple reason that the text was created in order to suit its own rhetoric.[27] The Qurʾān, in other words, shares a notion which the rabbis apply to aspects of the Bible, namely, that there is "no earlier and no later" in it (see Bavli *Pesahim* 6b).[28] Paying close attention to the Qurʾān's repetition of themes and words may indeed help us appreciate the message of the simile of the profligate townspeople, of *Sūrat Yā Sīn* as a whole, and indeed of the theme of the messengers' warning so prominent in the Meccan parts of the Qurʾān. Such a synchronic and internal approach, to reiterate, is incomplete on its own, and far from incompatible with a diachronic and external one; the readings should rather be balanced as I will attempt to do in part II and III of this paper. Yet such synchronicity does serve as a solid starting point, as I will now try to illustrate.

The Structure of the Simile

The simile of the profligate townspeople in Q36:13-30 is itself constituted by a frame narrative, including an opening and a closure, and an interlude, both of which relate to and are indeed constituted by the theme of a revealed reminder and warning – as will see, this theme is partially expressed by using the roots *rsl, nzl*, and *ndhr*, which already appear at the beginning of the sūra.

- The first part, the opening of the frame narrative, is introduced by the verse "cite for them" (a phrase also used e.g. in Q18:32 and 45); it tells the story of three messengers who are sent to an unnamed town whose inhabitants accuse them of being imposters and threaten them with violence (Q36:13-19).
- The second part, Q36:20-27, is a dramatic interjection introduced by the appearance of a man who almost literally "interlopes" into the narrative in Q36:20. This unnamed man from "the outskirts" of the town begs the townspeople to accept the messengers. His plea functions as a short reprieve for his people. Yet he is rejected as well and "enters the garden," whereupon the frame narrative resumes.
- The third part, Q36:28-32, closes the frame narrative with the destruction of the town.

The narrative structure, in my reading, gives a very prominent position to verse 19, the perhaps exasperated complaint or question of the messengers to the townspeople "What! If you are reminded (or: "is it because you are reminded?" *ʾa-ʾin dhukkirtum*)... Rather, you are a profligate people (*bal ʾantum qaqmun musrifūna*)!" The text, by various markers, highlights that the audience should give special heed to this verse:

- Most importantly, in anticipating the broader contextualization of the simile within the Meccan sūras, we will see that the Qurʾān addresses its audience directly, using a very similar phrase: in Q43:5, the Qurʾān addresses its audience directly by asking whether God should withhold "the reminder" (*al-dhikra*) from them "because you are a profligate people" (*qawman musrifīna*). Yet already within the simile within Q36 we can see that the locution addresses the Qurʾān's implied audience.
- Namely, the apostle's reproach to the audience in the simile is phrased in a way that its urgency directly addresses all those who are listening. The two phrases that the apostles spoke before in the simile, turning to the townspeople in the second person plural, already convey a grammatically and theologically pertinent double function by directly addressing the sūra's implied audience as well. "We have indeed been sent to you"

(Q36:14) and "Our Lord knows that we have indeed been sent to you and our duty is to communicate in clear terms" (Q36:16-7) are both phrases which the Qurʾān's own messenger could have spoken himself (albeit in the first person singular). The last appeal to the simile's townspeople, then, constitutes the culmination of the messenger's discourse and of the fact that the townspeople now have been reminded. As a final appeal, again in the second person plural, its eschatological urgency will have been apparent to the sūra's intended audience – and likely to its historical audience as well.

- The centrality of the locution "if you are reminded" is furthermore highlighted by the repeated use of the theme of "warning" and especially by the repeated use of the root *dhkr* (along with the word *qawm*, "people," as we will see) in various contexts throughout the sūra, as I will illustrate more fully below. As we have seen already above, the importance of the theme of "warning" is apparent: already introduced at the introduction of *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, it is once reiterated in Q36:10, "it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them" (*ʾa-ʾandhartahum ʾam lam tundhirhum*), leading to the key phrase in 36:11: "you can only warn (*tundhiru*) someone who follows the reminder (*al-dhikra*)." The "reminder" there stood for the Qurʾān itself as well as for its call to remember the Scriptural past. The simile thus here again points to the urgency that the simile bears for its audience, who have been informed that the "reminder" is the Qurʾān itself, and that they, like the doomed people in the simile, have hereby been warned and reminded of impending doom should they not repent!
- Finally, verse Q36:19, as the simile's final address to the townspeople before the dramatic interjection afforded by the interloping man, links part one, the opening frame, to part two, the interjected narrative. Since part three of the simile constitutes a return to part one, verse 19 constitutes a fulcrum for the entire passage under consideration.

The centrality of verse 19 seems thus more than apparent; I shall continue discussing and building on its prominent function when discussing the broader context of the simile as well as in the context of the simile's relationship to the story of Lot's people, whom Lot accuses, in Q7:81, again by using the same exact extended phrase as in verse 19 in our simile.

The Simile's Inner Cohesion

In addition to connecting the simile to the sūra's introduction, the repetition of key themes and words should also guide our reading of the simile itself. The first key theme of the simile, carried on from the introductory verses, is, as so often in the Qurʾān,

the “sending” of “messengers,” both marked by forms of the verb *rsl*. The simile uses a form of *rsl* once in Q36:13, twice in 14, and once in 16. Opening a narrative frame, the words introduce and recount the simile of the “messengers” “sent” to the townspeople, indicating that they, like the Qurʾān’s own messenger in the introductory verses, indeed have a mandate from God. Then, in Q36:30, summing up the story, we learn that anytime any messenger (*min rasūlin*) came to the townspeople, they would deride him. The usage of the root *rsl*, hence, in addition to triggering an association with the sūra’s opening and with the here and now of the Qurʾān’s prophet, functions as an opening and a closure. The repetition thereby reinforces the narrative frame within the simile as laid out above: the frame that encloses the interjected part (Q36:20-27) in which a man “interlopes” the main narrative of warning and destruction.

Yet the interjected part, the story of the interloper, is fully integrated in the simile, for the theme of God’s sending also connects the frame narrative to the interjection Q36:20-27 itself. In Q36:15, the townspeople claim that God, whom they (just like the Qurʾān’s messenger himself) address as *al-raḥmān*, “the Merciful one,” “has not sent down,” *wa-mā ʾanzala*, the messengers; in effect, they say that He has not sent down *min shayʾin*, “anything.” Artfully and dramatically, the Qurʾān takes all three Arabic terms the townspeople utter in the simile’s opening part out of their mouths and uses them against the people in the interjected part, as well as in the closing part, of the frame narrative:

- In Q36:23, the “interloping man” states that the gods his townspeople take beside *al-raḥmān*, on whose intercession they hope, will not avail *shayʾan*, “anything.”
- Then, in Q36:28, God is reported as stating that “*mā ʾanzalnā*, “We have not sent down a host” to the townspeople after having sent the messenger whom they reject.

This second frame firmly integrates the main narrative and the interjected part, turning the townspeople’s derision against themselves.[29]

The integration of the interjected part into the simile is paralleled by the entire simile’s firm integration into the sūra as a whole, pointing to the sūra’s conformity to its self-understanding as a synchronically *and* a diachronically revealed text, and pre-empting the sūra’s firm integration into the redacted synchronic *and* diachronic late Medinan Qurʾān (or into the *muṣḥaf* at the very latest). To give one more example of the textual unity, we should note that the introduction of the sūra already addresses its audience *directly* as “people” (*qawm*, Q36:6) who have to heed the “reminder” (*al-dhikr*, Q36:11).” We can now see how the Qurʾān uses the simile to confront its contemporaneous Meccan audience with the memory of the destruction of a “people” (*qawm*) to whom it states that they, too, are “reminded” (*dhukkirtum*, Q36:19) and then

destroyed – the use of *qawm* and *dhkr* in the key verse Q36:19, in other words, triggers the audience's intended self-identification through its reference to Q36:6 and 11, respectively.[30] The lament of the interloping man about the fate of "my people" (*qawmī*) in Q36:26, finally, firmly integrates the simile into the sūra and the interjected part into the simile itself: as stated above, the central passage, "you are a profligate people" (*qawm*, Q36:19), ends the efforts of the messengers and leads to the interloping man's direct address to "my people" (*yā-qawmi*, Q36:20). Once the man has resigned himself to accepting his people's fate, the main narrative resumes by stating that after him, God sent down to *his* people (*qawmihī*) not a host to destroy them, but a single cry, again integrating the parts of the simile as well as emphasizing the recurring themes of "the people" and "sending down." They may have shared the man's belief in a complete eschaton at the end of time, but not in a local one before Judgement Day!

The inner structure of the simile, hence, is formed by the repetition of the roots such as *dhkr*, *rsl*, and *qwm*, "reminder," "sending," and "people," throughout the simile's two parts, and the repetition of *al-raḥmān*, *nzl*, and *shayʾin*, "the Merciful one," "sending down," and "anything." The structure created through the repetition of these terms pivots around the key verse Q36:19 – the same verse already highlighted by reading the simile in dialogue with the sūra's opening passage. This verse summarises the reminder to the profligate townspeople, whose wickedness both the three messengers and the "interloping man" cannot undo – a lesson the contemporary Meccans are advised to heed.

This brief analysis is not meant to be exhaustive, there are more repetitions that generate structure and meaning and connect the opening and the closing part of the simile to each other[31] and the interjected part to the simile as a whole.[32] Yet the synchronic analysis of the simile within *Sūrat Yā Sīn* is conducive to extending the scope of our synchronic internal analysis to the Meccan sūras as a whole, a subject to which I will soon turn.

In effect, *Sūrat Yā Sīn* as whole, in its later verses (after the simile), reaches back to the scriptural past in order to address the eschatological future (similar to the rhetoric of the New Testament we saw above). Before that, however, immediately after relating the simile of the profligate townspeople, the sūra first engages two typical Qurʾānic themes, God's administration of agriculture and of the heavenly bodies. (Both of these will be important when attempting to study the sūra in dialogue with the rabbis, in part III.) First, the immediate sequel of the text, Q36:33, introduces a new theme, the revival of destroyed land. The audience learn that God makes it into "orchards of date palms and vines" (*ʾaʿnābin*, Q36:34), so that humans can "eat of its fruit, and what their hands have cultivated" (Q36:35). This leads then to the theme of God's cosmic governance in Q36:37-40, culminating in the subservient status of the heavenly bodies: "neither it behoves the sun (*al-shams*) to overtake the moon (*al-qamar*), nor may the night (*al-layl*) outrun the day (*al-nahār*, Q36:40)".[33] After some further discussion

of the generation after Noah, the sūra then returns to the key themes of the simile, namely the destruction of the wicked, finally addressing the end of times:

> 52 They will say, "Woe to us! Who raised us from our place of sleep?"
> This is what the Merciful One (*al-raḥmān*) had promised, and the messengers (*al-mursalūna*) had spoken the truth.
>
> 53 It will be but a single cry (*ṣayḥatan wāḥidatan*), and behold, they will all be presented before Us (*jamīʿun ladaynā muḥḍarūna*).

The sūra here in two verses recalls the entirety of the simile, pointing to its centrality for *Sūrat Yā Sīn*: the truthfulness of the messengers of *al-raḥmān* here evokes the townspeople's erroneous allegation that *al-raḥmān* had sent down nothing, and the allegation that the messengers were lying in the simile (in Q36:14 and 15) is now juxtaposed with the events that prove them truthful once and for all. The "single cry" at the end of times, in verse 53, evokes the "single cry" by which the townspeople were destroyed (using exactly the same phrase, *ṣayḥatan wāḥidatan*, in Q36:29, a first simultext on which more below). Finally, the fact that "they will all be presented before Us," that is before God, recalls the rhetorical question in the simile, "have they not regarded how many generations we have destroyed before them… and all of them will indeed be presented before Us" – in effect, the sūra, in verse 53, also simultextually repeats exactly the same phrase, *jamīʿun ladaynā muḥḍarūna*, it already used in Q36:31-2, pointing once again to the sūra's sense – and reality – of literary cohesion.

A careful reading of the sūra, hence, like the simile itself, shows the typical tripartite Meccan structure illustrated by Neuwirth and many others: the introduction (Q36:1-12), addressing the Qurʾān's own audience, followed by the simile of the profligate townspeople (Q36:13-32), and a long cosmically and eschatologically oriented coda (Q36:33-83).[34] The three parts of the sūra, again like those of the simile, closely interrelate present, past, and future: the introduction addresses the rejection of the Qurʾān's own messenger by his Meccan contemporaries.

The simile indeed confronts its contemporaries with the rejection of the messengers and of the interloping man by his own townspeople, leading to the narrative of their past destruction. The sequel of the sūra, after pointing to God's agricultural and cosmic governance, turns to the future, emphasizing the eschatological punishment of all those who reject God's messengers (esp. Q36:59-65), and then turns to the themes its previous parts also address: a "reminder" (*dhikr*, Q36:69) the theme and root we saw highlighted in the opening and the simile (esp. Q36:19), the charge of impure monotheism (Q36:74) already brought against the townspeople in the simile (Q36:23, on which more below), and the theme of God's creation (Q36:71-83) which opened the sequel of the simile. The sūra as a whole, hence, hems in its Meccan contemporaries from all possible angles, evoking the Scriptural past, the eschatological

future, the presence of the messenger who addresses it, and, above all, God as the meta-historical creator and maintainer of the entire world. With this in mind, we can return to the question of the "identity" of the profligate townspeople in the context of the Qurʾān as a whole, and especially its Meccan sūras. An internal reading of the sūra alone would not do justice to the myriads of ways in which the simile constructs the profligate townspeople as both a model of and a model for the scriptural past and as a model off and a model for the Qurʾān's own audience, oblivious of the possibility of impending doom.

The Simile's Context in the Meccan Sūras of the Qurʾān

As suggested in the introduction, the broader Qurʾānic context of the simile in *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* is constituted by the Qurʾānic stories of the warning and destruction of sinful peoples. Yet in addition to the simile's role as a variant of this core Qurʾānic theme, there are many specific details which the simile shares with specific other Qurʾānic stories of destruction, especially in the Meccan sūras. As a few examples will illustrate, the simile of the profligate townspeople will have evoked, among its audience, not only the Qurʾān's core theme of the warning and destruction of towns in general, but also that of the destruction that happened in the scriptural past in particular – the simile triggers association especially with simultexts about Lot's people, the Egyptians, and the Thamūd.

A first illustrative example of how the reading of *Sūrat Yā Sīn* is enhanced by paying attention to its Meccan simultexts is constituted by the means of destruction of the townspeople in our simile, the "a single cry" (*ṣayḥatan wāḥidatan*, Q36:29) as discussed above, already emphasized within *Sūrat Yā Sīn* through the internal repetition in Q36:29 and 53. The noun *ṣayḥa* also appears in a story about the destruction of Lot's town in Q15:73 (on which more below). The Qurʾān uses the same term to designate the destruction of the town of the Thamūd, Ḥijr, in the immediate sequel of that passage (Q15:83). Likewise, in Q11:67, the same cry kills the people of Thamūd, as it does in in Q54:31. This verse (followed by a reference to Lot's people), even uses the same full term, "a single cry (*ṣayḥatan wāḥidatan*) that we saw in our simile. The term "cry" in our simile, hence, functions as a trigger word that points to the meta-historical matrix of the destruction of towns, placing the simile simultextually in a scriptural past constituted by the Thamūd and Lot's people.[35]

In addition to the Thamūd and Lot's people, the simile triggers simultexts depicting Egypt.

For example, the description of the man who comes from outskirts of the city to the profligate townspeople (*wa-jāʾa min ʾaqṣā al-madīnati rajulun*, Q36:20), triggers the simultext Q28:20, which repeats the phrase almost verbatim (*wa-jāʾa rajulun min ʾaqṣā l-madīnati*), leading the audience to understand the profligate townspeople in association with the Egyptians.[36]

As in the case of the "single cry," repetitions within the simile in *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, in addition to generating meaning within the simile, more than once trigger simultexts elsewhere in the Qurʾān. For example, the simile uses the concept of the "bad omen," uttered by the profligate townspeople against the messengers, by turning it against the townspeople. The accusation of a "bad omen" is again used equally in the case of Egypt and the Thamūd, and these repetitions in turn trigger associations to themes elsewhere in the Qurʾān, leading to a complex yet relatively stable field of cross-references.[37] I suggest that such cognate passages become simultexts that would guide the audience to construct the profligate townspeople in continuity with such peoples as the Egyptians, the Thamūd, and Lot's people.[38] As is the case in their association with the Meccans, the audience is not invited fully to identify these people with one another – yet the lessons learned from their examples stays the same. The singularity of the prophet's message accommodates the plurality of its applications.[39]

Crucially, the scriptural past and the eschatological future are not the only referent of the simile, it equally – and simultaneously – evokes the present of the Qurʾān's own messenger, as another brief example illustrates. The profligate townspeople in the simile accuse the messengers (*al-mursalūna*, Q36:13) of lying (*fa-kadhdhabūhumā*, Q36:14), and the interloping man exhorts them to follow "who does not ask for any reward (*man lā yasʾalukum ʾajran*, Q36:21). The ancient trope that the true prophet does not take a wage is well established throughout the Qurʾān.[40] The trope equally appears in Q26:164, where Lot himself declares that he himself is one of the messengers, emphasizing that "I do not ask for any reward for it" (*wa-mā ʾasʾalukum ʿalayhi min ʾajrin*) – right after his people accused them of lying (*kadhdhabat*, Q26:160), as in the simile of the profligate townspeople. Not taking a reward is also the response to the charge of lying that is also employed by Noah in Q10:72 and in Q26:109, by Hūd in Q26:127, and by the Qurʾān's own messenger in Q25:57.[41] By pointing to simultexts featuring the accusation of lying and the true messenger's refusal to accept a reward in various contexts, including that of Lot and of the messengers in the simile, *Sūrat Yā Sīn* solidifies its meta-historical narrative matrix of the sending of a messenger to a town that will reject him, leading to its destruction – an acute lesson for the hostile elements among the Qurʾān's own audience, who are thus asked to self-identify with the profligate townspeople.

The Profligate Townspeople, Lot, and the Meccans

A key aspect of reading the Qurʾān's simultexts is properly to weigh their respective *limited* significance. We have thus far seen many examples in which the people of Lot, the people of Pharaoh and the Thamūd seem to constitute simultexts of special significance for the ways in which the Qurʾān guides its audience's understanding

of the profligate townspeople in *Sūrat Yā Sīn*. Yet the Qurʾān's simultexts equally evoke the examples of Noah and Hūd, leading to the occasional impression of an entropic set of cross-references in which all stories are the same story. I think this impression is wrong. Rather, the text seems to create meaning by evoking a large number of references that are arranged in concentric circles around each trigger word, references whose pertinence is determined not so much in absolute terms – no part of Scripture can be insignificant, the rabbis would agree – as by the frequency, intensity, and precision through which they are evoked.[42] The Qurʾān evokes a complex, yet intelligible and hierarchical set of narrative references.[43] The groups which are most emphasized by the simile of the profligate townspeople, through structure, repetition, and precision of the simultexts, I would argue, are the contemporary Meccans and the people of Lot.

How can we establish such a hierarchy of simultexts? If we begin with the accusation of the "profligate townspeople" as such, we should first note that both the terms "profligate" and "people" are exceedingly common in the Qurʾān.[44] However, the precise locution hurled against the townspeople after they reject the reminder, "you are a profligate people," the key verse Q36:19 highlighted structurally as discussed above, occurs only twice more in the Qurʾān. The centrality of this verse within the simile and within *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* as a whole suggests an especially meaningful choice of words; the implied audience would therefore have understood the simile as an invitation to compare the "profligate townspeople" to two groups who are confronted with the same two words: the "Meccans" and Lot's people.

- First, importantly, in Q43:5, the Qurʾān addresses its audience directly by asking whether God should withhold "the reminder" (*al-dhikra*) from them "because you are a profligate people" (*qawman musrifīna*). The occurrence of the same exact and almost exclusive terminology, here and in our simile, is paired with the reference to "the reminder," whose paramount pertinence I discussed above. This suggests again how closely the Qurʾān links the profligate townspeople to its own audience – in the introductory verses of the sūra explicitly, and in the simile, by lexical allusion.
- Second, crucially, in Q 7:81, Lot tries to dissuade his people from coming "to men with desire instead of women," accusing them with the same exact *extended* phrase as in our simile: "rather you are a profligate people" (*bal ʾantum qawmun musrifūna*); thereupon his people want to expel him "from your (pl.) town (*qaryatikum*)." The occurrence here of the same extended unique Qurʾānic phrase, paired with the reference to "the town," suggests that the townspeople in our simile, whom the Qurʾān links to its own audience, should be understood in light of Lot's people, with similar urgency as the Meccans.

A diachronic analysis of these key lines would rely on establishing the precise order of sūras, and exclude material postdating *Sūrat Yā-Sīn*. The synchronic approach advocated here assumes that the coherence of the Qurʾānic conceptuality and lexicon constitutes a sufficient basis to use *both* passages as simultexts, thereby allowing us to understand the profligate townspeople both as models of and for Lot's people and for the contemporary Meccans. The inaccuracy inherent in the synchronic model is offset by the accumulation of pertinent evidence. The result of reading the simile within *all* Meccan sūra repeatedly emphasizes the contemporary Meccans, the people of Lot, the people of Pharaoh and the Thamūd points to the stability of associations throughout the Meccan Qurʾān.[45] The importance of the contemporary Meccans, moreover, is corroborated by the opening lines of *Sūrat Yā-Sīn*, whereas the simile's evocation of simultexts about Lot's people can be illustrated in greater detail.

The designation of Lot's people as a "profligate people" in its particular juxtaposition of different types of "sinfulness" and "people," to begin with, is a common way in which the Qurʾān describes the people of Lot. In Q26:166, Lot's people are addressed with the words: "rather, you are a transgressing people" (*bal ʾantum qawmun ʿādūna*), also because of sex between men which the Qurʾān considers sinful (as in Q7:81).[46] Homosexuality, perceived as aberration, is likewise the apparent reason for Lot's people being designated as "corruptive people" (*al-qawmi'l-mufsidīna*) in Q29:30, a term repeated in Q21:74, when Lot's people are called "an evil and violent people (*qawma sawʾin fāsiqīna*). Q15:58 designates Lot's people as a "sinful people" (*qawmin mujrimīna*) without specifying their sin; the same term is also applied to them in Q51:32. The Qurʾān, in other words, regularly, though not exclusively, uses the simile's grammatical construct of juxtaposing some type of "sinfulness" and "people" to describe Lot's kin – not an exclusive, but a prominent designation for them.[47] Lot's people seem to constitute an archetype of the sinful people, in comparison with whom other destroyed people seem to pale in comparison. I suggest, therefore, that the fate of Lot's people, as described in part II of this study, will collectively serve as one of the most prominent simultexts for the simile, though not the only one, as I will argue also in part III.

Hence, the specific overlap of verse Q36:19 with an address to Lot's people, and other lexical affinities to Lot's story suggest that the Qurʾān wants its audience to understand the profligate townspeople in the simile by linking them to scriptural precedents, especially (though not exclusively) to its simultexts that describe Lot's people, as well as to those persons whom it addresses as its (Meccan) audience. Like the New Testament and like Late Antique Jews and Christians, the Qurʾān thereby fuses the charges of sexual and religious aberration, as I will discuss below in more detail. At the same time, we must be careful not to over-read the Qurʾān's use of themes and language preserved in such simultexts; the lexical overlaps invite the audience (and that includes us) to compare, but not fully to identify the townspeople with either group.

To conclude this part of this study, the Qurʾān creates a strong sense of synchronicity, of being an eternal and timeless part of the heavenly book, by using such simultexts: this is its feature that I suggested depicting in terms of "secondary synchronicity" which culminates in the later Medinan collection (and likely partial redaction) of the Qurʾān. Its simultexts are both specific and general, thereby weaving a large web of hierarchically differentiated cross-references. The Qurʾān comes close to explicating the synchronicity of its narratives. For example, the townspeople in the simile accuse the messengers – as is typical in the Qurʾān – of being "nothing but flesh, similar to us" (*qālū mā ʾantum ʾillā basharun mithlunā*, Q36:15). The same sentence is uttered *collectively* and almost verbatim by the people of Noah, ʿĀd and Ṯamūd (*qālū ʾin ʾantum ʾillā basharun miṯlunā*, Q14:10, their respective messengers affirm this in Q14:11). The individual stories of these people varies, yet their accusations, and the lesson the audience is expected to derive from their fate, is the same in every instance. There is, then, not much of an earlier or later in the Meccan Qurʾān-at least in its edited form, and certainly not in its self-presentation.

In part II of this article, I will now trace the *diachronic* development of the Qurʾān's various stories of Lot's people directly, hypothesizing that throughout the Meccan sūras, the Qurʾān biblicises and rabbanises the Lot story all the while continuing to develop its own themes independently. I will pay special attention, in the analysis of Lot narratives, to elements that may well function as simultexts to *Sūrat Yā-Sīn*, to which I will then return in part III when seeking to integrate the findings of part I and II of this study.

Part II: The Qurʾānic Lot Narratives

Part I of this study considered *Sūrat Yā-Sīn*, and especially the simile of the profligate townspeople, arguing for the validity of *reading* the Qurʾān in a largely synchronic perspective. This second part will consider the Qurʾān's story of Lot and the destruction of his town, arguing for the validity of *hearing* the Qurʾān diachronically, seeking to recreate aspects of the sequential experience of the texts first historical audience. The suggested way to approach this audience, about which we know very little, is to focus on the Qurʾān's *implied* audience. Crudely put, we do know that the Qurʾān made some sense to its audience – so much so that Islam thrived based on a new Scripture. The Qurʾān also records the broad range of its own reception, ranging from the warm welcome of the faithful to the incredulous dismissal of their opponents. Based on this interaction, we can surmise, on the one hand, that this implied audience has some sense of the Jewish and Christian tradition, and on the other hand that the Qurʾān introduced new and differently cast Biblical materials to this audience. I will, in the sequel, first give a brief overview over the Biblical story of Lot in its Aramaic

and Syriac renderings. I will then argue for three subsequent categories in which to place all eight Qurʾānic passages providing information about the events leading up to the destruction of Lot's people and his town, unnamed in the Qurʾān and known as Sodom in the Jewish, Christian, and later Muslim tradition.

Lot and Sodom in the Bible and in the Aramaic Translations

A brief summary of the narrative of Lot in the Hebrew Bible and in the Aramaic renderings of the story in the Aramaic Targum tradition (especially Onqelos and Neofiti, as specified) and in the Peshitta will prove helpful to understand the Qurʾān's stories of Lot and his people.[48]

In Genesis 18, three men (Hebrew *ʾnshym,* Aramaic *gbryn*, Gen. 18:2) come to Abraham, who prepares food for them. According to the Hebrew, as well as according to the translation of Targum Onqelos and the Peshitta of Gen. 18:8, they eat the food (*ʾklw*), according to Targum Neofiti, it merely seems that they eat. The men announce the birth of a son. Sarah laughs. Two of the "men" (Gen. 18:16, see Gen. 19:1) then set out towards Sodom, and Abraham accompanies them. In the Hebrew text, one of the men seems to be God himself, since Abraham remains "standing before YHWH" after "the men" leave (Gen. 18:22, only two carry on in Gen. 19). The Peshitta comes closest to the Hebrew Bible by translating that Abraham stands "before God" (*qdm ʾlhʾ*). None of the Jewish Aramaic renderings translate this verse in a straightforward manner, reflecting instead the theological preferences of those retelling Genesis. Targum Neofiti interpolates that Abraham stands "seeking mercy" (*bʿy rḥmyn mn qdm*) God, whereas Onqelos specifies that Abraham "ministered in prayer before" (*mshmysh bṣlw qdm*) God. (Both Targumim abbreviate the Tetragrammaton.) Then Abraham pleads with God, who agrees that He will not destroy the town if there were even just ten righteous men in it.

In Genesis 19, two angels (Onqelos: *mlʾkyʾ*, Peshitta: *mlʾkyn*, Gen. 19:1) then arrive in Sodom (marking a sudden shift from "men" to "angels" and a logical one from "three" to "two"). Lot meets them and urges them to sleep in his house. When they agree, the men of the "town" (Onqelos *qrtʾ*, Peshitta *qrytʾ*, 19:4) surround the house, asking "where are the men (Onqelos: *gbryʾ*, Peshitta: *gbrʾ*) who came in to you in the night? Bring them out to us, that we may know them" (i.e., sexually, Peshitta: *ndʿ*, Onqelos: *nydʿ*, Gen. 19:5). Lot, addressing the people as "my brothers" (*ʾḥy*) begs them not to act wickedly, and offers his daughters instead. The Sodomites threaten to do worse to Lot then they would do to the angels. The angels, in turn called "men" (Onqelos: *gbryʾ*, Peshitta: *gbrʾ*), blind the men outside, and ask Lot whether he has any sons in law in the town (Oneqelos *qrtʾ*, Peshitta *qrytʾ*, Gen19:10-12). The messengers warn Lot that God has sent them (Onqelos: *shlḥnʾ*, Peshitta: *shdr*) to destroy the town. Lot's sons-in-law surmise Lot is jesting. At dawn, the angels (now called thus, not

men, Onqelos: *mlʾkyʾ*, Peshitta: *mlʾkʾ*) try to press (Onqelos: *dḥqw*, Pehsitta: *ʾlṣwhy*, Gen. 19:15) Lot onwards. God is merciful (*ḥs)* to Lot, and the angels bring him outside the city. Lot implores the angels that since "your servant has found mercy (Onqelos: *ʾshkḥ ʿbdk rḥmyn*, Peshitta: *ʾshkḥ ʿbdk rḥmʾ*) in your eyes", to direct him towards Zoar, which they do (Gen. 19:19-23). At sunrise, God rained (Onqelos *ʾmṭr*, Peshitta: *ʾḥt*) brimstone and fire out of heaven (*shmyʾ*) and overthrew the towns (Onqelos: *hpk yt qrwyʾ*, Peshitta: *hpk lqwryʾ*, Gen. 19:24-5). Lot's wife looks backs and becomes a pillar of salt (Onqelos: *qmʾ dmlḥ*, Peshitta: *qymtʾ dmlḥʾ*, Gen. 19:26). The narrative ends with a summary "that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow (Onqelos: *mgw hpyktʾ*, Peshitta: *mn gw hpyktʾ*), when he overthrew the towns in which Lot lived" (Gen. 19:29). In the introduction, I have presented a few aspects of how Jewish and Christian sources use this story to differentiate between in- and outsiders in past, present, and eschatological future (see above, xxx-xxx). We will now see that the Qurʾān, in eight instances, successively imparts much of this story on its audience, while introducing a few noteworthy changes.

The Biblicisation of the Qurʾān's Lot Narratives and the Qurʾānisation of the Bible

The Qurʾān frequently makes use of the powerful memory of the destruction of Lot's people. As mentioned above, the Qurʾān does not contain the name "Sodom," instead referring to the town either as that of Lot, or simply as *qarya*. Likewise, the Sodomites in the Qurʾān simply are "Lot's people," just like the generation of the flood is called "Noah's people," in line with the doctrine of the autochthonous warner discussed above. Likewise, in its retellings and references to the story of Lot and his townspeople, the Qurʾān adapts further key elements of the story to fit its own prophetology. Yet overall, it remains remarkably close to the biblical text – closer perhaps than in any such cases, including that of Joseph.[49] Among the main differences between the narratives in the Qurʾān and in the Bible (and its Aramaic renderings) is that that in the Qurʾān, Lot is one of his "people" i.e. the Sodomites; that the messengers who come to Lot are not called angels (even though they seem to belong in this category as we will see); and that the Qurʾānic Lot, unlike the Biblical one, warned his people, because no town is destroyed before a warning is given. These main differences illustrate the Qurʾān's integration of its Lot story in its own prophetology, esp. its narrative matrix of destroyed towns, laid out in the introduction. Several other differences between the Qurʾān and the Bible should also be understood in correspondences with this Qurʾānic matrix; other aspects of the Qurʾān's tradition, I will propose, should be understood through the Qurʾān's dialogue with the Jewish and the Christian exegetical tradition.

Indeed, the Qurʾānic references to Lot and the destruction of his people can be placed in three categories. I argue that the three categories represent three stages in an

ongoing tendency to biblicise, and subsequently rabbanise the Qurʾān's initial reference to Lot. As any attempt to establish a relative chronology of Qur'anic passages, my attempt is partially circular, positing a sequence and then deriving its proof from what has been posited. I still consider the present attempt worthwhile, however, for it affords a double mechanism of external verifiability. First, the stories are arranged according to the displaying an increasingly close relationship with the Biblical tradition, which of course retains an aspect of arbitrariness – there is no reason why a later passage should not assume or allude to a previous one that does not need to be fully recast. Secondly, and perhaps more surprisingly, we find that the only versions of the Qurʾānic Lot stories in which we find rabbinic elements are those which have been classed as the third and latest category according to these passages' biblical intertextuality. This constitutes an external confirmation of a chronology established through the Qurʾān's dialogue with a specific body of external. While there are several possible explanations for this fact, the simplest explanation for remains that the rabbinic elements enter the Qurʾānic versions at a specific moment and then remain part of its own discourse. The inverse scenario, that they initially appear but then are excised or coincidentally deleted, seems rather unlikely, as we saw in the case of Medinan law supplementing Meccan eschatology at a later stage.

Regardless of their ultimate value, the following considerations suffer from their reliance on written texts and on the concept of an "influx" of literature. Stories circulate orally much more than in writing, and the idea of a "flow" of texts obfuscates the literary agency of later literature, be it written or oral. Both concepts, "texts" and "influx," certainly do not reflect historical reality; I posit neither the likelihood of the circulation of Biblical and rabbinic written texts in the Qurʾānic milieu nor the Qurʾān's direct engagement of any of them. As we will see, the Qurʾān's biblicisation and subsequent rabbanisation do not bear any traces of direct textual contact. Its qurʾānisation of biblical and rabbinic traditions, moreover, shows that it firmly maintains its own literary agency in the process of integrating contemporary traditions to its own prophetological and narrative worldview. Instead, the method here applied uses written texts to show points of literary contact as a shorthand for the complex and irretrievable process of the transmission of Biblical texts into the Qurʾān's oral milieu. While the margin of error remains considerable, the alternative rejection of the evidence generated by the application of imperfect yet powerful tools of research remains more detrimental to the efforts of appreciating the Qurʾān.[50]

In detail, the initial stage of the Qurʾān's Lot narratives corresponds most fully to the Qurʾān's core matrix of the story of the warning and the destruction of towns, as outlined most fully in *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ*, with only a few details paralleling those from the Bible. In the subsequent stage, the motifs known from Genesis increase in length and complexity, displaying an ever closer use of biblical details. Only in the

last stage do we find any material known from the rabbis, intermixed with further biblical motifs. I will first point to the increasing prominence of biblical motifs in the first two stages of this development, and then to the rabbinic ones in the third stage. Some – though not all – of the biblical, rabbinic, and Christian material here presented has, in one way or another, already been discussed by Heinrich Speyer and others.[51] Speyer's findings, while presented in a crassly reductionist framework that stretches from putative Jewish and Christian "influence" to alleged "incomprehension" on Muḥammad's part, still serve as a helpful basis for the following inquiry into the development of the Qurʾānic Lot narrative. Yet Speyer, while pointing to the chronology of the Qurʾān, never considered the material in terms what I will call the sequential qurʾānisation of the biblical and the rabbinic traditions. We will see that in addition to the importance of the internal and synchronic approach to the Qurʾān that allows us to reconstruct at least aspects of the message it seeks to generate, an external and diachronic reading points to its technique of imparting first biblical, and then rabbinic traditions on its audience.

In the first, most basic stage, in which we should place Q54:33-39 and Q37:133-8, we find brief references to the destruction of Lot's town in the context of many of the motifs the Qurʾān associates with the destruction of other towns; few biblical themes appear other than Lot's name and the fate of his people.

- In the first passage, in Q54:33, right after the "single cry" destroys the people of Thamūd, we learn that the people of Lot, when he warned them, "accused him of lying" (*kadhdhabat*). Here, the Qurʾān is employing the same themes that appear in the simile *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* and elsewhere in the Qurʾān: the "single cry" is as common as the accusing the messenger of lying. Then, Lot's people are destroyed by a violent storm (*ḥāṣiban*) at sunrise (*bi-saḥarin*, Q54:34), as in Gen. 19:24, except for Lot, for whom God shows mercy (*niʿmatan*, Q54.35), as in Gen. 19:19. The passage next relates how the Sodomites demanded from him the guests (*rāwadūhu ʿan ḍayfihī*, not necessarily to have sex with them), and then tells of their subsequent blinding, the content of Gen. 19:5-10.
- The Qurʾān's key focus that Lot was "one of the messengers" (*al-mursalīna*) occurs in the second passage, in Q37:133. This is followed by a reference to the fact that an unidentified "old woman" stayed behind, who was destroyed with all others, and whose remains one passes "in the morning and at evening" (Q37:136-7). In line with Gen. 19:26, where such a pillar is mentioned in relation with Lot's wife, the Qurʾān's reference to these remains is plausibly to pillars in the environment of the Qurʾān's audience, either in their daily surroundings or perhaps on common travel routes.[52]

The first category of Qurʾānic Lot narratives is thus marked by snippets of information that do not indicate the audience's familiarity with the Bible; rather, the Qurʾān imparts this information successively. The scenario is a far cry from the subtle allusions to, and sophisticated use of, biblical traditions that the audience in the Medinan sūras is assumed to know.[53] On the one hand, this does not imply a "pagan" audience in "Mecca" that would be completely unfamiliar with biblical traditions. On the other hand, however, while at least part of the "Meccan" audience may know biblical characters, more information on them seems to be welcomed by the entire audience.

In the second category of Lot stories, the slightly longer versions in which I place Q7:80-4 and Q26:160-175, Lot also "reminds" his people, in the aforementioned matrix of the warner of his people, who then seek to expel him. He is delivered, and the town is destroyed. The two passages, we will see, exclusively share the motif that the townspeople threaten to expel Lot, but also hearken back to various elements of the brief references in the first category – a first sign of insipient self-referentiality, in addition to sharing the common theme of the destruction of towns throughout the Qurʾān, epitomised in the simile in *Sūrat Yā-Sīn*.

- In the first passage, in *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ*, the people of Lot again "accuse… the messengers of lying (*kadhdhabat qawmu lūṭini'l-mursalīna*, Q26:160). The fact that it appears not to be Lot – as in Q54:33 – but an unnamed plurality of messengers who are accused of lying shows that the Qurʾān here presents Lot within the formulaic matrix in which four other prophets appear within the same sūra (see above). The phrase that the people "accuse the messengers of lying" is in fact used for five of the individual prophets evoked in *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ*.[54] We are, in effect, not dealing with a "real" plurality of prophets, as in Q36 and in the Lot stories of the third category, but with only one "trusted apostle" (*rasūlun ʾamīnun*) as whom Lot presents himself. Lot is named "their brother" (*ʾakhūhum*, Q26:161), the brother of his people, in accordance with the Qurʾān's matrix (again especially prominent in *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ*) that prophets emerge autochthonously – they always implores their own people to fear God. The term "brother" is equally used in Lot's address in Gen. 19:7 "I beg you, my brothers (*ʾḥy*), do not do so wickedly." (In the Bible, of course, Lot is not a Sodomite.)[55] Lot then emphasizes that he does not demand any reward, mirroring this theme's employment in *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ*, *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* and throughout the Qurʾān as discussed above. Lot's plea is followed by his accusation against his people of engaging in sex between men (Q26:165-6, not necessarily in relationship to his guests). The people threaten to make him one of those who are expelled (*al-mukhrajīna*, Q26:167). This theme is foreign to the Bible but applied to the Qurʾān's own messenger e.g. in Q9:40, when he

is threatened by those seek to expel him (*ʾakhrajahu*). We then learn about the fact that God saves Lot's family, as in Genesis 19:12, "except for an old woman," (Q26:171-2), the very same phrase used in Q37:136-7.

- In the second passage, in *Sūrat al-ʾAʿrāf*, Lot warns his people, implying that they are about to invent sex between men (Q7:80-1, again not necessarily in relationship to his guests) and calling them a "profligate people," the key verse shared with the simile in Qurʾān Q36 *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* 19 (discussed above). Lot's people then say: "expel him from the town (*ʾakhrijūhum min qaryatikum*), repeating the same motif we saw in Q26:167. The term here used for "town," *qarya*, is shared with the simile in *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* Q36 and with the Qurʾānic trope of the destroyed "towns." (The term is used throughout the Aramaic versions of Gen. 19 to designate Sodom, yet this is hardly surprising, since it is also a generic term describing any town.) Now, it is not "an old woman," but for the first time Lot's wife who is left behind according to Q7:83, in accordance with Gen. 19:26. Also, God destroys the town for the first time through rain (*wa-ʾamṭarnā ʿalayhim maṭaran*, Q7:84), using the same root employed in Genesis 19:24 (*mṭr*, in the Hebrew as well as in Targum Onqelos).

The two stages thus far seem to reflect the on-going development of a narrative. They introduce more and more biblical elements to the story at the same time as developing the Lot story based on elements derived from the evolving inner-Qurʾānic matrix of the destruction of towns. The diachronic qurʾānisation of the a Biblical narrative, along with the biblicisation of the Qurʾān's own narrative matrix of the destroyed town is hard to miss. Specifications of previous details, such as the identification of the old woman as Lot's wife, point to the Qurʾān's attempt successively to introduce its audience to the fuller details of the story of Lot's people.

The third category of Qurʾānic Lot stories is markedly different from the first two categories in as far as the narrative here is connected to the story of Abraham, and that it is not Lot, but an unnamed plurality who are now the "messengers". (The apparent plurality of the messengers in Q26, as we saw above, constituted a formulaic opening of Lot's apostleship, as common in *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ*.) The narratives in Q51:24-37, Q15:49-77, Q11:69-83 and Q29:28-35 are structured in very parallel ways. At the same time as connecting the Lot story to that of Abraham known from Gen. 18, a host of additional Biblical and extra-biblical details about the story of Lot himself now enter the Qurʾān's narrative. Most importantly, after illustrating the influx of Biblical narrative, I will seek to illustrate the Qurʾān's affinity with rabbinic traditions in this stage alone.

First, to the Biblical material. In all four versions in this last category, an unnamed plurality of messengers (*al-mursalūna*, Q51:31, Q15:57 and 61, Q11:69 and

77) come to Abraham. They are never named "angels," as noted above; their function as "messengers" fully corresponds with their self-depiction as having been "sent" in Gen. 19:10-12. In Q51 and Q11 only, Abraham brings the messengers a calf, just as in Genesis 18:7-8, but in explicit contradiction of the language there, they do *not* eat it. In Q51:27, Abraham asks the messengers, "do you not eat?" (*ʾa-lā taʾkulūna*), in Q11:69, he sees their hands not reaching for the food. In all versions but Q29, Abraham then experiences fear from them, in all version, they respond that he must not fear (Q51:27-8, Q15:52-3, Q11:70). The depiction of the hands and the fear are two details foreign to the biblical narrative. In all versions, the messengers first "bring him the good news" (*ʾa-bashshartumūnī*, Q51:28, Q15:54 and 55, Q11:71 and 74, and Q29:31, a concept not used in the Bible) that a son will be born to Abraham and Sarah, in all versions but Q29, Sarah laughs, as in Gen. 18. The messengers then inform Abraham about the destruction of Lot's people, akin to the announcement that they will destroy Sodom in the Bible, as well as about the deliverance of Lot's own family, absent in the Bible (see Q51:32-6, Q15:58, Q11: 70 and 74, Q29:31-2). Both in Q51 and in Q29, the narrative breaks off at this moment, in both, the destruction is now implied to be a "sign" (Q51:37 and Q29:35).[56]

In Q51, Lot and his family are not named, they remain anonymous as the people in *Sūrat Yā-Sīn*, and are merely referred to as "house of *muslimīn*," (Q51:36). By contrast, his name is given as Lot in the versions belonging to the first and second category, and in the three other versions in the third category. We also learn that it is Lot and his family who are saved, except for his wife (Q15:59, Q11:81, Q29:33, and already in Q7:83 in category two), in accordance with Gen. 19:26. In the other two sūras that relate the incidents in Lot's town, in Q15:66 and Q11:76, the messengers then inform Lot personally about his people's destruction, a detail not known from the Bible. In both these sūras, in Q15:68-71 and Q11:78-9, Lot then defends the messengers, offering his own daughters, a detail known from Gen. 19 that here first enters the Qurʾānic narrative. Another biblical element, the prohibition to "turn" around, also known from Gen. 19:26, also appears first in both Q15:65 and Q11:81. Regarding the end of Lot's town, in Q51:33, we merely learn that stones fall on the town. The two other sūras offer more detail: "the cry" seizes the town (as discussed above, a simultext to the similar passage in the simile in *Sūrat Yā-Sīn*), the "topmost part becomes its nethermost part" and stones "rain" (*wa-ʾamṭarnā*, Q15:74, Q11:82) down on it at sunrise, using the same concepts and time of day as we saw in the previous Lot passages and in the Hebrew Bible.[57] Overall, the continuous "trickling in" of Biblical information imparted on the audience through successive recitation in the first two categories accelerates to a stream in the third one.

In addition to the qurʾānisation of Biblical narrative in this third category, we also see a palpable onset of an inner-Qurʾānic, self-referential development of themes, marking a shift towards the audience's incipient sense of the text as a synchronic

web of references – a phenomenon I will discuss more fully in part III.[58] In Q15:67, when the messengers inform Lot about his people's destruction, "the people of the city came rejoicing" (*ʾahlu l-madīnati yastabshirūna*), repeating in a starkly different context the root *bshr* used for the "giving of the good news" to Abraham in all four version in the third category. The (simultextual) repetition of the root in a different context underlines the crassness of their violence: whereas Abraham rejoices over the promise of a son, the Sodomites rejoice because they found victims. The sexual nature of the violence, however, is not yet explicit: Lot's people were "bewildered in their drunkenness" (Q15:72); an audience fully familiar with the Qurʾān's Lot narratives may well understand the reason for their joy as sexual anticipation. Intriguingly, however, the simultextual *reading* at this point does not point either to the Qurʾān or to the Bible. The context indicated in Q15, moreover, is markedly not sexual at all: all we learn is that Lot's people simply state that they had prohibited Lot "from strangers" (*ʿani l-ʿālamīna*, Q15:70), literally "from the ones from the world," likely prohibiting any contact with them. We will revisit this statement with no foundation in the Hebrew Bible when considering the Qurʾān's rabbinic context.[59]

Finally, Q11:78 makes the sexual aspect of the people's crime against the guests fully explicit by stating that "they had been committing vices aforetime;" in Q11:79, the townspeople state quite explicitly that they have "no interest in your daughters, and indeed you know what we want". Only here is the theme we encountered as "demanding Lot's guests" in Q54:37 (which does not specify the sexual nature of the demand) explicitly connected with the theme of sex between men, which already appeared in the second category (in Q26:165-6 and Q7:80-1) – yet there, as well as in Q29:28-9, the charge is homosexuality in general; it is connected to the guests only in the third category of stories, implicitly in Q15 and explicitly in Q11 (as it is in Genesis).

Indeed, independent of the Bible, the introductory lines of the narrative, Q29:28-9, depict Lot as warning his people about sex between men, who respond by demanding that he bring down God's punishment as a sign of his veracity – an aspect of qurʾānisation of the biblical narrative. Lot, in other words, is here fully presented as the warning figure familiar from the first two categories of stories, and their demand of a sign follows typical Qurʾānic depictions of an incredulous crowd.[60] Then, Lot asks for God's help *against* his people, another detail not known from the Bible, but in line with the Qurʾān's image of the persecuted messengers mentioned in the introduction.[61] Hence, in Q29 alone we find the full integration of the two first categories of the Lot stories, in which Lot himself warns his people as a messenger, and the third category, which fully integrates Biblical details previously missing. The remaining tension regarding the identity of the messengers – Lot or the angels – is resolved "later,"–a possible, but by no means a necessary indication that Q29 may well be the earliest passage within the third category.[62]

Arranging the passages along the lines of a steady influx of Biblical detail, hence, leads to a sequence in the Qurʾān's retelling of the Lot narratives that bypasses many philological considerations of the text – this fact may constitute the strength as well as the weakness of the present approach. The external literary evidence alone points to a sequence of three clusters of Lot stories corresponding to my categories one, two, and three. Each passage, moreover, is distinct enough from all others to make random repetition of previous material in a putative, highly complex and perhaps decentralised milieu of Qurʾānic text production seem an unlikely explanation of the coherence of these categories.[63] Rather, it seems that these stories were retold in close dialogue with a specific community and in a partially discernible order by one messenger,[64] or at the most by one extremely cohesive prophetic "school" – such a school being a scenario for which I would not be able to name any precedent.[65]

If one were to take the sequence of the passages discussed here as indicative of the order of the sūras in which we find them, then, surprisingly, the order of the sūras within the three *categories* of Lot stories (I: Q54:33-39 and Q37:133-8; II: Q7:80-4 and Q26:160-175; and III: Q51:24-37, Q15:49-77, Q11:69-83 and Q29:28-35) displays a clear, though incomplete affinity with Nöldeke's chronology. (To reiterate, no sequence can be established within my three categories.) The one crucial difference is that Nöldeke places Q51 as the first of the sūras discussed here[66] and Q7 as the very last one.[67] The affinity of the sequence suggested here is even closer to the traditional chronology (which only places Q37 elsewhere), whereas my findings do not at all overlap with alternative models such as that of Bazargan; I do not of course go as far as Sinai and Witztum in establishing a precise order within the proposed categories.[68] The present findings, then, do not constitute any justification (or a partial falsification) of the chronology presented by the Muslim tradition, or of Nöldeke's modifications. They pertain to the pssage in question alone, not to the sūras in which they are placed. Yet the fact that a sequence that relies on nothing but the internal development of one story, and on that story's relationship to the Hebrew Bible, shows such surprising affinity to the traditional chronology is remarkable, albeit the range of dates admittedly far too small to build a broader theory on it. If anything, these findings constitute the beginnings of an answer to the challengers of the possibility to define any diachronic approach to the Qurʾān based on external features, just as much as part I of this study invites those weary of this approach to the possibility of engaging in meaningful synchronic studies of the Qurʾān.

It is therefore quite possible – though by no means mandatory – partially to establish elements of a chronology of specific Qurʾānic passages based on a hearing of the text in dialogue with the Bible, as it is also possible to assign all the sūras discussed here to a Meccan period, distinct from and in my view preceding a later, Medinan one. (As mentioned in the introduction, such a temporary distinction does not necessitate a geographic one.) Yet even if the sequence suggested here were imprecise or wrong

(and, to reiterate, no sequence can be established *within* my three categories), we can still conclude that an influx of scriptural motifs and terms into the Qurʾān's Lot narrative is at least possible. After an initial phase, in which Lot barely stands out from the Qurʾān's notion of the messenger, we can observe a steady biblicisation of the narrative in phases two and three.

Crucially, the same pattern established for the biblicisation of the Qurʾānic Lot story in category three holds true for motifs known from rabbinic exegesis of Genesis which likewise enter the Qurʾān in the third stage. Indeed, it seems that nearly *all* the elements of the story that cannot be traced to either Genesis or other Qurʾānic destruction stories entered the Qurʾān in dialogue with the rabbinic traditions about Sodom. Intriguingly, the rabbinic traditions *all* appear in the last category of stories, the ones including the Abraham narrative. This is the case for Q11, Q15, Q29 and Q51, and here we can see at least an incipient external verification of the three categories I have posited. These cagetories were determined by the relationship of the Qurʾān to the Bible, and constituted a first, if imperfect element of external verification. The fact that all rabbinic evidence appears in the third category exclusively, in turn, points to an outside verification of the initial hypotheses.

The Rabbanisation of the Qurʾānic Lot Narrative

In Q51:36, we learn that there was "one house of Muslims" (*baitin mina l-muslimīna*) in Lot's town, an echo perhaps of Abraham pleading for the righteous people in Sodom in Genesis 18 – yet, as Speyer rightly noted, Abraham does not mention Lot at all in Genesis 18, he only suggests a possible number of righteous people in Sodom.[69] It is the Midrash that connects the "ten" righteous persons in Genesis 18 with Lot's family (see *Bereshit Rabbah* 49:13, the Midrash distances itself from Abraham's assessment). In Q11:74 Abraham then specifically "argues with Us" concerning the people of Lot, and in Q29:32, Abrahm points out that Lot is a resident of the city. The Qurʾān's fusion of the two motifs – the righteous ones and Lot – may well be a first echo of a rabbinic teaching on Lot in the Qurʾān – yet it may equally well be simply the product of understanding Genesis 18 in the light of Genesis 19. The remainder of cases regarding the Qurʾān's rendering of the Biblical story in ever increasing rabbinic decor, however, is more unambiguous, especially when in common tension with the Hebrew Bible and its Christian retellings, as is the next case, equally noted by Speyer.

In Q51:27, Abraham asks the messengers, "do you not eat?" (*ʾa-lā taʾkulūna*). As mentioned above, this clearly contradicts Gen. 18:8 (in the Hebrew as well as rendered in Targum Onqelos and the Peshitta, and in the Christian commentaries), where the angels indeed "ate" (*ʾklw*). As Speyer clearly saw, the motif of "not eating" is a rabbinic tradition since for the rabbis, angels would not eat. Targum Neofiti depicts the angels as merely appearing to eat, and the rabbinic exegetical tradition explicitly states that

for the angels, there is "neither eating nor drinking" (*ʾyn … ʾkylh wshtyh*, *Bereshit Rabbah* 48:11). Rather, the angels merely "appeared to be eating" (*nrʾyn kʾwklyn*, ibid. 48:14). The Qurʾān, hence, agrees with the rabbis against the Bible as well as against its Syriac interpretation that the messengers did not, in effect eat.[70] Yet Speyer, in his chase for parallels, did not notice that the Qurʾān in effect changes quite dramatically the rabbinic point of view that the angels did not eat: whereas in the Midrash, they *appear* to eat, the very fact that they clearly do not eat, and Abraham's subsequent fear, becomes a narrative springboard for the Qurʾān, in which a few rabbinic, post-biblical elements appear in a radically altered setting. The differences between the Qurʾān and the Midrash, in my view, are as important as the affinities, pointing to the qurʾānisation of the rabbinic Lot narratives that occurs simultaneously with the rabbanisation of the Qurʾān's Lot narratives. The question of the messengers' angelic status, in effect, offers a fascinating case study for the way in which the Qurʾān absorbs and adapts rabbinic materials according to its own doctrines.

The first question is whether the messengers to Abraham and Lot, for the Qurʾān, are men or angels, a question to which Josef Witztum has turned recently, and which I myself have also explored elsewhere in greater detail.[71] The passages at hand do not explicate that they are angelic beings. Furthermore, the Qurʾān allows for messengers to be angels, jinn, or humans, and tends to send, as a warning messenger, always a member of a group's own community, as spelled out in Q6:130. The case of the story of Lot, however, does not involve a warning; the messengers instead deliver judgement: Lot is spared, and Sodom destroyed. Since angels usually appear as human beings to those who see them (see e.g. Q19:17), it is then not surprising that there is some ambiguity in the Lot stories as well. There are two passages, however, which help us understand that the Qurʾān implicitly depicts the messengers sent to Lot as actual angels.[72]

The Qurʾānic and the rabbinic doctrine that angels do not eat – both, to reiterate, at variance with the Hebrew Bible and the Syriac Christian tradition – points to the affinity of the two discursive spheres. This is then corroborated by various other moments in which the Qurʾān retells rabbinic narratives within its own narrative framework. The refusal to eat, in the Qurʾān, namely takes the following form. In the version of the narrative in Q11:70, we learn that "the hands" of the messengers did "not reach" (*ʾaydiyahum lā taṣilu*, Q11:70) for the roasted calf, whereupon Abrahm began to fear them. Language of "fear" or "reaching" does not appear in Genesis or its Syriac exegesis; it does of course jibe well with the general pre- Qurʾān as well as the Qurʾān discourse on human reactions to the divine, as demonstrated by Witztum.[73] Intriguingly, however, the rabbis understand the verse that Abraham stood "by" (*ʿl*) the angels while they ate (Gen. 18:8) to mean that he stood "over" them, leading to their conclusion that *they* "feared" Abraham. The Qurʾān thus shares the motive of fear with the rabbis, yet in accordance to its doctrine that the humans fear the angels, it transposes the motif of fear from the angels to Abraham.

Intriguingly, the reason the angels fear Abraham, in the Midrash, also finds a transposed echo in the Qurʾān. For the rabbis, the angels begin fearing Abraham since "he had stepped out of their obligation" (*yṣʾ ydy ḥwbtn*, *Bereshit Rabbah* 48:14), meaning they had fulfilled their mission to announce the birth of his son. The idiom uses the noun *yad*, "hand," so the verse literally reads that the angels began to fear Abraham in the moment "he went out of the hands of their obligation", or, in most manuscripts, simply "out of their hands."[74] It is in this moment that that "fear of him seized them" (*ʾymtw mwṭlt ʿlyhm*), that is the angels, as Abraham stood over them.[75] The Midrash then continues its line of thought by stating that they pretended to eat because "if you come into a town (*qrt'*), follow its customs". In order to follow earthly customs, the angels then "seemed as if they were eating, removing each course in turn." The Qurʾān's narrative reflects various aspects of the rabbinic version. The Qurʾān's statement that Abraham "experienced fear of them" (*wa-ʾawjasa minhum khīfatan*) because the messengers' "hands did not reach (*ʾaydiyahum lā taṣilu*, Q11:70), in effect uses rabbinic themes – in both cases, the fear sets on at the moment that "hands" are mentioned along with movement at the moment of a refusal to eat.

The example illustrates the difficulty of the comparative task at hand: there are too many shared details between the Qurʾān and the rabbinic depiction of the same moment in biblical history than coincidence should allow for, yet there are too many difference to categorize the interdependency as a direct one. If anything, the example shows the Qurʾān's liberty in integrating these rabbinic elements: in the Midrash, they pretend to eat, in the Qurʾān, they ostentatiously do not do so; in the Midrash, the messengers experience fear, in the Qurʾān, Abraham fears; in the Midrash, Abraham went out the messengers' hands" (*yṣʾ ydyhm*), in the Qurʾān, the messengers' hands in turn do *not* reach (*ʾaydiyahum lā taṣilu*, which in turn causes Abraham's fear). In effect, the Qurʾān's sustained narrative interventions use a recognizable rabbinic narrative element, suggesting an intentionally diverging, rectified and ecotypified retelling in an oral setting. The Qurʾān, it seems, successively imparts on its audience knowledge of its own version of the rabbinic tradition, integrating qurʾānisation and rabbanisation into the process of biblicisation.

Further examples corroborate the narrative affinity between the Qurʾān and the rabbis. In Q15:70, when Lot's people came running and "rejoiced" (Q15:68), apparently in anticipation of sexual gratification as discussed above, they reprimand Lot for hosting his guests. They claim that they had categorically prohibited Lot "from strangers" (*ʿani'l-ʿālamīna*), literally "from the ones from the world". In Genesis, the Sodomites mistreat and sexually threaten the angels, and, while contempt for strangers may well be among their sins in Jacob of Serugh, no formal prohibition occurs here – despite the striking parallel between Abraham's recognition of the angels *as* strangers in Jacob and in the Qurʾān.[76] The rabbis, however, already posit such a categorical formal prohibition of contact with strangers as the Qurʾān implies. In *Vayiqrah Rabbah*

4:1, the Sodomites say: "Let us forget the obligation of hospitality (*twrt hrgl*), and let us not strengthen the poor and the oppressed (*ʿny wʾbywn*)," a teaching of which the Qurʾān's prohibition of contact with strangers seems rather reminiscent. More drastically even, according to *Bereshit Rabbah* 50:7, "the Sodomites made an agreement among themselves that whenever a stranger (*ʾksnyʾ*) visited them they would penetrate him (sexually) and take his money."[77] The rabbis' view that the Sodomites, in addition to sexual violence against strangers, would rob them, is another Midrashic detail likely shared by the Qurʾān. In Q29:29, Lot accuses them, stating "do you come to men, and cut off the way, and commit outrages in your gatherings?" (*wa-taqṭaʿūna' l-sabīla wa-taʾtūna fī nādīkumu'l-munkara*); "cutting off the way" most likely depicts highway robbery – another detail of which no trace can be found in the Bible, which makes the Qurʾān's teaching of the rabbinic tradition ever more suggestive.[78]

All of the rabbinic traditions here discussed enter the Qurʾānic discourse as perceivable echoes, allowing for a doubly diachronic hearing of it. They confirm the third of the three categories of the Qurʾānic stories of Lot as the latest once, since it would be highly unlikely that the respective rabbinic traditions, once having entered the Qurʾānic discourse, would subsequently disappear in later retellings. Furthermore, since the rabbinic traditions of *Bereshit Rabbah* were edited in Palestine in the fourth or fifth century and thereby predate the Qurʾān, they thereby allow for a diachronic reconstruction of the Meccan sūras at least in theory.[79] Based on their presence in the Qurʾān, we can assume that they were most likely part of the Arabic rabbinic oral tradition in the seventh century.

Therefore, the successive "influx" of rabbinic traditions into the Qurʾānic Lot narratives in the third category alone allows for establishing a sequential order of those Qurʾānic passages (in category three) that contain rabbinical echoes as subsequent to those that do not (in categories one and two). At the same time, we should also note the scarcity of traces of rabbinic Aramaic or of specific rabbinic literary structures in the Qurʾān: all we find is individual exegetical motifs. The possibility of written textual influence cannot ever be fully excluded, yet it seems much more likely the Qurʾān seems to integrate a steady flux of rabbinic *oral* traditions in its expansion of the Lot narrative. Crucially, the Qurʾān's integration of these traditions does not reflect any particular concern for the integrity of the rabbinic traditions themselves. Likewise, the narrative sequence as laid out does not suggest an audience keenly familiar with the rabbinic or biblical details of the story. The Qurʾān, in the Lot passages, and throughout the Meccan sūras more broadly, simply adapts aspect of the traditions from the Bible and from the rabbis without further ado. There is no trace of narrative polemics here, or of anti-rabbinic discourse more broadly – in clear contrast to the anti-rabbinic polemics of the Medinan sūras, and the implicit narrative polemics against (likely Syriac) Christian traditions so prominent for example in Q18 *Sūrat al-Kahf*. [80]

While such an argumentum *e silentio* bears its own risk, we can state that comprehension of the qurʾānised versions of the rabbinic traditions employed here is not a prerequisite for the audience's previous familiarity with them. In clear contrast to similar rabbinic material in the Medinan sūras, the Meccan sūras under discussion simply successively introduce aspects of the rabbis' understanding of the story of Lot and Sodom to the audience. The relative scarcity of lexical overlap corroborates the sense that the rabbinic tradition here is *not* intended to be heard as simultexts, but rather as part of the biblical tradition of the past: a clear mark that a diachronic hearing of the Qurʾānic passages as a successive communication here is the appropriate literary tool alongside the later synchronic simultextual nature of the late Medinan edited version of the Qurʾān, or of the *Muṣḥaf* at the latest. The intended audience of the Meccan sūras seems less familiar with rabbinic materials, with biblical materials, and certainly with Qurʾānic materials than that of the Medinan sūras. Yet in all this, no written text seems to matter: the oral context of the biblical and rabbinic discourse matches the traditional view of the Qurʾān's oral performance and production at least in Mecca.[81]

The Qurʾān's far-reaching rabbanisation of its Lot narrative, then, does not prove rabbinic "influence" on the Qurʾān in any simplistic way. On the contrary, the comparison emphasizes the stark contrast between the alternate assessment of Lot. For the rabbis, e.g., Lot is far from being perfect.[82] In *Bereshit Rabbah* 49:6, however, God opens the gate of repentance (*tshwbh*) for the Sodomites, and later, in 50:5, Lot prays for mercy for them. In the Qurʾān, by contrast, Lot is completely righteous – the basis for Künstlinger's true, but overstated claim that the Qurʾān's Lot reflects the Christian tendency to make prophets completely righteous – in line with the later Islamic tradition of the righteousness of all prophets. In summary, one could stat that the Qurʾān's Lot narratives combine the "Christian" tendency of emphasizing the righteousness of the prophet with select rabbinic narrative motifs – yet in a unique combination that increasingly leaves the framework of both traditions behind.[83]

To conclude this section, there is clear evidence of the Qurʾān's biblicisation and rabbanisation of its Lot narrative. Occam's razor suggests that the simplest explanation would be the truest one, namely that the literary processes points to a sequence: first an ongoing biblicisation of the Qurʾānic prophetological matrices, and later an incipient rabbanisation. This does not prove the importance of rabbis in "Mecca," and even less a putative contact of the Qurʾān's prophet with the rabbis of Arabia or those of Palestine. The only thing we can defend is that the Qurʾān simply introduces its audience to the story of Lot, with which they may have had basic familiarity, in an incremental way, and that this story has clear parallels first with the Bible and then also with the rabbinic tradition. At the same time, the outside perspective shows a plausible sequence of the Qurʾān's Abraham and Lot narratives, falling into the three distinguishable categories shown above, among which the first two point to a biblicization, and only the third one shows the additional interaction with the oral rabbinic tradition.

While such a chronological sequence may be self-evident for some hearers of the Qurʾān, its limited, though extant demonstrability may answer the dire need of a more objective, and less circular starting point for establishing such a sequence. The fact that there are no rabbinic details in category one and two, yet many in category three, which furthermore are intersecting with an accelerated biblicisation of the Qurʾānic Lot narratives, makes it very likely that the narrative in these sūras of the third category postdates the narratives in the previous ones. As mentioned before, these findings are only valid for the narratives themselves – they do not corroborate that sūras Q51, Q15, Q11 and Q29 in their entirety would postdate sūras Q7 and Q26, and that these in turn postdate Q54, Q37. We may at some point determine the exact sequence of the sūras (as well as confirm or reject my methods and the sequence I suggest). Yet such an effort would necessitate further studies based on the Qurʾān's increasingly intimate textual relationship to rabbinic or Christian texts. With this, we can return to *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, and ask the question anew how the audience should perceive of the simile's profligate townspeople in light of the inner-Qurʾānic development of the Lot story.

Part III: The Diachronic and the Synchronic Qurʾān: *Sūrat Yā Sīn* in the Context of the Qurʾān, the Gospels, and the Rabbis

The synchronic and internal reading of the simile of the profligate townspeople in *Sūrat Yā Sīn* in part I of this study showed a rich web of simultextual allusions to passages throughout the Qurʾān, suggesting that the audience is guided to read the story of the proflicate townspeople as precisely what it purports to be: a meta-historical simile. More specifically, the literary structure and the trigger words pointed to a hierarchy of simultexts, and two specific contexts in which the simile's Meccan audience is invited to place the profligate townspeople, without fully identifying it with either. On the one hand, the example of themselves is constantly evoked to the Meccan audience, in line with the sūra's address at its beginning. On the other hand, the most prominent "scriptural" example with which the audience is invited to associate the profligate townspeople are the people of Lot. While we should not overvalue the sūra's structural emphasis on Q36:19 at the expense of other important messages embedded in the text, the verse remains the simile's fulcrum both internally and externally. The messengers' accusation against the "profligate people" links the sūra's Meccan audience to the simile's townspeople as much as to the audience of the Meccan Qurʾān more broadly (who are called a "profligate people" in Q43:5) and to Lot's people (who are equally named in Q 7:81). Such is the result of the simultextual reading of a text that describes itself as of infallible divine precision, and in many ways seeks to put this claim of precision into practice.

Readings of *Sūrat Yā Sīn* in light of simultexts pertaining to pharaoh's people, or the Thamūd, would surely be instructive as well.[84] Reading the sūra, and especially the simile at its heart, in dialogue with the Qurʾān's stories about Lot, however, seems the most natural starting point. Can we, however, integrate the synchronic reading of the sūra (according to part I) with the diachronic hearing of the Lot narratives (according to part II)? The following is suggestive of the validity of the attempt, even if the results are less unambiguous than one would have hoped for.

The diachronic and external hearing of the Qurʾān's Lot narratives showed the simultaneous strands of the biblicisation and rabbanisation of the Qurʾān's Lot narrative. Beginning with the rudimentary narrative in the first category (Q54:33-39 and Q37:133-8), which contains but a few biblical details, we saw an increasing biblicisation in the second category (Q7:80-4 and Q26:160-175), and a strong stream of biblical materials as well as the rabbanisation of the Qurʾān's Lot narrative in the third category (Q51:24-37, Q15:49-77, Q11:69-83 and Q29:28-35). Here, in the third category, we also found the beginning of a self-referential qurʾānisation of this narrative, which in turn invited a synchronic internal reading next to the diachronic external hearing. I will now revisit specific instances of the synchronic and internal reading of the simile (from part I) first in light of the diachronic sequence of sūras (from part II), and second in light of the diachronic external hearing of the Qurʾān's Lot narrative in dialogue with the rabbis (also from part II). The simultextual affinities of *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, as discussed in part I of this study, pertained especially to sūras containing the passages of the categories II and III of the Lot stories, providing a helpful starting point even if these simultextual results should not be used without further differentiation.[85] It seems that *Sūrat Yā Sīn* stands in between categories II and III. While the evidence obtained in parts I and II, when considered on its own, presented itself as relatively unambiguous, at least by the inescapably fuzzy standards of literary analysis, the combination of the results raises a number of interpretative problems.

- The charge in Q36:19, the simile's fulcrum, "rather, you are a profligate people," triggers a reference to the same locution in Q7:81, which I suggested (in part I) reading as a simultext. Given that Q7:81 stands in my second category of Lot stories (according to part II), we should understand *Sūrat Yā Sīn* especially in light of the Qurʾān's Lot narrative as related in the second or third of my categories. We should note, however, that the charge in Q7:81 is the perceived sin of sex between men, while the unnamed man in our simile speaks not about his people's homosexuality but about *shirk*, a common Qurʾānic transgression discussed e.g. in the destruction of the town in Q7:3-6. The interloping man in the smile of the profligate townspeople is pleading to his contemporaries that there is no sense in taking gods besides

God since their intercession will not avail him anything. If my simultextual reading were correct, we will have to understand what sex between men and *shirk* may have in common.

- Second, while it is common parlance in the Qurʾān that a specific people rejects "the messengers" (see e.g. Q26:176, where Lot is meant; see the discussion above), there are, to the best of my knowledge, only two cases in which the Qurʾān relates the actual arrival of more than one apostle at a time: on the one hand, the unspecified group of messengers that visit Abraham and then continue on to Lot and his people, and on the other the case of three messengers who call the people to repentance in our simile. In both cases, moreover, an individual, Lot and the interloping man respectively, temporarily interfere with the common Qurʾānic narrative paradigm of the warning and destruction of a town, and both these individuals are delivered.[86] The plurality of messengers, however, becomes a narrative focus only in the third category of Qurʾānic Lot stories, we may therefore again try to consider understanding *Sūrat Yā Sīn* in light of the Qurʾān's Lot narrative within the third category – which would then include the story's rabbinical context. The difference between the "several" messengers in the Lot story and the "three" messengers in the simile, however, still needs to be clarified.
- Third, it should be noted that in Q51, no name is given to Lot, and throughout all the Lot narratives, his town never receive a name. The same holds true, for example, for the towns in Egypt, yet the absence of names still generates an easily transferable generality to the Lot narratives, which in turn turns Lot's story into one of the more prominent simultextual referents of the simile of the profligate townspeople. More specifically, while the town of Lot is called *qarya* throughout the texts, it is called a city, a *madīna*, in Q15:67. To the best of my knowledge, the simile contains the only other settlement that the Qurʾān refers to as both *qarya* and *madīna* (see Q36:13 and 20). Hence, it is again tempting to associate *Sūrat Yā Sīn* with the Lot materials, especially in light of the Qurʾān's narrative as related in sūras Q51 and Q15. It I not clear if we can build our undestanding on any argument *e silentio*: The word *madīnah* in Q36:20, after all, triggered the Egyptian simultext of Q28:20.

The combination of the synchronic and diachronic and internal and external analyses here becomes exceedingly complex. I would suggest that we should consider *Sūrat Yā Sīn* in light of the Qurʾān's Lot narratives, that we should consider the Qurʾān's Lot narratives in their process of rabbanisation and biblicisation, and that we should find out whether we can place *Sūrat Yā Sīn* diachronically somewhere among the second or third category of Lot stories. The simile, of course, has no affinity to *any* of the

rabbinic elements we can identify among the Qurʾānic Lot stories, one could thus conclude that it is not possible externally to verify or falsify the connection of the simile's townspeople to Lot's people by means of rabbinic literature. Yet this again depends on method, and on the amount of intertextuality one allows between the Qurʾān and the rabbinic tradition, and the threshold for positing any relationship, as we will see.[87]

"When a man is evil, one calls him a Sodomite": The Sins of Lot's People

The charges against Lot's people in the Qurʾān, in Q7:81, is the perceived perversion of sex between men, using the expression "rather, you are a profligate people" (*bal ʾantum qawmun musrifūna*). When Q36:19 uses the same expression to designate the profligate townspeople in the simile, would it want its audience to understand the repetition of the term as implying the charge of sexual deviation as well, as a synchronic and simultextual analysis would suggest? As pointed out above, the only explicated charges against the profligate townspeople in *Sūrat Yā Sīn* are disbelief in the messengers and *shirk*, i.e. their hope for the intercession of other deities, whereas Lot's people are accused sex between men, hostility to strangers and, likely, highway robbery. We may, however, be able to corroborate the result of the synchronic and internal reading, the association of the profligate townspeople with the Qurʾānic Lot narratives, by considering a diachronic external hearing of *Sūrat Yā Sīn*. We will see, namely, that the rabbis and parts of the Christian tradition associated the Sodomites not only with sexual transgressions, but also with false hope for intercession and heresy.

Indeed, the Qurʾān may well use fuse various types of misconduct, as Isaiah and 2 Peter have done before it. The language used by 2 Peter especially gives us an important precedent for the polemical technique employed in the Bible as well as in the Qurʾān: as we saw in the introduction, 2 Peter repeatedly uses the example of the Sodomites to warn its contemporaries, those following the "false prophets among the people," and the "false teachers among you, who shall bring in damnable heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). 2 Peter takes charges of living "ungodly" and following "after filthy lusts of the flesh" as tantamount to the heretics of his day, whose false teachers "have no respect for authority;" the letter threatens them "to be punished at the judgment day" (2 Peter 2:6-10). When the Qurʾān applies a term to its Meccan contemporaries or to the profligate townspeople that it uses elsewhere to depict engaging in sex between men among Lot's people, and threatens them in turn with the destruction of their town, it thus follows in the footsteps of biblical and Late Ancient heresiology, for which moral and religious corruption were always two sides of the same coin.

There is no need to posit that the Qurʾān presupposes familiarity with Isaiah or 2 Peter, since the example of Lot and the Sodomites had become generalised examples of all kinds of evil both in the Syriac and the rabbinic tradition. As Jacob Neusner

pointed out, Aphrahat, for example, used the "Jewish" Sodomites as the typological opposite of the righteous "Israelites", namely the church.[88] In associating the Israelites with Sodom, Aphrahat in turn uses the rhetoric of the Biblical prophets, yet he goes much further in suggesting that the "people from any of the nations" fully replace the Israelites, who in turn become the Sodomites here and in several other passages.[89]

Yet in *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, there is no trace of anti-Jewish polemics. More in line with the Qurʾān, Jacob of Serugh, as well as the rabbis, takes the example of the Sodomites to depict evil per se, in any nation. Jacob associates theSodomites with adultery.[90] More pertinently even, the rabbis charge the Sodomites with idol worship and sexual misconduct, as in the following commentary on Genesis 13:13:

> Rabbi said: "Among the cities, you have none that is more evil than Sodom, and when a man is evil, one calls him a Sodomite (*sdwmy*)…. *The citizens of Sodom were evil (rʿym) and sinned (ḥṭʾym) greatly against G-d*: "evil" means [they harmed] each other, "sinned" means sexual crimes (*gylwy ʿrywt*), "against G-d" means idol worship (*ʿbwdt kwkbym*), "greatly" means bloodshed (*shpykwt dmym*).
>
> (*Bereshit Rabbah* 41:7)

The association of various forms of moral transgression, be they sexual or religious, is thus a firmly established mode of rabbinic polemics, and the town of Sodom is evoked as the personification of any form of evil. The Qurʾān's use of the example of Lot's people as among the most archetypical transgressors, which I sought to illustrate in part II of this study, thereby broadly dovetails with the explicit rabbinic views of Sodom. The simultextual association of Lot's people and the profligate townspeople, with perceived sexual and religious transgressions, equally stands in close proximity to the rabbis' use of Lot. Can we here see a sign of the relevance of the rabbinic Lot traditions for the understanding of *Sūrat Yā Sīn*? In addition to charging the Sodomites with idol worship in general, the Midrash (*Bereshit Rabbah* 50:12) also tells the following parable about the Sodomites' hope for intercession, of which Q36 may retain some more specific echoes:

> Said Rabbi Levi: A parable (*mshl*) about a province (*mdynh*) that had two patrons, one from a city and one a son of the province (*bn mdynh)*. The king became angry with them and wanted to punish them. The king said: if I punish them before the sons of the province (*bny hmdynh*) – now they say: "if the (patron from) the city had been here, he would have stood up for us. And if it was before the (patron from) the city – now they say: "if the (patron who was a) son of the province (*mdynh*) were here, he would have stood up for us. Likewise, because among the Sodomites some were serving (*ʿbdym*) the sun (*lḥmh*) and

> some were serving (ʿ*bdym*) the moon (*lbnh*). The Holy One, Blessed be He said: If I punish them during the day (*ywm*) – now they will say: "if the moon was he, it would stand up for us." If I punish them by night (*lylh*) – now they will say: "if the sun was here, it would stand up for us." Rather, he destroyed them on the sixteenth of Nissan, at the hour that the sun and the moon stood in the firmament, as it is said: the sun (*shmsh*) had gone out over the land and Lot came to Zoar (see Gen. 19:32).

The rabbis here tell a simile, or parable (called *mashal*, a cognate of Arabic *mathal* and to Syriac *mtlʾ*) in order to explain a concrete past event, in their case, the destruction of Sodom. I do not believe that the Qurʾān contains any direct echo of this parable.[91] Yet even if we were to imagine the fragmentising of such a parable that is likely to occur in the oral tradition, we should note that it shares a number of key themes with *Sūrat Yā Sīn*. To begin with, the rabbis'simile speaks about a town serving deities that will not intercede for them when the town is judged, just as the man in the parable in *Sūrat Yā Sīn* warns the profligate townspeople: "shall I take gods beside Him? If the Merciful One wanted to cause me any distress, their intercession will not avail me anything" (Q36:23). *?* A brief exploration of the further elements and lexemes that occur both in our simile in *Sūrat Yā Sīn* and in the rabbinic parable points to the limits of combining the synchronic and the diachronic appreciation of the Qurʾān, on which such a comparison is predicated.

- In the parable, the Sodomites are depicted as "serving," i.e. worshipping the sun and the moon, using the root ʿ*bd*, a cognate of which the Qurʾān, somewhat surprisingly, uses to describe the profligate townspeople after their destruction. The depiction there of townspeople as the regrettable "servants" (*al-*ʿ*ibādi*, Q36:30) stands out doubly, first because the lexeme ʿ*bd* usually bears a positive connotation in the Qurʾān (Noah, e.g., is a servant of God in Q54:9), and second, because the simile juxtaposes the negative usage of the term for the townspeople with the positive instance in which the interloping man implies that he *serves* God properly (in Q36:22).
- Equally, the immediate sequel to the simile in Q36 *Sūrat Yā Sīn* emphasizes God's sovereignty over sun and the moon: "neither it behoves the sun (*al-shams*) to overtake the moon (*al-qamar*), nor may the night (*al-layl*) outrun the day" (*al-nahār*, Q36:40). The Qurʾān's discussion of the heavenly bodies is of course commonplace. Yet at the same time, it shows some affinity to the rabbis' accusation against the Sodomites of worshipping the sun and moon, and their punctual balance between night and day.
- Finally, it was noted that the usual designation of Sodom in Jewish Aramaic is *qrt*ʾ, "town;" Sodom is compared to such a *qrt*ʾ in *Bereshit Rabbah* 48:14.

> In the parable in *Bereshit Rabbah* 50:12, however, it is compared to a *mdynh*, a term that denotes "province" in Jewish Aramaic. Should we understand the shift from *qaryah* to *madīnah*, between Q36:13 and 20 as reminiscent of the cognate shift from *qrtʾ* to *mdynh* in the rabbinic parable? The similar shift from *qarya* to *madīna* regarding Lot's town in Q15:67 could be understood as suggesting this, and in light of the broader considerations we should perhaps understand it thus. Yet basing any claim of intertextual affinity on the two common words would go too far, and not actually add to the evidence.

To reiterate, simultextual readings are not a zero-sum affair. The importance of one text does not necessarily diminish that of another one, be it in- or external to the Qurʾān. Still, the simultextual reference of Q36:20 to Q28:20 discussed above, regarding the "man from the outskirts of the city" in Egypt, has a much clearer textual basis than that to rabbinic traditions. Hence, even if the one were to grant the Qurʾān an initial diachronic dialogue with the rabbinic Lot tradition, its secondary synchronicity subsequently may well erase the signs of it. In other words, in order to contextualise the simile in light of the rabbinic parable, we would have to make two assumptions: First, that the simile's evocation of Lot's people, as illustrated in part I of this study, is sufficiently strong to warrant a contextualisation not only within the Qurʾān's own Lot narratives, but also within those of the rabbis. And second, that the influx of rabbinic Lot traditions into the Qurʾān had already begun when *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* was composed, that is during the third phase of the Qurʾān's composition of Lot narratives as illustrated in part II of this study. Yet even if one were to grant the first assumption, the second one, as likely as it may be given the affinities here discussed, is precisely what we are trying to find out, so in order to avoid an overly circular argument, we must rest this particular as suggestive, yet ultimately unverifiable.

We should, hence, avoid full circularity and exercise due caution when contextualizing *Sūrat Yā Sīn* within the rabbinic Lot stories in as far as they go beyond what is already reflected within the Qurʾān. A similar limit of integrating the synchronic and the diachronic analysis, we will see, emerges also regarding the second contextual reason to associate *Sūrat Yā Sīn* with the third category of Lot stories, the plurality of messengers.

The Profligate Townspeople and the Workers in the Vineyard

The simile in *Sūrat Yā Sīn* speaks about two messengers, reinforced by a third, and juxtaposed to the interloping man. The coming of three messengers to the profligate townspeople would show another punctual affinity to the three messengers that come to Lot in the Bible – had the Qurʾānic narratives of Lot preserved their number

in detail.[92] Instead, however, the Qurʾān, in its first category of the narratives about Lot's people, mentions Lot alone, in the second category speaks only of the generic rejection of messengers (Q26:160, a general accusation against many peoples paralleled elsewhere in the Qurʾān) in addition to Lot, and only in the third category substitutes an unnamed plurality of angelic messengers for the three initial and two subsequent messengers in the Bible.[93] Should we still assume affinity between the simile of the profligate townspeople and the third category of Lot stories simply because in each story a group of messengers is juxtaposed to a single human being?

Exploring an alternative scenario may be helpful here. The number of the messengers in the simile may be placed into the context of another parable known from another part of the Qurʾān's Bible, i.e. from the Gospel: a parable first told in the Gospel of Matthew to which Emran al-Badawi has drawn our attention in the context of *Sūrat Yā-Sīn*.[94] This famous parable of the workers in the vineyard provides a narrative model in which God sends a third messenger to reinforce the ones sent twice before. In the Peshitta's Aramaic, it is rendered as following:

> Hear another parable (*mtlʾ*). There was a man who was a householder, and he planted a vineyard (*krmʾ*), and fenced it, and he dug in it a winepress, and built a tower, and then he leased it to labourers, and went away on a journey.
> And when the fruit season was at hand, he sent (*shdr*) his servants (*lʿbdwhy*) to the laborers, that they might send him (*dnshdrwn*) of the fruits of his vineyard (*dkrmh*).
> And the laborers seized his servants (*lʿbdwhy*), and some were beaten, and some were stoned (*drgmwhy*), and some were killed.
> Again he sent (*shdr*) other servants (*ʿbdʾ*), many more than the first; and they did likewise to them.
> At last he sent (*shdr*) his son to them, saying, "They might feel ashamed before my son."
> But when the laborers saw the son, they said among themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and retain his inheritance."
> So they seized him, and took him out of the vineyard (*krmʾ*), and killed him.
> When therefore the owner of the vineyard (*dkrmʾ*) comes, what will he do to those labourers?
> They said to him, "He will destroy them severely, and lease his vineyard (*krmʾ*) to other laborers, who will give him fruits in their seasons." ...
> When the high priests and Pharisees heard his parables (*mtlwhy*), they understood that he was speaking against them.
> So they wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the people, because they regarded him as a prophet (*dlnbyʾ*).
>
> (Matthew 21:33-46)

It seems to me that the Qurʾān's simile of the profligate townspeople introduces its audience to its own version of this simile in the same way it elsewhere introduces its audience to aspects of the rabbinic tradition. As is the case with the Qurʾān's rabbinic intertextuality, there is no sign here of any direct textual link of any sort. Inversely, it seems much more likely that simile's such as this one permeated Syriac Christian culture and homilies; it is on the oral discourse of its time to which that the Qurʾān builds and to which it responds.[95]

Regardless, it makes good sense to hear the Qurʾān directly in dialogue with the gospel parable as long as one remains acutely aware of the provisional nature of the enterprise. The themes and lexemes this parable shares with the Qurʾān are as manifold as the ones between the Qurʾān and the rabbinic parable of the king's judgment of a town, as discussed above. The rabbinic simile shared with the Qurʾān the context of the judgement of a town that that hopes for intercession; the present simile, in addition to another judgment, also shares the motif of the stoning of apostles, as well as a number of details that points to the fruitfulness of constructing a triangular relationship between the three texts.

In detail, in Matthew, Jesus announces his story as a parable (*mtlʾ* Mt. 21:33), just as the Qurʾān announces it as a simile (*mathal*, Q36:13). In Matthew, the Lord twice *sends* his servants (*lʿbdwhy*, Mt 22:34, 35, 36) and finally his son to the workers; in the Qurʾān, God twice *sends* a messenger, reinforced by a third (Q36:14) – a structural, even if not a complete narrative affinity. God's apostles are here called servants (*al-ʿibād*, Q36:30), reflecting the positive use of the term by the interloping man in the simile in *Sūrat Yā Sīn*. Thus far, Matthew's parable shares as much with the Qurʾān as it would with the rabbinic parable of punishment. There is, of course, no son in the Qurʾān. The setting in Matthew's parable, however, is also reiterated in the Qurʾān: in Matthew, the servants are seized and stoned (*drgmwhy*, Mt. 21:35), in the Qurʾān, they are impugned (Q36:14) and threatened with stoning (*la-narjumannakum*, Q36:18; both themes are common throughout the Qurʾān).[96] In Matthew, a *krm*', a "vineyard" (Mt 21:33) is planted, and, after the evil tenants are "severely destroyed," that vineyard is "leased to other laborers" in Mt. 21:42. In the Qurʾān's simile, God makes the interloping man "one of the chosen ones" (*al-mukramīna*), using a root cognate to Syriac (as well as Aramaic, or Hebrew) *krmʾ*, "vineyard." While we cannot be sure that this first allusion to "vine" will have been evident to the entirety of the Qur'an's audience – the Arabic cognate *karm* for "vineyard" is attested only in post-qurʾānic literature – the theme of a vineyard is explicated later in the sūra. After God destroys the townspeople, He then plants orchards of "vines" (*ʾaʿnābin*, Q36:34) for the future nourishment of other human beings. The Qurʾān, hence, introduces its audience not so much to a version of Matthew's parable but to a new parable that maintains the symbolic imagery all the while neutralising divergent theologies, just as it had done in the case of angels acting as messengers in the Bible: there is no son,

just an unnamed man who has affinity with Lot as much as with Jesus, the simile loses its anti-Jewish bent, and, while Matthew's apostles are killed, they are only threatened in the Qurʾān that generally does not allow for the killing of its apostles, as Sidney Griffith correctly points out.[97]

The simile of the profligate townspeople may thus well evoke the parable of Matthew as well as that of the rabbis, at least to someone familiar with these texts. Yet rather than seeking to tie down the simile in Q36 to a specific biblical, rabbinic, or Syriac "subtext," it may be the most rewarding to cast the net as wide as reasonably possible. The plurality of the messengers in the simile of the profligate townspeople, juxtaposed to the interloping men, seems reflective of the Qurʾān's integration of Matthew's parable all the while containing echoes of the rabbinic parable discussed above, as well as of the Qurʾān's own Lot narratives, most acutely those in the third of my categories in which the plurality of messengers becomes a narrative focus. We can therefore state that the plurality of messengers in the third category of Qurʾānic Lot narratives does constitute a structural similarity that would justify placing *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* among the third category of Lot stories, yet the evidence will need to be reassessed once a better chronology of these sūras has been established.[98]

The Qurʾān's narration of the simile therefore is a good example of the ways in which an external diachronic understanding may form a sound basis for the analysis of the text – yet the Qurʾān's secondary synchronicity, seeks to eclipse its primary diachronic nature. To give one last illustration of this process we can consider the term depicting the man that in the simile is referred to as one of *al-mukramīna*, of "the chosen ones" (Q36:27). To reiterate, the Arabic, here uses a root cognate to the Syriac for "vineyard," *krmʾ*; "vines" (Q36:34), moreover, are planted in the simile right after the town's destruction. While this diachronic hearing may have a historical basis, a closer look at this term suggests that while the Qurʾān, diachronically, may marshal the scriptural past, it does so mainly for the purpose of establishing an internally synchronic, meta-historical present.

The Qurʾān's term *al-mukramīna*, at the same time as possibly evoking the *krmʾ* known from Matthew's parable or one of the Syriac retellings it inspired, points its audience to its own textual present: in the exact same grammatical form of the word (the genitive plural passive participle of the IVth form), it occurs only once more in the Qurʾān, namely in Q51:24, where it is applied to the messengers sent to Abraham and Lot – another simultextual trigger of a narration in the third category of Lot stories, among which Q51 figures.[99] The Qurʾān's use of this term for both the messengers visiting Abraham and Lot as well as for the man in the simile of the profligate townspeople in *Sūrat Yā Sīn* is a detail that may well be a coincidentally simultext, and bears evidentiary weight only in the larger context of shared details. Still, the term serves as a good illustration for how the Qurʾān here creates another simultext that may well engage the scriptural past at the same time

as creating a textual present – and this remains true no matter when this secondary synchronicity is created (in Q51, in Q36, or during a later edition of both). The result remains a textual triangle, in which the (Meccan) Qurʾān integrates texts from its scriptural past, such as the Syriac (or possibly Arabic) tradition preserving the simile from Matthew's Gospel and the rabbinic Lot tradition, and integrates them into its own textual presence (such as the simile in *Sūrat Yā-Sīn* or Q51:24). Yet this triangle is then dissolved into the static synchronicity the Qurʾān creates through its simultextual nature, and it is to this layer to which all diachronic analyses must necessarily always return in the end – and from which they equally, admittedly or not, start in the beginning, when approaching the *Muṣḥaf*.

The simile of the profligate townspeople, I would therefore argue, integrates the Qurʾān's own version of Matthew's parable into a meta-historical parable that stands in turn in conversation with the Qurʾān's other stories of destruction, most of all its simultextually prominent own version of Lot and Sodom. The result of the Qurʾān's integration of the two stories does not lead to rabbinic polysemy, to an open ended diversification of possible meaning. Contrarily, we see here an instantiation of the Qurʾān's pursuit of *homonoia*, showing over and over again that the story of the warning of a destroyed town, the impugning of the messenger, and the final destruction happens in many versions just to reveal the one eternal truth of its underlying narrative paradigm.

While a full integration of the sychronic and the diachronic Qurʾān remains a future aspiration, the present attempt shows the Qurʾān to be a text that creates a "secondary synchronicity," a text that clearly developed over a few years or decades, but self-consciously creates itself as having "no former and no later," in a way not dissimilar to the one in which the rabbis read the Bible.[100] This internal Qurʾānic synchronicity determines the textual surface, and determines the Qurʾān's intended message. After having more clearly identified the message of any given passage, we can engage in a study of the Qurʾān's external diachronicity, the Qurʾān's dialogue with the rabbinic and the Christian tradition of its time. In the Meccan period, however, this dialogue occurs beneath the surface of the text: rather than indicating that it assumes the audience's familiarity with specific rabbinic or Gospel traditions, the Qurʾān first introduces its audience to its own version of aspects of these external texts. In Medina, I believe, the external synchronicity reaches the textual surface.

Importantly, the presence of a cluster of elements known from the Gospel tradition in the Qurʾān shows the same signs of their transposition and integration in the Qurʾānic narrative matrix that we saw in the case of echoes from the Hebrew or Aramaic Bible, and from its Midrashic interpretation. I would be the first to point out that some instances of this integration here suggested may well be coincidental. The identification of oral rabbinic and Christian texts within the Qurʾān's oral narrative horizon may never be a precise science, especially since it depends on the written

witnesses of a discourse whose voices have not been heard for fourteen centuries. The evidence, however, gains force in an accumulative way, and suggesting that the Qurʾān indeed wanted its audience to partake of its own rendering of the rabbis' view of Lot both when introducing the narrative explicitly and when alluding to it in the simile of the profligate townspeople, here alongside its presentation of its own version of Matthew's parable, and of a rabbinic simile perhaps comparable to the one discussed above.

Understanding the simile in *Sūrat Yā Sīn* as a narrative in dialogue with both the Qurʾānic and the rabbinic Lot narrative *and* with a parable known from the Gospel of Matthew and the rabbis then leads us to appreciate once more the differences between the Qurʾān use of the parable and that of the Christian tradition – in the same way in which the Qurʾān also differed from the rabbis' views of the character of Lot. In the Gospel, the parable about "the son," the "tower" and the evil labourers, denotes the specific circumstances of Jesus, Jerusalem, and the high priests and Pharisees. This is explicated in Matthew 21:45; the Syriac patristic tradition understood the concrete parable likewise.[101] The Qurʾān's simile, by contrast, applies to all people at all times; God has no son and the destruction of Jerusalem does not appear here either: another instance of its Qurʾānization of a Biblical narrative.

The Qurʾān's simile then uses a parable cognate to that of Matthew's parable of the death of Jesus and to the rabbinic simile to create a truly meta-historical parable, which in turn evokes the story of Lot and all other messengers in its own synchronic textual space. The creation of this meta-historical context, and of the secondary synchronicity in which biblical stories are partially dissolved, may be among the central characteristics of the simile of the profligate townspeople, and of the Meccan Qurʾān as a whole. The Qurʾān points back to Scripture, it points ahead to the end of time, and it points to its own present in a way that fuses the three horizons of past, present and future.

Notes

* The writing of this paper has been supported by a grant from the Leverhulme trust. It is partially the result of two fruitful workshops. I presented my thoughts on the Qurʾānic Lot narratives at the workshop *Fragmentation and Compilation: The Making of Religious Texts in Islam – A Comparative Perspective (Part II)*, convened by Asma Hilali at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, and learned much from the ensuing discussion. During the academic year 2012-13, I discussed *Sūrat Yā Sīn* in the context of the Notre Dame Qurʾān Seminar, convened by Gabriel Reynolds and Mehdi Azaiez (see <https://quranseminar. nd.edu/>). While I have indicated contributions by specific members in the text below, I must also express my gratitude and intellectual indebtedness to the group as a whole. I owe much gratitude, moreover, to Sidney Griffith, Angelika Neuwirth, Gabriel Reynolds and Nicolai Sinai and Josef Witztum for their spirited comments upon an earlier version of this paper and for saving me from several errors, as well as to Russel Harris and Asma Hilali for their careful editing work. A note on texts and translations: the vocalised

text of the Qurʾān is that of ʿĀṣim (transmitted by Ḥafṣ), i.e. the Cairo text; all translations of the Qurʾān are based on the version of Ali Quli Qura'i, *The Qur'an with a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 2006). The Babylonian Talmud is quoted according to Manuscript Munich; all quotations from *Bereshit Rabbah* follow Manuscript London as edited by Hanokh Albeck and Yehudah Theodor, *Bereschit Rabba mit kritischem Apparat und Kommentar* (Jerusalem: Shalem Books, 1996 [1912–1927]); translations are based on Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon, *Midrash Rabbah* (London, Soncino Press, 1939). The Peshitta is cited according to the edition of George Anton Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2004). The consonantal transliteration of Hebrew and Aramaic is simplified as ʾ b g d h w z ḥ ṭ y k l m n s ʿ p ṣ q r sh t. All translations from the Peshitta are based on the version of George Lamsa, *The Four Gospels According to the Eastern Version* (Philadelphia, A. J. Holman Company, 1933; needless to say, Lamsa's translation is less problematic than some of his scholarly assumptions). Throughout this article, I have emended all translations to give a more literal sense of the originals; all further translations are my own.

1 As in Biblical and Talmudic studies, the distinction between a "heard" and a "read" Qurʾān is a hypothetical reconstruction of two idealized states whose actual distinction in history will have often been fluid. Likewise, the idea of an implied and intelligible original meaning of any text has its shortcomings, yet the tentative reconstruction of this meaning underlies most historical studies of ancient literature. On the difference between the Qurʾān as it was first pronounced and the Qurʾān as it was collected see for example Angelika Neuwirth, 'Two Faces of the Qurʾān: Qurʾān and Muṣḥaf,' *Oral Tradition* 25 (2010): 141-156. For a thorough study on the relative stability of oven the earliest versions of the Qurʾān see Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, 'Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān,' *Der Islam*. 87 (2012): 1–129. It is as illustrating the Qurʾān's growing emphasis on literary self-awareness as a written text that I understand the illuminating two-partite article by Marianna Klar, 'Text-Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Combining Synchronicity with Diachronicity in *Sūrat al-Baqara: Part Two,"* *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 19.2 (2017): 64-105 and eadem, 'Text-Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Combining Synchronicity with Diachronicity in *Sūrat al-Baqara: Part One*," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 19.1 (2017): 1-38. While both parts of the article reached me too late to discuss Klar's weighty insights here, it seems to me that her study's diverging approach neatly complements my own – at the same time as inadvertently highlighting the idiosyncrasies of the present study.

2 See, for example, Joseph Witztum, *The Syriac Milieu of the Quran: The Recasting of Biblical Narratives* (PhD Dissertation, Princeton, NJ, 2011); idem, 'The Foundations of the House (Q 2: 127)', *Bulletin of the SOAS* (2009): 25-40); Emran el-Badawi, *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions* (New York: Routledge, 2013), Sidney H. Griffith, 'Christian Lore and the Arabic Qurʾān: The 'Companions of the Cave' in Surat al-Kahf and in Syriac Christian Tradition', in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān: The Qurʾān in Its Historical Context 2* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 109-37; and Kevin van Bladel, 'The Legend of Alexander the Great in the Qurʾān 18:83-102', in **ibid.**, 175-203; as well Holger Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture: The Didascalia Apostolorum as a Point of Departure* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

3 For pertinent criticism see Devin Stewart, 'Reflections on the State of the Art in Western Qurʾanic Studies,' in Carol Bakhos and Michael Cook (eds.),' *Islam and its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017); Walid Saleh, 'A Piecemeal Qurʾān: Furqān and its Meaning in Classical Islam and in Modern Qurʾānic Studies,' *Jerusalem Studies of Arabic and Islam* 42 (2015): 31-71; idem, 'The Etymological Fallacy and Qurʾānic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity,' in Michael Marx et al. (eds.), *The Qurʾān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu* (Brill: Leiden, 2010), 649-698; and Sidney H. Griffith, 'Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qurʾān': Who were those who said 'Allāh is third of three' according to al-Māʾida 73?' in Meir M. Bar-Asher et al. (eds.) *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Mediaeval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qurʾān, Presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai* (Jerusalem: The Ben Zvi Institute, 2007), 83*-110*.

4 See, for example, Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran: Handkommentar mit Übersetzung. Band 1: Poetische Prophetie. Frühmekkanische Suren* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011); eadem, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren: die literarische Form des Koran, ein Zeugnis seiner Historizität?* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007); see also eadem, 'Meccan Texts – Medinan Additions? Politics and the Re-Reading of Liturgical Communications', in Rüdiger Arnzen and Jörn Thielman, *Words, Texts, and Concepts Cruising the Mediterranean Sea: Studies on the Sources, Contents, and Influences of Islamic Civilization and Arabic Philosophy. Dedicated to Gerhard Endress on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 71-93; and Nicolai Sinai, 'Processes of Literary Growth and Editorial Expansion in Two Medinan Surahs", in Carol Bakhos and Michael Cook (eds.),' *Islam and its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017), 69–119; see also 'The Qurʾān as Process', in idem, Angelika Neuwirth, and Michael Marx (eds.), *The Qurʾān in Context*), 407-440; and cf. Behnam Sadeghi, 'The Chronology of the Qurʾān: A Stylometric Research Program', *Arabica* 58 (2011): 210-99; see also note 68 below.

5 Most scholars, of course, accept that there is a fundamental difference between the Qurʾān's language and law used in the so-called "Medinan" sūras and the so-called "Meccan" sūras. Others do not see any critical basis for reconstructing a particular compositional sequence of passages or sūras within the Qurʾān, while still others continue to have doubts even regarding the Qurʾān's compositional context in the Ḥijāz. For a criticism of the chronology see esp. Gabriel Said Reynolds, 'Le problème de la chronologie du Coran', *Arabica* 58 (2011): 477–502; for a suggestion of an extended redaction history see for example Claude Gilliot, 'Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qurʾān: is the Qurʾān Partly the Fruit of a Progressive and Collective Work?' in Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.), *The Qurʾān in its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2008), 88-108; on the geography of the Qurʾān see also note 52 below.

6 See Holger Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture*, see e.g. 18 note 27, and Shlomo Dov Goitein, 'The Birth-Hour of Muslim Law', *The Muslim World* 50 (1960): 23–29.

7 The present study raises the issue of the two main textual layers of the Qurʾān only implicitly, since all materials pertaining to the Lot narrative, as well as *Sūrat Yā-Sīn*, can be found among the Meccan sūras. I want to emphasize, however, that this study does not rely on any of the distinguishing features between the Meccan and Medinan sūras, and contributes to the differentiation between the two layers only in indirect ways.

8 Taking the redactional stage, and even the individual manuscript traditions, as the beginning (not the endpoint) for any inquiry is a praxis that has long been established in Jewish studies; see Peter Schäfer, "Research into *Rabbinic* Literature: *An Attempt to Define* the Status Quaestionis," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (1986): 139–152, and the ensuing debate in the same journal. New Testament scholarship, by contrast, has, to some degree, relinquished the study of the value of individual manuscripts to scholars who seek to establish a hypothetical eclectic *Urtext* (as epitomised in the Nestle and Aland editions). A good representative of the more critical tendencies in the field remains Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

9 In addition to the "Syriac Turn" and the improved diachronic analyses (see notes two and four above), a third field in Qurʾānic studies has made considerable advances in the recent decade: codicology. See esp. François Déroche, *Qurʾans of the Umayyads: A Preliminary Overview* (*Leiden Studies in Islam and Society*; Leiden: Brill, 2014). I expect that much of present scholarship, including the findings of this article, will have to be revisited in due course based on our constantly improving knowledge of Qurʾānic manuscripts. That being said, the Muslim tradition of reading the *rasm* text seems, to date, far more reliable in establishing the Qurʾān's original meanings than the works criticised by the scholars named in note 2.

10 For a study on the editorial cohesion in the sequence of some Meccan sūras see Islam Dayeh, 'Al-Ḥawāmīm: Intertextuality and Coherence in Meccan surahs," in Michael Marx et al. (eds.), *The Qurʾān in Context*, 461-498.

11 "External" text are all those external to the Qurʾān itself, "internal" ones are those preserved in the *Muṣḥaf*. The distinction between what is "internal" and "external," of course, is a pragmatic distinction that does not ultimately withstand scrutiny, as long ago argued by Dominque LaCapra, see e.g. *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), esp. 23-71.

12 Fully introducing the philological tools of Biblical studies into the field of the study of the Qurʾān remains an urgent necessity, as Nicolai Sinai nicely illustrates in a recent article; see idem, 'Processes of Literary Growth and Editorial Expansion in Two Medinan Surahs,' 69-116. For the present article, I will restrict myself to introducing tools developed in Talmudic studies.

13 The helpful concept of "rabbanization" has long been used in rabbinic scholarship, marking the rabbis' rereading of Biblical narrative in light of rabbinic hermeneutics; see e.g. Burton Visotzky, *Golden Bells and Pomegranates* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2003). In the present article, I suggest that the Qurʾān retells its Lot narrative in the light of a traceable and increasing number of Biblical and rabbinic details; a tendency I will call the Biblicisation and rabbanisation of the Qurʾān. I want to emphasize, however, that the Qurʾān dissolves these details into its own hermeneutical textual world, and that this process of Qurʾānisation at the textual surface eclipses its concurrent tendencies of biblicisation and rabbanisation below, as I will illustrate throughout this study. The helpful concept of "Qurʾānisation" of a previous narrative has been advocated in the context of the *sīra* literature by Uri Rubin, see e.g. his *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 226-33; see also idem, "The Life of Muhammad and the Qur'an: The Case of Muhammad's Hijra", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28 (2003): 40-64.

14 One of the key problems in establishing the Qurʾān's chronology which I will be able to address only in passing in the present study is the possibility of editorial changes occurring after the compositional stages of the sūras, such as those medinan insertions in Meccan sūras. Regarding the coherence of *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, at least, my literary analysis suggests that crass editorial intervention after the compositional stage seems unlikely; see also note 4 above.

15 On the role of the Lot stories within the Hebrew Bible see for example the perceptive essays edited by Diane Lipton, *Universalism and Particularism at Sodom and Gomorrah: Essays in Memory of Ron Pirson* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

16 See e.g. Dtn. 29:23 and 32:32, Isaiah 3:9 and 13:19, Jeremiah 23:14, 49:18 and 50:14.

17 On the importance of the Aramaic Gospels for the study of the Qurʾān see most recently the innovative study by El-Badawi, *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, an important contribution even if perhaps not devoid of over-readings of the evidence, Sidney Griffith, "The Qurʾān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions, by Emran El-Badawi" *Ilahiyat Studies* 5 (2014): 115-21.

18 The employment of the Scriptural past to depict the eschatological future, and the attempt thereby to deal with the difficult present, is evident throughout the Qumran scrolls; *Pesher Habaquq* and the *War Scroll* may be the most impressive examples. The Sodom story occurs regularly in the Qumran scrolls, for example in *Jubilees* 16:1-9; see Jaques van Ruiten, "Lot versus Abraham: The Interpretation of Genesis 18:1-19:38 in *Jubilees* 16:1-9," in Ed Noort and Eigert Tigchelaar (eds), *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18-19 and Its Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 29-46; and Eibert Tigchelaar, 'Sodom and Gomorrah in the Dead Sea Scroll', in ibid, 47-62.

19 See Dowid Künstlinger, "Die Christliche Herkunft der kurānischen Loṭ-Legende," in *Rocznik orientalistyczny* 7 (1929-30): 281-95. Needless to say, I disagree with Künstlinger's overall thesis as epitomized by the title of his article. I instead posita Qurʾānic composition in dialogue with oral traditions that are built on, but not restricted to the Hebrew and Aramaic Bibles, the New Testament, and the Rabbinic tradition.

20 The "prophetology" of the Qurʾān, as exemplified most clearly in Q26 *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ*, has recently been discussed by Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: the Scriptures of the People of the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), esp. 5; see already Josef Horovitz, *Koranische*

Untersuchungen (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1926), 44-77, and recently Gabriel Said Reynolds, "On the Qurʾān and the Theme of Jews as 'Killers of the Prophets'," *Al-Bayān* 10 (2012): 9–32.

21 For a comprehensive review of literature on the so-called "punishment stories" in the Qurʾān see Devin Stewart, "Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions in the Qur'ān," in *Qur'ānic Studies Today*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael Sells (Routledge: London, 2016), esp. 29-34. For previous studies of these narratives, oriented along the lines of the chronology established by Nöldeke (and Blachère), as well as the biography of Muhammad, see David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers: A Qur'anic Study* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999), esp. 66-73 (on Lot); see also the foundational article by Rudi Paret, "Das Geschichtsbild Mohammeds," *Die Welt als Geschichte* 4 (1951): 214-24. Walid Saleh has presented a complete revaluation of the entire Qurʾān based on his argument that these stories, which he rightly calls "messengership stories," contain the key to the worldview of the prophet. See Saleh, xxx.

22 Michel Cuypers has pioneered readings of the Qurʾān which pay close attention to the message the text generates through such repetitions, see Michel Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur'an: Rhetorical Analysis* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); see also the helpful introduction by Carl. W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide, with Select Translations* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). For very pertinent criticism of Cuypers see Nicolai Sinai, 'Going Round in Circles,' review essay on Michel Cuypers, *The Composition of the Qur'an: Rhetorical Analysis*, and Raymond Farrin, *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*, *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19 (2017): 106–122. Mehdi Azaiez has been applying a similar strategy in his recent publications, see idem, *"Le contre-discours coranique: premières approches d'un corpus*," in idem (ed.), *Le Coran, Nouvelles approches* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2013). In effect, both Cuypers and Azaiez introduce tools to Qurʾānic studies that had long proven successful in the study of rabbinic Midrash; a transfer of knowledge which I hope to facilitate even further in the present article. The use of repetition to create meaning in rabbinic narratives has long been demonstrated by Yonah Frenkel, *דרכי האגדה והמדרש* (Masada: Yad la-Talmud, 1991), 260–74; see also his 'שאלות הרמנוטיות בחקר סיפור האגדה,' *Tarbiz* 47 (1977/78), 139–72 (reprinted in: idem, *The Aggadic Narrative: Harmony in Content and Form* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 2001), 11–50, [Hebrew]). Frenkel's theories have been corrected and expanded by scholars such as Joshua Levinson, see e.g. idem, *The Twice-Told Tale: A Poetics of the Exegetical Narrative in Rabbinic Midrash* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005 [Hebrew]), and Jeffrey Rubenstein, see e.g. *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). For the use of cognate narrative techniques in Greek literature see the collection of articles in John W. Welch (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981) and Tomas Hägg, *Narrative Technique in Ancient Greek Romances: Studies of Chariton, Xenophon, Ephesius, and Achilles Tatius* (Stockholm: Svenska institutet i Athen, 1971).

23 The root "to warn," *ndhr*, for example, is in effect nowhere as prominent as in *Sūrat Yā Sīn*; it appears twice in Q36:6 and 10, and once in Q36:11 and 70. Further clusters of words based on this root include Q7:2, 6, and 69; Q18:2, 4; and 56 and Q46:3, 12, and 21.

24 In a recent paper presented at the second annual conference of the British Association of Islamic Studies that I am currently preparing for publication ("Secondary Synchronicity as Literary Device"), I argued that the Meccan sūras emphasize diachronic revelation and allow for a certain textual dynamic, whereas the Medinan sūras increasingly emphasize a more punctual revelation and the text's supernatural cohesion.

25 Especially for the redactional layer of the Qurʾān, Zvi Septimus' notion of "simultexts" in the Babylonian Talmud ("the Bavli") can be of some pertinence. The analytical framework Septimus proposes, "attempts to explore the linguistic feature of the Bavli ... that brackets the chronological narrative of the Bavli's evolution and focuses on the final product: "the Bavli." I also seek to expand Fraenkel's notion of *segirut* (autonomy) to the entire Bavli rather than any one story within it. In doing so, I demonstrate that if ... there is creative "reworking" in the Bavli, then it is

an activity that extends beyond the parameters of the story unit, or even the *sugya*, the dialogue on a given topic. The Bavli as a whole is shaped and defined by this activity. This type of creative "reworking" is bidirectional with products becoming sources of each other, over and over. By reading the Bavli in this manner, a new type of thematic relationship between different stories in the Bavli emerges." (Septimus, "Trigger Words and Simultexts: The Experience of Reading the Bavli," in Barry Scott Wimpfheimer (ed.) *Wisdom of Bat Sheva: In Memory of Beth Samuels* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2009), 164-5).

26 See e.g. Moulie Vidas, *Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), and Holger Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 8-14.

27 The Qurʾān, relating to the mother of the book in various ways, sees itself as both synchronic and diachronic: as part of the heavenly book (see e.g. Q43:3-4) it has been created by God in the past, as synchronic eternal text, it is then revealed to its prophet word by word, as a diachronic text. It is not surprising to find traces of this self-identity in the text's literary features. A good starting point for reflecting on the self-referentiality of Qurʾānic verses is the volume on the Qurʾānic self-perception as scripture edited by Stefan Wild, *Self-Referentiality in the Qurʾān* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), see also Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même: Vocabulaire et argumentation du discours coranique autoréférentiel* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), as well as Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qurʾān's Self-image. Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Walter J. Ong's notion of "secondary orality", describing a written text that intentionally creates an aura of orality, is a good model for considering both the Qurʾān's orality and synchronicity; see idem; *Orality and Literary: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982).

28 See Margarete Schlüter, 'The Creative Force of a Hermeneutic Rule: the Principle "there is no earlier and later in the Torah" in Midrashic and Talmudic Literature', in Rachel Elior and Peter Schäfer (ed.), *Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought: Festschrift in Honor of Joseph Dan on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 59-84. It should be noted that the Talmud shows clear awareness of its own situatedness in time, creating a sense of literary antiquity by employing passages in Hebrew within Aramaic texts, at other times referring to previous rabbinic literature as outdated, for a discussion see the works cited in note 21 above.

29 *Al-raḥmān*, the exceedingly common name of God in the Qurʾān, furnishes a second structural means of integrating the parts of the simile that generates meaning through repetition. In Q36:16, the messengers state "our Lord knows," *rabbunā yaʿlamu*, designating their submission under God with the first person (plural). The fact that both Arabic roots *rbb* and *ʿlm* are pervasive in the Qurʾān points to their importance, and the careful employment of pronouns in the simile guides the audience to the simile's repeated use of the same roots in diverging contexts. The interloping man, first uses the root *rbb*, surprisingly with the possessive pronoun of the second person (also plural), to explicate that what separates him from his people: he – unlike them! – has faith in "your (pl.) Lord" (*bi-rabbikum*). Both he and his people at least nominally share the same deity; implicitly making it clear to the audience that the profligate townspeople, and perhaps of the audience itself, fall short of their own ideals. The interloping man then repeats and thereby emphasizes the same roots *rbb* and *ʿlm* once more when expressing his exasperation with the words: "Had my people only known (*yaʿlamūna*) that my Lord (*rabbī*) forgave me" (Q36:26). Now, however, like the messengers, he shifts to the possessive pronoun of the first person (now singular) when designating his deity.

30 The ubiquity of the theme of "remembrance" in the Qurʾān strengthens this point: Sidney Griffith has drawn our attention to the centrality of the word *dhkr*, used to introduce the Scriptural past, throughout the Qurʾān, see Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic,* esp. 61-85, and see already the magisterial study of the root *dhkr* in Fritz (Dov) Goitein, *Das Gebet im Quran* (PhD Dissertation: Frankfurt, 1923), 3-14.

31 For example, in Q36:13 and 14, *ʾidh*, "when," introduces the simile of the messengers to the town, in Q36:29 *fa-ʾidhā,* "when," marks the climax of the destruction of the townspeople. The

repetition of the term *ʾidh* at the beginning and the end of the simile links the appearance of the messenger to the impending destruction, a warning to the reluctant ones among the Qurʾān's own audience. As Griffith has shown, *ʾidh*, "when," can function similarly to the root *dhkr*, "remind", see note 30 above and Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic,* esp. 61-85.

32 In Q36:17, for example, the messengers state that it is upon them to communicate "clearly" (*mubīn*), in Q36:24, the interloping man states that hoping on other gods would place him "clearly" (*mubīn*) in error, connecting his mission to that of the messengers.

33 On God's governance of both agricultural revival and cosmic bodies see e.g. Q2:164 and Q45:3-5.

34 On Neuwirth's respective studies see note four above.

35 A "single cry" (*ṣayḥatan wāḥidatan*) also occurs in Q38:15, likely denoting eschatology in general; here, it is evoked after Noah, ʿAd, Pharaoh, Thamūd, the people of Lot, and Ayka are portrayed as accusing the apostles of lying (in Q38:12 and 14). Many more examples of "the cry" can be adduced: it pertains to the eschatological judgment also in Q50:42; in Q23:41, "the cry" seizes the generation after Noah; and it can also be applied to individuals, for in Q29:39-40, Korah, Pharaoh, and Haman are seized by "the cry."

36 The Egyptian cluster of simultexts triggered by the words "from the outskirts of the city" should be considered in light of the fact that the Qurʾān elsewhere uses the Arabic term *madīna*, which could designate any city, only in association with Egypt, Lot's People (Q15:67, see below), the Thamūd, and the Qurʾān's own prophet. In detail, the Qurʾān mainly refers to the cities of Egypt with this term (Q7:111 and 123, Q12:30, see also Q26:36 and 53). Moses kills man in a "city" in Egypt (Q28:15 and 18); the "city" in Q18:82 is not clearly placed in Egypt, but of course again associated with Moses (but cf. Q18:19). The city in Q27:48 is that of the Thamūd. All other mentions of the term *madīna*, to the best of my knowledge, refer to the city of the Qurʾān's prophet (see Q9:101 and 120, Q33: 60 and Q63:8). The interloping man from the outskirts of the "city" in *Sūrat Yā Sīn* is thereby constructed as another new Moses and a another Ṣāliḥ, and the Qurʾān's prophet in continuity with the all the previous ones. On Egypt see also notes 34 and 35 below.

37 In Q36:18, the townspeople say that *taṭayyarnā*, "we take the messengers for a bad omen;" in Q36:19 the messengers respond that *ṭāʾirukum*, "your bad omens" will attend the townspeople, using their own words against them, as we have seen above. Likewise, the Egyptians misconstrue a bad omen in Q7:131, as the Thamūd do in Q27:47.

38 Intriguingly, Lot's town in Q15:67 is called a *madīna*, a "city," while elsewhere it is called a "town," *qaryah* (as in Lot Q7:82 and Q29:31). The town of Lot and that of the profligate townspeople in the simile, hence, are the only two places in the Qurʾān which are both designated as both *qarya*, "town," and *madīna*, "city" (see Q36:13 and 20). Considering the semantic field evoked by the trigger words of the "single cry" in Q15:67 (see note 35) and *madīna* itself (see note 36), we may be able to consider the example of Lot's people as an especially significant simultext for the profligate townspeople.

39 My findings here confirm those of Sidney Griffith (see above) and Nicolai Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung. Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), see esp. chapters one and four to seven. The term "Fortschreibung," or "written elaboration" of a Qurʾānic text, constitutes an important tool in the literary analysis of the relative dating of the material, see also note 54 below.

40 According to the Didache (11:5-10), any prophet asking for money is a false one, a theme also known from the *Shepherd of Hermes* 43:12 as Patricia Crone points out in her commentary on the passage (see note *).

41 For further examples see also Q11:29 and 51, Q26:145, 164, and 180.

42 The necessity of interpreting every aspect and even the most mundane detail of scripture is beautifully dramatised in Bavli *Menahot* 29b, an often cited story about Moses' visit to Akiva's academy (see e.g. Jeffery Rubenstein, *Stories of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 182-203). The Qurʾān invites a reading of all of its passages in light of all others, in a similar way as the rabbis read the Bible, as mentioned above (note 21). In stark contrast

to the Talmud, however, the Qurʾān does not seem to invite its own interpretation through an open-ended process of oral Torah, but rather seems to convey ever growing clarity about divine matters – a concept close to the Christian ideal of "homonoia," the single-mindedness of the church, rightfully juxtaposed to "polynoia," the many-mindedness of the rabbis, by Daniel Boyarin, see idem, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), esp. 161-5. Yet the Qurʾān also shows awareness of interpretative ambiguity, see e.g. Joseph Witztum, 'Variant Traditions, Relative Chronology and the Study of Intra-Qurʾānic Parallels,'in Hoyland et al. (eds.), *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone* (Brill: Leiden, 2014), 1-50. On the Qurʾān's openness towards interpretation (even in light of its emphasis on the clearness of its message) see Nicolai Sinai, 'Qurʾānic Self-Referentiality as a Strategy of Self-Authorization', in Stefan Wild (ed.), *Self-Referentiality in the Qurʾān,* 103–134.

43 Or a thorough exploration of the issue of hierarchy within intra-textual relations in the Qurʾān, subtly framed within the framework of "Relevance Theory," see Salwa M. S. El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'ān: Relevance, coherence and structure*. (*Routledge Studies in the Qur'an*; Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

44 For example, Lot's people are also called "profligate" see Q51:34; as are the unbelievers among the Thamūd in Q26:151, and Pharaoh in Q40:28 and 34 and in Q44:31 – yet these simultexts are not evoked in a manner, by means of literary structure and lexical identity, in which their trigger words would convey a similar sense of urgency.

45 The simultextual reading here could easily be translated into a diachronic one. The evidence provided by passages that were composed after the passage under consideration can be compared to the testimony of a text's earliest historical audience. If a later verse associates a previous one with any semantic field, then this later verse within the Qurʾān functions as the best – even if not immediate – evidence of the meaning of the previous passage. The sooner the later verse follows upon the previous verse it evokes, the more accurate the association will be. It is for this reason that it makes sense to differentiate at least between the two main layers of the Qurʾān, a Meccan and a Medinan layer, even in a synchronic reading – all the while making room for the possibility of a later editing of any of the passages throughout both layers.

46 Among the passages on Lot, the Qurʾān, amidst its accusations of sexual violence, also criminalises sex between men in general. The focus here is squarely on the male-to-male sex act; the modern category of "homosexuality" is a far broader one and the term should be avoided in the discussion of ancient legal materials. Both the Qurʾān's stringent views and their reception history seem comparable to similar on the prohibition of sex between men in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Talmudic and Medieval Muslim culture, by contrast, had a somewhat more lenient attitude to the matter. For Muslim views of sex between men, and of homosexuality more broadly, only some of which were shaped in dialogue with the stories about Lot's people, see the contributions to Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); especially Jim Wafer, "Muhammad and Homosexuality," in ibid, 87-96. For contemporary attitudes see Samar Habib, *Islam and Homosexuality* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2010).

47 As a few illustrative (though not exhaustive) examples illustrate, the juxtaposition of "people" with an adjective describing their particular sinfulness is not uncommon in the Qurʾān. Just as we have seen that the Meccan contemporaries of the Qurʾān's messenger are called "a profligate people" in Q43:5, Noah and Hūd call their contemporaries and "ignorant people" (*qawman tajhalūna*, Q11:29 and Q46:23). Moses calls the Egyptians the "wrongdoing people" (*al-qawmi'l-ẓālimīna*, Q28:21), a designation of the Egyptians repeated in Q28:25 and in 10:85. The same term is also applied to the generation after Noah in Q23:41, and, in a Medinan Sūra, to the Qurʾān's contemporaries (Q9:109).

48 On Sodom in the Targumim see already Florentino García Martínez, 'Sodom and Gomorrah in the Targumim', in Noort and Tigchelaar (eds.), *Sodom's Sin*, 83-96. On the date and provenance

of Targumim, the Bible translations into Jewish Aramaic, and the difficult question of how the Targumim relate to rabbinic literature, see now Willem F. Smelik, *Rabbis, Language, and Translation in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). A good overview presenting the (fourth to fifth-century C.E.) date and provenance of the Peshitta is given in Peter J. Williams, 'The Syriac Versions of the New Testament', in Bart D. Ehrman, Michael W Holmes (ed.), *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (Studies and Documents 46; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 150-2.

49 On the Qurʾānic Lot see already Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature* (Curzon: Richmond 2002), 27-8. On the Biblical and Syriac exegetical context of *Sūrat Yūsuf* see esp. Joseph Witztum, 'Joseph Among the Ishmaelites: Q12 in Light of Syriac Sources', in Gabriel Said Reynolds (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān: The Qurʾān in Its Historical Context 2* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 425-448; see also idem, *The Syriac Milieu of the Quran: The Recasting of Biblical Narratives* (PhD Dissertation, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2010), 188-239.

50 For a discussion of the parallel problem of reconstructing the oral transmission of aspects of Christian narrative into the rabbinic milieu see Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies*, esp. 137-227.

51 See Fred Leemhuis, 'Lūṭ and his People in the Koran', in Noort and Tigchelaar (eds), *Sodom's Sin*, 97-113; Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Gräfenheinrichen: Schulze, 1931), 146-58; cf. Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (Bonn: Baaden, 1833), 127.

52 Unlike the Bible, the Qurʾān does not specify here that it was Lot's wife who was turned into a salt pillar; it rather generally speaks of the remains of a plurality of people ("… and you pass by *them*" (*latamurrūna ʿalayhim*)… , Q37:137) and does not mention salt pillars. Patricia Crone suggests that one could take the fact that the Qurʾān's audience is familiar with the remains of Lot's people as indication that the early Qurʾānic community may actually be located in the Dead Sea region where salt pillars are indeed found. Yet this raises more questions than it would answer since the Qurʾān does not actually mention the salt pillar known from the Bible, which Crone sees as evidence of the putative southern Palestinian provenance of the Qurʾān. See eadem, "What do we actually know about Mohammed?" Accessed on October 30, 2012 at http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-europe_islam/mohammed_3866.jsp.

53 For the assumptions of the audience's familiarity with biblical narratives of law in the Medinan sūras see e.g. Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture*, chapter three.

54 The overriding importance of the narrative demands of *Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ* that displace those of the biblical matrix reminds us that one must always first understand all Qurʾānic passages in the context of the sūras in which they are found. The "omission" of biblical elements in passages I classify as earlier, as Nicolai Sinai reminded me in a private communication, does not need to attest to the relative lateness of the passages in which they eventually do appear. Inversely, the insipient appearance of biblical themes such as the sexual demands of Lot's people does constitute a biblical theme in Q26 and in Q7, which is then expanded by another biblical theme in the third category of Lot stories: the attempted rape of the guests, implicitly in Q15 and explicitly in Q11, see below. This then fully falls into Sinai's helpful category of "Fortschreibung" of Qurʾānic themes, see note 39 above.

55 In the Bible, Lot is Abraham's nephew (See Gen. 11:27); he only moves to Sodom at one point in his life (Gen. 13:12). The Sodomites, in Genesis, are not Lot's "people" in the Qurʾānic sense, yet Lot is calling them "brothers" in a metaphorical way.

56 On the Abraham and Lot narratives see for example Nicolai Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 115-7. Sinai, of course, considers Q51 to predate Q11.

57 Note that the Qurʾān elsewhere speaks of towns that were "overturned" (*wa-l-muʾtafikāti*, Q9:70 and Q69:9), likely referring to the towns of Lot's people and using the same root of "overturning" we find in the Hebrew, in the Syriac, as well as in Jewish Aramaic (*hpkh* in all three languages). These passages are too short to consider them into our present considerations – in their allusive

character, they could indeed be very early, or they could constitute later allusions to a story the audience now fully knows.

58 The richness of the Qurʾān's growing overlap with the Bible subtly continues along with the onset of Qurʾānic self-referentiality. In Q11:74 Abraham "argues with Us" concerning the people of Lot, and in Q29:32, he points out that Lot is a resident of the city, just as Abraham pleads for the righteous people in Sodom in Genesis 18 (here without mentioning Lot). In a second addition "when our messengers came to Lot, he was distressed on their account, and in predicament for their sake" (Q11:77 and Q29:33), a detail only implicit in his urging them to sleep indoors, in Genesis.

59 There are of course many more examples of such Qurʾānic self-referentiality. Q11:78 states not that they "rejoiced," as in Q15, but that they "came running (*yuhraʿūna*), Q11 therefore for the first time provides a truly alternative perspective on what is likely the "same" moment in the Lot narrative as in Q15. Intriguingly, this information in Q11 is positioned as a narrative response to Lot's distress, just after his announcement that this is a "terrible day" – by running into the scene at this moment, his own people dramatically show that Lot is justified in being distressed for the messengers. Q11 therefore seems to integrate elements both from Q15 and from Q29 – or vice versa, since we shall not venture into the diachronic appreciation of the relationship of the sūras within the three categories I posit; see also note 68 below.

60 The Thamūd, for example, demand such a sign in Q26:154, as do the apostles of Jesus in the Medinan sūra Q5:113.

61 See also Q11:80 and note 16 above. Marshall rightly cautions against any facile identification of the role of Lot with the struggles of the Qur'an's own prophet, see idem, *God, Muhammad, and the Unbelievers*, 69 – yet at least a comparative appreciation between the prophet and the previous prophets is of course always implied.

62 Determining a sequence within the third category of Lot stories remains impossible based on the methods here suggested. The unique combination of Qurʾānic and Biblical motifs in Q29 makes it likely that this version should be placed at the beginning, as the first of the stories within the third category, for two reasons: one, it maintains the closest relationship to the first two categories, presenting Lot mainly as a warner, and second, because it does not connect the alleged sex between men among the Sodomites to a possible assault on the guests. Yet such considerations amount to little but educated guesswork at best, and could only be used if corroborated by additional outside evidence.

63 See note 6 above and cf. Claude Gilliot, "Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qurʾān."

64 A comparison of the Qurʾān with the Babylonian Talmud, and the authorial presence of its editors, points most clearly to the truly "dialogical" nature of the Qurʾān, which seems far more immediately engaged with a living and diverse community than the Talmud. See note 26 on the Talmud's authorial voice; on the Talmud's "monological dialogue" see also Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), esp. 140-8.

65 The cases of the "compound" prophets in the Bible, most famously the three parts of the book of Isaiah, all show a much clearer shift in ideology and language than would be discernible in the Qurʾān, see e.g. Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40–55* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 26-32.

66 It is of course Q51 where Lot is not mentioned explicitly; it may well be possible that it is the earliest of the stories in the third category, but see note 56 above.

67 It is of course in Q7 that, in contrast to the other versions in the first two categories, specified that it is Lot's wife (rather than "an old woman") who is left behind according to Q7:83. Q7:84 also describes the destruction through rain, using the same root employed in Genesis 19:24 and thereby giving more palpable Biblical elements. It is thus well possible that Q7 contains the latest version within the second category; a dating of the passage to after the third category would, however, be incompatible with my findings.

68 It should be noted that my sequence of passages is closer to the traditional orders of entire sūras than Nöldeke's. In the traditional chronology, the order of the passages I discuss, including

their attribution to my categories I, II, and III would be 1) Q54:33-39 (I), 2) Q7:80-4 (II), 3) Q26:160-75 (II), 4) Q11:69-83 (III), 5) Q15:49-77 (III), 6) Q37:133-8 (I), 7) Q51: 24-37 (III), and 8) Q29:28-35 (III). The only divergence from the traditional chronology is constituted by the position of Q37. The general affinity of my model with Nöldeke is hardly surprising, given that he considers, in his own way, the process I termed that of the Qurʾān's biblicization; see Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Quorāns* (Wiesbaden: Georg Olms Vertragsbuchandlung, 1961). By contrast, it would be much more difficult to harmonise my findings with the chronology suggested by Bazargan, recently suggested to be a possible improvement over Nöldeke by Sadeghi. The order of the passages I discuss, including their attribution to my categories I, II, and III, according to Bazargan, would be 1) Q37:133-8 (I), 2) Q26:160-75 (II, verses 163, 164, and 175 are excluded from his calculations), 3) Q15:49-77 (III), 4) Q51: 24-37 (III), 5) Q54:33-39 (I), 6) Q11:69-83 (III), 7) Q7:80-4 (II), and 8) Q29:28-35 (III), cf. Sadeghi, 'The Chronology of the Qurʾān', 233, as well as notes 3 and 51 above and note 89 below. On the important studies of Sinai and Witztum see above, notes 34 and 63.

69 See Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, 150.

70 Whereas Ephrem simply states that the angels ate, Jacob of Serugh engages in a long discussion about the inherent miracle that spiritual beings can indeed eat material food, and compares the consumption to a sacrifice. See Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* XV, e.g. in Edward G. Matthews and Joseph P. Amar (translators), *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works* (*The Fathers of the Church;* Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 1994), 158, and Jacob of Serugh's *Third Homily on Sodom*, in Paulus Bedjan (ed.), *Homilae selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* (Paris: Via Dicta, 1905), volume V, 100-1. My gratitude to Alison Salvesen for sharing with me a preliminary translation of two of Jacob's Homilies on Sodom. Speyer also points to the earliest Jewish exegetes, who, like the rabbis, state that the angels appear to be eating, see Josephus (*Antiquities* I, 11, 2) and Philo (*De Abrahamo* §118), see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, 149.

71 See Josef Witztum, "Thrice Upon a Time: Abraham's Guests and the Study of Intro-Qur'anic Parallels," in Holger Zellentin (ed.), *The Qur'ān's Reformation of Judaism and Christianity* (Routledge Studies in the Quran; New York: Routledge), in preparation; Holger Zellentin, 'Angels or Men? The Messengers to Lot in the Qur'an in their Jewish and Christian Context', delivered on 10 April 2015 at the School of Oriental and African Studies on the occasion of a workshop in Honour of Gerald Hawting and currently being prepared for publication. See already Patricia Crone, 'Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God', in Philippa Townsend and Moulie Vidas (eds), *Revelation, Literature, and Society in Late Antiquity* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 315-36; and Gerald Hawting, '"Has God sent a mortal as a messenger?" Messengers and angels in the Qurʾān', in Gabriel Zayd Reynolds (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān: The Qurʾān in its Historical Context 2* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 372-89.

72 Qurʾān Q25 *Sūrat al-Furqān* 20 quotes God as stating: "We did not send any apostles (*l-mursalīna*) before you but that they indeed ate food (*la-yaʾkulūna al-ṭaʿāma*) and walked in marketplaces." Here, the human nature of apostles is clearly tied to their eating and physical perambulation – the eating by the human apostles in effect presupposes the fact that angels would not eat. The fact that the messengers that visit Lot do not eat already strongly suggests their angelic statues. The second pertinent passage, Qurʾān Q41 *Sūrat Fuṣṣilat* 30, confirms this beyond reasonable doubt by showing how angelic messengers address humans: "Indeed those who say, 'Our Lord is God!' and then remain steadfast, the angels (*l-malāʾikatu*) descend upon them, [saying,] 'Do not fear, nor be grieved! (*ʾallā takhāfū wa-lā taḥzanū*). Receive the good news (*wa-ʾabshirū*) of the paradise which you have been promised." The angels' locution is indeed almost a verbatim echo of Q51:28 and Q29:33, where the messengers likewise state "do not fear" (*lā takhaf*, see also Q15:52-3 and Q11:70). We can therefor safely assume that not eating as well as telling humans not to fear, for the Qurʾān, is an indication for the angelic nature of the messengers to Lot, in

tension with the Qurʾān's statements on the generally human nature of messengers to humans discussed above.

73 See Witztum, "Thrice Upon a Time," esp. pp. 11-2. Speyer, somewhat forcedly, suggests that Abraham's fear may be caused by "a confusion with the tale of Simeon" (see Judges 13:22), where the protagonists fear that they may die since they have looked upon God (Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, 150). For Speyer, the fact that Abraham does not recognise the men as angels constitutes a parallel between the Qurʾān, the rabbis, and Aphrahat (ibid., 149). This is not one of his stronger arguments since the confusion about the messengers' identity already constitutes part of the Biblical narrative.

74 The expression "to step out of an obligation" is common in Mishnaic Hebrew, see e.g. Mekhilta deRabbi Ishmael *Bo* 6 and 10, Sifra *Emor* 16:1 and 2, and Sifre *Re'eh* 77, see also the cognate expressions used in *Bereshit Rabbah* 39:6 and 49:9, cf. also Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Bavli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: The Judaica Press, 1996 [1903]), 587. The above text from *Bereshit Rabbah* is cited according to manuscript Paris 149; most manuscripts omit the term "obligation." Joseph Witztum has reminded me in an oral communication that the Vatican manuscript alone renders the text quite differently, reading that Abraham and the angels in turn *rḥṣw ydyhm*, "washed their hands;" the passage about fear does not appear in this manuscript. The halakhic emphasis and the elimination of the slightly irreverent fear of the angels in this manuscripts are the hallmarks of a medieval correction, whereas the reading preserved in manuscript Paris 149 retains an archaic idiom and, together with its abbreviation in the majority of manuscripts, likely constitutes the preferable *lectio dificilior*.

75 The angels in Midrash Rabbah are named as Michael, Gabriel, and Rafael (see *Bereshit Rabbah* 48:9). Here (in ibid., 48:14), it is specified that "Michael trembled and Gabriel trembled," later (in ibid., 50:2), we learn that it was Michael's task to announce the birth of Isaac to Abraham. Michael then departed, whereas Gabriel was sent to overturn Sodom, and Rafael to rescue Lot (see also Bavli *Bava Metsiʿa* 86b). It should be noted that part of this rabbinic identification is adopted by a work of *tafsīr*, for which the messengers are also angels: according to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (died 767 C.E.) on Q11:69, the messengers who came to Abraham were Gabriel, the angel of death and Michael, according to his commentary on Q15:51, they were Gabriel and Michael. See Leemhuis, 'Lūṭ and his People in the Koran', 105.

76 On the Sodomites sins see Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on Sodom*, in Paulus Bedjan (ed.), *Homilae selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* (Paris: Via Dicta, 1905), volume V, 82. On Abraham's reaction to the angels *as* strangers see Witztum, "Thrice upon a Time," pp. 16-9.

77 The Sodomites kill a young girl who secretly tries to feed a poor man (*ʿnyʾ*), as the story appears in *Bereshit Rabbah* 49:6. Moreover, the motif of the Sodomites' mistreatment of the poor and of strangers, including the one of the murder of the girl, is expanded in the Babylonian Talmud. In *bSanhedrin* 109a, the Sodomites take advantage of travellers who cross by boat or through the water, they physically deform their guests (*ʾwrḥyn*, in order to make sure they fit in a standardized bed!), and they would give money, but not food to any poor person (*ʿnyʾ*) who would come to Sodom (denying him food until he would starve to death, and they would recuperate their money). Somewhat attenuating the treatment known from *Bereshit Rabbah*, the Bavli states that "they made this agreement amongst themselves: whoever invites a man (*mzmyn gbrʾ*) to a feast shall be stripped of his garment."

78 "Committing outrage in your gatherings" is a rather general accusation; one should note, however, that the rabbis accuse the Sodomites of employing a court consisting of five perverse judges in *Bereshit Rabbah* 50:3 (Lot among them) and in Bavli *Sanhedrin* 109b (without Lot). While we should note a possible overlap between these traditions and the Qurʾān's accusations that the people of Lot "commit outrages in their gatherings," we should not let the rabbinic sense of judicial outrage determine our understanding of the Qurʾān, which does not invoke a juridical setting. The root used to describe the "gathering" of the townspeople in Q29:29, *nūn-dāl-wāw*,

for example, is used only twice more in the Qurʾān to describe such a group of human supporters, once in a neutral context in Q19:73, and once in a negative context in Q96:15; in neither case do these supporters pass legal judgment.

79 On the compositional dating of *Bereshit Rabbah* see Günther Stemberger, *Introduction to Talmud and Midrash* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 279-80.

80 For Medinan use of rabbinic material, and the desideratum for a new assessment of the rabbinic material in the Qurʾān, see e.g. Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's Legal Culture*, 203-28. On Q18 *Sūrat al-Kahf* see note 2 above.

81 To be sure, there is some lexical overlap between the Qurʾān and the rabbinic texts. In all three versions of the third category reporting this part of the story, for example, the messengers announce the promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah with the verb "to bring good news" (*bshr*, Q15:53, 54 and 55, Q11:71 and 74, and Q29:31). *Bshr* is of course a common Qurʾānic term, more specifically, we have seen in Q41:30 that the angels propagate that the humans should "Receive the good news (*wa-ʾabshirū*) of the paradise" (see also Q3:454). At the same time, we should note that in *Bereshit Rabbah* 50:2, the names and the tasks of the three angels who come to Abraham are described thus: "Michael said his good news (*bswrtw*) and left, Gabriel was sent to overturn Sodom, and Raphael to rescue Lot." Is it then coincidence that Gabriel and Michael become the bearers of the revelation of good news (*bushrā*) in Q2:97, a later Medinan passage? As we have seen, Gabriel and Michael are the angels that appear to Abraham and Lot according to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, see note 75 above. Note that Speyer, while discussing the importance of the root <u>bshr</u> in the Qurʾān, but does not discuss its occurrence in *Bereshit Rabbah*; see ibid, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, 151-2. The Qurʾān's use of the Arabic verb *bshr*, a cognate to Aramaic *bsr*, "delivering the good news," to announce Sarah's pregnancy is noteworthy at least, and reinforces our sense that the Qurʾān's narrative imparts aspects of the rabbinic tradition to its audience in as far as these aspects are fit, or modified, to resound with its own doctrines, concepts, and narratives. Likewise, a clear pattern emerges in the preceding discussion that it is predominantly the *Palestinian* rabbinic tradition, and especially of *Bereshit Rabbah*, which the Qurʾān reflects, in accordance with the suggestions I made in the forthcoming publications of the Notre Dame Qurʾān Seminar, see note *.

82 In *Bereshit Rabbah* 41:7, Lot's own actions are associated with the "immoral desire" of the Sodomites. In ibid. 50:4, we learn that Lot was not particular about the pollution through idol worship. Lot also acts as the chief judge of a wicked court in Sodom in ibid. 50:7, see note 78 above.

83 The Qurʾān's Lot, in contrast to the Bible and the rabbinic tradition, does *not* intercede on the behalf of his people, and eventually turns against them. In the Qurʾān, as in the Christian tradition, the behaviour of all of God's messengers is sanitized in comparison to the Hebrew Bible and to the rabbinic tradition; Lot's righteousness in the Qurʾān and in the New Testament and the Christian tradition, hence, points to a general, but not to a specific narrative affinity. Lot first speaks *to* his people (Q11:78), but only in order to seek to turn them away, as he does in Genesis. In Q29, Lot warns them, a function well established in the first two categories of Lot stories, yet in Q29:28-9, the story begins by Lot's *condemnation* of sex between men among his people, followed by his plea for God's help *against* them. In contrast, the rabbis' Lot pleads *for* his people and intercedes as their advocate. In other words, the Qurʾān's Lot pleads *with* his people, as a messenger and as a warner, and, in Q29, after they reject him, ultimately acts as the attorney for the prosecution which eventually brings about the destruction for which they mockingly ask (Q29:29). In the Qurʾān, Lot seeks to convince his contemporaries to repent, and then accuses them, a subtle difference lost on Speyer, who conflates his actions with those of the rabbinic Lot, see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, 151-2.

84 In the case of the Thamūd, as noted before, such an understanding could also include a study of external synchronic material, i.e. material that the text assumes its audience to know as contemporary. Intriguingly, Sinai's comparison between the Qurʾān (esp. Q91) and aspects of the fate of the Thamūd in the poetry of Umayya b. Abī al-Ṣalt (esp. in Schulthess 34) show signs of a

process analogue to the one I describe as the qurʾānisation of biblical and rabbinic material. The most important difference again pertains to the complex and particular prophetology the Qurʾān presents in its retelling of material equally known from Umayya, see Sinai, 'Religious Poetry from the Qurʾānic Milieu', esp. 11-4.

85 As discussed on pages xx-xx above, the simultexts triggered by *Sūrat Yā Sīn* included Q54:31 in part I; Q7:82, 111, 123 and 131; and Q26:36 53, 109, 160, and 164 in part two; and Q15:67, 73, and 83; Q11:67; Q29:31 and 39-40 in part III.

86 Lot's delivery is first mentioned in Q54, and repeated throughout all subsequent narratives. In the case of Lot, God delivers him at dawn and shows mercy (*niʿmatan*, Q54.35), as in Gen. 19:19, whereas the interloping man in the simile states that "my Lord forgave me (*ghafara lī rabbi*)," Q36:27.

87 The validity of the two results of part I and part II of this study is not contingent on the compatibility of the specific insights: the simile in *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, in other words, may well evoke the Qurʾānic Lot narrative according to the first, second, or third category of these stories, without evoking its rabbinic aspects. This is the case especially if the sūra were to predate much of third category and thereby Lot's rabbanisation in the Qurʾān. Still, we should explore the possibility that *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, in its evocation of the Qurʾān's own Lot narratives, should also contain *some* echoes of these narratives' ongoing rabbanisation, allowing at least for a plausible external corroboration of the analysis. Moreover, we should ideally be able to explain the association of sex between men and *shirk* suggested by the simultextual reading of the profligate townspeople and Lot's people, which we will stands in a long Jewish and Christian tradition of associating perceived doctrinal and sexual deviance.

88 Aphrahat makes this case, for example, in Demonstration 11.1: "For when people from any of the nations serve [the cause of] justice, they are called the children and heirs of Abraham, their father. But the children of Abraham, when they do an unclean deed of the foreign peoples, they become "Sodomites" and "the people of Gomorrah." Translation in Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: the Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Brill: Leiden, 1972), 20, see also 97-101; Syriac text in D. Ioannes Parisot, *Patrologia Syriaca* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894), I, 469, see also William Wright, *The Homilies of Aphraates, The Persian Sage, Edited with an Introduction by William Wright* (London: William and Norgate, 1869), 203.

89 See Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism*, e.g. 19, 39, 43, 62, and 87-8. See also the elaborate comparison between Jerusalem and Sodom in Aphrahat's *Demonstration* 20 and 21 ("Of Persecution"); as analysed by Adam Becker. Analysing the displacement of the Jews in *Demonstration* 20.10, Becker summarizes: "Aphrahat quotes Isa 65.15, where Israel is told: "The Lord your God will put you to death and name his servants with another name." The servants are the "Nation from the Nations", while the Jews, rejected by God, are the Sodom and Gomorrah of Isa 1.10. The prophecy of the servants "with another name" is fulfilled, according to Aphrahat, by Acts 11.16 ("There at Antioch the disciples were first called Christians"), see Becker, "Anti-Judaism and Care for the Poor in Aphrahat's *Demonstration* 20," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10 (2002): 316-7.

90 See Jacob of Serugh, *Second Homily on Sodom*, 80 and 82.

91 I have presented this analysis previously in my contributions to the Notre Dame Qurʾān Seminar, see note *.

92 In the simile in Q36, moreover, two messengers arrive, reinforced by a third, whereas in the Bible, three arrive, and only two continue – an inversion of the order as Patricia Crone points out in her commentary on the passage, see note *.

93 The Qurʾān, obviously, shares with the rabbis the notion that the third messenger is *not* God, in contrast to what Scripture implies and what the Syriac tradition elaborates. Ephrem, for example, explains the fact that Lot bows before the two angels by stating that "there appeared in the second angel the same vision that Abraham had seen in the third" – that is, God "appeared to him at the door of the tent" as one of the angels, see Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* XVI:2.2, Matthews and Amar (translators), *St. Ephrem the Syrian*, 160 (see already above, note 70). The messengers,

hence, are not only angels for Ephrem; one of them actually *is* God – a position not too surprising from the point of view of a Christian who believes in God's incarnation in Jesus. Likewise, for Ephrem, it was "the angel in whom the Lord had appeared, brought down from before the Lord, who is in heaven, fire and brimstone upon Sodom," see Ephrem, ibid, XVI:7.1, Matthews and Amar, ibid., 162. In this aspect as well, the Qurʾān rejects the messenger's role in during the destruction – instead, in the Qurʾān, as well as in the Bible, God directly causes the destruction (see e.g. Q11:82, "We rained on it stones").

94 See el-Badawi's as well as my own commentary on the passage, see note *.

95 On the use of the simile in Syriac Patristics see for example the references by Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 5 (Of Wars) 22; Ephrem, *Homily on Our Lord* 46, and Jacob of Serugh in Thomas Kollamparampil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies on the Feasts of our Lord* (Centre for Indian and Inter-Religious Studies and Dharmaram Publications: Bangalore, 1997), 271.

96 See e.g. Q 11:91 and Reynolds, 'On the Qurʾān and the Theme of Jews as "Killers of the Prophets"', 9-32.

97 See note 17 above.

98 We should note that the traditional chronology places Q36 (not directly) in between Q7 and Q26, the two sūras in which the passages of my second category of Lot stories appear. This is noteworthy given the simultextual affinity between Q7 and Q36 under discussion. Nöldeke, by contrast, places Q36 (not directly) between Q15 and Q11, two of the four sūras in which the passages of my third category of Lot stories appear. While the evidence here is far too scant to engage in a more thorough discussion of the impact of my findings on the accuracy of these chronologies, the relative proximity of Q36 to the second category of Lot stories remains noteworthy.

99 The root *krm* elsewhere also appears in a few other illuminating contexts in order to describe the reward of God's servants that are *not* his offspring, see e.g. in Q21:26 (evoking, once again, Jesus) – servants who also will enter the garden, like the man in the simile in *Sūrat Yā Sīn*, see e.g. Q37:42 and 70:35.

100 See note 28 above.

101 Ephrem, according to Ishodad, for example, explains the parable as follows: "He calls God the man; the hedge is his observance of the law, or the help of God; the tower is the temple, the wine-vat is the altar on which the blood of the sacrifice is shed; the husbandmen are the band of priests; the servants that were sent are the prophets; the sending of the son at last he calls his own coming; and that they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him means that he perished at their hands," see J. Rendel Harris, *Fragments of the Commentary of Ephrem Syrus upon the Diatessaron* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1895), 73. See also note 70 above.