The Qur’an and Judaism

Reuven Firestone

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter consists of two parts. The first examines the historical-phenomenological relationship between the Qur’an and Judaism (the Qur’an *and* Judaism), while the second examines perspectives expressed by the Qur’an toward Judaism (the Qur’an *on* Judaism). The former includes perspectives offered by pre-modern and contemporary non-Muslim researchers regarding the Qur’an and its relationship to the religion and culture of Judaism; the latter considers how the Qur’an itself appears to evaluate Judaism. Both are considered within an explicit evaluative framework of assessment that reflects on the problematic of tension inherent in the relationship between established religion and emergent religion

Keywords: Covenant, Torah, People of the Book, Rabbis, Jews, New Religious Movements (NRMs)

The Qur’an and Judaism

THE Qur’an includes many characters and narratives, laws, notions, and even language that are familiar from the Bible, but they appear differently in their Qur’an contexts. Moreover, episodes from biblical stories may not appear in Qur’anic renderings, or Qur’anic stories may include material that does not appear in biblical renderings. So too, similar laws are often immediately recognizable but distinctive in each scriptural context. The remarkable likeness unsurprisingly raises the question of relationship. How does the Qur’an fit into the history of monotheist tradition and the relationship between monotheist expressions? How does one explain their striking similarities and equally glaring differences?

The Qur’an itself seems to reflect a consciousness of association with Jewish and Christian scripture, thought, and practice. The Qur’anic awareness also conveys a certain level of anxiety: ‘Surely it [the Qur’an] is a communication sent down from the Lord of the worlds, which the trustworthy spirit has brought down on your heart [Muḥammad] so you will be one of the warners in a clear Arabic tongue. It is most certainly in the scriptures of

the ancients. Is it not a sign for them that the learned among the Children of Israel know it?’ (Q. 26:192–7). These verses raise a number of interesting issues. They argue that the Qur’an is authentic, which of course suggests that there were at least some among its audience who questioned its authenticity. They provide a source for the revelation and a mode for its transmission, justify its particular discourse in the Arabic language, and authorize the role of a new prophet. Moreover, the verses claim that it (the Qur’an, the revelation, the words, or at least the message) can be found also in the scriptures that are already known and claimed by other religious communities. It can even be asserted that the ‘it’ which ‘the learned among the Children of Israel (p. 141) know’ includes the entire discourse of the verses in question, including the claim for the authenticity of the new warner-messenger. The passage asserts outright that Jewish scholars already know about it.

These and many other verses express something of the natural tension inherent in and around the process of religious genesis. There is no neutral context for the birth of religion, for religions are always born into a world in which some already exist. And those established religions predictably resent the appearance of competition. The scripture and beliefs of a new religion are always scrutinized by contemporary observers in relation to prior scripture and religion, and the burden rests on the new faith to demonstrate to a mixed public of potential joiners and sceptics that it embodies authentic representations of the divine will.

New scripture must demonstrate its legitimacy specifically in relation to prior scripture and religious practice—or tradition in the event that established religion is not scriptural, as in the case of the ancient Near East. Proving authenticity and validity is typically accomplished through a process combining the condemnation of certain aspects of former scripture and religious practices or notions, and the appropriation of others (Deut. 6:14; Psalms 135:15–21; Gal. 3:6–14; Heb. 8:6–13). This is no less the case with the Qur’an, which also moves to correct problematic aspects of previously recognized scripture. The statement that God does not tire in Q. 50:38, for example, can be read to correct the suggestion in the Hebrew Bible that God felt the need to rest after Creation (Exod. 20:11, 31:17), and Q. 5:72–5 corrects the New Testament articulation of what has been understood as the divine nature of Jesus (Col. 1:14–20).

The Qur’an similarly considers and critiques Jewish law and practice as articulated in Jewish scripture and tradition. In Q. 16:114–18, for example, we observe a consideration of dietary law articulated in reference to the eating practices of Jews. ‘Eat from what God has provided you that is lawful (*ḥalāl*) and wholesome, and give thanks for the favor of God, if it is Him you serve. God has forbidden you only dead things (*al-mayta*) and blood (*al-dam*) and the flesh of pigs (*laḥm al-khinzīr*), and anything offered up to something other than God … But do not assert a falsehood with your tongues, saying “this is permissible and this is forbidden,” to invent a lie against God. Those who invent a lie against God will not thrive … We forbade for the Jews what We have told you before. We did not oppress them; rather, they oppressed themselves’ (see also Q. 3:93–4, and Cf. Lev. 11, Deut. 14:3–21).

Three Theses of Relationship

These and many more cases reflect a complex intertextual relationship between the new revelation of the Qur’an as the word of God and prior revelations of God’s word. Modern scholars have reflected on this connection and have suggested a variety of propositions to account for it. These can be broken down, roughly, into three groups.

(p. 142) The ‘Borrowing Thesis’

Those holding this approach generally presume that Muḥammad wrote the Qur’an and that parallels between it and prior scripture result from his having learned much of his information from Jews or Christians. The borrowing thesis reflects an old argument found in both Jewish and Christian pre-modern polemics, namely, that Muḥammad was not a prophet and that the Qur’an which he brought was not a divine revelation. The fact that the borrowing thesis is addressed and rejected by the Qur’an itself is a demonstration of the pertinence of the proposition: ‘. . . They say “you are a forger.” No! Most of them do not know [anything]. Say, “The holy spirit [*rūḥ al-qudus*] has brought it down from your Lord in truth . . .” We know that they say, “But a human teaches him.” [But] the language that they wrongly attribute to him is foreign, while this language is clear Arabic’ (Q. 16:101–3).

The assumption of Qur’anic borrowing is articulated in its classic modern Jewish form by Abraham Geiger (d. 1874), one of the earliest modern comparative scholars of the Qur’an (*Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* 1833). Geiger, however, along with most Jewish scholars, took an approach that differed both from the pre-modern articulations and also from most of their Christian colleagues engaged in the same endeavour, in that the Jewish analysis tended to be less politically charged (Pregill 2007: 650; Lassner 1999).

Geiger, unlike many of his Jewish and Christian colleagues engaged in study of the Qur’an, considered Muḥammad a sincere religious enthusiast and not a pretender seeking political or material gain by inventing a new religion. He held that because Muḥammad was unlearned and wished to validate what he believed to be the genuine heavenly status of the Qur’an, he sought to use material known to derive from prior scripture. Jews were greatly esteemed as an ancient monotheist community during Muḥammad’s lifetime, so it would have been natural to incorporate Jewish wisdom in order to strengthen his belief that he was taught by direct revelation from God. According to Geiger, Muḥammad had abundant opportunity to learn from local Jews, but because the Jews of Arabia possessed no written scripture, his knowledge of Judaism and Bible derived from an oral tradition. It is the fluidity and exegetical nature of oral tradition that explains the disparity between Qur’anic and biblical material.

Geiger’s general approach was taken up by subsequent scholars such as Charles Cutler Torrey (1933) and Irwin Rosenthal (1961). Meanwhile, Christian scholars often held the view that Muḥammad borrowed his ideas from Christians (Wellhausen 1887; Smith 1897;

and to a certain extent Bell 1926), while some suggested that he borrowed equally from both (Margoliouth 1905).

The ‘Cultural Diffusion Thesis’

Geiger and other Western scholars of the Qur’an prior to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries pre-dated the development of modern anthropological and literary studies in cultural diffusion, orality, and the transmission of tradition, and modern (p. 143) and postmodern literary theories of composition and literary assimilation. These developments have had a profound impact on Qur’an scholarship ever since, though some lesser informed investigators continue to work with the pre-twentieth-century assumptions. Certainly since the mid-twentieth century, the major approach to comparative studies of Qur’an and Bible assumes processes of cultural diffusion through which non-indigenous notions and themes entered into local cultures, a perspective developed in a different context by Leo Frobenius (1898). According to the ‘cultural diffusion thesis’, the Qur’an naturally reflects a great deal of Jewish as well as Christian and other traditions and ideas through one or more processes of transmission across the porous boundaries of culture.

According to one articulation of this perspective, biblical and religious ideas deriving from Judaism and Christianity came to Arabia with the migration of Jews and Christians who brought their religious notions, practices, and stories of biblical characters with them. As the religious newcomers integrated into Arabian culture and societies, their religious *realia* became integrated into Arabian culture as well, so it was natural for the Qur’an to reflect these along with all the other cultural and intellectual material through which its message is articulated (Firestone 1990). An advantage of this approach is that it allows for a wider range of possibilities to explain the origin of the Qur’an. Not only could it have developed as a human product that reflects the contemporary literary *realia* of its culture, it could have developed as a divine message articulated via the language and culture, images and metaphors current among the receiving population.

The ‘Semitic Civilization Thesis’

A somewhat different perspective is found in the work of Michel Cuypers, who takes a structure analysis approach (also called ‘rhetorical analysis’, Cuypers 2009: 30). Cuypers argues that both Western and traditional Muslim analyses of Qur’anic intertextuality with the Bible have been limited by the overwhelming intellectual appeal of Greek rhetorical analysis, which by its very nature, is unable to appreciate the particulars of the Semitic rhetorical style that governs the structure of the Qur’an. By engaging in a more culturally appropriate approach, one can discern the deep cultural and literary continuity with prior Semitic traditions. According to Cuypers, the Qur’an, similar to the Bible, ‘re-appropriates earlier writings, reusing them and turning them to a new perspective which makes revelation advance’ (31). This approach assumes the continuous presence of what is commonly understood as ‘biblical’ themes in Semitic cultures external to the particular cultural and literary environment of the Bible. Arabia, like the Land of Israel, contained its

own particular versions of a common library of ancient Near Eastern literatures, which existed in particular dialectical form wherever it was found. So-called ‘biblical’ material found in the Qur’an, therefore, was not inherently biblical. It was neither borrowed by a prophet nor deposited by visitors from outside, but existed as a basic part of Arabian civilization, just as it existed as a basic part of West Semitic or Mesopotamian civilization, available to be shaped by the particularities of history. A similar proposal has been suggested by others (Firestone 2000). One significant advantage (p. 144) of this approach is its neutral perspective, which places Qur’an and Bible on an equal footing in their unique formulation and creative treatment of common themes.

Both the ‘borrowing’ and ‘cultural diffusion’ approaches have been criticized as reflecting Western Orientalist perspectives, though they are no less sympathetic to the Qur’an than they are to the Bible. Nevertheless, they also evoke older, pre-modern polemical arguments used by members of established religions to delegitimize the Qur’an. These polemics began quite early. The Byzantine monk and historian, Theophanes the Confessor (d. 818), for example, claimed that Jews were persuaded to join the false-prophet Muḥammad until they learned that he was not the messiah they were expecting. Some remained with him out of fear and managed to prejudice him against Christianity by telling him lies that were presumably preserved in the text of the Qur’an (Theophanes, *Chronicle*, Annus Mundi 6122 [p. 464]). Some pre-modern Jewish texts from as early as the tenth to eleventh centuries found in the Cairo Geniza, a repository of ancient manuscripts from the ninth to nineteenth centuries discovered in the storage room of an ancient Cairo synagogue, claim that Jews infiltrated Muḥammad’s entourage and actually wrote the Qur’an for him as a recognizable but flawed Jewish text, and embedded codes to prove that it is not the record of a truly divine revelation (Firestone 2014). These perspectives reflect the generally hostile environment that has typified the intellectual as well as political relations between the monotheistic traditions (Firestone 2011). That polemical environment is reflected in the Qur’anic perspective toward Jews and Judaism as well.

The Qur’an on Judaism

Common Arabic terms for Judaism, *al-yahūdiyya* and *diyānat al-yahūd*, do not occur in the Qur’an, even though Judaism was known in seventh-century Arabia (Rubin 2003). Al-Bukhārī includes references attributed to Muḥammad about conversion to Judaism with the word *hawwada* (*Janā’iz* 440, 4401), and the Qur’an itself uses an idiom for Judaizing, *al-ladhīna hādū*, to refer to ‘those who have Judaized’ or ‘those who have become Jews’, though this expression may have been understood as a reference to ‘those who are/have been Jews’ (Q. 2:62; 4:46, 160; 5:44, etc.). Despite the lack of a specific referent for the religion or religious civilization of Judaism, the Qur’an refers frequently to Jews and occasionally also to Jewish practices.

Contemporary Arabian Jews as Reflected in the Qur’an

The Qur’an uses a wide variety of terms to refer to Jews. The most common is ‘Children of Israel’ (*banū isrā’īl*) which appears forty-three times, and often refers to the ancient Israelites in narrations of stories with clear parallels from the Hebrew Bible. The term (p. 145) can also refer to Jews contemporary to the Qur’an, but in these cases it is evocative of their biblical origins and especially indicative of the biblical stories about Israelite opposition and even rebellion against God and Moses. Paralleled to this appellation are such terms as ‘the people of Moses’ (*qawm mūsā*) or in reference to Moses, ‘his people’ (*qawmihi*). ‘Those who have Judaized’ (*al-ladhīna hādū*) occurs ten times, ‘Jews’ (*al-yahūd*) eight times, and ‘Jew’ or ‘Jewish’ (*yahūdī*) once, these three latter terms referring to Jews living within the period of the Qur’an’s emergence.

Another common locution is various forms of ‘People of the Book’ (*ahl al-kitāb*), which occurs thirty-three times: ‘[those] who have been given the Book’ (*al-ladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*) nineteen times, ‘[those] whom We have given the Book’ (*al-ladhīna ātaynā al-kitāb*) six times, [those] who have been given a portion of the Book (*al-ladhīna ūtū naṣīb^{an} min al-kitāb*) three times, and occasionally other locutions such as ‘[those] who read/recite the Book’ (*al-ladhīna yaqra’ūna al-kitāb*) or ‘successors who have inherited the Book’ (*khalfun warithu al-kitāb*), and People of the Reminder (*ahl al-dhikr*) twice, in which Reminder (*dhikr*) becomes a synonym (also elsewhere) for divine writ. These designations refer in general to people who are in possession of pre-Qur’anic scripture, meaning both Jews and Christians. While the terms may refer only to Jews, only to Christians or to both simultaneously, the contexts in which they appear most often reflect reference specifically to Jews. The distinctive language of the references is sometimes purposeful, such as the locution ‘those who were given a portion of the Book’, which suggests that the previous scriptures are not the only legitimate divine revelations (Rubin 2003).

The Qur’an uses still other terms, such as ‘[those] who have been given the Knowledge beforehand’ (*al-ladhīna ūtū al-ʿilm min qablihi*, Q. 17:107), and the collective ‘one who has knowledge of the Book’ (*man ʿindahu ʿilmu al-kitāb*, Q. 13:43) which probably refers not only to Jews and Christians but also to followers of the Prophet. Other appellations include ‘People of Abraham’ (*āl ibrāhīm*, Q. 4:54), who were given ‘the Book and the wisdom and … a great kingdom,’ and ‘the tribes’ (*al-asbāṭ*) which always (four times) occur in the expression, ‘Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes’.

The Qur’an also refers to two additional categories within the community of Jews. One refers to rabbis (*rabbāniyūn*, Q. 3:79; 5:44, 63) and perhaps Q. 3:14 (*rabbiyyūn*), and the other to scholar-colleagues (*aḥbār*, Q. 5:44, 63; 9:34), the latter category known in the Talmud as learned Jews who are slightly less accomplished than rabbis (Jastrow 1903: 421–2; Sokoloff 2002: 428).

The large number and variety of references to Jews, and as we shall observe below also Jewish practice, show how Jews and Judaism were significant to the emergence of the Qur’an. The Qur’an calls on sceptics to consult with the ‘People of the Reminder’ to learn the truth about revelation and scripture (Q. 16:43–4), and even instructs the Prophet to consult ‘[those who] have been reciting the Book before you’ if he has any doubt the revelation he himself received (Q. 10:94). The hadith also mentions both directly and indirectly how Jews were a respected community of monotheists in the pre- and earliest Islamic periods (Bukhārī, *anbiyā’* 50; Kister 1972). The recognized status of Jews in the Arabian communities in which they lived seems to have persuaded many people considering new claims to divine revelation to take Jewish ideas, practices, and opinions (p. 146) into account. Because established religions inevitably oppose the emergence of new religions, and because Jews represented one important established monotheist community that resisted the advancement of a new expression of monotheism, it is natural for Jewish opinions and practices to appear in the Qur’an. In most but not all cases, the Jewish opinions, practices, and behaviours found in the Qur’an are critiqued in polemical contexts.

Torah and Covenant

The Torah (*tawrāt*) appears by name eighteen times in the Qur’an, and it is referred to by other names such as the Book (*al-kitāb*), the Remembrance (or the Reminder, *al-dhikr*), and the Redemption (or Deliverance, *al-furqān*), these last three terms being used also for the Qur’an. Sometimes, the Qur’an associates *tawrāt* with the law in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Q. 3:93), which are also known in Jewish religious parlance as *Torah.* In other contexts, *tawrāt* refers to a larger corpus of Hebrew Bible literatures (Q. 5:43–6). Other terms referring to a portion of the Hebrew Bible are *zabūr*, perhaps referring to Psalms (Q. 4:163) and *ṣuḥuf*, referring to sheets or scrolls associated with Moses and/or Abraham (Q. 87:19). ‘Tablets’ (*alwāḥ*) refers to what God gave to Moses (Q. 7:150). God gave Moses the Book as a guidance (*hudan*) for the Israelites (Q. 17:2) and made with them a covenant (Q. 2:83) (Adang 2003).

The Torah is the record of a true divine revelation (Q. 5:44), confirmed both by Jesus (Q. 3:50) and the Prophet (Q. 3:3). The giving of revelation is associated with the divine covenant God gave to Israel at the mountain (Q. 4:154, that is Sinai through association with Q. 23:20, 95:2), and which God will not break (Q. 2:80). The Torah contains the judgement of God, guidance, and light (Q. 5:43–4). The Jews, however, broke their covenant (Q. 4:155; 5:13)—or, some Jews broke their covenant (Q. 13:25) and perverted their scripture either by distorting the text (Q. 5:13) or by twisting the meaning of the words (Q. 4:46). The Torah and the Gospel teach about the coming of the new Prophet (Q. 3:81; 7:157; 61:6), but the People of the Book conceal the truth that they know from their own scripture (Q. 2:146).

The Torah contains divine laws, but some of the laws therein are punishments inflicted upon the Jews for taking usury, oppressing the poor, and turning people away from God (Q. 4:160–1). Jews accepted the scripture revealed directly to them, but they refused to

accept subsequent divine revelations including the Qur’an, for which God is extremely angry with them (Q. 2:87–91). Some did not even accept their own Torah (Q. 62:5). Prophecies of the coming of Prophet Muḥammad are given in the Torah (Q. 3:81; 7:157), but they were concealed by Jews (Q. 2:146, 3:71). Israelites/Jews disbelieved the divine signs, disobeyed God, and killed their own prophets (Q. 2:61). They did not accept God’s revelation given through Jesus (Q. 3:52) nor the new revelation given through Muḥammad (Q. 4:153). Because of their refusal, most Jews are not true believers (Q. 3:110; 26:67).

This elaborate position regarding prior revelation and those who claim to follow it reflects the complexity of relationship between emergent monotheism and established (p. 147) monotheism. A similar position is found in the New Testament in relation to the Hebrew Bible. In fact, the very reference to the Hebrew Bible as the ‘Old Testament’ in Christian parlance conveys the ambivalence of the relationship. On the one hand, it is true revelation. On the other, its history and promise are incomplete and unfulfilled as long as its completion in the New Testament (or testimony) of God is not accepted. ‘By speaking of a new one [referring to the covenant or testament—*diathéké*—in Heb. 8:8], he has pronounced the first one old; and anything that is growing old and aging will shortly disappear’ (Heb. 8:13). Establishment monotheisms are not inherently or entirely wrong, according to newly emergent monotheisms, but neither are they practised correctly or carried out according to the true will of God.

The Qur’an represents itself as a continuation or expression of the same message found in the Torah (and Gospel) tradition (Q. 3:3–4). Given that the Jews did not follow the divine message given specifically to them, it should not be surprising that they resist or even oppose the message given through a new prophet (Q. 3:184; 6:91–3).

On the other hand, some People of the Book are indeed believers, believing in God and what was revealed to the new community of believers as well as their own community (Q. 3:199), though those among adherents of prior religions who actually carry out God’s will represent a minority (Q. 3:113–14). The Qur’an also contains material that seems to reflect positively on Jews in general—not simply on a minority that goes against the grain of normative Jewish practice or belief. These verses refer to Jews along with believers, Christians, and Sabeans (an unidentified religious community) as people ‘who believe in God, the Last Day, and do righteousness’. They need not fear, for they will be rewarded by God (Q. 2:62; 5:69). They believe in the Book given to them prior to the revelation of the Qur’an, and ‘when [that prior Book] is recited to them they say, “We believe in it, for it is the truth from our Lord. We have certainly submitted ourselves [to God] beforehand” ’ (Q. 28:52–3). It appears, therefore, that at least in some Qur’anic layers, People of the Book who remain Jews or Christians may hold the same status as believers, meaning followers of the new prophet and revelation (Donner 2002–3). Some interpreters of Q. 2:62 and Q. 5:69, however, understand the description of the religiosity among these groups to be a limiting qualifier, meaning that these verses refer only to those among the aforementioned groups who do indeed believe in God, the Last Day, and do righteousness—not Jews and Christians in general.

Qur’an Supportive of Jewish Ritual Practice and Piety

The Qur’an allows believers to eat the food and marry the virtuous women of those who have been given the Book (Q. 5:5). Likewise, the requirement for fasting is introduced as a requirement upon the believers just as it was required for those—presumably Jews—before them (Q. 2:183). Synagogues as well as churches, mosques, and other places ‘in which (p. 148) the name of God is mentioned often’ are to be respected and protected (Q. 22:40). Some of the People of the Book are very pious. ‘They recite the verses of God during the hours of the night and prostrate themselves’ (Q. 3:113). In a reference to the revelation of the Qur’an is found a comparative note that ‘those who have been given the Knowledge beforehand, when it is recited to them they fall down on their faces [lit. “chins”] in prostration and say, “Glory to our Lord! Surely the promise of our Lord has been fulfilled!” ’ (Q. 17:107–8). Elsewhere, ‘[those] to whom We have given the Book’ are doubly rewarded because ‘they have endured, they drive off evil with good, and contribute from what We have provided them. When they hear idle talk they turn away and say, “We keep our behaviors and you keep your behaviors. Peace be upon you. We are not interested in the ignorant” ’ (Q. 28:54–5).

Jewish Practices and Beliefs Reflected in the Qur’an

The Qur’an occasionally refers innocently to normative Jewish practice, such as the Jewish legal obligation (*halakhah*) to ransom Jewish captives (Q. 2:85). It also notes that there are People of the Book (perhaps sectarians?) whom it perceives as worshipping idols (Q. 5:64), a common problem of the ancient Israelites critiqued frequently in the Hebrew Bible. Elsewhere the Qur’an criticizes Jews for saying ‘Uzayr is the son of God’ in parallel with the complaint that Christians say, ‘Al-Masīḥ is the son of God’ (Q. 9:30), and that both revere their religious leaders and teachers as lords (Q. 9:31—perhaps a play on the Hebrew word *rabbi*, which is linguistically equivalent to the Qur’anic term, ‘my Lord’, *rabbī*). As noted, fasting and Sabbath observance are mentioned in the Qur’an and not criticized as false behaviours, though the Qur’an criticizes some Jews for not observing the Sabbath properly as commanded in the Torah (Q. 2:63–6; 4:47, 54; 7:163).

Qur’an Condemning of Jewish Behaviour

More often than not, the Qur’an is more condemning than admiring or even neutral regarding Jewish behaviour, and this is articulated in a manner that is reminiscent of the attacks upon Jews found in the New Testament (Reynolds 2010; Rubin 2003: 23). Some Jews believe in the divine message brought by the new emissary of God’s word, but most are condemned for criticizing or worse, denouncing both the messenger and the message of God. They hinder believers from joining the new religion (Matt. 23:13–14/Q. 2:109;

3:99) and stir up the locals against the new messenger (Acts 14:2/Q. 3:181; 6:147). They do not keep the very revelation that they were personally given by (p. 149) God (Acts 7:53/Q. 2:89), and they believe wrongly that they are God’s only chosen people (Rom. 4:29, 11:7/Q. 2:94; 62:6). Jews [Children of Israel] committed the horrendous sin of killing their own prophets long before the advent of the new revelation and its messenger (Matt. 23:30–1/Q. 2:61; 3:183).

Additionally, the Jews were covenanted with God to teach their Scripture to the people at large, but they ignored it and considered it of no value (Q. 3:187), and they even concealed it (Q. 2:159, 2:174). They disbelieve the signs of God (or God’s verses of revelation—*ayāt Allāh*—Q. 3:70, 3:98). They failed to observe the Sabbath as required by the covenant and were cursed as a result (Q. 2:63–6; 4:154–5). They turned many away from the path of God, unlawfully took usury, and falsely consumed the resources of the people, for which they were punished with severe legal strictures (Q. 4:160–1). They are arrogant in their claim, along with Christians, that they are the children of God (Q. 5:18). Jews (or perhaps Zoroastrians?) claim that they are purer than others (the subjects are not identified—Q. 4:49). Jews, like idolaters, are the most hostile toward the believers (Q. 5:82).

Caution not to be Influenced by People of the Book

People of the Book are depicted in the Qur’an as actively discouraging people from appreciating the new revelation and religion. ‘Neither the Jews nor the Christians will ever be pleased with you until you follow their creed (*milla*)’ (Q. 2:120, see also Q. 2:135, 2:142). ‘O you who believe, do not take as associates those who were given the Book before you or disbelievers who take your religion in mockery and jest’ (Q. 5:57, see also 5:51, 42:15, 45:18). Abraham and other foundational figures were not Jews or Christians, but represented a primordial monotheism that preceded the religions practised at the time of Qur’anic revelation by Jews and Christians (Q. 2:140, 2:135; 3:65, 3:67–8). People should therefore resist the attempt of Jews and Christians to malign the new message brought by the Prophet and the practices of the new community of Believers.

Conclusion: The Qur’an in a Phenomenology of Emergent Religions

The Qur’an represents Jews, along with Christians, as devotees of established monotheistic religions that were challenged by the emergence of a new and threatening expression of monotheism. The Jews as a community rejected the new prophet and the revelation that he brought (Q. 2:89–90, 2:105; 4:153), though some individuals and perhaps small groups joined the new community of Believers (Q. 3:199).

(p. 150) The tension between established and newly emergent religions continues to influence religionists long after as the consequential polemics become embedded in religious civilization. Those who remain identified with established religions naturally incline toward the critique employed by their forebears against once emergent religions, and those who identify with the emergent religion tend to engage the kinds of perspectives that their religious ancestors engaged during the time of their religions’ genesis. These unintentional predispositions affect nearly everybody, sometimes including scholarly researchers.

Current methodologies influenced by postmodern, post-colonial, and gender studies have sensitized researchers to the complexity of identity construction and the impact that has on one’s perspectives and overall worldview. As scholars continue to develop analytical and self-analytical tools, we will observe continued development in the approach and results of research on the elusive relationship between the Qur’an and prior religions and their sacred scriptures.

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Reuven Firestone

Reuven Firestone is the Regenstein Professor of Medieval Judaism and Islam at Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles. His published works include Holy War in Judaism: The Fall and Rise of a Controversial Idea (Oxford University Press, 2012) and Learned Ignorance: Intellectual Humility among Jews, Christians and Muslims (Oxford University Press, 2011). He is also the author of the Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990. And Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam. NY: Oxford University Press, 1999.