Moses and Pharaoh's Magicians: A Discursive Analysis of the Qur'anic Narratives in the Light of Late Antique Texts and Traditions

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Introduction

Moses holds an important place within the Abrahamic faiths in general. The figure of Moses is given detailed consideration in the Qur'an and the subsequent interpretive tradition of Islamic scholars has, in many ways throughout the centuries, actively fostered the image of an 'Islamic' Moses as a means of differentiating the Islamic community from other religious groups, particularly from Jews and Christians.[1] Such differentiation has its roots in the ways in which the Qur'an's Moses narratives include elements from both Jewish and Christian textual and interpretive traditions combined with distinctively Qur'anic embellishments or additions.

This paper presents an analysis of one segment of the prophetic story (or stories) of Moses as presented in various accounts in the Qur'an: Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh and his magicians, and the magicians' resultant conversion. These Qur'anic accounts (as found in Q. 7:103–126, Q. 10:75–92, Q. 20:41–76, and Q. 26:10–51) are analysed and compared with one another as well as with the Biblical narrative (found in Exodus 3–12) as transmitted by Jewish and Christian translations (the Aramaic Targumim and the Syriac Peshitta, respectively) and interpretive traditions (Rabbinic commentary and the writings of the Early Church Fathers).[2]

The intent of this paper is, through comparative analysis of the narratives both within the text of the Qur'an and with other, extra-Qur'anic, texts of the Biblical tradition and Late Antique world, to achieve a greater understanding of the discursive development, messages, and intents of the Qur'an. By analysing the similarities and differences in the telling of the narratives of Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh and his magicians this paper will approach how these narratives helped inform and construct the

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discursive norms and understandings of the earliest Qur'anic community.[3] In essence, it will analyse how the telling of these stories might have helped the community make sense of their world, and interpret and understand their circumstances, as well as helping to develop and create communal identity and boundaries. By doing so, it will be shown that the author of the Qur'an made specific and significantly conscious choices regarding which traditions and textual readings to follow or incorporate. These choices include both major narratological ones involving how the story is told, or what elements are included (for example, the roles and placement of Aaron, the nobles, and the magicians in the story), as well as more minor, though not insignificant, word choices (such as *thuʿbān*, *sajada*, or *bayḍāʾu*) which end up affecting how the text is received as well as enforcing and transmitting messages about the discursive norms that were accepted by the nascent community. The effective use of these narratives (as well as prophetic narratives more broadly) as models for the believing community in its identity formation cannot be underestimated.

It is clearly the case that many (if not all) of the Qur'anic prophetic narratives are typological re-presentations of prophetic history. They were meant to re-tell the stories of ancient prophets in such a way as to increase the faith and religiosity of the community. But they were also meant to legitimate and, as part of the political context, corroborate the political reality and religious significance of Muḥammad's mission and revelation. This is particularly the case with the narratives relating to Moses. As Cornelia Schöck writes:[4]

> The essential feature of the allusions to the past is a typological interpretation of the earlier narratives, by which the biography of Moses is seen in light of the biography of Muḥammad. The Qurʾān reminds its audience of Moses' deeds and the events connected with him, associating these deeds and events with the circumstances in Muḥammad's life.

This typological message, as presented in the specific narratives analysed here, is directed largely at both Muḥammad and his audience and is meant to both comfort and give hope, as well as teach how to live as a moral community. As Fred Donner notes:[5]

> The purpose of the stories in the Qurʾān, then, is profoundly different from their purpose in the Old Testament; the latter uses stories to explain particular chapters in Israel's history, the former to illustrate—again and again—how the true Believer acts in certain situations. In line with this purpose, Qurʾānic characters are portrayed as moral paradigms, emblematic of all who are good or evil. Moreover, as stories, they are not imbued with much, if any development—which is why they can appear as detached fragments. In this sense, the Qurʾān

> can be seen to be profoundly ahistorical; it is simply not concerned with history in the sense of development and change, either of the prophets of peoples before Muḥammad, or of Muḥammad himself, because in the Qurʾānic view the identity of the community to which Muḥammad was sent is not *historically* determined, but *morally* determined.

As such, the narrative of Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh's magicians includes both exhortatory messages to its audience of submission to God and conversion in the face of an oppressive ruling elite, as well as active polemic against that ruling elite. Given the repetition of this narrative multiple times in the Qur'an, it is certainly a safe assumption that it was a significant and important story for the members of the earliest Qur'anic community and, thus, was strongly connected with the development of its specific communal identity and discursive worldview. As Angelika Neuwirth writes, 'History experienced in the Qur'an, thus, is not least re-presentation, *Vergengenwärtigung*, of significant past evoked to shed light on the lived present and to make it partake in the aura of salvation history'.[6] Thus, the prophetic or historical narratives (especially when repeated with minor variations) in the Qur'an should of necessity be analysed not as strict presentation of history, but rather the merging of historical narratives with contemporary needs and formulations.[7]

It is clear, therefore, that in many ways the repetition and variation of these narratives as told in the Qur'an serves a social and moral function for the earliest Qur'anic community. As Reynolds describes it, 'the Qur'an accordingly has no intention of proceeding through an organized or logical re-telling of well-structured narratives. Instead it brings those narratives to the audience's mind (or better, conscience) whenever such a move corresponds to the task of reminding and warning.'[8] Neuwirth goes even further, understanding the usage of the various narratives as evidence of communal education and development:[9]

> The phenomenon of recurring narratives, retold in slightly diverging fashions, has often been interpreted as mere repetition, i.e. as a deficiency. These forms deserve, however, to be studied as testimonies of the consecutive emergence of a community and thus reflective of the process of canonization. Their divergences, then, point to a successively changing narrative pact, to a continuing education of the listeners and the development of a moral consensus that is reflected in the texts.

Thus, the content, form, and function of the Qur'an's narrative stories should be viewed as integral portions of the development of the nascent community's identity. As Neuwirth wrote recently, 'rather than imagine the emergence of the Qur'an

isolated from the establishment of the community, we have to imagine synchronicity, a sort of twin birth of scripture and liturgical community'.[10]

Methodologically, this paper eschews a focus on reading the Qur'an solely through a tradition-oriented lens, i.e. the lens of Islamic exegetical tradition (*tafsīr*) and the biography (*sīra*) of Muḥammad.[11] This is not to say that such approaches are without merit, or that they do not make important contributions to the field of Qur'anic studies.[12] Instead, this paper assumes a more historical-critical and literary approach meant to grant insight into the discursive understandings and worldview of the earliest Qur'anic community. There is a danger that such an approach can easily become too historically oriented, particularly as related to Biblical textual traditions, asserting discourses of borrowing or lending that privilege older textual traditions.[13] However, in this article, the analysis instead attempts to view the Qur'anic narratives in light of, and in reaction to, other traditions and texts (Biblical or otherwise) of the Late Antique world. It does this in order to draw conclusions about the discursive implications for, and the implicit claims and self-understanding of, the earliest Qur'anic community. Sidney Griffith states that, within Qur'anic studies:[14]

> It is no longer a matter of sources and influences but of traditions, motifs, and histories retold within a different horizon of meaning. In this vein some scholars have even begun talking of the Qur'an's role as a kind of biblical commentary in Arabic, reacting to the Bible … and developing many of its themes within its own interpretive framework.

This paper will attempt to do just that, while also situating the influence of that interpretive framework historically. It will focus solely, however, on the narrative of Moses appearing before Pharaoh and his contest with Pharaoh's magicians resulting in their conversion. It will begin with an overview of the Biblical narrative, to establish the foundations for the discussion of the Qur'anic narrative to follow.

An Overview of the Biblical Confrontation Narrative (Exodus 3–12)

The Biblical narrative of Moses' confrontation with Pharoah and his magicians is contained in the first part of the Book of Exodus and is well known, both historically and contemporaneously. It stands as a portion in the larger Exodus narrative that begins with the birth of Moses, as prophet-saviour of the Children of Israel, and ends with his leading them out of bondage in Egypt, through the Red Sea by miraculous means, and to Mount Sinai and the revelation of the Law. The sections of the story that are pertinent to this study are largely contained in Exodus 3–12. Prominent aspects of the narrative that stand out and will be important in the comparative analysis with the Qur'anic material include: first, the integral role of Aaron, as Moses'

spokesman, in delivering their message to Pharaoh and the performing of the signs (Exod. 4:14–17). Second, the fact that Moses is given three signs (staff changing to serpent upon being thrown, transmutation of hand to leprous state and back again, and the turning of water to blood) in order to convince the Children of Israel to follow him (Exod. 4:2–8) and to convince Pharaoh to allow the Children of Israel to leave (Exod. 3:10, 5:1, 6:6, and 7:2). Third, only one of these signs is initially used before Pharaoh to convince him (throwing the staff). In response, Pharaoh summons magicians who can perform the same miracle, but are still overcome (Exod. 7:8–12). Fourth, in the Biblical narrative, the magicians play a seemingly insignificant role; they are simply there as props in the greater drama (Exod. 7:11–12, 22; 8:7, 18–19). And, fifth, the Biblical confrontation between Moses, Aaron, and the magicians is only part of a greater dramatic presentation of increasingly difficult miracles, with at least fifteen distinct visits and discussions between Moses, Aaron, and Pharaoh, and the ten traditional 'plagues' upon Egypt, culminating in the death of the firstborn and the Children of Israel leaving the land of Egypt.

The Qur'anic Narratives of Moses and Pharaoh's Magicians

Detailed narratives involving Moses' confrontation with Pharoah and his magicians appear in four different suras in the Qur'an (Q. 7:103–126, Q. 10:75–92, Q. 20:41–76, and Q. 26:10–51). In general, the narratives follow the same rough outline. However, three of them (Q. 7:103–126, Q. 20:41–76, and Q. 26:10–51) are more unified in their presentation of the narrative (with regard to certain key elements), while the last (Q. 10:75–92) introduces specific elements not seen in the others, while leaving out other key elements (see Table 1). In general, though, combining the versions into an amalgamated Qur'anic account provides a somewhat condensed and re-formed version of the Biblical narrative: Moses comes before Pharaoh in order to have a discussion in which Moses asks him to let the Children of Israel go and shows his signs, after which Pharaoh consults with his nobles. Pharaoh summons magicians in order to challenge or overcome Moses' signs. There is a challenge between Moses and the magicians, with Moses coming off victorious. The magicians are presented as prostrating at that point and declaring their belief in the God of Moses. Pharaoh becomes angry with them and threatens them with torture and execution, and they respond that he can indeed kill them but it does not matter to them, as they would return to their Lord as believers.[15]

As can be seen in Table 1, each of the narratives presents this story with slight variations. The elements held in common among all of them include the introductory elements of Moses' call as the Lord's messenger, being sent to Pharaoh, bringing signs, the accusation of magic imputed to Moses (either by the Nobles or by Pharaoh), the imputed desire for Moses to take the land or power away from Pharaoh, and the confrontation with the magicians in which the magicians cast their staves first.[16]

Narrative Element	***Ṭā Hā*** **Q. 20:9–76**	***al-Shuᶜarāʾ*** **Q. 26:10–51**	***al-Aᶜrāf*** **Q. 7:103–126**	***Yūnus*** **Q. 10:75–86**
Introduction:	9–48	10–17	103	75
Moses' prophetic call	9–48	10–17	103	75
Aaron included as co-messenger	29–36, 42–45	13, 15–16		75
Moses instructed to go to Pharaoh	43, 47	10, 16	103	75
Moses given signs to show Pharoah	42, 47, 56	15	103, 105–106	75
Moses/Aaron express fears of rejection or harm/injury by Pharaoh	45	12–14		
Pharaoh's assembly/nobles present at initial meeting		25, 34	103	75
Meeting with Pharaoh:	49–76	18–51	104–126	76–83
Moses declares his status as Messenger of God, Lord of the Worlds			104	
inclusion of Aaron in discussion (through use of plural pronouns)				78
call for release of Children of Israel			105	
recognition of Moses' history with Pharaoh/ among Egyptians		18–22		
description of God and His Creation	49–55	23–26		
Pharaoh describes himself as God		29		
Moses performs specific signs: staff and hand transformation		32–33	107–8	
accusation of madness against Moses		27		

Narrative Element	*Ṭā Hā* Q. 20:9–76	*al-Shuᶜarāʾ* Q. 26:10–51	*al-Aᶜrāf* Q. 7:103–126	*Yūnus* Q. 10:75–86
accusation of magic (by Pharaoh)	57	34		
accusation of magic (by nobles)			109	76
importance ascribed to traditions of fathers by Pharaoh's people				78
imputed desire for Moses to take land or power (from Pharaoh)	57, 62–64	35	110	78
call to set a date for confrontation	58–59			
call to bring all skilled magicians for confrontation		36–38	111–112	79
private discussion/plot between Pharaoh and others (either magicians or nobles)	60, 62–64	34–36		
magicians make deal with Pharaoh for Rewards		41–42	113–114	
magicians confrontation with Moses		43–51	115–126	
magicians cast first	65–66	43	115–116	80–81
magicians cast both staffs and ropes	66	44		
magicians give oath about winning		44		
inspiration of God to Moses	68–69		117	
Moses overcomes	69	45	117–119	
Moses orates response				81–82
prostration and conversion of magicians	70	46–48	120–122	
mention of Aaron in conversion	70	48	122	

Narrative Element	***Ṭā Hā*** **Q. 20:9–76**	***al-Shuᶜarāᵓ*** **Q. 26:10–51**	***al-Aᶜrāf*** **Q. 7:103–126**	***Yūnus*** **Q. 10:75–86**
brief mention of believers converting				83
Pharaoh's anger and threats	71	49	123–124	
depredations against Pharaoh				83
magicians faithful response	72–76	50–51	125–126	
Moses' other meeting with the Israelites:				84–86
admonition to trust and submit to God				84
appeal to God to rescue them				85–86

Table 1: Elements in Qur'anic Narratives of Moses and Pharaoh's Magicians

However, in noting the differences and similarities between the accounts, it becomes clear that while the accounts in *Sūrat al-Aᶜrāf*, *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, and *Sūrat al-Shuᶜarāᵓ* (Q. 7:103–126, Q. 20:41–76, and Q. 26:10–51) are fairly consistent in their portrayal of the narrative, the account in *Sūrat Yūnus* (Q. 10:75–92) differs in many significant ways. The former three accounts, in addition to the many elements that are shared in common by at least two narratives, have in common a number of specific and important elements that are left out of the narrative in *Sūrat Yūnus*. First, they all include Moses' distinct declaration of messengerhood to Pharaoh: *'O Pharaoh! I am truly a messenger from the Lord of the worlds, obligated to speak naught about God save the truth. I have brought you a clear proof from your Lord … '* (Q. 7:104–105, cf. Q. 20:47 and Q. 26:16).[17] These declarations all also include a call for the release of the Children of Israel (see Q. 7:105, Q. 20:47, and Q. 26:16). Likewise, while *Sūrat Yūnus* fails to include an overt narration of the conversion of Pharaoh's magicians, the other three narratives are unified in presenting Moses' overcoming the magicians in the casting of staves, resulting in the prostration and conversion of the magicians, which includes a declaration of belief in *the Lord of the worlds, the Lord of Moses and Aaron* (Q. 7:121–122 and Q. 26:47–48, cf. Q. 20:70).[18] This is then followed by the accounts of Pharaoh's anger and threats of dismemberment and crucifixion, as well as the faithful responses of the converted magicians in the face of impending death (Q. 7:117–126, Q. 20:71–76, and Q. 26:49–51). While *Sūrat Yūnus*' account is relatively sparse in the details about the meeting with Pharaoh, it does have plenty of detail with regard to the introductory aspects (the call of Moses and Aaron, the signs,

etc.), but also adds in several things that are not found in the other accounts. These are: (i) notions of Aaron being involved which go beyond that found in the other narratives (involving him expressly in the discussion with Pharaoh via the usage of the dual form, Q. 10:78); (ii) the Egyptians' response to Moses' message includes a stress on their following the customs of their forefathers (Q. 10:78); (iii) Moses gives an verbal response to the magicians' thrown staves rather than throwing his own staff (Q. 10:81–82); (iv) declared depredations against Pharaoh (Q. 10:83); and (v) an added meeting with the Israelites (Q. 10:84–86), much of which has been noted to be 'independent of the Biblical story'.[19]

This variation between the three 'synoptic' narratives and the narrative in *Sūrat Yūnus* is all the more interesting when the chronology of these suras is taken into account. *Sūrat Yūnus*, according to both traditional and modern western chronological schemas, came after the other three accounts.[20] All of the narratives occur within suras received during the Meccan period, with *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* and *Sūrat al-Shuᶜarāᵓ* coming in the Middle Meccan, and *Sūrat al-Aᶜrāf* and *Sūrat Yūnus* in the Late Meccan period. This is noteworthy as 'most narratives … about Moses, however, date from the Medinan period of revelation … when Muḥammad came in close contact with Jews',[21] and is indicative of the importance of these narratives to the feelings, identity, and experience of the community at that early point in time in their history. Viewing the entirety of the Moses pericopes, Neuwirth speaks to the notion of potentially seeing chronological development across their presentation:[22]

> Though a linear movement is obviously not traceable in the narrative sequence, the stories related in the Meccan suras do display development. Moses consistently moves closer to the centre of the textual counter world being constructed from the Biblical tradition. His character eventually becomes the focus of the transformation process that the world of the community undergoes and that liberates the proclaimer's followers from the oppressive reality of Mecca.

A similar point is applicable more narrowly to the magical confrontation narratives: while it is impossible to drawn a firm line of development chronologically, certain elements can be seen to be developing or shifting along with the situation of the community in Mecca.

The most obvious of these developments is, as pointed out by Neuwirth above, that shown by the character of Moses.[23] Within the earliest narratives of the challenge with Pharaoh's magicians (*Sūrat Ṭā Hā* and *Sūrat al-Shuᶜarāᵓ*), Moses is described and defined in many ways by his fears and expressions of inadequacy. In *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, Moses is shown, together with Aaron, to express fears about their ability to complete their assigned mission (Q. 20:45), and later they have their fears directly addressed by God in an effort to encourage Moses in the face of the magical challenge (*We said,*

'Fear not! Truly thou art uppermost. Cast that which is in thy right hand; it will devour what they have produced. They have produced on a sorcerer's trick. And the sorcerer prospers not, wherever he may go', Q. 20:68–69). In *Sūrat al-Shuᶜarāᵓ* Moses likewise expresses fears and insecurities about his mission, and specifically with regard to his own weakness of tongue (Q. 26:12–14). Such expressions are conspicuously missing from the later narratives in *Sūrat al-Aᶜrāf* and *Sūrat Yūnus*. Rather than receiving comfort and encouraging inspiration in the face of fears, Moses is given prompt and firm guidance, *'Cast thy staff'* (Q. 7:117), at the moment of trial. This difference in the depiction of Moses may correspond to developing notions of prophethood or the establishing of a distinctly Qur'anic 'prophetology' among the earliest Qur'anic community during the time in Mecca.[24] With the preponderance of suras dedicated to prophetic narratives of extreme and perfect faith or trust in the face of persecution, the community may have begun to see such fears and inadequacies as unbecoming and unrealistic of a prophet with such firm and unassailable inspiration or revelation from God.

Another development that could be indicative of changing circumstances and issues facing the community revolves around the identification and role of the 'nobles' (*al-malaᵓ*) of Pharoah's court or 'a type of council or assembly'.[25] The development of this group as a literary element can easily be traced chronologically through the relevant suras. In *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, they are not fully developed or identified, simply being assumed or implied in the narrative as partners in Pharaoh's plotting (Q. 20:60 and 62–64). By contrast, in *Sūrat al-Shuᶜarāᵓ* they are identified as both 'those around' Pharaoh (Q. 26:25) as well as being noted as the 'nobility' or 'nobles' (*al-malaᵓ*, Q. 26:34). This group is then specifically referenced in both the latter two narratives by the same term (Q. 7:103 and Q. 10:75). Their development and importance in the stories, and by extension the historical circumstance, can be seen by means of two further notable points. First, in the two earlier narratives, Pharaoh himself is the one who accuses Moses of using magic (Q. 20:57 and Q. 26:34), while this action is shifted to the nobles in the latter two narratives (Q. 7:109 and Q. 10:76). Second, in the first narrative, Pharaoh accuses Moses of desiring to drive him (Pharaoh) out of the land or take power by rhetorical question, *He said, 'Have you come to us in order to expel us from our land with your sorcery, O Moses?'* (Q. 20:57). This is later stated and urged using an unidentified 'they' (Q. 20:62–64). This 'they' is then developed and further identified as the nobles in the subsequent narratives (Q. 26:35, Q. 7:110, and Q. 10:78). Such indications of positive identification and development might reasonably be read as indicative of changing realities facing the earliest Qur'anic community in Mecca, and can be typologically read to indicate growing tensions between the believers and certain elements within the Meccan socio-political elites. The specific development of this group as the true antagonists of the story, taking over the role of opposition from Pharaoh himself, would speak directly to the circumstance

of the listening audience, more than likely being seen as thinly veiled (if not overt) polemical condemnation of the local Meccan elites who would have feared Muḥammad's rise to power and worried that he would drive them out of their positions.

However, counter examples that do not display such linear development can also be found in these narratives. The two most prominent of these include Moses' presentation of the signs and the summoning of the magicians. In the first narrative chronologically (*Sūrat Ṭā Hā*), there is no mention of specific signs being given. While there is mention of signs to be given, they are not specifically identified. In the next narrative (*Sūrat al-Shuᶜarāᵓ*), while initially the signs are only noted very vaguely (Q. 26:15), later the specific signs of the hand transmutation and the throwing of the staff are given (Q. 26:32–33). These specific signs are also noted in *Sūrat al-Aᶜrāf* (Q. 7:107–108). However, in the last narrative (*Sūrat Yūnus*), there is no mention of any specific signs given. Likewise, circumstantial changes may be at play in the seeming non-linear development of the summoning of the magicians as represented in the various narratives. In the first, there is no specified call for a gathering of the magicians of Egypt to challenge Moses. In *Sūrat al-Shuᶜarāᵓ* and *Sūrat al-Aᶜrāf*, this call is made by the nobles (Q. 26:36 and Q. 7:111–112, respectively). However, this is changed in *Sūrat Yūnus*, as the call is specifically attributed to Pharaoh (Q. 10:79). There are enough changes in the content and tone of the narrative in *Sūrat Yūnus* that these discrepancies may easily be attributed to a difference in authorial intent, and not due to a specific linear development of the narrative. Either way, these variances represent a shift in the narrative that can be attributed to discursive changes in the experience and context of the Qur'anic audience in the later Meccan period. In other words, the telling of the narrative is being moulded homiletically to the specific circumstances of the earliest Qur'anic community, being tailored to speak directly to their experience, without concern for telling strictly historical narratives.

In addition to this type of role in the ongoing community construction, it is also clear that these narratives of Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh and his magicians, as part of the greater prophetic narrative tradition in the Meccan suras, functioned liturgically. Such a conclusion is drawn largely by the comparison with other liturgical traditions of the time combined with the literary breakdown of the Meccan suras. During the early Meccan period, a tripartite structure began to emerge as an organisational feature of the recitations, which, as a Carl Ernst has noted became the norm for most middle and late suras.[26] Many of these suras have a ring structure, involve a middle section that includes a 'narrative of prophecy and struggle', and end with 'powerful affirmations of revelation'. Scholars have postulated that such a tripartite literary breakdown (as a discursively significant literary form) has its precedence in two possible similarly three-part literary creations: the pre-Islamic Arabic ode and

the worship services of the monotheistic communities of the Near East. For our purposes here, the latter is the more important parallel as, as Angelika Neuwirth has said:[27]

> suras frequently recall the tripartite structure of the services familiar from the monotheistic environment, made up of introductory and concluding responsorial with the recitation of a Bible passage at their centre. Similarly, most suras of the middle Meccan period display a tripartite structure, consisting of a dialogical or at least discursive (polemic-apologetic) introduction, a narrative from Biblical or post-Biblical tradition in the middle, followed by a discursive conclusion.

Given this apparent relationship, it is not much of a stretch to see, as Carl Ernst does, that 'the threefold structure of the middle and later Meccan suras in this way furnishes evidence of increasing liturgical use in worship service as a formal principle behind the composition of the suras.'[28]

With such thoughts in mind, it is natural then to note that the narratives under consideration here all appear in the second section of the tripartite structures in their respective suras. Ernst's idea that the second part of the sura is 'typically a narrative of prophecy and struggle that highlights the crucial choices facing the messenger's audience', in conjunction with the functions of the narratives in the development of the communal bonds, boundaries, and identity of the earliest Qur'anic community, causes modern scholars to see the Moses narratives as a typological re-presentation of past prophetic engagement. Within this overall framework, then, the magician confrontation narratives present exhortatory or homiletic messages to their audience, stressing the necessity of conversion and following of the signs of God, regardless of socio-political consequences, persecutions, or even death. The auditors of the narrative are situated as needing to make a conscious choice as to which character represents them typologically or categorically: either the magicians (uninformed pagans who, when faced with the truth, choose to submit), or the hard-hearted nobles, or Pharaoh (rejecting the truth when it is presented to them).

The Qur'anic Narratives in the Light of Biblical and Late Antique Texts and Traditions

Having reviewed some of the more important aspects of Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh and his magicians, it is important also to view the Qur'anic usage of this narrative within the historical context and religious milieu of its original reception. Because the character of Moses in the Qur'an 'is made up of Biblical, Haggadic and new elements',[29] it is necessary to locate each of these aspects within the variant retellings of this story as given in order to understand the specific message of the Qur'an, i.e. how the narrative is being used, how it would have been understood, etc.

It should be remembered, again, that, in most cases, the prophetic stories, as referenced or re-told in the Qur'an (particularly in the Meccan period), appear to have been meant to bring the Biblical narratives 'to the audience's mind (or better, conscience) whenever such a move corresponds to the task of reminding and warning'.[30] Likewise, these stories are meant to exemplify moral behaviour, 'to illustrate—again and again—how the true Believer acts in certain situations'.[31] From this perspective, beyond the moral and faith-based frameworks that provided meaning for the original auditors, the narratives also provide messages of distinct discursive importance, informing the community how they are to live, what norms they are to accept, and how they should view and act within their circumstances.

In this light, then, the distinct details in these stories are provided with discursive power, as the similarities with the earlier Biblical traditions help ground the usage of the narrative within that tradition. This sends important messages to the original audience about how they are to conceive of themselves and the usage of these scriptural materials (either as written text or verbal/aural recitation). By utilising the story of Moses, the Qur'an is able to tap into, and present itself as a successor to or inheritor of, the Biblical tradition. It provides an anchor into past hierophanic and revelatory experience that offers a model and means of understanding the construction of their community. By choosing specifically the model of the development of the Children of Israel from a community bound in servitude to Pharaoh, who are liberated and eventually become a holy community devoted to the service and worship of the One God, the Qur'an appropriates such a discursive development for its own audience, casting them as the benighted masses who will be saved from bondage by adhering to the Prophetic instruction and trusting in the revelatory message presented. Establishing such a discursive norm, and tapping into the historical power of such narratives, must have played a major role in the discursive shaping and moulding of the identities of the community, both communal and individual. By presenting the narrative of Moses as typological re-telling of the circumstances of Muḥammad, Muḥammad is transformed into a prophetic figure of deliverance, while those who oppose him are cast as playing the role of Pharaoh and his court, the epitome of evil, rejectors of God, and persecutors of the righteous. In this manner, it is clear that most of the similarity between the Biblical and Qur'anic re-tellings is found in the presence of the same characters and general story line (for example, Moses, Aaron, Pharaoh, the magicians, and the motif of the magical challenge), while in specific instances some distinct detail (such as Moses' call to be a prophet, the history of Moses having committed a crime in Egypt, or the call for the magicians to be brought forward) is utilised to further the connection with the Biblical narrative. In this manner, such elements and generalities are placed in each rendering of the story to anchor the new re-telling firmly in past narrative, contrasting with the altered elements that are more pertinent to the present when the narratives were to be used.

The differences that are introduced to the traditional narrative, then, stand out as much more discursively significant. By appropriating, adapting, and adopting such a well-known traditional narrative to its own literary and rhetorical purposes, the author of the text of the Qur'an was able to rely upon the signifying power of changes to that narrative to inform the listening audience of its recitation of the circumstances they found themselves in while also sending messages of moral importance. The historical narratives not only become firmly embedded in the contemporary identities of the intended audience, but also are merged with the context of that audience and, in a way, become an allegorical or anagogical re-telling of both histories. In this manner, the differences in narrative, as exhibited in the Qur'an vis-à-vis the Biblical narrative and the traditional (Jewish and Christian) interpretations of it, inform of the melding of scripture and identity construction, providing specific points of departure that can be interpreted to shed light on the situation and circumstances of the original reception of the Qur'anic account. The most significant of these differences between the Qur'anic and Biblical narratives will be considered here, with an eye to determining what aspects of the stories can be viewed as Biblical, haggadic, and 'new' or original in the Qur'an. However, it is also necessary to nuance these categories somewhat, as 'Biblical' can be divided into influences and readings based on different translations of the Biblical text, especially as established by sectarian (Jewish or Christian) variances. Likewise, 'haggadic' as a category is by definition a Jewish genre of writing, and, as such, is not the most precise of categories as Christian traditions and texts are also shown here to have potentially been significant. The most significant differences in the Qur'anic narratives that set them apart from the Biblical narrative include: the role and position of Aaron in the narrative, the presence and actions of the nobles, and the various issues surrounding the magicians.[32] Each of these will be considered in turn.

The Role of Aaron

Aaron's position and presence in these narratives is an interesting one to consider, in light of the fact that he plays such a prominent and integral role in the Biblical narrative.[33] Aaron, elsewhere in the Qur'an, is also prominent and significant. He is mentioned as one of the favoured of God (Q. 37:114 and 119), one to whom things were revealed (Q. 4:163 and Q. 21:48), and is also listed as among the Biblical prophets (Q. 6:83–87). He is referred to as a *nabī* (in a list of other prophets, Q. 6:83–90) and referenced as being among those sent by God (Q. 26:16).[34] Likewise, he is acknowledged as Moses' helper (or minister), in some cases specifically because of Moses' deficiency in speech (Q. 19:52–53, Q. 20:25–36, Q. 25:35, Q. 26:12–17, and Q. 28:33–35). In many cases in the Qur'an, including in the extended narratives being considered here, Aaron went with Moses before Pharaoh. Yet, in only one of these narratives is he mentioned as having a role in the actual discussion or confrontation (and then only through the use of the dual grammatical form, see

Q. 10:78). All of the actions attributed to Aaron in the Biblical narrative (such as the throwing of the staff in Pharaoh's presence) are appropriated by Moses in the Qur'anic narratives. However, the statements of conversion by the magicians all mention their belief in *the Lord of Moses and Aaron* (Q. 7:122, Q. 26:48, cf. Q. 20:70 where the name order is reversed). Given the acknowledgement of Aaron's presence in these narratives and elsewhere in the Qur'an, it cannot be assumed that this variation is a defect or an artefact of the oral 'interpreted Bible'.[35] Rather, the general absence of Aaron and the appropriation of his role by Moses must have been a deliberate rhetorical choice within these specific narratives. In addition to collapsing the character and actions of Aaron into that of Moses, it should be noted that the separate Biblical stories of Moses and Aaron showing the signs to the children of Israel (Exod. 4:29–31) and Moses showing signs to Pharaoh (Exod. 7:10–13) are also combined into one narrative incident in the Qur'an. This would have effectively reified the Moses narrative for the Qur'anic community, creating a unified, single prophetic figure showing one set of signs to society, fitting much better the circumstances of Muḥammad as the sole prophetic figure in Mecca.

Such an assertion must be unpacked a bit more, given important considerations vis-a-vis historical interpretive traditions about the Biblical Moses narratives and Aaron's role specifically. In order to understand what knowledge or interpretations of the Biblical narratives of Moses were prevalent in the region of the Ancient Near East prior to the reception of the Qur'an, we can look to the works of Josephus Flavius, the Jewish-Roman historian, as well as the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Viewing and understanding how and why they interpreted Moses the way they did can help us understand how the Qur'an should be situated within its religious and interpretive context.[36] Specifically, it is clear that in the Christian interpretive tradition of the Ante-Nicene Fathers as well as in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, the character of Moses is lifted to a place of prominence, while Aaron's role is largely diminished, if not ignored or removed. Within the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, the story of Moses leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt is recounted, but hardly ever is Aaron mentioned. On the contrary, in a number of instances, the miracles and signs are directly attributed to Moses.[37] However, as noted above, the prevalence of Aaron as a prophetic figure in the Qur'an, as well as his minor position and place within the narratives of the magical challenge itself, indicate that the Christian traditional interpretive outlook, as characterised by the nearly complete absence of Aaron in the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, was not too influential in this instance on the narrative that the Qur'an is telling. Or, rather, the Qur'an (or its author) is making a conscious choice to not follow the Christian interpretive tradition in this respect.

Josephus also similarly reduced the position and action of Aaron, attributing the miracles and actions to Moses instead. Louis Feldman interprets this action by

Josephus as a result of his greater purpose of reforming the public image of Moses as the hero of the Jewish people, making him more palatable to Graeco-Roman society by removing Aaron's role and making Moses fit better the Graeco-Roman notions of what a true hero is or does.[38]

In order to more firmly establish the importance of Moses, Josephus downgrades the role of Aaron as Moses' spokesman. Thus, Exod. 4:30 states that Aaron performed the miracles in the presence of the people in order to convince them, but according to Josephus (2:280) it is Moses who, after at first failing to convince the most distinguished Israelites by a mere description of the miracles, proceeds to perform them before their eyes.[39]

Josephus changes the Biblical narrative more generally as well, with only Moses going in to see Pharaoh (Exod. 5:1), and the actions of Aaron (Exod. 7:10 and 19 and 8:2 and 13) being attributed to Moses. Likewise, Josephus carefully omits recounting the verses depicting Moses as being a god to either Aaron (Exod. 4:16) or Pharaoh (Exod. 7:1).[40] According to Feldman, this is because Josephus is strongly concerned with countering the claims some had made divinising Moses.[41] While superficially this is similar to what is being done in the Qur'an, it is clear from the evidence discussed above that Moses' appropriation of Aaron's roles and characteristics are for specific literary, rhetorical, and typological effect, not due to any reliance on Josephus' narration of the event. Rather, it seems that the Qur'an and Josephus are each decreasing the prominence of Aaron in this specific instance for completely different reasons: making the character of Moses more palatable to a Graeco-Roman audience versus recasting Moses typologically and rhetorically to mould a homiletic message. When Josephus omitted notions of divinisation when recounting Moses' story, he did so to counteract the claims of his audience. The Qur'an, on the other hand, omits them as they do not accord with its implicit prophetology nor its theological claims and teachings about the nature of God (*tawhīd*) and issues of associating anyone with God (*shirk*). It should also be noted that elements within the Jewish interpretive tradition, as represented by Rabbinic materials, present an opposite view, retaining the respective roles of Aaron and Moses (perhaps in a reaction against the Josephus narration as well as broader Christian traditions) and declaring that generally 'both [Moses and Aaron] are of equal importance'.[42]

The attribution of Aaron's actions to Moses also raises interesting questions about the use of the staff by which the miraculous signs are wrought. In both Biblical and Qur'anic narratives, regardless of whether it is Aaron or Moses casting the staff, it is transformed into some sort of snake or serpent.[43] However, the underlying terminology used is indicative of interesting textual choices on the part of the Qur'an. In the Hebrew Bible, Aaron's staff is transformed into a *tannīn*, translated as 'serpent'.[44] In the Torah, this word appears in the priestly source materials, in Exod.

7:9, 10, and 12 and in the priestly creation account in Gen. 1:21. The word also seems to have distinct mythological or cosmological significance, given its usage elsewhere as dragon or sea monster. It is also worth noting that this is a different word than the more common *naḥash*, used in the J source's creation account (Gen 2–3) and the pericope in which Moses is given the signs by God to convince the Israelites and Pharaoh (Exod. 4:1–16).[45] This peculiar significance is also transmitted into other translations of the Bible that would have been influential within the religious milieu of the reception of the Qur'an. In the Aramaic *targummim*, particularly those that pre-date the reception of the Qur'an, there are some differences. In Targum Onqelos, the Aramaic cognate term *tannīn* is used at all three points in Exod. 7:9, 10, and 12, which retains its cosmological (and astrological) significances as it is also used for sea serpent or dragon.[46] However, in Targum Neofiti, the translation uses Aramaic *ḥywy* or *ḥewē* at each of these points, meaning simply 'snake', a much more common term.[47] The more cosmologically important term is also used in the Peshitta, the Syriac translation of the Bible. In all three verses, the cognate term of *tannīn* (Syr.) appears, generally understood as 'serpent' or 'adder', however it also has the more mythological or cosmological meaning of 'sea serpent'.[48]

This type of usage of a peculiar, and potentially mythologically significant, word is mirrored in the Qur'an.[49] The word used in the two narratives that reference this miracle as part of the magical challenge between Moses and Pharaoh's magicians is *thuᶜbān* (Q. 7:107 and Q. 26:32). Defined as either a more quotidian 'serpent' or 'snake', the word is also connected with more supernatural or mythological notions in both its Qur'anic usage and the later interpretive tradition. Lane notes that, in addition to meaning 'a kind of long serpent, a great serpent, a bulky and long serpent, that hunts the rat or mouse, that is more useful in the house than are cats, serpent in general', it is 'also applied to an enormous fabulous serpent, the basilisk.'[50] Additionally, within the *tafsīr* tradition broadly there are some who preserve such notions as well, as can be seen in the fact that the *Study Quran* points out that in the interpretive works of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Thaᶜlabī (d. 427/1035) and Abū ᶜAlī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (or: al-Ṭabarsī, d. 548/1153–1154), 'the serpent produced from his staff was said to be of supernaturally large size and to have frightened Pharaoh from his throne'.[51] It should also be noted that this word is different from the other words for snake or serpent that are utilised elsewhere in the Qur'an, even in the other sections of the Moses narratives dealing with the giving of the sign of the staff to use with Pharaoh (for example, *ḥayya* in Q. 20:20, and *jānn* in Q. 27:10 and Q. 28:31). The usage of a word with both quotidian and cosmological significances, as mirroring the usage of the words in the Biblical texts, points to the supposition that the author of the Qur'anic text recognised the difference in usage, and consciously chose a word that also retained a more mythological connotation in addition to the more quotidian. Certainly, it indicates a conscious following of either

(or both) the textual tradition of Onqelos or the Syriac, rather than the Neofiti text. Such a reliance upon a specific Biblical tradition would have significant discursive influence within the earliest Qur'anic community, sending messages about which discursive norms would continue to be accepted, perhaps even influencing what people or peoples would choose to be involved with the community.

The Nobles (al-malaʾ)

The presence and actions of the nobles or nobility (*al-malaʾ*) in the story represents another departure (or a deliberate addition or expansion) from the Biblical narrative. The closest analogue within the Exodus narrative is the action of the 'servants' or 'officials' of Pharaoh (*ʿabdē parʿōh*) in pleading for Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave: 'Pharaoh's officials said to him, "How long shall this fellow be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the Lord their god; do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?"' (Exod. 10:7, NRSV).[52] It is also possible that this group could roughly correspond to, or be an expansion upon, the 'wise men' (*ḥăḵāmîm*) that Pharaoh calls on in conjunction with the magicians (Exod. 7:11). Yet, there is no mention of that group doing anything in the Biblical narrative, nor are they there to counsel Pharaoh previously. In the Qur'an, this group, 'a type of council or assembly',[53] is presented in the narratives as made up of close confidants of Pharaoh, counselling him on various issues. In the narratives considered here, however, these nobles take an opposite role from the Biblical text and are largely responsible for convincing Pharaoh that Moses plans to take over a position of power in the land, potentially by use of magic (Q. 7:109–110, Q. 20:62–63, cf. Q. 26:34–37).[54]

As a major addition (or deliberate expansion) to the narrative not seen in the Biblical account, the nobles or *al-malaʾ* also bring to the text the connotations associated with the word from the rest of the Qur'an, in which the term is nearly universally used negatively (if not pejoratively) to refer to supporters or counsellors of leadership who explicitly reject and deny the prophetic message. This group, all referred to by the same term (*al-malaʾ*), appear in the Qur'an as rejecters of the prophets Noah, Hūd (among the people of ʿĀd), Ṣāliḥ (among the people of Thamūd), Shuʿayb (among the people of Midian), and, of course, Moses (with Pharaoh), or even just as a general category of leaders of disbelievers in the prophetic message.[55] This is largely in line with Griffith's notions of the Qur'anic prophetology:[56]

> the pattern is always the same. The prophet/messenger arises within his own people … delivers his message, is discredited by his audience but is vindicated by the divine punishment visited upon his adversaries, the retelling of which becomes a 'sign' for those who will believe. This pattern can be seen to determine the shape of the recall of even the most familiar of biblical figures and their stories in the Qurʾān.

Such a determinative pattern surely wielded significant discursive power over the earliest Qur'anic community and how they viewed their social, religious, and political leadership, as well as how they understood everything from political power structures to disruptive social movements (including their own). In contrast, it must be noted that there are a few instances where the usage of the term is either neutral or positive. These include occasions on which it is used to refer to the counsellors of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon (Q. 27:32 and 38), as well as a cryptic reference to the 'higher assembly' (Q. 37:8 and Q. 38:69), which may be a reference to ancient Near Eastern conceptions of a 'divine council'.[57]

In addition, in two of the narratives considered here, it is made clear that Moses has been sent not only to Pharaoh, but also to his assembled council of nobles: *We sent Moses with Our signs unto Pharaoh and his notables* (Q. 7:103, cf. Q. 26:25 and 34). His mission, at least in this sura, is to share his message deliberately with this group of social elites. As has been noted, the nobles reject the signs that Moses performs, accusing Moses of magic: *'surely this is manifest sorcery!'* (Q. 10:76, cf. Q. 7:109, Q. 20:56, and Q. 26:34). Having already dealt with the historical, literary, and textual aspects of the sign of the staff, the issue of the transformation of Moses' hand will be discussed here as a sign and detail that is also significant in the variations that appear in the various texts of this narrative. In the Biblical text, the transformation of the hand is initially given as a sign in Exod. 4:6–7, wherein, upon withdrawing his hand, Moses sees it as being 'leprous, as white as snow' (Exod. 4:6, NRSV) or having a 'snowy encrustation' (Exod. 4:6, JPS). The underlying terminology, *měṣōraᶜat kašāleg* (or at the least the first term) is a difficult one in Hebrew: 'a term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain'.[58] Textually, it is important to note that while Targum Neofiti renders it as 'leprous as snow' (using a cognate of the Hebrew *měṣōraᶜat*) and the Syriac has 'leprous like snow' (using the root *g-r-b*, a non-cognate term for leprosy or leprous), Targum Onqelos describes the hand simply as 'white as snow' (*ḥiwwār kĕtalgā*) without the problematic word.[59] The Qur'anic narratives that mention this sign specifically simply label the hand as 'white' (*bayḍāᵓ*, Q. 7:108 and Q. 26:33). It seems to be the case that, in this instance, the author of the Qur'an chose to follow the reading of Onqelos rather than the others. This may have been due to issues related to its prophetology and dogmatic line about the perfection of the prophets. However, given the imperfections shown in Moses' character, particularly in *Sūrat al-Aᶜrāf*, it seems that such a reading would be potentially too influenced by later developments within Qur'anic and Islamic interpretive notions of prophetic perfection to suit the original context. In such a case, then, the author of the Qur'an may simply have chosen in this case to follow the textual reading from one of the Jewish *targumim* for rhetorical or literary purposes related to not wanting to draw too much attention to the signs themselves. Rather, the focus of the narrative remains upon, first, the fact that Moses performed signs as proof of divine favour and, second,

on the message that Moses has brought from God. This is supported by the fact that the traditional plagues or miracles wrought by Moses and Aaron are not given as much emphasis within the Qur'an. Rather, the emphasis is on the message being presented and, more importantly, the moral choice of the audience about how to respond to that message.

The inclusion of the nobles or nobility as a literary element in these Moses narratives (and, by extension, their appearance in many of the other punishment stories) acts as a strong linkage of the narratives with the recitation present. For the earliest Qur'anic community, the highlighting of this group speaks more to their direct experience than it does to the Biblical past. While it certainly does illustrate and help evoke a specific 'Qur'anic prophetology' or prophetic narrative type-scene or paradigmatic trope, it must also have spoken distinctly to serious issues of social stratification and systematic oppression or persecution from elites against the fledgling community of believers. As such, these sections of the recitation would almost certainly have been interpreted as thinly veiled (if not overt) polemical condemnation of these local Meccan elites who would have feared Muḥammad's rise to power and worried that he would endanger their social positions and powerbase.

The Magicians and Their Conversion

It is in this polemical context that the conflict and conversion of the magicians takes on its strongest discursive and homiletic message. To provide an overview: two of the suras note specifically that the magicians were brought in from elsewhere in the land and entered into a contract with Pharaoh to receive rewards of power and position in return for vanquishing Moses (Q. 7:111–114 and Q. 26:36–37 and 41–42). Once they take part in the challenge, three narratives are unanimous (while the fourth can be read to insinuate) that, upon being defeated (i.e. having their staff-serpents swallowed by Moses'), the magicians fell prostrate (*sājidīna* or *sujjadan*) to the ground and declare immediately their belief: *'We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, The Lord of Moses and Aaron'* (Q. 7:121–122, Q. 26:47–48, cf. Q. 20:70).[60] In reaction, each narrative records that Pharaoh first became angry at their believing before he gave his permission; second accused them of being in league with Moses; and, third, threatened to cut off their hands and feet on opposite sides and to kill them by crucifixion (Q. 7:123–124, Q. 20:71, and Q. 26:49–50). At this point the newly-converted magicians respond that his threats are of no matter for them as they are now believers; he can kill them but they will return to the Lord as believers. However, the specific wording and rhetorical points made are in each case unique. In *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf* (Q. 7:125–126) the statement of the penitent magicians consists of condemnation for Pharaoh taking vengeance on them for believing and a prayer for patience and constancy as they are to die. In *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* (Q. 20:72–76), they first state that Pharaoh can only harm them in this life, and declare their belief and hope for

forgiveness for the magic Pharaoh compelled them to perform, and then give a standard Qur'anic dichotomous formulaic description of Hell for unrepentant sinners and Gardens of Eternity for the believers. In *Sūrat al-Shuᶜarāᵓ* (Q. 26:50–51) it is stated most plainly that Pharaoh's threats are meaningless to them as they will simply return to their Lord and only desire His forgiveness that they can be foremost among the believers. In all cases, however, the message is the same: Pharaoh's threats do not matter in the face of God's reality. In this manner, the Qur'anic narratives send exhortatory or homiletic messages to those in the earliest Qur'anic community of the necessity of conversion and following the signs of God, regardless of socio-political consequences, persecutions, or even death. The auditors of the narrative are situated as needing to decide which character represents them typologically or categorically: viewing themselves as either the magicians (uninformed pagans or unbelievers who are faced with the truth and can submit) or the hard-hearted nobles or Pharaoh (who reject the truth even when presented to them).

Beyond such a discursively significant message, there are other messages and significations of import which appear simultaneously as the narratives come to a climax (at least within the short sections of the Moses narratives being analysed here). One of the first things of note is the fact that in every one of the Qur'anic accounts, in addition to appropriating Aaron's role in throwing the staff, Moses also tells Pharaoh's magicians to cast their staffs first (Q. 7:115–116, Q. 10:80, Q. 20:65–66, and Q. 26:43–45).[61] In the Biblical accounts, Aaron throws his staff first, and the magicians are summoned to respond and throw theirs (Exod. 7:8–13). Such a variation may at first seem like a difference without real distinction. However, when considered discursively and homiletically with the circumstances of the original community in mind, this subtle change to the Biblical narrative could be indicative of a paradigmatic outlook of the earliest Qur'anic community in the Meccan period with regard to conflict and violence with those persecuting and oppressing them. The community in Mecca may have been more reactive and less assertive or aggressive vis-à-vis any conflict or challenge, focusing simply on sharing the message and signs of God. If this was the case, it seems to have changed after the Emigration and the changed situation during the Medinan period. As Q. 22:39–40 reads *Permission is granted to those who are fought, because they have been wronged—and truly God is able to help them—who were expelled from their homes without right, only for saying, 'Our Lord is God.'*

Additionally, the Qur'anic conflict with the magicians is limited to one set of acts (the throwing of the staffs is combined with the transformation of the hand). In the Biblical narrative, however, there are two additional magical confrontations during which the Egyptian magicians match other actions performed by Aaron: turning water to blood (Exod. 7:22) and bringing up hordes of frogs from the river (Exod. 8:7).[62] Interestingly, the plagues are not as significant in the narratives of Moses' encounter

with Pharaoh in the Qur'an, playing a much smaller role in general in the Qur'anic text than in the Biblical text. They only appear via general references in the Qur'an, for example in Q. 43:46–56 and Q. 7:133, neither of which goes into much detail. Or they are referenced enigmatically as *the nine signs* (see, for example, Q. 27:12 and Q. 17:101). Roberto Tottoli notes, 'As regards the plagues, the Qurʾān refers to nine signs (Qur. 27:12), but when it lists them the number is different; these discrepancies are also evident in the apocryphal Jewish and Christian literature.'[63] By limiting the miraculous signs that Moses shows to Pharaoh to two (the staff and hand transformations), the Qur'an is setting a relatively low bar for prophetic sign-giving in comparison with the Biblical tradition of Moses, in which Moses and Aaron perform successively more and more difficult miraculous actions. This seems most likely to be in response to Meccan questioning of how the Qur'anic signs have been received (for example Q. 25:32) or apparent demands for signs and miracles to give validity to the prophetic pronouncements of Muḥammad (for example Q. 10:20, Q. 13:7, Q. 13:27, Q. 17:90–93, and Q. 28:47–49).

The Qur'an is very clear in these narratives what the proper response is to being presented with these signs: conversion accomplished by prostration. As has been noted, in three of the narratives, this conversion is explicitly described (Q. 7:120–122, Q. 20:70, and Q. 26:46–48), while in the last there is an ambiguous statement that could refer to such (Q. 10:83). The description of the conversion revolves around the physical prostration (*sājidīna* or *sujjadan* in Q. 7:120, Q. 26:46, and Q. 20:70, respectively) and the verbal declaration of belief: *'We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Moses and Aaron'* (Q. 7:121–122 and Q. 26:47–48, cf. Q. 20:70).

While the conversion of the magicians is not contained within the Biblical narrative, and some have labelled it 'an innovation of the Ḳurʾān',[64] the narrative aspect of prostration in response to Moses' signs and mission is grounded in the broader Exodus narrative. In the related Biblical narrative of Exodus, in two places the Hebrew word *hištaḥăwah*, 'to prostrate or bow low', appears. The Qur'an appears to be responding to and using homiletically both of these instances from the Biblical text. The first instance (Exod. 4:30–31, NRSV), details the reaction of the Israelites to Moses' message and signs:

> Aaron spoke all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and performed the signs in the sight of the people. The people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped (*wayiqdû wayištaḥăwû*).

In the Jewish and Christian translations, this instance of prostration is represented by a number of verbs. Translating the Hebrew *hištaḥăwah*, Onqelos and the Peshitta (and Pseudo-Jonathan) use the Aramaic and Syriac verb *s-g-d* ('to bow down, prostrate,

worship'),[65] while Neofiti uses *y-d-y* ('to give thanks, admit, consent').[66] While this instance in most of the textual traditions does indicate the response of prostration to hearing the word and seeing the signs, the fact that those doing the prostration are those who already believe in the God of Israel show that more is going on than simply a re-telling of this specific narrative.

The second instance from the Biblical text also indicates complex usage, occurring with Moses providing a hypothetical future wherein Pharaoh and Egypt are punished with the death of the firstborn, depicting their responses to such tragedy. Among other things, Moses declares, 'Then all these officials of yours shall come down to me, and bow low (*wahištaḥăwû*) to me, saying, "Leave us, you and all the people who follow you"' (Exod. 11:8, NRSV). Intriguingly, while the Peshitta in this case again translates *wahištaḥăwû* with *s-g-d* (Syr.), all of the Aramaic versions translate it with a verb meaning 'to ask, beg, enquire' or simply 'to ask'. In Onqelos (and Pseudo-Jonathan) this is the verb *b-ᶜ-y*, while in Neofiti it is simply *š-ᵓ-l*.[67] In this case, it is clear then that the Qur'an is following, or preserving, in this instance, the textual tradition of the Syriac translation.[68] While the circumstances described in this verse are never actually witnessed in the Biblical text, Moses' description of the future prostration of the servants or officials of Pharaoh (*ᶜabdēka*) fits the context of the Qur'anic narrative better insofar as it represents a group of hostile rejecters of the prophetic message prostrating. It does differ, however, in the fact that their prostration in the Biblical text is not accompanied by conversion or belief in the prophetic message. Rather, it is a prostration of entreaty and request rather than a prostration of conversion or communion with God.[69] For these reasons, it seems to be the case that in the Qur'anic narrative, these two instances of prostration in response to the prophetic message and signs are deliberately conflated. In such a case, the connecting factor in the textual history seems to be the usage of the Semitic root *s-g-d* (in its Aramaic and Syriac cognates) as a translation of Hebrew *hištaḥăwah.* This usage is mirrored in the Arabic use of the verb *sajada* to focus the attention of the audience on the prostration of the magicians.[70] Given the discursive importance of prostration as a ritual action within the Qur'an and the earliest Qur'anic community and the fact that such can be traced via the usage of *sajada* to being fully entrenched in the community's rituals and identity by the Middle Meccan period, it is clear that the usage of *sajada* in these narratives is not accidental or simply an artefact of previous textual narrative.[71] Rather, its usage is a deliberate choice of the author meant to send specific messages about the community, their methods of worship, and how to join with or become part of the correct community of believers in response to recognition of the Prophetic message. In this case, the choice to follow the Peshitta and the Hebrew Bible may have also sent specific discursively significant messages, whether deliberately or unintended, about the other textual transmissions and the sectarians that adhered to them.

While the prostration aspect can be shown to be grounded in the Biblical text, the idea of the magicians' conversion to belief in Moses' message is absent from the Biblical narrative. The pre-Qur'anic interpretive traditions of Christianity and Judaism also largely do not view the magicians of Pharaoh as having converted. Such viewpoints are involved specifically with the extra-Biblical traditions and texts surrounding the persons of Jannes and Jambres, two magicians named in these materials as those who confront Aaron and Moses in Egypt.[72] Most of these materials predate the reception of the Qur'an by hundreds of years, as their tale and legend seem to have originated before the birth of Christ, perhaps as early as the third or second century BCE.[73] For instance, Jannes and Jambres are mentioned in early Christian materials, specifically being referenced in the New Testament in 2 Timothy 3:8. However, the notion of them having converted is absent and is a necessary implication in the comparison made by the author to those in their day:[74]

> As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these people, of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith, also oppose the truth. But they will not make much progress, because, as in the case of those two men, their folly will become plain to everyone.

Such a view is also represented throughout later Christian tradition, specifically in the Ante-Nicene Fathers.[75] Indeed, Christian tradition goes so far as to identify these figures as those who led Pharaoh and his army to their ultimate demise in the Red Sea, more than likely seen as the point that their folly became 'plain to everyone': 'the Egyptians Jannes and Jambres led Pharaoh and his army astray until they were swallowed up in the sea.'[76] Even earlier in Christian writings, it is concluded that even the 'mixed multitude' that went out of Egypt did not include any Egyptians:[77]

> we may conclude that they who came out of Egypt with Moses were not Egyptians; for if they had been Egyptians, their names also would be Egyptian, because in every language the designations (of persons and things) are kindred to the language.

Such a conclusion would preclude the possibility of conversion for those Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses (whether Jannes and Jambres or others).

The Jewish interpretive tradition prior to the reception of the Qur'an likewise largely avoids the notion of conversion for the magicians of Pharaoh. While the tradition of Jannes and Jambres as the magicians who opposed Moses and Aaron seems to have arisen in the Palestinian Jewish context of the first or second century BCE, any fully-formed notion of them having converted within Jewish contexts and sources arises much later, after the rise of Islam. The only connection with them and the

'mixed multitude' that followed Moses from an alleged pre-Islamic sources comes in the Midrash Tanḥuma:[78]

> There were forty thousand of the mixed multitude, who forced themselves on the Israelites at the Exodus and came out with them from Egypt. Among them were the two great Egyptian magicians of Pharaoh who imitated Moses's miracles before Pharaoh. Their names were Junus and Jumburius.

This source, first of all, does not explicitly note a conversion as happening; there are other ways to understand their presence besides assuming conversion. Secondly, as noted by Pietersma, Tanḥuma Buber (a connected source form the same period) does not note the presence of Jannes and Jambres at all, and 'moreover, neither version of Midrash Tanḥuma explains how and why it was that the "mixed multitude" had accompanied Israel out of Egypt. Does the presence of the motley crowd at Sinai presuppose the conversion tradition? And even if one answers this question in the affirmative, one may question whether Jannes and Jambres are original to the Tanḥuma tradition.'[79] Thus, the only Jewish source allegedly arising prior to the rise of Islam that could possibly be interpreted to imply a conversion of the magicians, is suspect historically and ambiguous at best.[80]

In view of these facts, and despite the fact that the legend of Jannes and Jambres and the text named after them were well known and widespread in the Mediterranean world (specifically in the Syriac East), the Qur'an, while relying generally upon the story, is certainly innovating based on it and expanding upon Biblical traditions by presenting the magicians as prostrating and converting to follow Moses. Unlike the Jannes and Jambres story, however, such a conversion leads to them being put to death by Pharaoh, rather than leading Pharaoh and his armies to their deaths. Discursively and historically, then, for the earliest Qur'anic community, this story sends exhortatory or homiletic messages illustrating the necessity of conversion and following of the signs of God, regardless of socio-political consequences, persecutions, or even death.

Conclusion

Based on the proposition that the relationship between Biblical and Qur'anic narratives involves an intentional, homiletic rendering of the former by the latter based on the needs and desires of the earliest Qur'anic community, this article has shown that the Qur'anic narratives of Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh and his magicians contain significant discursive subtexts and elements as well as exhortatory messages. This content was initially meant to re-present the story as a typological rendering of the Moses stories in the light of the life and circumstances of Muḥammad. The story also served as a model for the construction of the community based in the similarities

preserved in the story of the Children of Israel and the earliest followers of Muḥammad. In this sense, even the choice of using the Exodus narrative within the Meccan suras sent specific messages about how the nascent community was to conceive of itself. These messages were reinforced by the number of retellings or references to this narrative within the early suras of the Qur'an. Specifically, the community of believers was most likely being prompted to see and view themselves as a community in the process of developing from being bound to 'Pharaonic' paganism to a new society or community bound to God. The narrative invites the comparison, then, of Moses and Muḥammad, recasting them as types of one another: as prophetic figures of deliverance, leading the way out of pagan idolatry and wickedness. However, it is also made clear that this communal deliverance is contingent upon individual responses to the prophetic word and message, represented by the conversion of the magicians.

Such a discursive message would dramatically create and enforce notions about community, identity, and boundaries and norms. Additional discursive messages would also have been influential in shaping the worldviews of those who considered Muḥammad's 'Recitation' as scripture. These would include the establishment and development of a distinct prophetology and social critique, as demonstrated by the chronological development of the character of Moses and the identity of the nobles across the various retellings of the narrative. This narrative, in its variations, would have had significant influence in colouring how members of the community evaluated political, social, and religious leadership qualities and qualifications. It would push for a natural distrust of the political power and governance structures of the Meccan aristocracy at the time as well as an inherent respect and honour for those on the periphery who were pushing back against the entrenched socio-political elites. This message is reinforced by viewing the narrative as a distinct polemic against certain social or political elites in Mecca who would stand to lose influence or power by the rise of a new religious minority. However, such a message is also tempered by the use of Moses as a discursive model: giving signs, calling to repentance, but only actively entering into conflict or challenge when forced to or as initiated by others. Such a model would have stood as important instruction on how to deal with enemies and challenges in the distinct tension-filled circumstances of Mecca.

Other important messages would also be sent by the introduction of differences into the narratives via expanding or collapsing existing elements in the narrative or innovating entirely new elements to insert. Even the fact that the author of the Qur'an felt capable and authorised to depart from the traditional narratives would have sent specific discursive messages impacting the ways and means by which the earliest Qur'anic community viewed, used, and interpreted 'scripture.' While such hints cannot necessarily be proven (given the fact that later Islamic communities did not retain the same feelings after the canonisation process), other significant differences

from the Biblical tradition can be seen which spoke directly to the circumstances of the auditors of Muḥammad's recitations: the clear collapsing of the actions and role of Aaron into the character of Moses, the presence and actions of the nobles as a major expansion upon minor Biblical groups, or the specific issues surrounding the conversion of the magicians. As has been shown, each of these applied to the circumstances and discourse of the earliest Qur'anic community in specific ways, prompting the development of a self-understanding and communal identity that pushed back against established socio-political or religious norms, and furthered the establishment of others in their place.

Likewise, the deliberate mixing of textual traditions and intertextual choices made by the Qur'an vis-à-vis other Biblical textual traditions indicates a complex relationship that would have helped establish distinct discursive norms regarding the relationship of the nascent Qur'anic community to the Christian and Jewish population as well as influenced the community's views of the Christian and Jewish scriptures.[81] Through discussing a number of key word choices, it has been shown that in one case the Qur'an accords with Targum Onqelos (the lack of 'leprous' when discussing the hand transformation, preferring simply instead 'white'), while in another situation the Qur'an follows the Syriac Peshitta translation ('prostration'), and in yet another case, seems to reflect both the Onqelos and Peshitta over other potential readings (the usage of *thuᶜbān* to retain both quotidian and mythological meanings of *tannīn*).[82] In any of these cases alone, it could be said that the Qur'an was deliberately prioritising one tradition over another. However, when all of these 'borrowings' are taken together, they send a very different discursive message. Rather than pointing to a single textual (or even interpreted) transmission of the Bible, the author of the Qur'an, for this narrative, is relying upon and freely stitching together textual readings (or oral recitations of Biblical text) from a variety of sources and expanding upon them to achieve the desired effect. Discursively, such a strategy would reinforce the Qur'an's claims to be a successor to the Jewish and Christian scriptural traditions. Likewise, by distinctly and noticeably following both Christian and Jewish variant readings within the same pericope, the Qur'anic message signifies itself as being applicable to both Jewish and Christian communities and individuals. By deliberately placing itself in conversation with both earlier religious traditions, the Qur'an demonstrates a strong concern with not alienating either of those religious communities at this point in its reception.[83]

The inclusion and deliberate alteration in the narrative of Moses and his confrontation with Pharaoh's magicians played an integral role in the development of the discursive norms and worldviews of the developing Qur'anic community. Understanding the specific underlying textual usages and socio-religious and political messages contained in the narrative, and their application to the lived reality of that earliest Qur'anic community, assists in the understanding and appreciation of the communal

identity development of the earliest Qur'anic community as well as the origins of the Qur'anic text.

NOTES

1 For important work on this, see Wheeler, *Moses*. See also Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, pp. 31–35.

2 The Qur'an references the Exodus narrative and Moses appearing before Pharaoh many times. Most of the references are general, simply noting that the Children of Israel were delivered, in some cases Moses or Pharaoh may not even be mentioned. The delineation of the four narratives used in this paper was based on the amount of detail in the narratives, as well as the prominent positions given to the nobles, the magicians, the confrontation with Moses, and the conversion of the magicians (the last being the most important, not being mentioned anywhere else in the Qur'an). For general references, see Q. 2:49–50, Q. 14:5–6, Q. 17:101–104, Q. 25:35–36, Q. 40:23–47 (note that this reference mainly tells a narrative of an unnamed follower of Moses who has a confrontation with Pharaoh), Q. 44:17–33, Q. 54:41–42, Q. 73:15–17, and Q. 79:20–26. For references that mention, in some way or another (but again, without great detail), either nobles, magicians, or a confrontation between Moses and the magicians, see Q. 23:45–49; Q. 28:3–6, 36–42; Q. 43:46–56; and Q. 51:38–40. For general scholarly engagement with the Moses narratives in the Qur'an, see Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, pp. 61–65; Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, pp. 32–44; Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen*, pp. 225–365; Busse, *Islam, Judaism, and Christianity*, pp. 93–104; and Causse, 'The Theology of Separation' and Neuwirth, 'Narrative as Canonical Process'. Causse's 'The Theology of Separation' originally appeared in French as Causse, 'Théologie de Rupture'. Likewise for Busse in the original German see Busse, *Die theologische Beziehung*. It should be noted that most of these provide only simple and superficial treatment of the narratives at best, or deal with the greater Moses narratives and not simply with the portion discussed herein.

3 'Earliest Qur'anic community' here is used as shorthand for the community that initially responded to and followed the Prophet Muḥammad, accepting his recitations (i.e. the Qur'an) as authoritative and authentic, i.e. scripturally. See Neuwirth's discussions of the pre-canonical and post-canonical Qur'an, and the value of recognising the differences inherent in this view, in Neuwirth, 'Qur'an and History'.

4 Schöck, 'Moses', pp. 419–420. It is important to note that this typological relationship is not the same as that commonly invoked within Christianity, seeing Christ as a teleological fulfillment of Old Testament types. Angelika Neuwirth describes it thus: 'The experience of Moses appears as a significant prefiguration of that of Muhammad. Is it justifiable to claim that Muhammad thus becomes the antitype of Moses? Obviously, the paradigm of typology at work here is different from the Christian one. There is no teleological tension between the biblical and qur'anic events, and Muhammad does not come to fulfill a biblical promise; rather, here things work the other way around. The biblical events corroborate the truth and significance of the qur'anic events. We might therefore more precisely speak of *taṣdīq* (validation), insofar as the older tradition comes to confirm the new. Yet the construction of reciprocity, of empirical and psychological analogies, goes beyond a merely semantic, "textual" similarity between the plots of the prophetic stories. They touch on the "context," attesting the emergence of a new prophetic identity. Taking the biblical intertexts and the qur'anic intratexts seriously, we discern a development both in terms of the psychological condition of the Prophet Muhammad and in terms of the translation of the biblical version into a late antique epistemic space' (Neuwirth, 'Qur'anic Studies', p. 9).

5 Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, p. 84. Neuwirth pushes back a little against a fully-developed version of ahistorical Qur'anic viewpoints. See Neuwirth, *Scripture*, pp. 278–281.

6 Neuwirth, 'Qur'an and History', p. 16.

7 It is important to recognise that all versions of a narrative are simply retellings in a form constructed by the author and audience to fit their own context: see Waldman, 'New Approaches'. This allows Reynolds to view the Qur'an generally as homily (Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, pp. 230–258).

8 Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, p. 238.

9 Neuwirth, 'Form and Structure', p. 261. Elsewhere, she posits that the variant narratives should be seen, 'not as an amorphous heap of "materials", but, with a view of its pre-canonic existence within a communication process, can be realised as presenting lively scenes from the emergence of a community' (Neuwirth, 'Qur'an and History', p. 6).

10 Neuwirth, 'Qur'anic Studies', p. 2.

11 Focusing on an interpretive orientation based on the later-developed *tafsīr* and *sīra* traditions, especially in conjunction with unexamined assumptions and biases of modern society, may fail to take into account what the Qur'anic text was intending to transmit in its original context, particularly as pertaining to the Qur'an's relationship and conversation with the Biblical texts and traditions that preceded it. Such an examination may inform more about the context in which the interpretation was made, and less about the context in which the Qur'an was composed or received. For an overview of some of these issues, see Neuwirth, 'Orientalism'. Methodological missteps based on unexamined assumptions and biases are characteristics of early western scholars and their engagement with the Moses stories, particularly evident in their general phenomenological outlook, issues of orientalism, and the privileging of Judeo-Christian (particularly Protestant) paradigms and texts. This led many to view Muḥammad as fundamentally inept or ignorant in his understanding of the Biblical stories. See, for instance, Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen*, pp. 259, 267.

12 For good examples of reading the Qur'an with regard to the traditional biography of Muḥammad and interpretive tradition, see Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*; Neuwirth, 'Narrative as Canonical Process'; and Causse, 'The Theology of Separation'.

13 As Angelika Neuwirth has said, 'Qur'anic scholarship today tends to privilege historical inquiry, focusing on fragmented texts and their alleged subtexts, on biblical, post biblical and ancient Arabian traditions, and on the codex's earliest venues of transmission. Historical scholars are less interested in making sense of the text as a literary artifact, let alone as an epistemic intervention into the reception of the Bible' ('Qur'anic Studies', p. 1). For overviews of the major methodological concerns with regard to the relationship of the Bible and the Qur'an, see Robbins and Newby, 'A Prolegomenon', and Firestone, 'The Qur'an and the Bible'. For more in-depth analysis of the relationship, see Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, and Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, pp. 54–96. For additional studies on the historical backdrop to the Qur'an, see Reynolds, *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* and *New Perspectives*. These represent more nuanced and sophisticated understandings of the relationship between the Qur'an and the Bible that stand in contradistinction to earlier scholars, some of whom either privileged Biblical texts as 'originals' and therefore of more worth, or went to the other extreme by rejecting notions of historical precedence and positing ahistorical avenues of causation and reliance. In doing so, they tend to present their interpretation of the Qur'an through the lens of later (largely Jewish) works, such as Exodus Rabbah, Pirke de Rabbi Eliezar, or Yalqut Shimoni. For example, see Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen*, pp. 259, 267, and 273–275; Katsh, *Judaism and the Koran*, p. 198. This occurs despite the fact that some scholars of the time recognise causal borrowings based in historical circumstance. See, for instance, Katsh referencing the views of Horovitz and Hirschberg regarding Islamic influence in various Rabbinic materials (Katsh, *Judaism and the Koran*, p. 47, n. 11). Katsh is referencing Hirschberg, *Yisrael Ba'arab*, p. 237, and Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, p. 23.

14 Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, p. 56.

15 Past scholarship on the narrative of Moses before Pharaoh and his confrontation with Pharaoh's magicians is sparse and generally very superficial. See Hirschfeld, *New Researches*, pp. 61–65; Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, pp. 32–44; Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen*, pp. 225–365; Busse, *Islam, Judaism, and Christianity*, pp. 93–104; and Causse, 'The Theology of Separation', p. 45. Most of these simply recount the facts of the narratives as contained in the Qur'an. Speyer is the most detailed, providing the best (though still somewhat inadequate) comparison with the Biblical tradition.

16 On notions of magic in the ancient world, see Graf, 'Theories of Magic', and Frankfurter, 'Dynamics of Ritual Expertise'. In consideration of Moses, magic, and ancient Egypt, see Rendsburg, 'Moses the Magician'. Based on Q. 2:102, some scholars have connected the stories and notions of magic in the Qur'an with specific Enochic traditions of two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, who taught magic or sorcery to humanity. This influences interpretations of the magic confrontations seen here with Moses. See Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, p. 147; Katsh, *Judaism and the Koran*, pp. 92–93; and Vajda, 'Hārūt Wa-Mārūt'. Geiger attributes this to a Jewish legend about two angels in the time of Noah. See Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, pp. 83–84.

17 All references and quotations from the Qur'an are taken from the translation in Nasr et al., *The Study Quran*.

18 The declaration of the magicians in Q. 20:70 is *'We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses'*. The names are reversed in order to retain the end of verse rhyme scheme in this short section. For more on this phenomenon in the Qur'an, see Stewart, 'Poetic License in the Qur'an', and Stewart, 'Poetic License and the Qur'anic Names of Hell'.

19 Neuwirth, *Scripture*, p. 299.

20 For chronological lists, see Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, pp. 69–96; Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, pp. 213–222.

21 Schöck, 'Moses', p. 419.

22 Neuwirth, *Scripture*, p. 302.

23 For Neuwirth's descriptions and analysis of three of these narratives, see Neuwirth, *Scripture*, pp. 288–294, 299–301.

24 On the ideas of a distinctive prophetic paradigm or 'prophetology,' see Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, pp. 62–64.

25 Schöck, 'Moses', p. 421.

26 Ernst comments that 'most of the middle and late suras generally have three parts. Many exhibit a ring structure, beginning and ending with parallel sections that praise God, list virtues and vices, debate unbelievers, and affirm the revelation; the third section normally concludes with a flourish, containing a powerful affirmation of revelation. The second part, in the middle of the sura, is typically a narrative of prophecy and struggle that highlights the crucial choices facing the messenger's audience' (Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, p. 106).

27 Neuwirth, *Scripture*, p. 285.

28 Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an*, p. 108.

29 Heller and Macdonald, 'Mūsā'. Note also: 'The topics in the qurʾānic account of Moses go back to biblical and post-biblical narratives. The details in the Qurʾān and in early Islamic exegesis testify to the great influence of Jewish Haggada on Muḥammad and early Islam. This does not mean, however, that the qurʾānic Moses fully corresponds to the Moses of Jewish tradition. The Qurʾān has its own point of view and its own interpretation of the older narrative material' (Schöck, 'Moses', p. 419).

30 Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, p. 238.

31 Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, p. 84.

32 Other differences in the narratives can be discerned, e.g. the uses and purposes of the signs given to Moses by God to prove his status as messenger. However, it is less clear what purpose, if any, this differentiation between the Qur'anic and Biblical narratives served. For other scholarly work on the sign(s) of Moses, see Katsh, *Judaism and the Koran*, p. 81, and Hirschfeld, New Researches, pp. 61–65.

33 On Aaron's presence in this story and the Qur'an in general, see Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen*, pp. 260–262; Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, pp. 57–58, 73, and 77.

34 On the Qur'anic reference to Aaron as a *nabī*, see Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, p. 47.

35 Generally, caution should be exhibited in the analysis and comparison of narratives between the Bible and the Qur'an, as there is room for other influences on the narratives as transmitted and existing (more than likely in oral form) in the religious milieu at the time. As Sidney Griffith has noted: 'the Bible that came within the purview of the Qurʾān was not simply the canonical scripture of either the Jews of the Christians, nor was it a written text. Rather, in a number of its *sūrahs* the Qurʾān is in dialogue with narratives about a number of biblical figures, which narratives had circulated both orally and in writing in Late Antique Jewish and Christian communities. According to the hypothesis being proposed here, they came into Arabic orally … As narratives they are not the Bible as such, but one may think of them as composing in the ensemble a kind of oral "interpreted Bible"' (Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, pp. 91–92). However, without specific evidence to the contrary, it must be assumed that the written narrative as held in the Hebrew Bible was represented at the least fairly faithfully in this oral form.

36 Josephus deals with Moses within his work entitled *Antiquities of the Jews.* For the complete works of Josephus, see Josephus, *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary*. For the Ante-Nicene Fathers, see Roberts et al., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Hereafter referenced as ANF, the works of the Ante-Nicene Fathers include Christian commentary and writings ranging from the Apostolic Fathers of the second century CE through to Fathers of the third and fourth centuries CE, as well as a variety of other writings (pseudopigraphic and otherwise) arising in the period.

37 See Hyppolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies*, 5.11 (ANF 5:162); *The Recognitions of Clement*, 3.55 (ANF 8:331), *The Recognitions of Clement*, 3.57 (ANF 8:333); *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, 1.5 (ANF 8:1372, cf. ANF 8:1396, 8:1431, 8:1515).

38 For Feldman's analysis of the person of Moses in the works of Josephus, see his 'Josephus' Portrait of Moses', 'Josephus' Portrait of Moses: Part Two', 'Josephus' Portrait of Moses. Part Three'.

39 Feldman, 'Josephus' Portrait of Moses', p. 311. See also, Feldman, 'Josephus' Portrait of Moses', p. 11. For the third portion of Feldman's analysis, see Feldman, 'Josephus' Portrait of Moses. Part Three'.

40 This understanding is based in the original Hebrew of these passages, and not later translations which so often are influenced by the presuppositions and assumptions (largely theological) of their translators. In the Hebrew, Exodus 4:16b reads: *wĕʾtāh tihyeh lō lēlʾōhīm* 'and you will be for him for a god.' The preposition *l-* may be translated in a number of ways, but 'for' is probably best. This is especially the case as it compares with Exodus 7:1, which reads in part *nĕtatiykā ēlʾōhīm lĕparʿōh* or 'I have made you a god to Pharaoh.'

41 See Feldman, 'Josephus' Portrait of Moses', pp. 323–324.

42 Mek. d'Rabbi Yishmael 12:1:3. See also Mek. d'Rabbi Yishmael 12:1:2. For a view that does present Aaron as removed somewhat from the revelation of God (in accordance with the Biblical text), see Mek. d'Rabbi Yishmael 12:1:1.

43 For a scholarly look at the staff of Moses in Islamic interpretation and tradition, see Tottoli, 'Il Bastone'.

44 Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, p. 392; Robinson, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 1,072. However, there is still debate about the meaning of this word. For an overview, see Rendsburg, 'Moses the Magican', p. 245. Rendsburg views it as conclusive that in the Egyptian and Exodus context (used in Exod. 7:9, 10, and 12) this word should be translated as 'crocodile'. For important notes concerning the usage and influence of Hebrew words in the Qur'an, see Jeffrey, *The Foreign Vocabulary*, pp. 23–26.

45 The J source and P (or the priestly materials) are two of the four sources (the other two being E and D) put forward by the Documentary Hypothesis for the original materials or sources underlying the Torah. For an introduction, see O'Brien, *Sources of the Pentateuch*.

46 Sokoloff, *A Dictionary*, p. 587.

47 Sokoloff, *A Dictionary*, p. 197. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, whose dating seems to be most likely after the reception of the Qur'an, uses *ḥywy* in the first instance (Exod. 7:9), but then shifts to *ḥrmn* ('poisonous snake') in Exod. 7:10 and 12 (see Sokoloff, *A Dictionary*, p. 215). While Ps-Jonathan is created certainly after the reception of the Qur'an, its usages and translation will be noted in this paper simply as a means of illustrating broader trends in Jewish interpretation both before and after the rise of Islam.

48 Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon*, p. 1,655.

49 While not the case in these particulars and being tangential to this particular point, the contributions of Arthur Jeffery on the usage of foreign words in the Qur'an are important to consider and provide a handy framework for considering the issues at hand (see Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary*). Of all of the comparisons herein with translations of the Biblical text, the only word that appears in his work is *sajada*, which is treated below.

50 Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, p. 337.

51 Nasr, *The Study Quran*, p. 443.

52 The servants or officials of Pharaoh, *ʿabdē parʿōh*, are the standard designation for this group throughout the Hebrew Biblical text. As well, cognates of the same word in Aramaic and Syriac appear in the Targummim and the Syriac Peshitta.

53 Schöck, 'Moses', p. 421.

54 It should be noted that, in Suras 7 and 20, the nobles state that it is Moses' intent to drive Pharaoh out of the land, while in Sura 26, Pharaoh is the one that states that Moses is there to drive the nobles out of their place. The role of magic in the planned displacement is not stated outright in Sura 7, but can be inferred.

55 See Q. 7:60, 66, 75, 88, 90, 103, 109, and 127; Q. 10:75, 83, and 88; Q. 11:27, 38, and 97; Q. 12:43; Q. 23:24, 33, and 46; Q. 26:34; Q. 28:20, 32, and 38; Q. 38:6; and Q. 43:46. The author is unaware of any early or contemporary scholars that have dealt with this group in any significant way.

56 Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, p. 70.

57 On the Divine Council in the Biblical text and tradition, see Kingsbury, 'The Prophets'; Mullen, *The Assembly*; Kee, 'The Heavenly Council'; and Gordon, 'Standing in the Council'.

58 Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 87. The *Jewish Study Bible* also notes that 'the snowy encrustation looks like the skin disease that renders a person ritually impure' (Berlin

and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 104). Grammatically, it is a feminine participle of the Pual form of the verb *ṣāraᶜ* (see Robinson, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, pp. 863–864).

59 For the Aramaic, see Sokoloff, *A Dictionary*, p. 470. For the Syriac, see Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon*, p. 254.

60 Q. 20:70 omits the first phrase, with them only saying *'We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses'*. It almost goes without saying that this posture was adopted fairly early on in the history of the early community of believers as a posture of worship. For more on prostration as connected to pre-Islamic, Qur'anic, and later Islamic practice, see Tottoli's various articles: 'Muslim Attitudes … I'; 'Muslim Attitudes … II'; 'The Thanksgiving Prostration'; and 'Muslim Traditions'.

61 In two of the narratives (Q. 7:115–116 and Q. 20:65–66), the magicians ask who shall throw first, to which Moses responds by telling them to go first. In the other two narratives (Q. 10:80 and Q. 26:43–45) Moses simply tells them to cast first.

62 Beyond this second 'plague' the Egyptian magicians fail to perform the miracles that Aaron and Moses do. In Biblical traditions generally, there are some discrepancies between the Biblical text itself and other related literature about the numbering and identification of the plagues. In the Biblical text itself, the plagues are: turning the Nile water into blood (Exod. 7:14–25), frogs covering the land (Exod. 8:1–15), lice (Exod. 8:16–19), flies/wild animals (Exod. 8:20–24), pestilence or disease of livestock (Exod. 9:1–7), boils (Exod. 9:8–12), hail and thunder (Exod. 9:13–20), locusts (Exod. 10:9–15), darkness (Exod. 10:21–23), and death of firstborn (Exod. 12:29–30).

63 Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, p. 58.

64 Wensinck and Vajda, 'Firᶜawn'. While also asserting its status as an innovation, Speyer also (seemingly grasping at straws to account for the narrative) draws attention to other stories that are only superficially connected via notions of conversion: 'Die Erzählung von der Anerkennung Allahs durch die Zauberer Firᶜauns entstammt entweder der Phantasie Mohammeds, der vielleicht an die Bekehrung der Königin von Saba (27, 45, 2. m. P.) oder an die Firᶜauns beim Untergang im Meer (10, 90—92) dachte und dasselbe seelische Erlebnis bei den Zauberern voraussetzte oder den Bericht des Esterbuches von der schließlichen Bekehrung vieler Heiden zum Judentum (Est. 8, 17) im Auge hatte' (Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen*, p. 267). The literary connection with the second instance of prostration in Exod. 11:8 is both more proximate and a stronger candidate for allusive and homiletic possibilities.

65 For the Aramaic term, see Sokoloff, *A Dictionary*, pp. 366–367. For the Syriac, see Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon*, p. 966.

66 Sokoloff, *A Dictionary*, p. 235.

67 See Sokoloff, *A Dictionary*, pp. 107, 532.

68 On the general influence of Syriac on the Arabic of the Qur'an, see Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary*, pp. 19–23. Jeffery's broader discussion of various influences from other languages is also of interest, see Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary*, pp. 11–41. For a more detailed discussion of this word (as part of a more controversial and contested hypothesis and methodology), see Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading*, originally published as Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart*.

69 Different ritualised usages of prostration can be recognised throughout the Hebrew Bible, as well as within the Qur'anic text.

70 On the usage of this word as a loan word of Aramaic origin through Syriac into Arabic, see Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary*, pp. 162–163; Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading*,

pp. 44–45 and 59–60. Note that this transmission occurred before the Islamic era according to Jeffery, citing its usage in line 112 of the *Muᶜallaqa* of ᶜAmr b. Kulthūm.

71 Again, on the importance of prostration in the Qur'an and for this early community, see Tottoli, 'Muslim Attitudes … I'. For a more detailed comparative analysis of the types, usages, and discursive importance of prostration within the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an, including its impact on the earliest Qur'anic community, see Smith, 'Prostration'.

72 For the best overview of the Jannes and Jambres tradition and text, see Pietersma, *The Apocryphon*.

73 Pietersma makes a distinction between the legend or tale of Jannes and Jambres and the written book, while noting that the former may have emerged as early as the second century BCE, he views the best likely time period for the writing of the book as during 'the early Roman period' or 'during the darkest period of Egyptian Jewry around the turning of the era or shortly thereafter' (Pietersma, *The Apocryphon*, pp. 20, 59).

74 2 Tim. 3:8–9, NRSV.

75 See Hyppolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies*, 5.11 (ANF 5:162); *The Recognitions of Clement*, 3.55 (ANF 8:331), *The Recognitions of Clement*, 3.57 (ANF 8:333); *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, 1.5 (ANF 8:1372, cf. ANF 8:1396, 8:1431, 8:1515).

76 *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, 1.5 (ANF 8:1515).

77 *Origen against Celsus* 3.8 (ANF 4:1052).

78 Tanḥ. Ki Tissa 1:21:38 (see also 2:9:19). There is disagreement in the ancient sources about the names as specifically given. On this see Pietersma, *The Apocryphon*, pp. 36–42.

79 Pietersma, *The Apocryphon*, p. 19.

80 Pietersma notes that he doubts that any tradition of Jannes and Jambres converting is as early as some have claimed. See Albert Pietersma, *The Apocryphon,* p. 19. Based on this discussion, it seems most likely that the spread of Islam and the Qur'anic narrative of Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh and his magicians caused the notion of the magicians' conversion to enter the Jewish interpretive tradition, rather than the other way around.

81 Such a relationship has been noted before. Geiger discusses it to some degree (see Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, pp. 23–25), though his discussion is pervaded with orientalist paradigms and assertions seen as problematic in contemporary discourse. There are, to be sure, subtle differences in methodological nuance and conclusion from that presented here.

82 The fact that the Qur'an, in these instances, never agrees with the Targum Neofiti text raises interesting questions about the availability of that translation in the Arabian Peninsula.

83 Whether it achieved this or not, given the historical issues and conflict with the Jews in Medina, is another question. See Newby, *A History*, pp. 82–86.

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