

THE SYRIAC MILIEU OF THE QURAN:
THE RECASTING OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVES

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to contribute to our understanding of the Quran and ultimately to the situating of pre-Islamic Arabia in its Late Antique context. The core argument is that Quranic retellings of Biblical narratives are often much more indebted to the Christian Syriac tradition than scholars have hitherto believed.

Although it is frequently presumed that stories from the Hebrew Bible were transmitted to the Quranic milieu by Jews, the evidence examined in this study strongly suggests that this is often not the case. The body of the dissertation consists of four case studies: the fall of Adam, Cain's murder of Abel, Abraham's construction of a sanctuary together with his son, and the entire story of Joseph and his travails. A comparison of these four narratives as presented in the Quran to both Jewish and Christian Syriac texts shows that in many respects the Quran is markedly closer to the Syriac tradition. The similarities fall under four headings: motifs, diction, literary form, and typological function.

Within the Syriac tradition the sources which tend to present the most parallels are verse homilies and hymns. These were performed publicly and served to instruct a wide population. These literary genres were thus ideal channels of transmission for Biblical traditions to the Quranic milieu.

There are several advantages to reading the Quran from the perspective of the Syriac tradition. On an interpretive level, which is the focus of this dissertation, light can be shed on many details which previously were considered errors or innovations on the part of the Quran, but now may be shown to reflect developments found in the Syriac sources. The study of the Syriac background also allows us to appreciate more fully the ways in which the Quran adapts earlier traditions. On a historical level, it furthers our

comprehension of an area and era concerning which there is a dearth of contemporary evidence.

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Though not involved directly in the dissertation, several scholars have assisted me throughout the years in my study of Arabic and the Quran. Among them I should mention first my teachers in Jerusalem: Meir Bar Asher, Yohanan Friedmann, Simon Hopkins, Etan Kohlberg, Ella Landau-Tasserion, Michael Lecker, and Shaul Shaked. Gabriel Reynolds kindly invited me to participate in a conference dedicated to the Quran and prevailed upon me to publish some of my findings concerning Joseph. Angelika Neuwirth played a crucial role in the completion of this dissertation in that she strongly suggested that I finish up and was instrumental in directing me to the next stage; in this context I also wish to thank Nicolai Sinai and Georges Khalil for all their advice and assistance.

In writing this dissertation I was able to draw upon the collections of three fantastic libraries: Firestone at Princeton University, the Princeton Theological Seminary Library, and the Library at the Institute of Advanced Studies. I am beholden to the staff of

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1. Foreword

In many ways the Quran is an enigmatic text. Scholars still debate the exact nature of the cultural milieu in which it originated and often grapple with the literal meaning of the words. Within the Islamic tradition there is a long history of reflection on many aspects of the text – lexical, grammatical, thematic, chronological, etc. – without which it would be almost impossible to imagine Western scholarship on the Quran. However, critical study of the text, engaging questions which are either off limits for theological reasons or simply beyond the concerns of the classical exegetes, is sorely lacking with the result that the field of Quranic studies is still in its infancy.

This is especially true in comparison with the study of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. We have no critical edition of the Quran, no complete critical commentary, no satisfactory Quranic grammar and so on. Promising efforts have recently been made in these directions, but much remains to be done.

There are many reasons for this lamentable state of affairs: the complexity of the Quranic text and its language, scholars' over-reliance on later suspect Islamic reports for the reconstruction of the era which preceded the Quran, a lack of deep knowledge of parallel Jewish and Christian traditions – all these have played their part. Since the Quran (together with pre-Islamic poetry, the authenticity of which is itself not always beyond doubt) is essentially our only major contemporary source for the culture and religion of pre-Islamic Arabia, Quranic scholarship can profit considerably from studying the Quran in the context of Late Antique religious traditions.

In this dissertation I seek to shed light on the cultural backdrop of the Quranic narratives and thus contribute to the understanding of the text and ultimately to situating pre-Islamic Arabia in its Late Antique setting. I propose to accomplish this by examining the Quran's re-castings of narratives from the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, in light of

earlier Jewish and Christian retellings of the same stories. Other aspects of the Quran are, of course, also worthy of similar inspection; its eschatological piety, anti-Jewish polemics, legal injunctions, and foreign vocabulary (the last attracting the lion's share of earlier interest) all come to mind. But the narratives are a fruitful starting point in that they afford the opportunity of working with textual parallels of considerable length and examining the relationships between them.

The Quran includes narratives with parallels in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament but in forms that often deviate from the Biblical versions, thus suggesting an awareness of intermediary Jewish and Christian transmissions. Whereas the New Testament material was obviously transmitted via Christians, the Hebrew Bible stories could have been received not only from Jews but also from Christians, who retold those stories as well.

Beginning in the nineteenth century Western scholars have been fascinated with the question of Jewish and Christian influence on Muhammad and the Quran. Important studies have been written, although a strong tendency to favor a single religious tradition prevails. Scholars often assumed a single channel of transmission and stuck to it without examining evidence which could support alternative accounts. In the case of retellings of narratives from the Hebrew Bible, Western scholarship has dedicated much of its attention to exploring their Jewish background. This predisposition is evident in the title of what is considered to be the foundational study in the field, Abraham Geiger's *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen* (Bonn, 1833), but can be seen to plague many recent works as well. Even scholars who present a case for a strong Christian impact on the Quran often go no further than observing that Christians too transmitted narratives from the Hebrew Bible. Textual parallels from Christian sources are usually not pursued or seriously examined and are definitely not covered systematically in any

manner comparable to the treatment of Jewish texts. It is this lacuna which this study aims to fill.

Among the Christian sources those in Syriac appear to be a gold-mine of valuable parallels. We have at our disposal a vast corpus of literature in Syriac, an Eastern Aramaic dialect used primarily by Christians in North Syria and Mesopotamia. Syriac literature of the golden age (third to seventh centuries) is variegated and includes many genres. Most relevant for my project are retellings of Biblical narratives in prose and verse, including homilies and hymns. Since many of these pre-Islamic texts often treat topics which come up in the Quran as well it is somewhat surprising that they have not been fully utilized in the study of the Quran. This is perhaps to be expected from scholars who are trained primarily in Islamic studies and have a working knowledge of rabbinic sources, but have no real acquaintance with Syriac and its literature. But even scholars who are better acquainted with Syriac usually neglect the Syriac texts.

This is acutely true of the sensationalist work published under the pseudonym of Christoph Luxenberg. Luxenberg argues – using what one reviewer has called “wayward philology” - that much of the Quran can be deciphered when read as reflecting Syriac rather than Arabic vocabulary and syntax. Aside from the by now many well-noted methodological flaws of his study, it is utterly striking that Luxenberg is almost entirely uninterested in examining textual parallels between Syriac texts and the Quran, but rather expends his efforts in reconstructing the Quran’s mostly imaginary Syriac subtexts.

However, Luxenberg’s highly problematic study has had one positive impact on the field in regenerating interest in the study of the Quran in light of the Syriac literary tradition. This course of research is already yielding significant results, and can undoubtedly still be further developed. Departing from recent scholarship’s focus on Quranic material of an evidently Christian origin such as New Testament narratives or

Christian hagiography, I wish to examine the retellings of the Hebrew Bible narratives in this light.

To do so I examine four Quranic narratives: Adam's fall, Cain and Abel, Abraham's construction of the Ka'ba, and the entire story of Joseph. I hope to establish that in several instances these Quranic retellings show an undeniable affinity to Syriac poems which expand on Biblical themes. These poems range from formal dialogues in alternating stanzas to dramatized narratives which include dialogue and homiletic material. They were used in liturgy, had a wide audience and therefore could easily have served as a channel of transmission for Biblical traditions. Indeed, in the stories I have examined the Quranic retellings and the Syriac poems display similarities with regard to elements of the plot, literary form, diction, and typological function. My analysis, which is based on an extensive comparison with both rabbinic and Christian sources, suggests that the Quranic retellings belong to the same milieu as the Syriac metrical homilies and are heavily indebted to them.

But my interest in revealing the sources of the Quranic narratives lies not only in tracing the evolution of Biblical themes into their Islamic versions and demonstrating the literary links between the Islamic texts and the Syriac tradition, but more importantly in understanding how the Quran appropriated, revised and adapted its building blocks in order to convey its own message. It is my opinion that rather than seeking the misunderstandings or confusions of Muhammad – as scholarship in the past often regarded Quranic deviations from Jewish sources - it is more productive to ask in what ways the Quran reflects earlier trends and in what ways it develops its received traditions in new directions.

2. Some comments on my sources

The single most important text for this dissertation is the Quran. Since the focus of this study is on Quranic retellings of four different Biblical narratives, each chapter tends to have a different set of sources which will be introduced in their appropriate places. In what follows, however, I will briefly present some of the works and authors which recur throughout.

2.1. Rabbinic sources

For the sake of this study the rabbinic texts can be classified under three headings: those which are indisputably pre-Islamic, those which are evidently post-Quranic, and those whose dating is still debated.

For arguments of dependence and influence the first group is most relevant. The primary rabbinic source used in this study, *Genesis Rabba*, belongs here. It is of Palestinian origin and is usually dated to the first half of the fifth century.¹

Though it cannot be denied that the second group contains many early traditions, the late date of these texts renders arguments for Jewish influence on the Quran on their basis weak. Important texts in this category which display many similarities to the Quran and are therefore suspect of reflecting Islamic influence include *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* (henceforth *PRE*),² Targum Pseudo-Jonathan which is probably dependant on *PRE*,³ and especially *Sefer Ha-yashar*.⁴

¹ See G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Edinburgh, 1996), 279. The critical edition of this text is J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba: Critical Edition with Notes and Commentary* (Jerusalem, 1965) (in Hebrew); ET in H. Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis* (London, 1961).

² For the provenance of *PRE* in eighth or ninth-century Palestine, see Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 328-30, and more recently R. Adelman, *The Return of the Repressed: Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Pseudepigrapha* (Leiden, 2009), 35-42. For awareness of Islamic legends in *PRE*, see B. Heller, "Muhammedanisches und Antimuhammedanisches in den Pirke Rabbi Eliezer", *MGWJ* 69 (1925): 47-54.

The same problem arises with texts of the third group. Here too one is often unsure whether a specific tradition is indeed pre-Quranic. The *Tanḥuma* is a case at hand which presents several parallels to Quranic motifs and must be treated with care.⁵

2.2. Syriac works

The two most central authors of early Syriac literature, Aphrahat and Ephrem, are well-known for sharing a stock of traditions with early Judaism and for displaying a deep interest in the Old Testament. Little is known of Aphrahat's life beyond the one book for which he is famous, his *Demonstrations*, written between 336 and 345.⁶ Much more information is available concerning Ephrem (d. 373), who left behind an entire corpus of works. Writing in Nisibis and later in Edessa, Ephrem produced works in prose, metrical homilies, and hymns.⁷ The *Commentary on Genesis* is preserved in a single manuscript, dated to 523, and is usually accepted as a genuine work of Ephrem. It retells the Biblical

³ See, for example, A. Shinan, "Dating Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Some More Comments", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41 (1990): 57-61.

⁴ For the late date of *Sefer Ha-yashar*, see Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 339. It is usually dated to the eleventh or twelfth century, though Joseph Dan suspects that it was composed only at the beginning of the sixteenth century in Naples. It is clearly independent on Islamic traditions.

⁵ The dating of the *Tanḥuma* remains unresolved. Whereas Zunz and his followers date it to the first half of the ninth century, Böhl argues that it "existed in substance around 400 at the least". But even those who opt for an early date concede that the work never attained an absolutely final form and that late interpolations are often to be found. As for its provenance, Palestine is most likely even if the text continued to develop in other countries; see Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 305-306. For an assertion of the *Tanḥuma*'s knowledge of Muslim legends, see B. Heller, "La légende biblique dans l'islam: récents travaux et nouvelles méthodes de recherches", *Revue des Études Juives* 98 (1934): 14.

⁶ The edition cited here is J. Parisot, *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes*, PS 1-2 (Paris, 1894-1907). For a brief survey of research on Aphrahat, see R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (Piscataway, 2004), 28-29. Noteworthy are the introductions to the French and German translations of the *Demonstrations*; M.-J. Pierre, *Aphraate le sage persan: les Exposés* (Paris, 1988-89); P. Bruns, *Aphrahat: Unterweisungen* (Freiburg, 1991).

⁷ For a brief survey of research on Ephrem, see Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 30-34. A good introduction is found in S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Kalamazoo, 1992). For Ephrem's works, see S. Brock, "A Brief Guide to the Main Editions and Translations of the Works of Saint Ephrem", in *Saint Ephrem: un poète pour notre temps* (Antelias, 2007), 281-338.

story in its own words and contains many narrative expansions, some of which are relevant for this study.⁸ Also of relevance are his *Hymns on Paradise*.⁹

In the fifth and sixth centuries we have two poets linked with the School of Edessa, Narsai (d. c. 500) and Jacob of Serugh (d. 521). Though Narsai, a leading Dyophysite author, wrote in other genres as well, only his metrical homilies are preserved. In this study I have primarily made use of his homily *On Joseph*, but have occasionally cited other homilies as well.¹⁰ Jacob, Narsai's younger contemporary, was a Monophysite. His preserved corpus is much larger than that of Narsai and several of his homilies are cited in this study.¹¹

2.3. The use of *tafsīr* in this work

This dissertation is devoted to the study of the Quran, not to the history of its exegesis by Muslims. Nevertheless, Muslim commentaries have been consulted throughout the work. What follows is my justification for doing so.

Recently several scholars have warned against confusing Quranic studies and *tafsīr* studies.¹² The Quran, it is argued, should be read in light of what came before it, not what came after it. Yet there is a risk that in stressing the uncertainty of the exegetical tradition, its midrashic features, and its legendary character, we may overlook the benefits

⁸ The edition cited here is R. M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri In Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii*, CSCO 152-53, SS 71-72 (Louvain, 1955); ET in E. G. Mathews Jr. and J. P. Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works* (Washington, 1994).

⁹ The edition cited here is E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradiso und Contra Julianum*, CSCO 174, SS 78, (Louvain, 1957); ET in S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise: St Ephrem* (Crestwood, 1990). All translations are those of Brock.

¹⁰ The edition usually cited in this study is A. Mingana, *Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et Carmina* (Mosul, 1905). For the various editions of Narsai's homilies, see S. P. Brock, "A Guide to Narsai's Homilies", *Hugoye* 12.1 (2009): 21-40.

¹¹ The largest collection of Jacob's homilies is found in P. Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* (Paris, 1905-10) (henceforth *JSB*). I also used Jacob's *Homilies against the Jews* in the edition of M. Albert, *Jacques de Saroug: Homélie contre les Juifs*, PO 38.1 (Turnhout, 1976); partial ET in I. K. Cosgrove, *Three Homilies against the Jews by Jacob of Serug* (London University dissertation, 1931). For Jacob, see G. A. Kiraz (ed.), *Jacob of Serugh and His Times* (Piscataway, 2010), and especially the contribution of Brock, "Jacob of Serugh: A Select Bibliographical Guide", *ibid.*, 219-44.

¹² "Qur'ān studies and *tafsīr* studies have gotten all mixed up"; G. S. Reynolds, "Introduction: Qur'ānic Studies and its Controversies", in *QHC*, 17.

scholarship can gain from a critical reading of the classical tradition and downplay its philological aspects. The *mufassirūn* were most always careful readers of the Quran with an impressive command of the text and of the Arabic language. It would probably be fair to assume that their knowledge of Arabic and the Quran was greater than that of most if not all Western scholars. This does not mean that they are always right, far from it. It does suggest, however, that much can be learned from reading them. In their attention to detail, they highlight problems in the text that may escape other readers. The solutions they offer for these difficulties are often based on assumptions that modern scholarship does not share and thus finds unsatisfying, but as a tool for revealing tensions and knots in the text they are most useful. They also alert the reader to variant readings and suggest alternative understandings of the syntax, both of which at times affect the meaning. The Quran is in no way an easy or clear book, its recurring claims to being *mubīn* notwithstanding. Although one encounters many Western studies that in analyzing the Quran cite the text in translation with no indication of uncertainty, this is frequently misleading. Many matters of detail remain open. Thus in spite of the major contributions Western scholarship has made to the study of the Quran, it has not come close to discussing the details of the text in any manner comparable to the Muslim exegetical tradition. The *tafāsīr* have therefore not been rendered redundant, and in this dissertation they are read critically and are treated as secondary literature on the Quran.

Bearing in mind the vast literature generated by the study of the Quran and the fact that the commentaries are used here as tools for understanding the text, my coverage of them is necessarily neither comprehensive nor systematic.¹³ I draw upon a relatively

¹³ A more comprehensive use of the commentaries is found in a recent study devoted to the history of the exegesis of three Quranic verses; K. A. Bauer, *Room for Interpretation: Qur'ānic Exegesis and Gender* (Princeton University dissertation, 2008). Bauer examines sixty-seven works by fifty-nine authors, but her focus is on the commentaries, not the Quran. Likewise in J. D. McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge, 1991), ten verses are examined systematically through the lenses of ten exegetes. For a recent bibliographically rich survey of the major commentaries on

small number of *tafāsīr* and do not attempt to convey all they have to say about the verses I examine. Rather, these works were consulted in order to get an idea of the major issues discussed in the exegetical tradition. I primarily used the commentaries of al-Ṭabarī (d. 923),¹⁴ al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144),¹⁵ Ibn ‘Aṭīyya (d. 1147),¹⁶ al-Rāzī (d. 1210),¹⁷ and al-Qurṭubī (d. 1272).¹⁸ I also made some use of the Shi‘i commentator al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1153),¹⁹ and have examined a modern collection of variant readings.²⁰

the Quran, see C. Gilliot and IREMAM, “Kontinuität und Wandel in der ‘klassischen’ islamischen Koranauslegung (II./VII.–XII./XIX. Jh.)”, *Der Islam* 85 (2009): 1-155.

¹⁴ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-qur‘ān*, ed., ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo, 2001). This commentary is especially important on account of the great number of earlier exegetical traditions it preserves. For al-Ṭabarī and his commentary, see McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 38-45; and especially, F. Rosenthal, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood* (Albany, 1989), 5-134, and C. Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue, et théologie en Islam: L’exégèse coranique de Tabari* (Paris, 1990).

¹⁵ Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl wa-‘uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta’wīl*, ed., ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī (Beirut, 2001). This commentary is famous for its Mu‘tazili outlook and is considered a masterpiece of philological, syntactical and rhetorical analysis; see McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 49-54; Gilliot, “Kontinuität”, 78-80; and A. J. Lane, *A Traditional Mu‘tazilite Qur’ān Commentary: The Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144)* (Leiden, 2006).

¹⁶ ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq b. Ghālib b. ‘Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-kitāb al-‘azīz*, ed., ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Abd al-Shāfi Muḥammad (Beirut, 2001). See, Gilliot, “Kontinuität”, 58-59.

¹⁷ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Cairo, 1934-62). An extremely rich work, this commentary has famously been accused of containing “everything but *tafsīr*”, but this is truly unfair. Its style is extremely clear. See McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 63-71; Gilliot, “Kontinuität”, 94-96.

¹⁸ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-ahkām al-qur‘ān*, ed., ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Beirut, 2006). For this commentary, see Gilliot, “Kontinuität”, 100-101.

¹⁹ Al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma‘ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-qur‘ān* (Beirut, 1961). See B. G. Fudge, *The Major Qur’ān Commentary of al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154)*, (Harvard dissertation, 2003); Gilliot, “Kontinuität”, 80.

²⁰ ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Khaṭīb, *Mu‘jam al-qirā’āt* (Damascus, 2002).

3. Syriac Christianity and the Quran: a survey of the literature

3.1. Introduction

In several verses the Quran rejects the allegation that Muhammad's supposedly divine information was derived from mortals.¹ The men in question are referred to in a characteristically vague manner, but the Muslim exegetes identify them variously as Jews and Christians.² Medieval Jewish and Christian polemicists for their part claimed responsibility for Quranic teachings.³

Modern scholarship too has been preoccupied with the question of Jewish and Christian influence on the Quran, though it is primarily, even if not always, motivated by philological-historical considerations rather than apologetics. The part played by Christian and Jewish traditions and doctrines in the formation of the Quran was a major interest in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with scholars tending to emphasize the contribution of one religion or the other.⁴ The field reached its zenith in the years before the Second World War.⁵ Later, as the model of influence and sources became increasingly offensive to prevailing sensibilities, the foci of interest shifted

¹ Q 6:105; Q 16:103 (“We know well that they say: ‘Only a man teaches him’. The speech of him at whom they [falsely] hint is outlandish, and this is clear Arabic speech”); Q 25:4-6 (“Those who disbelieve say: ‘This is naught but a lie that he has invented, and other folk have helped him with it’, so that they have produced a slander and a lie. And they say: ‘Fables of the men of old which he has had written down so that they are dictated to him morning and evening’. Say: ‘He who knows the secret of the heavens and the earth has revealed it. Indeed He is Forgiving, Merciful’”); and Q 44:14 (“[He is] tutored, crazy”).

² See C. Gilliot, “Les ‘informateurs’ juifs et chrétiens de Muḥammad: reprise d’un problème traité par Aloys Sprenger et Theodor Nöldeke”, *JSAI* 22 (1998): 84-126; *id.*, “Informants”, *EQ* 2:512-18; *id.*, “Le Coran, fruit d’un travail collectif?”, in D. De Smet *et al.* (eds.), *Al-Kitāb: la sacralité du texte dans le monde de l’Islam* (Brussels, 2004), 185-231; *id.*, “Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qur’ān: Is the Qur’ān Partly the Fruit of a Progressive and Collective Work?” in *QHC*, 89-90; and *id.*, “On the origin of the informants of the Prophet”, in K.-H. Ohlig and G.-R. Puin (eds.), *The Hidden origins of Islam: New Research into its Early History* (Amherst, 2008), 153-87.

³ For a recent overview, see B. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam* (Leiden, 2009), 151-201.

⁴ For a survey, see T. Kronholm, “Dependence and Prophetic Originality in the Koran”, *Orientalia Suecana* 31-32 (1982-83): 47-70.

⁵ For an idea of the state of the field in the thirties, see the detailed survey of literature in Heller, “La légende biblique dans l’islam”, 1-18.

elsewhere.⁶ Recently, however, the identification of the textual traditions invoked and reworked by the Quran has reemerged as a major scholarly agenda. To survey this entire body of literature fully is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead it will briefly note those studies which argue for a Christian and specifically Syriac background for the Quran. At the same time a few contributions will be discussed in some detail by way of highlighting methodological pitfalls which threaten comparative studies such as the one this dissertation engages in.

Leading the scholars who focused on Jewish influence was Abraham Geiger (1810-74) in his extremely learned, well-organized, and lucid study from 1833.⁷ Followers of Geiger who wrote similarly-minded monographs include Hartwig Hirschfeld,⁸ William St. Clair Tisdall,⁹ Israel Schapiro,¹⁰ David Sidersky,¹¹ Charles Cutler Torrey,¹² Abraham Katsh,¹³ and most recently Bat-Sheva Garsiel.¹⁴

⁶ An early reaction to studies dedicated to the sources of the Quran is found in J. Fück, “Die Originalität des arabischen Propheten”, *ZDMG* 90 (1936): 509-25. More recent are W. A. Saleh, “‘What if You Refuse, when Ordered to Fight?’ King Saul (Ṭālūt) in the Qur’ān and Post-Quranic Literature”, in C. S. Ehrlich (ed.), *Saul in Story and Tradition* (Tübingen, 2006) 261-83, and M. E. Pregill, “The Hebrew Bible and the Quran: The Problem of the Jewish ‘Influence’ on Islam”, *Religion Compass* 1 (2007): 643-59. One must also consider the effect that the Nazi regime had on leading German Jewish scholars of the Quran; see N. Sinai and A. Neuwirth, “Introduction”, *QC*, 5.

⁷ A. Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (Bonn, 1833); ET in *id.*, *Judaism and Islam* (Madras, 1898). For recent studies of Geiger and his book, see R. Firestone, “The Qur’ān and the Bible: Some Modern Studies of their Relationship”, in *BaQ*, 7-11; S. Heschel, “Abraham Geiger and the Emergence of Jewish Philoislamism”, in D. Hartwig *et al.* (eds.), “*Im vollen Licht der Geschichte*”: *Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung* (Würzburg, 2008), 65-86; and A. W. Hughes, “Contextualizing Contexts – Orientalism and Geiger’s *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* Reconsidered”, *ibid.*, 87-98.

⁸ H. Hirschfeld, *Jüdische Elemente im Korân: Ein Beitrag zur Korânforschung* (Berlin, 1878).

⁹ W. St. Clair Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qur’ān* (London, 1905). In his fourth chapter, “Influence of Sâbian and Jewish Ideas and Practices”, Tisdall closely follows Geiger’s arguments. He does, however, devote other chapters to Christian and Zoroastrian elements in the Quran.

¹⁰ I. Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente im erzählenden Teil des Korans* (Leipzig, 1907). This study is devoted to the Joseph story in Q 12. Although Schapiro cites Syriac texts in his study, they are adduced mainly as parallels to Muslim exegetical traditions. Geiger’s model is followed throughout in that it is always assumed that the source of the Quranic elements is Jewish.

¹¹ D. Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran et dans les vies des prophètes* (Paris, 1933). Much of Sidersky’s attention is given to post-Quranic Islamic traditions. Arthur Jeffery published an insightful review of the book in *The Muslim World* 23 (1933): 412-15.

¹² C. C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York, 1933). Torrey takes the tendency to focus on Jewish influence to an extreme. According to him, “there is no clear evidence that Mohammed ever received anything directly from a Christian source”; *ibid.*, 50. Even narratives which are evidently of Christian origin, such as those concerning the sleepers of the cave and Alexander, are argued to have come

Other scholars highlighted Christian elements in the Quran. Noteworthy are the works of Wilhelm Rudolph,¹⁵ Tor Andrae,¹⁶ Richard Bell,¹⁷ Alphonse Mingana,¹⁸ Karl Ahrens,¹⁹ Joseph Henninger,²⁰ Erwin Gräf,²¹ Günter Lüling,²² and Christoph Luxenberg.²³

Several scholars have studied the links between the Quran and Syriac Christianity. Much attention has been devoted to the identification of Aramaic/Syriac loanwords.²⁴ Josef Horowitz showed that most proper names of Biblical figures in the Quran follow the

to Muhammad “through the medium of a Jewish document”; *ibid.*, 107. See the critical remarks in Heller, “La légende biblique dans l’islam”, 6-8.

¹³ A. I. Katsh, *Judaism in Islām, Biblical and Talmudic Backgrounds of the Koran and its Commentaries: Suras II and III* (New York, 1954).

¹⁴ B. Garsiel, *Bible, Midrash and Quran: An Intertextual Study of Common Narrative Materials* (Tel-Aviv, 2006) (in Hebrew).

¹⁵ W. Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum* (Stuttgart, 1922).

¹⁶ T. Andrae, “Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum”, *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift* (1923): 149-206; (1924): 213-92; (1925): 45-112 (French translation of all three in *id.*, *Les origines de l’islam et le christianisme* (Paris, 1955); *id.*, *Mohammed, sein Leben und sein Glaube* (Göttingen, 1932), ET in *id.*, *Mohammed: The Man and his Faith* (New York, 1936). Especially relevant is the chapter on “Mohammed’s Religious Message” (pp. 53-93 in the ET).

¹⁷ R. Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* (London, 1926). On Bell’s contributions to the study of the Quran, see A. Rippin, “Reading the Qur’ān with Richard Bell”, *JAOS* 112 (1992): 639-47, and Firestone, “The Qur’ān and the Bible”, 11-16.

¹⁸ A. Mingana, “Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kur’ān”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 11 (1927): 77-98. A recent review of Mingana’s ideas is found in G. S. Reynolds, “A Reflection on Two Qur’ānic Words (*Iblīs* and *Jūdī*), with Attention to the Theories of A. Mingana”, *JAOS* 124 (2004): 675-89

¹⁹ K. Ahrens, “Christliches im Qoran: Eine Nachlese”, *ZDMG* 84 (1930): 15-68 and 148-90; *id.*, *Muhammad als Religionsstifter* (Leipzig, 1935). The latter work was reviewed rather critically by Joshua Finkel in *The Review of Religion* 1 (1936-37), 62-73. Many of Finkel’s comments illustrate the point that the works dealing with Jewish influence on the Quran are not comprehensive, and that for this reason the student of the Christian origins of Islam should not hastily conclude that specific themes are not Jewish.

²⁰ J. Henninger, *Spuren christlicher Glaubenswahrheiten im Koran* (Schönebeck, 1951); *id.*, “L’influence du christianisme oriental sur l’islam naissant”, in *L’Oriente Cristiano nella Storia della Civiltà* (Rome, 1964), 379-410. The latter item includes extensive references to early scholarship concerning Jewish and Christian influence on the Quran.

²¹ E. Gräf, “Zu den christlichen Einflüssen im Koran”, in *Al-Bahit: Festschrift Joseph Henninger* (St. Augustin bei Bonn, 1976), 111-44. A concise outline of this article appeared under the same title in *ZDMG* 111 (1962): 396-98, and was reprinted in R. Paret (ed.), *Der Koran* (Darmstadt, 1975), 188-91.

²² The most recent version of Lüling’s theories is found in G. Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation: The Rediscovery and Reliable Reconstruction of a Comprehensive Pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal Hidden in the Koran under Earliest Islamic Reinterpretations* (Delhi, 2003). For a review of this idiosyncratic work, see G. Böwering, “Recent Research on the Construction of the Qur’ān”, in *QC*, 74-77. As Syriac does not play a major role in his work and his theories are highly fanciful, I shall not analyze Lüling’s ideas here.

²³ C. Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache* (Berlin, 2004); revised ET in C. Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (Berlin, 2007).

²⁴ See especially Mingana, “Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kur’ān”, and *FV passim*. According to Mingana’s estimate, seventy percent of the “foreign influences on the style and terminology” of the Quran are of Syriac origin. This is somewhat problematic, since under the rubric of Syriac, Mingana includes “Aramaic and Palestinian Syriac” as well; Mingana, “Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kur’ān”, 80.

Syriac form.²⁵ Alphonse Mingana argued for Syriac influence on the style of the Quran.²⁶ More recently Christoph Luxenberg has put forward the provocative theory that the Quran was written in an “Aramaic-Arabic hybrid language”.

Moving beyond linguistic issues, much effort has been invested in examining the Quran’s position regarding Christian dogma in light of known Christian sects and beliefs, while the polemical character of the Quran is often ignored.²⁷ Tor Andrae explored the Syriac background of Quranic eschatology and piety. Other studies examined the Quran in light of Christian liturgy.²⁸ Several scholars attempted to demonstrate that the Quran was acquainted with the *Diatessaron*.²⁹ A few studies have looked at the polemics against the Jews in both the Syriac tradition and the Quran.³⁰ More recently, Emran El-Badawi

²⁵ J. Horowitz, “Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran”, *HUCA* 2 (1925); *id.*, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin, 1926).

²⁶ Mingana, “Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kur’ān”.

²⁷ For this, see S. H. Griffith, “Christians and Christianity”, *EQ*, 1:313-14, and *id.*, “Syriacisms in the ‘Arabic Qur’ān’: Who Were ‘Those Who Said ‘Allāh is Third of Three’ according to *al-Mā’ida* 73?” in M. M. Bar-Asher *et al.* (eds.) *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur’ān; Presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai* (Jerusalem, 2007), 83*-110*.

²⁸ *GdQ*, 1:112, note 1; A. Baumstark, “Jüdischer und christlicher Gebetstypus im Koran”, *Der Islam* 16 (1927): 229-48; and more recently with more attention to the Syriac, W. Diem, “Arabic *allaḏī* as a Conjunction: An Old Problem and a New Approach”, in E. Ditters and H. Motzki (eds.), *Approaches to Arabic Linguistics: Presented to Kees Versteegh on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday* (Leiden, 2007), 104-109. See, however, the cautionary remark concerning Baumstark’s study in A. Neuwirth, “Qur’anic Readings of the Psalms”, in *QC*, 737 (“His attempt to distinguish between these reminiscences as to their Jewish or Christian origin is however highly problematic in view of the no longer definable borderlines between different religious traditions that were probably characteristic of such culturally marginal areas as the peninsula”). A broader argument is made in Gräf, “Zu den christlichen Einflüssen im Koran”. Whereas Baumstark had examined specific Quranic liturgical formulae (*subḥān* + pronoun/noun in genitive and *al-ḥamdu lillāhi*) and suggested a Christian origin, Gräf argued that generally speaking the Quran is a liturgical text which follows earlier Syriac liturgies.

²⁹ J. Bowman, “The Debt of Islam to Monophysite Syrian Christianity”, *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 19 (1964-65): 177-201; *id.*, “Holy Scriptures, Lectionaries and Qur’ān”, in A. R. Davis and A. D. Stefanowska (eds.), *Austrina* (Oriental Society of Australia, 1982), 533-39; H. Quecke, “Lk 1,34 in den alten Übersetzungen und im Protoevangelium des Jakobus”, *Biblica* 44 (1963): 499-520 (for the Quran see 514-15); *id.*, “Lk 1,34 im Diatessaron”, *Biblica* 45 (1964): 85-88; *id.*, “Zur Auslegungsgeschichte von Lk 1,34”, *Biblica* 47 (1966): 113-14; K. Luke, “The Koranic Recension of Luke 1:34”, *Indian Theological Studies* 22 (1985): 380-99; J. M. F. Van Reeth, “L’Évangile du Prophète”, in D. De Smet *et al.* (eds.), *Al-Kitāb: La sacralité du texte dans le monde de l’Islam* (Bruxelles, 2004), 155-174 (with no mention of Bowman).

³⁰ Andrae, “Der Ursprung”, 104-105; G. S. Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext* (London, 2010), 251; *id.*, “On the Qur’anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (*tahrīf*) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic” *JAOS* 130 (2010): 189-202.

has examined religious terminology shared by the Syriac Gospel of Matthew and the Quran.³¹

Turning to retellings of evidently Christian narratives, in recent years there has been a renewed interest in the study of the Quran in light of the Syriac literary tradition. Thus the following narratives or episodes have been studied: the “Companions of the Cave” story (Q 18:9-26),³² the Dhū l-Qarnayn narrative (Q 18:83-102),³³ and the stories of Mary and Jesus.³⁴ To this group one may add the episode of Moses and the fish (Q 18:60-64), which has been demonstrated to derive from a Syriac version of a legend concerning Alexander.³⁵

³¹ E. El-Badawi, “Divine Kingdom in Syriac Matthew and the Qur’ān”, *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 61 (2009): 1-42. In some instances El-Badawi overstates his case. Thus he finds in Q 21:105 (“the earth shall be inherited by my good servants [*al-arḍa yarithuhā ‘ibādī l-ṣāliḥūna*]”) a trace of Matthew 5:5 (“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit [*nertun*] the earth”), even though the beginning of Q 21:105 itself tells us explicitly that it is quoting from the Psalms: “For We have written in the Psalms (*al-zabūr*), after the Remembrance (*al-dhikr*) that ...” El-Badawi stresses the use of *y-r-th* and *y-r-t* in the Quran and the Syriac version of Matthew respectively, but the same root (*y-r-sh*) is used in Psalms 37:29 (“The righteous shall inherit the land”); El-Badawi, “Divine Kingdom”, 13-14. For the identification of the quotation from Psalms see already *GdQ*, 1:9. Another example of El-Badawi’s over-emphasis on the Syriac version of Matthew concerns his discussion of the recurring Quranic statement, “all that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies (*yusabbiḥu*) God”. El-Badawi compares this with verses in Matthew and Luke in which Jesus’ followers glorify God (*ṣabbah[w] lalāhā*) and concludes that the Quranic phrase “may indeed be related to Matthew by virtue of its vocabulary and context of divine kingdom, although it is impossible to be certain in this instance. Given the evidence of the inscriptions, it may not be exclusively Christian, or even Judeo-Christian for that matter”; El-Badawi, “Divine Kingdom”, 17-18. Again El-Badawi ignores Hebrew Bible verses such as Psalms 69:34 (“Let heaven and earth praise him”) and 148:1 (“Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights!”). In the Jewish Aramaic targum and the Peshitta the words for praise in these verses are rendered with the root *ṣ-b-ḥ*.

³² Most recent is S. Griffith, “Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur’ān: The ‘Companions of the Cave’ in *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian Tradition”, in *QHC*, 109-37.

³³ K. van Bladel, “The *Alexander Legend* in the Qur’ān 18:83-102”, in *QHC*, 175-203. Van Bladel revives and significantly develops the observations in Th. Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans* (Vienna, 1890), 27-33.

³⁴ For some recent studies concerning the Mary and Jesus materials, see C. B. Horn, “Intersections: The Reception History of the *Protoevangelium of James* in Sources from the Christian East and in the Qur’ān”, *Apocrypha* 17 (2006): 113-50; *ead.*, “Mary between Bible and Qur’an: Soundings into the Transmission and Reception History of the *Protoevangelium of James* on the Basis of Selected Literary Sources in Coptic and Copto-Arabic and of Art-Historical Evidence Pertaining to Egypt”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18 (2007): 509-38; *ead.*, “Syriac and Arabic Perspectives on Structural and Motif Parallels regarding Jesus’ Childhood in Christian Apocrypha and Early Islamic Literature: The ‘Book of Mary’, the *Arabic Apocryphal Gospel of John*, and the Qur’ān”, *Apocrypha* 19 (2008): 267-91; and Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 130-47.

³⁵ Already in the late nineteenth century scholars had noted that this episode is dependent on a similar scene found in the *Alexander Romance* (in Greek, but not in the Syriac translation) and its derivatives. A fish scene features in some Greek recensions of the *Alexander Romance*, in the Babylonian Talmud (*Tamid* 32b), and in a homily attributed to Jacob of Serugh but now agreed to be later (henceforth the *Alexander Homily*). For a critical edition of all three recensions of the *Alexander Homily*, see G. J. Reinink, *Das*

Less studied are the retellings of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament narratives in this context.³⁶ In his 1833 study, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*, Abraham Geiger suggested a Jewish background for many aspects of the Quran. Fundamental to his argument were the Quranic recastings of narratives from the Hebrew Bible. These include many departures from the Biblical text for which Geiger was often able to supply rabbinic precedents. This set the tone for later scholarship. The Quranic retellings are often assumed to reflect Jewish traditions, and thus Western scholarship tends to ignore Christian sources. Syriac texts are cited now and then but are not covered systematically in a manner comparable to the way the Jewish texts are treated.³⁷ Though several scholars have suggested that even retellings of Hebrew Bible narratives may derive from a Christian source, textual parallels from Christian texts are not usually

syrische Alexanderlied: die drei Rezensionen, CSCO 454-55, SS 195-96 (Louvain, 1983). The fish episode is found on pp. 42-51. For the *Alexander Homily* as the source of the Quranic episode, see I. Friedländer, *Die Chadhirlegende und die Alexanderroman* (Leipzig, 1913), 61-67 and 330. It shares several features with the Quran; the hero seeks a source of water; he emphasizes that he will not be diverted from his goal; the body of water is identified by the means of a fish belonging to the hero which swims away after being introduced into the water by a servant; the hero tries to trace his way back to the water source. Recently Brannon Wheeler has argued unconvincingly against the identity of the fish episode in the *Alexander Homily* and the Quran. In doing so he reduces the similarities between the texts to two: a fish which escapes before being eaten and the mention of some unusual water. Wheeler stresses the fact that the Quran never states that the fish was dead (as if Alexander was traveling with an aquarium!) or that it came back to life as a result of contact with the miraculous water; B. M. Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis* (London, 2002), 11-19 (his other arguments consist of citing alternative traditional interpretations of the Quranic episode although these are themselves quite fanciful). Wheeler's reluctance to consider the Quran's sources – part of a much larger trend in Quranic studies – as well as his misapprehensions concerning the Syriac texts have been criticized in K. van Bladel, "The Syriac Sources of the Early Arabic Narratives of Alexander", in H. P. Ray and D. T. Potts (eds.), *Memory as History: The Legacy of Alexander in Asia* (New Delhi, 2007), 59-60 and 69, note 41. For surveys of the oriental Alexander sources, see S. Gero, "The Legend of Alexander the Great in the Christian Orient", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 75 (1993): 3-9, and van Bladel, "The Syriac Sources". Recent scholarship believes the *Alexander Homily* to have been written between 630 and 640; Gero, "Legend", 7, and van Bladel, "The Syriac Sources", 57. This makes it difficult to treat it as the direct source of the fish episode in the Quran, but does not negate the Quran's dependence on an earlier Syriac source similar to the *Alexander Homily*.

³⁶ Although the two terms refer to the same set of books, their theological implications are rather different. I tend to use the term Old Testament only when discussing the perspective of Christian authors.

³⁷ Historically this is the result of several factors, such as the availability of texts as well as the identity of the scholars, who were often well versed in rabbinic sources but less so in the Christian tradition. See also the comment in N. A. Stillman, "The Story of Cain and Abel in the Qur'an and the Muslim Commentators: Some Observations", *JSS* 19 (1974): 231-32 ("One of the primary reasons why so much of the non-Christological material in the Qur'an and Muslim commentators has been traced back to Jewish rather than Christian sources is the fact that oriental Christian literature is still such an overwhelmingly vast, uncharted sea").

pursued.³⁸ Even scholars who argue for a strong Christian impact on the Quran are often content with a general observation to the effect that Christians too transmitted narratives from the Old Testament, and seek evidence in support of their views elsewhere.

There are, however, some exceptions. In 1824 Samuel Lee highlighted parallels between the Quranic retellings of Biblical stories and the writings of Ephrem as he knew them, though as we shall soon see Lee's failure to use rabbinic sources weakened many of his arguments.³⁹

After Lee a few authors were open to the idea of Christian transmission, though they did not devote substantial effort to establishing this point.⁴⁰ The most balanced work is the book of Heinrich Speyer.⁴¹ In his introduction he criticizes Geiger, pointing out that many legends concerning Biblical narratives are shared by Jewish and Christian sources and that Christian transmission of these legends to the Quran cannot thus be ruled out.⁴²

The body of Speyer's work consists of an examination of the stories one after another,

³⁸ From early on scholars were aware that Syriac literature might supply the background for the Quranic retellings of Biblical narratives, though they did not pursue this course of study. See, for example, Rudolph Leszynsky's comment in defense of Geiger's theory: "Was nun die Erzählungen Mohammeds über Propheten betrifft, so haben Geiger, Hirschfeld und Grünbaum die zu gründe liegenden Aggadas nachgewiesen. Bevor man behaupten kann, daß auch dies ein Gut der arabischen Christen gewesen sei, wäre es erforderlich, im einzelnen die Parallelen aus der christlichen syrischen Literatur aufzusuchen. Solange das nicht geschehen ist, muß man annehmen, daß die Juden Mohammed den Stoff zu seinen Predigten boten"; R. Leszynsky, *Die Juden in Arabien zur Zeit Mohammeds* (Berlin, 1910), 39. For the need to examine Syriac sources, see the remark of Arthur Jeffery in his review of Sidersky's book: "The work would also have benefited by reference to the Christian ecclesiastical writers, especially the Syriac authors. Large numbers of Jewish legends became domiciled also in the Syriac speaking Church, and the large number of Syriac and Ethiopic loanwords in the Qur'ān at least suggests that the actual source of much of Muhammad's material was a Christian and not a Jewish source. This is true even of Biblical legends, for such forms of proper names as Yūnus (=Syr. *Yūnas* not the Heb. *Yōnah*), Sulaimān (=Syr. *Shelēmūn* not Heb. *Shlōmō*), Fir'aun (=Syr. *Fer'ūn* not Heb. *Par'ō*) and many others, point to Muhammad's source being a Christian one even when the story concerns an Old Testament character"; *The Muslim World* 23 (1933): 414.

³⁹ S. Lee, *Controversial Tracts on Christianity and Mohammedanism* (Cambridge, 1824), 124-38.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 102-103, and D. Künstlinger, "Christliche Herkunft der kurānischen Lōt-Legende", *Rocznik Orjentalistyczny* 7 (1929/30): 281-95. Künstlinger argues that the positive depiction of Lot in the Quran reflects the Christian attitude towards him. He does not, however, examine Syriac sources; see his comment *ibid.*, 289.

⁴¹ H. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Gräfenhainichen, 1931).

⁴² His own conclusion is that: "Es stellte sich oft heraus, dass so manche Sage, die man nur bei Juden oder nur bei Christen zu Hause wähnte, bei beiden zu finden ist. Kommt nun etwa hinzu, dass eine Erzählung, an deren jüdische Herkunft man glaubte, an eine Persönlichkeit geknüpft ist, die einen Namen christlicher Bildung trägt, so liegt kein Grund vor, eine Übermittlung durch Christen nicht anzunehmen"; Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, XI.

detail by detail, in light of Second Temple sources, rabbinic texts, and Christian writings. At times, he concludes that a specific element is of Jewish or Christian origin; in other instances his data suggest to him that the Quran could have received the information from either source. Among the Christian authors Speyer examined, the two which display by far the most parallels to the Quran are the Syriac writers Aphrahat and Ephrem.⁴³ Though Speyer's work is an important resource which has yet to be replaced, it is by no means problem-free. The coverage of sources, especially on the Christian side, is neither comprehensive nor systematic. This is due only in part to the fact that many Syriac works were unedited when Speyer wrote his dissertation, since he seems to have made no use of Mingana's and Bedjan's editions of Narsai and Jacob of Serugh, both of which presumably would have been available to him. Moreover, like many scholars of his era, Speyer mostly ignores the Quranic adaptation of its materials, assuming that Muhammad or the Quran "were eager to give back the stories faithfully, had they only understood them properly".⁴⁴ Another weakness of Speyer's book, again in no way unique, is that it tends to treat Quranic verses atomistically with little regard for their literary context.

Though Speyer's work eventually fell out of fashion, most recently there has been renewed interest in situating the Quran in its wider late antique context. Notable are the latest book by Angelika Neuwirth which contains a forceful argument for this approach,⁴⁵ and Gabriel Reynolds' recent work on the Biblical subtext of the Quran in which attention is paid to Syriac sources.⁴⁶ This dissertation joins these new efforts.

⁴³ See the index of quotations from Christian literature *ibid.*, 504.

⁴⁴ Saleh, "What if You Refuse, when Ordered to Fight?", 266.

⁴⁵ A. Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike: Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin, 2010). Regrettably, I have not had time to take account of its arguments in detail.

⁴⁶ G. S. Reynolds, "Redeeming the Adam of the Qur'ān", in D. Kreikenbom *et al.* (eds.), *Arabische Christen – Christen in Arabien* (Frankfurt am Main, 2007), 71-83; and especially *id.*, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*.

3.2. Some textual arguments for a Syriac milieu and their flaws

What follows is a selective survey of some attempts to argue for a specifically Syriac milieu for the Quran, with one major goal in mind: to identify some recurring methodological flaws. In surveying these studies I wish to stress the importance of carefully studying parallel texts. I begin by examining at some length the mostly overlooked work of Samuel Lee, which pre-dated Geiger's influential book and offered a competing model, though one largely ignored. My justification for this rather long discussion is twofold. First, I wish to draw attention to Lee's work, which has not been given the credit it deserves. Second, the flaws found in Lee's argumentation are characteristic of much of subsequent scholarship.

3.2.1. Beginnings: Samuel Lee between polemics and scholarship

Samuel Lee (1783-1852) was a remarkably gifted linguist. As a carpenter's apprentice he taught himself Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac in his spare time. When he was twenty five a fire destroyed his tool box (worth 25 pounds) and with it all his "views and hopes were consumed". As a result he sought a position as a country schoolmaster, which eventually led to his studies at Cambridge. Throughout he continued to acquire more languages and eventually he became a professor of Arabic and later of Hebrew at the University of Cambridge. He produced grammars, editions and translations covering Syriac, Persian, Coptic, Malay and even Maori, and his writings attest to his knowledge of other languages too.⁴⁷

Lee was not only a talented academic. He was also a devout Anglican whose "great advancement and rising reputation had not kindled the flame of ambition in his

⁴⁷ For Lee's inspiring life as well as a description of his major works, see the biography by his daughter: A. M. Lee, *A Scholar of a Past Generation* (London, 1896). His works are listed on pp. 249-51.

mind, nor corrupted it from ‘the simplicity that is in Christ’”.⁴⁸ In fact the Church Missionary Society supported his studies at Cambridge and later hired him as a professor of Hebrew, Arabic, Sanskrit and Bengali at its own training college in Islington. And indeed Lee employed his skills in the service of the British and Foreign Bible Society, working on translations of the Bible into diverse languages.⁴⁹

In 1824 Lee published a work entitled *Controversial Tracts on Christianity and Mohammedanism*. It was conceived with missionaries in mind and included translations of polemical writings by Rev. Henry Martyn in Persian (1781-1812), and by “some of the most eminent writers of Persia”.⁵⁰ In a tract dedicated to the denial of Muhammad’s prophecy, Martyn summons the Quran itself as witness. After noting its general lack of “real elegance”, Martyn adds (in Lee’s translation): “It contains moreover many low and vulgar expressions, as well as many stories which are all together unnecessary, because they are to be found in the books of the Jews and the Christians”.⁵¹ It is to this last point that Lee chooses to devote an appendix (B) in which he aims to demonstrate that Muhammad had acquired his knowledge of Christian traditions in Syria.⁵² To this end he examines several thematic (and linguistic) parallels between the Quran and the works of Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373) as he knew them.

These correspondences lead him to infer that “what has been had from the Christians came from Syria... from the common accounts in circulation among the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁹ For Lee’s contribution to the mission, see L. L. Vander Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims: The Record: Anglican and Reformed Approaches in India and the Near East, 1800-1938* (South Pasadena, 1977), 39-41.

⁵⁰ For Martyn, an Anglican missionary who translated the New Testament into Hindustani, Persian and Arabic, see the entry in F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford, 2005), 1052, and Vander Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 30-36.

⁵¹ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 113.

⁵² Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 124-38. I am indebted to Krisztina Szilágyi for drawing my attention to this appendix. Its relevance for the academic study of the Quran is noted, in a slightly overstated fashion, in Vander Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims*, 40: “Fifth, Lee noted the many linguistic similarities between the Quran and the Syriac versions of the Bible and called for Muslims and Christians to research as to Islam’s debt to Syrian and Nestorian Christianity. In the year of 1824, Lee sets the stage for a scholarly approach to the origins and sources of the Quran and Islam”.

Syrians, or from the public reading of the Scriptures and the writings of Ephrem in the Churches of the day”. In his conclusion he is even bolder: “[...] how are we to account for those statements peculiar to none but Mohammed and Ephrem the Syrian? For my part I see no reason why the one might not have copied from the other, especially as Mohammed had every facility for so doing”.⁵³

That Lee should make such an argument (for the first time?) is only natural when his Syriac and Arabic skills and his missionary zeal are kept in mind.⁵⁴ This study has, to the best of my knowledge, passed unnoticed in subsequent scholarship. This is largely due to its being hidden as an untitled appendix to a book containing polemical tracts, but perhaps also to the Syriac channel being eclipsed by the Jewish one so powerfully argued for in Geiger’s influential book only ten years later. In what follows I will survey and evaluate Lee’s arguments in a detailed manner. Unsurprisingly for such an early work, his study suffers from several flaws, but many of these continue to plague subsequent scholarship.

Writing when he did, the texts available to him were quite limited. He essentially drew upon two works. His major source was the six-volume work entitled *Sancti Patris Nostri Ephraem Syri Opera quae exstant Graece, Syriace, Latine* (Rome, 1732-46), which includes the works attributed to Ephrem in Syriac and Greek with Latin translations (henceforth Roman edition).⁵⁵ The Syriac texts are based on poor manuscripts and the attribution of some of them to Ephrem is unfounded. The authorship of the Greek texts is especially dubious, and it is now agreed that the vast majority of these Greek works do not belong to Ephrem at all (rather they are referred to as the corpus of Ephraem

⁵³ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 138.

⁵⁴ His Syriac contributions prior to his short 1824 note on the Syriac sources of the Quran include editions of the New (1816) and Old Testament (1823). As for Arabic, in 1817/8 he edited an Arabic and Coptic Psalter.

⁵⁵ For information on the Syriac texts included in this collection, see Brock, “Brief Guide”, 284-88. The Syriac texts are found in the last three volumes which were edited by P. Mobarak and S. E. Assemani.

Graecus).⁵⁶ Lee, of course, was unaware of these problems, and, as we shall see, this often weakens his arguments. The other work available to Lee was Joseph Assemani's three volume survey of Syriac literature, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*.⁵⁷

Lee's excessive focus on Ephrem is evident in his proposal that the origin of the Quranic idea that the Scriptures have been corrupted is to be found in Ephrem's polemics against heretics who tampered with the Bible.⁵⁸ But the Quran directs this accusation at the Jews and this charge had been made by many other groups.⁵⁹

Another major flaw in Lee's study is that it rarely if ever examined rabbinic sources, which at times render his suggestions needless. Since he was able to read Jewish texts in their original languages, one wonders whether this inattention stems from the unsystematic nature of the appendix or reflects his religious biases.⁶⁰ Thus regarding the statement that God lifted up the mountain (*al-tūr / al-jabal*) over the children of Israel (Q 2:63 and 93, Q 4:154, and Q 7:171), Lee has "no doubt this has arisen from a misunderstanding of the Syriac text" of the Peshitta to Exodus 19:11 and 20. Here verse 11 refers to the fact that on the third day God will descend (*nāḥēt*) on Mount Sinai (*l-turā d-sinay*) in the sight of all the people (ܢܫܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܐ), and in verse 20 it is stated that God did indeed descend (*nḥet*) (ܢܫܐ ܕܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܢ ܗܘܢܐ). Lee suggests that

⁵⁶ For the corpus of Greek works attributed to Ephrem and their relationship to the Syriac texts, see D. Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, "Éphrem Grec", *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique* 4:800-15, and W. Suh, *From the Syriac Ephrem to the Greek Ephrem: A Case Study of the Influence of Ephrem's Isosyllabic Sermons (Memre) on Greek-Speaking Christianity* (Princeton Theological Seminary dissertation, 2000), especially 4-11.

⁵⁷ J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana* (Rome, 1719-28).

⁵⁸ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 132.

⁵⁹ See the references in C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden, 1996), 223, n. 2 and especially W. Adler, "The Jews as Falsifiers: Charges of Tendentious Emendation in Anti Jewish Christian Polemic", in *Translation of Scripture* (Philadelphia, 1990), 1-27. The Christian authors Adler discusses all write in Greek and Latin, with one exception: Jacob of Edessa (640-708) is mentioned as accusing the Jews of tampering with the pre-Abrahamic chronology; *ibid.*, 24-25. For the accusation in Syriac sources and the Quran that the Jews hide the truth, see Reynolds, "On the Qur'anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification".

⁶⁰ Lee's command of Hebrew and Semitics is evident in his erudite *A Lexicon, Hebrew, Chaldee and English* (London, 1840).

Muhammad “might have heard an ignorant priest” pronounce *naḥḥet* (“brought down”) rather than *nāḥēt* (will descend),⁶¹ assumed that the *lamed* attached to *turā* is the marker of the direct object rather than the preposition “to”, and thus understood the verse to mean that God brought the mountain down. By inference the Prophet “would very naturally conclude, that if God caused the mountain to descend, he must first have caused it to ascend”.⁶²

Clever as this may be, it is clearly wrong. Leaving aside its inherent difficulties and unsupported assumptions (including Muhammad’s knowledge of Syriac), in rabbinic sources there is a well known parallel, noted by Geiger, according to which God raised mount Sinai over the Israelites in order to threaten them so that they would accept the Torah.⁶³ The textual anchor of this tradition is plain,⁶⁴ though why some rabbis would wish to transform their forefathers’ willing acceptance of the Torah (underlined in Exodus 19:8)⁶⁵ to a coerced act remains somewhat unclear.⁶⁶ In any case it is not surprising that in its anti-Jewish polemic the Quran should have seized upon this rabbinic tradition, taking it in a way to its natural conclusion by amending *we-šama’nu we-’asinu* (“and we

⁶¹ Lee uses the Western Syriac pronunciation, but the argument remains the same.

⁶² Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 129.

⁶³ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 129 (citing BT *Aboda Zara* 2b). See also Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 303-304 (adding BT *Shabbat* 88a: “*And they stood under the mount*: R. Abdimi b. Hama b. Hasa said: This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, overturned the mountain upon them like an [inverted] cask, and said to them: ‘If ye accept the Torah, ’tis well; if not, there shall be your burial’”). The raised mountain motif is found in other rabbinic sources as well, one of which is even closer to what we find in the Quran. Compare *Song of Songs Rabba* 8:5 (“*Under the apple tree I awakened thee*. Paltion, a man of Rome, said in a discourse: The mountain of Sinai was uprooted and stood in the height of heaven, and Israel was placed under it, as it says, *And ye came near and stood under the mountain*... Said the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘If you accept My law, well and good; but if not, I will press this mountain down upon you and crush you’”) with Q 7:171 (“And when We shook the mountain above them as if it were a canopy, and they supposed it was about to fall on them, [We said:] ‘Take forcefully what We have given you, and remember what is in it; haply you will be godfearing’”); see J. Obermann, “Koran and Agada: The Events at Mount Sinai”, *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 58 (1941): 34-35.

⁶⁴ In Exodus 19:17 and Deuteronomy 4:11 it is said that the Israelites stood “at the foot of the mountain”. But literally what is said is that they stood at/in the bottom of or even under the mountain (בְּתַתִּית הַהָרִי or בְּתַתִּית הַהָרִי). Exodus 19:18, which refers to the mountain moving (“while the whole mountain shook violently”, cf. Q 7:171), may have encouraged the rabbis to follow an extremely literal reading.

⁶⁵ See also Exodus 24:7 and Deuteronomy 5:23.

⁶⁶ See discussion with more sources in E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem, 1987), 1:327-29; J. Heinemann, *Aggadah and its Development* (Jerusalem, 1974), 170-74 (in Hebrew); and G. J. Blidstein, *Studies in Halakhic and Aggadic Thought* (Jerusalem, 2004), 83-86 (in Hebrew).

shall listen and do it”) in Deuteronomy 5:23 and 27 to *sami ’nā wa-’aṣaynā* (“We hear and rebel”) in Q 2:93 (cf. Q 4:46), a pun based on the Hebrew rather than the Syriac.⁶⁷

Another weakness in Lee’s appendix, which is characteristic of many later studies as well, is the lack of a clear distinction between the Quran and later Islamic tradition.⁶⁸ As a result some of his “coincidences between the Koran and the writings of Ephrem” have little to do with the former. Such is the case regarding his comments on the departure of Satan from Heaven.⁶⁹ Lee cites Ephrem’s *Hymns on the Church* 35 in which Death and Satan flee, the former to the deep of Sheol and the latter to the wilderness, when they hear the angels speaking of the coming birth of Jesus who will put an end to them both.⁷⁰ With this Lee compares Q 15:16-18 (“We have set in heaven constellations and decked them out fair to the beholders, and guarded them from every accursed Satan excepting such as listens by stealth -- and he is pursued by a manifest flame”).⁷¹ In itself this offers no parallel, and indeed Lee is quick to cite a note of George Sale (1697-1736), himself citing al-Bayḏāwī, according to which “these evil spirits had the liberty of entering any of the heavens till the birth of Jesus, when they were excluded from three of them...”.⁷² But none of this is Quranic!

⁶⁷ For Q 2:93 and Q 4:46, see Obermann, “Koran and Agada”, 23-48. Whereas in H. Hirschfeld, *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Korân* (Leipzig, 1886), 63, it is assumed that Muhammad had misunderstood the Hebrew in this instance, in Obermann, “Koran and Agada”, 46, we read of a “wishful mishearing” on the part of the Prophet. Obermann also places this in the context of rabbinic traditions which criticize the Israelites’ insincerity in accepting the Torah. See also Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis*, 1-3.

⁶⁸ The same is true of Geiger and of much subsequent scholarship; see J. Horowitz, “Jewish Proper Names”, 145-46.

⁶⁹ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 131-32.

⁷⁰ Lee refers to the Roman edition, 5:328; see now E. Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Ecclesia*, CSCO 198, SS 84 (Louvain, 1960), 89-90.

⁷¹ For a recent study of this theme, which occurs several times in the Quran, see G. Hawting, “Eavesdropping on the Heavenly Assembly and the Protection of the Revelation from Demonic Corruption”, in S. Wild (ed.), *Self-Referentiality in the Qur’ân* (Wiesbaden, 2006), 25-37.

⁷² This tradition, which is attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās, adds that when Muhammad was born the devils were forbidden from the other four heavens. The source of this is most probably speculation on Q 72:8-9 where the jinn of the Prophet’s time are surprised to find the heavens suddenly guarded; see al-Qurṭubī on these verses.

Some of Lee's suggestions are based on a careless reading of the sources. Thus he refers to *Hymns against Heresies* 55 in which Ephrem disparages Bardaisan's views of Paradise, and comments: "Again we have the voluptuous paradise of the Koran ascribed to the heretic Bardasanes, which was of a character too congenial to that of the Arabs of his day to be omitted by the Prophet"⁷³.

This comparison not only contradicts his entire argument for Ephremic influence, since here Muhammad supposedly adopts a position harshly criticized by Ephrem, but also collapses upon scrutiny. What the passage Lee mentions actually refers to does not resemble anything found in the Quran and is completely incompatible with the Quranic worldview. In it Ephrem cites Bardaisan as referring to "The palace whose portals open to the Mother at command" and accuses him of situating Paradise in a shameful place. He then adds:

He also hated the blessed paradise of the Holy One

and believed in another paradise of shame:

"Gods measured it and laid it out, that it is the Father with the Mother.

By their sexual union they founded it,

they planted it with their descendants".⁷⁴

What drew Lee's attention was the sexual character of the Paradise of both Bardaisan and the Quran. But their nature is utterly different. Whereas the Quran promises the believers sexual companions in Paradise in reward for their good deeds,

⁷³ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 131.

⁷⁴ Lee refers to the Roman edition, 5:558; see now E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra Haereses*, CSCO 169, SS 76 (Louvain, 1957), 208-209. The translation is taken from H. J. W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen, 1966), 147. Drijvers (*ibid.*, 143-52) translates portions from this hymn and attempts to reconstruct a coherent Bardaisanian mythology from Ephrem's attack. A complete, though inaccurate, translation of the hymn into English is found in M. Sprengling, "Antonius Rhetor on Versification with an Introduction and Two Appendices", *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 32 (1916): 196-98.

Bardaisan has in mind a mythological union between two divinities (the Father and Mother of Life) which brings about the foundation of Paradise.⁷⁵ The sensual nature of the Quranic afterlife has also puzzled subsequent scholars, who have tried to derive it from Ephrem's own *Hymns on Paradise!* We shall return to this in discussing Tor Andrae.

Another weakness of Lee's approach concerns his extremely low opinion of Muhammad and the Quran. In addition to being offensive (which is neither here nor there) this attitude leads Lee to make ridiculous conjectures with the justification that a confused author such as Muhammad could have committed any sort of error. Particularly unconvincing is Lee's identification of the two angels who lead people astray, Hārūt and Mārūt, in Q 2:102 as Arvaṭ (or as Lee would have it Aruṭ) and Marutha.⁷⁶ The former is an obscure figure mentioned as a student of Ephrem in the *Testament of St. Ephrem* and reproached for blaspheming against the Son, abandoning Christ's wine and drinking the dregs of sin.⁷⁷ Little is known about him beyond his heresy.⁷⁸ Marutha bishop of

⁷⁵ Earlier in the hymn Ephrem attributes to Bardaisan the position that the union of the Father and Mother of Life led to the birth of the Son of Life, i.e. Jesus. Later the Father is identified with the Sun and the Mother with the Moon; Drijvers, *Bardaisan*, 144-45 and 147-48. For the possible Mesopotamian background of this myth, see A. Annus, "Paradise on the Top of the Ziggurat", *The Melammu Database*; available online at:

http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu/database/gen_html/a0001495.php

Annus argues that the phrase translated by Drijvers as "palace" should be rendered as "the top of the building" and understood as equivalent to the top of the ziggurat.

⁷⁶ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 132-34.

⁷⁷ See Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 1:145, and E. Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones IV*, CSCO 334, SS 148 (Louvain, 1973), 58. The manuscripts offer several forms of his name: -ܕܘܪܘܬܐ-ܕܘܪܘܬܐ ܕܘܪܘܬܐ-ܕܘܪܘܬܐ. In the Greek version of this work the name is Αρουαδ; see R. Duval, "Le testament de saint Éphrem", *Journal Asiatique* IX 18 (1901): 266 and 298.

⁷⁸ See T. J. Lamy, "Le testament de saint Éphrem le syrien", in *Compte rendu du IV^e Congrès scientifique des Catholiques: sciences religieuses* (Fribourg, 1898), 206, where variant forms of the name are adduced and mention is made of Sozomen's reference to a disciple of Ephrem named Aranad who was known for his eloquence but was said to have deviated from sound doctrine.

Maipherqat (d. before 420), on the other hand, was known for his learning, piety and miracles.⁷⁹

Both men are unlikely candidates for identification with the Quranic angels, and Lee's attempt to defend his theory only highlights its improbability:⁸⁰

I am inclined to believe that these two persons are the two fallen angels of the Koran; because they had both become famous, the one for his learning and wickedness, the other for his learning, piety and miracles, and had both preceded the times of Mohammed. No one need be surprised at the blunder which must be attached to the Prophet on this supposition. One who could have stated in his revelation, that Miriam the sister of Moses was the same with Mary the mother of Christ, may have coupled a good with a bad man; and from the accounts which he had heard of their actions, have concluded that they were fallen angels who had practiced magic. Allowing this therefore, and finding that their names agree with those given in the Koran, there appears to me but little reason to doubt that this is actually the case.⁸¹

Lee's comments here are typical of his suspicious view towards Muhammad. Not only is he prone to error (through lack of understanding or defective memory) as the conflation of the two Maryams suggests,⁸² he is also portrayed as a deliberate fraud,⁸³ and

⁷⁹ See Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 1:174-95. For more recent studies, see D. Bundy, "Maruta of Maipherqat", in E. Ferguson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (2nd ed., New York, 1997), 2:732-33.

⁸⁰ Though the exact source of this tradition has not yet been identified, it is now commonly held that it reflects a synthesis of post-Biblical traditions concerning the fallen angels of Genesis 6:1-4 and Zoroastrian angelology where one finds Haurvatāt and Amertāt, two of the archangels; see G. Vajda, "Hārūt wa-Mārūt", *EF*, 3:236-37. For a recent discussion, see P. Crone, "The Book of Watchers in the Qur'ān", in H. Ben-Shammai *et al.* (eds.), *Exchange and Transmission across Cultural Boundaries: Philosophy, Mysticism and Science in the Mediterranean* (Jerusalem, forthcoming). Other scholars after Lee posited a Syriac background for Mārūt. Wensinck suggested that *mārutā* ("mastery, lordship") was a translation of Azazel, whereas Horowitz argued that the Syriac word was the inspiration for the recasting of the names of the two angels in Slavonic Enoch, Orioch and Marioch; J. Horowitz, "Jewish Proper Names", 165.

⁸¹ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 133-34.

⁸² See also *ibid.*, 138. On p. 134 Lee attacks Sale for holding too high a view of the Quran: "It certainly would be going to far to accuse Mr. Sale of intentionally exalting the Koran: but there are a few instances, in which he seems to have attempted something like this, even at the expense of good criticism and logic".

a slavish copier of Ephrem's work. In this negative attitude towards the Prophet, Lee by no means stands alone in his times. A more charitable approach, however, was also in the air, and it would be interesting to contrast Lee with Geiger on this point.

Its offensive tone and at times wild theories aside, Lee's appendix does draw attention to some interesting parallels. Most valuable are his comments concerning the Joseph story.⁸⁴ An entire chapter of this dissertation will be devoted to the relationship between Q 12 and a set of Syriac sources. Although most of these texts were unavailable when Lee wrote his appendix, he noted the affinity between Q 12 and a Greek sermon attributed to Ephrem: "No one I am sure can read the sermon of Ephrem 'in Pulcherrimum Joseph' and the twelfth chapter of the Koran, without being struck with a manifest similarity of style and sentiment". Moreover, Lee argues, the two sources share two remarkable departures from the Bible in that Jacob suspects some villainy in the business of the bloodied shirt and Potiphar's wife confesses her crime.⁸⁵ Lee concludes: "These coincidences are, I think, sufficient to show that the one must have been the genuine offspring of the other; and that Syria was the soil from which the Pseudo-Prophet must have obtained his". Lee's astute observations did not, however, have much impact on the field of Quranic studies.

Beyond these two examples from the Joseph story, Lee notes several parallels which, though inconclusive, are nonetheless of value. Such is the Syriac parallel for the two miracles which Moses performs before Pharaoh in the Quran: the transformation of

⁸³ "But had he upon his return from Syria given out his revelation, and talked as wildly as travelers sometimes do, when just arrived from foreign countries, the very secret of all his pretensions would have come out at once"; *ibid.*, 124-25.

⁸⁴ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 127-28.

⁸⁵ For the latter parallel Lee adduces also Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* 35.7-9; Roman edition, 4:93-94, and ed. Tonneau, 99-100.

Moses' staff into a snake and the sudden leprosy which came upon his hand. We read as follows in Q 7:104-108⁸⁶:

(104) Moses said: "Pharaoh, I am a Messenger from the Lord of all beings, (105) worthy to say nothing regarding God except the truth. I have brought a clear sign to you from your Lord; so send forth with me the Children of Israel". (106) Said he: "If you have brought a sign, produce it, if you speak truly" (107) So he cast his staff; and behold, it was a serpent manifest. (108) And he drew forth his hand, and lo, it was white to the beholders.

These wonders are indeed mentioned in Exodus 4:1-9, though there Moses is to perform them before the Children of Israel, not Pharaoh. When the time comes for a miracle before the king we read of Aaron's staff becoming a snake and eventually swallowing the snakes produced from the staffs of the Egyptian magicians. There is no mention of leprosy (Exodus 7:8-12).

This discrepancy between the two scriptures was noted already by Ludovico Marracci (1612-1700). Sale, whose translation of the Quran was heavily indebted to the work of Marracci, responded by noting that "it is true the scripture does not expressly say so [i.e. that the miracles were to be performed before Pharaoh], but it seems no more than a necessary inference from that passage, where God tells Moses that if they will not hearken to the first sign, they will believe the latter sign, and if they will not believe these two signs, then directs him to turn the water into blood".⁸⁷ As stated, Sale's point is not entirely clear. Presumably, he assumes that the turning of the water into blood must have been done before the Egyptians. In Exodus 4:1-9 Moses is told of three signs for the

⁸⁶ Lee mentions only Q 7, but parallel accounts are found in Q 26:30-33, Q 27:10-12, and Q 28:31-32. In Q 20:17-23 both wonders are mentioned, though it is not clear that Moses is to perform them before Pharaoh.

⁸⁷ G. Sale, *The Koran, Commonly Called the AlCoran of Mohammed* (Philadelphia, 1833), 1:350-51.

children of Israel: the staff becoming a snake, the hand turning leprous, and Nile-water becoming blood when poured on the ground. In Exodus 7:8-25 the following wonders are performed for and against Pharaoh: Aaron's staff turns into a snake and then the water of the Nile becomes blood. To many modern readers the similarity in these sequences might suggest variant traditions. To ancient readers, however, it could suggest that in Exodus 4 God intended the signs for both the Israelites and the Egyptians. But do we have evidence of readers who chose this solution?

Lee introduced a passage from Ephrem's *Commentary on Exodus*, where in recasting Exodus 4, it is explicitly stated that the two miracles are to be performed for the Egyptians as well:

First [God] ordered him to convince the people with the snake, and with his hand that became leprous and then clean. Then [God said to him]: "Pharaoh is no more difficult than the serpent, nor is his army, which I shall change into whatever I want, just as I changed your hand. If the Egyptians do not believe these two signs which you will work before them, and before the sons of your nation, pour water from the river onto dry land, and it will turn to blood".⁸⁸

Lee then concludes: "This I take to be Mohammed's authority for the inference which Mr. Sale seems to think is but a necessary one".⁸⁹

This parallel is germane, and is in fact better than the one adduced by Geiger from *PRE* 48,⁹⁰ in that the latter is a post-Quranic work which often displays knowledge of Islamic traditions. Whether or not the parallel from Ephrem is conclusive, remains,

⁸⁸ Ed. Tonneau, 131; Roman edition, 4:203; ET in Mathews and Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 233.

⁸⁹ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 129.

⁹⁰ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 125. In *PRE* 48 after Aaron's staff turns into a snake before Pharaoh (as in Exodus 7:10), his (or Moses'?) hand becomes leprous.

however, debatable since Sale was right to argue that the text of Exodus itself could be taken to mean that both miracles were also performed in front of Pharaoh.

This is suggested not only by the parallel between Exodus 4:1-9 and 7:8-25, but also by a puzzling verse in Exodus 4. After God presents the miracles to be performed before the Children of Israel (Exodus 4:1-9), we read in verse 21:

And the Lord said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.

But no mention has been made so far of wonders to be performed before Pharaoh. This verse has puzzled readers, ancient, medieval and contemporary. Whereas many argue that the wonders referred to in the verse cannot be those mentioned in Exodus 4:1-9,⁹¹ others prefer to understand 4:21 as indicating that the wonders of 4:1-9 were intended for Pharaoh as well. This is what we find not only in Ephrem and the Quran, but also as early as Josephus (*Judean Antiquities* 2.284).⁹² In any case the parallel noted by Lee is valuable and has not, to my knowledge, been taken up since.

Another interesting observation of Lee’s concerns the image of an elevated paradise from which Adam and Eve are expelled as a result of their sin.⁹³ Lee adduces several quotations from the works of Ephrem in which it is clear that he envisaged Paradise as high above all mountains. To this Lee compares Q 2:36 where God addresses

⁹¹ See *Exodus Rabba* 5:6; Rashi on Exodus 4:21; and U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem, 1967), 55.

⁹² The same solution is found also in Ch. B. Chavel, *Ramban (Nachmanides): Commentary on the Torah: Exodus* (New York, 1973), 55, and more recently in M. Fishbane, “Exodus 1-4 / The Prologue to the Exodus Cycle”, in H. Bloom (ed.), *Modern Critical Interpretations: Exodus* (New York, 1987), 66.

⁹³ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 130-31.

Adam and Eve saying: “Descend (*ihbiṭū*), each of you an enemy to each; and in the earth a sojourn shall be yours, and enjoyment for a time”.⁹⁴

Ephrem’s picture of Paradise as a mountain is well studied.⁹⁵ Although it has Biblical origins (especially Ezekiel 28:13-14: “You were in Eden, the garden of God... you were on the holy mountain of God...”), and is echoed in Second Temple literature,⁹⁶ it does not seem to have been developed in rabbinic sources.⁹⁷ That the Quranic version of Adam and Eve’s descent should reflect a Christian tradition is not surprising, seeing that the story of Iblīs’ refusal to bow down before Adam is distinctly Christian.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, it is not entirely clear that the Quran shares Ephrem’s geography, since all we really find there is that Iblīs, Adam and Eve descended from the Garden of Eden. When one considers the identification of the Garden with (the celestial) Paradise it seems natural to assume that leaving the Garden entails a descent even without Ephrem’s geography.⁹⁹

Lee notes that throughout the Quran rivers are said to flow under Paradise, implying again that the garden is situated on a mountain. This too is reasonable, but not conclusive, seeing that two scholars have recently suggested that these so called “rivers”

⁹⁴ See also Q 2:38, Q 7:24, Q 20:123, and Q 7:13 (regarding Iblīs). A similar remark comparing the Quran’s geography with that of the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* is found in Reynolds, “Redeeming the Adam of the Qur’ān”, 80, and in a more developed form in *id.*, *The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 59-62.

⁹⁵ See N. Séd, “Les hymnes sur le paradis de saint Éphrem et les traditions juives”, *Le Muséon* 81 (1968): 457-67; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 258-59 and 306-10; Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 49-57; and G. A. Anderson, “The Cosmic Mountain: Eden and its Early Interpreters in Syriac Christianity”, in G. A. Robbins (ed.), *Genesis 1-3 in the History of Exegesis: Intrigue in the Garden* (Lewiston, 1988), 187-224.

⁹⁶ See discussion of *1 Enoch* in Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 308.

⁹⁷ For the notions of a terrestrial Paradise, see M. Bockmuehl, “Locating Paradise”, in M. Bockmuehl and G. G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Paradise in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Views* (Cambridge, 2010), 192-209.

⁹⁸ See chapter 4.3.

⁹⁹ For the debate among Muslim scholars as to whether or not the Garden of Eden is identical with the eschatological Paradise, see Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ ilā bilād al-afrāḥ aw šifat al-janna*, eds. ‘A. al-Shurbajī and Q. al-Nūrī (Beirut, 1992), 49-73. In the course of this debate different interpretations of *ihbiṭū* (Q 2:36) were put forth: as referring to descending from Heaven to Earth, from the most elevated location on Earth, or as not indicating descent at all but rather moving from one location to another; see *ibid.*, especially 49-51 and 67. The only verse which might suggest that *h-b-ṭ* does not indicate descent is Q 2:61, where God responds to the Jews’ complaint about food by saying *ihbiṭū miṣran*. The *tanwīn* on the second word led some scholars to understand the phrase along the lines of “go to / dwell in a town”, but the alternative reading *miṣra* and the fact that the Bible often refers to descent to Egypt (e.g., Genesis 26:2, 39:1, etc.) suggest that what is meant is “descend to Egypt”. For the two readings, see al-Qurṭubī on 2:61.

(*anhār*) should be understood as underground irrigation canals which were widespread in pre-Islamic Arabia.¹⁰⁰

Yet another example of Lee's contributions concerns Q 2:60 ("And [remember] when Moses sought water for his people, so We said: 'Strike the rock with your staff'; and there gushed forth from it twelve fountains; all the people knew now their drinking-place...").¹⁰¹ No equivalent scene is found in the Bible. Commenting on this tradition Geiger does not note any rabbinic parallels but rather remarks that "apparently this is a confusion" of Exodus 17:1-7 (where the people demand water and Moses strikes the rock which then brings forth water) with Exodus 15:27 (the Israelites reach Elim where there are twelve springs).¹⁰²

Lee, on the other hand, adduces a passage which suggests that the Quran is following an older tradition.¹⁰³ He refers to his source as Ephrem's *Commentary on Numbers*, but in fact the passage is extracted from the ninth-century *Catena Severi* and is not necessarily Ephremic.¹⁰⁴ The passage is a comment on the song which Israel sang in Numbers 21:

(16) From there they continued to Beer; that is the well of which the Lord said to Moses: "Gather the people together, and I will give them water". (17) Then Israel sang

¹⁰⁰ D. Waines, "Agriculture and Vegetation", *EQ* 1:41; P. Crone, "How Did the Quranic Pagans Make a Living?" *BSOAS* 68 (2005): 391.

¹⁰¹ See also Q 7:160, where it is clear that the number of fountains corresponds to the twelve tribes.

¹⁰² Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 129. The conflation is attributed explicitly to Muhammad in Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 293. See also Sale's comment on the verse.

¹⁰³ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 126-27.

¹⁰⁴ The text is found in the Roman edition, 4:263. For the source of this text, see Brock, "Brief Guide", 285. For the confusion surrounding the Ephremic material in the *Catena Severi*, see D. Kruisheer, "Ephrem, Jacob of Edessa, and the Monk Severus: An Analysis of Ms. Vat. Syr. 103, ff. 1-72", in R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum VII* (Rome, 1998), 599-605.

this song: “Spring up, O well!—Sing to it!— (18) the well that the leaders sank, that the rulers of the people dug, and revealed with their staffs”...¹⁰⁵

The passage from the *Catena* first glosses “the leaders” with the house of Moses and “the rulers” with the heads of the tribes, and then goes on to explain that the rock which traveled with them would afford twelve streams when they stood still but not when they traveled.¹⁰⁶ In journeying it would not dry up, but would not flow either. Therefore it resembled a well. When the Israelites would set up camp, the house of Moses and the leaders of the tribes would sing praise to it with their staffs and it would rise and flow.¹⁰⁷

Whether or not this passage is pre-Quranic remains unclear, since the *Catena* does not indicate its source. The language is vague (“They say”, *āmrin*). Parallels are found in the Syriac commentary of Isho’dad of Merv (*fl.* 850). Here in one version the rock had twelve holes from which the water flowed, according to the number of the tribes, and in another twelve streams flowed out of the rock.¹⁰⁸ Again the scholars who held these views are unnamed (*nāšīn*) and so the issue of the dating is unresolved. It is, however, certain that the tradition itself was known to Ephrem who used it as a type for Christ sending the twelve apostles (*Hymns on the Nativity* 2.10: “O source untasted by Adam, which gave forth twelve speaking springs and Life filled the world!”).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ The last phrase is usually rendered “with the sceptre, with the staff”, but the commentary follows the Peshitta’s unique understanding of 𐤒𐤒𐤓𐤓𐤁 as referring to examination (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ); see M. P. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1999), 188.

¹⁰⁶ For the notion of a traveling rock which supplied the Israelites with water, see J. L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 620-21, 631 and 817.

¹⁰⁷ A partial translation of the passage is found in C-O. Nordström, “The Water Miracles of Moses in Jewish Legend and Byzantine Art”, *Orientalia Suecana* 7 (1958): 108.

¹⁰⁸ See C. van den Eynde, *Commentaire D’Išo’dad de Merv sur l’Ancien Testament: II. Exode-Deutéronome*, CSCO 176 and 179, SS 80-81 (Louvain, 1958), 34 and 109 (Syriac) and 45 and 138 (French).

¹⁰⁹ ET in Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 209-10, where in addition a similar passage is cited from the hymns of Ephrem preserved in Armenian (*HArm.* 42), and reference is made to Q 2:60. See also Jacob of Serugh’s *On the Veil of Moses* (homily 79 in *JSB*, 3:295) and his *Homilies against the Jews* 3, line 126 (ed. Albert, 94).

But this tradition is not limited to Syriac circles. It is found already in Ezekiel the Tragedian (second century BCE),¹¹⁰ as well as in a painting in the synagogue at Dura-Europos (ca. 250) which “depicts a well into which Moses is dipping his rod. From this well, which stands before the tabernacle, twelve streams are flowing to twelve tents with representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel”.¹¹¹ Nonetheless, Lee’s Syriac parallel is worthy of incorporation in the scholarly discussion of this theme.

In addition to noting parallel content, Lee also drew attention to coincidences in style and phraseology.¹¹² His remarks on style are vague and he gives no concrete examples from either the Quran or Ephrem’s compositions. Instead he refers to “a kind of rhythmus” which characterizes both.¹¹³

More to the point are Lee’s lexical observations, though his argument fails to acknowledge the Jewish Aramaic evidence.¹¹⁴ He notes the following as Syriac loanwords: *salwā* (Q 2:57; Q 7:160; Q 20:80), *furqān* (Q 2:53 and 185; Q 3:4; Q 8:29 and 41; Q 21:48; Q 25:1), *malak al-mawt* (Q 32:11), *Fir’awn* (throughout), *qissīs* (Q 5:82),

¹¹⁰ “From out a single rock twelve sparkling springs”; cited in Eusebius’ *Preparation for the Gospel* 9.29.

¹¹¹ Nordström, “The Water Miracles”, 100. This painting has attracted a lot of scholarly attention. See, for example, C. H. Kraeling, *The Synagogue* (New Haven, 1956), 118-25, and E. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New-York, 1953-68), 10:27-41. The painting is linked to the Quran in Garsiel, *Bible, Midrash and Quran*, 147-48, where a supposed parallel in the *midrash yelammedenu* is noted as well, though it does not contain the idea of twelve fountains emerging from a rock. More relevant is Tosefta *Sukka* 3.11, where the princes of Israel are said to have drawn water for their tribes from the rock/well with their staffs.

¹¹² Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 134-38.

¹¹³ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 135. The examples Lee gives for this kind of writing include a few verses from Isaiah, a (completely mistranslated) verse of Imru’ al-Qays (whom he believes was a contemporary of the Prophet), a letter of the English poet William Cowper (1731-1800), the *Maqāmāt* of Ḥarīrī, the Life of Timour, the *Gulistān* of Sa’dī (thirteenth century), the *Anvari Soheili* of Husein Vaez Kashifī (d. 1504/5) and the letters of Abu al-Fazl ibn Mubarak (d. 1602). More than define an exact style this list underlines Lee’s eclectic reading. In sum, it seems that what he had in mind was rhymed prose with abundant word play.

¹¹⁴ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 135-37.

khardal (Q 21:47; Q 31:16), and *Shu'ayb* as a loan translation of the Syriac form of Jethro.¹¹⁵

The last example is baffling. Lee writes:

Mohammed gives to Jethro the name of Shoab... which is a literal translation of his name as given in Syriac, ܫܘܐܒܐ. The roots of both words having the same meanings. In Arabic the word is of the diminutive form: in Syriac, if we change one T for another (the Syrians having two) viz. ܫ for ܫܘ, we shall have ܫܘܐܒܐ which shall have the diminutive form, a mistake which the Prophet might have made, as he must trusted solely to his ear.¹¹⁶

All this is either unsubstantiated or simply wrong.¹¹⁷

The other suggestions do make sense, though one cannot rule out Jewish Aramaic influence. Lee himself concedes that the phrase “Angel of death”, *malak mawtā*, is current among Jews as well.¹¹⁸ Such is the case for the word for quail, *salway*, which is attested not only in Syriac but also in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic.¹¹⁹ The same is true of *purqānā* which is attested in both Syriac and Jewish Aramaic.¹²⁰ As for mustard, Jeffery is inclined to a Syriac derivation, presumably on account of the reference to a mustard seed in the gospels.¹²¹ It should be noted, however, that the Quranic verses are not a clear

¹¹⁵ The two other items discussed by Lee (*al-masīh al-dajjāl* and the name of Pharaoh’s wife) are not Quranic.

¹¹⁶ Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 137.

¹¹⁷ There is no evidence for the identification with Jethro in the Quran; the roots do not share the same meaning; the form of the name is ܫܘܐܒܐ rather than ܫܘܐܒܐ; and ܫܘ is not a diminutive ending in Syriac.

¹¹⁸ See *FV*, 269-60, where an Ethiopic origin for *malak* is preferred.

¹¹⁹ See *FV*, 177-78. As Lee notes the Hebrew *selāw* is too remote.

¹²⁰ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 41-42, argued for a Jewish origin. A survey of the literature is found in *FV*, 225-29. See more recently F. Donner, “Quranic *Furqān*”, *JSS* 52 (2007): 279-300, and the response in U. Rubin, “On the Arabian Origins of the Qur’ān: The Case of *Al-Furqān*”, *JSS* 54 (2009): 421-33.

¹²¹ *FV*, 122. Also noted is the occurrence of the word in Christian Palestinian Aramaic and early Arabic poetry.

reflection of any NT verse, and that mustard was used proverbially in rabbinic sources as well.¹²²

More convincing is the form of Pharaoh's name with a final *n* unattested in Jewish sources, but known in Greek, Syriac and Ethiopic.¹²³ Likewise, even Geiger recognized *qissīsīna*, which is used to describe Christian religious figures, as a Syriac loan.¹²⁴

Yet even when his arguments are convincing, Lee's study remains completely unsystematic. That both thematic and linguistic examples are the result of random observations might be seen from a comparison with the systematic works of Geiger, Horovitz and Jeffery.

Lee is interesting for a different reason. He reflects an early attempt to posit a direct lineage linking the Quran to the Syriac tradition. Unfortunately his work went unnoticed, so that later scholars who pursued a similar line of enquiry did not take his arguments into account, even in those instances where he made a compelling case.

As to Lee's methodological weaknesses, we shall soon see that more recent scholarship suffers from many of the same faults, namely over-emphasis on the work of Ephrem, reliance on faulty texts, neglect of the Jewish evidence, lack of clear distinction between the Quran and its exegesis, and fanciful reading of the sources.

3.2.2. Tor Andrae and Ephrem's *Hymns on Paradise*

Tor Andrae's (1885-1947) primary areas of study were Islamic mysticism and the Jewish and Christian origins of early Islam. Two of his works touch upon Syriac and the Quran. The first and more important for our discussion consists of a series of three

¹²² See, e.g., Mishna *Nazir* 1.5, and Mishna *Nidda* 5:2.

¹²³ *FV*, 225.

¹²⁴ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 36. Cf. *FV*, 239-40, where the occurrence of the word in early poetry, in Ethiopic, and in South Arabian inscriptions is noted.

articles from the 1920s devoted to a study of Quranic eschatology.¹²⁵ The second is a biography of the Prophet which includes a chapter on “Mohammed’s Religious Message”, where Andrae summarizes his views on the Quran’s affinity to Syriac Christianity.¹²⁶

Andrae explores the Christian background of both Quranic eschatology and the form of Islamic piety portrayed in the Quran. With regard to the latter he writes: “The deep earnestness, the keen expectations of future life, the contrition and trembling before the Day of Judgment, the warning against the carelessness which forgets responsibility and retribution: these things form also the basic mood of Christian ascetic piety as it survived in the Oriental churches, and where likewise it had become the ideal and norm of the laity in a much higher degree than was the case in the West”.¹²⁷

Though some Christian elements are evident, Andrae rightly concedes that the major features of the end of days according to the Quran are mostly common to Judaism and Christianity.¹²⁸ There are some indications of greater proximity to Christian apocalypses, but only rarely are they conclusive. Since thematic study alone proves insufficient, Andrae turns to what he refers to as the *homiletische Anwendung* of the ideas.¹²⁹ By this he means the larger conceptual framework in which the individual traditions are embedded, and the worldview they are meant to serve.

¹²⁵ Andrae, “Der Ursprung”.

¹²⁶ Andrae, *Mohammed: The Man and his Faith*.

¹²⁷ Andrae, *Mohammed: The Man and his Faith*, 83.

¹²⁸ The evidently Christian elements include verses such as Q 43:61 where Jesus seems to be a sign of the Hour, presumably a reference to his return before the day of Judgment; Q 4:159 where Jesus is said to testify against the People of the Book on the Day of Resurrection; Q 27:82 according to which an eschatological beast (*dābba*) will emerge from the earth and speak to the people (compare Revelation 13:11-18); Andrae, “Der Ursprung”, 216-17. For the beast, see also Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 456 (citing Rudolph and Ahrens); A. Abel, “Dābba”, *EF* 2:71; and recently D. Cook, *Studies in Muslim apocalyptic* (Princeton, 2002), 120. See, however, the cautionary remarks of D. Brady, “The Book of Revelation and the Qur’ān: Is there a Possible Literary Relationship?” *JSS* 23 (1978): 222-25. In this context it should be noted that the Book of Revelation was translated into Syriac only in the sixth century; S. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition* (Piscataway, 2006), 106.

¹²⁹ Andrae, “Der Ursprung”, 237 and 45.

Andrae emphasizes the shared type of piety in which the fear of the Day of Judgment holds a central position, but he is usually unable to supply exact textual parallels. The examples that he does cite are more indicative of similar religious sentiments and conceptions and less of any direct genealogical relationship between the two traditions.¹³⁰ In fact Andrae states that a direct literal dependence is not to be expected, since whatever Muhammad received from Christianity was transmitted to him via oral preaching and personal contacts.¹³¹

Nonetheless, Andrae does highlight similarities between Ephrem and the Quran. Like Lee, for lack of an alternative, he uses the flawed Roman edition of Ephrem's works, and is not aware that the corpus attributed to Ephrem in Greek is mostly inauthentic. Andrae draws parallels from both the Greek and Syriac works, though laying particular stress on the Quran's affinity with Ephrem's *Hymns on Paradise*.¹³² The following are some of the more noteworthy parallels concerning Paradise:¹³³ location on a high mountain,¹³⁴ division into various levels corresponding to the degree of righteousness of their inhabitants,¹³⁵ the ceaseless production of fruit and the miraculous liquid

¹³⁰ Thus, for example, Andrae notes the use of "negligence" or "laxity" (*mahmyānutā* and *rāpyutā* in Syriac, and *ghafla* in Arabic) embodied in disregard for the Day of Judgment to define the frame of mind of the unbelievers; Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 289-90. Likewise he draws attention to the disdain both traditions display towards frivolity; *ibid.*, 290-92. Andrae notes an interesting textual parallel between *Carmina Nisibena* 74.20 and Q 102:1-2; *ibid.*, 284.

¹³¹ Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 46.

¹³² As Andrae himself notes (Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 52), Grimme had already pointed out the Quran's indebtedness to Ephrem regarding Paradise; H. Grimme, *Mohammed* (Münster, 1895), 160, note 9. The *Hymns on Paradise* are found in the Roman edition, 6:562-98; see now E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Paradiso und contra Julianum*, CSCO 174, SS 78 (Louvain, 1957).

¹³³ Andrae's list of parallels with the *Hymns on Paradise* is not exhaustive. Compare, for example, *Hymns on Paradise* 10 and 11.2 ("No harmful frost, / no scorching heat / is to be found in that blessed place of delight") with Q 76:13 ("therein they shall see neither sun [*shams*] nor bitter cold [*zamharīr*]"). The meaning of *zamharīr* is in fact unclear. Whereas some exegetes understand it as "intense cold", others would have it mean "moon", which would completely change the meaning of the verse; see E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge, 1984), 1:1255. In addition to the parallels from the *Hymns on Paradise*, Andrae notes a passage from Ephraem Graecus concerning the humble astonishment that their being worthy of Paradise arouses in the believers, for which see Q 37:50-60 and Q 52:25-27; Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 54-55.

¹³⁴ See our discussion of Lee above.

¹³⁵ In Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 52, a portion from *Hymns on Paradise* 2.11 is cited. In its entirety it runs as follows: "When the just ascend its various levels (*dargaw*) / to receive their inheritance, / with justice He raises up each one / to the degree (*dargā*) that accords with his labors; / each is stopped at the level /

springs/streams,¹³⁶ the glory of Paradise and the banquet in which the just partake,¹³⁷ the availability of wine and fruit,¹³⁸ and the peacefulness of Paradise.¹³⁹

One of Andrae's suggestions drew harsh criticism from Edmund Beck, the leading scholar and editor of Ephrem's works and himself no stranger to Quranic studies. Andrae had argued that *Hymns on Paradise* 7.18 contained a veiled reference to the virgins of Paradise.¹⁴⁰ In Brock's translation the stanza reads as follows:

The man who abstained / with understanding, from wine, / will the vines of Paradise
(*gupnaw[hy] d-pardaysā*) / rush out to meet (*sāwḥān*), all the more joyfully, / as each one
stretches out and proffers him / its clusters (*wa-ḥdā ḥdā sḡolāh mawšṭā d-tettel lēh*); / or
if any has lived / a life of virginity, / him too they [feminine] welcome (*a'lāy[hy]*) into
their pure bosom (*'ubbhēn*), / for the solitary such as he / has never lain in any bosom /
nor upon any marriage bed"

whereof he is worthy, / there being sufficient levels (*dargaw*) in Paradise / for everyone: / the lowest parts for the repentant, / the middle for the righteous, the heights for those victorious, / while the summit is reserved for God's presence"). With this Andrae compares Q 56:7-10, which distinguishes between different ranks in Paradise. It is worthwhile noting also the linguistic parallel between Syriac *dargē* and Arabic *darajāt*, which is used similarly in verses such as: Q 3:163; Q 4:95-96; Q 8:4; Q 9:20; Q 17:21; Q 20:75; and Q 58:11.

¹³⁶ Both mentioned in *Hymns on Paradise* 10.6. For the first theme compare Q 13:35 (*ukuluhā dā'imun*), for the second see Q 47:15 (where one finds rivers of water, milk, wine, and honey, whereas Ephrem has springs of wine, milk, honey, and cream). This theme, however, is known already in 2 *Enoch* 8 and in the *Apocalypse of Paul* 23, where springs of honey, milk, oil, and wine are found. For the four rivers, see J. Horowitz, "Kawthar", *EI*¹, 4:835 (offering the following explanation for the replacement of oil with water: "in Arabia pure water was not taken for granted and besides it was necessary to mix with the wine of Paradise"); E. J. Jenkinson, "The Rivers of Paradise", *The Muslim World* 19 (1929): 151-55; J. D. M. Derrett, "Whatever Happened to the Land flowing with Milk and Honey?" *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 178-84; and S. T. Um, *The Theme of Temple Christology in John's Gospel* (London, 2006), 28-31.

¹³⁷ Andrae cites at length from *Hymns on Paradise* 9, and compares the attendant breezes (or spirits) in Ephrem's hymn with the maidens of the Quran; Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 53-54.

¹³⁸ Andrae compares *Hymn on Paradise* 7.18 (cited below), where the vines stretch out and offer their clusters to those who abstained from wine in this world, with Q 76:14 (*wa-dhullilat qutūfuhā tadhlīlan*); Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 54. Note also that according to the Quran too wine is prohibited in this world (Q 5:90-91) and yet is a delight of Paradise (Q 47:15 and Q 83:25).

¹³⁹ Andrae cites *Hymn on Paradise* 5.12 ("Paradise delighted me / as much by its peacefulness as by its beauty: / in it there resides a beauty / that has no spot; / in it exists a peacefulness that knows no fear"); Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 54. See also *Hymns on Paradise* 11.3, and compare with Q 6:127 and Q 10:25 (*dār al-salām*) as well as Q 7:46; Q 13:24; Q 15:46; Q 16:32; Q 19:62; Q 39:73; Q 50:34; Q 56:26 and 91.

¹⁴⁰ Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 54; and in a more developed manner in Andrae, *Mohammed: The Man and his Faith*, 88.

On this Andrae comments:

The wine which the redeemed enjoy [in the Quran] is likewise not lacking in the Christian Paradise, and one may recognize a veiled reference to the virgins of Paradise in Afrem's saying: "whoever has abstained from wine on earth, for him do the vines of Paradise yearn. Each one of them holds out to him a bunch of grapes. And if a man has lived in chastity, they (feminine) receive him in a pure bosom, because he as a monk did not fall into the bosom and bed of earthly love". To be sure, Afrem occasionally points out that this is only an attempt to give some idea of a joy which no earthly mind is able to grasp. But most of his listeners and readers no doubt remained quite oblivious to his feeble attempts to spiritualize his sensual images. Popular piety certainly interpreted this daring imagery in a crass and literal sense, and under such circumstances one cannot blame a citizen of pagan Mecca for doing the same thing.¹⁴¹

But as Beck demonstrated, Andrae misconstrued this passage, possibly led astray by the faulty Roman edition of Ephrem's hymns. Though all the feminine forms in the passage refer to the vines (*gupnē*), Andrae believed that the poet was referring to women welcoming the righteous into their bosoms, rather than describing vines in a personified fashion. Andrae's confusion may have resulted from the form of *gupnē* which looks like a masculine and especially from the text of the Roman edition which has *sāwḥin* in the masculine instead of *sāwḥān* in the feminine.¹⁴² In fact the other feminine forms in the passages should have indicated to Andrae that the vines were the subject throughout, but in his search for a precedent for the Quranic virgins he overlooked this.¹⁴³ This is not the

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 88 (underlining mine).

¹⁴² See Roman edition, 6:584.

¹⁴³ E. Beck, "Eine christliche Parallele zu den Paradiesjungfrauen des Korans?" *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 14 (1948): 398-405, and *id.*, "Les Houris du Coran et Ephrem le Syrien", *MIDEO* 6 (1961): 405-408. Recently Griffith returned to this debate; Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān", 112-13. Griffith attempts to rehabilitate Andrae's point by arguing that it was not meant as an exposition of

influence, specifically from Syriac poetry.¹⁴⁵ The arguments adduced for Romanos' *syrianité*, however, often suffer from methodological flaws similar to those found in the study of the Syriac background of the Quran.

Building on Thomas Wehofer's study of Romanos' *kontakion* on the *Parousia* (published in 1907), in which he noted extensive parallels in vocabulary with a Greek hymn attributed to Ephrem, Casimir Emereau concluded in 1918 that the poetic forms of the Greek *kontakion* and the Syriac *memrā* were identical. As William Petersen comments, this not only fails to distinguish between poetic form and literary sources, but also assumes that the works attributed to Ephraem Graecus indeed reflect the Syriac corpus of Ephrem, which is far from true.¹⁴⁶ Indiscriminate use of Ephraem Graecus is likewise characteristic of many studies on Syriac and the Quran.

But even Petersen's more careful study of Romanos is problematic. As the title of his book indicates, he seeks to establish Romanos' use of two Syriac sources: the *Diatessaron* and the works of Ephrem. But as Manolis Papoutsakis has recently noted: "Syriacists sympathetic to Petersen's general thesis discreetly pointed out that a number of the Syriac passages which he had regarded as Romanos' sources were only reflections of motifs otherwise widespread in Syriac literature of the late antique period. If one should search for possible sources of Romanos in the Syriac milieu, the range of texts to be examined critically should extend well beyond Ephrem to include Syriac writers of the intervening period – *from Ephrem to Romanos*".¹⁴⁷ One could easily replace Romanos with Muhammad and Petersen with the majority of scholars studying Syriac and the Quran. We have already seen that the Ephremic corpus has received disproportionate attention as a source of the Quran, whereas relevant Syriac texts of the fifth and sixth

¹⁴⁵ A survey of the debate is found in W. L. Petersen, *The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist*, CSCO 475, Subsidia 74 (Louvain, 1985), 3-19.

¹⁴⁶ Petersen, *The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus*, 10-11.

¹⁴⁷ M. Papoutsakis, "The Making of a Syriac Fable: From Ephrem to Romanos", *Le Muséon* 120 (2007): 46-47.

centuries remain unexamined. In the following section we shall see that several scholars have argued that the Quran knew the *Diatessaron* even though the evidence for this is extremely weak.

3.2.3. John Bowman and the *Diatessaron*

The bulk of John Bowman's (1916-2006) scholarly output was dedicated to the Gospel of Mark and the Samaritans.¹⁴⁸ He was also interested in comparative religion, and devoted three articles to Syriac influence on the Quran.¹⁴⁹ In them he makes broad claims that are often cited but are insufficiently substantiated. Bowman sets out to prove three things. The first is "that Muhammad's Biblical historiography and his view of the Old Testament are entirely derived from the Syrian Church interpretation of the Old Testament seen through the eyes of the New Testament". The second is "that Muhammad's monotheism is derived from a Monophysite Syriac Christianity protesting against Orthodoxy". The third is that there is "Quranic evidence of lexical indebtedness to early Syriac religious texts".¹⁵⁰

Bowman emphasizes the Christian view that the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament. The Jews, who fail to perceive this, are accordingly heretics who misinterpret their own Scripture. In this Bowman finds the background for the Quranic anti-Jewish polemic alleging that they hid the proper meaning of the text (Q 6:91).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ On Bowman and his contribution to Oriental studies in Australia, see A. Sagona, "John Bowman (1916-2006)", available at:

<http://www.humanities.org.au/Resources/Downloads/Fellows/Obituaries/JohnBowman.pdf>

¹⁴⁹ Bowman, "The Debt of Islam"; *id.*, "The Qur'an and Biblical History", in *Ex orbe religionum* (Leiden, 1972), 2:111-19; and *id.*, "Holy Scriptures, Lectionaries and Qur'ān".

¹⁵⁰ Bowman, "The Debt of Islam", 177-78.

¹⁵¹ Bowman, "The Debt of Islam", 184-85. Bowman's choice of this verse to illustrate his point is problematic since it seems to be referring to concealment of the text itself rather than of its meaning ("They measured not God with His true measure when they said: 'God has not sent down aught on any mortal'. Say: 'Who sent down the Book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance to men? You put it into parchments, revealing them, and hiding much; and you were taught that you knew not, you and your fathers'. Say: 'God'. Then leave them alone, playing their game of plunging"). It is not clear who is being criticized here. Whereas the beginning and ending of the verse seem to point to the Meccans, the middle

Although this approach to the Old Testament is common in the early church, the Syriac fathers place special stress on it. Thus authors like Aphrahat, Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh cite the Old Testament more than the New Testament in writing on New Testament themes. Therefore the Quran's emphasis on personages from the Hebrew Bible is not necessarily indicative of Jewish rather than Christian influence. While Bowman concedes the existence of rabbinic midrashic traditions supplementing the Hebrew Bible narratives in the Medinan period, he insists that "Muhammad's whole attitude to the Old Testament even at this period is that which is derived from Syrian Christianity: the Old Testament is confirmed in the New Testament before it was corrupted".¹⁵² This may or may not be true. Bowman in any case has not demonstrated it.

Bowman states generally that "Syriac literature of the fourth and fifth and sixth centuries is not extensive. Ephraem's hymns would be known to every Syrian Christian in Arabia, and Jacob of Saroug's mystical treatises [sic] to every monophysite monk of whom there were many in Muhammad's time".¹⁵³ Beyond this Bowman shows little interest in examining the very texts which might prove his point, *i.e.* the homiletic poetry on Old Testament themes, and other relevant Syriac works on these matters. His comments suggest that he was not well acquainted with this literature. Unaware of Beck's refutation, he repeats Andrae's thesis concerning the Quranic female mates of Paradise as derived from Ephrem. Disconcertingly, Jacob of Serugh is mentioned erroneously as the author of the *Liber Graduum*.¹⁵⁴ Rather than examine Jacob's corpus or similar works, Bowman chooses to stick to the Gospels, or rather the *Diatessaron*.

part appears to rebuke the Jews; see R. Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart, 1971), 147.

¹⁵² Bowman, "The Debt of Islam", 186-87. Bowman's example of a Mishna citation in the Quran should be corrected from Q 4 to Q 5 (on this quotation see chapter 5.3.3).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 193-94.

A major contention of Bowman's is that when it speaks of the *injīl*, the Quran means Tatian's second-century harmony of the Gospels, known as the *Diatessaron*. This text served the churches using Syriac as their liturgical language up to the fifth century, but was extant even later.¹⁵⁵ The original text no longer survives, though it can be partially reconstructed on the basis of Ephrem's *Commentary on the Diatessaron* and Gospel harmonies in other languages which derive from it. Its identification as the *injīl* is repeated by several scholars, though the arguments adduced in support of this claim are weak.¹⁵⁶ I will briefly list and refute the main arguments.

Bowman notes the singular form of the word *injīl*, suggesting that the Quran was unaware that there were four Gospels. Rather than take this as indicative of the Quran's limited knowledge of Christianity or as influenced by the parallel terms *tawrāt*, *qur'ān*, and *zabūr*, all in the singular, Bowman assumes that only one harmonized Gospel circulated in the Quranic milieu.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, he maintains that the Quran would surely have highlighted the discrepancies between the Gospels had it known more than one. Both arguments are unconvincing. Whereas the consistent use of the singular form has been noted by others,¹⁵⁸ it does not prove that only one gospel was to be found in the milieu in which the Quran took shape. That the singular could be used to describe the Gospels in their entirety, or rather their message, can easily be demonstrated from the Syriac titles for the *Diatessaron* and the Old Syriac version of the Gospels. The former is

¹⁵⁵ For the *Diatessaron*, see W. L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (Leiden, 1994). The use of the *Diatessaron* in the fifth century is attested by both Theodoret of Cyrrhus ("I myself found more than two hundred copies in reverential use in the churches of our diocese, and all of them I collected and removed and instead of them I introduced the Gospels of the four Evangelists") and Rabbula, whose forty-third canon stipulates the use of the separate Gospels; *ibid.*, 41-43. That the *Diatessaron* was still regarded as worthy of citation in the ninth century is demonstrated by the quotations found in Isho'dad of Merv's (*fl.* 850) *Commentary on the Gospels*; *ibid.*, 52-53.

¹⁵⁶ Studies which accept the identification of the *injīl* with the *Diatessaron* include N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Albany, 1991), 19; J. M. F. Van Reeth, "L'Évangile du Prophète", in D. De Smet et al. (eds.), *Al-Kitāb: la sacralité du texte dans le monde de l'Islam* (Brussels, 2004), 155-174 (with no mention of Bowman). See also Gilliot, "Reconsidering the Authorship of the Qur'ān", 99-100.

¹⁵⁷ A similar argument was made independently in Van Reeth, "L'Évangile du Prophète", 158-60.

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 180, note 1, and S. H. Griffith, "Gospel", *EQ* 2:342-43.

known as the “Gospel of the mingled [evangelists]” (*ewangelion da-mḥalltē*), the latter, which consists of all four Gospels, as the “Gospel of the separated [evangelists]” (*ewangelion da-mparršē*).¹⁵⁹ As for the Quran not pointing out contradictions between different Gospels, this too is unsurprising. The Quran does not provide a systematic critique of the Torah either, although it too contains contradictions.¹⁶⁰

Bowman finds further support for his theory in the famous Quranic conflation of Miriam the sister of Moses and Mary the mother of Jesus. This, he argues, is the result of reading Luke 1:5 and 36 (Elizabeth a descendant of Aaron and Mary a relative of Elizabeth) without Jesus’ genealogy which is omitted in the *Diatessaron*.¹⁶¹ But other explanations do exist. Most convincing are those studies which read the Quranic conflation in light of the typological comparison between the two women (both named Maryam in Syriac) that is common among Syriac authors.¹⁶²

But Bowman’s weakest argument by far is that based on the correspondences between the Quran and the Arabic version of the *Diatessaron*.¹⁶³ He notes “the complete identity” of the spelling of the names of Biblical figures as well as the rendition of Matthew 19:24 (“Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God”) with the exact same words of Q 7:40 (*ḥattā yaliḡa l-jamalu fī sammi l-khiyāṡi*). Although Bowman concedes that “it may be too much to assume a written translation of the *Diatessaron* from Syriac into

¹⁵⁹ See Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 33. Rabbula’s forty-third canon is a good illustration of the use of the singular to denote all four Gospels: “The priests and deacons should exercise [due] care that in all the churches the *Ewangelion da-Mparršē* shall be present and shall be read”; Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron*, 42-43 (translation modified). The term itself as well as the verbs which refer to it are all in the singular.

¹⁶⁰ For later systematic critiques, see H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, 1992).

¹⁶¹ Bowman, “The Debt of Islam”, 188.

¹⁶² See M. Marx, “Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qur’an: From Hagiography to Theology via Religious-Political Debate”, in *QC*, 533-63, and Reynolds, *The Qur’an and its Biblical Subtext*, 145-47. For a similar typological comparison between Joshua and Jesus (both of whom carry the same name in Syriac), see Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 50-52.

¹⁶³ For the Arabic Harmony, see Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron*, 133-38.

Arabic in the time of Muhammad”, he nonetheless deduces from these similarities that such forms were not regarded as primarily Muslim, presumably since their origin was in the Syriac *Diatessaron*.¹⁶⁴ However, the use of Islamic phraseology is to be expected in a Christian work translated into Arabic somewhere between the ninth and eleventh century,¹⁶⁵ and tells us nothing about the origin of the Quranic forms and phrases. A text which renders the Pharisees as the *mu'tazila*,¹⁶⁶ the law as *sunna*,¹⁶⁷ and divorce as *ṭalāq*,¹⁶⁸ is clearly expressing itself in the *lingua franca* of the times, making itself intelligible to both Christian and Muslim readers.¹⁶⁹

The rest of Bowman’s arguments consist of parallels between the Quran and verses included in the *Diatessaron*, but unless one can show – and Bowman does not – that the two texts share a unique tradition unattested in the four Gospels, this is of no consequence. Ideally the case should be based on quotations preserved by Syriac authors and not only on later harmonies in other languages.

A detailed inquiry along these lines is found in Hans Quecke’s examination of ancient translations of Luke 1:34.¹⁷⁰ In the Greek text, the phrasing of Mary’s question upon receiving the Annunciation is puzzling: “How can this be since I do not know (ὁὐ γινώσκω) a man?” Early readers were troubled by the use of the present tense in Mary’s response.¹⁷¹ In surveying the different approaches to this matter, Quecke focuses on a set

¹⁶⁴ Bowman, “The Debt of Islam”, 188-89.

¹⁶⁵ The authorship of the Arabic *Diatessaron* is still debated. Three of the manuscripts attribute it to Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043), but several scholars reject the attribution on various grounds, some of them preferring an earlier, pre-tenth-century date; see N. P. G. Joose, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Arabic Diatessaron* (Free University of Amsterdam dissertation, 1997), 38-44.

¹⁶⁶ See discussion in Joose, *Sermon on the Mount*, 36-37 and 116-17.

¹⁶⁷ Joose, *Sermon on the Mount*, 110-13.

¹⁶⁸ Joose, *Sermon on the Mount*, 145-46.

¹⁶⁹ Joose, *Sermon on the Mount*, 117, drawing on S. Griffith, “Ḥabīb ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā’iṭah, a Christian mutakallim of the First Abbasid Century”, *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980): 165 (“It became essential for the Christian churches to make their doctrines as intelligible as possible in Arabic, or at least to defend themselves from charges of intellectual absurdity in the new *lingua franca*”).

¹⁷⁰ Quecke, “Lk 1,34 in den alten Übersetzungen”; *id.*, “Lk 1,34 im Diatessaron”; *id.*, “Zur Auslegungsgeschichte von Lk 1,34”, *Biblica* 47 (1966): 113-14.

¹⁷¹ For a recent discussion of this verse, see R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (New York, 1993), 298-309.

of sources which understood the verb as referring to the past. Some of these sources also make the man the subject and Mary the object rather than the other way around, reading the equivalent of “no man has known me”. The texts which contain both elements include the *Diatessaron* lemma preserved in Ephrem’s *Syriac Commentary on the Diatessaron* (*gabrā lā ḥkam li*),¹⁷² the Arabic (*lam ya’rifnī rajul*) and Persian (*mard ba-man narasīd*) Harmonies,¹⁷³ and Q 3:47 (*annā yakūnu lī waladun wa-lam yamsasnī basharun*, almost verbatim also in Q 19:20). This suggests to Quecke that the Quran is an echo of a tradition similar to that of the *Diatessaron*.¹⁷⁴

Building on Quecke’s work, where the Quran was a side point, K. Luke devoted an entire article to this example in order to argue that the Quran was aware of a Diatessaronic reading (spread by Syriac monks active in Arabia).¹⁷⁵ Luke’s argument is much more reserved than that of Bowman, of which he seems unaware, in that rather than argue that the only Gospel known to the Quran was the *Diatessaron*, Luke confines himself to one specific reading. Regrettably, his presentation of the matter is less compelling than it should be in that he focuses only on the fact that in the Quran the man is the subject of the sexual act and Mary the object, ignoring the past tense of the verb.¹⁷⁶ This in itself is inconclusive, since the Quranic version could have arisen independently

¹⁷² Quecke, “Lk 1,34 im Diatessaron”, 85-88. Theoretically one could read the verb as an active participle (*ḥākem*), but in light of the renditions found in the later Harmonies based on the *Diatessaron* this seems less likely.

¹⁷³ Quecke, “Lk 1,34 in den alten Übersetzungen”, 508.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 514-15.

¹⁷⁵ Luke, “The Koranic Recension of Luke 1:34”.

¹⁷⁶ Luke believes that the attribution of the sexual initiative to the male reflects Tatian’s Encratite tendencies: “It would seem that the present text was created by Tatian after his fall into the Encratist heresy, a heresy characterized by aversion to sex and marriage, two realities of life where the male has the initiative”; Luke, “Koranic Recension”, 393. A simpler explanation for Tatian’s reading may be the common notion that men are the active partners in sexual activities. Note, for example, that on several occasions the Peshitta to the Old Testament attributes the sexual act to men, where in the Hebrew it was attributed to women (Genesis 19:8; Numbers 31:17; Judges 11:39 and 21:11); see Quecke, “Lk 1,34 in den alten Übersetzungen”, 508-509. Alternatively, one might assume that the *Diatessaron* variant resulted from a scribal error at some stage of the transmission. The difference between a reading equivalent to the Greek and that of Tatian is only one small squiggle in the Syriac script: in the Peshitta which reflects the Greek we read “*gabrā lā ḥkim* (ܡܚܪܝܩ) *li*” versus “*gabrā lā ḥkam/ḥākem* (ܡܚܪܝܩ) *li*”. Be the source of the variant as it may, this is an example of how knowledge of Tatian’s Encratism induced scholars to find fanciful traces of it in his *Diatessaron*.

under the influence of perceptions of male activity and female passivity; but in tandem with the change in tense, it makes for a stronger argument.¹⁷⁷

More recently Jan Van Reeth has argued, unaware of Bowman and Luke, that the Quran intentionally refers to the *Diatessaron* in order to underline the unity of the evangelical message.¹⁷⁸ He adduces several passages in which he finds textual links between the Quran and the *Diatessaron*. Interestingly, like Luke's example many of them concern the verses describing the Annunciation. The significance of the parallels he notes is, however, unclear, and at times there is no real similarity between the texts he cites.¹⁷⁹ In other instances the resemblance does exist, though the Diatessaronic reading is based only on one late Western witness and is thus precarious. Finally, some of the parallels could have arisen independently.

An illustration of the last two problems is found in the comparison Van Reeth draws between Q 3:42 ("And when the angels said: 'Mary, God has chosen you, and purified you; He has chosen you [*iṣṭafāki*] above all women of the world [*al-'ālamīna*]'") and the Liège *Diatessaron* for Luke 1:28 ("...thou art blessed above the women of the earth"). Whereas other witnesses add "Blessed are you among women" to Luke 1:28, the additional words "of the earth" are found only in the thirteenth-century Middle Dutch Liège Harmony. The absence of this phrase in the lemma in Ephrem's *Commentary* as well as in other versions of the *Diatessaron* suggests that this is not an original reading. Moreover, in drawing this comparison, Van Reeth ignores both the role the word *al-'ālamīna* fulfills in supplying the rhyme for the verse and the occurrence of the exact same structure a few verses earlier: "God chose (*iṣṭafā*) Adam and Noah and the House of

¹⁷⁷ In other verses in which *m-s-s* in the first form is used to denote sexual activity the actors are always men; Q 2:236-237 and Q 33:49 ("*tamassūhunna*"). Women are ascribed an active role in only in the reciprocal sixth form; Q 58:3-4 ("*yatamāssā*").

¹⁷⁸ Van Reeth, "L'Évangile du Prophète", 155-174.

¹⁷⁹ Such is the case with Q 48:29 and the Arabic and middle-Dutch *Diatessaron* which cite Mark 4:26-27 immediately after Matthew 13:23; Van Reeth, "L'Évangile du Prophète", 161-62.

Abraham and the House of Imran above all beings (*al- 'ālamīna*)” (Q 3:33). This is not to say that all the examples given by Van Reeth are of no importance, only that none are unique enough to have resolved the issue. Though intriguing, such variations must remain by nature inconclusive as far as determining a direct literary relationship is concerned.

In contrast to the meager parallels offered by the *Diatessaron*, the material examined in this dissertation derives from long retellings of Biblical narratives which offer much more than the seemingly random addition of a word or turn of phrase.

3.2.4. Erwin Gräf and speculative reading of the Quran

Erwin Gräf (1914-1976) wrote primarily on Islamic law, covering topics such as judicial organization and jurisdiction, capital punishment, hunting and animal slaughter, prisoners of war, and the system of justice among Bedouin in present-day Arabia.¹⁸⁰ Outside the realm of law, he dedicated one study to Christian influences on the Quran and highlighted two genres of Syriac literature which might provide parallels for the Quran, liturgical texts and homilies.¹⁸¹ Gräf argued that Muhammad was more likely to have been informed by laymen than by theologians, and that the laity would have acquired its knowledge of Christianity primarily from baptismal instruction and participation in worship at the church.¹⁸² As a result one cannot expect the Quran’s knowledge of Christianity to be accurate.

Though Gräf’s premises seem sound, the parallels he manages to cull from liturgical and homiletic texts are not all that impressive.¹⁸³ Thus, for example, he notes

¹⁸⁰ R. Paret, *The Study of Arabic and Islam at German Universities: German Orientalists since Theodor Nöldeke* (Wiesbaden, 1968), 58.

¹⁸¹ Gräf, “Zu den christlichen Einflüssen im Koran”, 111-44.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 112-13. See also his summary: “Wenn wir also nach Parallelen suchen, sollten wir uns nicht in erster Linie direct an Bibel, Apokryphen etc. halten, sondern an die liturgische und auch die homiletische (exegetische) Literatur, die das damalige kirchliche Leben illustriert, und an die Art, wie sie die kanonischen Texte nutzt”; *ibid.*, 133.

¹⁸³ See the comment in Böwering, “Recent Research on the Construction of the Qur’ān”, 87, note 60 (“small harvest”).

two parallels between Aphrahat and the Quran, namely a similar understanding of Christ,¹⁸⁴ and a religious interest in the Byzantine-Sassanian conflict;¹⁸⁵ but neither is especially strong. In a hymn attributed to Rabbula where the burning bush is likened to Mary the mother of Jesus, Gräf finds the solution for the Quran's conflation of the two Maryams.¹⁸⁶ Though he is right to seek the answer in the Christian typological reading of the Old Testament, much stronger parallels which explicitly link the two Maryams can be adduced.¹⁸⁷ Perhaps most interesting and worthy of further study is Gräf's observation concerning the similarity between the "sign (*āyāt*) passages" of the Quran and the frequent use of proofs from nature in Eastern Christian liturgy.¹⁸⁸

Here, however, I wish to focus on the example to which Gräf devotes most of his article: Q 74:1-7:

¹⁸⁴ Gräf, "Zu den christlichen Einflüssen im Koran", 113-14. Gräf focuses on the famous but unclear assertion *wa-lākin shubbiha lahum* (Q 4:157). This phrase has attracted much attention from Western scholars who have tried to make sense of it by searching for some heretical group which either denied the crucifixion or might at least have been understood in such a manner. Gräf's solution is to read the phrase in light of Philippians 2:7 and later formulations in Aphrahat. The link with Philippians 2:7 is not new (see E. F. F. Bishop, "Shubbiha Lahum: A Suggestion from the New Testament", *The Muslim World* 30 [1940]: 67-75), convincing, or uniquely Syriac for that matter. For recent treatments of Q 4:157, see T. Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford, 2009), and G. S. Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?" *BSOAS* 72 (2009): 237-58. The link between Aphrahat's concept of Jesus as a prophet and other verses in the Quran which treat Jesus as a mortal seems more promising. For Aphrahat as a subordinationist, see W. L. Petersen, "The Christology of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage: An Excursus on the 17th 'Demonstration'", *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 241-56.

¹⁸⁵ Gräf, "Zu den christlichen Einflüssen im Koran", 114. Gräf compares the beginning of Q 30 with Aphrahat's fifth demonstration, a recent study of which is found in C. E. Morrison, "The Reception of the Book of Daniel in Aphrahat's Fifth Demonstration, 'On Wars'", *Hugoye* 7 (2004). Writing in 337 CE when, as a result of Constantine's adoption of Christianity, the Sasanians began to view their Christian population as a fifth column, Aphrahat seeks to reassure his audience that the Romans could not lose and would prevail. In Q 30:2-5 we read: "The Byzantines have been vanquished in the nearer part of the land; and, after their vanquishing, they shall be the victors in a few years. To God belongs the Command before and after, and on that day the believers shall rejoice in God's help; God helps whomsoever He will; and He is the All-mighty, the All-compassionate". The comparison of the two texts is somewhat problematic since presumably Q 30 reflects more current seventh-century events (note that Aphrahat makes no mention of Rome's defeat). For an attempt to read these verses in light of a contemporary Syriac source, see van Bladel, "The *Alexander Legend* in the Qur'ān 18:83-102", 191. It should also be noted that rabbinic sources too displayed an interest in the outcome of the struggle between Rome and Persia; see BT *Yoma* 10a. I am indebted to Patricia Crone for bringing this last reference to my attention.

¹⁸⁶ Gräf, "Zu den christlichen Einflüssen im Koran", 117-18. This comparison can be found elsewhere as well.

¹⁸⁷ For more compelling parallels, see Marx, "Glimpses of a Mariology in the Qur'an".

¹⁸⁸ Gräf, "Zu den christlichen Einflüssen im Koran", 118-23.

“(1) O you shrouded [in your mantle] (*muddaththir*), (2) arise, and warn! (3) Your Lord magnify (4) Your robes purify (5) and defilement flee! (6) Give not, thinking to gain greater (7) and be patient unto your Lord”.

Traditionally these cryptic verses are treated as an early, if not the earliest, revelation to Muhammad, and have attracted much attention. Many Western scholars assume that the passage reflects the pre-Islamic practice of the *kāhins* receiving revelation while wrapped in a mantle, but the traditional interpretations also deserve consideration.¹⁸⁹ Gräf reads these verses as referring to baptismal rites, understanding the garments as those lost on account of sin and regained in baptism.¹⁹⁰ This is extremely speculative, there being no mention in these verses of immersion in water. This sort of argument reflects a tendency to read into the Quran Christian notions even when there is little evidence to support such a reading.¹⁹¹

In the course of this study I will seek to demonstrate that though Gräf’s examples of parallels from liturgical and homiletic texts are not compelling, his basic insight regarding these genres was sound.

3.2.5. Christoph Luxenberg and the use of texts

The author who writes under the pseudonym of Christoph Luxenberg makes a series of sensational claims: that the Quran was written in an “Aramaic-Arabic hybrid language” which was spoken in Mecca at the time; that the text was first transmitted in writing without a reliable oral tradition accompanying it; that later Arabs misinterpreted

¹⁸⁹ See U. Rubin, “The Shrouded Messenger: On the Interpretation of *al-Muzzammil* and *al-Muddaththir*”, *JSAI* 16 (1993): 96–107.

¹⁹⁰ Gräf, “Zu den christlichen Einflüssen im Koran”, 123-33. For a similar reading, see H. Suermann, “Die syrische Liturgie im Syrisch-palästinensischen Raum in vor- und frühislamischer Zeit”, in T. Nagel (ed.), *Der Koran und sein religiöses und Kulturelles Umfeld* (Munich, 2010), 168, note 50.

¹⁹¹ A recent example of this tendency is found in S. Khalil Samir, “The Theological Christian Influence on the Qur’ān: A Reflection”, in *QHC*, 141-62.

and distorted the text, reading it as pure Arabic and often misunderstanding its defective script; and finally that Syriac lexicography holds the key to deciphering the Quran.¹⁹² The bulk of his book is dedicated to re-readings of various passages in the Quran.

The many flaws of Luxenberg's Syriac reading of the Quran are by now widely noted.¹⁹³ Reviewers have stressed the faulty methodology, circular argumentation, "wayward philology", errors in both Arabic and Syriac, lack of historical context, mistaken assumptions regarding the socio-linguistic setting, and lack of familiarity with secondary literature. These criticisms need not be repeated here. Two points are nonetheless noteworthy. First, although Luxenberg's major hypothesis is clearly wrong, this does not mean that all his individual emendations and new readings should be disregarded without inspection. It seems sounder to examine each suggestion on a case-by-case basis. Luxenberg casts his net extremely widely, and even if he is often misguided, he might catch a fish every now and then.¹⁹⁴

Second, it is surprising that despite his investment in the Syriac background of the Quran, Luxenberg limits his study to pseudo-philological guesswork based on

¹⁹² See the summary in Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 326-33.

¹⁹³ A substantial number of reviews have appeared. Aside from a few positive ones most were scathing or at least highly critical. Positive reviews include those of G. S. Reynolds (*Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 3 [2001]: 198-201); C. Gilliot (*Arabica* 50 [2003]: 381-93 and in several subsequent publications); and especially R. R. Phenix and C. B. Horn (*Hugoye* 6.1 [2003]: "Not in the history of commentary on the Qur'an has a work like this been produced"). For scathing reviews see those of F. De Blois (*Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5 [2003]: 92-97: "His book is not a work of scholarship but of dilettantism"); S. Hopkins (*JSAT* 29 [2003]: 377-80); the remarks in A. Neuwirth, "Qur'an and History – a Disputed Relationship: Some Reflections on Qur'anic History and History in the Qur'an", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5 (2003): 8-10; and Saleh, "The Etymological Fallacy and Qur'anic Studies", 670-94. Highly critical, though open to some of the suggestions are F. Corriente (*Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 1 [2003]: 305-14); D. Stewart, "Notes on Medieval and Modern Emendations of the Qur'an", in *QHC*, 225-48; and D. King, "A Christian Qur'an? A Study in the Syriac Background to the Language of the Qur'an as Presented in the Work of Christoph Luxenberg", *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 3 (2009): 44-75, where many of the earlier reviews are briefly summarized.

¹⁹⁴ The following is an example of a valid observation made by Luxenberg. In discussing the Quranic orthography of Syriac loanwords, he assumes that Arabic *junāh* ("sin, crime") reflects Syriac *gunhā*; Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 206, note 272. Though the common derivation is from Persian *gunāh* (see *FV*, 102-103, where it is stated that the word is not found in Syriac), Luxenberg seems to be on to something here. First, the Persian derivation cannot explain the shift from *h* to *ḥ*. Second, though it is not the basic meaning of Syriac *gunhā*, the word also carries the meaning of "crime"; see R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford, 1879-1901), 1:752. It is likely that the Syriac and Persian were conflated in pre-Islamic Syriac and that the Arabic word reflects this conflation.

dictionaries, and shows hardly any interest in examining Syriac textual parallels to the Quran.

The major Syriac sources cited by Luxenberg are Payne Smith's *Thesaurus Syriacus*, which itself incorporates the comments of the tenth-century lexicographers Bar Bahlūl and Bar 'Alī, Carl Brockelmann's *Lexicon Syriacum*, and Eugene Manna's *Chaldean-Arabic Dictionary*. Only one text of Ephrem is cited independently of the lexica, and this is a text already discussed by Andrae and Beck (*Hymns on Paradise* 7.18).¹⁹⁵ Jacob of Serugh is cited once from the *Thesaurus*,¹⁹⁶ Narsai does not appear at all, and so forth. There is no mention of the rich hymnographic tradition in Syriac. In a few instances the Bible is cited, but then again not always in Syriac and not as part of a careful comparison.

In what follows I will examine one example where a suggestion of Luxenberg's makes sense, though the argument could have been stronger had he worked with texts rather than dictionaries. In discussing the dietary restrictions imposed on the Jews, Q 6:146 states "... and of oxen and sheep We have forbidden them the fat of them, save what their backs carry, or their entrails (*al-ḥawāyā*), or what is mingled with bone...". Though *ḥawāyā* occurs only once in the Quran, the classical exegetes agree that it refers to the intestines.¹⁹⁷ Luxenberg, on the other hand, cites Rudi Paret, who considered the meaning of the term uncertain,¹⁹⁸ and by changing one diacritic mark emends the word to *al-jawāyā* or *al-jawwāyē* to reflect Syriac *gwāyā* ("intestine").¹⁹⁹ In his recent review of

¹⁹⁵ Luxenberg refers to this text several times. See especially Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 258. See also *ibid.*, 102-103, where Ephrem is cited from the *Thesaurus*.

¹⁹⁶ Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 162.

¹⁹⁷ The only other word in the Quran from this root, *aḥwā*, "of grayish color", (Q 87:5) is unrelated.

¹⁹⁸ Paret, *Kommentar*, 154. Paret does not expand on this ("Die Deutung des Ausdrucks *ḥawāyā* ist nicht sicher"). The problem he sees may be the lexical meaning of the word as it is for Luxenberg, but it may also be the syntax, i.e. whether the entrails and "what is mingled with bone" are to be understood as part of the exception or as part of the rule; see, e.g., the discussion in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīr al-Kabīr*, 13:223-24.

¹⁹⁹ Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*, 45-46. I ignore here Luxenberg's theory that the final *alif* denotes an *ē* and that the word therefore reflects the Syriac plural form.

Luxenberg's book, King views this suggestion favorably,²⁰⁰ and indeed it seems plausible if not necessary.

But Luxenberg (and King) might have made a stronger case had he examined the text which the Quran seems to reflect here, i.e. Leviticus 7:22-25, which runs as follows:

(22) The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: (23) "Speak to the people of Israel, saying: 'You shall eat no fat of ox or sheep or goat. (24) The fat of an animal that died or was torn by wild animals may be put to any use, except that you must not eat it. (25) If any one of you eats the fat from an animal of which an offering by fire may be made to the Lord, you who eat it shall be cut off from your kin'".²⁰¹

Though the language may seem categorical, it is likely that the rabbis were correct in understanding the prohibition as limited to those fats which are offered on the altar (with the exception of the tail fat [*alyah*]), the rationale being that those fats belong to God and are therefore off limits for humans. These fats are enumerated several times, one example being Leviticus 7:3-4 (describing the guilt offering):

(3) All its fat shall be offered: the broad tail, the fat that covers the entrails, (4) the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which shall be removed with the kidneys.²⁰²

Q 6:146 evidently ultimately reflects the verses in Leviticus, as can be seen from the limitation of the fat ban only to oxen and sheep as well as from the specific reference to the entrails in both texts.

²⁰⁰ King, "A Christian Qur'an", 47.

²⁰¹ See also Leviticus 3:17 ("It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, in all your settlements: you must not eat any fat or any blood").

²⁰² See also Leviticus 3 throughout.

This last point, however, is somewhat problematic in that the two texts seem to contradict each other regarding the permissibility of intestinal fat. Whereas in Leviticus it is clearly forbidden, the plain meaning of Q 6:146 seems to be that it is not: "... and of oxen and sheep We have forbidden them the fat of them, save what their backs carry, or their entrails (*al-ḥawāyā*), or what is mingled with bone...". Unless one stretches the Arabic and argues, as indeed some have, that the words "or their entrails" etc. go back to "the fat of them" and thus denote forbidden fats, the natural reading would be that these words form part of the exception from the prohibition. The verse then states that the fat on the backs, on the intestines, and that mingled with bone, are all permissible, and thus stands in opposition to Leviticus and Jewish law.

Scholars have dealt with the contradiction either by assuming a misunderstanding on the Quran's part or by stretching the Arabic to fit Leviticus.²⁰³ Be the exact relationship between the texts as it may, they are undeniably closely related. It is, therefore, worthwhile to examine whether the wording of Leviticus may shed light on *ḥawāyā*.

The Hebrew for entrails is entirely unrelated, *qereb*. The Jewish Aramaic targums, however, render this with גוא/גווא (*gawwā*, see, for example, Onqelos and Pseudo-Jonathan on Leviticus 7:3).²⁰⁴ This is close to Luxenberg's reconstruction, though not identical. For the exact equivalent we need to turn to the Peshitta where we find ܠܘܘܐ (*gwāyā*). Thus Luxenberg's hypothetical emendation is now well supported with a parallel Syriac text.

²⁰³ For the first approach, see E. Gräf, *Jagdbeute und Schlachtthier im Islamischen Recht* (Bonn, 1959), 44, and more recently and with a better understanding of Jewish law, Z. Maghen, *After Hardship Cometh Ease: The Jews as Backdrop for Muslim Moderation* (Berlin, 2006), 151-53, where an attempt is made to reconstruct how the mistake came about. For the second approach, see U. Rubin, *The Qur'ān* (Tel Aviv, 2005), 120 in the note to v. 146 (in Hebrew).

²⁰⁴ Neofiti has כרסה.

That Q 6:146 reflects a Christian report on Jewish dietary laws is in fact utterly unsurprising, in that the very end of the verse declares these laws to be a punishment for the Jews' misbehavior (“[...] that We recompensed them for their insolence...”), a well known Christian theme.²⁰⁵

To conclude, one of the many flaws of the work of Luxenberg lies in his neglecting to examine actual Syriac texts, even when these deal with the same subject-matter as the Quran, and might lend support to some of his theories. In this dissertation, on the other hand, I shall examine Syriac and Quranic retellings of the same stories to see whether they are related.

3.2.6. The recent textual studies of Griffith and van Bladel²⁰⁶

In two important contributions Sidney Griffith suggests a methodology for identifying lexical and thematic Syriacisms in the Quran and then demonstrates it with two examples.²⁰⁷ The first is a discussion of Q 5:73 where Christians are rebuked for saying: “God is the third of three (*thālithu thalāthatin*)”. The second is a fascinating study of the story of the “Companions of the Cave” (Q 18:9-26) in light of earlier Syriac accounts, especially the liturgical homily of Jacob of Serugh. Griffith highlights the ways in which the Quran adapted and Islamicized these accounts using familiar Quranic themes and language.

Griffith begins both articles by offering a short survey of the field. His very first sentence in his article on the “Companions of the Cave” narrative is worth quoting as it highlights the importance of a literary genre which will play a large role in this dissertation:

²⁰⁵ For more on the law as punishment, see in the conclusions to the dissertation, chapter 8.3.

²⁰⁶ I have treated these studies in a slightly shorter fashion in a book review which appeared in *JAOS* 129 (2009).

²⁰⁷ Griffith, “Syriacisms in the ‘Arabic Qur’ān””; *id.*, “Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur’ān”.

It is something of a truism among scholars of Syriac to say that the more deeply one is familiar with the works of the major writers of the classical period, especially the composers of liturgically significant, homiletic texts such as those written by Ephraem the Syrian (c.306-373), Narsai of Edessa and Nisibis (c.399-502), or Jacob of Sarug (c.451-521), the more one hears echoes of many of their standard themes and characteristic turns of phrase at various points in the discourse of the Arabic Qur'ān.²⁰⁸

The studies devoted to such matters are, however, not without their difficulties, since Quran scholars seldom have “more than a philological grasp of Syriac and almost no first-hand acquaintance with the classical literature of the language”, while scholars of Syriac have a largely grammatical and lexical grasp of Arabic and “are often not at all familiar with Qur'ānic or other early Islamic literature”.²⁰⁹

Without it detracting from the significance of Griffith's contributions, I would like to note a few minor reservations concerning some proposed Syriacisms. Griffith argues that the Arabic phrase *thālithu thalāthatin* (Q 5:73) is awkward and reflects the Syriac epithet for Christ, *tlitāyā*.²¹⁰ In fact there is nothing odd about this structure, which is attested not only in the books of grammar but also in the Quran itself (compare *thāniya thnayni* in Q 9:40). Later Griffith notes that Arabic *aṣḥāb* (Q 18:9) may be considered an apt translation of Syriac *ḥabrē*,²¹¹ although the Arabic phrase does not in fact allude to the friendship between the youths as does the Syriac, but rather categorizes them as the “people of the cave” (compare *aṣḥāb al-kaḥf* to *aṣḥāb al-jaḥīm* or *aṣḥāb al-janna*, for

²⁰⁸ Griffith, “Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān”, 109. Note that Griffith widens the scope and refers to authors from the fifth and sixth centuries.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

²¹⁰ Griffith, “Syriacisms in the ‘Arabic Qur'ān’”, 100*-108*. This argument is repeated in shorter form in *id.*, “Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān”, 115.

²¹¹ Griffith, “Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān”, 125.

example), with no stress on their friendship.²¹² Likewise, the suggestion that *raqīm* (Q 18:9) understood as “inscription” or “writing” reflects an import of a Syriac form seems unnecessary, since the Arabic *fa’īl* usually has a passive sense when derived from transitive verbs.²¹³

Griffith’s article should be read together with that of Kevin van Bladel which examines the Syriac background of another story in the same Sura. In this learned and intriguing study, van Bladel argues that the story of Dhū l-Qarnayn (Q 18:83-102) is a retelling of the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, itself dated in recent scholarship to 629 or 630 CE. This raises the question whether a text composed in northern Mesopotamia at such a late date could have “become relevant enough to the followers of Muḥammad to warrant a Qur’ānic pronouncement upon it”.²¹⁴ Van Bladel suggests that indeed it could.

This is a fine textual and literary analysis. A minor quibble is that in comparing the texts, van Bladel slightly exaggerates their similarity. For example, in describing the events that led to the building of the great wall against the Huns according to the Syriac text, he writes: “Alexander asks the locals if they want a favor, and they answer that they would follow his command... Together they accomplish the task with the help of the Egyptian metalworkers. This account matches Q 18:92-98... in precise detail”.²¹⁵ Q 18:94-96 indeed contains a conversation between Dhū l-Qarnayn and the locals in which he agrees to build a wall for them and asks them for assistance, but in the Syriac text Alexander addresses his troops rather than the locals, who seem to play no part in the construction.²¹⁶ In the same manner, van Bladel rightly notes the parallel between the repeated phrase *atba’a sababan* in Q 18, understanding it as “he followed a heavenly

²¹² For this use of *ṣāhib*, see W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (Cambridge, 1977), 2:203.

²¹³ Griffith, “Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur’ān”, 126-27. For the common passive sense of *fa’īl*, see Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 1:136.

²¹⁴ Van Bladel, “The *Alexander Legend* in the Qur’ān 18:83-102”, 190.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 179-80.

²¹⁶ E. A. Wallis Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great, being the Syriac Version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes* (Cambridge, 1889), text 267, trans. 153.

course”, and the description in the Syriac *Alexander Legend* of the window of heaven through which the sun enters when it sets. Nonetheless, the comparison is taken too far when van Bladel translates a passage from the *Alexander Legend* as follows: “And when the sun entered the window of heaven, he (Alexander) immediately bowed down and made obeisance before God his Creator, and he traveled and descended the whole night in the heavens, until at length he came and found himself where it (the sun) rises. He saw the land of the setting sun and found a mountain where he descended, named Great Mûsās, and they (the troops) descended and arrived with him. And they went forth to mount Qlāwdiyâ (Claudia)”.²¹⁷ This gives the impression that Alexander traveled from West to East passing through a heavenly course. In fact, according to a more accurate understanding of this passage, only the sun’s journey is mentioned: “And when the sun enters the window of heaven, it immediately bows down and makes obeisance before God its creator, and it travels and descends the whole night in the heavens, until at length it comes and finds itself where it rises. Alexander looked towards the West and found a mountain that descends, named Great Musās, and they [Alexander and his troops] descended along it, arrived, and went forth to mount Qlāwdiyā”.²¹⁸

A few interesting parallels between the studies of Griffith and van Bladel are noteworthy. Both challenge or at least raise doubts about the traditional dating of their respective portions of Q 18 to the Meccan period. In addition, both consider transmission of the stories via Arabic-speaking Monophysites to be likely. On a methodological level, both not only focus on the correspondences between the Syriac texts and the Quran, but also note how the latter omitted overtly Christian themes and adapted the stories to its general outlook.

²¹⁷ Van Bladel, “The *Alexander Legend* in the Qur’ān 18:83-102”, 198, note 12.

²¹⁸ ET slightly modified from Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great*, text 260, trans. 148. That this is a more accurate translation is suggested both by the position of the nouns “sun” and “Alexander” as well as by the use of participles indicating a recurring action to describe the journey through the window of heaven.

Building on the contributions of Griffith and van Bladel, one could further develop this last line of enquiry towards a study of how the Quran molds and reshapes its sources. Griffith and van Bladel do not treat all the details in which the Quran diverges from the Syriac texts, though at times these are instructive. In the first story, for example, when the youths awake they question each other as to how long they have slept. They waver between assuming that only “a day or part of a day” has passed and saying that the Lord knows best (Q 18:19). This discussion seems to imply that already then they suspected that something unusual had taken place. This discussion has no parallel in the Syriac accounts, but is reminiscent of verses such as Q 2:259,²¹⁹ and Q 23:112-14 which use the same formulaic language. A similar example is found in the second story. Here the locals offer a tribute (*kharjan*) to Dhū l-Qarnayn in return for his building a barrier. He rejects the payment saying: “That wherein my Lord has established me is better”; instead he asks for their help in the construction (Q 18:94-95). The tribute and its rejection have no precedent in the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, but seem to reflect the common Quranic theme that prophets generally, and Muhammad especially, ask for no reward in return for their services. Interestingly, the only other occurrence of the word *kharj* in the Quran is with regard to the Prophet: “Or do you ask them for any tribute (*kharjan*)? But the tribute of your Lord is better and He is the best of providers” (Q 23:72).²²⁰

All in all the articles by Griffith and van Bladel are model studies of the Quran’s reworking of Syriac traditions. In many ways this dissertation follows in their footsteps, with one major difference: it analyses Quranic retellings of Hebrew Bible narratives. As a

²¹⁹ Cf. the story of Abimelech in *4 Baruch* 5 and the story of Hōni in the two *Talmuds* (PT *Ta’anit* 66d and BT *Ta’anit* 23a).

²²⁰ See also Q 27:35-36, where the Queen of Sheba sends Solomon a present which he rejects, saying: “But what God has given me is better than what He has given you”. This theme is found neither in the Biblical account nor in the Jewish version of the story closest to the Quran, in *The Targum Sheni on Esther* 1:2.

result a much wider set of sources has to be taken into consideration and the alternative Jewish transmission has constantly to be kept in mind.

3.2.7. Reynolds and the Quran as homily

In a recent book Gabriel Reynolds argues for understanding the Quran as a homiletic text. Though he stresses that his work “is not an investigation into the sources of the Qur’ān”,²²¹ a large part of his project touches on this very issue. Reynolds examines thirteen case studies, seven of which concern Hebrew Bible themes.²²² These case studies reflect both the conclusions of previous scholarship as well as original contributions, and include several observations concerning the affinity between the Quran and the Syriac tradition.

Following previous scholarship Reynolds notes the affinity between the vocabulary of the Quran and Christian, mostly Syriac, usage, and emphasizes the Quranic echoes of Christian anti-Jewish rhetoric. In fact Reynolds states that “the Qur’ān generally reflects Christian traditions”.²²³ In support of this claim he notes the exclusively Christian accounts of the sleepers of the cave and Alexander, and adds that “when an account is common to both Jewish and Christian tradition... the Qur’ān is generally concerned with the Christian rendition thereof”. The examples (the angelic prostration before Adam and Satan’s role in leading Adam astray) are, however, the very same two

²²¹ Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 35. See also *ibid.*, 36: “The key, then, is not what sources entered into the Qur’ān, but rather the nature of the relationship between the Qur’ānic text and its Jewish and Christian subtext”.

²²² These include: the prostration of the angels before Adam, the outcast Satan, Adam and feathers, Abraham the Gentile monotheist, the laughter of Abraham’s wife, Haman and the tower to heaven, and Jonah and his people.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 246. Reynolds adduces Grünbaum as making this point, though it seems that the latter only posited Christian transmission in a few Quranic instances and generally believed that the Quran reflects Jewish traditions. The sentence cited by Reynolds (“Die syrischen Legenden, die sich alle auf die Bibel beziehen, haben mehr aus Judentum aufgenommen als die arabischen, deren manche übrigens syrischen Ursprungs sind”; M. Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sagenkunde* [Leiden, 1893], 54) only means that some of the Arabic legends originate in the Syriac traditions. The sentence occurs in a paragraph which starts by affirming the Jewish origin of some of the Arabic legends.

instances which Geiger already recognized as exceptions to the rule of Jewish origin. Although I tend to share Reynolds' intuition, I believe that its substantiation requires the demonstration that Christian sources offer better elucidations of narratives which Geiger and his followers read in light of rabbinic texts.

I will not engage here in a detailed review of Reynolds' book, but will make do with a few comments on his last chapter, in which he argues that the Quran is a homiletic work. Reynolds adduces several aspects of the Quranic text in support of this contention, including its allusive character, its repetition of the same accounts several times in an inconsistent manner, its chronological "mistakes" (Haman in Pharaoh's court and so on), its use of rhyme, and its repeated claim that it expresses an old truth.

More specifically Reynolds compares the Quran to the Syriac metrical homilies known as *mēmre*. The Quran's rhyme performs a function similar to that of the meter in the Syriac homilies in that both facilitate chanting or recitation;²²⁴ the Quran and the Syriac homilies both contain invocations to the audience; they tend not to follow a clear chronology and often move freely between different topics; they frequently include anti-Jewish polemic and share a similar eschatological imagery.

Having noted these similarities, Reynolds adds that the Syriac metrical homilies "were particularly widespread in the period and in the context of Islam's origins".²²⁵ In this he follows Griffith's reasoning concerning the wide circulation of Jacob of Serugh's homilies among Arab Monophysites from among the Ghassānids and the Christians of Najrān.²²⁶

²²⁴ Reynolds also observes that the "classical Syriac homily, for example, is marked by an inconsistent rhyme (usually with a final *ā*, due to the common Syriac nominal form)"; Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 249. Lest this be misunderstood it should be stressed that the classical Syriac homily paid little attention to rhyme.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 253; and Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān", 121. Though this is more than likely, it should be noted that there is little evidence for the reception of Jacob's homilies among Arabic speakers. The one piece of hard evidence quoted by Griffith is Jacob's letter of consolation written to the Arab

Though his arguments seem to lead to a historical thesis concerning a link between the Quran and the Syriac homilies, Reynolds is quick to dispel such an impression: “But I do not mean to argue that Jacob is the source of the Qur’ān... Syriac homilies are not an antecedent to the Qur’ān, but rather a parallel body of religious literature”.²²⁷ One may suspect that Reynolds is torn between two scholarly paradigms. In the spirit of classical orientalist scholarship on the Quran he collects evidence for the traditions of which the Quran was aware; but, following more recent sensibilities, he is careful not to refer to them as sources. I do not myself share his discomfort on this point, and see no problem in principle in the attempt to reconstruct the sources from which the Quran derived its information concerning Biblical narratives.

As Reynolds presents it, his argument concerns the Quran’s genre. If the outcome of this argument is that the Quranic presentation of Biblical material is read as message-driven, rather than as an imperfect paraphrase of the original text, his point is well taken.²²⁸ Difficulties arise, however, if the comparison is stretched beyond this. There is, after all, a crucial distinction between the Quran and the homiletic texts. Whereas homilies never present themselves as divine revelation, the Quran claims this authority for itself again and again. This difference is of great consequence for the relationship to the Bible: while the homilies are by definition subordinate to the Biblical passages they comment on, the Quran evidently does not think of itself in such terms.²²⁹ Reynolds’ book is nonetheless an important contribution to the study of the Jewish and Christian subtext of the Quran.

Christians of Ḥimyar in the aftermath of the Jewish persecution under Dhū Nuwās; this was not, of course, a homily.

²²⁷ Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 253.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 245.

²²⁹ A similar criticism is voiced in D. King’s review of Reynolds’ book in *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 4 (2010): 87.

3.3. Conclusion

In this dissertation I follow in the footsteps of many of the studies mentioned in this chapter, attempting to avoid their pitfalls. I shall focus on the Christian, more precisely Syriac tradition, and the particular way I shall do so differs from that of most others in four ways. First, I will look at Hebrew Bible stories in the Quran. Scholars interested in the Jewish roots of the Quran used to take it for granted they must have been transmitted via Jews while those interested in Christian roots limited themselves to the study of the Gospel stories. This study will focus on four Hebrew Bible narratives and show that they too, in fact, were transmitted by Christians. Secondly, I shall study the material in terms of thematic, literary, lexical and typological correspondences, not just one of these, and also look at the function of the material in the Quran: what is the Messenger doing with the Christian tradition? Thirdly, I shall not ignore the Jewish material. Throughout I shall compare Jewish and Christian handling of the themes that reappear in the Quran to clinch their derivation, which is not always Christian: material of Jewish and Christian derivation often coexist within the same narrative. Where this is the case, I shall also attempt to explain why this is so. Fourthly, I shall not equate the Syriac tradition with Ephrem, as others have tended to do, but rather follow the Christian material right up to the fifth and sixth centuries, with special attention to Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) because of his date, his prolific output, and the influence he exerted over a wide circle.

4. Geiger, Adam, and the Syriac Satan

4.1. Introduction

In his seminal study devoted to the Jewish influence on Muhammad and the Quran, Geiger rarely considers the alternative of Christian transmission. Aware of course that in order to prove his point he must also look at the old Arabian tradition and Christianity, he nonetheless refrains from doing so. His justification is that such investigations would lead too far away from his subject, would require a much more exact treatment than his project would allow, and are rendered unnecessary by his evidence “so that on most points we can without them attain to a high degree of probability, practically sufficient for all scientific purposes”.¹

Geiger’s problematic assumptions are made manifest in the beginning of the chapter “Stories borrowed from Judaism”, the most extensive in the book. There he states categorically that these stories must have derived primarily from Jews since Christians “bestowed very little attention in those days on the Old Testament, but in their narratives kept to what is strictly Christian, viz., the events of the Life of Jesus, of His disciples and His followers, and of the multitude of subsequent Saints and wonder-workers, which afforded them abundant material for manifold embellishments”. Whereas the Jews were versed in even the minutest details of the Hebrew Bible, this is “an intimate knowledge with which we cannot credit the Christians”. Moreover, argues Geiger, “just those points in the Old Testament which were specially suited to the Christian teaching are found to be scarcely touched upon in the Quran; thus, for instance, the narrative of the transgression of the first human pair is not at all represented as a fall into sin, involving the entire corruption of human nature which must afterwards be redeemed, but rather Muhammad contents himself with the plain, simple narration of the fact. This may be taken as an

¹ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 29-30.

instance to prove that the narratives about persons mentioned in the Old Testament are almost all of Jewish origin...”²

Here Geiger sets forth three arguments all of which are erroneous or at least misleading. It is simply not true that Christians lacked interest in the Old Testament and its narratives. Neither is it correct that they did not have an intimate knowledge of its minute details. Finally, at times Christians expand Old Testament narratives without adding or stressing teachings unique to Christianity.

To illustrate this last point we may cite the recent work of James Davila.³ Questioning a common scholarly assumption that any Hebrew Bible pseudepigraphon which is not obviously Christian must be Jewish, Davila seeks to test this empirically by looking at what Christian authors actually did when they wrote about Old Testament topics. Examining a range of Christian texts in different genres, Davila demonstrates, *inter alia*, that Christians could write works that contained no – or at least very few and easily excisable – Christian signature features; that “Christians could be concerned primarily with exegetical issues rather than homiletic ones”; and that “some Christian works on the Old Testament drew frequently on Jewish exegesis”.⁴ His examples include homilies by John Chrysostom, who wrote about one hundred and fifty homilies or sermons on Old Testament topics (so much for the supposed Christian lack of interest in the Old Testament!); a sermon by Augustine (one of the fifty he dedicated to the Old Testament); entire portions of Ephrem’s Commentaries on Genesis and Exodus; the *Heptateuchos* of Pseudo-Cyprianus, a fifth-century Latin epic which paraphrases the Pentateuch, Joshua and Judges; and the *De Martyrio Maccabaeorum*, a Latin epic poem dating from the fourth to sixth centuries.

² Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 73-74.

³ J. R. Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other* (Leiden, 2005), 74-119. Davila builds on the earlier work of R. A. Kraft, “Setting the Stage and Framing Some Central Questions”, *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 32 (2001): 371-95.

⁴ Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha*, 76-77.

Reflecting on these sources, Davila notes: “Even in sermons... a Christian writer could concentrate virtually exclusively on retelling the story, explaining difficult points in the narrative, and deriving very basic and generic moral instruction from it”.⁵ No doubt other examples could be added, but the point should be clear. Geiger’s supposition does not adequately represent the character of Christian writing on the Old Testament. But it does not do justice to the Quran either. Can the Quran not adapt its sources and omit the themes which do not fit its worldview? Can it really be maintained that the Quran does not adopt Christian Biblical traditions in a selective manner?

Since Geiger did not look for Christian origins he found none, with two exceptions, both of which concern Adam: the legend of how God ordered the angels to bow down before Adam and how all complied except for Iblīs “bears unmistakable marks of Christian development”, as does, to a lesser extent, Satan’s involvement in the fall of Adam and Eve.⁶ So we find that the very story that Geiger adduced to prove the Jewish origin of Hebrew Bible retellings in the Quran, arguing from what it does not say, in fact reflects Christian influence in what it does say. This again suggests that Geiger’s reasoning is flawed.

This story of Adam’s fall is the subject of this chapter, in which I hope to demonstrate the degree to which the narrative follows the Christian Syriac tradition. What Geiger viewed as the single exception is, I would like to argue, in point of fact representative of many retellings of Hebrew Bible narratives in the Quran.

⁵ Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha*, 94.

⁶ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 77-79. Other elements which Geiger derives from Christianity are few and far between and include the following: the terms for Christian men of religion, *ruhban* and *qissāsūn*, are said to derive from Syriac (*ibid.*, 36); and the saying “[...] nor shall they enter Paradise until the camel passes through the eye of the needle...” (Q 7:40) “seems to be borrowed from Christianity” (*ibid.*, 52).

4.2. The Quranic accounts of the fall

The Quran relates the Adam story several times.⁷ Only three of these passages include the fall of the protoplasts, i.e the first humans, namely Q 2, Q7, and Q 20.

a) Q 2

(35) And We said: “O Adam, inhabit you and your wife the Garden, and eat thereof abundantly (*raghadan*) where you desire; but come not near (*wa-lā taqrabā*) this tree, lest you be of the evildoers”. (36) Then Satan caused them to slip therefrom (*fa-azallahumā ‘anhā*)⁸ and brought them out of what they were in; and We said: “Descend (*ihbiṭū*), each of you an enemy to each; and in the earth a sojourn shall be yours, and enjoyment for a time”. (37) Thereafter Adam received certain words (*kalimāt*) from his Lord, and He turned towards him; truly He is the Most-Relenting, the All-compassionate. (38) We said: “Descend from it, all together; and if there come to you guidance from Me, then whosoever follows My guidance, no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow. (39) As for the unbelievers who cry lies to Our signs, those shall be the inhabitants of the Fire, therein dwelling forever”.

b) Q 7

(19) “O Adam, inhabit you and your wife the Garden, and eat of where you desire, but come not near (*wa-lā taqrabā*) this tree, lest you be of the evildoers”. (20) Then Satan whispered to them, to reveal to them that which was hidden from them of their shameful parts. He said: “Your Lord has only prohibited you from this tree lest you become angels (*malakayni*), or lest you become of the immortals (*al-khālidīna*)”. (21) And he swore to

⁷ Q 2:30-39, Q 7:10-28, Q 15:26-48, Q 17-61-65, Q 18:50-51, Q 20:115-126, Q 38:67-85.

⁸ The variant reading of the consonantal skeleton attributed to Ḥamza al-Kūfī, *fa-azālahumā*, seems secondary; see discussion in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 1:560-61. Apart from Q 2:36, the root *z-l-l* occurs three times (Q 2:209, Q 3:155, and Q 16:94). In both Q 2:208-9 and Q 3:155 it is related to the actions of Satan. As we shall see, the language of slipping is used in Syriac sources with regard to Adam and Eve and Satan.

them: “Truly, I am of those who wish you well (*innī lakumā la-min al-nāṣihīna*)”. (22) So he led them on by delusion (*fa-dallāhumā bi-ghurūrin*);⁹ and when they tasted the tree (*dhāqā al-shajara*), their shameful parts became apparent to them, so they took to stitching upon themselves leaves of the Garden. And their Lord called to them (*wanādāhumā*): “Did I not prohibit you from this (*tilkumā*) tree, and say to you: ‘Verily Satan is for you a manifest foe?’” (23) They said: “Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us, and have mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the lost”.¹⁰ (24) Said He: “Descend, each of you an enemy to each; and in the earth a sojourn shall be yours, and enjoyment for a time”. (25) Said He: “Therein you shall live, and therein you shall die, and from there you shall be brought forth”.

c) Q 20

(115) And We made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot, and We found in him no constancy. (116) And when We said to the angels: “Bow down before Adam”; so they bowed down, save Iblīs; he refused. (117) Then We said: “Adam, surely this one is an enemy to you and your wife (*‘aduwwun laka wa-li-zawjika*). So let him not expel you both from the Garden, so that you become unprosperous (*fa-tashqā*). (118) It is assuredly given to you neither to hunger therein, nor to go naked (*ta’rā*), (119) neither to thirst therein, nor to suffer the sun”. (120) Then Satan whispered to him saying: “O Adam, shall I point you to the Tree of Immortality, and a Kingdom that decays not? (*hal adulluka ‘alā shajarati l-khuldi wa-mulkin lā yablā*)” (121) So the two of them ate (*fa-akalā*) of it, and their shameful parts became apparent to them so they took to stitching upon themselves leaves of the Garden. And Adam disobeyed his Lord, and so he erred. (122) Thereafter

⁹ The meaning of the verb *dallā* in this context is unclear; see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:908. As it stands its root is *d-l-w*. Noting the occurrence of *dalla* (“to direct”) in Q 20:120, Bell in his translation considered the emendation *fa-dallahumā*. A derivation from *d-l-l* was suggested already by Abū Manṣūr al-Azharī (d. 980), though without emending the text and with a different meaning (“emboldened”); see, for now, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 14:49, and Lane, *ibid*. One might also want to consider reading the word in light of *fa-azallahumā* in Q 2:36.

¹⁰ Q 11:47 uses almost identical language. Note also that God’s response in Q 11:48 opens with “O Noah descend...” and refers to God giving people enjoyment, as does Q 7:24.

his Lord chose him, and turned towards him, and He guided him. (123) Said He: “Descend (*ihbiṭā*) out of it, together, each of you an enemy to each; but if there come to you guidance from Me, then whosoever follows My guidance shall not go astray, neither shall he be unprosperous (*yashqā*); (124) but whosoever turns away from My remembrance (*wa-man a'raḍa 'an dhikrī*), his shall be a life of narrowness, and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him blind.’

The three accounts are different, yet similar enough for us to reject the idea that they developed independently. How then are the differences to be understood? A partial explanation is found in the fact that each account is formulated in a way that fits both the themes and the phraseology of its wider literary context.¹¹ This demonstrates that these Suras have at least some degree of coherence.

Of the three accounts Q 7 is closest to the Biblical account and its later Jewish and Christian embellishments, and it will be the focus of this study. But first let us examine the literary relationship between the three passages. How do they relate to each other?

¹¹ As for themes, the emphasis in Q 7:20 concerning Satan’s goal of divesting Adam and Eve of their clothes is repeated in Q 7:27 as part of an admonition to the children of Adam (i.e. humanity) to avoid the temptations of Satan. Specifically targeted is a presumably pagan practice of attending places of worship in the nude (Q 7:31). This was noted by Neuwirth (see articles cited below). As for phraseology, the following examples are noteworthy. 1) In Q 2:35 God permits Adam and Eve to eat from the Garden abundantly (*raghadan*). In Q 7:19 this adverb is missing. Compare with Q 2:58 which has *raghadan* and its parallel in Q 7:161 which does not. 2) The intriguing reference in Q 2:37 to words (*kalimāt*) which Adam received from God has a parallel in Q 2:124 where God tests Adam with words. 3) The ending of Q 2:38 (“no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow”) differs from that of Q 20:123 and is a phrase which occurs in Q 2:62, 112, 262, 274, and 277. In the rest of the Quran it occurs only in six verses (Q 3:170, Q 5:69, Q 6:48, Q 7:35, Q 10:62, and Q 46:13). 4) Satan’s reassurance that he wishes Adam and Eve well is unique to Q 7:21. The root *n-s-h* occurs thirteen times in the Quran, six of them in Q 7 (vv. 21, 62, 68, 79 [twice], 93). It is not found in Q 2 or Q 20. Compare the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* 18 (*OTP*, 2:279), cited in Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 69. 5) In a sentence unique to Q 7:22, we read that God called out to Adam and Eve (*nādāhumā*): “Did I not prohibit you from this (*tilkumā*) tree...” The same verb is used five more times in Q 7 (vv. 43, 44, 46, 48, and 50). In the other two Suras it is used only once (Q 2:171 and Q 20:11). More importantly, only in Q 7:22 and Q 7:43 do we find the variant forms of the demonstrative *tilkum(ā)*; in all other verses the form is *tilka*. 6) The reference to Adam’s forgetting in Q 20:115 is reminiscent of Q 20:52, 88, and 126; see discussion in N. Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation* (Wiesbaden, 2009), 89. 7) The verb *shaqiya* occurs twelve times in the Quran, three times in Q 20 (vv. 2, 117, and 123). It does not occur at all in Q 2 or Q 7. 8) Satan’s question “shall I point you to...” in Q 20:120 uses the same language that Moses’ sister uses in Q 20:40. Note that in both cases this question follows shortly after a reference to an enemy of two people (Q 20:117 and Q 20:39). 9) For “but whosoever turns away from My remembrance” in Q 20:124 compare Q 20:99-100.

The relationship between all the Quranic Adam accounts has been studied by Beck and Neuwirth using different approaches and arriving at different results.¹² Beck's article is primarily devoted to a close philological reading of the Iblīs and Adam stories with references to Syriac parallels. His main goal is to establish the literary relationship between the various Quranic passages. Neuwirth too is interested in this, but unlike Beck, she also examines the relationship of each account to the Sura in which it occurs, the meaning each account had for its first listeners, and the progress of the canonization process.¹³

The following table offers a synopsis of the parallel Arabic texts:¹⁴

| Q 2 | Q 20 | Q 7 |
|---|---|--|
| (35) وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ | (117) قُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ إِنَّ هَذَا عَدُوٌّ لَكَ وَلِزَوْجِكَ فَلَا تَخْرُجَنَّكُمَا مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ فَتَشْقَى (118) إِنَّ لَكَ أَلًا تَجُوعَ فِيهَا وَلَا تَعْرِى (119) وَأَنْتَ لَا تَظْمَأُ فِيهَا وَلَا تَصْحَى (120) فَوَسَّوَسَ إِلَيْهِ الشَّيْطَانُ قَالَ يَا آدَمُ هَلْ أَدُلُّكَ عَلَى شَجَرَةِ الْخُلْدِ وَمُلْكٍ لَّا يَبْلَى | (19) وَيَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ فَكُلَا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ (20) فَوَسَّوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُورِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوْآتِهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَن تَكُونَا مَلَكَتَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ (21) وَقَاسَمْتُهُمَا إِنِّي لَكُمَا لِمِمن النَّاصِحِينَ (22) فَدَلَّاهُمَا بِعُرْوَةٍ |
| (36) فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ | (121) فَأَكَلَا مِنْهَا فَبَدَتَ لَهُمَا سَوْآتُهُمَا | فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتَ لَهُمَا سَوْآتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا |

¹² E. Beck, "Iblis und Mensch, Satan und Adam: Der Werdegang einer koranischen Erzählung", *Le Muséon* 89 (1976): 195-244; A. Neuwirth, "Negotiating Justice: A Pre-Canonical Reading of the Qur'anic Creation Accounts (Part I)", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2.1 (2000): 25-41; *ead.*, "Negotiating Justice: A Pre-Canonical Reading of the Qur'anic Creation Accounts (Part II)", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2.2 (2000): 1-18; *ead.*, "Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory: The Qur'anic Path towards canonization as Reflected in the Anthropogonic Accounts", in A. Neuwirth and A. Pflitsch (eds.), *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies* (Beirut, 2001), 113-52. See also Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 86-96.

¹³ Neuwirth has the following to say about Beck's study: "The study by Beck... discusses the cosmogonic accounts elucidating them by extra-Qur'anic evidence. Its value as an analysis unfolding the 'development of a Qur'anic narrative' is, however, reduced by its obsolete literary approach which presents the Qur'ān as authored by Muhammad and depending directly on particular older religious texts, Jewish and Christian"; Neuwirth, "Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory", 126 note 36. In my opinion, this downplays Beck's philological contributions.

¹⁴ The table includes only the parallel parts in the accounts. Some verses before and after have been omitted in order to present the material in a more manageable fashion.

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ (37) فَتَلَمَّىٰ آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ (38) قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ (39) وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ</p> | <p>وَطَافًا يَخِصِّفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ وَعَصَىٰ آدَمُ رَبَّهُ فَغَوَىٰ (122) ثُمَّ اجْتَبَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ وَهَدَىٰ (123) قَالَ اهْبِطَا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ اتَّبَعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا يَضِلُّ وَلَا يَشْقَىٰ (124) وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَىٰ</p> | <p>يَخِصِّفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَمْ أَنْهَكُمَا عَن تِلْكَمَا الشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقُلْنَا لَكُمَا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ (23) قَالَآ رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنفُسَنَا وَإِن لَّمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ (24) قَالَ اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ (25) قَالَ فِيهَا تَحْيَوْنَ وَفِيهَا تَمُوتُونَ وَمِنْهَا تُخْرَجُونَ</p> |
|---|--|---|

Beck and Neuwirth agree that the account in Q 2 is the latest of the three and that it uses both Q 7 and Q 20. This is most evident in a glaring redundant repetition in Q 2:36 and 38:

(36) Then Satan caused them to slip therefrom and brought them out of that they were in; and We said: “Descend, each of you an enemy to each; and in the earth a sojourn shall be yours, and enjoyment for a time”. (37) Thereafter Adam received certain words from his Lord, and He turned towards him; truly He is the Most-Relenting, the All-compassionate. (38) We said: “Descend from it, all together; and if there come to you guidance from Me, then whosoever follows My guidance, no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow”.

Why does God repeat the order to fall? The exegetes offer several answers, all of which are artificial. According to the Mu‘tazilī al-Jubbā’ī (d. 915), the descent was in two

stages, from Paradise to the lower heaven and from the lower heaven to Earth.¹⁵ Another explanation cited by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is that the order was repeated for mere emphasis. Al-Rāzī offers yet another interpretation according to which the repetition was needed since Adam and Eve were under the wrong impression that they no longer needed to descend to Earth. The source of their mistake was the acceptance of their repentance which intervenes between the two commands (v. 37).¹⁶

The actual reason of the repetition becomes clear when we notice that the account in Q 2:35-39 is built on a combination of the accounts in Q 7:19-25 and Q 20:117-23.¹⁷ In those accounts the order “descend” occurs only once, in different language. Q 2 preserves both versions. The command in v. 36 is word for word that of Q 7:24, whereas the command in v. 38 is extremely close to Q 20:123.¹⁸ Compare the verses:

| Q 2:36 | Q 7:24 |
|--|--|
| <p>وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ</p> | <p>قَالَ اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ</p> |

| Q 2:38 | Q 20:123 |
|---|---|
| <p>قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِذَا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ</p> | <p>قَالَ اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ فَإِذَا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ اتَّبَعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا يَضِلُّ وَلَا يَشْقَىٰ</p> |

¹⁵ See D. Gimaret, *Une lecture mu'tazilite du Coran* (Louvain, 1994), 85.

¹⁶ All three explanations are found in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 3:26. For other explanations, see Ibn 'Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 1:131.

¹⁷ See Neuwirth, “Negotiating Justice (Part II)”, 12, where surprisingly the double command is not mentioned. Compare Q 2:35 with Q 7:19; the use of *akhrāja* in Q 2:36 and Q 20:117; the second part of Q 2:36 with Q 7:24; Q 2:37 with Q 20:122; and Q 2:38 with Q 20:123.

¹⁸ Cf. Beck, “Iblis und Mensch”, 242.

In the first set of verses the language is identical. In the second there are some departures, but not so many as to obscure the close similarity.¹⁹ One can only speculate why the latest version of the account wished to preserve both versions of the command. Perhaps conservative editorial practice was at play, though we note that in other instances the reworking was rather free. What is clear, however, is that of the three accounts Q 2 is the latest.²⁰

What about Q 7 and Q 20? Which came first? Here the scholars part ways. Whereas Beck believes Q 7 to be earlier, Neuwirth, following Nöldeke's dating of the Suras, thinks that the story in Q 7 presupposes that of Q 20.²¹ She finds an indication of this in a discrepancy between Q 7:19, where God orders Adam and Eve not to approach the tree, and Q 7:22, where after the sin God scolds them saying: "Did I not forbid this tree to you and did I not tell you that Satan is a manifest enemy of yours?" In truth God never said this in Q 7, but He did in Q 20:117! Therefore Q 7 relies on Q 20 here.²² Beck, on the other hand, interprets the same data in an opposite manner. According to him, Q 20 seeks to fill in the gap in Q 7.²³ Neither explanation is evidently superior. Moreover, neither argument is compelling given that the portrayal of Satan as a manifest enemy of mankind is a common Quranic theme and might be regarded as public knowledge understood to have been imparted by God.

¹⁹ Q 2:38 departs from Q 20:123 in five ways (underlined in the table). The following remarks are a partial explanation: 1) The omission of *ba'dukum li-ba'din 'aduwwun* resulted perhaps from the mention of the exact same phrase in v. 36. Repetition is fine but to a degree. 2) The verbal forms *ittaba'a* and *tabi'a* are interchangeable in meaning and differ in spelling only in an *alif*. 3) The ending of Q 2:38 both supplies a rhyme that fits the Sura and uses a formulaic phrase that, as we have already noted, is common in Q 2.

²⁰ Theoretically, one could argue that Q 2 was the earliest account and that Q 7 and Q 20 sought to improve it by omitting one of the commands. This, however, is a less economical explanation and seems highly unlikely.

²¹ Nöldeke places Q 20 in the second Meccan period and Q 7 in the third Meccan period; *GdQ*, 1:124-26 and 158-60. The traditional Islamic lists, on the other hand, usually place Q 7 before Q 20; *ibid.*, 1:59-61, and N. Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Washington, D.C., 2003), 69-72 (There was, however, an opinion attributed to Ibn 'Abbās that viewed Q 7 as Medinan and thus later than Q 20; cf. *GdQ*, 1:61). I should stress that in my analysis I do not address the relationship and chronology of the entire Suras, only of the accounts of Adam contained in them.

²² Neuwirth, "Negotiating Justice (Part II)", 8.

²³ Beck, "Iblis und Mensch", 236.

Beck offers other arguments for Q 7 being earlier than Q 20. First, Q 20 assumes two crucial facts without ever stating them: that Adam and Eve were placed in the garden and that God forbade them to approach the tree. These details are omitted in Q 20 since it assumes that they are already known from Q 7.²⁴

A second argument that Beck offers concerns the switching of person in Q 20 between the singular and the dual in referring to Adam (and Eve), where Q 7 is consistent in using the dual. This is most evident in the first part of Q 20:121, which in using the dual breaks with both the preceding verses (end of 117-20) and the following verses (end of 121-122). This is interesting since the part of the verse which breaks the pattern has an almost identical parallel in Q 7:22, a verse in a passage which consistently uses the dual. This suggests to Beck that the story in Q 20 is of an inconsistent and derivative nature.²⁵

A third indication to Beck of the derivative nature of the account in Q 20 concerns the tension between God's acceptance of Adam's repentance in Q 20:122 and Adam's expulsion in Q 20:123. There is no such tension in Q 7, where Adam and Eve ask for forgiveness (Q 7:23), and receive an answer in the form of an order to leave Paradise (Q 7:24). There it is never stated that God accepted their repentance before the expulsion.²⁶

²⁴ Beck, "Iblis und Mensch", 236 and 240. Beck's argument is problematic. Rather than relying on Q 7 concerning the prohibition, Q 20 seems to intentionally tell a slightly different story in which there was no prohibition of approaching the tree. Thus the initial warning in Q 20:117 alerts Adam to the danger of Satan with no mention of the tree (compare 7:19); in his whispering in Q 20:120 Satan has no need to explain away a prohibition that was never given (compare Q 7:20); and after the eating there is no rebuke for transgressing the Divine command (compare Q 7:22). In this Q 7 is clearly closer to the Biblical account than Q 20 is, and is, in my opinion, therefore earlier. In Q 20 the story is reworked in a way that drifts away from its Biblical origin.

²⁵ Beck, "Iblis und Mensch", 239.

²⁶ Beck, "Iblis und Mensch", 240-41. Genesis makes no mention of Adam repenting. Some sources understand God's question "where are you?" in Genesis 3:9 as granting Adam the opportunity to repent. Adam, however, chooses to blame Eve rather than confess; Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum*, 2.26; Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 7.8; and Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* 2.24-31. Some post-Biblical retellings do describe Adam's repentance, but this usually takes place outside Paradise long after the sin and there is no immediate acceptance on God's part; see *Genesis Rabba* 22.13 (Adam learns repentance from Cain), BT *Erubin* 18b, BT *Aboda Zara* 8a, *PRE* 20. In the Latin *Life of Adam and Eve* 4-8 Adam and Eve are led to repentance after searching for food outside Paradise for several days and finding none. The closest parallel to the Quran that I have found is in the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* 27-29, where after God orders the angels to cast Adam and Eve out of Paradise, Adam begs God's forgiveness, admitting his sin. God then tells the angels to continue driving Adam out and tells Adam that he is no longer allowed to be in Paradise. Adam then asks to eat from the Tree of Life before he is cast out and again God denies his request, adding

Beck finds a fourth indication that Q 20 is later in God’s command, “descend”. Whereas Q 7:24 (and Q 2:36 and 38) uses the plural *ihbiṭū*, Q 20:123 uses the dual *ihbiṭā*. To Beck this is an instance of overcorrection. Since the command is addressed to Adam and Eve one might expect the dual, but, as the continuation of the sentence in the plural shows, the real addressees are Adam and Eve’s descendants, i.e. humanity in its entirety. Therefore the plural form is the more original and the dual is an overcorrection which only adds to the confusion in person in Q 20.²⁷

My own inclination is to think that Beck is correct, though his arguments are not decisive. I would wish to add in his favor one argument, which, though speculative, may shed some light on the matter. Compare Q 7:20 with Q 20:120:

| Q 20:120 | Q 7:20 |
|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">فَوَسْوَسَ إِلَيْهِ الشَّيْطَانُ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">قَالَ يَا آدَمُ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">هَلْ أَدُلُّكَ عَلَى شَجَرَةِ الْخُلْدِ وَمُلْكٍ لَّا يَبْلَى</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">فَوَسْوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُورِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوْآتِهِمَا</p> <p style="text-align: center;">وَقَالَ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَكَتَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ</p> |

Whereas in Q 7 Satan claims that eating from the tree would turn Adam and Eve into angels (*malakayni* in the dual) and make them immortal (*min al-khālidīna*), in Q 20 he offers to show Adam the Tree of Immortality (*shajarat al-khuld*) and a dominion that

that if he guards himself from all evil outside Paradise he will be raised in the resurrection and will be given to eat from the Tree of Life. Adam receives God’s mercy only after he dies (33-37); *OTP*, 2:285 and 289-91. In light of the general affinity between the Quran and the *Life of Adam and Eve* it seems likely that Q 7 reflects the same sort of cool response to Adam’s plea for mercy. Somewhat parallel to Q 20, though most probably accidentally, is Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.23.5-6, where Adam’s hiding from God suggests his recognition of his sin; the wearing of fig-leaves demonstrates repentance; God’s granting of skin garments reflects mercy; and the expulsion is out of pity rather than envy. A collection of sources on Adam’s repentance is found in Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 73-77, and L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1909-39), 5:114-16, note 106.

²⁷ Beck, “Iblis und Mensch”, 241-42. The issue of the identity of the addressees of the command “descend” is more complicated than Beck indicates. He considers only two options: Adam and Eve versus the entirety of humanity, but Satan too might be one of those addressed. The reason to think that Satan is included here is the mention of enmity, which is reminiscent of the cursing of the serpent in Genesis 3:15 (“I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers...”). Beck explains that since evil men take the side of the Devil, the enmity motif can be transferred to describe relationships between humans, but another reading would be to assume that in this sentence Satan too is being addressed.

shall not perish (*mulk lā yablā*). In both verses Satan entices Adam with two promises: angelhood and immortality in Q 7:20, and immortality and dominion in Q 20:120. Though angelhood and dominion are very different concepts they are expressed by two words which include the consonants *m-l-k*.²⁸ Unlikely to be a mere coincidence, this requires an explanation.

One approach is to read in Q 7:20 *malikayni*, i.e. “kings”, instead of *malakayni*, “angels”.²⁹ But this reading, though attested, seems secondary. First, it is not widespread. Second, angelhood is related to immortality, whereas kingship is not.³⁰ Beck drew attention to Q 21:34 (“We did not assign immortality [*khuld*] to any human [*bashar*] before you...), which implies that angels are in fact possessors of *khuld*.³¹ Finally, angelhood can easily be related to the serpent’s speech in Genesis, whereas dominion cannot. In Genesis 3:5 the serpent says to Eve: “for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods [or God] (כְּאֱלֹהִים)...” Unsurprisingly, this verse troubled ancient readers. One solution was to render *elohim* here as angels.³² This is what we find in Targum Neofiti, the Geniza Targum fragment, and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. The Aramaic word used is *mal’akin*.³³

²⁸ Though *malak* (angel) and *malik* (king) are confusingly similar, the root of the former is *l-'k* and that of the latter is *m-l-k*. For an example of a poet who mistakenly believed the root of *malak* to be *m-l-k*, see the entry *l-'k* in *Lisān al-'arab*.

²⁹ This reading is attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās, Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr, al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī, al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 105), al-Zuhrī (d. 124), and Ya‘lā b. Ḥakīm transmitting from Ibn Kathīr (d. 120/738); see Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *Tafsīr al-baḥr al-muḥīṭ* (Beirut, 1993), 4:280. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 10:108, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 14:47 (citing al-Wāḥidī). In addition to a comparison of the two verses, this reading may have been an attempt to avoid a contradiction between the angels’ recognizing Adam’s superiority and his wishing to become one of them. More generally, this reading is related to the debate concerning the status of angels with regard to prophets.

³⁰ Though Q 7:20 employs an *aw* between the two promises this has the force of “and”, as can be seen in Q 20:120.

³¹ Beck, “Iblis und Mensch”, 239. For the contrast between angels and humans, see Q 12:31.

³² Compare 2 Samuel 14:17 (“[...] for my lord the king is like the angel of God, discerning good and evil...”); cited in M. McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis* (Collegeville, 1992), 60 note 6. See also Psalms 8:5 (“Yet you have made them a little lower than God [*elohim*]”) which is rendered in the Targum as “And you have made him a little less than the angels”, and the sources collected in P. S. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis of ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23 (1972): 65.

³³ I have not, however, found this rendition in the Syriac tradition, which following the Peshitta renders the word as “gods”.

It would therefore seem that *malakayni* is the better reading in Q 7:20. But if so, what are we to do with *mulk* in Q 20:120? I would like to suggest that this is the result of a misreading of MLKYN as *malikayni* for *malakayni*. This type of mistake would indicate that whoever composed or redacted Q 20 was working with Q 7 (in written form!).

To sum up, Q 2 is clearly the latest of the three accounts. Beck and Neuwirth differ concerning Q 7 and Q 20. Beck adduced several arguments in favor of Q 7 as the earliest account, but none are entirely conclusive. I have added another argument to support his case, but it too is speculative.

The relative dating of the accounts is of import since of the three versions, Q 7 is closest to the Biblical story and the subsequent Jewish and Christian embellishments. This in itself could be construed as an argument for its early dating. If Q 7 is the earliest version of the narrative, then the other Suras, I would argue, reflect a drifting away from the Biblical tradition. In its first occurrence the story remains fairly faithful to its origins, but eventually, the Quran feels free to adapt it and change it according to its needs. This is my understanding of the process. Alternatively, one could argue that as time goes by the Quran becomes more aware of Biblical traditions and adapts the Adam story accordingly. This model is well known, the classic example given being the figure of Ishmael and his relationship to Abraham or lack thereof it. Several scholars have argued that originally Muhammad was unaware that Ishmael was Abraham's son; only in Medina did he learn this and adapt his references accordingly.³⁴

Be this as it may, what is most important for our purpose is the numerous themes and details that Q 7 shares with the post-Biblical retellings of Genesis 2-3 and especially with the Syriac tradition. It is these details that we now turn to examine.

³⁴ For this argument and its problems, see R. Paret, "Ismā'īl", *EF*², 4:184. See also chapter 6.5.3.

4.3. Reflections of the Christian tradition

Before we analyze the story of the fall it should be noted that the scene which immediately precedes it, Iblīs' refusal to bow down before Adam, has been shown to derive from the *Life of Adam and Eve* traditions and especially the closely related Syriac work, the *Cave of Treasures*.³⁵

The *Life of Adam and Eve* is extant in Greek, Latin, Slavonic, Armenian, Georgian, and Coptic (fragments).³⁶ Though it is often assumed to be a Jewish work, all manuscripts of it were produced by Christians. Even if one is not entirely convinced by recent arguments in favor of Christian authorship, it is hard to deny that eventually these works circulated among Christians rather than Jews.³⁷ As for the date of the earliest version, the Greek one, de Jonge and Tromp have recently written that "it would seem safe to posit its origin... in the second to fourth centuries".³⁸

The *Cave of Treasures*, on the other hand, is manifestly a Christian work which contains several parallels to the *Life of Adam and Eve* literature.³⁹ It was written in Syriac,

³⁵ As we have seen already Geiger assumed the story must be Christian, though he cited no parallels. The *Cave of Treasures* as a source was noted in M. Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge*, 60-61 and afterwards in M. Seligsohn, "Ādam", *ET*¹ 1:127 ("As to the legend that God had established Adam as the king of the angels, the Qur'ān followed the Christian Syriac Midrāsh" referring to the *Cave of Treasures*). On this, see also Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 102-103; Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 54-58; S. M. Zwemer, "The Worship of Adam by the Angels", *The Muslim World* 27 (1937): 115-127; P. J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden, 1983), 18-22; and more recently Reynolds, "Redeeming the Adam of the Qur'ān", 71-83; *id.*, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 43-64. The most striking similarity between the Quran and the *Cave of Treasures* concerns Satan/Iblīs' argument against bowing down before Adam. Whereas in the *Life of Adam and Eve* his refusal is founded on him being created first, in the *Cave of Treasures* and the Quran the issue is their nature: it is not fitting for a creature made of fire to worship a creature made of dust or clay.

³⁶ The episode of Satan refusing to bow down is found only in the Latin, Armenian and Georgian versions.

³⁷ For a critical view of the Jewish provenance, see M. de Jonge and J. Tromp, *The Life of Adam and Eve and Related Literature* (Sheffield, 1997), 67-75, and especially M. de Jonge, *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament as Part of Christian Literature: The Case of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Greek Life of Adam and Eve* (Leiden, 2003). A counter-argument is found in M. D. Eldridge, *Dying Adam with his Multiethnic Family: Understanding the Greek Life of Adam and Eve* (Leiden, 2001), 233-64.

³⁸ M. de Jonge and J. Tromp, *The Life of Adam and Eve and Related Literature*, 77.

³⁹ More generally, see L. van Rompay, "Memories of Paradise: The Greek 'Life of Adam and Eve' and Early Syriac Tradition," *ARAM* 5 (1993): 555-70.

and though scholars differ concerning its date, a recent study has concluded that “a date in the fifth or sixth centuries is very probable”.⁴⁰

As we shall see these very works are important also for understanding the story of Adam’s fall. But the same is true also of the works of Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh. Two homilies of Jacob are especially interesting: *On Adam’s departure from Paradise*⁴¹ and his so-called *Hexaemeron*.⁴²

4.3.1. Satan’s fall and Adam’s temptation

In Q 7 immediately after Iblīs is banished (Q 7:13-18), Adam and his mate are placed in the garden and are ordered not to approach the tree (Q 7:19). As Beck notes, this exact sequence of events is found in the *Cave of Treasures* 3.3-9.⁴³ In Q 20 and Q2, on the other hand, after Iblīs refuses to bow down, the story moves to the Paradise scene without developing the source of the enmity of Iblīs/Satan which explains his role in leading Adam astray.⁴⁴

4.3.2. One tree

Whereas Genesis knows of two trees, the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life, in the Quran the two are conflated. Here Satan describes the forbidden tree (= Tree of Knowledge in Genesis) as granting both angelhood (compare “you will be like gods”

⁴⁰ See C. Leonhard, “Observations on the Date of the Syriac *Cave of Treasures*”, in P. M. M. Daviau *et al.* (eds.), *The World of the Aramaeans III* (Sheffield, 2001), 255-93. The quotation is from p. 288. The edition of the *Cave of Treasures* I use is A. S.-M. Ri, *La caverne des trésors: Les deux recensions syriaques*, CSCO 486, SS 207 (Louvain, 1987).

⁴¹ Kh. Alwan, *Jacques de Saroug: quatre homélies métriques sur la création*, CSCO 508, SS 214 (Louvain, 1989), 31-77. In Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 69-70, this homily is cited a few times, but as we shall see the parallels have not been exhausted.

⁴² The text is homily 71 in *JSB*, 3:1-151. For a study see T. Jansma, “L’Hexaméron de Jacques de Sarûg”, *L’Orient Syrien* 4 (1959): 3-42, 129-62, and 253-84.

⁴³ Cf. the Latin, Armenian and Georgian *Life of Adam and Eve* 16.1. Of the three only in the Georgian is it clear that Adam is ordered to dwell in Paradise after the Devil and his followers are cast down from their dwellings.

⁴⁴ Beck, “Iblis und Mensch”, 235-36.

[Genesis 3:4]) and immortality. Is this mere confusion on the part of the Quran as Geiger and Speyer would have it, or is it a reflection of other traditions which referred only to one tree?⁴⁵

Beck noted a parallel in the *Cave of Treasures* which speaks only of one tree.⁴⁶ Here we read the following: after Satan refuses to bow down before Adam and as a result is cast out of Heaven (3.1-7), Adam enters Paradise and is ordered not to eat from the tree (3.8-9). In the next chapter we are told that God planted the Tree of Life in the middle of the garden and that this pre-figures the Cross which was set in the middle of the world (4.2-3). Then after Satan misleads Eve concerning the tree, she rushes to eat from it (4.14). Also mentioned is the other tree (*ilānā ḥrinā*) in which Eve took cover after she was exposed (4.16) and the fig tree from the leaves of which Adam and Eve made loincloths (4.19). But the Tree of Knowledge is never mentioned, and a reader without familiarity with Genesis could well assume that the forbidden tree is the Tree of Life.⁴⁷

A similar situation exists in the late Greek treatise *Apocalypse of Sedrach* 4:4, where God tells Sedrach: “I created the first man, Adam, and placed him in Paradise in the midst of [which is] the tree of life, and I said to him: ‘Eat of all the fruit, only beware of the tree of life, for if you eat from it you will surely die’”.⁴⁸

How are we to understand this lack of mention of the Tree of Knowledge? Perhaps the Biblical account is simply assumed. Alternatively, this may be a response to tension in the text of Genesis 2-3 between verses which refer to two special trees and

⁴⁵ See Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 79, and Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 71.

⁴⁶ Beck, “Iblis und Mensch”, 235.

⁴⁷ The above summary holds true only for the East-Syrian recension. In the West-Syrian recension God planted trees in the middle of Paradise (4.2) and the prohibition regarding eating from the Tree of Knowledge is explicitly mentioned (4.3). Then when seducing Eve, the serpent repeats Genesis 3:5 and explains that God fears lest they eat from the tree and their eyes be opened and they become like gods. The West-Syrian version is clearly secondary and results from introducing passages from the Peshitta into the *Cave of Treasures* (Genesis 2:15-17 in 4.3 and Genesis 3:1-5 in 4.12); see Leonhard, “Observations on the Date of the Syriac *Cave of Treasures*”, 280-81, note 84.

⁴⁸ See Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 125-26. The final form of the *Apocalypse of Sedrach* has been dated to the tenth or eleventh centuries. Some scholars believe it contains materials from the first centuries CE; *OTP*, 1:606.

verses which seem to know only of one. As a result several modern scholars believe that originally the text referred only to one tree.⁴⁹ Ancient scholars may have solved this problem by identifying the two trees with each other or by simply omitting one tree.⁵⁰ They may have been aided by such verses as Proverbs 3:18 where wisdom is said to be “a tree of life” to those who hold on to it and Sirach 17:11: “He placed before them knowledge, and the Torah of life he gave as their inheritance”.⁵¹

4.3.3. The prohibition

In Genesis 2:16-17 the first prohibition concerns eating from the tree:

(16) And the Lord God commanded the man: “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; (17) but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die”

Led astray by the serpent Adam and Eve eventually eat from the tree in Genesis 3:6:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

⁴⁹ See recently Y. Zakovitch, “Is The Tree of Knowledge The Tree of Life?” in R. Eilior (ed.), *A Garden Eastward in Eden: Traditions of Paradise* (Jerusalem, 2010), 63-70 (in Hebrew).

⁵⁰ In M. Radscheit, “Der Höllenbaum”, in T. Nagel (ed.), *Der Koran und sein religiöses und kulturelles Umfeld* (Munich, 2010), 113-14, are noted both the problems in the Biblical text and the existence of some works which have only one tree. In addition to the *Cave of Treasures* and the *Apocalypse of Sedrach* Radscheit lists the Greek *Apocalypse of Esdras* 2:10-12, but at least in M. Stone’s translation it is far from clear that this passage is relevant: “And the prophet said: ‘Who made Adam, the protoplast, the first one?’ And God said: ‘My immaculate hands, and I placed him in Paradise to guard the region of the tree of life’. [...] Since he who established disobedience made this (man) sin”; *OTP*, 1:572. As Stone notes, Walker’s earlier translation is different (“And the prophet said: ‘Who made Adam the first-formed?’ And God said: ‘My undefiled hands. And I put him in paradise to guard the food of the tree of life; and thereafter he became disobedient, and did this in transgression”). But this too does not indicate a conflation of the two trees.

⁵¹ See Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 112 and 125.

In Q 7:19, on the other hand, Adam and Eve are forbidden to approach the tree (*lā taqrabā*).⁵² What this means is not entirely clear since it stands in contrast to eating from wherever they want and is transgressed by their tasting of the tree (Q 7:22).⁵³ Should this be dismissed as a meaningless stylistic variation? Perhaps.⁵⁴ But let us pursue the possibility that it reflects an exegetical response to the text of Genesis.

In presenting the prohibition in Genesis I skipped over the way it is related by the Serpent and Eve in their dialogue (Genesis 3:1-5). Whereas the serpent refers to eating (though initially expanding the ban to all the trees of the garden), in Eve’s version there are two prohibited acts: “but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it (וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בּוֹ), or you shall die” (Genesis 3:3). Whence the additional proviso?

Before we examine responses to this question, let us first note that in rendering the Hebrew words וְלֹא תִגְעוּ בּוֹ, “nor shall you touch it”, the Aramaic Targums and the Peshitta use the root *q-r-b*. In the Targums we find וְלֹא תִקְרְבוּן בִּיהּ,⁵⁵ the regular way of rendering נָגַע; in the Peshitta *w-lā tetqarrbun lēh* which is ambiguous. It could mean both “do not touch” and “do not approach”.⁵⁶ Here we have a precedent for God’s command in the Quran: *lā taqrabā*. But do Eve’s words reflect God’s original instruction?

⁵² Also Q 2:35.

⁵³ In Q 20:121 the sin is described as eating (*fa-akalā*).

⁵⁴ The exegetes differ on this issue. Some thought that *lā taqrabā* simply means “do not eat”; see al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma’ al-bayān*, 1:188 (on Q 2:35), citing the fifth Imam, Muhammad al-Bāqir. Others argue that its import is to forbid other possible benefits derived from the tree; see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 3:5 (on Q 2:35). Similarly Ibn ‘Aṭīyya cites an interpretation that *lā taqrabā* was used since it covers both eating and the necessary preliminary action, which is approaching. This, Ibn ‘Aṭīyya comments, is an example of *sadd al-dharā’i* (blocking the means which lead to evil). Compare this to the rabbinic notion to be discussed below that Adam made a hedge around God’s prohibition.

⁵⁵ See also *Genesis Rabba* 19.3 and *Midrash Psalms* 1.9. In the printed editions of the latter Eve mentions three prohibitions: to eat, touch, and approach (לִיקְרֵב). The source of this third prohibition, omitted by Buber in his edition (p. 10 note 122), is clearly the Targumic rendition of Genesis 3:3, which conveys the touching prohibition in Aramaic. The Aramaic gloss was misinterpreted (based on Hebrew) as a new prohibition to approach.

⁵⁶ Both Payne Smith and Sokoloff adduce the verb in Genesis 3:3 under the meaning “to approach”. Interestingly, in the shorter dictionary produced by Payne Smith’s daughter, Genesis 3:3 is rendered

Rabbinic sources offer one response. In *Genesis Rabba* 19.3 Eve's account exemplifies Proverbs 30:6 ("Do not add to his words, or else he will rebuke you, and you will be found a liar"). Eve exaggerates and thus brings about the sin. Rather than simply saying that they were not allowed to eat, Eve claims that they may not even touch the tree. Seizing on this opportunity, the serpent pushes Eve against the tree and so demonstrates that the tree is harmless and God's warning false.⁵⁷

Another approach is to give Eve the benefit of the doubt. Why should she misquote God, especially in her pre-corrupted state? Taking Eve's words at face value, we conclude that God indeed forbade both eating and touching/approaching the tree, even though Genesis 2:17 failed to mention this. Reasoning such as this must have led Josephus to paraphrase God's initial order as follows: "God, then, ordered Adam and his wife to taste of the other plants but to abstain from that of wisdom, telling them in advance that if they touch it, ruin would result from it" (*Judean Antiquities* 1.40).⁵⁸

"neither shall ye touch it"; Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2:3723; M. Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon* (Winona Lake, 2009), 1401; and J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford, 1903), 517. Whereas the Payne Smiths list "to touch" as one of the meanings of the *etpa'al*, Sokoloff does not. All agree, however, that the *pe'al* carries both meanings. An examination of the way *n-g-* in *qal* is rendered in the Peshitta shows that the *pe'al* is by far the more common choice. The *etpaal* is used primarily in prohibitions; see Genesis 3:3, Exodus 19:12, Leviticus 11:8, 12:4, Numbers 16:26, Deuteronomy 14:8, Isaiah 52:11, Psalms 105:15 / 1 Chronicles 16:22, and Lamentations 4:15 (1 Samuel 10:26, 2 Samuel 14:10 are examples of exceptions). Exodus 19:12 is a nice demonstration of this usage: "[...] Be careful; do not go up the mountain and do not touch (*la tetqarrbun*) its foot. Any who touch (*d-negrob*) the mountain shall be put to death". The prohibition is in the *etpa'al*; the description in the *pe'al*. It is not clear to me why the Peshitta does this. Is it a simply a matter of style or is there an intention to strengthen prohibitions to include even approaching?

⁵⁷ Similar traditions are found in BT *Sanhedrin* 29a ("Hezekiah said: Whence do we know that he who adds [to the word of God] subtracts [from it]? — From the verse, *God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it neither shall ye touch it*"); *Abot de-Rabbi Natan* (A) chapter 1 (p. 4 in the Shechter edition) (Adam makes a hedge around his words when relating God's command to his wife by adding the prohibition of touching the tree and the serpent then touches it to persuade Eve that it is not dangerous); *Abot de-Rabbi Natan* (B) chapter 1 (a hedge made by Adam); *PRE* 13 (the serpent touches the tree, convinces Eve to touch it as well and thus leads her to eat of it); *Midrash Psalms* 1.9 (similar to *Genesis Rabba*); *Leqah Tob* on Genesis 3:1 (p. 24 in the Buber edition) (Adam adds the prohibition to distance Eve from sin and the serpent pushes her). Writing in the fourth century St. Ambrose shares the same approach; see J. J. Savage, *Saint Ambrose: Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel* (New York, 1961), 334-39 (cited in Radscheit, "Der Höllenbaum", 109, note 76). Radscheit comments that the order in the Quran excludes such an interpretation without noting that in this the Quran follows a tradition found already in Ephrem and Jacob.

⁵⁸ ET in L. H. Feldman, *Judean Antiquities Books 1-4*, in S. Mason (ed.), *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary* (Boston, 2000), 3:15 and note 87. See also 3 *Baruch* (Greek) 4:8: "And I said: 'I pray you, show me which is the tree which caused Adam to stray'. And the Angel said: 'It is the vine which the angel Samael planted by which the Lord God became angered, and he cursed him and his planting. For this

This is also how Ephrem read the story. Describing Satan's reaction to Eve's words, Ephrem writes:

The tempter then turned its mind to the commandment of Him who had set down the commandment that [Adam and Eve] were not only commanded not to eat from it [i.e. the tree], but they were not even to draw near in the least to it (*d-āp lā metqarrābu netqarrbun lēh*). The serpent then realized that God had forewarned them about even looking at it lest they became entrapped by its beauty (*Commentary on Genesis 2.20*).⁵⁹

The tempter then manages to entice Eve to gaze at the tree:

But she neglected these things that she ought to have said in response to the serpent and, just as the serpent had desired, she directed her eyes away from the serpent who was before her and began to look upon the tree to which she had been commanded not to draw near (*d-lā tetqarrab lēh*) (*Commentary on Genesis 2.20*).⁶⁰

Ephrem's understanding may be related to a theme to which he returns throughout his *Hymns on Paradise*, where, building on Biblical foundations, he describes Adam as a priest and Paradise as a temple.⁶¹ In this scheme the Tree of Knowledge serves as the barrier beyond which it is forbidden to approach, much like the curtain which separates the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple. Thus we read:

reason he did not permit Adam to touch it..."; *OTP*, 1:667. In its present form 3 *Baruch* is a Christian work, though scholars are unsure whether its basis was a reworked Jewish composition. It is preserved in Greek and Slavonic. In the Slavonic version there is no mention of God forbidding the touching of the tree.

⁵⁹ Ed. Tonneau, 37; ET slightly adapted from Mathews and Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 111. As Mathews notes, Ephrem clearly understands *w-lā tetqarrbun lēh* as "do not approach".

⁶⁰ Ed. Tonneau, 36; ET slightly adapted from Mathews and Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 112.

⁶¹ For a thorough study of this theme in the Bible with some examples of post-Biblical developments, see L. Mazor, "The Correlation between the Garden of Eden and the Temple", *Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 13 (2002): 1-42 (in Hebrew).

In the very midst He planted / the Tree of Knowledge, / endowing it with awe, / hedging it in with dread, / so that it might straightaway serve / as a boundary to the inner region of Paradise. / Two things did Adam hear / in that single decree: / that they should not eat of it / and that, by shrinking from it, / they should perceive that it was not lawful / to penetrate further, beyond that Tree (*Hymns on Paradise* 3.3).⁶²

And again later on in the same hymn:

The tree was to him / like a gate; / its fruit was the veil / covering that hidden tabernacle. / Adam snatched the fruit, / casting aside the commandment. / When he beheld that glory / within, / shining forth with its rays, / he fled outside; / he ran off and took refuge / among the modest fig trees.

In the midst of Paradise God has planted / the Tree of Knowledge / to separate off, above and below, / sanctuary from Holy of Holies. / Adam made bold to approach (*qreb w-amrah*),⁶³ / and was smitten like Uzziah: / the king became leprous, / Adam was stripped. Being struck like Uzziah, / he hastened to leave: / both kings fled and hid, / in shame of their bodies (*Hymns on Paradise* 3.13-14).⁶⁴

While Ephrem assumes that God indeed forbade approaching the tree, he does not go so far as to introduce this second prohibition into Genesis 2:17. In Jacob of Serugh's homily *On Adam's departure from Paradise*, however, God's initial order is rewritten accordingly. Here God's words are as follow:

⁶² Ed. Beck, 9; ET in Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 91.

⁶³ See also *Hymns on Paradise* 12.10.

⁶⁴ Ed. Beck, 11; ET slightly adapted from Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 95. Whereas Brock translates *qreb* as "touch", I prefer "approach". This is more fitting for Ephrem's gate and separation imagery and follows his understanding in the *Commentary* as cited above.

From all of them that are in the garden you may eat freely, / but do not approach (*lā tetqarrab*) this one lest you die (lines 203-4).⁶⁵

Whereas line 203 is more or less faithful to the Peshitta version of Genesis 2:16, line 204 rewrites Genesis 2:17 in light of Eve's words in Genesis 3:3. As he is wont to do, Jacob repeats God's warning in many formulations. In the course of this, God is said to caution Adam against eating and approaching the tree. Here Jacob uses the root *q-r-b* both in the *etpaal* (as in the Peshitta) and in the *peal* (closer to the Quranic form).⁶⁶ Interestingly, Jacob's homily also refers several times to tasting the tree just as the Quran does in the description of the sin (Q 7:22). A good example is found in the following couplet:

As long as you do not approach and eat from it (*kmā d-lā teqrob tekol menēh*) you shall be immortal, / but if you stray and taste from it (*teṭ'am menēh*) you shall die (lines 217-18).⁶⁷

How exactly Jacob envisions the relationship between the two prohibitions remains unclear. Perhaps they are no more than two ways of saying the same thing. The important point is that Jacob's homily supplies a precedent for the Quran formulation of the prohibition.

4.3.4. Satan's role

In Genesis Satan plays no role in leading the first couple astray. This part is reserved for the serpent, which is to be understood as an actual animal, admittedly one

⁶⁵ Alwan, *Jacques de Saroug*, 39. See also the homily *On Adam's Transgression etc.* in J. J. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri, Rabulae episcopi Edesseni, Balaei aliorumque Opera selecta* (Oxford, 1865), 82, line 18 ("He commanded him not to approach the tree").

⁶⁶ See lines 207, 217, 226, 256, 260, 279, and 819.

⁶⁷ Alwan, *Jacques de Saroug*, 39. Tasting the fruit is referred to also in lines 211 and 244.

that was clever and could talk, but not as an alias of the Devil. This is evident both in the description of the serpent at the very beginning as “more crafty than any other wild animal” (Genesis 3:1) and even more so in the curses it receives at the end: “(14) Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. (15) I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:14-15).

But unlike the snakes in our world this serpent could talk. How is this to be explained?⁶⁸ Several ancient exegetes, including the author of Jubilees, Philo, and Josephus, maintained that originally snakes, or perhaps all animals, were able to speak. But others identified the serpent as a Devil-like figure, often Satan himself or Satan’s agent. This solution explains the serpent’s ability to speak, its cleverness, and the emphasis in Genesis 3:15 on the enmity between it and mankind. In *1 Enoch* 69:6 the angel Gadreel, fulfilling a satanic role, is said to have led Eve astray and to have “showed the weapons of death to the children of men”. In the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* (also known as the *Apocalypse of Moses*) 15-17 the serpent is the Devil’s mouthpiece. Kugel lists the following texts which either identify the serpent with the Devil/Satan or refer only to Satan with no mention of the serpent: *2 Enoch* 31:4-6, Revelation 12:9 and 20:2, *3 Baruch* (Slavonic) 4:8, Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 103, *Apocalypse of Sedrach* 4:5, and *Testimony of Truth* 47:3-6.⁶⁹

Though Kugel does not intend to supply his readers with an exhaustive list, rabbinic sources are conspicuously missing and not by chance. The only rabbinic source he cites is Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis 3:6, where Eve is reported to have seen Sammael the angel of death and become frightened. In itself this is enigmatic and should

⁶⁸ In this paragraph I closely follow Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 98-100.

⁶⁹ As Kugel notes, *Wisdom of Solomon* 2:24 (“Through the devil’s envy entered the world...”) may refer to the incident of Cain and Abel.

be read in light of its likely inspiration in *PRE* 13 where Sammael descends to earth with his followers in order to lead Adam to sin. He mounts the serpent and compels it to do his evil work.⁷⁰ As a whole the classical rabbinic tradition did not link the serpent with Satan (the only exceptions being *PRE* and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, late works known to reflect Islamic traditions, and the even later *Zohar*).⁷¹ Though several of the works cited by Kugel may very well be of Jewish origin, it should be remembered that they were preserved only among Christians and thus seem to have been rejected by rabbinic Judaism.⁷²

It would therefore seem that the episode in the Quran which has Satan lead the protoplasts astray reflects the Christian tradition.⁷³ And indeed Christians not only transmitted old Jewish works suppressed by the Rabbis, but also emphasized Satan's role

⁷⁰ For an analysis of *PRE* 13 in light of parallel traditions, see Adelman, *The Return of the Repressed*, 71-98. Perhaps hinting at an involvement of Satan in the story is the following comment in *Genesis Rabba* 17.6: "R. Hanina, son of R. Adda, said: 'From the beginning of the Book until here no *Samekh* is written, but as soon as she [Eve] was created, Satan was created with her...'; Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 1:157; ET in Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 1:137. See Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 78, and Urbach, *The Sages*, 167.

⁷¹ See Urbach, *The Sages*, 167-69. For the *Zohar*, see for example 1:35b. The assertion in T. Cuyler Young, Jr. "Satan", *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:988, that Satan is identified with the serpent in BT *Sota* 9b and BT *Sanhedrin* 29a is simply wrong. All we find there is a reference to the "primeval serpent" with no suggestion that this is a title of Satan.

⁷² Cf. Garsiel, *Bible, Midrash and Quran*, 47-50. Garsiel argues that the source of the scene in which Satan leads Adam and Eve astray is Jewish. Her argument is based on Satan's involvement in the story in 2 *Enoch* and the *Life of Adam and Eve* as well as on Satan's role as a tempter generally in rabbinic literature. Another attempt to defend the Jewish origin of this scene is found in Katsh, *Judaism in Islām*, 34, where the argument is based on Jewish lore of the post-Quranic era as found in the *Zohar* 1:35b.

⁷³ This essentially is Geiger's view though he adds an unnecessary twist. He first observes: "In this narrative the Devil is again given his Hebrew name, and yet the first explanation of the temptation through the snake as coming from the Devil seems to be entirely Christian, as no such reference is to be found in the older Jewish writings". But then he cites *PRE* 13 and concludes: "Thus this legend, even if not entirely Jewish, appears to have been derived by Muhammad from the Jews"; Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 78-79. I take this to mean that the Quran received the Christian tradition via late rabbinic sources such as *PRE*. In Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge*, 61, on the other hand, it is argued that the Quran reflects the Syriac tradition (i.e., the *Cave of Treasures*) and that *PRE* 13 is the result of Islamic influence. Another option worthy of consideration is that the Quran and *PRE* 13 both derived the notion of Satan's role from the Syriac tradition. For the possible Christian influence on *PRE*, see H. Spurling and E. Grypeou, "Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer and Eastern Christian Exegesis", *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 4 (2007): 217-43, especially 220-24, where Sammael's part in *PRE* 13 is discussed. That Satan's role in the Quranic story is due to Christian influence is argued also in Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 68-71, where a wide range of sources is cited. See also Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 59, note 97.

in their own retellings of the Adam legend. What follows are a few Syriac examples, though this theme is common to Christian writers in other languages as well.⁷⁴

First the *Cave of Treasures*. Envious of Adam and Eve's exalted state, Satan enters the serpent and dwells in it. Were it not for this disguise, Satan's hideous (*mšakkartā*) appearance would have caused Eve to flee immediately. Satan's trick is likened to the method employed by a fowler who, wishing to teach a bird to speak, places a mirror between them so that when he speaks to it, the bird will pay attention and respond, believing that it is being addressed by a fellow bird. It is Satan who speaks to Eve from within the serpent (*Cave of Treasures* 4.4-14).

The same view is shared by Ephrem. Wondering how Eve could converse with the serpent, Ephrem offers several explanations, two of which involve Satan: Satan spoke through the serpent or appealed to God that speech be given to it (*Commentary on Genesis* 2.16).⁷⁵ Later though Ephrem simply assumes that Satan speaks through the serpent. Thus, for example, the serpent's address in Genesis 3:1 is presented as follows: "The one who was in the serpent then spoke to the woman, through the serpent, saying..." (*Commentary on Genesis* 2.19).⁷⁶

Like the *Cave of Treasures*, Ephrem offers an explanation for Satan's disguise, but his answer is of a different nature. Had the temptation been presented by anything else but an "utterly despicable and hideous (*bse wa-mšakkar*)" creature such as the serpent, Adam and Eve's responsibility for their transgression would not have been full (*Commentary on Genesis* 2.18).⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Further Syriac sources are collected in Spurling and Grypeou, "Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer and Eastern Christian Exegesis", 223, note 20.

⁷⁵ Ed. Tonneau, 34; ET in Mathews and Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 108. Ephrem's other explanations are that Adam understood the serpent's language or that the serpent posed the question in its mind and speech was given to it.

⁷⁶ Ed. Tonneau, 36; ET in Mathews and Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 110-11.

⁷⁷ Ed. Tonneau, 35; ET in Mathews and Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 109. Note that here too the disguise is related to hideousness. Whereas in the *Cave of Treasures* Satan seeks to cover

Having introduced Satan into the story, Ephrem needs to explain why in the Biblical text it is the serpent that is punished rather than Satan. In his view, Satan was judged secretly. “For God did not wish to make known Satan’s condemnation in the presence of those who had not even perceived that he was the tempter. Remember, the woman said, *the serpent*, and not Satan, *deceived me*”. Satan’s punishment was to go to the fire with all his hosts, as is hinted in John 16:11 (*Commentary on Genesis 2.32*).⁷⁸

In his homily *On Adam’s departure from Paradise* Jacob of Serugh too understands Satan to be the force behind the serpent. Terrified of Adam’s splendor as an image of God, Satan prefers not to face him directly but rather to send the serpent to gauge his rival’s strength and armor (lines 307-16). In addition to a messenger (*izgaddā*), Jacob portrays the serpent as a garment Satan puts on (317); a flute (*abbubā*) into which the spirit of falsehood blows (321); a notary who reads out the document prepared by the scribe (323-24); a child and disciple who pronounces the work of his teacher (325-29); and a singer who sings out the story written by another (329-330).⁷⁹ Though Jacob often refers to the words of the serpent, it is clear that Satan is speaking through its mouth (399).⁸⁰

But Satan’s role raises the same question that troubled Ephrem: if he is the instigator, why is it the serpent, a mere tool, that is punished and not him (lines 831-38)? Jacob resolves this problem, but not before he informs us that the Jews conclude from this that the serpent acted alone and that Satan played no part (839-44). In his answer, Jacob compares the serpent to the ground, which is cursed on account of Adam (Genesis 3:17). Likewise, the serpent is cursed on account of Satan in order to distress him (845-87).⁸¹

his abhorrent looks so as to entice Eve, in Ephrem’s *Commentary* Satan acquires a despicable form in order that the temptation not be too great.

⁷⁸ Ed. Tonneau, 44-45; ET in Mathews and Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 121.

⁷⁹ Alwan, *Jacques de Saroug*, 43-45.

⁸⁰ Alwan, *Jacques de Saroug*, 49.

⁸¹ Alwan, *Jacques de Saroug*, 64-66.

In the Quran the serpent never appears in the story, only al-Shayṭān. Perhaps the text is playing with two meanings of the word *shayṭān*; “devil” from the Ethiopic and “serpent” from Arabic.⁸² Alternatively, the Quran may have been aware of a version that identified the serpent with Satan, or that true to form the Quran simplifies the account by doing away with non-essential details which only add complications and distract attention from the main points. Just as Eve’s name is never mentioned, so also the serpent is done away with.⁸³ In this the Quran develops the trend already apparent in the Christian sources.⁸⁴

4.3.5. Adam and Eve’s original clothing

Though in the Bible it is stated explicitly that Adam and Eve were naked before they ate from the forbidden tree (Genesis 2:25 and 3:7), the Quran assumes that before the sin they were clothed. This is evident in both Q 20 and Q 7 (but not in Q 2). In Q 20 God warns Adam about Satan when placing him in Paradise: “(117) Then We said: ‘Adam, surely this is an enemy to you and your wife. So let him not expel you both from the Garden, so that you become unprosperous. (118) It is assuredly given to you neither to hunger therein, nor to go naked (*lā ta’rā*), (119) neither to thirst therein, nor to suffer the sun’”. Q 7:20 states that Satan’s aim was “to reveal to them that which was hidden from them of their shameful parts” (more on this later). Though this verse does not state that the hiding mechanism was garments, this is explicit in Q 7:27: “Children of Adam! Let

⁸² This point is made in K. Dmitriev, “An Early Christian Arabic Account of the Creation of the World”, in *QC*, 367. For *shayṭān* as serpent, see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:1552. On the origin of *shayṭān*, see M. Kropp, “Der äthiopische Satan = šayṭān und seine koranischen Ausläufer; mit einer Bemerkung über verbales Steinigen”, *Oriens Christianus* 89 (2005): 93-102.

⁸³ Similarly Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 59. Cf. R. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur’ān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, 2002), 20.

⁸⁴ Once Satan is understood to be the force behind the serpent the two figures easily blend. Thus Ephrem, who in his commentary has Satan speak through the serpent, writes the following in a hymn with reference to Satan: “Mary’s foot trampled him / for he had struck Eve on her heel” (*Hymns on Nativity* 22.31); E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitate*, CSCO 186, SS 82 (Louvain, 1959), 114. The language is based on the cursing of the serpent in Genesis 3:15.

not Satan tempt you as he brought your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their garments (*libāsahumā*) to show them (*li-yuriyahumā*) their shameful parts...” Whence this theme of original clothing that was later lost?⁸⁵

Beck has already noted parallels in Syriac works. In the *Cave of Treasures* 3.14 Adam and Eve are said to have been dressed in glory (*lbišin šubhā*) and to have been radiant with magnificence (*maprgin b-tešbuḥta*) before their sin. After they eat from the tree they become naked (4.14 and 4.18). To this Beck adds a few quotations from the hymns of Ephrem, some of which I will cite later.⁸⁶ In Ephrem’s *Commentary* this theme is stressed. Adam and Eve’s lack of shame in Genesis 2:25 results from the glory that covered them. Only after they transgress is that glory taken from them and they feel ashamed (*Commentary on Genesis* 2.14). Though in some instances the Syriac sources simply refer to glory covering Adam and Eve, in other cases this glory is envisioned as a garment (*lbušā*) thus bringing us closer to the *libās* of the Quran.⁸⁷ Thus Ephrem speaks of the serpent having stolen Adam’s garments (*naḥtē*) (*Hymns on Paradise* 3.15). The concept of original garments of glory is especially important in the Syriac tradition where the whole aim of the Incarnation and of baptism is to restore the lost robes of glory to mankind.⁸⁸ But how unique is this notion? Was it shared by rabbinic sources?

⁸⁵ Interestingly, this theme occurs also in a poem attributed to ‘Adī b. Zayd of al-Ḥīra (d. ca. 600). There we read: “They both sewed, as they had been stripped of their garments (*idh buzzā labūsahumā*), clothing from fig leaves, which was not spun”; ET slightly adapted from Dmitriev, “An Early Christian Arabic Account”, 372. Dmitriev briefly notes that the Quranic parallel and the Syriac background; *ibid.*, 373.

⁸⁶ Beck, “Iblis und Mensch”, 237 and note 73. Beck refers to *Hymns on Paradise* 3.15, 6.9, 7.5 and *Hymns on Faith* 83.2. See also Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 68-69, where the theme is quoted from Jacob of Serugh as well. Reynolds’ main argument there – that the *rīsh* (feathers) given to men in Q 7:26 reflects “the garments of skin” of Genesis 3:21 – is unconvincing. This verse no longer addresses Adam, but rather his present-day descendants. The reference in the verse to a sign or miracle (*āya*) does not prove his point either, even if we accept that it refers to the *rīsh*, since mundane phenomena are also described as *āyāt* in the Quran; see, for example, Q 40:79-81.

⁸⁷ The Syriac sources seem to waver between two slightly different models. Before the sin Adam and Eve were either a) fully clothed in garments (of glory) or b) they had no clothes but the glory that covered them in some mysterious manner made their nakedness invisible.

⁸⁸ Much has been written about this theme. One of the most important studies is S. Brock, “Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition”, in M. Schmidt (ed.), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Regensburg, 1982), 11-38.

Several scholars argue that it is shared by both the Jewish and Christian traditions. In my opinion, this reflects an un-nuanced reading of the rabbinic sources and assumes that disparate texts all share the same view.⁸⁹ In what follows, I will show that the pre-Islamic rabbinic sources do not mention the loss of garments on account of the sin and most probably were unaware of, or at least did not approve of, the idea that Adam and Eve were dressed before their sin.

Adam's glory is mentioned in a few writings from Qumran. In the very beginning of the *Words of the Luminaries* we read that Adam was fashioned in the image of God's glory. In several texts "all the glory of Adam" (כול כבוד אדם) is a reward of the righteous, but there is no indication that the glory is a garment that covers nakedness.⁹⁰ The same is true of the reference to Adam's splendor (תפארת) in *Sirach* 49:16.

In addition to Ephrem and the *Cave of Treasures*, Kugel finds pre-sin garments of glory in the *History of the Rechabites* 12:3; the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* 20:2;⁹¹ and 3 *Baruch* (Greek) 4:16.⁹² Other sources could no doubt be added, but what is of interest here is whether rabbinic sources shared this view.

The origin of this theme is debated. Most likely it is to be found, as Kugel suggests, in the discomfort that some ancient readers felt imagining Adam and Eve going about naked in Eden. The solution was sought in Psalms 8:4-5 where God is said to have crowned man with glory and honor.⁹³ These verses were understood as referring

⁸⁹ The harmonizing reading is most emphatically stated in G. A. Anderson, "The Garments of Skin in Apocryphal Narrative and Biblical Commentary", in J. L. Kugel (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Midrash* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 101-43. Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, 68-69, follows in his footsteps. A more careful assessment of the rabbinic evidence is found in H. Reuling, *After Eden: Church Fathers and Rabbis on Genesis 3:16-21* (Leiden, 2006), 251-58.

⁹⁰ See *Damascus Document* 3.20, *Community Rule* 4.23, and *Thanksgiving Hymns* 4.15. All these sources are referred to in Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 117.

⁹¹ This sentence is missing in several manuscripts; *OTP*, 2:281.

⁹² See the discussion in Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 115-20. The one rabbinic source he cites (*Genesis Rabba* 11.2) is actually slightly different as we shall see. His other quotations indeed attribute glory to Adam but not necessarily as clothing.

⁹³ Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 115.

specifically to Adam. The Peshitta strengthens the link with the glorious clothing motif by replacing “crowned” with “clothed”.

Brock, however, argues for a different origin. In his view the clothing motif stems from Jewish speculation concerning a verse which occurs towards the end of the story after the sin is committed and punishments are announced: “And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). Brock cites the Targumic rendition of these garments as *lbušin d-iqār*, “garments of glory”, and the reading attributed to Rabbi Meir’s Torah scroll where instead of ‘or, “skin”, we find ‘or, “light” (*Genesis Rabba* 20.12). Though this verse is generally understood to refer to God’s clothing of Adam and Eve after the fall, Brock suggests that these rabbinic sources understood the verse as referring to the status of Adam and Eve at their creation before the fall.⁹⁴

This reconstruction is problematic. First, as Brock notes, the Syriac sources never link Adam and Eve’s original garments to Genesis 3:21.⁹⁵ Second, in the Targums there is no hint that the “garments of glory” are to be understood as pre-fall garments. In fact evidence to the contrary exists: in the only Targum which clearly assumes that the protoplasts were clothed before their sin, this clothing is replaced after the sin by the garments of glory. Thus we read in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis 3:21:

ועבד ייי אלקים לאדם ולאינתתיה לבושין דיקר מן משך חויה דאשלח מיניה על משך בישריהון חלף טופריהון
דאישתלחו ואלבישינון

⁹⁴ Brock, “Clothing Metaphors”, 14.

⁹⁵ See S. Brock, “Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): 223 (“As far as Syriac writers are concerned, there is no evidence of any awareness that the phrases ‘robe of glory’ and ‘robe of light’ ever had anything to do with the exegesis of Gen. 3:21, and so the tradition of their being the pre-Fall garments must have passed from Judaism to Christianity in a context no longer directly connected with the biblical text of Genesis”).

And the Lord God made garments of glory for Adam and for his wife from the skin which the serpent had cast off [to be worn] on the skin of their flesh, instead of their [garments of] fingernails of which they had been stripped, and he clothed them.⁹⁶

Third, Rabbi Meir's reading is not clearly associated with the state of Adam and Eve before the sin either.⁹⁷ Here we read:

And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin ('or), and clothed them.

In R. Meir's Torah it was found written,⁹⁸ "Garments of light ('or)": this refers to Adam's garments, which were like a lantern, broad at the bottom and narrow at the top. Isaac the Elder said: They were as smooth as a fingernail and as beautiful as a jewel. R. Yohanan said: They were like the fine linen garments which come from Bethshean, *garments of skin* meaning those that are nearest to the skin. R. Eleazar said: They were of goats' skin. R. Joshua said: Of hares' skin. R. Yose b. R. Hanina said: It was a garment made of skin with its wool. Resh Lakish said: It was of Circassian wool, and these were used [later] by first-born children.⁹⁹ R. Samuel b. Nahman said: [They were made from] the wool of camels and the wool of hares, *garments of skin* meaning those which are produced from the skin (*Genesis Rabba* 20.12).¹⁰⁰

Eight opinions are cited in this passage concerning the nature of the garments. The redactor of the Midrash divided them into two groups on the basis of their understanding

⁹⁶ ET in M. Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis* (Collegeville, 1992), 29.

⁹⁷ Scholars are divided concerning Rabbi Meir's light garments. Whereas Goshen Gottstein and Toepel think they were bestowed on Adam and Eve after their sin, Brock, Anderson and Reuling believe that they were given at the creation of Adam and Eve; see A. Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature", *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 171-95 at 179-80; A. Toepel, "When Did Adam Wear the Garments of Light?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 61 (2010): 62-71; Anderson, "The Garments of Skin", 116-25; Reuling, *After Eden*, 251-58.

⁹⁸ For other references to R. Meir's Torah, see the note in Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 1:70.

⁹⁹ The Midrash alludes here to the notion that before the Levites and Kohanim were chosen the first-born children served as priests.

¹⁰⁰ Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 1:196-97; ET slightly adapted from Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 1:171.

of the phrase “skin garments”, but gave no indication that any of these opinions refer to garments worn by Adam and Eve before their sin. In fact Resh Lakish explicitly states that these garments were later used by the first-born children when they served as priests, clearly assuming that the garments remained in the possession of humankind.¹⁰¹ Even the manner in which Rabbi Meir’s opinion is presented suggests that the clothes were mundane: “In R. Meir’s Torah it was found written, ‘Garments of light (’or)’: this refers to Adam’s garments, which were like a lantern, broad at the bottom and narrow at the top”. Rather than stress that the garments were made of light and thus were of a miraculous nature, *Genesis Rabba* interprets Rabbi Meir’s enigmatic gloss as a comment on the shape of the garments which resembled a lantern [or rather its shade], i.e., broad at the bottom and narrow at the top. What Rabbi Meir originally meant remains unclear. The redactor of *Genesis Rabba*, in any case, chose an interpretation that fits nicely with the context of the garments given after the sin.¹⁰²

There is one passage in *Genesis Rabba* which is often taken as reading Genesis 3:21 to refer to the pre-sin situation, but it too is ambiguous:

And were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more crafty, etc. Now surely Scripture should have stated, *And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin* (Genesis 3:21) [immediately after *And were not ashamed*]? Said R. Joshua b. Qorhah: It teaches you on account of what sin that wicked creature leapt upon them, viz. because he saw them engaged in sex, he [the serpent] conceived a passion for her. R. Jacob of Kefar

¹⁰¹ For other passages which share this assumption, see the note in Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 1:197.

¹⁰² Reuling’s summary of her criticism of Anderson’s article is worth quoting here: “It is very well possible that a coherent tradition of Adam-legends existed, which explains the glory and fall of the first human in the sense Anderson presumes, and that this tradition lies at the background of R. Meir’s statement. It is, however, impossible to substantiate this claim on the basis of the midrashic materials. Moreover, if it existed, it should be noted that the redactors of *Genesis Rabba* choose not to emphasize this interpretative framework, but rather elaborate on the original state of glory without addressing the topic of its loss – that is to say, without addressing the topic in relation to our verse. This is an altogether remarkable difference from the treatment of Genesis 3:21 as we have seen in Christian sources”; Reuling, *After Eden*, 257-58.

Ḥanan said: It is thus written in order not to conclude with the passage on the serpent (*Genesis Rabba* 18.6).¹⁰³

This passage assumes that Genesis 3:21 should have followed immediately after Genesis 2:25 and offers two explanations for why this natural order was dispensed with. According to R. Joshua b. Qorḥah, the episode of the serpent was removed from its natural place in order to juxtapose it with the mention of Adam and Eve's nakedness and thus supply lust as a motive for the serpent's wish to lead them astray. According to R. Jacob of Kefar Ḥanan, the episode of the serpent was placed in the middle so as not to conclude the passage with the bitter taste of Adam and Eve's sin.

But the assumption of the question that the two rabbis seek to answer is odd and counter-intuitive. Taken simply Genesis 3:21 refers to the period after the sin. Why then should it precede the verses in which the sin is related? The answer given by many readers of *Genesis Rabba* is that this passage reads Genesis 3:21 as referring to garments given before the sin. In light of this they also read Rabbi Meir's comment.¹⁰⁴

Though this reading of the passage is certainly possible, it is not the only one. One can understand Genesis 3:21 as referring to post-sin garments and still make sense of the passage's question. The issue might be thematic rather than chronological. The Midrash here is troubled by the lack of logical continuity between Genesis 2:25 (Adam and Eve's nakedness) and Genesis 3:1 (the serpent). Not content with Genesis 2:25 as a preparatory remark, the relevance of which will become clear only later in Genesis 3:7 (the eyes of Adam and Eve open and they realize that they are naked), the Midrash believes that thematically Genesis 3:21 (God clothing Adam and Eve) continues Genesis 2:25 (their

¹⁰³ Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 1:168-69; ET slightly adapted from Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 1:147.

¹⁰⁴ See Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 1:168, where this passage is compared to *PRE* 14, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, and *Midrash Abkir*, all much later sources! The same understanding is adopted in Anderson, "The Garments of Skin", 115.

nakedness) and should have followed immediately after it.¹⁰⁵ The Midrash explains why this is not the case either by supplying a thematic connection between Genesis 2:25 and Genesis 3:1 (R. Joshua b. Qorḥah) or by explaining why the passage should end with Genesis 3:21 (R. Jacob of Kefar Ḥanan).

That early rabbinic sources did not envision Adam and Eve as losing their garments is clear from the way Genesis 3:7 was treated. “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked...”, the verse tells us. If they were clothed beforehand, we would expect a comment at this point regarding the loss of their garments on account of the sin. This is what one finds in the Christian tradition,¹⁰⁶ but not in the rabbinic texts.¹⁰⁷ In *Genesis Rabba* 19.6 we read: “*And they knew that they were naked etc. Even of the one precept which they had possessed they had stripped themselves*”.¹⁰⁸ The Rabbis are responding here to a problem in the text: how could they not have known that they were naked? They had not yet acquired the wisdom of the tree, but they were not blind.¹⁰⁹ But the Midrash’s answer refers to metaphorical nakedness, not to a loss of an actual covering.¹¹⁰ In the Targums too (except for the late Pseudo-Jonathan) Genesis 2:25 and 3:7 are rendered in a straightforward manner with no hint that Adam and Eve were

¹⁰⁵ A similar explanation of our passage from *Genesis Rabba* was offered by the Maharal of Prague (Judah Loew ben Bezalel, d. 1609) in his *Gur Aryeh*, a super-commentary on Rashi’s commentary on the Torah (on Genesis 3:1).

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Chrysostom’s comment as cited in Anderson, “The Garments of Skin”, 134 (“Rather the eating was the substance of the sin... on account of which they lost the glory that enclothed them... Beforehand they had enjoyed complete frankness with God, and they did not know they were naked. Indeed they were not naked, for the exalted glory covered them better than any garment...”), and Ephrem’s remark cited above. For Chrysostom’s understanding of the garments, see also Reuling, *After Eden*, 149-51.

¹⁰⁷ This point is made in Reuling, *After Eden*, 257. Though she agrees with Anderson that R. Meir referred to pre-sin garments, she adds: “the midrash makes no connection between the garments of light and the first sin and does not relate whether the glorious clothes were created before or after the transgression of the commandment”.

¹⁰⁸ Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 1:175; ET in Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 1:152.

¹⁰⁹ For a discussion of this motif and some parallels, see Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 129-30.

¹¹⁰ *Genesis Rabba* does refer to Adam’s radiance (רִי) and glory (כְּבוֹד) which were lost, but this is never related to his nakedness and seems to concern a radiance that emanated from his body or the initial light of the luminaries; *Genesis Rabba* 11.2, 12.6, and 21.5.

covered with garments of any kind. It seems then that these rabbinic sources were not troubled by the nudity of Adam and Eve in the garden.

In fact, only late, i.e. probably or at least possibly post-Quranic rabbinic sources unequivocally contain the theme of original garments lost on account of the sin. I know of five such sources: *PRE* 14,¹¹¹ Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, *Abot de-Rabbi Natan* (hereafter *ARN*) (B) chapter 42,¹¹² *Midrash Abkir*,¹¹³ and the *Zohar*.¹¹⁴

The Targums are a good example of how this theme is grafted onto an earlier tradition which was unaware of it. Let us examine the following renditions of Genesis 3:21:

Onqelos:

וַעֲבַד יְיָ אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם וּלְאִיתָתָהּ לְבוּשֵׁי דִיקָר עַל מִשְׁךְ בְּסָרְהוֹן וְאֶלְבֵּי־שָׁנוֹן

And the Lord God made garments of glory for Adam and for his wife [to be worn] on the skin of their flesh and he clothed them.

Neofiti:

¹¹¹ “What was Adam’s clothing? A skin of fingernail and a cloud of glory covering him. As soon as he ate from the fruit of the tree the skin of fingernail was stripped off him, he saw himself naked and the cloud of glory ascended from above him”. Note that whereas in *Genesis Rabba* 20.12 Isaac the Elder likens the smoothness of Adam’s garment to a fingernail, In *PRE* the garment consists of fingernail. Interestingly, the notion of fingernail garments is found in the *Tafsir* tradition concerning Q 7:27. In one tradition it is stated that Adam repented in the nick of time so that he kept his fingernails and toenails as remnants from the covering of his entire body.

¹¹² “Ten decrees were passed with regard to the first man. The first was that he was clothed in precious garments, but the Holy One, blessed be He, stripped them off him”; see discussion in Reuling, *After Eden*, 319-20. There is no consensus regarding the dating of *ARN*. Whereas some scholars consider it to have emerged as early as the third century, Kister regards both versions as post-Talmudic and dates their extant forms to the period between the sixth and eighth century; Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 227.

¹¹³ *Midrash Abkir* is a late work (late tenth-century Italy) that is known primarily from excerpts in the *Yalqut Shim’oni*; Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 313, and A. Geula, *Lost Aggadic Works Known only from Ashkenaz: Mirash Abkir, Midrash Esfa and Devarim Zuta* (Hebrew University dissertation, 2006), 1:112-13 (in Hebrew). In *Yalqut Shim’oni Genesis*, #34 the *Midrash Abkir* is cited as likening Adam to a king’s servant who does wrong and his gold necklace is therefore replaced with metal chains.

¹¹⁴ “Afterward the blessed Holy One clothed them in garments soothing to the skin, as is written *garments of skin*. At first they wore *garments of light* and he was waited upon by the highest beings, for the angels on high came to bask in that light, as is written: *You made him little less than God, adorned him with glory and Majesty!* Now that they sinned, *garments of skin*, soothing the skin, not the soul” (*Zohar*, 1:36b); ET slightly adapted from D. C. Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition* (Stanford, 2004), 1:229-230. See also *Zohar*, 1:224a.

ועבד יי אלהים לאדם ולאנתתיה לבושין דאוקר למשך בשרהון ואלבש יתהון

And the Lord God made garments of glory for Adam and for his wife for the skin of their flesh and he clothed them.

Fragment Targum:

וברא מימרא דיי אל'ם לאדם ולאנתתיה לבושין דיקר מן משך בסריהון ואלבש יתהון

And the Memra of the Lord God created garments of glory for Adam and for his wife from the skin of their flesh and he clothed them.

Pseudo-Jonathan:

ועבד יי אלקים לאדם ולאנתתיה לבושין דיקר מן משך חויא דאשלח מיניה על משך בישריהון חלף טופריהון דאישתלחו ואלבישינון

And the Lord God made garments of glory for Adam and for his wife from the skin which the serpent had cast off [to be worn] on the skin of their flesh, instead of their [garments of] fingernails of which they had been stripped, and he clothed them.¹¹⁵

Onqelos, Neofiti, and the Fragment Targum are almost identical here. They all construe the “skin garments” so that the skin is not the material from which the garments were made, but rather the object which the garments were meant to cover.¹¹⁶ In addition the mere garments of the Biblical text become “garments of glory”.¹¹⁷ There is no hint

¹¹⁵ ET in Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 29.

¹¹⁶ The preposition מן in the Fragment Targum is, however, troubling. If not an error, might this reflect a garbled transmission of a tradition similar to Pseudo-Jonathan?

¹¹⁷ Several scholars believe that the rendition “garments of glory” reflects Rabbi Meir’s reading of ‘or, “skin”, as ‘or, “light”. The Targums then would reflect a double rendering of ‘or both as “glory” and as “skin”; see McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, 62 note 21, Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 29, note 43, and Anderson, “The Garments of Skin”, 121. This is not convincing. Why exchange “light” with “glory”? A preferable explanation might be that the Targums envision Adam and Eve’s clothes as the priestly garments described in Exodus 28:2 and 40 as glorious. A comparison between Genesis 3:21 and Exodus 28:40-41 is drawn in Mazor, “The Correlation between the Garden of Eden and the Temple”, 16-17. That the first couple’s garments eventually came to be used by priests is a view found in *Genesis Rabba* 20.12 and elsewhere. Alternatively, the glory might have been introduced from Psalms 8:4-5, where

that this refers to the period before the sin. Pseudo-Jonathan retains the earlier tradition but adds two elements: that these garments of glory were made from the skin which the serpent had cast off,¹¹⁸ and that they replaced an earlier covering which consisted of fingernail substance.¹¹⁹

To sum up, though many scholars consider the lost garments motif to be common to classic rabbinic sources and Christian authors, this is not the case. Pre-Islamic rabbinic sources do not describe Adam and Eve as losing their garments as a result of the sin. In fact it is far from clear that the rabbis believed Adam and Eve were clothed before the eating from the forbidden tree. Therefore it seems likely that the Quranic portrayal of the first couple losing their garments is indebted to the Christian tradition rather than the rabbinic one.¹²⁰ One cannot rule out the possibility that a similar tradition existed among Jews in Talmudic times without being put in writing until much later, but the accumulative evidence of the Christian parallels suggests that Christian transmission is a simpler explanation

God is said to have crowned man with glory and honor. This may have been taken as a reference to Adam; cf. *Genesis Rabba* 8.6, BT *Sanhedrin* 38b and *Zohar* 1:57b.

¹¹⁸ Pseudo-Jonathan alone adds the casting off of skin once every seven years to the curses the serpent receives in Genesis 3:14.

¹¹⁹ Pseudo-Jonathan is consistent in his portrayal of the clothing situation of Adam and Eve. Genesis 2:25 (“And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed”) is rendered, against the other Targums: “And the two of them were wise, Adam and his wife, but they did not remain in their glory”. Then Genesis 3:7 (“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked...”) is rendered, again against the other Targums: “Then the eyes of both of them was enlightened and they knew that they were naked because they were stripped of the clothing of fingernails in which they had been created, and they saw their shame...”

¹²⁰ One difference between the Quran and the Syriac sources should be noted. Whereas the Syriac texts consistently allude to supernatural aspects of the garments (glory and light), the Quran simply mentions Adam and Eve’s *libās*. According to the exegetes cited by al-Ṭabarī, these garments consisted of nails, light, or *taqwā*, i.e. fear of God; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 10:132-35. The last interpretation is interesting and depends on how we construe Q 7:26 (“Children of Adam! We have sent down on you a garment to cover your shameful parts, and feathers; and the garment of godfearing -- that is better [*wa-libāsu l-taqwā dhālika khayrun*]; that is one of God’s signs; haply they will remember”). Does this verse imply that the original clothing was that of *taqwā*? The transliterated phrase is problematic and its meaning depends on whether we read *wa-libāsu* or *wa-libāsa*; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 10:127-29.

4.3.6. Satan's removal of their garments and his motivation

Addressing Adam's descendants, Q 7:27 attributes the actual stripping of Adam and Eve's garments to Satan: "Children of Adam! Let not Satan tempt you as he brought your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their garments to show them their shameful parts..." The exegetes explain that though Satan did not actually remove their clothing, this is ascribed to him on account of his being the cause of the divestment.¹²¹

Similar language is found in Ephrem:

Even though all the trees / of Paradise / are clothed each in its own glory, / yet each veils itself at the Glory; / the Seraphs with their wings, / the trees with their branches, / all cover their faces so as not to behold / their Lord. / They all blushed at Adam / who was suddenly found naked; / the serpent had stolen his garments (*nahtē*), / for which it was deprived of its feet (*Hymns on Paradise* 3.15).¹²²

Likewise in his third hymn *On the Pearl* Ephrem addresses the pearl, saying:

You resemble Eve, who was clothed (*da-lbišā wāt*) / in spite of her nakedness. Cursed be he who deceived her, / stripped her and left her (*w-ašlah šabqāh*). Your glory the serpent / is not able to strip off. In your likeness / women will be clothed in light, in Eden (*Hymns on Faith* 83.2).¹²³

But Q 7:27 tells us not only that Satan stripped Adam and Eve of their clothes but also that his goal was to expose their nakedness: "to show (*li-yuriyahumā*) them their shameful parts". The same idea occurs earlier in Q 7:20: "Then Satan whispered to them,

¹²¹ See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 10:135-36, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 14:53.

¹²² Ed. Beck, 11-12; ET in Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, 95-96.

¹²³ E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*, CSCO 154, SS 73, (Louvain, 1955), 254; ET in A. S. Rodrigues Pereira, *Studies in Aramaic Poetry* (Assen, 1997), 449.

to reveal (*li-yubdiya*) to them that which was hidden from them of their shameful parts

...¹²⁴

Satan's interest in exposing Adam and Eve is unique to Q 7 and finds no parallel in the Biblical text. It does, however, serve the polemical point this Sura is making against attending places of worship in the nude (Q 7:31). Such customs amount to no more than surrender to Satan's wiles.¹²⁵ In making this point the Quran draws on the Syriac tradition, where Satan is especially interested in Adam and Eve's garments.

Commenting on Genesis 3:7, Ephrem writes: "Their eyes opened; not to become like God as the serpent had said but rather to see their nakedness as the enemy had waited for... The enemy was also jealous because [Adam and Eve] were superior in glory (*šubhā*) and reason to all other creatures of the earth..." (*Commentary on Genesis 2.22*).¹²⁶ This theme is further developed in two of Jacob of Serugh's homilies. In his above-mentioned homily *On Adam's departure from Paradise* Jacob writes concerning Satan:

The robber ran and stood there on the road of Paradise / in order to divest (*da-nšallah*) the merchants who had set out on it (lines 299-300).¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Not all exegetes, however, agree that these verses indeed address Satan's motivation. The question is whether the *lām* in *li-yubdiya* and *li-yuriyahumā* indicates the goal (*lām al-gharaḍ*) or the consequence (*lām al-'āqiba*). The classic example of the latter is Q 28:8 ("So then the folk of Pharaoh picked him out to be an enemy and a sorrow to them [*li-yakūna lahum 'aduwwan wa-ḥazanan*"]"), though this too is debated. See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 14:46 and 53. I prefer the goal interpretation for two reasons. First, it avoids the redundancy of vv. 20 and 22 both stating that their nakedness became apparent to them. Second, the Syriac evidence supports this reading.

¹²⁵ Neuwirth, "Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory", 142 ("The account – originally culminating in the couple's ungrateful neglecting divine orders – has changed its orientation: In the context of the final composition of surah 7 it is obviously understood to climax in the primordial couple's shocking discovery of their nakedness. As such it is put in the service of a reform concept, the plea for a less overt pagan practice of ancient Arabian rites which used to be partly carried out by naked worshippers").

¹²⁶ Ed. Tonneau, 38-39. The translation in T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian* (Lund, 1978), 107, is inaccurate.

¹²⁷ Alwan, *Jacques de Saroug*, 43. Cf. the description in J. S. Jabbūr, *The Bedouins and the Desert: Aspects of Nomadic Life in the Arab East* (Albany, 1995), 1, note 1: "When Bedouin raiders in the desert encountered someone from the settled areas, it was their custom to accost him with the command, *Ishlah yā walad*, 'Strip, boy!' meaning that they intended to rob him of his clothing".

If this short allusion is not explicit enough, Jacob returns to this theme in a far more developed manner in his so-called *Hexaemeron*. In the part devoted to the sixth day of creation we read as follows:

The bridegroom and bride rose with the garment of light that they wore, / and [giving them] its nuptial gifts the entire world delighted in them. / The day smiled at the bridegroom and gave him / as a nuptial gift all its light so that he might rejoice in it. / Paradise opened its high gates so that the bridegroom and bride might enter / and delight there in the bridal chamber of blessings that was prepared. / Then that ruler who guards the air envied / that grandeur which was given to the house of Adam.¹²⁸ / Of his own accord he cast himself into rebellion, / devastation, destruction, and disturbance, / in order to tear asunder that banquet full of beauties / pull down from the bride her wreath through his wicked deceit, / lay a trap and destroy the beauty of their garments (*we-nesroḥ šuprā da-lbušayhon*),¹²⁹ / uncover (*wa-nparse*) them and make them stand naked (*'artelā'it*), / and turn them into laughing-stock and great shame in the world. / [The reason for all this] was that he envied the house of Adam how greatly they were honored.¹³⁰

That Satan was envious of Adam is a widespread theme and in no way is it unique to the Syriac sources and the Quran.¹³¹ What does, however, link them is the immediate cause of this envy and the way in which it was expressed. Rather than emphasize Satan's desire for Eve as some rabbinic sources say with regard to the serpent, the Quran first mentions God's command to the angels to bow down before Adam as the cause of Satan's initial jealousy, and later states that Satan's goal was to divest Adam of his

¹²⁸ This epithet of Satan is based on Ephesians 2:2. For its meaning, see C. E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 2010), 131-32. For other occurrences of this epithet, see Jansma, "L'Hexaméron de Jacques de Sarûg", 37, note 119.

¹²⁹ In a variant: the beauties of their wreaths.

¹³⁰ *JSB*, 3:125-26.

¹³¹ See the discussion in Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 121-24.

clothing. Whereas the first theme is well-known from several sources, including the *Life of Adam and Eve*, the second theme seems to reflect an emphasis in the Syriac sources on the idea that Satan was especially agitated by the garments of glory which symbolized Adam's high status. Therefore he sought to take away these garments and put Adam to shame.

4.3.7. Resurrection

Whereas in Q 20:123 and Q 2:38 God tempers the expulsion with a vague reference to guidance that might eventually be given to mankind, in Q 7:25 He softens the blow by mentioning the resurrection.¹³²

Though the language is formulaic, the mention of the resurrection here is no mere coincidence and reflects responses to a theological challenge posed by the Biblical text. Genesis 3:19 offers little hope of life after death: "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return". This portrayal of the fate of Adam and mankind was troubling for later readers who firmly believed in the resurrection. Therefore subsequent Jewish and Christian retellings of the Adam story found different ways to insert the promise of resurrection into the narrative either by way of exegesis or through simple addition to the text.¹³³

In *Genesis Rabba* 20.10 the resurrection is read out of the text of Genesis 3:19: "R. Simeon b. Yoḥai said: 'Here Scripture hints at the resurrection, for it does not say *you*

¹³² The other accounts indeed end with eschatological references (the day of resurrection in Q 20:124 and Hell in Q 2:39), but in the context of a warning to evildoers rather than a consoling promise to Adam.

¹³³ Some of the works cited below were noted already in Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 72-73. I cannot find his reference to Slavonic Enoch.

are dust, and to dust you shall go, but rather you shall return".¹³⁴ An intriguing parallel is found in the Genesis Commentary written by the Alexandrian Christian scholar Didymus (d. 398):

We should also take the phrase *Until you return to the earth out of which you were taken* in an allegorical fashion. When you are resurrected in a spiritual body, you will hold heavenly citizenship, having arrived in the land of the meek, for *Blessed are the meek, because they will inherit the earth*, even though man has exchanged that earth for this arid one because of his failure.¹³⁵

Though they differ in their hermeneutic technique as well as in the part of the verse to which they apply it, both texts manage to find mention of the resurrection in Genesis 3:19.

The other approach, i.e. inserting a reference to the resurrection into a retelling of the story, is found in several texts. In the Palestinian Targums, after Genesis 3:19 is rendered fairly literally we read something along the lines of: "and from the dust you [shall] arise to give accounting for what you have done".¹³⁶

In the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* the resurrection is a recurring theme. When God banishes Adam from Paradise, Adam asks to eat from the Tree of Life before he leaves. God denies his request but adds: "But when you come out of Paradise, if you guard yourself from all evil, preferring death to it, at the time of the resurrection I will raise you again, and then there shall be given to you from the tree of life, and you shall be

¹³⁴ Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 1:194; ET slightly adapted from Freedman, *Midrash Rabba: Genesis*, 1:169. The same comment is cited in *Seder Eliyahu Rabba* end of chapter 31. The Leqah Tob has a slightly different version.

¹³⁵ Cited and analyzed in Reuling, *After Eden*, 70-71.

¹³⁶ Thus in the Fragment Targum (P); M. L. Klein, *The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch According to their Extant Sources* (Rome, 1980), 1:46 (Aramaic) and 2:7 (English). Similar additions are found in Neofiti and Pseudo-Jonathan. See the discussion and references in Reuling, *After Eden*, 44. According to Reuling, this insertion goes back to the theological debate concerning the resurrection and to the moral perspective which the Targums introduce into the Eden story generally.

immortal forever” (28).¹³⁷ Later God addresses Adam after the angels buried him and Abel:

And God called Adam and Said: “Adam, Adam”. And the body answered from the ground and said: “Here I am, Lord”. And the Lord said to him: “I told you that *you are dust and to dust you shall return*. Now I promise to you the resurrection; I shall raise you on the last day in the resurrection with every man of your seed” (41).¹³⁸

As in the Targums, here we have an addition to the verse rather than a conclusion deduced from it. But the content in all these sources is the same: Adam is consoled with the promise of the resurrection.

A similar expansion is found in the *Cave of Treasures* 5.2-13, though here it is of a clear Christological nature. As Adam and Eve are leaving paradise, God speaks to Adam and tells him not to be sad, for He will return him to his inheritance. When the time of exile is over God will send His Son for Adam’s salvation. Adam’s body should be placed in the middle of the Earth, for there salvation will occur for Adam and all of his descendants.¹³⁹

In sum, the introduction of resurrection into the Adam story is paralleled in both Jewish and Christian retellings of the Adam story and therefore is not in itself indicative of Christian transmission. Nonetheless, in light of the other themes examined a Christian origin seems likely.

¹³⁷ *OTP*, 2:285.

¹³⁸ *OTP*, 2:293. See also the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* 13 and 39.

¹³⁹ Compare with the *Testament of Adam* 3, where after God consigns Adam to death he informs him that He will not let him waste away in Sheol, but rather Jesus will taste death for Adam’s sake, set him at His right hand and make him into a God! *OTP*, 1:994.

4.4. Conclusion

The example of the Adam story studied in this chapter was adduced by Geiger as proof “that the [Quranic] narratives about persons mentioned in the Old Testament are almost all of Jewish origin...”¹⁴⁰ In this chapter we have examined the faulty premises on which Geiger founded his argument and highlighted details which indicate that the Adam narrative was in fact transmitted to the Quran via the (Syriac) Christian tradition.¹⁴¹ In doing so we have also noted that of the three accounts of the fall found in the Quran, one (Q 7) was especially close to the Christian retellings of Genesis 2-3. This raises interesting questions concerning the chronology of the Suras and the way in which narratives evolve in the Quran. I have offered my speculations on these matters, but would like to stress here that for the larger questions of this thesis what really matters is the affinity between the Quranic version of the story and the Syriac sources.

¹⁴⁰ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 73-74, cited at the beginning of this chapter.

¹⁴¹ Following Geiger, in this chapter we only examined thematic parallels. In the following chapters we shall also pay attention to the diction of the narratives. Here I shall note briefly a few linguistic similarities between the Quran and the Syriac traditions, though none are entirely distinctive. In addition to the use of *lā taqrabā* discussed above the following are noteworthy: 1) In Q 2:36 Satan causes Adam and Eve to slip. The language of slipping is likewise used in Syriac sources with regard to Adam and Eve and Satan; see the verb *šra'* (“to slip”) in Jacob’s homily *On Adam’s departure from Paradise* (lines 72, 136 and 564). According to Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon*, 1610, as a causative the *afel* of *š-r-*’ means “to betray, corrupt, lead astray”. In two of the four texts he cites, the subject of the verb is Satan. 2) The repeated references to Adam and Eve’s *pursāyā* (“nakedness, shame”) are reminiscent of the Arabic *saw’a* (more on this in chapter 5.2). 3) That eating from the tree will turn Adam and Eve into *zālimīn* (Q 7:19 and Q 2:36), in itself extremely common Quranic terminology, is nonetheless evocative of Adam and Eve’s *īlomotā* in Jacob’s homily (line 1044). 4) The orders to descend are reminiscent of the repeated references throughout the Syriac works to Satan and Adam falling. On this last point, see Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 58-62.

5. Jewish Cain, Muslim Abel¹

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined a Quranic retelling of a Hebrew Bible narrative which Geiger considered to be an exception to the rule in that it exhibited Christian influence. Having established that the Quranic episode of Adam's fall is in fact closer to the (Syriac) Christian tradition than Geiger believed, I now turn to study stories that to Geiger were evidently of a Jewish origin. In this chapter as well as the following ones I will argue that the Syriac Christian tradition helps illuminate these retellings too. To do so I will look at three examples, the first of which is the Cain and Abel story.

Within the Syriac tradition I shall focus primarily on dramatic poems which expand on Biblical themes and range from formal dialogues in alternating stanzas to dramatized narratives which include dialogue and homiletic material.² That the Quran should be aware of them is not entirely surprising bearing in mind their use in liturgy and wide audience.³ Indeed the Qur'ānic retellings and the Syriac poems display similarities with regard to motifs, literary form, lexical use, and typological function.

5.2. The texts

In Genesis 4 we read as follows:

(1) Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying: "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord". (2) Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. (3) In the course of time Cain

¹ An early version of this chapter was presented at the X Symposium Syriacum, Granada, September 2008.

² S. Brock, "Dramatic Dialogue Poems", in H. J. W. Drijvers *et al.* (eds.), *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984* (Rome, 1987), 135-47; *id.*, "Syriac Dialogue Poems: Marginalia to a Recent Edition", *Le Muséon* 97 (1984): 29-58.

³ For the wide diffusion of these homilies, see L. Van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation", in M. Sæbø (ed.) *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation* (Göttingen, 1996), 641; K. Upson-Saia, "Caught in a Compromising Position: The Biblical Exegesis and Characterization of Biblical Protagonists in the Syriac Dialogue Hymns", *Hugoye* 9.2 (2006).

brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, (4) and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, (5) but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. (6) The Lord said to Cain: “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? (7) If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it”. (8) Cain said to his brother Abel, and when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. (9) Then the Lord said to Cain: “Where is your brother Abel?” He said: “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” (10) And the Lord said: “What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! (11) And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. (12) When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth”. (13) Cain said to the Lord: “My punishment is greater than I can bear! (14) Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me”. (15) Then the Lord said to him: “Therefore whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance”. And the Lord put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him. (16) Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.⁴

In the Quran we read:

(27) Recite to them the story of the two sons of Adam truthfully when they offered an offering (*qarrabā qurbānan*) and it was accepted (*fa-tuqubbila*) from one of them and was not accepted (*wa-lam yutaqabbal*) from the other. [The one whose offering was not accepted] said: “I will surely kill you (*la-aqtulannaka*)”. [His brother] said: “Allah accepts [offerings] only from the God-fearing. (28) If you extend your hand against me to kill me (*la-in basatta ilayya yadaka li-taqtulanī*), I will not extend my hand against you to kill you. Indeed I fear God, the Lord of all. (29) Indeed I desire (*innī urīdu*)⁵ that you bear my sin and your sin (*an tabū’a bi-ithmī wa-ithmika*)⁶ so that you become one of the

⁴ NRSV slightly adapted to fit the Hebrew text.

⁵ The exegetes were troubled by Abel’s wish that Cain sin (See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 11:207). An interesting yet artificial solution was to read *annā urīdu* (“How could I wish...”) instead of *innī urīdu* (“I wish...”) which leaves the *rasm* intact, changing only the vocalization; al-Khaṭīb, *Mu’jam al-qirā’āt*, 2:258.

⁶ Abel’s utterance is problematic. What is his own sin and why should Cain bear it? In al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 8:330-33, the following explanations are cited: that Cain bear the sin of killing Abel in addition to

inhabitants of the Fire; that is the reward of the evildoers (*al-zālimīna*)” (30) But his soul incited him to kill his brother so he killed him and thus became one of the lost. (31) Then Allah sent a raven digging up the earth (*yabḥathu fī l-arḍi*) in order to show him how to conceal his brother’s corpse (*li-yuriyahu kayfa yuwārī saw’ata akhīhi*).⁷ He said: “Woe is me. Am I unable to be like this raven and conceal my brother’s corpse?” He then became one of those who pity themselves (*fa-aṣbaḥa mina l-nādimīna*).⁸ (32) On account of this

his other sins, taking *ithmī* as *ithm qatlī*, that Cain bear Abel’s sin in addition to his own sin in murdering his brother. The latter approach is fine-tuned in al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:658-59, where the idea is that Cain should bear his own sin in killing Abel and the equivalent of Abel’s sin were he to kill Cain, the rationale for this being that the instigator is responsible for the defensive actions of the attacked party. Another interpretation cited in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 11:207, is based on a tradition that on the day of resurrection wrongdoers who will not be able to appease those whom they wronged otherwise will take some of their sins off their hands. See also al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 7:414-15. The Quranic view of personal responsibility is not entirely clear. Whereas several verses repeat that “no bearer of burdens shall bear another’s burden” (Q 6:164, Q 17:15, Q 35:18, Q 39:7, Q 53:38), other verses present a murkier state of affairs. In Q 16:25, the unbelievers are said to carry their own burdens fully on the day of resurrection as well as “some of the burdens of those that they lead astray without any knowledge”. In Q 29:12-13, the unbelievers attempt to seduce the believers to join them with a promise to bear their sins. The Quran denies that they shall bear any of the believers’ sins and then adds: “They shall certainly carry their loads and other loads along with their loads...”. What these other loads are remains unspecified. It seems that Q 5:29 is another example of a more complicated concept of responsibility.

⁷ The meaning of *saw’a* is debated. It might be best to understand it as “any disgracing action or thing”; see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:1458. Following the context some exegetes understand it as “corpse” (*jīfa*). Others render it as “genitals” (*’awra*); see, e.g., Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 11:209. Though the exegetes do not spell it out, the source for the genitals interpretation is in a striking parallel passage in Q 7:20-27. There Satan leads Adam and Eve astray in order to “to reveal (*li-yubdiya*) to them that which was hidden (*wūriya*) from them of their shameful parts (*saw’ātihimā*)” (Q 7:20). Addressing its audience, the Quran reminds the children of Adam that God sent down to them “a garment to hide your shameful parts (*libāsan yuwārī saw’ātikum*) and feathers” (Q 7:26). The Quran draws the lesson to be learned from this story: “Children of Adam! Let not Satan tempt you as he brought your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their garments to show them their shameful parts (*li-yuriyahumā saw’ātihimā*)” (Q 7:27). The only other passage in which *saw’a* occurs is Q 20:121, again with reference to Adam and Eve’s nakedness. Likewise, *w-r-y* in the third form is used only in these two stories. The use of similar language in both narratives suggests that the language and themes of the one may have influenced the other. Already in the Biblical text the two stories which appear in consecutive chapters parallel each other in several ways. Compare, for example, God’s curse of Eve, “[...] yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16), with His consolation to Cain, “[...] its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:7); God’s questions to Adam and Eve, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9) and “What is this that you have done?” (Genesis 3:13), with His questions to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” and “What have you done?” (Genesis 4:9-10); and the curse concerning the ground in Genesis 3:17 with that in Genesis 4:11. It is not therefore surprising that in post-Biblical times the similarities between the two episodes continued to grow. Q 5:31 might reflect another instance of this process. In a mirror image of the Adam and Eve story in which a snake brought about their nakedness which required that God help them cover it, in the retelling of the Cain and Abel story a raven sent by God teaches Cain how to cover his brother’s nakedness/corpse. Whether the influence was restricted to phraseology or perhaps accounts for the origin of the burial motif in the Cain story remains to be seen (see also Genesis 3:19: “[...] until you return to the ground... you are dust and to dust you shall return”). An interesting precedent for the Quranic linking of Genesis 3 and 4 is found in the *Syriac Life of Abel* where in his plea to Cain, Abel says: “by Him who stripped Adam of the glory he was clothed in, do not take off from my limbs my clothes and reveal to the sun in the sky the nakedness (*pursāyā*) of my youth”; S. Brock, “A Syriac Life of Abel”, *Le Muséon* 87 (1974): 476. Though *pursāyā* is not found in the Peshitta to Genesis 3, it is used to describe Adam and Eve’s nakedness in later Syriac texts (see, e.g. Ephrem’s *Commentary on Genesis* 2.21-22 and 27). Interestingly, one of the Arabic words used to gloss *pursāyā* is *saw’a*; Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2:3277.

⁸ For this translation of *nādimīna*, see the discussion below.

(*min ajli dhālika*) We decreed to the Children of Israel (*katabnā 'alā banī isrā'īla*) that whoever kills a soul – not [in retaliation for another] soul nor for corruption in the land⁹ – shall be as if he killed all mankind; and whoever gives life to a soul shall be as if he gave life to all mankind. Our messengers have already come to them with clear signs, but many of them indeed commit afterwards excesses in the land (Q 5:27-32).¹⁰

The Quran departs from the Biblical version in several ways. Many details are omitted: the protagonists are simply “the two sons of Adam” (*ibnay ādama*) and no further names are given;¹¹ their occupations and specific offerings are not mentioned; the dialogue between God and Cain is lacking and so on. But omissions of this kind are characteristic of Quranic retellings, which after all were trying to drive home a point rather than repeat stories in their entirety.

More interesting are those elements of the plot which are not found in the Bible. Striking are the dialogue between the brothers in which Abel presents an extremely passive approach,¹² the burial scene and the decree which follows the story. Can these departures from the Biblical story tell us whence the Quran took its version?

⁹ The translation follows the predominant reading *aw fasādin*. According to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's reading *aw fasādan*, the verse should be rendered “[...] that whoever kills a soul – not [in retaliation for another] soul – or [commits] corruption in the land shall be as if he killed all mankind”; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 7:429, and al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 2:264.

¹⁰ Studies devoted to this episode in the Quran, primarily in light of later Islamic tradition, include W. Bork-Qaysieh, *Die Geschichte von Kain und Abel (Hābīl wa-Qābīl) in der sunnitisch-islamischen Überlieferung* (Berlin, 1993), and I. Zilio-Grandi, “La figure de Caïn dans le Coran”, *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 216 (1990): 31-85.

¹¹ Whereas the vast majority of exegetes recognized the story of Cain and Abel in this passage, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) and al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 723f) both argue that the two protagonists were not Adam's immediate sons, but rather were two Israelites, who were like all of humanity children of Adam. The motivation for this interpretation is found in v. 32, where God decrees to the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul shall be as if he killed all mankind. If the consequences of the sin affect the Children of Israel, it must have been committed by Israelites. Moreover, the story is related with the intent of highlighting Israelite jealousy; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 8:324-25; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 11:204. As we shall see later, in the Christian tradition Cain is said to be the father of the Jews.

¹² My characterization of the Quranic Abel as passive refers only to the fact that he abstained from physically defending himself. Spiritually, his behavior was brave and full of strength. I use passivity in a similar manner to describe Abel's conduct according to the Syriac sources.

5.3. Jewish origin?

To Geiger it is evident that the Quranic retelling “is depicted for us quite in its Jewish colours”, by which he means that the story follows rabbinic traditions.¹³ His conclusion is based on three parallels, though closer scrutiny suggests that the matter is more complicated than he assumes. Let us first examine the parallels he adduces.

5.3.1. The dialogue

The first concerns the dialogue held between the brothers before the murder. Non-existent in Genesis, such a dialogue is found in the Quran (vv. 27-29) and the Palestinian Targums. But as Geiger himself concedes “the matter of the conversation is given so differently in each case that we do not consider it worthwhile to compare the two passages more closely”.¹⁴ We shall return to examine the dialogues shortly.

5.3.2. The raven

The second parallel is shows greater similarity of detail and concerns the Quranic embellishment that Cain learned how to bury Abel by observing the practice of a raven (v. 31). A similar motif is recorded in a few rabbinic texts.¹⁵ Geiger cites *PRE* 21:

Adam and his helpmate were sitting and weeping and mourning for him, and they did not know what to do with Abel, for they were unaccustomed to burial. A raven, one of whose fellow birds had died, came, took its fellow, dug in the earth and buried it before their eyes. Adam said: “Like this raven I will act”. He took the corpse of Abel and dug in the earth and buried it. The Holy One, blessed be He, gave a good reward to the ravens in this

¹³ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 80. His arguments are reproduced in Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qur’ān*, 62-66. For an apologetic yet at times useful response, see M. S. M. Saifullah *et al.*, “On the Sources of the Story of Cain & Abel in the Qur’an”, available online at <http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Sources/BBCandA.html>

¹⁴ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 80.

¹⁵ The most comprehensive studies of this motif are H. P. Rüger, “Das Begräbnis Abels: Zur Vorlage von Sure 5,31”, *Biblische Notizen* 14 (1981): 37-45, and Ch. Böttrich, “*Die Vögel des Himmels haben ihn begraben*”: Überlieferungen zu Abels Bestattung und zur Ätiologie des Grabes (Göttingen, 1995).

world. What reward did He give them? When they bear their young and see that they are white they flee from them, thinking that they are the offspring of a serpent, and the Holy One, blessed be He, gives them their sustenance without lack. Moreover, they call out that rain should be given upon the earth, and the Holy One, blessed be He, answers them, as it is said: “He gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens which cry”.¹⁶

When Geiger wrote his study, it was still possible to believe *PRE* to be pre-Islamic. However, since then it has been demonstrated that *PRE* is clearly a post-Quranic midrash which at times reflects Islamic traditions so that we can no longer be sure which tradition influenced the other in this case.¹⁷

Other scholars traced the Quranic motif to the *Tanḥuma*.¹⁸ In *Tanḥuma* Bereshit 10 we read:

After Cain slew Abel, he [=Abel] was cast to the ground and Cain did not know what to do. Thereupon, the Holy One, blessed be He, summoned for him two clean birds and one of them killed the other, dug with its talons and buried it. Cain learned from it what to do. He dug [a grave] and buried Abel. It is because of this that birds are privileged to have their blood covered.¹⁹

As in the Quran, in this version it is Cain who buries Abel not Adam. Unlike the Quran which mentions a raven, in the *Tanḥuma* we find “two pure birds”. Their purity is noted presumably in preparation for their reward, the covering of their blood with soil,

¹⁶ Geiger, *Judaism*, 80. ET adapted from G. Friedlander, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer* (New York, 1981), 156-67. It should be noted that earlier in the same chapter we are told that Cain dug and buried Abel’s body in the ground so as to conceal his sin, though in the Yalqut’s quotation from *PRE* he hides it in the field without digging.

¹⁷ For the provenance of *PRE* in eighth or ninth-century Palestine and its awareness of Islamic legends, see chapter 2.1. That this is the case in the ravens tradition is assumed in V. Aptowitz, *Kain und Abel in der Agada, den Apokryphen, der hellenistischen, christlichen und muhamedanischen Literature* (Vienna, 1922), 54. Cf. Böttrich, “*Die Vögel des Himmels haben ihn begraben*”, 53-56, where it is argued that other reasons besides Islamic influence may have caused the raven to enter the Cain legend.

¹⁸ See Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes*, 18. His reasoning in preferring the *Tanḥuma* over *PRE* was based on content rather than on issues of dating. See also Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen*, 86, and D. Masson, *Monothéisme coranique et monothéisme biblique* (Paris, 1976), 336.

¹⁹ A freer and more elegant translation is found in S. A. Berman, *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu: An English Translation of Genesis and Exodus from the Printed Version of Tanhuma-Yelammedenu with an Introduction, Notes, and Indexes* (Hoboken, 1996), 31-32.

applicable only to pure birds (Leviticus 17:13).²⁰ Mirroring Cain, the bird first murders its friend and then buries it.²¹ For Stillman “the qur’anic version is merely an epitome” of the *Tanḥuma*.²² But this is not necessarily the case, seeing that the *Tanḥuma* most probably finished evolving long after the Quran appears.²³ That this passage might belong to later strata of the *Tanḥuma* is suggested by its not occurring in the parallel text known as the Buber *Tanḥuma*.²⁴ The emphasis on the birds’ purity might also be a reaction to the Quranic story, stressing that the birds were not impure ravens. Most importantly, as we shall argue later, the Quran preserves a more basic form of the legend in that all the raven does there is dig with no mention of killing or burying another bird.

The theme is also found in a *Targumic tosefta* to Genesis 4:8 (Oxford Bodleian Ms. Heb. c 74r):

And he (i.e. Cain) did not know where to strike him. He looked about here and there, until he saw two birds fighting; and one rose up against the other, and struck it on its mouth, and its blood spurted out until it died.²⁵ Cain took a lesson from it, and did the same to Abel [his] brother. Then seeing that he was dead, he feared that his father would demand

²⁰ “And anyone of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside among them, who hunts down an animal or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth”.

²¹ Note the correspondence between the figure that buries Abel and the question of how the dead bird died. In *PRE* Adam learns from a raven which buries an independently dead raven, whereas in the *Tanḥuma* Cain follows the example of a bird which kills its fellow and then buries it.

²² Stillman, “The Story of Cain and Abel”, 236.

²³ For the dating of the *Tanḥuma* see chapter 2.1. Regarding our passage scholars are divided. Whereas in Böttrich, “*Die Vögel des Himmels haben ihn begraben*”, 34-40, it is treated as the earliest Jewish attestation of the bird tradition, in Rüger, “Das Begräbnis Abels”, 44, it is thought to be based on a combination of *PRE* and the passage which appears in the printed editions of *Genesis Rabba*, but is not found in any of the manuscripts (treated below).

²⁴ For a similar principle, see M. Bregman, *The Tanhuma-Yelammedenu Literature: Studies in the Evolution of the Versions* (Piscataway, 2003), 184-86 (in Hebrew). Bregman’s examples concern parallel passages in the two versions of the *Tanḥuma* where the regular *Tanḥuma* has an additional sentence which is unattested in the Buber *Tanḥuma*. This is not the case in our example since the entire passage about the two birds has no parallel in the Buber *Tanḥuma*.

²⁵ I follow Klein here, though the mouth as the most vulnerable organ is odd. It might be preferable to interpret the text otherwise. The sentence *ימהיניה ידע ב[מה] ולא הוה ידע ב[מה]* could also be rendered “And he did not know with what to strike him”. In the same manner, *ומהייה בפומיה* might mean “and struck it with its mouth (i.e. beak)”. This interpretation is supported by the killer bird later digging a hole with its beak (*והוא נקיס* (בפומיה והפר). If correct, this would mean that Cain killed Abel with his teeth, an extremely savage portrayal. Such a tradition is indeed known from several sources; see Aptowitz, *Kain und Abel*, 51 and 154, note 219b (where the Targumic passage is cited and translated as I have suggested).

[Abel] from him; and he did not know what to do. Looking up, he saw the bird that had killed its fellow putting its mouth to the ground; and it dug [a hole], and buried the other dead one, and covered it with earth. At that moment, Cain did the same to Abel, so that [his father] might not find him.²⁶

It is hard to firmly date this passage.²⁷ Here the birds serve as role models not only for the burial but for the murder as well.²⁸ Note also that Cain's motive for the burial is to avoid getting caught by Adam. In all the other sources the burial is presented as a positive act inspired by God (Quran, *Tanḥuma*) and worthy of reward (*Tanḥuma*, *PRE*).

Another variant on this theme is found in the printed editions of *Genesis Rabba* 22.8. It is hard to know where this particular passage originated from. It clearly does not belong to the original text as it is unattested in all the manuscripts.²⁹ It is attributed to *Genesis Rabba* also in the printed editions of *Yalquṭ Shim'oni*, a twelfth or thirteenth-

²⁶ M. L. Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts of Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (Cincinnati, 1986), 1:12 (ET) and 13 (text). The text was first published in an appendix in M. Ginsburger, *Das Fragmententargum* (Berlin, 1899), 71-72. The language of the passage was partly inspired by Exodus 2:11-12 ("One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand"; see M. L. Klein, "Targumic Studies and the Cairo Genizah", in S. C. Reif (ed.), *The Cambridge Genizah Collections: Their Contents and Significance* (Cambridge, 2002), 58. Another possible inspiration for this passage may have been Adam's hiding from God in Genesis 3.

²⁷ The manuscript dates from the mid-11th to the late 14th century; Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts*, XXXVII. This, however, tells us little about the date of the work itself. Klein does not date the *Targumic toseftot* and makes do with the observation that vestiges of an original Palestinian dialect survive in them; *ibid.*, XXXVII. Böttrich's argument for an early date of the *Tosefta* on Cain and Abel is founded on an unfortunate oversight. He notes the correspondence of our *Tosefta* with the quotation found in Aptowitz, *Kain und Abel*, 154 note 219b, which he believes to stem from the *Fragment Targum*. Since he dates the *Fragment Targum* to the first or second century this proves that the tradition is ancient; Böttrich, "*Die Vögel des Himmels haben ihn begraben*", 46. The citation in Aptowitz stems, however, from the first publication of the very same manuscript published by Klein. Böttrich's dating is based then on comparing the manuscript to itself! This error is crucial for his early dating of the tradition.

²⁸ Jacob ben Asher (d. 1343) in his commentary on the Torah also knows of a tradition that Cain learned how to kill from observing one raven kill another; see Böttrich, "*Die Vögel des Himmels haben ihn begraben*", 46-47. The late date notwithstanding, Rüger argues that the midrash preserved by Jacob ben Asher was the *Vorlage* of Q 5:31; Rüger, "Das Begräbnis Abels", 44-45. See the responses in A. Ulrich, "Zum 'Begräbnis' Abels", *Biblische Notizen* 15 (1981): 48-54, and Böttrich, *ibid.*

²⁹ See Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 1:215. Neither Rüger nor Böttrich notes that the passage is unattested in the manuscripts; Rüger "Das Begräbnis Abels", 38, and Böttrich, "*Die Vögel des Himmels haben ihn begraben*", 40-41. It is also noteworthy that *Genesis Rabba* 22.10 assumes that Abel had not yet been buried ("It [the soul] could not ascend above, because no soul had yet ascended thither; nor could it go below, because Adam had not yet been buried there; hence the blood lay spattered on the trees and the stones"; ET adapted from Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 1:189).

century midrashic thesaurus on the Bible, but again not in the Oxford manuscript (Bodleian 2637) of the *Yalqut*.³⁰

And who buried him? Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat said: “The birds of the air and the pure animals buried him and God gave them their reward, the two blessings uttered over them, one on the slaughter and one on the covering of the blood”.

Here rather than serve as a role model, the wildlife itself buries Abel. In having both birds and animals participate in the burial, this passage answers a difficulty created by the tradition as presented in the *Tanḥuma*. If the covering of the blood of birds was a reward for their part in the burial of Abel, how is the covering of the blood of animals to be explained, seeing that Leviticus 17:13 prescribes the covering of both? Solution: both birds and animals buried Abel.

Since the bird tradition is found in several rabbinic sources and versions it is hard to deny the possibility that ultimately its origin is indeed Jewish. Nonetheless, four points are noteworthy. First, the tradition is found in Christian sources as well, though again it is most difficult to date these traditions.³¹ Second, none of these Jewish or Christian texts

³⁰ On the *Yalqut Shim'oni*, see Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 351-52. Our passage is in the *Yalqut Shim'oni* Genesis remez 38. For the Oxford manuscript reading, see D. Hyman *et al.* (eds.), *Yalqut Shim'oni 'al ha-Torah le Rabbenu Shim'on ha-Darshan*, (Jerusalem, 1973), 1:127.

³¹ In 2 *Enoch* 71:36 we read: “And in connection with that archpriest it is written how he will also be buried there, where the center of the earth is, just as Adam also buried his own son there – Abel, whom his brother Cain murdered; for he lay for 3 years unburied, until he saw a bird called Jackdaw, how it buried its own young”; F. I. Andersen, “2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) ENOCH”, in *OTP*, 1:208. This verse is attested only in the longer recension of 2 *Enoch* and is usually assumed to be an interpolation, the dating of which is no easy task. Whereas Vaillant postulates that the passage was added by a redactor working sometime in the 13th-16th centuries, Böttrich dates it to the fourth to seventh centuries; Böttrich, “*Die Vögel des Himmels haben ihn begraben*”, 111-14. Böttrich’s dating is based on his assumption concerning the date of the rabbinic parallels. For Georgian, Turkish, Slavic, Finnish and Estonian traditions, all attested in late works, see *ibid.*, 78-109. To this list should be added three Armenian works in which Cain learns his murder method from a demonic raven. The works are *Abel* 3.4 (“And whence did he know? Two demons in the form of ravens quarreled, and one, taking the flint, slaughtered his fellow. From this [Cain] learned, and having found [a stone], he slaughtered him bloodily. And he was buried by his parents”), *History of the Forefathers* 25 (“But half say that Satan disguised himself in the likeness of two ravens, and the one cast the other to the ground and slaughtered [it] with a flinty stone. Thus Cain did to Abel and killed him”), and *Abel and Cain* 27-28 (“Then Satan took on the form of two ravens, and the one took a sharp stone, and he struck the other with it in the throat and killed him, and the stone was sharp as a razor. And Cain learned

are definitely pre-Quranic.³² Third, the identification of the bird as a raven as opposed to a general reference to birds or pure birds seems more original, in that ravens were well known for their habit of digging caches to store food.³³ Eventually the raven's part was perceived as meritorious (*PRE*). This contradicts the usual image of ravens and therefore they were replaced with pure birds (*Tanḥuma*).³⁴ Finally, a textual comparison of the Quranic version to the rabbinic and Christian parallels seems to support the primacy of the tradition as preserved in the Quran. Whereas in the parallel versions one bird buries another, this is nowhere stated in the Quran, which has only one raven digging in the ground and nothing else. As we shall see shortly, while most exegetes read a second raven into the story, some retained the simple and original meaning of the verse. Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī is cited as saying the following: "The custom of ravens is to bury things. A raven came and buried something and he [=Cain] learned this from it".³⁵ A similar anonymous position is cited by al-Qurṭubī: "The raven dug in the ground in order to hide its food for a time of need for such is the practice of ravens. Cain learned from this to conceal his brother".³⁶

from Satan, and he took the stone and leaped upon his brother"); for the first two sources, see M. E. Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Adam and Eve* (Leiden, 1996), 148 and 193 and the parallels cited in his notes; for the third, see W. L. Lipscomb, *The Armenian Apocryphal Adam Literature* (Atlanta, 1990), 164 (Recension I) and 273 (Recension II). Lipscomb dates the *Adam Cycle* of which *Abel and Cain* is part to "the period between the eighth and fourteenth centuries"; *ibid.*, 33.

³² This argument is made in Saifullah *et al.*, "On the Sources", with regard to *PRE* and the *Tanḥuma*.

³³ See the comment of Abū Muslim below. In his commentary on *PRE* Rabbi David Luria (d. 1855) expresses his wonder as to why the impure raven should be ascribed a lofty role in the story. He offers the following explanations: 1) In 1 Kings 17:2-6 God sends ravens to feed Elijah. 2) The numerical value of קבור ("bury", Deuteronomy 21:23) is equivalent to ל[מדן] עורב ("a raven taught"). 3) The raven's blackness is related to mourning. None of these explanations is as compelling as the fact that ravens are well known for their digging.

³⁴ Ravens were often perceived as symbols of evil. The raven's role in the deluge story (Genesis 8:6) lent itself to such interpretations; see D. M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, 2003), 51 and 287 note 43.

³⁵ See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīr al-kabīr*, 11:209. Admittedly, the motivation for Abū Muslim's interpretation was not purely philological since he tends to avoid positing unnecessary miracles (see, for example, his comments on Q 2:260, Q 3:41, and Q 3:44 as preserved by al-Rāzī). Nonetheless, in this instance his reading is more convincing.

³⁶ See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 7:421. The same approach is found also in M. Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār* (Cairo, 1947-54), 6:346, where the raven is understood to have dug in the ground searching for something until it made a hole and thus inspired Cain to bury Abel. Riḍā rejects the traditions concerning two ravens as originating in the infamous *Isrā'īliyyāt*, adding that the Torah itself makes no mention of any of this.

As we noted most exegetes did not interpret Q 5:31 in such a manner, but this results from a rather fanciful and over-literal reading of the verse. All the verse really says is that God sent a raven digging the earth in order in order to show Cain how he might conceal his brother's corpse (*li-yuriyahu kayfa yuwārī saw'ata akhīhi*). The notion that the raven buried another raven rose from an artificial understanding of two features of the verse. The subject of the verb *yuwārī* was taken as the raven, whereas in truth it is Cain referred to immediately beforehand in the suffixed pronoun *li-yuriyahu*. As a result the pronominal suffix in *akhīhi* was understood as referring to the raven.³⁷ This reading was also motivated by a tendency to take the comparison between Cain and the raven to an extreme. When Cain said: “Am I unable to be like this raven and conceal my brother's corpse?” he meant: “Can I not dig like a raven?” He did not mean “Can I not bury my brother like the raven did”.³⁸ Most readers, however, sought for a stronger comparison between Cain and the raven. Therefore, according to Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm (d. 815f), Cain takes his cue from the raven that throws dust (*yaḥthū l-turāba*) on Abel and thus initiates his burial (compare the tradition of the interpolated passage in *Genesis Rabba*).³⁹ In this version there is only one bird, as in Abū Muslim's reading, but unlike the latter, al-Aṣamm has the bird act in an extraordinary manner. In the most developed and most prevalent form of the story Cain sees one raven bury another one. This account is found in two versions. In the first there is no explanation as to how the dead raven died (compare *PRE*). In the second the parallel with Cain is emphasized by having one raven

³⁷ See Ibn 'Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 2:181.

³⁸ Related is an issue of reading. Whereas our text has *fa-uwāriya*, some reciters read *fa-uwārī* which if not merely a phonetic variant suggests that Cain's utterance should be rendered: “Am I unable to be like this raven? I shall therefore conceal my brother's corpse”; see al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:660, and al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 2:262. This reading makes it even clearer that the raven concealed no corpse.

³⁹ See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 11:209. The same opinion is cited anonymously in al-Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī al-qur'ān wa-i'rābuhu*, ed. 'A.-al-J. 'Abduh Shalabī (Beirut, 1988), 2:167. Cf. al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 7:422.

kill the other (compare the *Tanḥuma* and the *Targumic tosefta*).⁴⁰ Is it possible that the midrashic sources reflect *tafsīr* traditions in this instance? Perhaps.

5.3.3. The moral

Geiger's third parallel is much more convincing. In the Quran it is not entirely clear how v. 32 proceeds from what came before, but the idea that killing one man is tantamount to killing all of humanity is related to the Cain and Abel story already in the Mishna (redacted ca. 220 CE). In *Sanhedrin* 4:5, the Mishna comments on a peculiarity of the Hebrew for "your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!" (Genesis 4:10); surprisingly the word for "blood" occurs in the plural rather than the expected singular. This is taken as an allusion to Abel's blood and to the blood of his (potential) descendants. The Mishna then concludes: "Therefore [לפיכך] but a single man was created in the world, to teach that whosoever destroys a single soul is regarded as though he destroyed a complete world, and whosoever saves a single soul is regarded as though he saved a complete world".⁴¹ According to Geiger, in the Quran one perceives no

⁴⁰ For both versions, see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 8:340-44. Somewhat puzzling is the tradition attributed to Ibn 'Abbās, according to which Cain saw the two ravens digging; *ibid.*, 341. One also finds a tradition attributed to Ibn Jurayj (Meccan, d. 150AH) in which Cain learned his murder technique from Iblīs who took the shape of a bird and killed another bird (compare the *Targumic tosefta* and especially the Armenian traditions); *ibid.*, 338. This tradition does not seem to reflect a reaction to the phrasing of the Quranic verse since the bird here is Satan and not a raven sent by God.

⁴¹ The full text of the Mishna runs as follows (ET adapted from Danby): "How did they admonish the witnesses in capital cases? They brought them in and admonished them, [saying:] 'Perchance you will say what is but supposition or hearsay or at secondhand, or [you may say in yourselves], We heard it from a man that was trustworthy. Or perchance you do not know that we shall prove you by examination and inquiry? Know, moreover, that capital cases are not as non-capital cases: in non-capital cases a man may pay money and so make atonement, but in capital cases the witness is answerable for the blood of him [that is wrongfully condemned] and the blood of his posterity [that should have been born to him] to the end of the world. For so we have found concerning Cain that slew his brother, for it is written: *The bloods of your brother cry*. It says not 'The blood of your brother', but *The bloods of your brother* - his blood and the blood of his posterity. Another explanation: *Bloods of your brother* - because his blood was cast over the trees and stones. Therefore [לפיכך] but a single man was created in the world, to teach that whosoever destroys a single soul is regarded as though he destroyed a complete world, and whosoever saves a single soul is regarded as though he saved a complete world; and for the sake of peace among mankind, that none should say to his fellow: 'My father was greater than yours', and that heretics should not say: 'There are many ruling powers in heaven'; also to proclaim the greatness of the King of kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, for man stamps a hundred coins with one seal, and they are all alike, but the King of kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, has stamped every man with the seal of the first man, yet not one of

connection whatsoever between v. 32 and the preceding verses. This digression, as he would have it, reflects Muhammad’s faulty presentation of the materials received from his Jewish informants who related to him the Cain and Abel story together with the Mishnaic saying.⁴² But Geiger’s interpretation is too simplistic a reading of the Quran.

That the Quran is citing a Jewish source here should really come as no surprise since the verse itself suggests this in the way it introduces the tradition: *min ajli dhālika katabnā ‘alā banī isrā’īla annahu....* Above I translated the verb as “We decreed”, but the basic meaning is “We wrote”. The same verb introduces the quotation of the *lex talionis* in Q 5:45: *wa-katabnā ‘alayhim fihā anna....*,⁴³ as well as the citation from Psalms 37:29 in Q 21:105: *wa-la-qad katabnā fī l-zabūr min ba’di l-dhikri anna....*⁴⁴ Interestingly, in our verse the quotation derives from a rabbinic text, the Mishna, rather than Scripture.

As convincing as the parallel is, it should not obscure a major difference between the text of the Mishna and the way in which it is used in the Quran.⁴⁵ Whereas in the Mishna this rhetorical saying urges great caution in matters of life and death, in the Quran

them is like his fellow. Therefore every one must say: ‘For my sake was the world created’. And if perchance you should say: ‘Why should we be at these pains?’ – was it not written: *He being a witness, whether he has seen or known, [if he shall not utter it, than shall he bear his iniquity]*? And if perchance you would say: ‘Why should we be guilty of the blood of this man?’ – was it not written: *When the wicked perish there is rejoicing?*” The composition of this Mishna is complex in that it is not entirely clear which passages belong to the warning proclaimed to the witnesses and which passages are tangents.

⁴² Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 81.

⁴³ Note that this verse too occurs in an anti-Jewish polemical context and that it too concerns murder.

⁴⁴ Apart from these verses *katabnā* occurs only three more times. In Q 4:66 it introduces a hypothetical decree; in Q 7:145 and Q 57:27 the general content of the decree is summed up in a word but no text is given. Cf. M. Cuypers, *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur’an* (Miami, 2009), 201-2.

⁴⁵ In Saifullah *et al.*, “On the Sources”, the link between *Sanhedrin* 4:5 and Q 5:32 is rejected on the basis of two arguments, both of which are unconvincing. First, it is argued that in its correct version the Mishna refers only to the destruction and preservation of a single soul from Israel, a message quite different from the universal wording of the Quranic verse. Second, it is noted that the condition, “- not [in retaliation for another] soul nor for corruption in the land – (*bi-ghayri nafsin aw fasādin fī l-arḍi*)”, has no parallel in the Mishna. The first point is simply wrong. The variant “from Israel” is only a secondary reading, for which see E. E. Urbach, “‘KOL HA-MEQAYYEM NEFESH AḤAT’: Development of the Version, Vicissitudes of Censorship, and Business Manipulations of Printers”, *Tarbiz* 40 (1971): 268-84 (Hebrew), and M. Kellner, “A New and Unexpected Textual Witness to the Reading ‘He Who Kills a Single Person – It is as if He Destroyed an Entire World’”, *Tarbiz* 75 (2007): 565-66 (Hebrew). As for the second objection, what is to prevent the Quran from adding an explanatory remark when citing a Jewish source? This is, in fact, what it seems to do in Q 5:45 where *Lex talionis* is quoted from the Pentateuch with the additional statement that “But whoso forgoes it (in the way of charity) it shall be expiation for him”.

it fills an anti-Jewish polemical function.⁴⁶ First, the saying is presented as a result of the murder (*min ajli dhālika*), whereas in the Mishna it explains why Adam was first created alone in the world and is not linked formally to the murder of Cain.⁴⁷ Second, it is presented as being decreed specifically for the Children of Israel, implying that they were in need of such a warning.⁴⁸ Third, in the Quran the saying is followed by a sentence which suggests that the Jews failed to observe its teaching: “Our messengers have already come to them with clear signs, but many of them indeed commit afterwards excesses in the land”. Thus it seems that rather than faulty transmission, v. 32 reflects a reshaping of the Jewish tradition to serve an anti-Jewish polemical agenda.

To sum up: of the three Jewish parallels noted by Geiger only the third may be seen as compelling. But it also suggests that the Quranic account is more than mere repetition of Jewish legends. We now turn to examine elements of the story which might suggest an awareness of the Christian tradition. Most important is Abel’s passivity in the dialogue in verses 27-29 (“If you extend your hand against me to kill me, I will not extend my hand against you to kill you”), which most probably reflects the Christian tradition in which Abel is perceived as a pre-figuration of Christ. This was noted by

⁴⁶ The rhetorical nature of the saying was lost on some of the exegetes of the Quran who were troubled by the comparison. How can the murder of one man be equivalent to the murder of all humanity? How can saving one man be tantamount to saving all men? Among the answers given were that the man murdered or saved is a prophet or a just Imam; that the saying depicts the viewpoint of the man murdered or saved; that the murderer of one and of all both burn in hell and that one who avoids killing one soul kills no one and thus saves all; that God can do as he pleases; and that this was an imposition upon the Jews; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 8:348-58, and al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 7:429-30.

⁴⁷ The passage in the Mishna too starts with “Therefore [לפיכך]”, but there the word looks forward to “to teach” and does not refer to the Cain incident. One wonders whether the Arabic reflects a misreading of the Hebrew here. According to the exegetes the link between the moral and the murder is even stronger since they argue that *ajl*, which occurs only once in the Quran, literally means “committing a crime”. The phrase then would mean “on account of the crime committed by that one [i.e. Cain]”; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 8:347-48, al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 7:427, and Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:25. In al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 7:428, a reading of *min ajli dhālika* backward as completing *fa-aṣbaḥa mina l-nādimīna* is noted. According to this reading, the verses should be rendered: “He then became one of those who pity themselves on account of this. We decreed to the Children of Israel...” This, however, seems artificial on account of the verse division and the fact that there is no *waw* before the verb for “decreed”, *katabnā*.

⁴⁸ See the comment in al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 7:428: “The Children of Israel were mentioned specifically, even though murder was forbidden for nations which preceded them, since they were the first nation to receive the threat concerning murder in written form. Beforehand it was merely oral. Then the matter was emphasized for the Children of Israel by means of the Book in accordance with their iniquity and bloodshed”. One wonders whether *katabnā ‘alā banī isrā’īla* carries here the meaning of “against”.

several scholars who did not, however, point to any Christian literary text containing a similar conversation between the brothers. The next section will be devoted to this task.

5.4. The Syriac background

I wish to suggest that vv. 27-30 reflect a source similar to a group of closely related Syriac texts including a dialogue poem on Abel and Cain,⁴⁹ the unpublished *Homily on Cain and Abel* by Isaac of Antioch,⁵⁰ and the *Syriac Life of Abel* by Symmachus.⁵¹ These texts together with Ephraem Graecus' *Homily on Cain and the Murder of Abel* (itself indebted to the Syriac tradition)⁵² all share an interest in exchanges between the two at different points of the narrative,⁵³ as opposed to the Greek tradition which does not supply such dialogues.⁵⁴ All these texts have been dated by the scholars studying them to the fifth or sixth centuries.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ S. Brock, "Two Syriac Dialogue Poems on Abel and Cain", *Le Muséon* 113 (2000): 333-75. I refer here only to the first poem, since the second one is most probably medieval. The first poem is transmitted in three forms, two of which represent the West Syriac tradition and one the East Syriac tradition; *ibid.*, 336-37.

⁵⁰ Ms. Vat. Syr. 120, ff. 172b-185b; see overview in J. B. Glenthøj, *Cain and Abel in Syriac and Greek Writers (4th-6th Centuries)* (Louvain, 1997), 44-46.

⁵¹ Brock, "A Syriac Life of Abel", 467-92.

⁵² For an overview of the content of Ephraem Graecus' homily and a discussion of its relation to the Syriac texts, see Glenthøj, *Cain*, 38-41.

⁵³ For a survey of the dialogues attributed to the brothers, see Glenthøj, *Cain*, 261-64.

⁵⁴ See Glenthøj, *Cain*, 254 and 274-76. Interestingly Glenthøj also notes that the use of dialogue is more characteristic of Syriac homilies on Gen. 22 than of Greek ones.

⁵⁵ Although anonymous and first attested in ninth-century manuscripts, the first Syriac dialogue poem published by Brock can safely be considered pre-Islamic; it was known to Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) and is transmitted in both the Eastern and Western Syriac tradition. According to its editor, it cannot be later than the fifth century; Brock, "Two Syriac Dialogue Poems", 333-35. As for Isaac's homily, at least three different Isaacs of Antioch are known in the Syriac tradition. According to Brock, our homily belongs to the earliest of them, Isaac of Amid (first half of the fifth century), said to have been a disciple of Ephrem; S. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (Kottayam, 1997), 41 and 197. Nothing is known of Symmachus, but based on style and general approach Brock suggests a late fifth or early sixth-century date; Brock, "A Syriac Life of Abel", 468. According to Glenthøj, Jacob of Serugh probably used Symmachus or a similar source; Glenthøj, *Cain*, 50-51. Moving to Ephraem Graecus' *Homily*, although written in Greek, it is thoroughly dependant on the Syriac tradition (especially Isaac of Antioch or a similar text), and probably dates from the middle of the fifth century; see *ibid.*, 38-40.

The similarities between the Quranic story and this group of sources fall into four categories: shared motifs, use of dialogue,⁵⁶ similar diction, and typological function. Whereas scholarship usually treats loanwords and to a lesser degree shared motifs, the literary form and function of the Quranic narratives are less commonly addressed, either independently or in conjunction with diction and motifs. Since the literary form and motifs are intertwined in this case I shall examine them together.

5.4.1. Literary form and motifs

Let us first examine the dialogue between the two brothers. In the Bible there is none. We do, however, find a puzzling verse which might have led later readers to create such a dialogue.

Genesis 4:8 in the Hebrew text runs:

Cain said to his brother Abel. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

The beginning of the verse seems corrupt since the content of Cain's utterance is missing in this version.⁵⁷ The Septuagint, Samaritan text, Palestinian Targums, Peshitta and the Vulgate all read additional words here equivalent to "Let us go to the field" (or "valley" in the Peshitta).⁵⁸ Some post-Biblical sources further develop this point by referring to an argument between the brothers in the field. This could be an alternative filling of the gap in the Hebrew text,⁵⁹ an attempt to explain why Cain murdered Abel, a

⁵⁶ Dialogue is an important stylistic feature of the Quran. Pre-Islamic poetry, on the other hand, makes little use of this literary device. See our discussion in chapter 7.3.

⁵⁷ This reading is shared by a fragment from Qumran and by Targum Onqelos.

⁵⁸ See R. S. Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1-11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition* (New York, 1998), 46-47.

⁵⁹ See *Genesis Rabba* 22:7.

result of a Midrashic reading of the verse,⁶⁰ a vehicle for depicting opposing worldviews, or a combination of these factors.

Already Philo reads the invitation to the plain as a challenge to a disputation in which Cain sought to gain mastery by the use of “sophistries that have the appearance of truth”, for “the plain, the rendezvous to which he summons him, is a figure of contest and desperate battle”.⁶¹ Philo interprets the story as an allegory for the conflict between two character traits found in every human soul. In this debate, “Abel, referring all things to God, is a god loving creed; but Cain, referring all to himself – his name means ‘acquisition’ – a self loving creed”.⁶² Philo elaborates on this point at length, but does not provide a dialogue comparable to the Quranic one.

The same is true of *Genesis Rabba* 22.7, according to which the brothers quarrel about either the division of the world, the location of the future temple, or a woman.⁶³ Not only does the Midrash supply new reasons for the murder which have nothing to do with the rejected sacrifice, but it also seems to mitigate at least part of Cain’s blame. The murder is no longer a one-sided act, but rather is the result of mutual strife in which a heated argument gets out of hand.

Closer to the Quranic dialogue is the exchange found in the Palestinian Targums. Let us look at Targum Neofiti for example:

And Cain said to Abel his brother: “Come! Let the two of us go out to the open field”; and when the two of them had gone out to the open field, Cain spoke and said to Abel: “I perceive that the world was not created by mercy and that it is not

⁶⁰ The words translated as “And when they were in the field (וַיְהִי בְהִיטְתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה)” might have been understood as “And when they were arguing in the field”, based on the use of *הוּוּ ב-* in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic to denote argumentation; see the comment of Z. W. Einhorn on *Genesis Rabba* 22:7. See also Philo’s comment on the plain below.

⁶¹ *That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better* I; F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, *Philo: With an English Translation* (London, 1929), 2:203.

⁶² *ibid.*, 223.

⁶³ See ET in Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 1:187.

being conducted according to the fruits of good deeds, and that there is favoritism in judgment. Why was your offering accepted favorably and my offering was not accepted favorably from me?” Abel answered and said to Cain: “I perceive that the world was created by mercy and that it is being conducted according to the fruits of good deeds. Because my deeds were better than yours, my offering was accepted from me favorably and yours was not accepted favorably from you”. Cain answered and said to Abel: “There is no judgment and there is no judge and there is no other world. There is no granting of good reward to the just nor is there punishment for the wicked”. Abel answered and said to Cain: “There is judgment and there is a judge and there is another world and there is granting of good reward to the just and there is punishment for the wicked in the world to come”. Concerning this matter the two of them were disputing in the open field. And Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.⁶⁴

The Palestinian Targums display some affinity to the Quranic version, especially in Abel’s response “Because my deeds were better than yours, my offering was accepted from me favorably and yours was not accepted favorably from you” which parallels Q 5:27 where he says: “Allah accepts [offerings] only from the God-fearing”, but also in the use of *qrbn*’ instead of the Biblical *minḥa* as well as the use of *etqabbal* paralleling the Quranic *tuqubbila*. Indeed several scholars suggested that the Targumic tradition was the source of the Quran on this point.⁶⁵ A. S. Yahuda even adduces this as evidence that the Jews in Arabia “were more acquainted with the Jerusalem tradition than with the Babylonian”.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ B. Grossfeld, *Targum Neofiti I: An Exegetical Commentary to Genesis* (New York, 2000), 5. Similar dialogues are found in the Fragment Targum, Pseudo-Jonathan, in a Geniza manuscript of the Palestinian Targum, and in a few Toseftot Targum; see Klein, *The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch*, 1:47 (Aramaic) and 2:8-9 (English); Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 32-33; and McNamara, *Targum Neofiti I: Genesis*, 65-67 (where several versions are listed).

⁶⁵ See Geiger’s comment above; Aptowitz, *Kain und Abel*, 12; and Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes*, 18.

⁶⁶ A. S. Yahuda, “A Contribution to Qur’ān and Ḥadīth Interpretation”, in S. Löwinger and J. Somogyi (eds.) *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, (Budapest, 1948), 1:293.

Nonetheless, in other ways the Targumic dialogue is very different from the Quranic one. Cain does not announce that he will kill his brother, but rather engages with him in a theological dispute at the end of which he murders him.⁶⁷ Most importantly Abel's response lacks the turn-the-other-cheek attitude which is strongly emphasized in the Quran, engendering exegetical puzzlement.⁶⁸ The passive nature of Abel's response in the Quran led Stillman to the conclusion that this element of the story was of Christian origin. This was upheld later by Busse, though neither of them pointed to an actual Christian literary source which contained a similar dialogue between the brothers.⁶⁹ It is here that the Syriac texts become relevant.⁷⁰

Let us first examine the dialogue poem. After an introduction which gives the setting, the dialogue in alternating stanzas commences in stanza 13 thus:

(Cain) Says Cain: Since the Lord has taken delight
in your sacrifice, but rejected mine,
I will kill you (*qāṭelnā lāk*): because He has preferred you.
I will take vengeance on His friend.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Several studies have been devoted to the identification of the adversaries who held the positions attributed here to Cain; see, e.g., S. Isenberg, "An Anti-Sadducee Polemic in the Palestinian Targum Tradition", *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970): 433-44; and J. M. Bassler, "Cain and Abel in the Palestinian Targums: A Brief Note on an Old Controversy", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 17 (1986): 56-64.

⁶⁸ Abel's reluctance to defend himself was puzzling for the exegetes as is evidenced by the various interpretations cited in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-kabīr*, 11:206, and al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 7:412-13. Al-Rāzī, for example, cites the following four: Abel said before the actual attack that he would not do what Cain planned, i.e., intentional murder; he meant that in defending himself he would not seek to kill Cain only to protect himself; it is permissible for an intended murder victim to abandon self-defense as 'Uthmān is said to have done; self-defense was forbidden at the time (Mujāhid). For Mujāhid's opinion, see also al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 8:329-330. In Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī taḥsīn al-Qur'ān* (Qum, 1992-2010), 5:293, this position is attributed to al-Ḥasan, Mujāhid, and al-Jubbā'ī.

⁶⁹ H. Busse, "Cain and Abel", *EQ*, 1:271, and Stillman, "The Story of Cain and Abel", 235-36. Cf. Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen*, 86. Recently Bat-Sheva Garsiel has noted Abel's passivity as "a rare example of the influence of the Christian approach"; Garsiel, *Bible, Midrash and Quran*, 55.

⁷⁰ The authors of the Syriac texts may have been aware of the existence of Jewish literary embellishments of Genesis 4:8; see Brock, "Two Syriac Dialogue Poems", 334 (concerning the first dialogue poem).

⁷¹ Brock, "Two Syriac Dialogue Poems", 342 (Syriac) and 351 (ET slightly adapted here).

A similar expression of intention (“I will kill you”) is repeated in Stanza 23.⁷² Thus at the very outset of the dispute Cain announces that he is about to kill Abel. This is quite different than the Jewish sources, in which a heated argument leads to murder. Here it is pre-meditated and is a result of the rejection of the offering, not of a dispute that gets out of hand. Likewise, in Ephraem Graecus we find Cain declaring to Abel after they arrive at the scene of the murder that he will kill him, the reason being the rejection of his sacrifice and his fear that Abel will inherit the earth.⁷³ Similarly, in Isaac of Antioch’s homily, Cain plans the murder even before they leave for the field. After he realizes that other methods of assailing God are futile (173b-174a), he concludes that the only way to cause grief to God is to kill Abel:

After Abel there is no Abel / in which He could take comfort over Abel. / If I shall kill him (*qāṭelnā lēh*) there will be no other / to bow down before His glory. / That I ascend to heaven is hard, / and I do not reach its height. / I will kill (*qāṭelnā*) His friend, Abel, / and will grieve Him on high (174b).

However, this speech in which Cain plans his revenge on God is not addressed to Abel.⁷⁴

These sources, and especially the dialogue poem, parallel the beginning of the Quranic dialogue, where the murderer announces his evil intentions: “He said: ‘I will surely kill you’ (*la-aqtulannaka*)”. In the Quran too, it is not a question of a heated argument that eventually leads to murder. Note also the use of the cognate verbs.

⁷² “(Cain) If God has sent to accept your offering, / honouring you greatly with the flames, / then I will kill you (*qāṭelnā lāk*) because He has favoured you, / accepting your sacrifice and rejecting mine”; Brock, “Two Syriac Dialogue Poems”, 343 (Syriac) and 352 (ET).

⁷³ See discussion in Glenthøj, *Cain*, 142 and 164.

⁷⁴ According to the *Syriac Life of Abel* as well the murder was pre-meditated. After Cain's offering was rejected and God admonished him, “he was overcome by envy and openly defeated by enmity. Great hate conquered him: he denied love and rejected brotherhood. He was decided in his mind to kill his mother’s son”. Only afterwards does he suggest to Abel that they go to the valley; Brock, “A Syriac Life of Abel”, 472-73. For many other references in Christian texts to Cain's planning of the murder, see Glenthøj, *Cain*, 128.

Returning to the dialogue poem, Abel's response in stanza 14 also parallels the brother's answer in the Quran:

(Abel) Abel replies: What wrong have I done
if the lord has been pleased with me?
He searches out hearts and so has the right
to choose or reject as He likes.

This theme is further developed in stanza 16:

(Abel) in all offerings that are made
it is love that He wants to see,
and if good intention is not mingled in,
then the sacrifice is ugly and rejected.⁷⁵

Abel's response here (similar to the Targum tradition) is most probably inspired by God's speech in Gen. 4:7 ("If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it"). In stanza 40 in fact Abel uses God's exact words: "sin is crouching at the door".⁷⁶ Similar transfers are seen in Isaac and Ephraem Graecus,⁷⁷ and are generally a regular feature of dramatic

⁷⁵ Brock, "Two Syriac Dialogue Poems", 342 (Syriac) and 351 (ET slightly adapted here). See also stanza 36: "(Abel) He would have chosen you, had you acted well, / and He would have been pleased with your offering: / you would have been accepted if only you had mixed / sincere love along with your sacrifice"; *ibid.*, 345 (Syriac) and 354 (ET).

⁷⁶ Brock, "Two Syriac Dialogue Poems", 346 (Syriac) and 355 (ET).

⁷⁷ See Glenthøj, *Cain*, 112. According to Isaac, after Cain's ruse of inviting Abel to accompany him and bring an offering on his behalf (175a), Abel responds, emphasizing the inappropriateness of using an advocate rather than praying directly to God (175a-176b). In doing so he uses language inspired by Genesis 4:7, repeatedly calling Cain to stand at God's door (*tar'ēh d-alāhā*) and beg till the end of his life that God accept his petition and absolve him of his sins (176a-176b).

homilies.⁷⁸ In any case, Abel's emphasis on intent is reminiscent of Q 5:27 (“[His brother] said: ‘Allah accepts [offerings] only from the God-fearing [*al-muttaqīna*]’”).⁷⁹

The rest of Abel's response in Q 5:28-29 does not have an exact parallel in the Syriac poem, but the passive approach it shows is similar to that of the Syriac poem, in which Abel begs for his life, relinquishing his share of the world (see, e.g., stanzas 18 and 20), mentions the effect of the murder on their parents (stanza 22 and 38), and attempts to appease Cain in various manners, never once trying to defend himself physically. Similar pleas for mercy are made in Ephraem Graecus, Isaac (177a-b) and the *Syriac Life of Abel*,⁸⁰ though in the latter two they are independent, not a response to an utterance of Cain.⁸¹ Especially interesting is the plea which Isaac imagines Abel to have pronounced trembling when Cain rose to kill him. He asks that Cain restrain his sword out of consideration for Eve and Adam, suggests that he replace his anger with love, and appeals to Cain's sense of justice, exhibiting a markedly passive attitude:

Let the dreadful judgment frighten you / from approaching innocent blood. Show me my transgression against you (*saklut[y] da-lwātāk*) / and behold my neck is beneath your sword. Inform me what my crime (*surhān[y]*) is / and do to me as you plan (lit.: “that which is in your heart”). You Cain be the Judge / and judge justice between me and you. Do not unjustly stretch out (*tawšet*) / your hand (*idāk*) against the blood of the upright one. Judge yourself like a stranger / and do not be favorable to yourself. Rebuke the iniquity (*'awlā*) which is in your heart / so that perhaps you might be acquitted, O feeble one. If you win unjustly, / you shall be found guilty according to justice. If you lose innocently, you shall find favor mercifully (177b).

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the phenomenon, see Glenthøj, *Cain*, 228 and 257-58.

⁷⁹ The move from good intent to fear of God can be seen as indicative of the importance of *taqwā* in the Quran. Compare with Q 22:37, where it said regarding beasts of sacrifice: “Their flesh shall not reach God, neither their blood, but your fear of God (*taqwā*) shall reach Him”. The parallel between the two verses is noted in al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 11:205.

⁸⁰ Brock, “A Syriac Life of Abel”, 474-76. Here too the passivity is evident: “If, then, you want to put me to death by murdering (me), (at least) grant me the greeting of a kiss [before] I die” (475).

⁸¹ See the discussion in Glenthøj, *Cain*, 135-45.

This passage is close to the Q 5:28-29 in several ways. Abel displays passivity in offering himself to Cain's sword; he describes the attack with vocabulary reminiscent of that used in the Quran (*lā tawšeṭ idāk - la-in basaṭta ilayya yadaka*); he refers to his own sin as he does in the Quran (*ḥawwān[y] saklut[y] da-lwātāk* and *awda' li mānaw surḥān[y] - an tabū'a bi-ithmī wa-ithmika*), though the context appears to be different; and warns Cain of the dire consequences of his intended deed.

This last theme is found in other Syriac sources as well. Thus we read in stanza 30 of the Syriac dialogue poem:

(Abel) He has clearly selected me, just as you say,
receiving my offering and showing me love.
See that you do not stain your hands with my blood
lest He utter some sentence against you.

To Cain's assertion that the pile of stones heaped over Abel's body will hide the crime Abel responds in stanza 32:

(Abel) That pile of stones which you heap up over me
will cry out for me, accusing you:
their clamour shall the Just One hear,
and He will judge the wrong done to me in accordance with His wisdom.⁸²

Similar warnings are found in Ephraem Graecus,⁸³ and the *Syriac Life of Abel*.⁸⁴ In the Quran too Abel attempts to dissuade Cain by mentioning punishment in hell (Q 5:29).

⁸² Brock, "Two Syriac Dialogue Poems", 344-45 (Syriac) and 353-54 (ET). Note that whereas in the Quran Cain buries Abel, in the dialogue poem he merely heaps stones over the body in order to conceal it.

⁸³ See Glenthøj, *Cain*, 137.

So far we have seen that the Syriac tradition and the Quran exhibit a similar dialogue in which Cain announces that he will kill his brother, while Abel attempts to dissuade him but does not put up a fight. Are there additional affinities between these texts, beyond the form of dialogue and its content?

To the shared motifs mentioned, it might be possible to add another more subtle and speculative one. After Abel's speech ends, v. 30 states:

(30) But his soul incited him to kill his brother (*fa-ṭawwa'at lahu nafsuhi qatla akhīhi*) so he killed him and thus became one of the lost.

The verb *ṭawwa'a* occurs only once in the Quran and its exact meaning remains somewhat vague.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, it seems to parallel another verb, *sawwala*, both in meaning and in syntax. Compare our verse with the description of Joseph's brothers' attempt to fool their father:

They brought his tunic with false blood on it. He [=Jacob] said: "No! Your souls have persuaded you to do something (*sawwalat lakum anfusukum amran*)..." (Q 12:18).

The verb *sawwala* occurs only three more times in the Quran; twice with the soul as subject⁸⁶ and once with Satan.⁸⁷ In fact the same evil act that Jacob attributes to his

⁸⁴ Brock, "A Syriac Life of Abel", 475.

⁸⁵ According to Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:1891, the primary meaning of *ṭawwī'* is *making obedient* or *causing to obey*. This does not, however, fit our verse, which has been rendered as: "And his soul facilitated to him the slaying of his brother", "And his soul aided him to kill his brother", or "encouraged him to kill his brother"; *ibid.* and al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 8:336-37. For a rather fanciful attempt to make such a meaning comply with the primary meaning of *causing to obey*, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 11:208. For a variant reading, *ṭāwa'at*, which might suggest a rendition such as: "But his soul agreed to the killing of his brother", see al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:659, and al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 2:259.

⁸⁶ Q 12:83 and Q 20:96.

children's souls is attributed in another verse to Satan.⁸⁸ A further parallel between Satan and the soul is found in the use of the verb *waswasa* ("to whisper"). It occurs 4 times in the Quran; three times describing Satan⁸⁹, and once describing the soul.⁹⁰ Thus it might plausibly be argued that in v. 30 the soul is envisioned as an entity which intervenes and prevents Cain from heeding Abel's reproach.⁹¹ Left to his own devices Cain might have seen the light, but with his soul playing a satanic role he proceeded to commit the heinous crime.⁹²

This is of interest since according to many Christian sources, Syriac and others, Satan instigates the murder much as Cain's soul does in the Quran.⁹³ Several such references are found in the dialogue poem. Thus, for example we read in stanza 12:⁹⁴

The envious man saw, and was clothed with anger;
down to the valley he dragged his brother.
The cunning Evil One incited him (*w-biṣā ṣni'ā hu ṣaggšēh*)
and indicated to him that he should shed blood.

⁸⁷ Q 47:25 ("Indeed those who turn back after guidance has become clear to them, Satan has seduced them [*al-shayṭān sawwala lahum*]...").

⁸⁸ Q 12:5 and Q 12:100.

⁸⁹ Q 7:20, Q 20:120, and Q 114:5. The first two occurrences refer to Satan's role in the Paradise story which, as we have seen with reference to *saw'a*, is parallel to the Cain and Abel episode and may have influenced it.

⁹⁰ Q 50:16.

⁹¹ Note Q 12:53 where the soul is said to be an inciter to evil (*inna l-naḥsa la-ammāratun bi-l-sū'i*). For the *naḥs* as a satanic impulse, compare Plato's appetitive soul and the rabbinic statement that identifies Satan with the evil inclination and the Angel of Death (BT *Baba Batra* 16a). For the evil inclination in rabbinic literature, see Urbach, *The Sages*, 1:471-83, and I. Rosen-Zvi, "Two Rabbinic Inclinations? Rethinking a Scholarly Dogma", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 39 (2008): 1-27.

⁹² Ibn Jurayj and Mujāhid indeed ascribe to Iblīs a role exactly at this point of the story, when he teaches Cain how to kill by crushing the skull of a bird between two stones; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 8:338.

⁹³ See already Theophilus of Antioch (d. 183-85), *Ad Autolyicum* 2.29 (ET in the edition of Robert M. Grant, [Oxford, 1970], 73): "When Satan saw that Adam and his wife not only were alive but had produced offspring, he was overcome by envy because he was not strong enough to put them to death; and because he saw Abel pleasing God, he worked upon his brother called Cain and made him kill his brother Abel". For further references, see Glenthøj, *Cain*, 25, 147, 213 and 279-81 (overview).

⁹⁴ See already stanza 10 where the Evil one cleaves to Cain as they leave to offer their sacrifices. In stanza 28 Abel refers to Cain as the abode of Satan.

But perhaps the closest parallel to the Quran on this point is supplied by Isaac, since here Satan's incitement to Cain to go ahead and murder his brother immediately follows Abel's passive response as it does in the Quran. Satan's agitation is much too long to be cited here in full, but perhaps a few lines will give its tenor:

But Cain did not consent / to withdrawing his hand from the pure one. For the Evil One had encouraged (*labbtēh*) him greatly / lest he hesitate to do so. The Evil One and his troops consulted / with Cain, the disciple of falsehood, so that they might prevail over the glorious one, / the one who rebukes their actions. The Evil One said to Cain: / "Kill your brother who persecutes us, / and show us a sign that you love us / in the death of this son of your mother. Let this one die for he did not allow us / to lift up our horn in sin. And let not this one / who oppresses us in his prayer live among us" (177b-78a).⁹⁵

The attribution of Cain's sin to Satan's instigation is not entirely surprising. In addition to being the ultimate source of evil, it is quite easy to read him into God's admonition in Gen. 4:7 ("And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it"). Nonetheless, Jewish recastings of the story do not seem to have mentioned Satan inciting Cain, so that again the Quran seems closest here to (Syriac) Christian sources.

The very end of the story might also suggest an affinity with Christian recastings of the narrative. "He then became one of the *nādimīna* (*fa-aṣbaḥa mina l-nādimīna*)", v. 31 tells us, but what exactly does this mean? It is often taken as meaning that Cain became repentant or remorseful. Did Cain indeed sincerely repent? Was he forgiven? Since such a tradition was current in rabbinic sources, a few Western scholars who

⁹⁵ See the analysis of Satan's role according to Isaac in Glenthøj, *Cain*, 126-27.

thought Cain had repented in the Quran adduced this as yet another instance of Jewish influence on the Quran.⁹⁶ This, however, is built on a faulty premise, since the Quran makes no mention of Cain's repentance.

Two arguments suggest that Cain did not repent sincerely or that his repentance was not effective.⁹⁷ First, the Quran does not mention any divine response to Cain's *nadam*. Were it sincere, one might have expected some indication of divine forgiveness. Such is the case with Adam (Q 2:37), Moses (Q 7:143-44), David (Q 38:24-25), Solomon (Q 38:35-36), and Jonah (Q 21:87-88).⁹⁸ Second, semantically the root *n-d-m* is never used in the Quran to describe sincere and effective repentance.⁹⁹ As Denny observed: "In most of its Qur'anic occurrences there is a sense more of being caught out and exposed, or at best of simply being terribly sorry, than there is a true change of heart, a *metanoia*, such as can be discerned in the other terms, especially *tawba*".¹⁰⁰ A comparison with the root *t-w-b* is instructive. In two verses *tā'ibīna* or *tā'ibāt* is a positive epithet for the believers.¹⁰¹ God is said to love the *tawwābūna* (Q 2:222). He himself is known as *al-Tawwāb*, i.e. "the One who accepts repentance".¹⁰² *Nādimīna*, on the other hand, occurs always in negative contexts. In Q 5:52 those who strive for pacts with the Jews and Christians will become *nādimīna* after God brings the believers victory. Following the unnamed messenger's appeal for help, God assures him in Q 23:40 that the people who reject his message will shortly become *nādimīna*. And indeed in the next verse we are told that they were seized by the cry and turned into scum. Likewise, in Q 26:157 the

⁹⁶ See Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes* 18 (citing the *Tanḥuma*), Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen*, 87, Masson, *Monothéisme coranique*, 336, and Stillman, "The Story of Cain and Abel", 237-38 (where Christian sources are also cited).

⁹⁷ That Cain did not show repentance in the religious sense is assumed already in T. H. Weir, "Repentance (Muhammadan)", in J. Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York, 1908-27), 10:735.

⁹⁸ For an overview, see U. Rubin, "Repentance and Penance", *EQ* 4:426-30.

⁹⁹ See A. Khalil, *Early Sufi Approaches to Tawba: From the Qur'ān to Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī* (University of Toronto, 2009), 61-64 (unpublished dissertation).

¹⁰⁰ F. Denny, "The Qur'anic Vocabulary of Repentance: Orientations and Attitudes", in A. T. Welch (ed.), *Studies in Qur'an and Tafsir*, *JAAR* thematic issue 47 (1980): 653.

¹⁰¹ Q 9:112, Q 66:5.

¹⁰² Q 2:37, 54, 128, 160; Q 4:16, 64; Q 9:104, 118; Q 24:10; Q 49:12; Q 110:3.

people of Thamūd become *nādimīna* after they hamstring the mysterious female camel. In the next verse we are told that the punishment then took hold of them. Finally, in Q 49:6 the believers are warned lest they hurt people unwittingly based on a false report and then become *nādimīna*. The only other occurrences of the root in the Quran are also in negative contexts. In Q 10:54 and Q 34:33 we are told that when the sinners see the punishment in the world to come they will feel *nadāma*.¹⁰³ Therefore rather than denoting repentance, in the Quran the root *n-d-m* seems to imply self-pity or disappointment. In short, Cain regretted what he had done, but did not repent of it: his feelings arose from the fact that the deed proved to have dire consequences for him, not from the fact that it was sinful.

The classical exegetes too seem to agree that Cain did not truly repent. It is true that, departing from Quranic usage, a prophetic tradition equates *nadam* with *tawba* (*al-nadamu tawbatun* or “Remorse is repentance”), but this is not true of Cain. In the exegetes’ reading Cain regretted everything but the sin itself. Thus he felt bad about carrying Abel’s corpse for a long time before burying it; about being bested by a raven; he missed his brother; suffered his parents’ wrath and so on, but his regret did not amount to repentance (*lam yandam nadama l-tā’ibīna*), as al-Zamakhsharī puts it.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, al-Rāzī states that Cain’s regret was not the result of fear of God and was therefore meaningless.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ The Arabic phrase *asarrū l-nadāma* is not entirely clear. The regular meaning of the verb *asarra*, “to conceal”, seems inappropriate in this context; see the interpretations cited in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s commentary and the comment in Paret, *Kommentar*, 224. Paret notes an intriguing parallel in Q 5:52 where the people regret the thoughts they harbored within themselves (*fa-yuṣbiḥū ‘alā mā asarrū fī anfusihim nādimīna*). Perhaps the use of *asarrū* to describe their reaction to the punishment is a literary device employed to highlight the “measure for measure” aspect of the punishment. In A. A. Ambros and S. Procházka, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic* (Wiesbaden, 2004), 132, the verb in these two verses is rendered as “to feel s.th. deeply”.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:660.

¹⁰⁵ See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 11:210. A different approach is found in the anonymous opinion cited in al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 7:423. Here it is stated that in the time of Cain *nadam* was not considered as *tawba*. See also Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī ‘ilm al-tafsīr* (Beirut, 1964), 2:339, where this last position is attributed to al-Ḥasan b. al-Faḍl, perhaps a corruption of al-Ḥusayn b. al-Faḍl [al-Bajalī].

Having concluded that the Quranic Cain did not repent, let us examine the Jewish and Christian traditions. In the Bible Cain does not repent, but from early times Genesis 4:13 was construed in such a way as to allow this notion. Cain's protest, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!" was rendered in several translations as an admission of guilt: "My sin is too great to forgive". This then led some sources to depict Cain as having been absolved. This exegetical move may have been inspired by any number of factors: a desire to emphasize the virtues of repentance,¹⁰⁶ a misunderstanding of the Hebrew, a notion that God's merciful response in v. 15 must have been preceded by repentance, and the fact that Cain was able to dwell in the land of Nod in spite of v. 12 where God says he will be a fugitive and wanderer.

This reading is widespread in rabbinic sources, though one also finds opinions that Cain did not repent.¹⁰⁷ A good example of both opposing approaches is found in *Genesis Rabba* 22:13 to verse 16:

Then Cain went away etc. Whence did he go out? R. Aibu said: It means that he threw the words behind him and went out, like one who would deceive the Almighty. R. Berekiah said in R. Eleazar's name: He went forth like one shows the cloven hoof, like one who deceives his Creator. R. Hanina b. Isaac said: He went forth rejoicing, as you read, *He goeth forth to meet thee, and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart* (Exodus 4:14). Adam met him and asked him: "How did your case go?" "I repented and am reconciled", replied he. Thereupon Adam began beating his face, crying: "So great is the power of repentance, and I did not know!" Forthwith he arose and exclaimed: *A Psalm, a*

¹⁰⁶ See Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 155.

¹⁰⁷ For a basic overview of the rabbinic approaches, see R. Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain* (Berkeley, 1981), 5-13. Detailed references to rabbinic sources in which Cain repents are found in M. Margulies, *Midrash Wayyikra Rabbah* (New York, 1993), 1:205. See also Urbach, *The Sages*, 1:467-68.

*song for the Sabbath day: It is a good thing to make confession unto the Lord (Psalms 92:1).*¹⁰⁸

A repentant Cain is found in Jewish sources ranging from the Aramaic Targums to the Zohar, but is rarely represented in the Christian tradition.¹⁰⁹ Aphrahat adduces Cain three times as an example of an unrepentant figure (*Demonstrations* 7.8, 7.16, and 14.42).¹¹⁰ In Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* 3.6-8, God's questions in vv. 9-10 ("Where is your brother Abel?", "What have you done?") were meant to offer Cain a chance to confess so that "if he repented (*tāb*), the sin of murder that his fingers had committed might be effaced by the compunction (*twātā*) on his lips". "But Cain was filled with wrath instead of compunction" and refused to confess, thus bringing upon himself God's punishment. Then when the trembling and the shaking lead him to utter v. 13 ("My offence is too great to be forgiven"), this is not accepted as compunction since it comes too late under the constraint of the punishment.¹¹¹ John Chrysostom also stresses that the time for repentance was before the judgment was given in vv. 11-12. Though he calls Cain's utterance in v. 13 a "complete confession", he adds that this came too late. "You see, he should have done this at the right time when he was in a position to find mercy from the Judge".¹¹²

Repentance or lack thereof it is a major theme in Isaac's homily. In Abel's response to Cain's insincere request that Abel be his advocate, Abel urges him to be impudent and beg mercy for himself, for the pleading of an advocate cannot accomplish what the repentance of the sinner can (175a-176b). Rather than heed this advice Cain

¹⁰⁸ ET slightly adapted from Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 1:191-92.

¹⁰⁹ Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, 12-13; Glenthøj, *Cain*, 289-90 ("One may wonder if there was not direct polarization between Jews and Christians on the question of Cain's repentance").

¹¹⁰ Ed. Parisot, 1:324, 337, and 696.

¹¹¹ See ed. Tonneau, 49-50. The ET in Mathews and Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 127-28, should be used with caution.

¹¹² R. C. Hill, *Saint John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 18-45* (Washington, 1990), 29.

proceeds to attack Abel, who tries to persuade him to desist without success. God's question, "Where is your brother Abel?", was meant to allow Cain to confess and be forgiven (181b), but the killer misconstrues this as ignorance and is emboldened to lie and suggest that Abel is busy with his flock (182a-182b). God then judges him harshly and the issue of repentance is taken up yet again:

It was not that God did not / know about the murder of Abel. / It was repentance from the murderer / that the judge thirsted to hear. / He asked him as if He did not know / so that he might confess that he killed and He may absolve him. / Since he did not confess before the Inquisitor / He brought his folly on his head. / For if when the murderer / was asked by the Judge, / he had confessed that he killed, the Merciful One / would have had pity and compassion over him. / After he did not confess and Justice came / it shut His mouth, / when the fool confessed that his sin / is too great to be forgiven (183a-183b).

Thus when Cain finally confesses God can no longer forgive him. Isaac develops this theme and likens Cain's behavior to the two worlds. His denial when given a chance to repent depicts this world, whereas his belated repentance which was not accepted (*tāb dawyā w-lā etqabbal*) depicts the world to come in which there is no mercy. "The beginning of his questioning resembles / this world of justice, / whereas the end of his sentencing [resembles] that world without mercy. / A murderer who confesses in time / saves his body from torments, / whereas he who denies his sins / increases the suffering of his flesh" (183b). Had Cain repented as David did, he would have been forgiven in the same manner (183b-184a).

Again in Narsai's fourth homily on creation it is said that God feigned ignorance in asking "Where is your brother Abel" in order to allow the insolent one to repent (*nettwe*) and be granted forgiveness. Cain, however, follows in the footsteps of his master

Satan and fails to confess. It is only after he is punished that he shows regret, but this was involuntary (*ba-twātā d-lā b-ṣebyānēh l-bāroyā metkaššap wā*) and therefore did not mitigate his punishment.¹¹³ Likewise, in Jacob of Serugh's homilies *On Cain and Abel*, Cain is portrayed as unrepentant. After God rejects his offering and admonishes him so that he might repent from his evildoing (*da-ntub men surḥānā*) Cain pays no attention.¹¹⁴ When asked about his brother's whereabouts after the murder, Cain yet again refuses to confess and repent.¹¹⁵ His response to the punishment in v. 13 ("My offence is too great to be forgiven") is itself another instance of rejecting repentance. In embracing despair rather than begging for mercy and pleading for forgiveness, Cain magnifies himself and depicts God as weak. "He shut close the gate of repentance before justice / so that abundant compassion would not go after him. He blocked that bridge of mercy with despair / so that love would not pass and lead him to forgiveness. He closed the road before petition so that it not proceed in it / and answered the Lord: 'My offence is too great to be forgiven'".¹¹⁶ Indeed when reunited with his parents he confesses (*awdi*) the murder, but only because his trembling limbs testify against him anyway. The confession itself is more of an attempt to justify himself than a true recognition of his guilt and responsibility. Cain accuses Satan of leading him astray and compares his sin to that of Adam and Eve, insinuating that they are no better than him. He stresses the awful consequences of the murder for him but never repents of the sin itself.¹¹⁷

An exception to the Syriac tendency to portray Cain as unrepentant is the *Syriac Life of Abel* 19-20, where after Cain returns to his parents' house and informs them of what had happened he proceeds to weep for Abel whom he now loves, his heart of stone crushed. Cain addresses Abel, saying: "may these eyes of mine consume away, those that

¹¹³ Ph. Gignoux, *Homélie de Narsai sur la création*, PO 34.3-4 (Turnhout, 1968), 632-34.

¹¹⁴ Homily 147 in *JSB*, 5:12.

¹¹⁵ Homily 148 in *JSB*, 5:23-25.

¹¹⁶ Homily 149 in *JSB*, 5:34-36.

¹¹⁷ Homily 149 in *JSB*, 5:41-43.

saw your tears and had no pity over you; and may those ears of mine grow deaf, because they were stopped at your suppliant cry. O that someone would give you back to me in this humiliation that has come upon me, my brother; would that someone would remove the dust from your eyes, and so you might see to what a low level your mother's son has descended".¹¹⁸ There is, however, no indication that his repentance is accepted or has any effect on his punishment.¹¹⁹ Cain confesses his wrongdoing and begs forgiveness in stanza 55 of the East Syriac version of the dialogue poem as well, but this seems secondary and is not as widely attested as the other two West Syriac versions.¹²⁰ Here too there is no mention of God accepting Cain's petition.

Thus we see that in the Christian tradition Cain's confession was involuntary and came too late, therefore having no effect on his fate.¹²¹ The Quran, which ends its description of Cain with "He then became one of those who pity themselves", seems to share the same understanding.

5.4.2. Lexical issues

Let us now examine the vocabulary used in these texts. The Quran and the Syriac texts share several words: In the Syriac texts (following the Peshitta to Gen. 4:3-4) the Biblical *minḥa* ("offering") is rendered as a *qurbānā*. *Qurbān* in this sense appears only twice in the Quran: here in Q 5:27, and in Q 3:183 (itself probably an echo of the related

¹¹⁸ Brock, "A Syriac Life of Abel", 482; ET slightly adapted.

¹¹⁹ See the comment in Glenthøj, *Cain*, 289 ("It is quite conceivable that [the *Syriac Life of Abel*] knew a similar Jewish dialogue between Adam/Eve and Cain, but he himself adapted this tradition to the normal Syriac view, widespread in Greek, too, that Cain repented at a wrong time and that he would be punished accordingly").

¹²⁰ Brock, "Two Syriac Dialogue Poems", 348 (Syriac) and 358 (ET). In Brock's translation the stanza runs as follows: "Cain was astounded by that curse, / how it came on him all of a sudden, / and in his folly he confessed he had done wrong, / asking a great deal for forgiveness". However, in the Syriac the third stich is *wa-b-saklutēh awdi d-hāb*, which should be rendered "and he confessed his folly for he had done wrong".

¹²¹The Quran too stresses on several occasions that late repentance is of no consequence. Q 4:18 teaches that "God shall not turn towards those who do evil deeds until, when one of them is visited by death, he says: 'Indeed now I repent', neither to those who die disbelieving; for them We have prepared a painful chastisement". See also Q 5:34; Q 10:90-92; Q 23:99-100; Q 40:85; and Q 63:10-11.

Biblical episode in 1 Kings 18); it has already been noted as a loanword from Jewish Aramaic or Syriac.¹²² Likewise the verb used in the Syriac texts is *qarreb*, as opposed to the Hebrew “brought”, *hevi*, and Targumic *ayti*. The verb *qarraba* in this meaning appears only here in the Quran. The use of this verb with the related noun is found both here in the Quran (*qarrabā qurbānan*) and in the Syriac texts where we find, for example, *qarreb[w] qurbānhon* and *qurbānā l-kinā qarreb[w]*.¹²³

Note also the following shared vocabulary: Syriac *qāṭelnā lāk* and Arabic *la-aqtulannaka*,¹²⁴ the various forms of the root *q-b-l* used by the Syriac authors and the Quran: Syriac *etqabbal*, *metqabbal*, *qabbel* etc. and Arabic *tuqubbila*,¹²⁵ Syriac *ṭlumyā* and Arabic *al-ẓālimīna* (Q 5:27),¹²⁶ and finally *lā tawṣeṭ idāk ba-dmā da-triṣā* (Isaac 177b) and *la-in basatta ilayya yadaka* (Q 5:28).

Although these words (with the exception of Arabic *qurbān* and *qarraba*) are quite common in both languages, their occurrence in a similar cluster in both traditions suggests that the story was indeed transmitted through an Aramaic channel. However, since many of them are found in the Targums as well (though not necessarily in Gen. 4), the linguistic evidence by itself is not sufficient to conclude that the channel of transmission must have been Syriac.

¹²² See *FV*, 234-35. Since some Targums also render *minḥa* as a *qrbn*’ one cannot go much further here; see Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. In Onqelos and Neofiti *qrbn*’ exists as a variant reading.

¹²³ See Brock, “Two Syriac Dialogue Poems”, 342 (Syriac) and 351 (ET) stanza 11 (“When they reached high ground and the presence of the Lord / they held out their offerings and presented them [*qarreb[w] qurbānhon*]”) and Isaac (173a) where the brothers are said to have “offered an offering to the Just One (*qurbānā l-kinā qarreb[w]*)”. See also Brock, “A Syriac Life of Abel”, 472 (*lamqarrābu qurbānē*).

¹²⁴ The Arabic probably displays a dissimilation of two consecutive emphatic consonants; E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of Comparative Grammar* (Louvain, 2001), 198.

¹²⁵ For the Syriac, see, e.g., Brock, “Two Syriac Dialogue Poems”, 342-45, *id.*, “A Syriac Life of Abel”, 472, and Isaac 175a. The Syriac texts are probably inspired by the Peshitta’s rendering of “accepted” (Gen. 4:7) as *qabblet*; see Glenthøj, *Cain*, 102. The Arabic word occurs three times in verse 27 (*fa-tuqubbila – yutaqabbal – yataqabbalu*) all in the fifth form, though the first and second occurrences are attested also in the first form; see Abū al-Baqā’ al-’Ukbarī, *I’rāb al-qirā’āt al-shawādhdh*, ed., M. al-S. A. ’Azzūz (Beirut, 1996), 1:434, and al-Khaṭīb, *Mu’jam al-qirā’āt*, 2:255.

¹²⁶ Thus in the refrain of the dialogue poem it is said: “[...] cry woe to the murderer / who slew his brother unjustly (*ba-ṭlumyā*); Brock, “Two Syriac Dialogue Poems”, 340 (Syriac) and 349 (ET).

5.4.3. The context of the story in the Quran and its typological function

“God, exalted and magnified be He, gave you the two sons of Adam as examples. Follow the good one and leave the evil one”, says the Prophet in a *ḥadīth* attributed to him.¹²⁷ But a close reading of the Quranic story in its context reveals that it serves as more than a mere ethical exhortation for the Muslims. Primarily it fulfilled a polemical purpose against their enemies, most probably the Jews.

Although traditionally treated as a hodgepodge of smaller units, recent scholarship has demonstrated that even the long chapters of the Quran are coherent.¹²⁸ Two recent studies by Neal Robinson and Michel Cuypers are specifically dedicated to demonstrating the careful composition of Q 5.¹²⁹ A full review and critique of their studies is beyond the scope of this chapter. Here I wish only to examine how the coherence of Q 5 affects the understanding of the Cain and Abel story.

The story is immediately preceded by the Israelites’ refusal to enter the Promised Land (Q 5:20-6), itself an example of the Jews’ unfaithfulness and their breaking of covenants (see Q 5:13).¹³⁰ In addition to their proximity, there are parallels between the two events which suggest that they were not juxtaposed randomly. Both feature two brothers (Moses and Aaron, and Cain and Abel) one of whom refers to the other as “my brother” (*akhī*), and in both a *nafs* is mentioned (vv. 25 and 30-31),¹³¹ though the

¹²⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 8:346-47.

¹²⁸ For a survey, see Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 493-512.

¹²⁹ See N. Robinson, “Hands Outstretched: Towards a Re-reading of *Sūrat al-Mā’ida*”, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 3 (2001): 1-19, and Cuypers, *The Banquet*.

¹³⁰ The story is adapted to present the Jews in a very unflattering light. Rather than pray for the Israelites as he does in Numbers 14:13-17, in Q 5:25 Moses asks God that he and Aaron be separated from the rest of them.

¹³¹ Moses’ mention of his brother as his only follower in v. 25 is somewhat puzzling: “He said: ‘O my Lord, I rule no one except myself and my brother, so separate us from the wrong-doing people’”. But v. 23 mentions “two men of those that feared” and they too must have followed Moses. See the discussion in al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:656. It is perhaps not irrelevant that this problematic verse serves as a link with the following passage.

relationships between the pairs are contrasting. Unlike Cain, Moses looks after Aaron. In v. 25 the *naḥs* is under Moses' control, whereas in v. 30 it leads Abel astray.¹³²

The Cain and Abel story is followed by the punishment of those who wage war against God and His Prophet (*yuḥāribūna llāha wa-rasūlahu*) and hasten to wreak corruption in the land (Q 5:33), suggesting that it too should be read as alluding to enemies of Muhammad and the Muslims. The language in v. 33 is general,¹³³ but perhaps this too is aimed primarily against the Jews. Again the two passages are linked, this time by use of similar phrases in inverted word order: *fasādin fī l-arḍi* ("corruption in the land") and *fī l-arḍi fasādan* (vv. 32 and 33).¹³⁴ V. 33 essentially enlarges on the mention of the corruption in the land in the previous verse, specifying which punishments are prescribed for this.¹³⁵ That those waging war against God are indeed the Jews is suggested by their fate at the end of v. 33: "That is for them degradation in this world (*khizyun fī l-dunyā*); and in the world to come awaits them a mighty chastisement (*'adhābun 'aẓīmun*)". The very same language is used in v. 41 to describe the Jews: "for them is in this world degradation (*fī l-dunyā khizyun*); and in the world to come awaits them a mighty chastisement".¹³⁶ But the stylistic argument on its own is inconclusive.

¹³² These similarities are noted in Robinson, "Hands Outstretched", 8. Further similarities are noted in Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 196-97, but these are not as distinctive.

¹³³ Similar language is used in Q 9:107 concerning those who established a place of worship as an outpost for those who waged war against Allah and His Prophet (*man ḥāraḇa llāha wa-rasūlahu*).

¹³⁴ Robinson, "Hands Outstretched", 8. For the coherence of Q 5:27-40, see Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 213-14. In his analysis the passage comprises three parts: Cain and Abel (27-31), the prescription for the Children of Israel (32 except the last sentence), and a discussion of crimes and punishments (end of 32 to 40). All three parts show links to the others. A different take on the message of these verses is found in H. Busse, *Islam, Judaism, and Christianity: Theological and Historical Affiliations* (Princeton, 1998), 69-70. There the section consisting of Q 5:19-34 is understood as targeted against the Jews of Medina. Verses 20-26 stress that the believers must go to war when commanded; vv. 27-32 confirm that killing is sometimes permissible; and vv. 33-34 list the punishments for those who fight against God and His Messenger.

¹³⁵ See the remark in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 8:359.

¹³⁶ The parallel is noted in Robinson, "Hands Outstretched", 8. To Ibn 'Abbās is attributed the position that those who fight against God and his Messenger are a group from among the People of the Book who broke their pact with the Prophet and spread corruption in the land; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 8:360. Others interpret the verse as referring to apostates; *ibid.*, 361-67. The common legal interpretation of the verse as concerning brigandry has no basis in the text.

Another and more subtle indication that Cain was a literary proxy for the Jews is found in a parallel between the endings of vv. 29-31 concerning Cain and vv. 51-53 which exhort the believers not to take the Jews and Christians as allies. Compare “(30) [...] that is the reward of the evildoers (*al-zālimīna*) (31) [...] and thus became one of the lost (*fa-aṣṣbaḥa mina l-khāsirīna*) (32) [...] He then became one of those who pity themselves (*fa-aṣṣbaḥa mina l-nādimīna*)”, with “(51) [...] Indeed Allah will not guide the wrongdoing people (*al-qawma l-zālimīna*) (52) [...] And they will become... self-pitying (*fa-yuṣṣbiḥū... nādimīna*) (53) [...] And they have become lost (*fa-aṣṣbaḥū khāsirīna*)”. Although the language is formulaic, these are the only two instances in which the three words occur in the rhyme of three consecutive verses, as Robinson notes. To him this suggests that “[t]he believers were surely meant to infer that the Jews of Arabia... were false brothers and potential fratricides”.¹³⁷

Moving now to the way the story itself is presented, the introduction already suggests that it serves a polemical purpose. V. 27 opens with “Recite to them the story of... (*wa-tlu ‘alayhim naba ‘a*)”, but does not specify who the audience is. The context¹³⁸ as well as the fact that all three other Quranic occurrences of the formulaic phrase “Recite to them the story of...” are polemical,¹³⁹ suggest that the audience is the Jews, as some exegetes understood.¹⁴⁰

Likewise, the comment which follows the story in v. 32 (“Our messengers have already come to them with clear signs, but many of them indeed commit afterwards

¹³⁷ Robinson, “Hands Outstretched”, 12-13. Robinson’s observation concerning the endings of the verses is in conformity with his contention that the Sura displays a chiasmic structure in which vv. 51-58 correspond to vv. 27-32.

¹³⁸ In Ibn ‘Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 2:178, it is argued that the pronoun in *‘alayhim* refers to the Israelites for two reasons: first, the preceding verses concerned them and adduced arguments against them on account of their plan to attack the Prophet (v. 11), and second, the Cain and Abel story belongs to their lore and is therefore fitting to be used against them.

¹³⁹ Q 7:175 (possibly directed at the Jews), Q 10:71 and Q 26:69 (both directed at the heathens).

¹⁴⁰ In al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 8:317, the account is to be recited by way of warning to the Jews who intended to attack the Prophet and his followers (see Q 5:11). In Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīn al-kabīr*, 11:203, there are two identifications of the audience: the people generally (*al-nās*) and the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*). According to Muqātil, however, the reference is to the Meccans.

excesses in the land”) clearly suggests that the People of the Book or the Jews are the target of this narrative.

But it is also the way the story itself is phrased that leads to the conclusion that it is told with enemies of the Prophet in mind. Compare the similar phrases in vv. 11 and 28:

| v. 11 | v. 28 |
|---|---|
| O you who believe, remember Allah's grace to you when a certain people planned to extend their hands against you (<i>an yabsuṭū ilaykum aydiyahum</i>), but [Allah] restrained their hands from you. Fear Allah and let the believers put their trust in Allah. | If you extend your hand against me to kill me, I will not extend my hand against you to kill you (<i>la-in basaṭta ilayya yadaka li-taqtulanī mā anā bi-bāsiṭin yadiya ilayka li-aqtulaka</i>). Indeed I fear Allah, the lord of all. |

This use of *b-s-t* to denote an attack is not common in the Quran,¹⁴¹ and its occurrence in both verses suggests that Abel and Cain stand for the Muslims and their enemies respectively, or perhaps even the Prophet and his enemies. V.11 does not spell out who these enemies are, but several exegetes identify them as Jews (at times specified as belonging to the tribe of the Banū al-Naḍīr) who plotted to assassinate Muhammad.¹⁴² And indeed several exegetes understood that the Cain and Abel story was meant to be read as commentary on the tensions between Muhammad and the Jews.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ It appears in Q 60:2 and perhaps in Q 6:93 (see al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:44-45).

¹⁴² See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 8:228-31. Others identify the enemies as Bedouin Mushrikūn who planned to kill the prophet; *ibid.*, 232-33. Since vv. 12-13 address the unfaithfulness and treachery of the Jews and call upon the prophet to pardon them, al-Ṭabarī himself prefers them as the culprits. V. 8 (“Let not the detestation of a people move you not to be equitable”) is also connected by some exegetes to the Jews’ plan to kill the prophet; *ibid.*, 223.

¹⁴³ See, e.g., al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 8:346, where it is stated that the Cain and Abel passage was meant to urge the followers of the Prophet to have recourse to pardon and forgiveness with regard to the Banū al-Naḍīr and to inform them that this sort of behavior is characteristic of their forefathers. See also al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, 5:290; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 7:408; and cf. Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār*, 6:339.

That the Cain and Abel story be directed against the Jews is not surprising seeing that this very same polemical use is well known from Christian texts. Already in Matthew 23:35 the Jews are held accountable for the blood of the righteous Abel. In several Christian sources John 8:44 is understood to mean that Cain is the father of the Jews.¹⁴⁴ Thus Aphrahat quotes Jesus as saying to the Jews: “You are the children of Cain, not children of Abraham” (*Demonstrations* 16.8).¹⁴⁵ Ephrem calls the Jews “the people of Cain”, refers to Judas as “the master of Cain, the murderer”, and remarks that: “Cain is not as reprehensible as the crucifiers, who greatly followed his craft”.¹⁴⁶ Many comparisons are drawn between them and Cain in Christian tradition, Syriac and other.¹⁴⁷ This of course is related to the typological understanding of Abel as foreshadowing Christ. Such a reading is suggested already by Hebrews 12:24 and is quite common in early Christian authors.¹⁴⁸

This typological reading is also found in the Syriac texts dealt with in this chapter. Often the comparisons are explicit. Thus in the *Syriac Life of Abel* we read concerning Abel’s friendly attitude towards Cain: “How symbols of our Lord were prefigured in the slain Abel! Abel rejoiced as he went with Cain – just as our Lord Jesus, when he said to the Jews: ‘I am he whom you see’. The day that Abel died was in Nisan, for it is written that Cain offered up a sheaf, and Abel a lamb: sheaves and lambs are seen at their best only in Nisan; maybe the day was Friday, too, for it was on a Friday in Nisan that his

¹⁴⁴ See the authors cited in N. A. Dahl, “Der Erstgeborene Satans und der Vater des Teufels”, in W. Eltester and F. H. Kettler (eds.), *Apophoreta: Festschrift für Ernst Haenchen* (Berlin, 1964), 77.

¹⁴⁵ Ed. Parisot, 1:784.

¹⁴⁶ See Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11*, 144-45.

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, the remark of Ambrose: “These two brothers, Cain and Abel, have furnished us with the prototype of the Synagogue and the Church. In Cain we perceive the parricidal people of the Jews, who were stained with the blood of their Lord, their Creator, and, as a result of the child-bearing of the virgin Mary, their Brother, also. By Abel we understand the Christian who cleaves to god...”; ET in Savage, *Saint Ambrose: Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, 362. See also the elaborate typology in Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* 12:9-13 (ET in R. Teske, *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean* [Hyde Park, New York, 2007], 130-34). A discussion of this theme with further (later) texts is found in Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain*, 92-98. See also Glenthøj, *Cain*, 26, 61, 89, 116, 119, 125, 134, 154, 179, 207, 210, 218 and 222.

¹⁴⁸ See Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11*, 145-49, and Glenthøj, *Cain*, 26, 61, 93, 134, 153, 170, 175 and 218. For an overview of the typological approach to the narrative, see *ibid.*, 249.

Lord died. And if the time also agreed, then he would resemble his Lord's son in all things".¹⁴⁹ Likewise, Isaac likens Abel's interaction with Cain to that of Jesus with Judah Iscariot and to a lamb wagging its tail before the slaughterer (174b-175a).

In the *Syriac Life of Abel* the two murders take place in a similar fashion: "At the moment when he slew him with his hands and arms stretched out, the symbol of Him whose hands and arms were stretched out on the wood [of the cross] was clearly depicted. The earth too was rent where he was laid upon it. He depicted the symbol of Him whose body was *laid in a new grave, wherein no one had been laid*".¹⁵⁰ But the similarities do not end here. Thus we read: "In Abel is depicted a type of the killing of the Lord, and at the same time a type of His resurrection is depicted in the raising of his corpse – even though he did not rise to life as did Lazarus; but he did rise from his place of burial and was removed. For when they brought up his corpse to wrap it in garments and lay it with themselves on high, then the resurrection of the Son was depicted in him".¹⁵¹ The raising of the corpse is assumed to have occurred on the third day like that of Christ and so on. The very end of the *Syriac Life of Abel* reinforces this typological reading: "To the slain Son, the symbols of whose death were depicted in the just, the righteous and the prophets, - He who received the offering of Abel and took vengeance on his murderer, and both rebuked and rejected the rebellious people who had acquired Cain's stiffness of neck, - to Him let us ascribe glory and honour...".¹⁵²

At times the typology is expressed more subtly as in the refrain found in one of the manuscripts of the dialogue poem (Harvard syr. 103):

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 473-74.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 477. The allusions are to Matthew 27:60 and Luke 23:53.

¹⁵¹ Brock, "A Syriac Life of Abel", 484. The second burial was meant among other things to prevent Abel's body from being devoured by a wild animal. Abel too in his plea for mercy begged that Cain not leave him in the field as food for the birds of the sky, the dogs and wild animals (*ibid.*, 475). Eve expressed a similar fear when requesting that Cain show her where the body was before it was devoured by wild animals and torn up by birds of prey (*ibid.*, 482). See Glenthoj, *Cain*, 145 and cf. the positive role of the raven in the Quran.

¹⁵² Brock, "A Syriac Life of Abel", 485. Brock (*ibid.*, 492) adds references from other Christian authors to Cain as a type of Israel.

O People ('*ammā*) and Peoples ('*ammē*), come, listen and hear
the story of Abel and Cain:
cry woe to the murderer
who slew his brother unjustly (*ba-ṭlumyā*).¹⁵³

The People and Peoples is a common reference in the Syriac tradition to the Jews and Christians, respectively.¹⁵⁴ This invitation is also reminiscent of the way the Quranic story is introduced: “Recite to them the story of the two sons of Adam truthfully...” (Q 5:27). The dialogue poem alludes to Jesus also in stanza 47 where Cain approaches Abel and makes him kneel down “like a lamb about to be slaughtered”.¹⁵⁵ Likewise, as Brock notes the reaction of the mountains and deaf rocks to Abel’s moans and weeping in stanza 49 was perhaps suggested by the description of the crucifixion in Matthew 27:51.¹⁵⁶

It would seem then that in this instance the Quran draws upon a Christian anti-Jewish polemical use of the Cain and Abel episode.¹⁵⁷ In both traditions the story is used to portray the Jews as villains. Their victims are, however, different: in the Quran Jesus is replaced by the Muslims or Muhammad. A trace of this process is found towards the end of Q 5 where Jesus’ interaction with the Jews is described in similar language to that used to describe their attack against the Muslims. Compare v. 110, “When God said: ‘Jesus Son of Mary, remember My blessing upon you and upon your mother... when I restrained

¹⁵³ Brock, “Two Syriac Dialogue Poems”, 340 (Syriac) and 349 (ET). According to Brock (*ibid.*, 359), this is likely to be the original refrain.

¹⁵⁴ See Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 41, note 1.

¹⁵⁵ Brock, “Two Syriac Dialogue Poems”, 346 (Syriac) and 356 (ET). As Brock (*ibid.*, 362) notes, the language is based on Isaiah 53:7. This verse was understood as a reference to Jesus.

¹⁵⁶ Brock, “Two Syriac Dialogue Poems”, 362. In the later medieval dialogue poem the typological references are overt. Cain is compared to Judas and Jesus to Abel: “Praise be to the true Shepherd / who in his love became a lamb, / dying on the wood on Golgotha, like Abel in the valley”; *ibid.*, 367 (Syriac) and 373 (ET).

¹⁵⁷ A similar conclusion was reached recently in Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 214-19; his analysis of the structure of Q 5 led him to study its relationship with previous scriptures and to conclude that many Biblical figures in the Quran are treated typologically (*ibid.*, 476-78). Cuypers, however, focused on New Testament texts and therefore was not able to supply a Christian source for the Quranic dialogue. The closest text he found is Matthew 23:33-36, which indeed mentions Abel, but it does not retell his story, nor does it include a dialogue with Cain.

(*kafaftu*) from you the Children of Israel...” to v.11, “O you who believe, remember Allah’s grace to you when a certain people planned to extend their hands against you, but [Allah] restrained (*kaffa*) their hands from you”.¹⁵⁸

The story establishes the murderous tendencies of the Jews, beginning with Cain’s killing of Abel. This evil behavior continues with their assault against Jesus and with their attack against the Muslims. As v. 32 stresses: “Our messengers have already come to them with clear signs, but many of them indeed commit afterwards excesses in the land”.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that major elements in the Quran’s version of the Cain and Abel story stand in the Syriac tradition. These include primarily the dialogue between the brothers, Abel’s passive reaction to Cain’s aggression, Abel’s attempt to dissuade his brother from sinning, and the typological use of the story against enemies of the Prophet. Though inconclusive, other elements too (the role of the *nafs* in Cain’s sin, his regret as opposed to repentance, and the diction of the narrative) are suggestive of a Syriac background.

But the Syriac sources do not include all the details of the Quranic version. I have discussed at some length the motif of burial as inspired by a bird. It is found in the Quran and in Jewish and Christian sources but not in the Syriac texts. Though I have raised some questions concerning the widespread assumption that the Quran is indebted to the midrashic parallels on this point, this does not change the fact that the Syriac tradition as we have it does not include this motif. Moreover, the quotation from the Mishna evidently reflects knowledge of a rabbinic text.

¹⁵⁸ The parallel is noted in Robinson, “Hands Outstretched”, 15.

My analysis of the way this quotation is used in the Quran offers an explanation for the relationship between the Jewish and Christian materials. The Quranic retelling of the Cain and Abel story draws on both Jewish and Christian traditions, but the overall spirit seems to be guided by Christian anti-Jewish approach. Even the quotation from the Mishna serves a sharp anti-Jewish polemical purpose. In the next chapter we shall see a similar mixture of Jewish and Christian elements concerning Abraham, and again I shall argue that a Jewish tradition is used polemically against the Jews.

Regarding methodology, I wish to stress the combined examination of motifs, literary form, diction, and typological function. Together these four types of evidence suggest that the Quranic Cain and Abel story is closely related to a strand of Syriac tradition. Taken individually, some of the parallels may not be compelling, but in conjunction they lend each other the power of persuasion. In the chapter devoted to the Joseph story we shall argue along similar lines.

6. Abraham and the Foundations of the House (Q 2:127)

6.1. Introduction: Abraham's polemical function

In Q 2 Abraham fulfills a crucial polemical function with regard to Judaism and Christianity. His religion is the true alternative. "They say: 'Be Jews or Christians and you shall be guided'. Say: 'Nay, rather [we follow] the religion of Abraham (*millat Ibrāhīm*),¹ a *ḥanīf*,² he did not belong to the polytheists'", runs Q 2:135. Later on we read: "Or do you say: 'Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians?'"³ Say: 'Have you then greater knowledge, or God?'" (Q 2:140).⁴

¹ For *millat Ibrāhīm* as the Quranic religion, see also Q 2:130; Q 3:95; Q 4:125; Q 6:161; [Q 12:38]; Q 16:123; and Q 22:78. The last verse presents a variant formulation which emphasizes even more the continuity between Abraham and the Quranic community: "the religion of your father Abraham (*millata abīkum ibrāhīma*)..." For the Syriac etymology of *milla*, see *FV*, 268-69.

² The word *ḥanīf*, which occurs ten times in the Quran in the singular and twice in the plural (*ḥunafā*), is problematic from a comparative viewpoint. In other Semitic languages the root *h-n-p* carries an intrinsically negative meaning. Thus Syriac *ḥanpā*, for example, is widely used to denote a pagan or a heathen. Since eight of the Quranic occurrences make reference to the faith of Abraham, the solution might be found in Christian passages which emphasize his non-Jewish background as an argument in favor of the inclusion of Gentiles in the faith. Margoliouth and Ahrens already considered Romans 4:10-12 in this context, though it does not include the word *ḥanpā* in the Syriac translation. Recently de Blois has revived and fine-tuned this theory, arguing that *ḥanpā* is also used for "Gentile" without negative implications. His most interesting quotation (and the only one which concerns Abraham) derives from the Syriac life of Clement of Rome, where it is said: *haymen abrahām lalāhā kad ḥanpā wā* or "Abraham believed in God when he was a *ḥanpā*"; F. de Blois, "Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and *ḥanīf* (ἕθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and Islam", *BSOAS* 65 (2002): 16-25, as well as Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 80-87. It may be worth adding that Abraham is mentioned with regard to *ḥanputā* (here clearly "idolatry" or "paganism") in other (more central) Syriac texts. In Narsai's homily *On the Revelations to Abraham* (ed. Mingana, 1:58), the love of Abraham (towards God) blossoms like a fruit full of delights out of the *ḥanputā* devoid of spiritual fruits. Later in the same homily God addresses Abraham, saying: "because you have stripped off the ugly garment of the name of *ḥanputā*, I will cover the shame of the nations with your faith" (*ibid.*, 1:59). In discussing Abraham's election in his homily *Against the Jews*, Narsai refutes the notion that Abraham was chosen on account of his love for God, since "the Spirit of revelation called him from Babylon before he believed / and after it called him he left *ḥanputā* and honored the truth" (*ibid.*, 1:300). See also Jacob of Serugh's *Homilies against the Jews* 2, lines 123-24 (ed. Albert, 76).

³ That the Jews or Christians claimed Ishmael as a coreligionist seems unlikely and most probably reflects the Quranic outlook which stressed his importance; compare Q 2:125, 127, 133, 136; Q 3:84; Q 4:163; Q 6:86; Q 19:54-55; Q 21:85; and Q 38:48.

⁴ The same argument is expanded in Q 3:65-68: "(65) People of the Book! Why do you dispute concerning Abraham? The Torah was not sent down, neither the Gospel, but after him. What, have you no reason? (66) Ha, you are the ones who disputed about what you know; why then do you dispute touching a matter of which you know not anything? God knows, and you know not. (67) Abraham was not a Jew, neither a Christian; but he was a *ḥanīf*, a *muslim*; he did not belong to the polytheists. (68) Surely the people most worthy of / closest to (*awlā bi-*) of Abraham are those who followed him, and this Prophet, and those who believe; and God is the Protector of the believers". What sort of disputations does the Quran have in mind here? Some exegetes imagine concrete debates either between the Christians of Najrān and Jewish scholars in the presence of the Prophet (see, e.g., the tradition attributed to Ibn 'Abbās in al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 5:481) or between the Jews of Medina and the Muslims (see, e.g., the tradition attributed to Qatāda *ibid.*, 5:482). But while one cannot rule out an actual debate in the time of the Prophet, it is worth noting that

Abraham is portrayed as a prototype Muslim. In fact *aslama* and its derivatives are applied to him several times.⁵ He asks that God make Ishmael and himself surrender to Him (*muslimayni laka*) and that there be of his progeny a community surrendering to God (*ummatan muslimatan laka*) (Q 2:128); God orders Abraham to surrender (*aslim*) and he responds by saying: “I surrender (*aslamtu*) to the Lord of all beings” (Q 2:131). Abraham then sees to it that his sons follow in his footsteps, instructing them and Jacob not to die except in a state of surrender (*muslimūna*) (Q 2:132). Jacob in turn, on his deathbed asks his children what they will worship after he is gone, their response being: “We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, one God, and we surrender to Him (*wa-naḥnu lahu muslimūna*)” (Q 2:133). Finally, the followers of Muhammad are likewise commanded to say: “We believe in God and what has been sent down to us and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what the prophets were given from their Lord, we make no distinction between any of them, and we surrender to Him (*wa-naḥnu lahu muslimūna*)” (Q 2:136).⁶

Though in these verses *muslim* has not yet fully acquired its later technical meaning of belonging to a distinct religion named Islam (note the preposition *li-* which accompanies the word *muslim*), the process has clearly begun. That in these verses *islām* is meant as an alternative to Judaism and Christianity is suggested by Q 2:111-12: “(111)

many Christian texts depict (fictional) debates between Jews and Christians concerning Abraham. For the lack of a significant tradition of *contra Christianos* in late antique Jewish sources, see P. Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York, 2008), xv-xviii. Roughly speaking, scholars are divided as to whether the Christian polemical works reflect actual encounters with Jews or merely stereotypes derived from exegesis of the Old Testament. The polemics in the Quran could also be regarded either as reflecting events in Medina (thus most scholars) or as the continuation of an old literary tradition of polemical anti-Jewish works.

⁵ In what follows I will translate *aslama* as “to surrender”, though scholars have debated the exact meaning of the verb. Baneth, for example, understood it as signifying devotion to God to the absolute exclusion of other objects of devotion. For a survey of the theories put forth by Western scholars, see J. I. Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term ‘Islām’ as Seen in a Sequence of Qur’ān Commentaries* (Missoula, 1975), 24-33.

⁶ Cf. Q 3:84.

And they say: ‘None shall enter Paradise except that they be Jews or Christians’. Such are their fancies. Say: ‘Produce your proof, if you speak truly’. (112) Nay, but whosoever surrenders himself to God (*aslama wajhahu li-llāhi*), being a good-doer, his wage is with his Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow”. The process is completed in Q 22:78, where the believers are told: “struggle for God as is His due. He has chosen you, and has laid on you no impediment in your religion, being the creed of your father Abraham; He named you the Muslims (*sammākum al-muslimīna*) aforetime and in this...”.⁷ Here the word clearly serves as a term for the followers of Muhammad.

Q 2 does not stop at simply making Abraham a Muslim. He is credited with preparing God’s house, presumably the Ka’ba, for worship together with his son Ishmael (Q 2:125, 127) and with establishing related rites (Q 2:128);⁸ he prays for the welfare of a settlement, presumably Mecca (Q 2:126);⁹ and he prays for the coming of Muhammad (Q 2:129).

This chapter is devoted to one detail within this portrayal of the Muslim Abraham: the notion that he founded the sanctuary of the Ka’ba together with his son Ishmael (Q 2:127). I will suggest that this episode draws upon post-Biblical traditions concerning Genesis 22, especially those attested in a set of Syriac texts. In addition to presenting the parallels between the stories, I will analyze the ways in which the Quran has reworked and appropriated its sources.¹⁰

⁷ The exegetes debate who coined this name. Whereas most believe the subject to be God, others think it was Abraham (see Q 2:128) who first used this term; see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 23:74.

⁸ Cf. Q 3:95-97; Q 22:26-29.

⁹ Cf. Q 14:35-41.

¹⁰ An earlier version of this chapter was published in *BSOAS* 72 (2009): 25-40. Since then I have had access to the excellent study of the Quranic Abraham stories in Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 97-151 (especially relevant are pp. 135-44). Though our goals are different – Sinai focuses on the ways in which Q 2:124-29 adapts and updates earlier Quranic passages about Abraham – we often argue along similar lines. Sinai’s insightful analysis links Q 2:124-29 with Genesis 22, but in doing so relies primarily on the Bible, citing *Genesis Rabba* sporadically. In this chapter I will argue that a wider reading of Jewish and especially Syriac Christian sources establishes the link with Genesis 22 more firmly and offers a solution for the puzzle posed by Q 2:127. See now also Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, 633-52, and especially 643-46.

Before we focus on the scene of the construction of the Ka'ba, let us note by way of introduction that much of the polemical use of Abraham in the Quran has a Christian precedent. Abraham was a focal point in the Christian-Jewish debate from the very beginning of Christianity.¹¹ Thus Paul notes that “not all of Abraham’s children are his true descendants” (Romans 9:7)¹² and that “it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants” (Romans 9:8).¹³

Paul invokes Abraham in Galatians as well in his polemics against the call for Gentile adherence to the law. By way of emphasizing that the Gentiles received the Spirit through belief rather than the works of the law, Paul declares:

(6) Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”, (7) so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. (8) And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying: “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you”. (9) For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed (Galatians 3:6-9).

The polemic in Galatians is aimed at Jewish Christians, not at non-Christian Jews. Nonetheless, the undercutting of the importance of the law seems to carry implicit consequences for the status of the Jews’ covenant with God and their relationship to

¹¹ A useful study is J. S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville, 1991).

¹² Compare Q 2:124 and parallels discussed below.

¹³ But this does not mean that the unbelieving Jews are rejected. After explaining the part their unbelief played in the salvation of the Gentiles, Paul envisages that ultimately the Jews will receive God’s mercy. In making this final argument, Paul comments: “As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors” (Romans 11:28, see also 15:8). Here, in contrast to the Quranic verses we shall examine below, the merit of the ancestors is still important.

Abraham.¹⁴ Explicit exclusion of the Jews from the Abrahamic heritage will, however, occur only in the writings of later Christian authors.

In Matthew, the Jews' pride in their descent from Abraham is evident. John the Baptist rebukes the Pharisees and Sadducees: "Do not presume to say to yourselves: 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Matthew 3:9).¹⁵ The rejection of the Jews is not mentioned here but is explicit in Matthew 8:12, where the heirs of the kingdom of heaven will be thrown into outer darkness and prevented from participating in the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Another New Testament passage with themes found in the Quran is John 8:31-47. Responding to Jesus' assertion that following him will set them free, the Jews say: "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone..." (John 8:33). Jesus grants them physical descent in verse 37, but does not recognize them as Abraham's children.¹⁶ In an argument reminiscent of Q 3:68 ("Surely the people most worthy of / closest to (*awlā bi-*) Abraham are those who followed him, and this Prophet,¹⁷ and those who believe; and God is the Protector of the believers"), Jesus states that Abraham is not the father of the Jews, for "If you were Abraham's children you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did" (John 8:39-40).¹⁸

¹⁴ Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews*, 47-50. Whether or not Galatians should be read in light of Romans is discussed *ibid.*, 72-74.

¹⁵ Compare Luke 3:8, where the same argument is addressed to the crowds.

¹⁶ For the distinction between descendants (*sperma*) and children (*tekna*), see Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews*, 136-39.

¹⁷ As the verse stands the Prophet (*al-nabiyyu*) is mentioned as one who was most worthy of Abraham. If the variant reading *al-nabiyya* (for which see al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:399), is adopted, the sense would be that those who follow Abraham and the Prophet are most worthy of Abraham.

¹⁸ The contrast in the verse suggests that Abraham's work consisted of treating Jesus properly. This is confirmed in John 8:56 ("Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad"); see Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews*, 141-42. That being like Abraham might entail following Muhammad is implied in a variant reading of Q 3:68 discussed above.

In Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* Abraham is used "to render the Jews orphaned, without legitimate claim to Abraham as their father in any meaningful way".¹⁹ As Jeffrey Siker comments, "Justin uses the very Abrahamic heritage that the Jews claim in order to show that they are not the children of Abraham; he thus leaves them abandoned and disinherited".²⁰ One quotation should suffice:

They who attempt to justify themselves and claim that they are sons of Abraham hope to receive along with us a small part of the divine inheritance... those who have persecuted Christ in the past and still do, and do not repent, shall not inherit anything on the holy mountain, unless they repent. Whereas the Gentiles who believe in Christ and are sorry for their sins shall receive the inheritance, along with the patriarchs, the prophets, and every just descendant of Jacob, even though they neither practice circumcision nor observe the Sabbaths and feasts. They shall undoubtedly share in the holy inheritance of God (*Dialogue with Trypho* 25.1-26.1).²¹

Finally, concerning the description of Abraham and the other patriarchs as Muslims, a parallel in a book of Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 340) is noteworthy.²² Responding to pagan accusations that Christianity is merely a deviation from Judaism and therefore not an ancient religion, Eusebius argues that Christianity was essentially the religion of the Hebrews, including Abraham, before they became Jews in the time of Moses:

¹⁹ Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews*, 163.

²⁰ *Ibid.*.

²¹ All quotations from Justin follow *St. Justin Martyr: Dialogue with Trypho* (trans. Th. B. Falls, rev. Th. P. Halton, ed. M. Slusser) (Washington, D.C., 2003).

²² This was noted in E. Beck, "Die Gestalt des Abraham am Wendepunkt der Entwicklung Muhammeds: Analyse von Sure 2,118(124)-135(141)", *Le Muséon* 65 (1952): 90-91.

The law and life of our Saviour Jesus Christ shows itself to be such, being a renewal of the ancient pre-Mosaic religion, in which Abraham, the friend of God, and his forefathers are shown to have lived. And if you cared to compare the life of Christians and the worship introduced among all nations by Christ with the lives of the men who with Abraham are witnessed to by Scripture as holy and righteous, you would find one and the same ideal (*Demonstratio Evangelica* 1.5).²³

Not only did the forefathers follow the Christian religion, they also had knowledge of Christ and in fact they themselves were called the equivalent of Christians, as can be seen in Psalms 105:15 “touch not my anointed (χριστῶν)” (*ibid.*).²⁴

This short survey is far from exhausting Christian polemics regarding the Abrahamic heritage, but it should suffice as a backdrop demonstrating the Christian precedents for the Quranic arguments. In light of this we should not be completely surprised to find that in describing the erection of the Ka’ba, the Quran draws on a Christian tradition. It is to this scene that we now turn.

6.2. The passage

The episode is described in Q 2:127-29 in the following manner:

(127) And when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the house (*yarfa’u l-qawā’ida mina l-bayti*) [they said:] “Our lord! accept [this] from us. Indeed you are the hearer, the knower.

(وَأِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ)

²³ ET in W. J. Ferrar, *The Proof of the Gospel* (London, 1920), 1:25.

²⁴ For Eusebius’ theory of Christian prehistory, see A. Kofsky, *Eusebius of Caesarea against Paganism* (Leiden, 2000), 100-36.

(128) And our lord! make us surrender to you (*muslimayni*) and [make] of our offspring a nation surrendering to you (*ummatan muslimatan laka*) and show us our rites and turn to us. Indeed you are the relenting, the merciful.

(رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ)

(129) And our lord! send to them a messenger from them who shall recite your signs to them, teach them the book and the wisdom, and purify them. Indeed you are the mighty, the wise”.

(رَبَّنَا وَأَبْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ)

There are two difficulties in the Arabic of verse 127 which are smoothed out in my translation. First, Ishmael is not mentioned immediately after Abraham, but only at the end of the sentence after the description of the act and therefore seems to hang loose in the verse. A literal rendition of the verse’s beginning would be: “And when Abraham was raising the foundations of the house and Ishmael...”.²⁵ Second, the words “[they said]” are missing in the original,²⁶ and the verse moves abruptly from a description of Abraham and Ishmael’s act to the content of their prayer.

As a result of these difficulties, not all agree that Ishmael in fact took part in the raising of the foundations. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) quotes an opinion which holds that Ishmael alone uttered the prayer, and adds that accordingly Abraham raised the foundations alone.

The verse should then be rendered “And when Abraham was raising the foundations of

²⁵ In Beck, “Die Gestalt des Abraham”, 79, this difficulty is adduced as one argument for Beck’s opinion that the entire sentence “And when Abraham was raising the foundations of the house and Ishmael” is a later interpolation. His other arguments are the uncommon use of the imperfect *yarfa’u* after *idh*, the use of *al-qawā’ida min al-bayti* instead of simply *qawā’ida al-bayti*, the contradiction with other verses which assume that the house existed before Abraham, and a comparison with Q 14:35-41. Beck’s arguments notwithstanding, I find his solution extreme and hard to prove, and will assume that the sentence is indeed part of the original text. Beck’s view is also rejected in Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 138, note 27.

²⁶The reading of ‘Abd Allāh b. Mas’ūd (d. 652/3) did, however, supply *yaqūlāni* (“[the two of them] saying/said”) here; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 2:556. In al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 2:395, a similar reading, *wa-yaqūlāni*, is attributed both to Ibn Mas’ūd and to Ubayy b. Ka’b (d. between 640 and 656).

the house and Ishmael [said:] ‘Our lord! accept [this] from us. Indeed you are the hearer, the knower’”. Al-Ṭabarī does not identify those who hold this opinion, but refers to them as “others” (*ākharūn*).²⁷ A similar opinion is cited in the name of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728)²⁸ and is also held by the Baṣran grammarian al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 830), who comments on Q 2:127: “It was Ishmael who said: ‘Our Lord! accept [this] from us’”.²⁹

However, this approach is far from convincing. Q 2:125 demonstrates that Ishmael had a real part to play: “[...] And we ordered Abraham and Ishmael: ‘Purify my house for those who circle [it], for those who cleave [to it], and for those who bow and prostrate themselves’” (وَعَهَدْنَا إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ أَنْ طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْعَاكِفِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ).³⁰ Therefore the view held by the majority of exegetes which understands Q 2:127 as referring to Abraham and Ishmael raising the foundations of the house together seems preferable.

However, what exactly is meant by the phrase *yarfa‘u l-qawā‘id*, which I translated as “raising the foundations”, is not clear. The word *qawā‘id*, usually rendered as “foundations”, is found also in Q 16:26: “Those that were before them plotted; so God came upon their building from the foundations, and the roof fell down on them from above them...” (قَدْ مَكَرَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَآتَىٰ اللَّهُ بُنْيَانَهُمْ مِنَ الْأَفْوَاعِ فَخَرَّ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّقْفُ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ). In both

²⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 2:557. At pp. 560-62 al-Ṭabarī also cites two traditions attributed to the fourth caliph ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661) which, according to al-Ṭabarī, assume that Ishmael was a young child at the time of the building of the house and therefore did not participate in it. It should be noted, however, that neither tradition states explicitly that Ishmael did not participate. All they do is describe Abraham building the house without mentioning Ishmael. As a matter of fact, the second tradition even mentions that when the building was almost completed Abraham asked his son to go and find him the last stone. This implies that the child might in their view have been handing him stones earlier as well.

²⁸ See ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-qur‘ān al-‘aẓīm* (Riyadh, 1999), 1:233. It should be noted that although al-Ḥasan attributes the prayer to Ishmael alone, he adds that the father and son built together.

²⁹ Al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ, *Ma‘ānī al-qur‘ān* (Kuwait, 1981), 1:148.

³⁰ The exact relationship between Q 2:125 and Q 2:127 is not clear. In the first verse God commands Abraham and Ishmael to purify his house, which seems to imply that the house already exists. The latter verse, however, describes how the father and son build the house. One interpretation attributed to al-Suddī (Kufan, d. 745) claims that *tahhīrā* means in this context “build [in purity]”. Another is that God’s command is to purify the place in which the house will be built; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 2:531-32. For further interpretations, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 4:57-58, and Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 136, note 24.

verses the word *qawā'id* is often understood as foundations (*isās* or *āsās*).³¹ However, other explanations were suggested as well. Thus, in Q 16:26 many exegetes understood the word as meaning either “foundations” or “columns” (*asāṭīn*).³² More attention seems to have been paid to the word in Q 2:127. While many commentators understood it as “foundations”, some preferred other meanings. The well-known philologist al-Kisā'ī (ca. 737-805), for example, is said to have explained it as “walls” (*judur*).³³ A different interpretation is that the word refers to the rows of bricks (*sāfāt*).³⁴ Presumably, these interpretations are aimed at explaining what it means to “raise” the *qawā'id*. Since it is not entirely clear how foundations can be said to be raised,³⁵ the exegetes searched for other possible meanings for the word. But no matter how we choose to understand the phrase, it is clear that the father and the son are both depicted as participating in the erection of the house.³⁶ That “the house” refers to the Ka'ba, as the exegetes understand, seems very reasonable in the light of Q 5:97: “God has appointed the Ka'ba, the sacred house, as an establishment for the people...” (جَعَلَ اللَّهُ الْكَعْبَةَ الْغُرَبَاءَ الْبَيْتَ الْحَرَامَ قِيَامًا لِلنَّاسِ).

6.3. Pre-Islamic origin?

At first glance, this scene does not seem to have a clear Biblical precedent.³⁷ Nonetheless, modern scholars have suggested several passages as possible sources of inspiration. Henry Preserved Smith noted in 1897 that “the Old Testament makes him [i.e. Abraham] a builder of altars. What more natural than that Mohammed should suppose

³¹ See, for example, al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 2:386 and 12:314 (the term used here is *uṣūl al-binā'*).

³² See, for example, al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:563.

³³ See al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 2:386.

³⁴ See al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:213. Al-Zamakhsharī also mentions another interpretation which, somewhat artificially, takes *qawā'id* in Q 2:127 to mean *mā qa'ada mina l-bayti*.

³⁵ A common explanation is that raising the foundations refers to building on top of them; see *ibid*.

³⁶ Some traditions describe the father and son as building together. Others have Abraham doing the actual building, while Ishmael passes him the stones; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 2:557-60.

³⁷ In R. Firestone, “Abraham”, *EQ*, 1:7, it is considered to be one of the Abrahamic references in the Quran which have no parallel in Biblical and later Jewish tradition.

him the founder of the Kaaba?”³⁸ Speyer, Goitein and Rubin³⁹ pointed to Jubilees 22:24 where Abraham addresses Jacob and says: “This house I have built for myself to put my name on it upon the earth. It has been given to you and to your descendants forever. It will be called Abraham’s house. It has been given to you and your descendants forever because you will build my house and will establish my name before God until eternity. Your descendants and your name will remain throughout all the history of the earth”.⁴⁰ According to these scholars, the “house” referred to is a sanctuary (or perhaps the Temple in Jerusalem) and this tradition of Abraham as the founder of a sanctuary is the ultimate source for the Quranic scene.

These suggestions are not entirely satisfactory. Although the passage from Jubilees refers to the building of “Abraham’s house”, this seems to be a metaphorical reference to Abraham’s family (i.e. household)⁴¹ or to the land.⁴² Since Jubilees has not previously described Abraham as building an actual house or temple in his lifetime, there is no compelling reason to see a reference to such an edifice in Jubilees 22:24. Although Rubin argues that the general context of the passage in Jubilees implies the actual building of a sanctuary, I fail to see this.⁴³ Moreover, these suggestions do not address the unique aspect of the Quranic verse, namely, that Abraham and his son Ishmael build together.⁴⁴

³⁸ H. P. Smith, *The Bible and Islam* (New York, 1897), 40.

³⁹ Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen*, 162; S. D. Goitein, *Ha-islam shel Muhammad: Ketsad hithavta dat hadasha be-tsel ha-Yahadut* (Jerusalem, 1956), 182-84; U. Rubin, “*Ḥanīfiyya* and Ka’ba: An Inquiry into the Arabian Pre-Islamic Background of *dīn Ibrāhīm*”, *JSAI* 13 (1990): 108.

⁴⁰ ET from the Ethiopic in J. C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Louvain, 1989), 133.

⁴¹ See the remark in R. H. Charles and G. H. Box, *The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis* (London, 1917), 126, note 3: “‘House’ throughout this passage = ‘family’”. See also J. M. Baumgarten, *Studies in Qumran Law* (Leiden, 1977), 86.

⁴² See VanderKam, *Jubilees*, 133, in the note on 22:24.

⁴³ Rubin, “*Ḥanīfiyya*”, 108, note 108. It seems that the understanding of Jubilees 22:24 as referring to a sanctuary built by Abraham is more of a concern of scholars in search of a source for the Quranic scene than it is of scholars of Jubilees.

⁴⁴ In Goitein, *Ha-islam*, 184, it is noted that in Jubilees 22:24 the house is built both by Abraham and Jacob. Nonetheless, they are not described as building together at the same time. Rather, Abraham commands Jacob to continue his work after he passes away.

Joshua Finkel pointed to the story of Abraham's attempt to sacrifice Isaac in Genesis 22 as the source of this episode. In his opinion, the proto-Muslims responsible for this legend shifted the story of the attempted sacrifice to Mecca in order to form a national religion. Since Isaac was not an ancestor of the Arabs, his part was omitted from the story. Instead, Ishmael was assigned the auxiliary role of helping with the dedication ceremonies of the house.⁴⁵

6.4. Links with Genesis 22

In what follows I will attempt to substantiate the link between Genesis 22 and the Quranic scene. I will suggest, however, that the scene of the father and the son building together is not a mere replacement of the attempted sacrifice, as Finkel would have it, but rather an integral part of post-Biblical traditions concerning Genesis 22.

6.4.1. Abraham and Isaac build a house for God's mysteries

After Abraham and Isaac reach Mount Moriah, it is said:

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood (Genesis 22:9).

⁴⁵ J. Finkel, "Jewish, Christian, and Samaritan Influences on Arabia", *The Macdonald Presentation Volume* (Princeton, 1933), 158-60. Finkel argues that the conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans concerning the location of Mount Moriah (Jerusalem versus Mount Gerizim) emboldened the Arabs to shift the story to a third site. The link to Genesis 22 is found also, in a much less developed form, in Goitein, *ibid.*. Though Goitein emphasizes Jubilees 22:24, he also notes that Jubilees elaborates here on a link between Abraham and the Temple found already in 2 Chronicles 3:1, according to which Solomon built the Temple on Mount Moriah (a reference to Genesis 22:2). Thus Goitein too relates our Quranic scene indirectly to Genesis 22. A link to Genesis 22 is found also in Katsh, *Judaism in Islām*, 101, note 2. Katsh cites the Fragment Targum on Genesis 22:14 as containing the notion that Abraham and Isaac are "the two originators of the sanctuary" and adds: "Muḥammad here replaces Isaac by Ishmael". Though Katsh's intuition is sound, it should be noted that the Targum says nothing of Abraham and Isaac actually building a sanctuary. All we find there is that Abraham asks that future generations may say: "On the mountain of the sanctuary of the Lord Abraham sacrificed his son Isaac, and on this mountain which is the sanctuary the glory of the Shekhina of the Lord was revealed to him". I thank Mehdi Azaiez for drawing my attention to Katsh's comment.

The Biblical account is quite clear about the roles of the father and his son. All the actions in the verse are carried out by Abraham; Isaac is completely passive. Nevertheless, in post-Biblical sources Isaac was ascribed an active role as one who willingly offers himself for slaughter.⁴⁶ As part of this portrayal Isaac was depicted by some sources as participating in the building of the altar. We find this theme already in Flavius Josephus, and it is further developed in several pre-Quranic Christian sources (as well as in a number of post-Quranic Jewish ones) where the father and son are described as building the altar together.

Josephus in *Judean Antiquities* 1.227 writes: “And they brought with them as many things as were needed for the sacrifice except for the victim. When Isakos, who was in his twenty-fifth year, was setting up the altar and asked what they were about to sacrifice, since no victim was present, he [=Abraham] said that god would provide for them...”.⁴⁷ A homily attributed to Amphilochius of Iconium (ca. 340-after 394) and preserved only in Coptic attributes the following speech to Isaac: “...And now, build a place of sacrifice, and this will become a tomb for me, for your son, and I shall ascend it well. I myself, my father, I shall help you eagerly to build my tomb. I shall heap up the stones. May my tomb resemble a temple, and guide me thereto. Slay me for the One who has called you”.⁴⁸ As Sebastian Brock notes, several anonymous Syriac homilies on Genesis 22 include a motif similar to that of Amphilochius and describe the father and the son building together.⁴⁹ Thus in an artistic prose homily dated by Brock to the late fourth or very early fifth century we find: “So the (two) wise architects (*ardēklē ḥakkimē*) began

⁴⁶ See Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 304-306.

⁴⁷ ET in Feldman, *Judean Antiquities Books 1-4*, 88-89.

⁴⁸ “Amphilochii Iconiensis Oratio de Abraham Patriarcha”, ed. and trans. L. Van Rompay, in C. Datema, *Amphilochii Iconiensis Opera* (Turnhout, 1978), 286.

⁴⁹ See S. Brock, “Genesis 22 in Syriac Tradition”, in P. Casetti *et al.* (eds.), *Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy* (Fribourg, 1981), 13, 27, and S. Brock, “Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac”, *Le Muséon* 99 (1986): 127.

to build a choice altar for the noble offering. As Isaac collected together stones, Abraham took them from his beloved one”.⁵⁰ A similar description is found in two other Syriac homilies written in verse. The first, dated by Brock to the mid-fifth century, describes the building of the altar thus: “But now let us gather together some wood / so that we can build a pyre, (a labour) of our gladness... And Abraham began to build / the pyre that he had in mind, while Isaac was bringing along wood / on his shoulders to Abraham...old man and child both, readily became / workers for God...”.⁵¹ The second, which makes use of the first and is dated by Brock to the second half of the fifth century, describes the building of the altar thus: “Abraham began to build, / for his mind was prepared, while Isaac brought along stones / on his shoulders to Abraham: they became workers for God / the old man and his son, equally...”.⁵² Finally, descriptions of Abraham and Isaac building together are found also in several post-Quranic rabbinic sources and in the *Tanhuma*, the dating of which is problematic.⁵³

The source most relevant to our issue is a Syriac verse-homily by Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) dedicated to Genesis 22, *On Abraham and his Types*, homily 109 in Bedjan’s edition. The description of the building of the altar runs for several lines and emphasizes Isaac’s willing participation in his own sacrifice. For our needs a few lines suffice:

⁵⁰ See S. Brock, “An Anonymous Syriac Homily on Abraham (Gen. 22)”, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 12 (1981): 250.

⁵¹ Brock, “Binding”, 109, lines 69-79.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 124, lines 55-57.

⁵³ In *Midrash Tanhuma*, which began to crystallize in the fifth-seventh century, but continued to evolve into the middle ages), Wa-yera, #23, they build the altar together; see the ET in Berman, *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu*, 147. In *Midrash Wa-yosha* (probably composed at the end of the eleventh century), Abraham builds the altar and Isaac hands him the wood and stones. Abraham is likened to one who builds a bridal-home for his son, and Isaac to one who prepares a canopy for himself with joy; see A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* (Leipzig, 1853), 1:37. See also *Yalqut Shimoni* (a midrashic thesaurus of the twelfth or thirteenth century) on Genesis, no. 101 (quoting an anonymous Midrash similar to *Midrash Wa-yosha*), and *Sefer Ha-yashar* (date of composition disputed, eleventh/twelfth century or beginning of sixteenth century) where Abraham builds and Isaac hands him the stones and mortar; see ET in M. M. Noah, *The Book of Yashar* (New York, 1840), 67. These sources are collected in M. M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah* (Jerusalem, 1938), vol. 3, tome 4, p. 890.

Abraham approached and put down the fire with the knife / and began to build an altar for the Lord on the top of the mountain.

מיכא אבֿראָהאַם אָפּגאַנג און האָט אַרױסגעװאַרפֿן אַ פֿיר און אָנגעפֿאַנגען צו באַװען אַן אַלטאַר פֿאַר דעם הױשױם אָפּן בֿערג (אױף אַרױף)

The master-builder of faith approached and *ngad dumsā* / in order to build there a house for the mysteries which would take place.

מיכא אַרױפֿגעבױטער אָפּגאַנג און האָט אָנגעפֿאַנגען צו באַװען אַן אַלטאַר פֿאַר דעם הױשױם אָפּן בֿערג (אױף אַרױף)

And when Isaac gazed and saw what his father was doing, / he himself lifted stones in order to bring them forth to build the altar.

און װען יצחק האָט געזען און געזען װאָס זײַן פֿאָטער האָט געװען צו טױן, האָט ער זיך אָפּגעװאַרפֿט אַלע אַװעק און באַװען אַן אַלטאַר (אױף אַרױף)

He had seen the priest building an altar for his own sacrifice / and stretched out his hand in order to finish [the building] with him untroubled.

ער האָט געזען דעם פֿרױלעך באַװען אַן אַלטאַר פֿאַר זײַן אָפֿער, און ער האָט אָפּגעװאַרפֿט זײַן האַנט און האָט אָנגעפֿאַנגען צו באַװען אַן אַלטאַר (אױף אַרױף)

For he [i.e. Abraham] was the priest, the master-builder and the father of the lamb / and Isaac was the sacrifice, the stone bearer (lit: the laborer of stones) and the son of the priest.

פֿאַר װאָס ער [ד.ה. אַבֿראָהאַם] װאַר דער פֿרױלעך, דער אָפֿער־באַװענער און דער פֿאָטער פֿון דעם לאַם, און יצחק װאַר דער אָפֿער, דער אַװעק־באַרענער (ל.ה. דער אַרױפֿגעבױטער) און דער זון פֿון דעם פֿרױלעך (אױף אַרױף)

⁵⁴ JSB, 4:90, lines 4-13.

The meaning of *ngad dumsā* in the third line is not clear. The word *dumsā* (a Greek loanword) may refer to a house, to a row of bricks (or stones) or to the foundation of a building.⁵⁵ It is difficult to understand it as referring in this instance to the entire structure since the next line states that the final aim was “to build there a house...” (*d-nebne tammān baytā*).⁵⁶ It might, therefore, be preferable to understand it here as referring to a part of the structure, either to a row of bricks (or stones) or to the foundation. These meanings are found in Bar Bahlūl’s entry on *dumsā*.⁵⁷ Interestingly, the Arabic words he uses to gloss the Syriac are the same ones found in the exegetes’ definitions of the Arabic *qawā'id*: *sāf* and *asās*. Rabbinic sources have *dimos* (דימוס) (row or layer of stones) which in some instances seems to be the responsibility of the master-builder, the *ardikhal* (ארדיכל), who sets the stones in the *dimos*.⁵⁸ This parallels Jacob’s scene where the master-builder (*ardēklā*) deals with the *dumsā*. As for the meaning of the Syriac verb *ngad*, which literally means “to draw” or “to pull”, in this context, it seems to mean “to lengthen”, “to stretch” or “to extend”.⁵⁹ *Ngad dumsā* could therefore be understood to mean “extended the layer of stones” or “extended the foundation”.⁶⁰

In Jacob’s homily, we have more than Isaac simply helping with the building of the altar. The whole scene is described in terms of construction: Abraham is a master-

⁵⁵ For these meanings, see Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon*, 283. The meaning “course of stone or bricks in a building” exists also for the Greek δόμος (alongside the meaning “house”); see H. G. Liddel and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1996), 444.

⁵⁶ Although one could argue that *dumsā* in line 3 refers to the actual edifice, while *baytā* in line 4 refers to its function as a house for mysteries.

⁵⁷ R. Duval, *Lexicon Syriacum Auctore Hassano Bar Bahlule* (Paris, 1888-1901), 1:543.

⁵⁸ See Tosefta *BM* 11:5 and *BT BM* 118b.

⁵⁹ In Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2:2277, *ngad šurē* is cited. This is translated in Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary*, 327, as “he lengthened the walls i.e. built further”. The source of this quotation is J. P. N. Land, *Anecdota Syriaca* (Leiden, 1862-75), 1:61, citing the *Syro-Roman Law Book*. *Šurē*, however, is attested in only one manuscript of this work. Other manuscripts read either *šūqē* (streets) or *šqāqē* (lanes); W. Selb and H. Kaufhold, *Das Syrisch-Römische Rechtsbuch* (Wien, 2002), 2:154.

⁶⁰ Compare with instances where Jacob uses *dumsē* in the plural (probably referring to parts of one structure rather than to several structures) with *mtaḥ* “to stretch”; see *On our Lord’s Question and on the Revelation that Simon received from the Father* (homily 19 in *JSB* 1:476) and *On Peter’s Denial* (homily 21 in *JSB*, 1:530). A parallel use of the verbs *ngad* and *mtaḥ* is found in the passage from the *Syro-Roman Law Book* cited in the previous note: ܠܡܥܢܐ ܠܡܥܢܐ ܠܡܥܢܐ ܠܡܥܢܐ ܠܡܥܢܐ ܠܡܥܢܐ. Another verb that Jacob uses with *dumsē* is *traš* “to make straight”; see *On the Blessed Virgin, Bearer of God, Mary* (P. Bedjan, *S. Martyrii, qui et Sahdona, quae supersunt omnia* [Paris, 1902], 627) and *On the Council of Nicaea* (*ibid.*, 848).

builder (*ardēklā*), Isaac is a laborer who carries stones (*pā'lā d-kēpē*), and most importantly, the structure being built is not only an altar but also a house (*baytā*).⁶¹ I suggest that such a version in which Abraham built an altar which was also a house together with his son (Isaac) served as the background for the Quranic scene in which Abraham and his son (Ishmael) raise the foundations of the house together. Without putting too much emphasis on it, I find the similarity between the Arabic *yarfa'u l-qawā'id* and the Syriac *ngad dumsā* strongly suggestive. *Qawā'id* and *dumsā* can both mean “foundation(s)” or “row(s) of bricks”.⁶² Likewise, the two verbs are not that far apart in meaning. While the Arabic means “to raise”, the Syriac means “to pull” or “to extend”.⁶³ It is of interest that “a certain resemblance” has been noted previously between the Quran and another homily of Jacob regarding the story of the Sleepers of Ephesus.⁶⁴ I have also drawn attention to a Quranic parallel to a motif found in Jacob in the chapter on Adam (4.3.6).⁶⁵ Both Jacob and the Quran depict Satan as scheming to divest Adam of his clothing. Our example then would not be the only instance in which the Quran seems to reflect a Christian tradition as transmitted by Jacob of Serugh.

⁶¹ In Jacob’s homily *On the Flood*, he uses similar language to describe Noah’s building of the altar when he emerges from the ark (homily 108 in *JSB*, 4:54-55). Noah is likewise described as a master-builder of faith (*ardēklā d-haymānutā*) and his altar is called a building (*benyānā*) and a house (*baytā*). I am indebted to Manolis Papoutsakis for this reference.

⁶² For my argument it is not crucial that *dumsā* be shown to mean “layer of stones” or “foundation” (as opposed to “house” or “edifice”) in this instance, only that it might have been understood in this manner.

⁶³ At the beginning of the homily *On the Flood* (homily 108 in *JSB*, 4:3), Jacob uses a phrase which could be considered the exact Syriac equivalent of *yarfa'u l-qawā'id*. He says concerning Noah: “He alone was diligent in uprightness / and he toiled and raised the straight (stone) rows [or edifices] of faith” (ܩܘܘܿܢܐܘܿܬܐ ܕܩܘܿܢܐܘܿܬܐ ܕܩܘܿܢܐܘܿܬܐ ܕܩܘܿܢܐܘܿܬܐ / ܩܘܿܢܐܘܿܬܐ ܕܩܘܿܢܐܘܿܬܐ ܕܩܘܿܢܐܘܿܬܐ). See also *ibid.*, 5, where the *dumsā* (in this case probably an edifice) rises (*sālēq*) based on rows of stones (*sedrē*). I thank Manolis Papoutsakis for these references.

⁶⁴ See I. Guidi, “Seven Sleepers”, in Hastings (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 11:429. For the latest study, also emphasizing the importance of Jacob’s homily, see S. H. Griffith, “Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur’an”.

⁶⁵ See also 4.3.3.

6.4.2. The prayer

Further support for the suggestion that Q 2:127 reflects traditions concerning Genesis 22 is found in the prayer which accompanies the building of the house in Q 2:127-29.⁶⁶ In it Abraham and Ishmael ask that God accept their deed with special emphasis on the (religious) fate of their offspring. This parallels Genesis 22:15-18 which considers Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son as merit for his descendants:

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said: "By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice".

In the Biblical text this promise is God's initiative and does not follow a prayer by Abraham. However, later Jewish sources (probably motivated also by the obscure words of Genesis 22:14 "So Abraham called that place YHWH will see...") portray Abraham as praying to God to remember his willingness to sacrifice his son as merit for his offspring. In *Genesis Rabba* 56.10, for example, the following prayer is put in Abraham's mouth:

Lord of the universe! When you told me: *Take your son, your only son Isaac*, I could have answered: "Yesterday you told me *for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named after you* and now you tell me *Take*". God forbid, I did not do so, but suppressed my compassion in order to fulfill your will. In the same manner, may it be pleasing to

⁶⁶Cf. Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 139-41, where Q 2:124 is understood as an inversion of Genesis 22:16-18. In truth Q 2:127-29 offers more of a parallel in that these verses follow the construction of the house/altar and contain a real prayer of Abraham's rather than the two words he utters in Q 2:124 (*wa-min dhurriyyati*, "and of my seed?").

you, O lord our God, that when the children of Isaac are in distress, you should remember in their favor that binding and be filled with compassion for them.⁶⁷

I am unaware of a Syriac counterpart of this tradition. Though this poses somewhat of a problem for my argument, I shall explain later why the Quran chooses to adduce this Jewish tradition at this point and how it is used in fact against the Jews themselves.

6.4.3. The trial

Additional support for the linking of the Quranic scene with Genesis 22 may be found in the way the section concerning Abraham begins in Q 2:124: “And [remember] when his lord tested (*ibtalā*) Abraham⁶⁸ with words and he fulfilled them...” (وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ (إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ)). The classical exegetes offer several different identifications of these words of trial. They are taken, for example, to refer to the laws of Islam, to acts of ritual purification, to the rites of the *Hajj* or to the tests to which Abraham was subjected.⁶⁹ The verb “tested” (*ibtalā*), however, is reminiscent both of the way Genesis 22:1 begins (“After these things God tested (*nissa* [נסה]) Abraham...”) and of the manner in which the Quran itself describes the attempted sacrifice episode in Q 37:106 as a trial (*balā*). Therefore, it seems likely that this verse refers to the trial of the sacrifice. This

⁶⁷ For the original text and rabbinic parallels, see Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 2:607. See also B. Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis* (Wilmington, 1988), 87. For Targumic versions which are closer to the *Genesis Rabba* prayer, see McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, 118-19 and Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 80. For a survey of the redemptive virtue of the binding of Isaac in midrashic literature, see G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden, 1983), 206-208.

⁶⁸ This follows the majority reading. A reading which would render the verse “And when Abraham tried his lord” is attributed to Jābir b. Zayd Abū al-Sha‘thā’ (of Baṣra. d. 711/2 or 721/2) quoting his teacher Ibn ‘Abbās, and to Abū Ḥanīfā. See al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:210; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*’, 2:350; and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīr al-Kabīr*, 4:40.

⁶⁹ See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 2:498-508. Paret, *Kommentar*, 28, suggests a different understanding: the “words” refer to God’s promise of offspring to Abraham in his old age, and it is God who is the subject of the verb *atamma* and fulfills His promise.

interpretation is found in a few classical exegetes,⁷⁰ and is popular with Western scholars.⁷¹ It would follow that, if Q 2:124 is taken as a heading for the following verses, then Q 2:127 should be related to the sacrifice episode.⁷²

6.4.4. Divine help in finding the site

Yet another link to the sacrifice story of Genesis 22 is found in later traditions concerning the building of the Ka'ba. A motif common to many of these traditions is that Abraham could not find the location of the house on his own and required divine assistance. Al-Ṭabarī's introduction to his chapter about the building of the Ka'ba reflects the gist of these traditions: "Abraham did not know in which place to build since [God] had not made this clear to him. Therefore he was unable to accomplish it..."⁷³ As a result Abraham received some sort of supernatural help. The traditions differ as to whether the help came from Jibrīl,⁷⁴ from a supernatural strong wind,⁷⁵ from the Sakīna,⁷⁶ from a

⁷⁰ See, for example, 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* (Najaf, 1966), 1:59, and al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 2:351 (unattributed opinion). According to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, the verse refers to the various trials which God brought upon Abraham. His opinion is transmitted in several versions, some of which mention the attempted sacrifice as one of the trials; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 2:506.

⁷¹ See, for example, Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 102, Beck, "Die Gestalt des Abraham", 74, and Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 136.

⁷² One might be tempted to find further links to Genesis 22 in the mention of "words" (*kalimāt*) in Q 2:124 (*cf. devarim* in Genesis 22:1) and "place" *maqām* in Q 2:125 (*cf. maqom* in Genesis 22:3, 4). These words, however, are common enough in both texts so that such links are inconclusive.

⁷³ See Muḥammad b. Ja'fīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1879-1901), ser. 1, vol. 1, p. 274.

⁷⁴ See the tradition attributed to Mujāhid b. Jabr (Meccan, d. ca. 720) and other anonymous scholars in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 2:554.

⁷⁵ See the tradition attributed to al-Suddī (Kufan, d. 745); *ibid.*, 558. The wind is described as having two wings and a head in the shape of a snake. When Abraham and Ishmael cannot find the house, the wind sweeps away the earth that had covered the remains of the first house.

⁷⁶ See, for example, the tradition attributed to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (in the transmission of Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab [Medinan, d. ca. 712]); *ibid.*, 555. In this tradition Abraham (coming from Armenia) is led by the Sakīna, which first marks the site as a spider marks its house, and then reveals to him great stones (presumably the foundations of the earlier house). See also the tradition attributed to 'Alī (in the transmission of Khālid b. 'Ar'ara); *ibid.*, 561-62. In this tradition Abraham finds the matter difficult (*fa-dāqa Ibrāhīmu bi-dhālika dhar'an*), so God sends him the Sakīna, which is identified as a strong wind with two heads (a conflation of two originally independent elements; compare the previous note) to lead him to the site. When they reach Mecca, the Sakīna wraps itself around the site of the house.

cloud that rested over the site,⁷⁷ or from a *ṣurad*⁷⁸ bird.⁷⁹ Several of these traditions either cite explicitly or at least hint at Q 22:26 “And [remember] when we assigned (*bawwa’nā*) to Abraham the site of the house...” (وَإِذْ بَوَّأْنَا لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ). The common meaning of the verb *bawwa’a* in the second form is “to lodge one in an abode” or “to prepare an abode for one”.⁸⁰ This by itself could already give the impression of divine help concerning the site of the house. Moreover, the same root (in the fifth form) can also refer to a closely related meaning of marking a place in order to abide there.⁸¹ Some exegetes actually interpreted the word in this verse as meaning “we showed” (*araynā*).⁸²

This motif is again reminiscent of a common theme in post-Biblical traditions concerning the sacrifice story. In Genesis 22:2 God commands Abraham:

Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.

Verse 4 then reports that:

On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away.

⁷⁷ See the Kufan tradition attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (in the transmission of Ḥāritha b. Muḍarrīb); *ibid.*, 560-61. In this tradition Abraham sees a likeness of a cloud (*mithl al-ghamāma*) above the site of the house. In it there is a likeness of a head (*mithl al-ra’s*) which instructs him to build the house according to the dimensions of the cloud.

⁷⁸ For the various descriptions of this type of bird, see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:1677.

⁷⁹ Three traditions (all transmitted via the Meccan scholar Ibn Jurayj [d. ca. 767]) in Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka* (Mecca, 1933), 23, 24, and 26, mention that Abraham was accompanied by an angel, the Sakīna, and a *ṣurad* bird. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-uṣūl* (Beirut, 1992), 1:287, mentions only the Sakīna and the *ṣurad*, and explains that they fulfilled different roles: the bird was the guide, and the Sakīna supplied the dimensions of the building (it is not clear whether this is Tirmidhī’s opinion or a quotation from Abū Hurayra).

⁸⁰ Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:271.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* Several traditions use the fifth form to describe how the Sakīna marked the site of the house in the same way as a spider marks its house (*ma’ahu l-sakīnātu tadulluhu ‘alā tabawwu’i l-bayti kamā tatabawwu’u l-‘ankabūtu baytahā*); see, for example, the tradition attributed to ‘Alī in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 2:555. This reference to Q 22:26 was overlooked in R. Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, 1990), 86; he is intrigued by the spider motif, and suggests that it is either a comparison to the natural habits of a spider or a reflection of “a deeper but obscure level of association”.

⁸² See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 14:358.

Since the text does not mention that God showed this site to Abraham, readers naturally wondered how Abraham identified it. This question was answered in several ways. According to the homily attributed to Amphilochius of Iconium, God himself opened Abraham's insight and made him see the place in response to his request.⁸³ Similarly, one of the anonymous Syriac verse-homilies has a voice from above identifying the mountain for Abraham.⁸⁴ According to Jacob of Serugh, Abraham recognized the site through "the eye of prophecy" and saw a symbol of the crucifixion on the top of the mountain.⁸⁵ Classical Midrashim mention that Abraham saw a cloud enveloping the mountain. *Genesis Rabba* 56.2, for example, has the following comment:

And saw the place far away. What did he see? He saw a cloud enveloping the mountain. He said: "This seems to be the place where the Holy One, blessed be he, told me to sacrifice my son".⁸⁶

Later Jewish sources, based on the rabbinic use of the word *hammaqom* ("the place") to refer to God, say that Abraham saw the Shekhina standing on the mountain.⁸⁷ Thus *PRE* 31 states:

⁸³ Van Rompay, "Amphilochii Iconiensis Oratio de Abraham Patriarcha", 282.

⁸⁴ Brock, "Binding", 123, line 45.

⁸⁵ See Brock, "Genesis 22", 26, note 51. For additional opinions in Syriac sources, see *ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁶ For the original text and parallels, see Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 2:595. See discussion in J. Grossman and G. Sasson, "On Implicit Biblical Analogies in Midrashim of the Sages – in the Footsteps of Rabbi Y. Bin-Nun and Rabbi Y. Medan", *Megadim* 46 (2007): 26-30 (in Hebrew). Grossman and Sasson suggest that the literary similarities between Genesis 22 and Exodus 24 led to the transfer of the cloud motif from Exodus 24:15 ("Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain...") to Genesis 22.

⁸⁷ Interestingly, Jacob of Serugh also says that the Škinta was present when Abraham and Isaac reached the mountain; see Brock, "Genesis 22", 26, note 52.

And when they reached Zophim they saw the glory of the Shekhina resting upon the top of the mountain as it is said, *On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off*. What did he see? A pillar of fire standing from the earth to the heavens.⁸⁸

Some sources not only explain how Abraham eventually identified the site, but also stress the difficulty he initially experienced in a manner reminiscent of the Islamic traditions. Thus, for example, the homily attributed to Amphilochius puts the following request in Abraham's mouth:

Show me the way, which is hidden from me now, and you will see my zeal... For behold, I see many high mountains before me. Which one therefore pleases you? Which way will attain you? Where will you come to me? From where will you look at the one whom I shall present? For behold, it is our third day today that I and my son are searching to find you ... and the path was confused for me... Look and see my suffering. Show me the way you have chosen and (to which) you have called me.⁸⁹

All in all, these parallels seem more convincing than previous attempts to explain the supernatural help that Abraham received as reflecting either Abraham's three visitors in Genesis 18,⁹⁰ the clouds that guided the Israelites in the desert and in which God would

⁸⁸ ET in Friedlander, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 225-26. Later on in the same chapter it is said that God himself pointed out the altar to Abraham. See also *Aggadat Bereshit*, chapter 31; ET in L. M. Teugels, *Aggadat Bereshit* (Leiden, 2001), 99. See also the Palestinian Targums to Genesis 22:14. Fire marking the site is possibly mentioned in a Qumran fragment (4Q225); see M. Bregman, "The Aqedah at Qumran: Fire on the Mountain" (Abstract of lecture presented at the Orion Center, May 21, 1998, online access at: <http://orion.mssc.huji.ac.il/orion/programs/Bregman.shtml>).

⁸⁹ Van Rompay, "Amphilochii Iconiensis Oratio de Abraham Patriarcha", 282. Compare the fourth/fifth-century piyyut *Az be-'En Kol* where it is said of Abraham: "He ran quickly to do His desire / though the way was concealed from him"; ET in M. D. Swartz and J. Yahalom, *Avodah: An Anthology of Ancient Poetry for Yom Kippur* (University Park, 2005), 170.

⁹⁰ In G. R. Hawting, "The Origins of the Muslim Sanctuary at Mecca", in G. H. A. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, (Carbondale, 1982), 41, it is suggested that the traditions which describe Abraham's journey to find the site of the house in the company of three heavenly beings (one of them being the Sakīna) are reminiscent of Abraham's three visitors in Genesis 18 (one of whom could be identified with the Lord). In Genesis 18, however, there is no question of finding a site. Moreover, the

descend on the tabernacle,⁹¹ or indigenous pre-Islamic Arab legends regarding the sanctity of the shrine.⁹²

6.4.5. The existence of the house in the time of Adam

A final parallel between the Genesis 22 tradition and the founding of the house might be adduced again from later Islamic and Jewish traditions. Although the Quran mentions only Abraham and Ishmael as the founders of the house, many traditions claim that Adam had already built it (or that it had come down from heaven in his time).⁹³ The explanation given is that Adam's Ka'ba had to be rebuilt on account of the flood. A similar tradition is found again in post-Quranic Jewish sources with regard to the altar built by Abraham. Thus, according to Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis 22:9, Abraham built his altar at the exact site where Adam had built his. At the time of the flood it was destroyed, built again by Noah only to be destroyed again at the time of the scattering of the nations (Genesis 11), and finally rebuilt by Abraham.⁹⁴ Admittedly, such parallels between post-Quranic Islamic and Jewish sources cannot prove the origin of the Quranic episode itself. They do, however, indicate that to early audiences real parallels existed between the two stories. This in turn lends support to the idea that these parallels were already present in the background of the Quranic narrative itself.

Islamic traditions which refer to three supernatural beings (one of whom is in fact a *surad* bird) seem to be a compromise between conflicting traditions each of which mentioned only one such being.

⁹¹ See Firestone, *Journeys*, 207, note 45.

⁹² See R. Firestone, "Abraham's Journey to Mecca in Islamic Exegesis: A Form-Critical Study of a Tradition", *Studia Islamica* 76 (1992): 15-16. It is of course possible that elements originating from embellishments of Genesis 22 might have been reinterpreted according to Arabian folklore.

⁹³ See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 2:549-52. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 4:63, states that these traditions find support in the wording of Q 2:127 ("were raising the foundations of the house") which indicates that there were ruins of a former building.

⁹⁴ See Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 79. In *PRE* 31, it is the same altar on which Adam, Cain and Abel, and Noah and his sons offered their sacrifices. This is deduced from the text of the verse which refers to Abraham building "the altar" (*hammizbeah*) as opposed to "an altar" (*mizbeah*).

6.4.6. Etiological function

That such parallels exist between the sacrifice story of Genesis 22 and the Quranic scene describing the building of the Ka'ba is not surprising if we take into account the similar etiological function of the two texts. The scene in the Quran serves to explain the origin of worship at the Ka'ba (see Q 2:125). Genesis 22 probably also serves as an etiology for worship at the temple in Jerusalem (see Genesis 22:14), and at the very least was understood in this fashion in later Jewish tradition.⁹⁵ Therefore the scene in the Quran may be understood as an appropriation of the foundation story of the Jerusalem temple, adapted to the founding of the Ka'ba. This would not be the first time that the site in which the attempted sacrifice took place was identified with a sacred site of another religion. The Samaritans identified the site with Mount Gerizim,⁹⁶ while as a result of their typological reading of Genesis 22 as prefiguring the crucifixion,⁹⁷ several Christian writers identified the site with Golgotha.⁹⁸

6.5. The Quranic adaptation

If the Quranic description of the building of the Ka'ba does indeed reflect post-Biblical traditions concerning Genesis 22, what are the changes that it introduces into the story? Most striking is the fact that the account is now entirely about building a temple and not at all about sacrifice. This is all the more remarkable in that the story of the sacrifice appears elsewhere in the Quran (Q 37:100-11), with no cross reference or allusion to the foundation of the sanctuary.

⁹⁵ See the discussion in J. D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son; The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, 1993), 111-24.

⁹⁶ See I. Kalimi, "Zion or Gerizim? The Association of Abraham and the *Aqeda* with Zion/Gerizim in Jewish and Samaritan Sources", in M. Lubetski *et al.* (eds.), *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World* (Sheffield, 1998), 442-57.

⁹⁷ For this theme, see, for example, Brock, "Genesis 22".

⁹⁸ See A. Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, 1993), 187, and Brock, "Genesis 22", 7-8, 25.

Though this could be construed as an argument against my reading, I would argue in response that in separating the construction of the sanctuary from the sacrifice, the Quran follows its usual practice of references to narratives; it is quite common for the Quran to present distinct parts of the same story in different Suras in accordance with the themes of each Sura.⁹⁹ Thematic coherence often takes precedence over narrative completeness. In this instance too the Quran chooses to present the elements which best illustrate the argument of each Sura. The verses in Q 37 are part of a unit that deals with the deliverance of messengers from distress, and accordingly emphasize the sacrifice element of the story.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, the verses in Q 2 are part of a unit which deals with the religious legacy of Abraham, and therefore highlight the sanctuary and rites related to the story.¹⁰¹

In addition to removing the construction of sanctuary from the context of the sacrifice, the Quran introduces three more striking adaptations, all of which share an anti-Jewish polemical agenda. Thus the merit of Abraham's deed is restricted to Muslims, Abraham knows of Muhammad, and Ishmael rather than Isaac is the hero of the building story. In formulating these arguments the Quran follows at least partially in the path of Christian anti-Jewish polemics. Let us examine each argument.

6.5.1. Limited merit

The building of the house is followed by a prayer in which Abraham asks God to ensure the welfare of his descendants (Q 2:127-29). As we have noted, this seems to reflect the prayer that rabbinic sources place in Abraham's mouth after the attempted sacrifice. But the differences are striking. In addition to having the prayer refer to the rites

⁹⁹ See W. Kadi and M. Mir, "Literature and the Qur'ān", *EQ*, 3:212. They coin the term *taṣrīf* (based on Quranic usage such as Q 17:41) for this Quranic narrative principle.

¹⁰⁰ See Q 37:71-148.

¹⁰¹ See Q 2:122-52.

of the Ka'ba, we see that Abraham, Ishmael, and their descendants are all described as Muslims: "And our lord! make us surrender to you (*muslimayni*) and [make] of our offspring a nation surrendering to you (*ummatan muslimatan laka*) and show us our rites and turn to us. Indeed you are the relenting, the merciful". Thus what these verses seem to be saying is that Abraham's action indeed has merit, but only the Muslims enjoy it. The Jewish argument is cited only to be turned on its head.

That the merit of Abraham and the other patriarchs does not accord the Jews (or the Christians) any privileges is stressed in other verses in the immediate vicinity of our passage. In Q 4:122-23 we read: "(122) Children of Israel, remember My blessing wherewith I blessed you, and that I have preferred you above all beings; (123) and beware a day when no soul shall avail another, and no ransom shall be accepted from it, nor any intercession shall be profitable to it, neither shall they be helped". Though these ideas occur elsewhere in the Quran outside the context of anti-Jewish polemics, it seems likely that in this context the Quran is arguing that not even the merit of their forefathers will be able to save the Jews from their due punishment.

This is explicit in the next verse. After Abraham successfully passes God's trial, he is told that he will be made an *imām* for the people. When he requests that this promise apply to his descendants (*dhurriyya*) as well, God responds: "My covenant shall not extend to the evildoers (*al-zālimīna*)" (Q 2:124).¹⁰² As the exegetes stress, this is not an outright rejection of his descendants at large, but rather a qualification that some of them will be excluded from the pact with God. Who are the targets of this exception? The Jews and Christians are tempting candidates.¹⁰³ Not only is the larger literary unit mostly devoted to a critique of them, but also the immediately preceding verses could be read as making a similar point.

¹⁰² See also Q 37:113 (with regard to the descendants of Abraham and Isaac) and Q 57:26.

¹⁰³ See *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, ed. 'A.-A M. Shihāta (Cairo, 1979-89), 1:137.

The theme of the fate of Abraham's progeny continues in the next verses as well. After Q 2:125 mentions that God commanded Abraham and Ishmael to purify His house for the worshippers, Q 2:126 proceeds to relate Abraham's petition: "My Lord, make this a land secure (*baladan āminan*), and provide its people with fruits, such of them as believe in God and the Last Day". Here Abraham himself limits his appeal to the fate of his believing descendants. If this is not clear enough, God's response reiterates the point: "He said: 'And whoso disbelieves, to him I shall give enjoyment a little, then I shall compel him to the chastisement of the Fire -- how evil a homecoming!'"¹⁰⁴ But insofar as the secure land is a reference to Mecca, the exclusion in this instance might be directed at non-Muslim Meccan Arabs.

That the Jews will be judged on the basis of their deeds alone is made clear in a verse that occurs twice and is usually taken to refer to them. Immediately after Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob and his children are mentioned, the Quran comments: "That is a nation that has passed away; to them awaits what they have earned, and to you awaits what you have earned; you shall not be questioned concerning the things they did" (Q 2:134, 141).¹⁰⁵

In attacking the notion of the merit of the fathers, the Quran continues a Christian trend. Here I shall make do with two examples. The first is from Justin Martyr:

¹⁰⁴ A comparison with Q 14:35-37 is illuminating. There too Abraham petitions God regarding the welfare of his descendants, using very similar language, though that passage lacks any hint that Abraham intends the blessing to be limited to the believers: "(35) And when Abraham said: 'My Lord, make this land secure, and turn me and my sons away from serving idols; (36) my Lord, they [=the idols] have led astray many men. Then whoso follows me belongs to me; and whoso rebels against me, surely You are All-forgiving, All-compassionate. (37) Our Lord, I have made some of my seed to dwell in a valley where there is no sown land by Your Holy House; Our Lord, let them perform the prayer, and make hearts of men yearn towards them, and provide them with fruits; haply they will be thankful". In that passage Abraham's prayer is not linked to his trial, the founding of the house is not mentioned, Ishmael does not play a prominent role, and the blessing is not limited to Muslims. In short, all the elements related to the anti-Jewish polemic are missing. Seeing that unlike Q 2, Q 14 is traditionally considered to be a Meccan Sura, this is not surprising; see the discussion in Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 135-43, for an analysis of the reworking of Q 14 in Q 2. In Sinai's view Q 2:126 is aimed at the unbelieving Meccans, whereas Q 2:124 targets the Jews.

¹⁰⁵ These verses are completely misunderstood in a popular article where it is stated that "[s]ounding much like an ante-Nicean polemic, the Qur'an contends that the Jews are a nation that has 'passed away'"; S. Friedman, "The Myth of Arab Toleration", *Midstream* 16 (1970): 57. Those who have passed away are not the Jews, but rather their righteous forefathers.

And you are sadly mistaken if you imagine that, just because you are descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, you will share in the legacy of benefits which God promised would be distributed by Christ. No one can participate in any way in any of these gifts, except those who in their minds have been confirmed to the faith of Abraham, and who approve of all the mysteries... To prove this, God says through the mouth of Ezekiel, *If Noah and Jacob and Daniel should make entreaty for their sons or daughters, it will not be given unto them* (*Dialogue with Trypho* 44.1-2).

Note Justin's use of the Old Testament's theory of divine retribution to sever the link between Abraham and the Jews.¹⁰⁶ The same sort of argument is found in other authors as well. What follows is one example from a Syriac author.

Jacob of Serugh's *Homilies against the Jews* 6 contains a dispute between the synagogue and the church.¹⁰⁷ One of the issues debated is the synagogue's assertion that God will never exclude it from His inheritance on account of its righteous ancestors. After the synagogue lists the merits of various Biblical figures beginning with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it concludes by saying that as a daughter of such illustrious men it surpasses all other nations. The church concedes that the synagogue indeed descends from a great family, but adds that this is of no avail when the daughter behaves in a disgraceful manner. Here too Old Testament verses concerning divine retribution are employed. "The soul of the father and the soul of the son both belong to the Lord; / it is the soul of the sinner from which vengeance shall be sought, as it is written" (lines 111-12, paraphrasing Ezekiel 18:4). Likewise we are told that "a just father will not profit a sinning son; / he will save neither a son nor a daughter as it is written" (lines 113-14, summarizing Ezekiel 18:10-13 and 14:16). But not only does God not take into account

¹⁰⁶ The verse cited here is Ezekiel 14:20. See also *Dialogue with Trypho* 140.3.

¹⁰⁷ Ed. Albert, 164-67.

the merits of the fathers; the ancestors themselves wash their hands of their daughter: “The Lord of the just ones has been crucified by you at Golgotha / and your illustrious family does not acknowledge you because you are a murderess” (lines 115-16).¹⁰⁸

6.5.2. Abraham’s knowledge of Muhammad

At the end of his prayer, Abraham (with Ishmael) requests that a prophet be sent to his offspring: “And our lord! send to them a messenger from them who shall recite your signs to them, teach them the book and the wisdom, and purify them. Indeed you are the mighty, the wise” (Q 2:129). This has no precedent in the prayer of Abraham as attested in the various Jewish sources, and is a reference to Muhammad himself, as can be seen from other verses which employ the same language most probably with regard to Muhammad.¹⁰⁹ Thus the story now serves not only as an etiology for the sanctuary in Mecca but also as an early prediction of Muhammad’s prophecy.¹¹⁰

This is reminiscent of rabbinic speculation around the mysterious scene depicted in Genesis 15:12-16, where Abraham falls asleep and has a vision of the future. In Genesis, Abraham is informed that his progeny will be slaves in Egypt for 400 years and saved thereafter, but later Jewish sources had a much wider understanding of the future that Abraham saw. Thus in *2 Esdras* 3:14 it is said of Abraham: “you loved him, and to him alone you revealed the end of times, secretly by night”. Likewise, in *Genesis Rabba* 44.21, Abraham sees Hell, the foreign kingdoms that would dominate Israel, the giving of

¹⁰⁸ Ed. Albert, 166.

¹⁰⁹ See Q 2:151, Q 3:164, Q 62:2.

¹¹⁰ For similar predictions concerning Muhammad, see Q 7:157 (Moses) and Q 61:6 (Jesus). For a discussion of al-Ṭabarī’s treatment of these passages, see J. D. McAuliffe, “The Prediction and Prefiguration of Muḥammad”, in J. C. Reeves (ed.), *Bible and Qur’ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality* (Leiden, 2003), 107-31.

the Torah, and the future temple.¹¹¹ Even closer to the Quran's linking of Abraham and Muhammad is the Christian tradition beginning with John 8:56.

When Jesus promises that whoever keeps his word will never see death, the Jews' reaction is: "Are you greater than our father Abraham who died? The Prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?" (John 8:53). In reply Jesus says: "Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). To set at rest their chronological doubts Jesus adds: "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). What does the Gospel of John have in mind when it states that Abraham saw Jesus' day? Possibly this too is based on Genesis 15 (perhaps in conjunction with Genesis 17:17, where Abraham laughs in reaction to being informed that he will father a son). It is, however, more likely an allusion to Psalms 118:24 ("This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it") and Jubilees 16 where Abraham rejoices in anticipation of Isaac's exalted seed.¹¹² Interestingly, in the Syriac tradition John 8:56 is understood to refer to the attempted sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, where in acting on God's order to sacrifice his son, Abraham was given a glimpse into Jesus' redemptive career.¹¹³ Therefore in linking Genesis 22 with Abraham's knowledge of Muhammad, the Quran is following the tracks of the Christians.

6.5.3. Ishmael's role

The replacement of Isaac with Ishmael is another striking innovation, and is most probably related to the notion that the Arabs are the descendants of Ishmael. Although the

¹¹¹ For this theme in Second-Temple and rabbinic literature, see Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 299-301 and 312-15.

¹¹² For this explanation, see A. C. Brunson, *Psalm 118 in the Gospel of John* (Tübingen, 2003), 284-301.

¹¹³ See C. A. Karim, *Symbols of the Cross in the Writings of the Early Syriac Fathers* (Piscataway, 2004), 49-51, citing Ephrem (*Commentary on the Diatessaron* 18.1), Narsai (*On the Divine Revelations to Abraham*; ed. Mingana, 1:22) and Jacob of Serugh (*On Abraham and his Types*; homily 109 in *JSB*, 4:101-102). This tradition reads the day of Jesus as a reference to his resurrection and hence focuses on Genesis 22. This is spelled out in a ninth-century Syriac source; M. D. Gibson, *The Commentaries of Isho'dad of Merv, Bishop of Hadatha (c. 850 A.D.)* (Cambridge, 1911-16), 1:245 (ET), 3:157 (Syriac).

Quran never says so explicitly, this notion is known to have existed among some Arabs in pre-Islamic times, as attested in the writings of two fifth-century Greek authors, Theodoret and Sozomen.¹¹⁴ By emphasizing that the son who helped build the house was Ishmael, the Quran delivers another blow to Jewish claims to superiority. The son who played the crucial role was the forefather of the Arabs and Muslims, not of the Jews.

This suggestion may shed light on the much debated issue of the identity of the intended victim in Q 37:100-11 (Abraham's attempt to sacrifice his son). As it does in many cases, the Quran neglects to mention a proper name and simply uses the indefinite "boy" (*ghulām*).¹¹⁵ Classical exegetes as well as modern scholars disagree as to whether this refers to Isaac or Ishmael. Both sides adduce arguments from the Quran, and it seems that none are conclusive. Several scholars who have examined the history of the exegesis of the story in Q 37 concluded that Isaac was originally considered to be the intended victim, and only later was he replaced with Ishmael.¹¹⁶ If, however, the link between Q 2:127 and Genesis 22 is accepted, then we may conclude that at least one passage of the Quran already identified the son in question as Ishmael.

If the traditional chronology of the Suras is accepted, this might be an instance of change over time in the Quran's presentation of a theme. The progression from a Meccan Sura (Q 37) in which the name of the son is not mentioned to a Medinan one (Q 2) where he is identified as Ishmael coincides with the opinion of several Western scholars regarding the development of the figure of Ishmael in the Quran. These scholars argue that Ishmael changed from a prophet unconnected with Abraham in the Meccan period to

¹¹⁴ See I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1989), 154-56, 171-72, and 179-80.

¹¹⁵ Q 37:101.

¹¹⁶ See R. Firestone, "Abraham's Son as the Intended Sacrifice (*al-Dhabīh*, Qur'ān 37: 99-113): Issues in Qur'ānic Exegesis", *JSS* 34 (1989): 95-131, and S. Bashear, "Abraham's Sacrifice of his Son and Related Issues", *Der Islam* 67 (1990): 243-77. For a critique of Firestone's conclusions and a discussion of the difficulty of determining the opinion of early authorities on this issue, see F. Leemhuis, "Ibrāhīm's Sacrifice of his Son in the Early Post-Koranic Tradition", in E. Noort and E. Tigchelaar (eds.), *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqeda (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations* (Leiden, 2002), 130.

his first son in the Medinan one.¹¹⁷ It should be noted, however, that this opinion employs a circular argument in treating Q 14:39 as a Medinan addition to a Meccan Sura only on the basis that Ishmael is Abraham's son in that verse.¹¹⁸ Whatever the exact relationship between Q 2 and Q 37 is, Q 2:127 can still serve as evidence that the replacement of one sibling with another is already present in the Quran. The move from Isaac to Ishmael was in any case no trivial matter; it symbolized the Quran's break with the Jews.

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show the Biblical background of the story of the foundation of the Ka'ba, by showing how post-Biblical developments of Genesis 22 were appropriated by the Quran and later Islamic traditions. A completion of the cycle is found in the Judeo-Persian work *Bereshit [Nāmāh]* of Mawlānā Shāhīn-i Shīrāzī (fl. fourteenth century) which, arrestingly, incorporates the Islamic story of the building of the Ka'ba into its retelling of the events of Genesis¹¹⁹.

My linking of Q 124-29 to post-Biblical embellishments of Genesis 22 is based on parallels gathered from both Jewish and Christian texts. Thus the descriptions of father and son building together are found in pre-Islamic Christian texts (but only in post-Quranic Jewish sources), while Abraham's prayer is found in many Jewish sources but not in Christian ones. Had all the parallel elements been found in one Syriac source, the link with the story of the attempted sacrifice would definitely have been stronger. Likewise, one must concede that some of the parallels (especialy those which are only

¹¹⁷ For verses in which Ishmael seems unrelated to Abraham, see Q 6:86, Q 19:54, Q 21:85, and Q 38:48.

¹¹⁸ For the various theories regarding Ishmael in the Quran, see Paret, "Ismā'īl", 184, and Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*, 111-12.

¹¹⁹ See V. B. Moreen, "Is[h]ma'iliyat: A Judeo-Persian Account of the Building of the Ka'ba", in Benjamin H. Hary *et al.* (eds.), *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication and Interaction* (Leiden, 2000), 185-202.

attested later Islamic traditions) could have arisen independently. Nonetheless, when judged together their cumulative weight is impressive.

Although this chapter suggests that both Christian and Jewish traditions served as inspiration for the Quranic account, the particular affinity with Syriac homiletic poetry, especially the poem of Jacob of Serugh, in both content and phraseology is striking. Moreover, in employing the “Jewish” element of Abraham’s prayer the Quran does not reproduce it blindly. Rather it is cited only to turn a common Jewish argument on its head. Thus we might say that overall Q 2:124-29 is closer to Christian sensibilities, though it does not refrain from using Jewish tradition in its argument against the Jews. This state of affairs is similar to what we saw in our study of the Cain and Abel story. Both examples, however, concern short Quranic passages. For a longer and much more substantive example of the Quran’s dependence on Syriac homiletic poetry we turn to the most extended narrative in the Quran, the Joseph story of Q 12.

7. Syriac Joseph among the Ishmaelites: Q 12 and the Syriac tradition¹

7.1. Introduction

In this Chapter I will examine the Joseph story and argue that the Quranic version is closely related to the Syriac tradition. By contrast, previous scholarship has tended to emphasize the rabbinic background, generally ignoring the Syriac sources.²

Two aspects of the Joseph story render it particularly suited for a study of this kind. One is its sheer length: this is the longest narrative in the Quran.³ The other is the existence of several Syriac works devoted to Joseph, which furnish us with enough material to work with.⁴

The main Syriac works devoted to Joseph date from the fourth and fifth century and consist of one narrative in prose, *The Syriac History of Joseph*, falsely attributed to

¹ Materials from this chapter were presented at the conference “The Qur’ān in its Historical Context”, University of Notre Dame, April 2009, and in the workshop “The Qur’ān in relation to the religious traditions of the Near East in late antiquity”, Institute of Advanced Studies, Princeton, June 2009. Some of the examples will appear in an article which is forthcoming in G. S. Reynolds (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Qur’ān: The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context 2*.

² For studies of Q 12 which ignore Christian traditions, see, e.g., Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 111-18; Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes*, 55-68; Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 109-13; M. S. Stern, “Muhammad and Joseph: A Study of Koranic Narrative”, *JNES* 44 (1985): 193-94; Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur’ān*, 31 and 56-57; Garsiel, *Bible, Midrash and Quran*, 99-117; and J.-L. Déclais, “Joseph”, in M. A. Amir-Moezzi (ed.), *Dictionnaire du Coran* (Paris, 2007), 452-54. Two scholars refer to Syriac sources sporadically: Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente*; and Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 187-224. Schapiro examined many of the Syriac texts on Joseph (see his survey of Christian sources on p.12), but cites them mainly as parallels to Muslim exegetical traditions. Even when similarities with the Quran are noted it is always assumed that the source is Jewish; see, e.g., Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente*, 20, 49, 58, and 64. Not a single example is given where the Quran is closer to the Syriac sources. Speyer largely follows Schapiro, though he does entertain the possibility that some elements of the narrative might have been taken from Christians; see especially Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 199-200, 208, and 210-11. Most recently a study has appeared which raises the possibility that Syriac works were the precursors of the Quranic Joseph story: M. Tamcke, “Die Hymnen Ephraems des Syrers und ihre Verwendung im christlichen Gottesdienst unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Josephstexte”, in T. Nagel (ed.), *Der Koran und sein religiöses und kulturelles Umfeld* (München, 2010), 173-95. This study does not, however, examine or note any parallels between Q 12 and the Syriac sources and refers only to two of the Syriac works: Ephrem’s *Commentary on Genesis* and the cycle of twelve homilies attributed to Ephrem or Balai.

³ See C. Gilliot, “Narratives”, *EQ*, 3:518.

⁴ Overviews of the Syriac works are found in H. Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte mit Uebersetzung des Gedichts von Narsai und Proben aus Balai und Jaqob von Sarug* (Zürich, 1923), 9-52; S. Brock, “Dinah in a Syriac poem on Joseph”, in G. Khan (ed.), *Semitic Studies in Honour of Edward Ullendorff* (Leiden, 2005), 222-24; and K. S. Heal, *Tradition and Transformation: Genesis 37 and 39 in Early Syriac Sources* (University of Birmingham dissertation, 2008), 14-80.

Basil of Caesarea (hereafter PsB),⁵ and three works comprised of metrical homilies. These include a cycle of twelve homilies attributed to Ephrem (d. 373) or Balai (fl. early fifth century) (hereafter Balai),⁶ four homilies falsely attributed to Narsai (d. 503) or Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) (hereafter PsN),⁷ and one authentic homily by Narsai (number

⁵ Edited in two parts on the basis of one manuscript written in an East Syriac hand, Berlin Syriac 74 (1695 CE): M. Weinberg, *Die Geschichte Josefs angeblich verfasst von Basilius dem Grossen aus Cäsarea, Teil 1* (Berlin, 1893), and S. W. Link, *Die Geschichte Josefs angeblich verfasst von Basilius dem Grossen aus Cäsarea, Teil 2*, (Berlin, 1895). As Heal notes, the work is preserved in another four manuscripts, dated to the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries. There are also versions in Arabic, Latin (translated from Arabic in 1336) and Ethiopic (preserved in a late fourteenth/early fifteenth century manuscript and translated in E. Isaac, “The Ethiopic History of Joseph: Translation with Introduction and Notes”, *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 6 [1990]: 2-125); Heal, *Tradition*, 16-20; *idem*, “Identifying the Syriac *Vorlage* of the Ethiopic *History of Joseph*”, in G. A. Kiraz (ed.), *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock* (Piscataway, 2008), 205-10; *idem*, “The Syriac *History of Joseph*: A New Translation and Introduction”, in R. Bauckham and J. Davila (eds.), *More Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (forthcoming). Based on the haggadic elements contained in it, Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 11-12, suggests a mid-fourth century date for the work. Brock, “Dinah”, 222-23, prefers a fifth century date based on the occurrence of the Greek loan word *ara*. Weinberg, Baumstark (A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* [Bonn, 1922], 79), and Brock agree that the work was originally written in Syriac and is not a translation of a work of Basil. Cf. Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 12.

⁶ Edited in P. Bedjan, *Histoire complète de Joseph par Saint Ephrem: Poème en douze livres* (Paris, 1891). My citation method for this work is as follows: Balai, page number in the Bedjan edition. The earliest manuscript (dated to the sixth century) attributes the work to Balai, whereas later manuscripts attribute it to Ephrem; see the survey of the manuscripts and editions in R. R. Phenix, *The Sermons on Joseph of Balai of Qenneshrin: Rhetoric and Interpretation in Fifth Century Syriac Literature* (Tübingen, 2008), 1-11. Most scholars follow Baumstark, *Geschichte*, 62-63, in preferring the attribution to Balai. Cf. A. Palmer, “The influence of Ephraim the Syrian”, *Hugoye* 2:1 (1999), in his introduction to the fourth text in his anthology and in note 3. Heal, *Tradition*, 71, simply refers to an anonymous author and grants the text an early date. Recently Phenix, *Sermons on Joseph*, 14-31, has argued for Balai’s authorship, though the evidence is not entirely conclusive. Another discussion of the authorship is found in Tamcke, “Die Hymnen Ephraems des Syrsers”, 186-90. Tamcke is unaware of Phenix’s work.

⁷ The edition used here is that of Bedjan, *Homiliae Mar-Narsetis in Joseph*, in P. Bedjan, *Liber Superiorum* (Paris, 1901), 521-629. My citation method for this work is as follows: PsN, page number in the the Bedjan edition. For other editions, see Heal, *Tradition*, 58-60. These homilies survive in twelve manuscripts, not all of which include all four homilies; see A. S. Rodrigues Pereira, “Two Syriac Homilies on Joseph”, *Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux* 31 (1989-90): 96-97, and a fuller and more detailed list in Heal, *Tradition*, 42-58. Homilies 1 and 2 form the original work and have been dated approximately to the fifth century. The other two are later additions, homily 3 consisting of excerpts from the tenth homily of Balai; Rodrigues Pereira, “Two”, 99-100; Brock, “Dinah”, 223; and Heal, *Tradition*, 63-67. Brock rejects the attribution to Narsai on the basis of differences in style and usage. Likewise, the existence of a genuine collection of homilies on Joseph by Jacob of Serugh as well as an authentic homily by Narsai on Joseph make both attributions unlikely; Heal, *Tradition*, 62-63. Heal (*ibid.*, 33 note 1) supports a fifth-century date since the homilies are preserved in both West and East Syriac manuscripts. A shorter recension of the first three homilies is preserved in a West Syriac manuscript, Berlin 166, the beginning of which was edited in M. Engel, *Die Geschichte Josefs nach einer syrischen Handschrift der königl. Bibliothek in Berlin 1* (Berlin, 1895).

forty-one in Mingana's edition).⁸ The ten unpublished homilies by Jacob of Serugh have not been taken into consideration in this study.⁹

Other works worthy of mention are Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis*, and the sermon on Joseph, which belongs to the corpus of Greek texts attributed to Ephrem (hereafter Ephraem Graecus). Written in Greek, the sermon is closely related to the Syriac homilies and seems to stem from the same world.¹⁰ Also relevant are the two *kontakia* on Joseph by Romanos the Melodist (fl. sixth century), especially the first.¹¹

The precise relationship between all these sources is yet to be determined conclusively.¹² But as will be seen, the Quran seems closest to the first two homilies of PsN, which in turn likely used PsB.

It should be made clear from the outset of this chapter that there are many elements in Q 12 which are not found in the Syriac sources. My argument is not that the Syriac tradition provides the entire background for the Quranic Joseph story, but that it played a major role in the formation of the Quranic version.

⁸ Ed. Mingana, 2:265-88. The homily is found in five manuscripts from the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth century; Heal, *Tradition*, 77-78.

⁹ For a summary of their content as well as a brief study, see Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 42-52. In addition there are three short anonymous dialogue poems which focus on one Biblical scene; two about Joseph and Potiphar's wife, and one concerning Joseph and Benjamin's meeting; see S. Brock, *Soghyatha Mgabbyatha* (Glane, 1982), 13-17, and *idem*, "Joseph and Potiphar's Wife (Genesis 39): Two Anonymous Dispute Poems", in W.J. van Bekkum *et al.* (eds.), *Syriac Polemics: Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink* (Louvain, 2007), 41-57.

¹⁰ See the Roman edition of Ephrem's works, 2:21-41. For other editions and a preliminary English translation, see E. Lash, "Sermon on Joseph the Most Virtuous", available online at: <http://www.anastasis.org.uk/Joseph.pdf>. See also P.-H. Poirier, "Le sermon pseudo-éphrémien *In pulcherrimum Ioseph*: typologie et midrash" in *Figures de l'Ancien Testament chez les Pères* (Strasbourg, 1989), 107-22.

¹¹ For the Greek text and French translation, see J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode: Hymns I* (Paris, 1964), 202-45 (*De Joseph*), 260-93 (*Tentation de Joseph*). For a brief introduction to Romanos, see R. J. Schork, *Sacred Song from the Byzantine Pulpit: Romanos the Melodist* (Gainesville, 1995), 3-39. It now seems evident that Romanos was indebted to Syriac poetry; see Papoutsakis, "The Making of a Syriac Fable: From Ephrem to Romanos", 29-75 (references to earlier work by Brock are found on p. 46, note 44). For Romanos as a possible transmission channel of religious ideas into early Islam, see J. Koder, "Möglichkeiten biblischer Glaubensvermittlung der Byzantiner im Umfeld der Entstehung des Islam am Beispiel der Hymnen des Romanos Melodos", in T. Nagel (ed.), *Der Koran und sein religiöses und kulturelles Umfeld* (München, 2010), 135-56.

¹² Compare Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 84-88, with Heal, *Tradition*, 259, and Phenix, *Sermons on Joseph*, 72-112.

7.2. Links in the narrative

We now turn to the similarities between the Syriac and Quranic accounts. Examining the narrative, we find that these accounts frequently depart from the Biblical text in similar ways. Heinrich Näf's dissertation of 1923, devoted to Joseph in the Syriac tradition, briefly noted some of these shared departures,¹³ but his work was largely overlooked by subsequent scholars of the Quran. Moreover, Näf was convinced that Muhammad received all his Biblical knowledge through oral instruction from Jews and was not open to the possibility of Christian transmission.¹⁴

The departures from the Biblical account include omissions, expansions, and other transformations. For my argument the most relevant instances are those not shared by Jewish sources, either at all or at least not in identical form.¹⁵ It is also important to note that some motifs adduced by Geiger and his followers as examples of "additions derived from Jewish legend" are also present in the Syriac sources.¹⁶

¹³ See Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 58 (Jacob's belief in the dreams and his warning not to repeat them), 60 (revelation in the pit), 66-67 (Jacob unconvinced by the bloody garment), 69 (Jacob's damaged eyesight as a result of his grief), 70 (Potiphar doubting his wife's story), 72 (Joseph's remaining in prison longer as punishment for his request that the cup-bearer help him), 78 (Joseph's statement that he will be as, or in fact is, Benjamin's brother), 83 (the brothers insulting Benjamin and his family after the cup is found). In some of these examples Näf notes rabbinic parallels, but even when none are to be found he assumes that the Quran must reflect a lost Jewish tradition.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 85 and 87. Interestingly, a century earlier Samuel Lee commented on the "manifest similarity of style and sentiment" between Ephraem Graecus and Q 12. After noting that in both texts Jacob is suspicious of the brothers and Potiphar's wife confesses her crime, Lee concludes: "These coincidences are, I think, sufficient to show that the one must have been the genuine offspring of the other; and that Syria was the soil from which the Pseudo-Prophet must have obtained his"; Lee, *Controversial Tracts*, 127-28. Like other early scholars Lee considered the Greek corpus attributed to Ephrem to be authentic, even though this is often not the case.

¹⁵ I ignore parallels from *Sefer ha-Yashar*, since this late work (see chapter 2.1) is evidently indebted to the Islamic tradition; see M. Grünbaum, "Zu 'Jussuf und Suleicha'", *ZDMG* 43 (1889): 8ff. (cf. Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 112-14 and 116, and his comment in the preface, viii). A Jewish work which follows the Islamic tradition in an even closer fashion is the Judeo-Arabic version of the Joseph story translated and studied in M. S. Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations between Judaism and Islam* (Detroit, 2006).

¹⁶ The quotation is from Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 111. Geiger lists nine such examples: 1) Joseph's initial desire for his master's wife and his change of heart following his Lord's intervention (Q 12:24). 2) The assembly of ladies struck by Joseph's beauty (Q 12:30-34). 3) The examination of the tear in Joseph's garment (Q 12:26-28). 4) The witness who speaks up for Joseph (Q 12:26). 5) The notion that Joseph remained in prison longer on account of placing his trust in man rather than in God (Q 12:42). 6) Jacob warning his children not to enter the town by one gate (Q 12:67-68). 7) The brothers' statement that Benjamin's brother was also a thief (Q 12:77). 8) Jacob's conviction that Joseph was still alive (Q 12:83 and 94). 9) The idea that Joseph told Benjamin beforehand who he was (Q 12:69). This list is problematic

For each example I will compare the Bible, the relevant Syriac texts and the Quran. In addition to pointing out the similarities, I will attempt to explain the exegetical logic which brought about the deviation from the Biblical version, and to place these developments in the larger context of the exegesis of the Joseph story.

7.2.1. Why was Joseph hated?

An interesting instance of omission concerns the very outset of the story. Whereas the Biblical narrative opens by mentioning Joseph's "bad report" about his brothers, Jacob's preference for him, the robe he receives from his father, and his brothers' subsequent hatred of him (Genesis 37:2-4), PsN and the Quran both omit these embarrassing elements which portray Joseph and Jacob in a negative manner. They start the actual story with Joseph's dream(s),¹⁷ which come only later in the Bible (Genesis 37:5).¹⁸

But the attempt to defend the character of Jacob and Joseph does not stop here.

Compare the ways in which the dreams are treated in the three works:

| Gen. 37:5-11. | PsN ¹⁹ | Q 12:4-6 |
|---|---|----------|
| (5) Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his | One day Joseph was asleep and saw dreams / and the Lord | |

for two reasons. First, some of the parallels are attested only in *Sefer ha-Yashar* or other post-Quranic sources (examples 3, 4, and 9). Second, some of the parallels are attested also in the Syriac sources, at times in forms closer to what is found in the Quran. Examples 3, 7, 8, and 9 are cases in point and will be discussed at some length below. As for example 5, compare Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* 35.3; Balai, 110-11; and Ephraem Graecus, lines 595-600 (Lash, "Sermon", 28). A similar point is made in Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 208.

¹⁷ The Quran omits Joseph's first dream. A similar phenomenon is found later in the Sura when Pharaoh's two dreams (Genesis 41:1-7) are conflated (Q 12:43; cf. Romanos' *De Joseph* 16); see S. Goldman, "Joseph", *EQ*, 3:56, and A. Afsar, "Plot Motifs in Joseph/Yūsuf Story: A Comparative Study of Biblical and Qur'ānic Narrative", *Islamic Studies* 45 (2006): 171. In later works Joseph's first dream resurfaces in a somewhat garbled form; see, e.g., Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 18:87 (citing Wabb). Cf. 'Abd Allāh al-'Alamī, *Mu'tamar tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf* (Damascus, 1961), 1:197-98.

¹⁸ PsN, 522-23; Q 12:4-6. In Q 12:8 mention is made of Jacob's preference for Joseph and Benjamin, but this is presented as an accusation made by the brothers, not as a fact. Moreover, this accusation comes only after Jacob's reaction to the dream and could be understood as its result.

¹⁹ PsN, 522-23.

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>brothers, they hated him even more. (6) He said to them: “Listen to this dream that I dreamed. (7) There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf”. (8) His brothers said to him: “Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?” So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.</p> | <p>showed him hidden mysteries and their manifestations. / He called Jacob [saying]: “father, hear the dreams that I have seen / and if true interpret them as they will be. / I saw [myself] reaping with my brothers in the same field / and my sheaf rose while the sheaves of my brothers were bowing down before it.</p> | |
| <p>(9) He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying: “Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me”. (10) But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him: “What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother</p> | <p>Then again I saw a different second dream after this one / that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bow down before me”. / Jacob said: “Be quiet child. Do not reveal [your dreams] / lest there be envy among your brothers and they kill you. / The God of all wishes to make you a king / and I, your mother, and your brothers shall</p> | <p>(4) [Remember] when Joseph²⁰ said to his father: “O my father, I saw eleven stars, the sun and the moon, I saw them bowing down before me”. (5) [His father] said: “O my son, do not relate your vision to your brothers lest that they scheme against you. Indeed Satan is a manifest enemy of man.²¹ (6) Thus your Lord will elect you,</p> |

²⁰ Yūsuf is the common reading of the name. Variants such as Yūsif/Yu’sif and Yūsaf/Yu’saf also exist (probably deriving the name from Arabic *-s-f* [see the wordplay in Q 12:84, *yā asafā ‘alā yūsufā*]); see Muḥammad b. Abī Naḍr al-Kirmānī, *Shawādh al-qirā’āt* (Beirut, 2001), 147.

²¹ For Satan’s responsibility for the brothers’ envy compare Romanos, *De Joseph 4*.

| | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--|
| and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?" (11) So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. | come and bow down before you". | teach you the interpretation of accounts, and perfect His blessing upon you and upon the house of Jacob as He perfected it on your fathers before, Abraham and Isaac. Indeed your Lord is knowing and wise". |
|---|--------------------------------|--|

The Biblical Joseph, in what might seem to be arrogance, first recounts his dreams to his brothers and only then relates the second dream to his father. Jacob then rebukes him for it, acting in what might be construed as ignorance (Genesis 37:5-10). In PsN and the Quran, however, Joseph first seeks the meaning of the dream(s) from his father.²² Jacob then warns Joseph not to relate his dreams to his brothers and proceeds to interpret their true meaning, indicating his belief in them. Thus neither is Joseph arrogant nor Jacob ignorant.

Nāf noticed the similarity between PsN and the Quran on this point. Interestingly, assuming that Muhammad could only have received the Joseph story from Jews, Nāf inferred that a parallel tradition must have existed in Jewish circles, even though that is unattested.²³

²² Possibly related as well is the reading of the Septuagint. As opposed to the text of the Masora which has Joseph relate his second dream twice, once to his brothers (v. 9) and a second time to his father and brothers (v. 10), the Septuagint mentions in v. 9 that Joseph related the dream to his father and brothers and omits any such mention in v. 10. Thus, according to the Septuagint, one could possibly understand that Joseph related his second dream first to his father and only then to his brothers. Interestingly, PsB seems to be following the Septuagint when it has Joseph relate the second dream to his brothers for the first and only time when they are at their father's side; Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 17. It is possible that PsN was influenced by PsB on this point against the Peshitta tradition.

²³ Nāf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 57-58. See also Stern, "Muhammad and Joseph", 194. Stern adduces Jacob's reaction to the dreams as an example for the Quranic version bearing "the clear markings of the rabbinic tradition".

Although their specific solution is unique, PsN and the Quran develop tendencies found in other post-Biblical treatments of the Joseph story which tried to dissolve embarrassing features of the narrative.²⁴

An attempt to defuse the embarrassment caused by Joseph's unfavorable report is possibly reflected in the way that some witnesses of the Septuagint render Genesis 37:2. Rather than read "and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father" these versions have "they brought a bad disgrace against their father", thus shifting the blame from Joseph to his brothers.²⁵ Philo in his *On Joseph* (5) simply omits this matter, as does Josephus in his *Judean Antiquities* (2.10), stating generally that "the warm affection of his father evoked envy and hatred against him by his brothers, as did the happiness proclaimed by the dreams that he saw and disclosed to his father and to them..."²⁶ Although Jubilees covers most aspects of the Biblical Joseph story in its retelling, chapter 34 glosses over all the reasons for the brothers' hatred. No mention is made of the bad report, the robe Joseph received from his father or the pretentious dreams.²⁷

Likewise, Jacob's apparent favoritism was also found troubling. Balai and Narsai explain that Joseph was deserving of his father's love on account of his righteousness, whereas Ephrem in his *Commentary on Genesis* 33 glosses over Jacob's preference for Joseph and the gift of the coat, as does Ephraem Graecus (lines 122-42).²⁸

²⁴ The following references are not exhaustive by any means. Their purpose is to illustrate the sensibilities that guided PsN and subsequently the Quran.

²⁵ See J. W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (Atlanta, 1993), 613. *The Testament of Gad* 1:4-9 might also be an attempt to absolve Joseph of the sin of slander. While Joseph is depicted as accusing the sons of Zilpah and Bilhah of slaying and eating the best of the flock, this is explained as a result of a misunderstanding on his part. In H. W. Hollander, "The Portrayal of Joseph in Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Literature", in M. E. Stone and T. A. Bergren (eds.), *Biblical Figures outside the Bible* (Harrisburg, 1998), 257, it is suggested that the author of *The Testament of Gad* might be mitigating a tradition more critical of Joseph.

²⁶ ET in Feldman, *Judean Antiquities Books 1-4*, 133. See also *id.*, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley, 1998), 355.

²⁷ See Hollander, "Portrayal", 241. As opposed to this apologetic approach, *Genesis Rabba* 84.7 views the evil report as a sin which brought upon Joseph his subsequent troubles; see analysis in J. L. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 79-84.

²⁸ See discussion in Heal, *Tradition*, 111-22.

That Joseph's choice to relate his dreams to his brothers was deemed to be in need of defense is evident from the attempts at justification made by Philo and Josephus. Philo tells us that "Joseph in the simple innocence of his nature had no notion of the enmity which was lurking in his brothers' hearts and believing them to be friendly told them a significant dream which he had seen..." (*On Joseph* 6).²⁹ Likewise, Josephus remarks that Joseph related the dream to his brothers "in order that they might interpret its significance" (*Judean Antiquities* 2.11).³⁰

The notion that Jacob believed in his son's dreams could find support in the Biblical text itself, where in the course of rebuking Joseph, Jacob interprets the dream (Genesis 37:10). Moreover, the jealous reaction of the brothers in the following verse as well as the note that Jacob "kept the matter in mind" both seem to indicate that Jacob did not consider the dream quite so ludicrous after all.³¹ As a result, in several recastings of the story Jacob is presented as rejoicing in his son's dream and interpreting it without rebuke. Thus Josephus states: "He [Iakobos] was pleased with the dream, having comprehended its prediction with his intelligence; and having concluded wisely and not aimlessly, he rejoiced at the great things that it signified, which proclaimed good fortune for the child and that an occasion would come by God's gift when he would be esteemed by his parents and his brothers and would be worthy of homage... Thus Iakobos interpreted this vision not without understanding..." (*Judean Antiquities* 2.15-17).³² That Jacob believed in the dream (and even said so to Joseph's brothers) is found also in Balai.³³ According to PsB, Jacob rebukes Joseph in front of his brothers, warning him not

²⁹ ET in F. H. Colson, *Philo* (London, 1935), 6:143.

³⁰ ET in Feldman, *Judean Antiquities Books 1-4*, 134.

³¹ The tension between Jacob's rebuke and his keeping the matter in his mind is spelled out nicely in Philo, *On Joseph* 8-9. See also *Genesis Rabba* 84.12 ("but his father kept the saying in mind. R Levi said: He took a pen and recorded the day, the hour, and the place"; Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 2:1014; ET in Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 2:778).

³² ET in Feldman, *Judean Antiquities Books 1-4*, 135-36. Cf. É. Nodet, *Les Antiquités Juives: Livres I à III* (Paris, 1992), 86.

³³ Balai, 14-16.

to repeat the dreams, but in truth he believes them to be true.³⁴ The Quran represents a development in the same direction. The closest parallel, to its handling of the problem, however, is found in PsN as cited above.³⁵

7.2.2. When did the brothers first plan to do away with Joseph?

In Genesis 37 we first hear of the brother's plan to kill Joseph when they see him approaching Dothan:

(18) They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. (19) They said to one another: "Here comes this dreamer. (20) Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams".

In Q 12, however, we are dealing with premeditated murder:

(8) When they [=the brothers] said: "Indeed Joseph and his brother are more beloved to our father than we are, although we are a band. Indeed our father is in manifest error. (9) Kill Joseph or throw him to the ground (*iṭraḥūhu arḍan*),³⁶ that your father's face may be free for you (*yakhlu lakum wajhu abīkum*),³⁷ and thereafter you may be a righteous people

³⁴ Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 18.

³⁵ See also Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente*, 20, and Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 194, where Jacob's belief in the dreams in Balai and PsN is noted.

³⁶The words *iṭraḥūhu arḍan* is usually taken to mean something like "cast him to some (far away or dangerous) land"; see, e.g., al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-bayān*, 13:18. A comparison with Gen. 37:20 ("Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits...") and verses such as Exodus 4:3 ("And he said: 'Throw it on the ground' [הִשְׁלִיכְהוּ אֶרְצָה]). So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake...") suggests that the reference is to the ground, not to a distant land; see Yahuda, "A Contribution to Qur'ān and Hadīth Interpretation", 1:296.

³⁷ In J. Barth, "Studien zur Kritik und Exegese des Qorans", *Der Islam* 6 (1916): 137, it is suggested that *yakhlu* should be emended to *yajlu*. This reading is unattested and hardly an improvement.

(*wa-takūnū min ba'dihi qawman ṣāliḥīna*).³⁸ (10) One of them said: “Do not kill Joseph, but rather cast him into the bottom of the pit, so that some traveller might pick him up – if you must act”. (11) They said: “O father, why do you not trust us with Joseph, whereas we are truly his well-wishers? (12) Send him with us tomorrow and he will eat much and play (*yarta' wa-yal'ab*).³⁹ We shall indeed protect him”. (13) He said: “It grieves me that you should take him. I fear that wolves (*al-dhi'b*) may eat him while you are not paying attention to him”. (14) They said: “If wolves eat him although we are a band, we are indeed lost”. (15) So when they took him and agreed to place him in the bottom of the pit...⁴⁰ and We revealed to him: “you will indeed inform them of this matter of theirs while they are unaware (*wa-hum lā yash'urūna*)”.

A. S. Yahuda has suggested that vv. 9-10 were displaced by the compilers of the Quran and should come after the words “And when they took him” in v. 15.⁴¹ Though he does not divulge his reasoning, the glaring discrepancy with Genesis probably contributed to this view. If the discussion reported in vv. 9-10 occurred only after the brothers left the house, the nature of the offense in the Quran would be closer to what Genesis reports.

Nonetheless, parallels in pre-Quranic retellings of the story, and especially in the Syriac tradition, suggest that the Quranic text is not corrupt in this instance, but rather deliberately develops the vilification of the brothers by having them design their plot well before they leave their father's house. In these sources the brothers' evil plan is said to

³⁸ In this rendition the speaker suggests that after they do away with Joseph, the brothers should repent. Alternatively, *ṣāliḥīna* may refer to success in this world rather than to moral uprightness; see, e.g., al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:421.

³⁹ This is the Kufan reading and it suggests that Joseph was a young child when these events took place. There are several variant readings of *yarta' wa-yal'ab*. In addition to *yal'ab* in the third person singular one also finds *nal'ab* in the first person plural. The other verb is more problematic since the readings differ with regard to its person (third person singular versus first person plural), form (first, fourth, or eighth) and root (*r-t-* versus *r-'y*); see al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 4:193-98. If the root is *r-'y* the verb would refer to the grazing of the flock (compare Genesis 37:12-16). It should be noted that in several versions the verbs appear in different persons, the first in first person plural, the second in third person singular.

⁴⁰ Assuming an ellipsis. Alternatively, one could translate “And when they took him they agreed to place him in the bottom of the pit”, taking the initial *waw* in *wa-ajma'ū* as redundant; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 13:30.

⁴¹ Yahuda, “A Contribution to Qur'ān and Ḥadīth Interpretation”, 1:297.

have been hatched at an earlier stage. Thus Josephus relates that after Jacob interpreted Joseph's dream, "they burned with impatience to do away with the lad; and having resolved on this plan, when they had completed bringing in the harvest, they turned to Sikima..." (*Judean Antiquities* 2.18).⁴² A similar motif is found in the Syriac tradition. In PsB after the brothers heard Joseph's second dream, "anger entered into them, they clothed themselves with rage against him and planned to kill him".⁴³ In both PsB⁴⁴ and PsN, as a matter of fact, Jacob sends the brothers to pasture the flock in Shechem in order to protect Joseph from them. Thus we read in PsN:

Then the brothers of righteous Joseph heard these [dreams]; / they were smitten with envy and they planned to do away with him. / When righteous Jacob saw that they were biting him [=Joseph] / he sent them to pasture the flock at Shechem.⁴⁵

But why then did Jacob later send Joseph to the brothers? Did he not realize the danger to which he was exposing his beloved son? The answer given in PsN is that Jacob had not heard from his children for some time and was worried about them.⁴⁶ Balai offers another answer. According to him, when the brothers realize that they cannot deter Jacob from his preference for Joseph, they decide to conceal their animosity towards Joseph so

⁴² ET in Feldman, *Judean Antiquities Books 1-4*, 136. In M. Niehoff, *The Figure of Joseph in Post-Biblical Jewish Literature* (Leiden, 1992), 95-96, it is suggested that Josephus placed the brothers' plot at an earlier stage under the influence of his own experience of innocently falling into the hands of conspiring adversaries, but it could simply be a natural development of the story. The passage from Josephus is cited in Garsiel, *Bible, Midrash and Quran*, 102, as evidence that in portraying the murder as planned ahead of time Muhammad was following an early midrash. Echoing Niehoff, Garsiel explains that Muhammad found this tradition attractive on account of the blood-feuds which were characteristic of tribal life at the time. For the limits of this sort of explanation, see the review of Garsiel's book by M. Polliack in *Beit Mikra* 53.1 (2008): 170-78 (in Hebrew).

⁴³ Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 17-18. See Heal, *Tradition*, 143, for a variant which suggests a link with Psalms 41:8. Heal also finds a link with the betrayal of Jesus by Judas.

⁴⁴ Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 18.

⁴⁵ PsN, 523. Heal, *Tradition*, 159, notes that the reference to the brothers biting or gnawing Joseph is part of the wild animal imagery used to portray their viciousness. It anticipates their description as wolves, which will be dealt with later.

⁴⁶ PsN, 523. Compare Genesis 37:13-14.

that Jacob might eventually send him to them while they were tending the flock, a setting in which he could no longer protect him. The brothers even plant the idea in their father's mind. They say to each other:

Let us leave in peace from the presence / of our old father and not cause him pain. / Let us hide in our minds / the deadly poison that we have prepared (literally "plotted"). / For if he know that we are angry, / he will not send him [=Joseph] to us. / "Remain in peace", we shall say to him, / "you and Joseph your beloved, / and if it so happens that we are late, / inform us of your health. / Forgive our brother his folly, / that he made you and us his servants, / for youth is quick / to speak without thought (literally: "as it wishes")"

Jacob hears their deceitful words and is indeed fooled.⁴⁷

Following the tracks of the Syriac sources, the Quran states that the brothers planned to harm Joseph well before they left their father's dwelling-place. Developing Balai's notion that they strove for Jacob to send Joseph to them, Q 12:11-14 has the brothers explicitly request that Joseph be sent with them.⁴⁸ Geiger adduced the brothers' request as an instance "which owes its origin to error, or possibly to traditions unknown to us". These unknown traditions are to be found in the Syriac texts.

By transferring the brothers' deliberations from the field to their father's house and by changing the story so that they convince Jacob to send Joseph with them as part of their evil scheme, the Quran (like Balai) develops an existing trend which emphasizes the brothers' wickedness.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Balai, 17-18. Cf. Narsai (ed. Mingana, 2:271) and see Heal, *Tradition*, 146. As Heal notes, this deception is Balai's solution to the problem of why Jacob sent Joseph to his brothers if he was aware of their animosity towards them. The inspiration for this might have been the brothers' deceit with the bloodied coat later on, or other examples of deceit in Genesis; Heal, *Tradition*, 149.

⁴⁸ Cf. Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 116.

⁴⁹ The motif could also owe something to an extremely literal reading of Gen. 37:18 ("They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him").

7.2.3. The wolves

The next instance of a shared departure from the text of Genesis involves a specification of a general term in the Biblical account. In the Bible Jacob is deceived into believing that “a wild animal” had devoured Joseph (Genesis 37:20 and 33). We are not told what kind of animal was involved. The Quran, however, states several times that it was a wolf. Thus Jacob is reluctant to send Joseph with his brothers for fear that a wolf (*al-dhi`b*) or wolves (reading the word generically) may devour him (Q 12:13-14), and later, after leaving Joseph in the well, the brothers do indeed attribute his alleged death to wolves (Q 12:17).⁵⁰

The rabbinic sources which specify the wild animal in question usually identify it with Judah, the lion’s whelp (see Genesis 49:9),⁵¹ or Potiphar’s wife, the bear,⁵² thus giving Jacob’s words an ironic semi-prophetic meaning. To the best of my knowledge, no rabbinic source mentions a wolf in this context.⁵³ This is to be expected, seeing that the

⁵⁰ The identification of the animal as a wolf (as opposed to a larger, more menacing, animal) is possibly related to Joseph’s young age in the Quran. Whereas Genesis 37:2 states that Joseph was seventeen years old, Q 12 seems to assume that he was much younger. This explains why he is to “play” (v. 12), why Jacob fears for him and thinks he needs to be watched over (vv. 11-13), his description as a *ghulām* (v. 19), a term often used in the Quran to denote young children, his owners’ plan to adopt him (v. 21, compare Q 28:9 regarding Moses the infant and see the appendix to this chapter), and the reference later on to him reaching maturity (v. 22). As Patricia Crone pointed out to me, the notion that Joseph was a mere child at the time of his sale was not unique to the Quran; see the ivory carvings from the so-called Chair of Maximianus (made in Antioch or Alexandria in the first half of the sixth century). Figures of these carvings and further references are found in P. Crone, “‘Barefoot and Naked’: What Did the Bedouin of the Arab Conquests Look Like?” *Muqarnas* 25 (2008): 2-3. In the Islamic exegetical tradition both approaches are found: Joseph is either a small boy or a seventeen-year-old; see, e.g., Ibn ‘Atīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 3:228, and al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma‘ al-bayān*, 13:22. The latter opinion (attributed in other sources to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī) reflects knowledge of the Biblical account. It might have been adopted in order to make sense of the reference in v. 15 to Joseph receiving revelation (*wa-awḥaynā ilayhi*), deemed unfitting for a young child.

⁵¹ See, e.g., *Genesis Rabba* 95.2 (this section is a later addition from the *Tanḥuma*). For parallels in other rabbinic sources, see M. M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, 6:7 (New York, 1948), 1434.

⁵² See *Genesis Rabba* 84.7, and 19; 87.3-4. An interesting explanation for the source of this image is found in Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph*, 244. This image is found also in Balai, 88-89 and 111-12. I hope to return to this elsewhere.

⁵³ In Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph*, 245, it is suggested that “Perhaps it was the similarity of the Hebrew word for ‘bear’, *dov*, unknown in Middle Eastern climes, with the Arabic for ‘wolf’, *dhi`b* [...] that gave rise to the Muslim tradition...” Wolves do occur (describing the Egyptians) in Enoch’s second dream in *1 Enoch*, though this is most probably irrelevant for the Quran. In *1 Enoch* Joseph’s sale is summarized thus: “When those twelve sheep had grown up, they handed over one of themselves to the wild asses, and those

one brother who would not harm Joseph, his beloved Benjamin, is likened to a wolf in Genesis 49:27 (“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf”).⁵⁴

We do, however, find wolves in Christian retellings of the Joseph story. As part of the Joseph-Jesus typology, Joseph is referred to as the lamb. Hence his brothers are wolves.⁵⁵ Thus we read in PsN, for example: “The wolves (*dēbē*) rose, grabbed the lamb, and dragged him, / saying to him: ‘relate to us the dreams you saw’”,⁵⁶ and later “The wolves grabbed the rational lamb and behold they threw him down”.⁵⁷ The use of close cognates is noteworthy: compare Arabic *dhi`b* (sg.) and Syriac *dēbē* (pl.). Similar imagery is used by Balai, Ephraem Graecus, and Romanos.⁵⁸

Whereas PsN called the brothers “wolves”, in the Quran wolves are mentioned without an explicit link with the brothers.⁵⁹ This link is found, however, in the Islamic exegetical tradition. The occasion for the linkage is provided by the fact that in the Quran the wolf motif takes the form of an anticipatory fear that Jacob expresses before he sends

wild asses, in turn, handed that sheep over to the wolves, and that sheep grew up in the midst of the wolves” (*1 Enoch* 89:13); G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36; 81-108* (Minneapolis, 2001), 365. Interestingly, the Qumran Aramaic fragments of this work seem to read 𐤀𐤁𐤓 which could be interpreted as bears rather than wolves; *ibid.*, 378.

⁵⁴ Cf. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 196, where the Quranic wolf is said to be the result of confusion with Genesis 49:27, now understood artificially as meaning “Benjamin – a wolf will devour [him]”.

⁵⁵ For the pairing of wolves and lambs, see, e.g., Isaiah 11:6; 65:25; Luke 10:3. See also Jacob of Serugh’s *On the Flood* (homily 108 in *JSB*, 4:18) (regarding Noah).

⁵⁶ PsN, 524.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 527.

⁵⁸ Balai alternates between different images: Joseph as a “lamb among murderers” (21); the merchants state that had they not saved Joseph from his brothers they would have torn him to pieces like wolves (48); Joseph describes his brothers as lions and as wolves (79: “Mercy stood round me in the desert / when the lions surrounded me. / From the mouth of ten wolves / His compassion snatched me and I was saved”); the brothers as lions and Potiphar’s wife as a bear (110-12). For Ephraem Graecus, see lines 161-64 (Lash, “Sermon”, 11: “As he approached / they saw him / and like wild beasts / wanted to destroy / Joseph; while he / like an innocent lamb / went to fall / into the hands of the most ferocious wolves”), 230 (Lash, “Sermon”, 14: “and see they have become / like most savage wolves”) and 535-36 (Lash, “Sermon”, 26: “I went to my brothers, and they became like wild beasts; like savage wolves they tore me from you, dear father...”). In Romanos’ *De Joseph* 6, Jacob addresses his son as “my lamb” and tells him to go search for his sheep before the wolves devour him; Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos*, 1:208 (but see *De Joseph* 8, where the brothers are more ferocious than lions). In PsB, on the other hand, there is no mention of wolves, though the sons of the handmaidens do attack Joseph like wild beasts; Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 20. In Narsai (ed. Mingana, 2:275) it is a lion that Jacob considers as Joseph’s killer.

⁵⁹ The reference to actual wolves in a de-allegorized fashion is reminiscent of the sleepers’ dog in Q 18:18. According to Griffith, the mention of the dog is a result of the pastoral metaphors evoked in the Syriac tradition, where the sleepers are likened to lambs, whereas the Lord is their shepherd; Griffith, “Christian lore”, 127-28.

Joseph out with his brothers. The exegetes accordingly wonder why, of all possible dangers, was Jacob specifically afraid of wolves. Several answers are given,⁶⁰ one being that by the “wolves” Jacob was actually alluding to the brothers themselves.⁶¹

7.2.4. Revelation in the well

Genesis 37:24 simply states that the brothers threw Joseph into the pit (or well). Q 12:15, however, tells us that while he was there Joseph was the recipient of a revelation:

And when they took him and agreed to place him at the bottom of the pit (*ghayābat*⁶² *al-jubb*)... and we revealed to him: “You will indeed inform them of this matter of theirs while they are unaware (*wa-hum lā yash'urūna*)”.⁶³

Speyer considered this to be a Quranic embellishment,⁶⁴ but a similar motif exists already in PsN:

⁶⁰ Other answers given are the following: 1) Their land abounded with wolves (*arḍ madh'aba*); *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, 2:321. 2) Jacob mentioned a wolf to emphasize the danger to which Joseph would be exposed since he was vulnerable even with regards to a wolf and much more so when it came to larger predators; see Ibn 'Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 3:225. 3) Jacob had previously dreamt that a wolf attacked Joseph; see the commentary attributed to Ibn 'Abbās (via al-Kalbī) *Tanwīr al-Miqbas* (Cairo, 1951), 147, and the critique of this opinion in Ibn 'Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 3:224-25.

⁶¹ See, e.g., al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 11:275. A similar solution cited by al-Qurṭubī is that Jacob had dreamt of ten wolves surrounding Joseph, wishing to devour him. One of the wolves, however, protects Joseph. Then the earth is split open and Joseph hides in it for three days. See also Ibn 'Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 3:224-25. An elaborate argument in favor of Simeon as the intended wolf is found in al-'Alamī, *Mu'tamar*, 1:398-409. In this twentieth-century text Biblical verses are adduced to establish that wolves might be a metaphor for evil men.

⁶² This word appears only twice in the Quran (Q 12:10 and 15). Derived from the root *gh-y-b* (being distant or concealed), its meaning is fairly clear from the context. Nonetheless, several variants are found: *ghayābāt* (pl.), *ghayyābāt* (pl. of intensified form), *ghayabat* or *ghaybat* (the *nomen verbi*); see al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 4:186-88.

⁶³ It is not clear whether the words *wa-hum lā yash'urūna* conclude God's revelation to Joseph or are a comment of the narrator. According to the former option, God's point is that when Joseph meets the brothers again they will not recognize him. According to the latter option, the verse informs us that the brothers were unaware of the revelation Joseph received in the pit; see, e.g., al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 13:31-33.

⁶⁴ Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 197. Speyer adds that Muhammad may have been inspired by Genesis 45:5 (“And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life”), though I fail to see the connection.

The treacherous brothers led Joseph to the well / saying to him: “Descend therefore to the bottom of the well (*eštēh d-gubbā*). / Come descend and become king in the well as you said / and descend head downwards whether you wish to or not”. / The wolves grabbed the rational lamb and behold they threw him down / and behold his father’s God had descended with him to the well. / For twenty hands hurled Joseph into the well / but two caught him and were with him undoubtedly. / The hidden symbol had descended with Joseph into the well / [the one] that consoles him and encourages him while saying: “Do not fear, righteous Joseph, and do not be sad / for I am with you for your entire life. / I shall not leave you again and shall not neglect you wherever you go / and I shall be with you until you see old Jacob”.⁶⁵

Thus in addition to the linguistic identity of Arabic *jubb* and Syriac (and Aramaic) *gubbā*,⁶⁶ there is a thematic parallel between the two texts, as noted already by Nāf.⁶⁷ The motif might simply be a retrojection of the theme found later in the Biblical narrative: God was with Joseph both in his master’s house (Genesis 39:2-3) and in prison (Genesis 39:21 and 23).⁶⁸ But it may also have been transferred from Daniel 6, seeing that many parallels exist between the Joseph and Daniel narratives.⁶⁹ In this episode, Daniel is cast into a den (ܩܘܢܐ, the same word as *jubb* and *gubbā*) of lions, but is saved by a heavenly visitation in the form of an angel (Dan. 6:22 “My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong”). This suggestion finds support in another minor departure from the Bible. Whereas Genesis tells us that Joseph was cast into the pit

⁶⁵ PsN, 526-27. See also the third homily of Jacob of Serugh (Vatican Syriac 117, f. 418, column 2), where the mystery of the Son visits Joseph in the pit and consoles him.

⁶⁶ See discussion below in chapter 7.4.2.

⁶⁷ Nāf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 60.

⁶⁸ Interestingly Joseph’s prison is described twice as a ܩܘܢܐ (Gen. 40:15 and 41:14) or in the Peshitta a *gubbā*. The use of the same word to describe the pit in the desert and the prison could naturally bring about a transfer of a motif from one to the other.

⁶⁹ Both are taken captive, become courtiers of foreign kings, interpret dreams and rise to prominence. The two narratives share many phrases and expressions as well; J. J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis, 1993), 39-40, and see also Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente*, 82.

or well, in PsN we read of the *eštēh d-gubbā* (“the bottom of the well”).⁷⁰ This phrase is found only twice in the Peshitta: in Isaiah 14:15 and Daniel 6:25 (“The king gave a command, and those who had accused Daniel were brought and thrown into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. Before they reached the bottom of the den the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces”).⁷¹ Interestingly the Quranic *ghayābat al-jubb*, which refers not merely to the pit but to its hidden part, is quite close semantically to the Syriac. I have not found a similar phrase in Jewish retellings of the Joseph story.

7.2.5. Delivery of the bad news

In Genesis 37 the brothers deliver the news in a straightforward manner:

(31) Then they took Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood.

(32) They had the long robe with sleeves taken to their father, and they said: “This we have found; see now whether it is your son’s robe or not”.

Jacob in turn is deceived by their story as we shall soon see.

In the Quran, however, Jacob does not believe them. In fact, in Q 12:16-17 the brothers anticipate Jacob’s incredulous reaction:

⁷⁰ The same phrase occurs in Narsai’s homily, where Joseph prays to God from the bottom of the well; ed. Mingana, 2:273.

⁷¹ Another source of inspiration for PsN was Lamentations 3:52-57: “Those who were my enemies without cause have hunted me like a bird; they flung me alive into a pit and hurled stones on me; water closed over my head; I said, ‘I am lost’. I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit; you heard my plea, ‘Do not close your ear to my cry for help, but give me relief!’ You came near when I called on you; you said: ‘Do not fear!’”. Interestingly, *Lamentations Rabba* identifies the speaker in Lamentations 3:53, 55, as Joseph, Jeremiah or Daniel (all known to have been thrown into a pit). This supplies another example of the perceived affinity between Joseph and Daniel. Though their literary form is very different, both PsN and *Lamentations Rabba* result from a synoptic reading of the Bible.

(16) They came to their father in the evening, weeping.⁷² (17) They said: “We went to race each other (*nastabiqu*)⁷³ and left Joseph with our things so wolves ate him. You will not believe us, however truthful we may be”.

This invites comparison with Balai’s homily. After Jacob asks where Joseph was and whether he remained with the flock, the brothers reply, asking for their father’s patience. Before they proceed to relate their concocted story they first respond to their father’s implicit accusations, saying that:

Like men who have done a hateful deed / we stand ashamed. / Our mouth is shut as if it is us / who wronged your beloved. / Men who have committed hateful deeds - / behold, we resemble in our entrance. And [we resemble] murderers and thieves / for we have been apprehended by you.⁷⁴

7.2.6. Jacob’s reaction

In Genesis 37 Jacob is completely taken in by the brothers’ plot:

(33) He recognized it, and said: “It is my son’s robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces”. (34) Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son for many days. (35) All his sons and all

⁷² Genesis does not mention that the brothers wept when presenting Joseph’s garment. Weeping is mentioned only later in the story (Genesis 37:35 [Jacob]; 42:24 [Joseph]; 43:30 [Joseph]; and 45:2 [Joseph] and 15 [Joseph and Benjamin], but never with regard to the brothers; Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 197. In Balai, 53, however, the brothers intentionally act sad in order to fool their father. Thus they plan beforehand: “Behold when we enter and he sees us, / he will say to us: ‘Where is Joseph?’ / At that time let us all introduce tears through weeping (*b-hāw ’edānā na’ell kullān ba-bkātā*)”. And indeed when they enter, tears flow from their eyes and those who see them ask: “Over whom do you cry (*bākēton*) thus?” See also Ephrem’s *Commentary on Genesis* 33.2 (“With no mercy they cast him into a pit in the desert but they wept over him with tears in the house. They sold him naked to the Arabs but wept over him and wailed in the presence of the Canaanites”; ET in Mathews and Amar, *Ephrem*, 182).

⁷³ Ibn Mas’ūd is said to have read a different word here: *nantaḍīlu* (“to compete in a shooting match”; al-Khaṭīb, *Mu’jam al-qirā’āt*, 4:205).

⁷⁴ Balai, 54. See also *ibid.*, 55 (“Behold others killed the child, / yet we are apprehended on his account. / Those who killed him departed from him / yet those who did not kill him are apprehended”).

his daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said: “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning”. Thus his father bewailed him.

In Q 12:18, on the other hand, the scene plays out differently:

They put false blood (*bi-damin kadhibin*)⁷⁵ on his shirt (*qamīṣihi*).⁷⁶ He [=Jacob] said: “No! Your souls have enticed you to do something [wrong] (*bal sawwalat lakum anfusukum amran*).⁷⁷ [My course is] fair patience. God is He whose help is sought against what you allege (*wa-llāhu l-musta’ānu ‘alā mā taṣīfūna*)”.

Here Jacob neither says that Joseph is dead nor mourns over him. Moreover, he accuses the brothers of foul play and lying (hence: “what you allege [*taṣīfūna*]”).⁷⁸ All fourteen occurrences of the root *w-ṣ-f* in the Quran refer to false statements; never to neutral descriptions.⁷⁹ The motivation for this move is evident. In the Quranic version Jacob is not ignorant of God’s plan and does not give in to despair. He understands that his son’s dream was meaningful and places his trust in God.⁸⁰

Several scholars have argued that Q 12:18 follows the rabbinic tradition and compared the verse with a passage from the *Tanḥuma* which runs as follows.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Variant readings of *kadib* or *kadab* are also attested. The former is said to mean “turbid”, “fresh”, “dry”, and “a white spot [on the nails]”; the latter supposedly refers to a young goat (compare Genesis 37:31); see al-Khaṭīb, *Mu’jam al-qirā’āt*, 4:206-7.

⁷⁶ On the *qamīṣ*, see F. V. Greifenhagen, “The *qamīṣ* in Sūrat Yūsuf: A Prolegomenon to the Material Culture of Garments in the Formative Islamic Period”, *Journal of Qur’anic studies* 11.2 (2009): 72-92.

⁷⁷ Compare Q 12:83; Q 12:96 (concerning the Sāmīrī); and Q 47:25 (where Satan does the enticing).

⁷⁸ An almost exactly identical sentence (*wa-rabbunā l-raḥmānu l-musta’ānu ‘alā mā taṣīfūna*) is addressed to the unbelievers in Q 21:112.

⁷⁹ See Q 6:100 and 139; Q 12:18 and 77; Q 16:62 and 116; Q 21:18, 22, and 112; Q 23:91 and 96; Q 37:159 and 180; and Q 43:82. In light of this it might be better to translate our verse: “God is He whose help is sought against your lie”.

⁸⁰ It is also noteworthy that in Q 12, in contrast to Genesis, Potiphar’s wife’s attempt at deception with the shirt also fails; see section 7.2.8.

⁸¹ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 116; Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 197; and Garsiel, *Bible, Midrash and Quran*, 103.

A certain heretic (*min*) asked our Rabbi: “Is it possible for the dead to live again? Your ancestors do not acknowledge [this belief], yet you do acknowledge [it]! What is written about Jacob? *Then all his sons and daughters arose to comfort him [but he refused to be comforted]*. If he had known that the dead would live [again], would he have refused to be comforted and said *No I will go down mourning unto my son in Sheol?*” Our Rabbi said to him: “Foolish one! because our father Jacob knew through the Holy Spirit that Joseph was alive he did not accept consolation over him for one does not accept consolation over one who is alive”.⁸²

Setting aside the complicated issue of the date of the *Tanḥuma*, we note that the Quran differs from this passage by having Jacob voice his suspicions to the brothers. Closer to the Quran is the tradition found in the rendition of Genesis 37:33 in the Palestinian Targums (not including Neofiti). There we read: “He identified it and said: ‘It is my son’s cloak. It was not a wild beast that devoured him; and he was not killed by men. But I see by the Holy Spirit that an evil woman is standing before him’”.⁸³ In these Targums as in the Quran, Jacob’s honor must be saved. He is not fooled by his children, and is aware of the real danger before which Joseph stands.

This motif is not, however, unique to Jewish sources. As Näf already noted, the Quran seems close to several Syriac sources on this point.⁸⁴ According to Balai, Jacob cannot understand why Joseph’s robe was found intact; if Joseph had been murdered, his killers would have taken it, and if he had been devoured by wild animals, it should have

⁸² S. Buber, *Midrash Tanḥuma* (Wilna, 1885, reprint New York, 1946), 1:181; ET slightly adapted from J. T. Townsend, *Midrash Tanḥuma* (Hoboken, 1989), 1:236. Cf. *Genesis Rabba* 84.21. See also the tradition in the haggadic material added to some manuscripts of *Masseketh Soferim* (“It was taught: What did our father Jacob do when his sons brought him the coat [stained] with blood? He did not believe them at all. Whence do we infer this? For it is written, *But he refused to be comforted*, because no consolations are acceptable for a living person. One, however, who is dead passes naturally from the mind, as it is stated, *I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind...*”; A. Cohen, *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud* [London, 1971], 1:322).

⁸³ The quotation is from Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, 127. Similar are the renditions in the Fragment Targums and the Genizah Targum Fragments. On this rendition, see M. L. Klein, “Converse Translation: A Targumic Technique”, *Biblica* 57.4 (1976): 522-23.

⁸⁴ Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 66-68.

been torn to pieces.⁸⁵ According to PsN, Jacob examines the robe and concludes that the blood is not Joseph's "for human blood does not resemble that of animals".⁸⁶ In neither text does Jacob accuse the brothers outright of foul play, though Balai notes that when they heard their father's words "their consciences were rebuked / for their indictments had been proclaimed".⁸⁷ Similar doubts are placed in Jacob's mouth also by Ephraem Graecus (lines 409-25) and Romanos (*De Joseph* 8).⁸⁸ Again it seems likely that this was intended to redeem Jacob's honor. Instead of being a gullible old man, he is sharp as ever.⁸⁹ In the Quran this is nearly unavoidable seeing that he is an almost infallible prophet.

The exegetes of the Quran wondered how Jacob knew the brothers were lying. They give various answers,⁹⁰ one of which is a close parallel to that of Balai. According to this explanation, attested in several traditions, Jacob examined the garment and remarked that he had never seen a wolf as gentle as the one that had eaten his son without tearing his shirt.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Balai, 60-63. As Heal notes, Balai creates a nice parallel between Jacob and Potiphar. Both doubt the accounts of those close to them (children-wife) following an examination of Joseph's tunic; Heal, *Tradition*, 152. It is noteworthy that Josephus, who follows Genesis in portraying Jacob as convinced that Joseph had died, sees fit to add that the brothers tore Joseph's undergarment into pieces before they stained it with the blood of a goat (*Judean Antiquities* 2.35).

⁸⁶ PsN, 530. Jacob's inference is based on his knowledge of Scripture rather than on empirical observations. His reasoning is as follows: human blood is a spirit blown by God as can be seen regarding the blood of Abel, where the verse (Genesis 4:10) says that the blood cried out to God from the ground and demanded justice; *ibid.*, 530-31. This seems to imply that Jacob expected to hear a similar plea for justice from the blood on Joseph's garment; when he did not, he knew that the blood was not human.

⁸⁷ Balai, 63.

⁸⁸ See Lash, "Sermon", 22 ("See once more your tunic / has brought me, my son, / to another great grief; / for it is still intact, / so that I think that it was not a wild beast / that devoured you, my beloved, / but that you were stripped and slaughtered / by human hands..."); and Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos*, 1:210.

⁸⁹ Cf. Heal, *Tradition*, 151, note 25.

⁹⁰ See, e.g., Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 18:102-103, where the following are mentioned as reasons for Jacob's skepticism: his knowledge of the brothers' envy, his confidence that Joseph must be alive since God had chosen him (see v. 6), the fact that the shirt was intact, and the brothers' contradictory response when questioned that Joseph had been killed by thieves.

⁹¹ See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 13:36-39.

7.2.7. Joseph as Potiphar's son

After Joseph is taken to Egypt he is sold to Potiphar. Joseph finds success in the household of his master and achieves the status of overseer. Thus we read in Genesis 39:

(1) Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. (2) The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. (3) His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. (4) So Joseph found favour in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. (5) From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. (6) So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate.

There is no indication, however, that Joseph was adopted by his master. Rather he is referred to again and again as a slave (vv. 17 and 19).

In Q 12, on the other hand, Joseph's master contemplates taking him as a son:

The one from Egypt who bought him said to his wife: "Make his stay honorable; he may be of profit to us, or we may take him as a son (*nattakhidhahu waladan*)"...

While the Egyptian women indeed refer to Joseph as the *fatā* of Potiphar's wife (Q 12:30), this does not necessarily mean that he was a slave, since the word can also refer to a youth.⁹²

Is the notion that Joseph might be adopted by his master a Quranic innovation? Speyer thought not and adduced Ephraem Graecus' sermon as a precedent.⁹³ Here we read:

When Peterphes saw / the good character of the young man, / his great knowledge / and honesty, / he gave into the care / of Joseph the most virtuous, / as to his own son, / all that he had acquired (lines 460-63).⁹⁴

Speyer considers this to be an instance of Christian transmission. It should be noted, however, that in the sermon this is a comment of the author which likens the treatment Joseph received to that of a son. In the Quran, however, Potiphar himself suggests that he and his wife might adopt Joseph.⁹⁵

7.2.8. Potiphar's disbelief in the accusation against Joseph⁹⁶

In Genesis 39 Potiphar's wife keeps Joseph's garment as evidence and accuses Joseph of assailing her. Potiphar believes his wife without giving his slave an opportunity to present his version:

⁹² Compare 18:10 and 13, where there is no reason to believe that the sleepers of the cave are slaves, with Q 12:62, which most probably refers to slaves.

⁹³ Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 199-200.

⁹⁴ ET from Lash, "Sermon", 24.

⁹⁵ For another explanation of the origin of this theme, see the appendix to this chapter.

⁹⁶ This theme is discussed in Heal, "Reworking", 92-94, without mention of the Quran. Cf. Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 70-71.

(19) When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying: “This is the way your servant treated me”, he became enraged. (20) And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison.

In Q 12, however, we find a dialogue in which Joseph is able to present his case and is ultimately vindicated thanks to a forensic examination of the garment:

(25) They raced (*wa-stabaqā*)⁹⁷ to the door; and she tore (*wa-qaddat*) his shirt from behind. They encountered her master by the door. She said: “What is the recompense (*mā jazā’u*)⁹⁸ of him who purposes evil against your folk, but that he should be imprisoned, or a painful chastisement?” (26) Said he: “It was she that solicited me”; and a witness of her folk bore witness (*wa-shahida shāhidun min ahlihā*):⁹⁹ “If his shirt has been torn from the front then she has spoken truly and he is of the liars, (27) but if his shirt has been torn from behind, then she has lied, and he is of the truthful”. (28) So when he [=the husband]

⁹⁷ Note the use of the same verb in v. 17.

⁹⁸ Note the parallel in v. 74.

⁹⁹ The exegetes offer several identifications for this witness: an infant of Potiphar’s wife’s family, a wise grown up relative of hers, the (tearing of the) garment, a creature created by God who was neither man nor *jinnī*; see, e.g., al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 11:321-23. Compare the tradition known already to Origen in the third century (“Asenath brought charges against her mother in the presence of her father, stating that she had laid a trap for Joseph, and not Joseph for her. For this reason, therefore, Potiphar gave her in marriage to Joseph, in order to prove to the Egyptians that Joseph had committed no wrong of this kind against his house”; ET from V. Aptowitz, “Asenath, the Wife of Joseph: A Haggadic Literary-Historical Study”, *HUCA* 1 [1924], 257). See also *Midrash Abkir* (late tenth-century Italy) as cited in the *Yalqut* #146, where Potiphar wishes to kill Joseph and is dissuaded only by Asenath’s testimony: “[...] Asenath came to Potiphar secretly and related to him under oath the true state of affairs. Then God spoke to her as follows: ‘By your life, because you have defended him, the tribes which I wish to have originate from him will descend from you’”; text in Geula, *Lost Aggadic Works*, 2:37-38; ET slightly adapted from Aptowitz, “Asenath”, 256). While similar, the two sources are not identical. Whereas in *Midrash Abkir* Asenath’s testimony is set immediately after the accusation and before Joseph is imprisoned, Origen does not specify when it took place. Moreover, his comment is cited in the Catena on Genesis 41:45 (Joseph’s marriage to Asenath), not Genesis 39:29 (Joseph sent to prison). This suggests that according to Origen, Asenath’s testimony took place after Joseph was released from jail. Might *Midrash Abkir* reflect Islamic traditions here? The Quran itself might have adapted a tradition similar to the one attested by Origen and shifted it to an earlier stage in the story. See also Kugel, *In Potiphar’s House*, 56-57, where the Joseph tradition in the *Vienna Genesis* (a sixth-century illustrated Christian manuscript of Genesis) is discussed. There in the scene following Joseph’s flight from his temptress, he stands among two women and a baby in a crib. This baby has been interpreted as Asenath who testifies on Joseph’s behalf. Although possible, it should be noted that the baby does not appear in the illustration of the confrontation scene with Potiphar.

saw his shirt was torn from behind he said: “This is of your [fem. pl.] guile. Indeed your [fem. pl.] guile is immense.¹⁰⁰ (29) Joseph, turn away from this, and you [my wife] ask forgiveness of your crime. You are indeed of the sinners”.¹⁰¹

Thus the husband finds Joseph innocent. It is only later that Joseph is thrown into prison under some unspecified pretext. First comes the scene in which women cut their hands in amazement at Joseph’s beauty (Q 12:30-31).¹⁰² Then Potiphar’s wife announces that “if he will not do what I command him, he will certainly be imprisoned, and certainly be one of the despised” (Q 12:32). Joseph in turn addresses God, saying that prison is dearer to him than that to which the women are urging him and requesting that God turn the women’s guile away from him (Q 12:33). God grants him his request (Q 12:34), and in the next verse we read: “Then it seemed good to them, after they had seen the signs, that they should imprison him for a while” (Q 12:35). The verse leaves matters vague and does not explain why the Egyptians eventually saw fit to imprison Joseph in spite of the exonerating evidence.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ That the woman’s actions are typical of her entire gender is found also in PsN, 541. After she accuses Joseph in front of the other slaves, they reject her claim, stating that a man of Joseph’s stature would never do such a thing. They then add: “Women are acquiring an evil custom against men / if they do not act out their licentiousness they give false testimony”.

¹⁰¹ Alternatively, one could take the speaker in vv. 28-29 to be the witness rather than the husband; see, e.g., Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-kabīr*, 18:124-25. If the witness is indeed the speaker, the woman may be directed to seek her husband’s forgiveness rather than God’s.

¹⁰² See Kugel, *In Potiphar’s House*, 28-65. Kugel compares the Quranic scene to several parallels in late Jewish sources and offers a reconstruction of the development of this motif stage by stage. He does not, however, accord sufficient importance to the distinctive part this scene plays in the Quran. Here it serves to explain why Joseph, who has already been declared innocent, is nonetheless imprisoned. When the women are convinced of Joseph’s divine beauty, the wife states that if he does not succumb to her he will be imprisoned. Joseph then addresses God saying that he prefers prison to the women’s plan. God responds and saves him from their trickery. Finally, “It seemed right to them, after they had seen the signs, to imprison him for a time” (v. 35). In none of the parallel Jewish sources is Joseph previously declared to be innocent. It seems that some of the differences noted by Kugel are a result of this fundamental discrepancy.

¹⁰³ The exegetes explain that this was meant to prevent Joseph from shaming his mistress by telling his version, or to separate Joseph and the woman; see, e.g., Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-kabīr*, 18:132, and al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 11:341. The first explanation is reminiscent of *Genesis Rabba* 87.9 discussed below. In Paret, *Kommentar*, 250, it is suggested that v. 35 itself explains why Joseph was imprisoned: “the signs”, i.e. the powerful affect of his striking beauty upon women. According to Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 111, the vagueness of this verse “is characteristic of the angel Gabriel’s manner of spoiling a good story”.

How then did the narrative evolve so that Potiphar rejects his wife's allegation? In post-Biblical recastings of the story one finds similar motifs. Thus Philo remarks that the garment's evidence should have exonerated Joseph:

Joseph's master, believing this to be true, ordered him to be carried away to prison, and in this he committed two great errors. First he gave him no opportunity of defence, and convicted unheard this entirely innocent person as guilty of the greatest misconduct. Secondly, the raiment which his wife produced as left by the youth was a proof of violence not employed by him but suffered at her hands. For if force were used by him, he would retain his mistress's robe, if against him, he would lose his own (*On Joseph* 52).¹⁰⁴

By way of contrast to what we find in the Quran, the notion that the garment proves Joseph's innocence is a comment of Philo's which is not put into the mouth of one of the characters. In *Genesis Rabba* 87.9, on the other hand, Potiphar discloses to Joseph that he does not believe his wife, though no mention is made of the garment:

And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison. "I know that you are innocent", he assured him, "but [I must do this] lest a stigma fall upon my children".¹⁰⁵

That the garment proved Joseph's innocence is indeed found in Jewish works but all of these sources are post-Quranic.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ ET in Colson, *Philo*, 6:169. Similar comments are found in Romanos' *De Joseph* 14 and in the Armenian commentary on Genesis, attributed to Ephrem; see Heal, "Reworking", 94, and Heal, *Tradition*, 232.

¹⁰⁵ For critical text and later parallels, see Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 3:1074; ET in Freedman, *Midrash Rabba*, 2:812.

¹⁰⁶ The only rabbinic reference to an examination of the garment cited by Geiger is *Sefer ha-Yashar*, which he then believed to be pre-Islamic; Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 112-13. By 1833 when he wrote the introduction Geiger had already learnt from the work of Zunz that *Sefer ha-Yashar* was post-Quranic.

In the Syriac tradition, however, both elements are found together: the husband declares that he does not believe his wife on account of the damning testimony of the garment. Thus in Narsai we find the following response of Potiphar to his wife:

Potiphar said: “Who is your witness (*sāhdēk*) that he did this thing / for I do not wish to contend with him unjustly. / His garment is in your hands yet behold you cry that you are vanquished / and I do not wish to believe you since you are not truthful”.

His suspicions notwithstanding, in the next couplet Potiphar is moved by jealousy to imprison Joseph.¹⁰⁷ A similar response is found in PsN:

Potiphar heard these words and said thus: / “If you are pure why did the slave’s garment remain by you? / Had Joseph dared to come to sleep with you / he would have taken your covering, not you his. / Behold, your stupidity and offence are revealed / do not shout, be in uproar, or raise your voice. / I shall call him and set you against each other / watching and examining your appearances. / From the look of your faces I will understand and know / the guilty one who did this thing.

Nonetheless, he still felt justified adducing it as evidence for pre-Quranic traditions; *ibid.*, viii. Today it is clear that *Sefer ha-Yashar* is heavily indebted to Islamic traditions. A similar though not identical tradition is found in the post-Quranic Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. In the translation of Genesis 39:14 we read that Potiphar’s wife threw egg white on the bed and claimed it was Joseph’s semen. Then in the translation of 39:20 we are told that “Joseph’s master took counsel from the priests who discovered that it was the white [of an egg]. So he did not put him to death”. Finally, in 47:22 we read: “Only the land of the priests he did not buy, because they had seen his innocence at the time when his master wanted to kill him, and they had delivered him from the sentence of death”; ET in Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan:Genesis*, 131-32, 153; comments in A. Shinan, *The Embroidered Targum: The Aggadah in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem, 1992), 78-79 (in Hebrew). Even closer to the Quran is *Midrash Abkir* (late tenth-century Italy) on Genesis 47:22. There too Joseph’s refraining from buying the land of the priests is interpreted as his reward to them for defending him, but now the defense concerns the location of the tear in Joseph’s garment as it does in the Quran; Geula, *Lost Aggadic Works*, 2:41. Similarly the *Midrash Aggada* produced by the school of Mosheh ha-Darshan of Narbonne (first half of eleventh century) on Genesis 47:22 (p. 105 in the S. Buber edition), and *Sefer ha-Yashar*. See also Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 5:362, note 340. Seeing that all these sources are post-Quranic, it seems possible that they reflect Islamic traditions. In Geula, *Lost Aggadic Works*, 1:72-73, these sources are collected in the context of the links between *Midrash Abkir* and the Apocrypha and Jewish Hellenistic works. Might Islamic tradition have played some role in the transmission?

¹⁰⁷ Ed. Mingana, 2:279.

The wife then manages to persuade her husband not to summon Joseph but rather to send him to prison, arguing that she can no longer stand seeing him in her house.¹⁰⁸ It should be noted that by adding the husband's response these Syriac sources develop a Biblical one-way address into a dialogue.

The origin of the motif of Potiphar's disbelief seems to be in the surprisingly mild punishment that he metes out to a slave who allegedly attempted to rape his wife. Imprisonment seems insufficient; one would expect a much harsher corporal punishment and probably even an execution.¹⁰⁹ While this is understandable from the viewpoint of the entire Joseph saga which requires that he remain alive for the rest of the story,¹¹⁰ the audience no doubt wondered why he escaped a more severe sentence. A solution was supplied by having Potiphar doubt his wife and therefore punish Joseph leniently.¹¹¹ Support for this is found in PsB, where after Joseph rises to greatness, Potiphar says to his wife that he knew all along that Joseph committed no crime against her and therefore did not beat or scourge him.¹¹² The Quran further develops this exegetical tradition by having Potiphar believe Joseph completely and transferring the imprisonment to a later stage.

It is also noteworthy that by having the garment indicate Joseph's innocence a parallel is created with the role of the garment in the brothers' attempt to convince Jacob

¹⁰⁸ PsN, 541-42. In the account of PsB, Potiphar's doubt is mentioned explicitly not at the time of the accusation, but only after Joseph rises to power; Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 30 and 34. In other sources, however, there is no hint that Potiphar doubted his wife's account; see Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* 35.3; Balai, 91-94; and Ephraem Graecus line 565 (Lash, "Sermon", 27).

¹⁰⁹ That this was the reasoning is explicit in the remark of the *Leqah Tob* on Genesis 39:20. The tolerant treatment of Joseph is even more surprising when one compares it to parallel non-Biblical tales where the spouse demands the death of the youth; see H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon, 1997), 409. A survey of responses to this problem is found in Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 63-65, notes 39 and 47; and *idem.*, *Traditions of the Bible*, 456.

¹¹⁰ See E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, 1964), 304 ("Nor should one overlook the simple point that if Joseph had been subjected to the fate that the ancient Near East normally reserved for such moral offenses – real or presumed – the Joseph story would have died an untimely death"). See also Gunkel, *Genesis*, 409.

¹¹¹ Cf. K. Heal, "Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature", *BYU Studies* 41 (2002): 36 [=Heal, *Tradition*, 96]. Heal suggests that Potiphar's disbelief serves to create a link with Pilate and thus add to the typological reading of the story.

¹¹² See the text edited in Heal, *Tradition*, 27. In Weinberg's text there is a lacuna here.

that Joseph had been devoured by a wild animal. Whereas in Genesis both the brothers and Potiphar's wife are able, using Joseph's garment, to fool Jacob and Potiphar respectively, in PsN and the Quran, both plots fail on account of an examination of the very same garment. In PsN this is explicit in both instances; in the Quran only with regard to Potiphar's wife's accusation.¹¹³

The Quran also departs from the Syriac sources in that the evidence supplied by the garment concerns the location of the tear rather than the issue of who had possession of the garment at the time. In Genesis and the Syriac sources there is never any mention of the garment being torn. All that is said is that Joseph left it with Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:12).¹¹⁴

7.2.9. The last encounter between Potiphar's wife and Joseph

A striking instance of a shared expansion concerns Potiphar's wife. In the Bible she appears last in Genesis 39:17-19, where she accuses Joseph and thus brings about his imprisonment. Nothing more is said of her. By contrast, in the Quran she resurfaces later in the story, confesses her evil-doing and exonerates Joseph. After Joseph solves the king's dream (while still in prison), the latter sends for him:

(50) The king said: "Bring him to me!" but when the messenger came to him, he [=Joseph] said: "Return to your lord and ask him: 'What of the women who cut their hands?' Surely my Lord has knowledge of their guile". (51) "What was your business,

¹¹³ For the parallel function of Joseph's shirt in both episodes in the Quran and the contrast to Genesis, see Greifenhagen, "The *qamīs* in Sūrat Yūsuf", 76-77. According to Greifenhagen, the *qamīs*, "bloodied, then torn, and finally whole and fragrant", is "a synecdoche for Joseph and his progress as the revealer of truth".

¹¹⁴ An examination of the tear in the garment is mentioned also in *Sefer ha-Yashar* (noted in Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 113), and in *Midrash Abkir* and *Midrash Aggada* on Genesis 47:22. All these sources are, however, post-Quranic. In Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 204, it is suggested that the tearing might be the result of a conflation with the story of Amnon's rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13. The two stories are linked by the use of *קָטַעַת פְּסִים* in both (Genesis 37:3, 23, and 33, and 2 Samuel 13:18-19). After the rape Tamar tears her garment.

women”, he said, “when you solicited Joseph?” “How free is God from every imperfection! (*hāsha li-llāhi*)¹¹⁵”, they said, “We know no evil against him”. The wife of the mighty man said: “Now the truth is at last discovered; I solicited him; he is a truthful man”. (52) “That, so that he may know that I betrayed him not secretly (*lam akhunhu bi-l-ghaybi*),¹¹⁶ and that God guides not the guile of the treacherous. (53) Yet I claim not that my soul was innocent -- surely the soul of man incites to evil -- except inasmuch as my Lord had mercy; truly my Lord is All-forgiving, All-compassionate”. (54) The king said: “Bring him to me and I will choose him for myself”. Then, when he had spoken with him, he said: “Today you are established firmly in our favor and in our trust”.

The extent of Potiphar’s wife’s change of heart depends on whether vv. 52-53 belong to her speech. If so, she repented fully and believed in God, but even if not, as several exegetes suggest, v. 51 includes an admission of guilt on her part.¹¹⁷

Potiphar’s wife appears again in many of the Syriac sources as well. Ephrem, PsB, PsN, Balai, and Ephraem Graecus all include a scene in which she confesses, though they differ in details.¹¹⁸ According to PsN, for example, Potiphar hears the messengers announcing in the streets that Joseph has risen to power. When he learns that this is the very same Joseph whom he had imprisoned, he rushes to meet him, bows down before

¹¹⁵ The same phrase occurs also in Q 12:31. Though the tradition often derives *hāsha* from *h-sh-y* (see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:578-79 (where among the glosses offered for the phrase we find *ma’ādha llāhi* and “God forbid!”), and al-Khaṭīb, *Mu’jam al-qirā’āt*, 4:243-48), this must be related to the Aramaic and Syriac *hās l-* (“God forbid, far be it from”); Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon*, 474.

¹¹⁶ This last phrase could also be rendered: “that I betrayed him not in [his] absence”.

¹¹⁷ The exegetes suggest three speakers for these verses: Potiphar’s wife, Joseph and even Potiphar; see al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 11:375-77.

¹¹⁸ According to Ephrem’s *Commentary on Genesis* 35.7-9, Potiphar is present when Pharaoh’s dreams are interpreted. When he realizes Joseph’s new status, he rushes home to consult his wife who calms him and confesses her sin, stressing that if Joseph is to punish anyone it is her. She adds, however, that he would not do so, since his imprisonment led ultimately to his new high status. Potiphar then joins the crowds following Joseph’s chariot through the streets, and Joseph does him no harm, knowing that it was all part of God’s plan; ET in Mathews and Amar, *Ephrem*, 187-88. Similar is the account of Ephraem Graecus (lines 627-46); see Lash, “Sermon”, 29-30. In Balai’s version Potiphar’s wife observes Joseph in his greatness and imagines what she would say were he to bring up her false accusation, without actually speaking to him; Balai, 133-38. Only in PsB and PsN does the woman confess both to her husband and to Joseph; see Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 34 (there is a lacuna there which is filled in Heal, *Tradition*, 26-32), and PsN, 550-55.

him fearing for his life, and pleads that his folly be forgotten. Joseph calms him, telling him that he is not to blame. Potiphar then returns home, informs his wife of Joseph's new status, and expresses his fear, apparently not pacified by Joseph's words. His wife assures him that Joseph is just and will not harass him. She confesses that it was she who assaulted Joseph. Later she herself grows fearful and has a scribe write a petition to Joseph begging his mercy. Finally she comes before Joseph who reads her petition and dismisses her in peace, setting her mind at rest.¹¹⁹

Several factors might have brought about this narrative expansion: simple curiosity as to what happened to Potiphar and his wife, the fact that other characters in the story keep on reappearing, and perhaps the desire to create a pleasing chiasmic pattern of events.¹²⁰ A reading of the Joseph narrative in light of a parallel scene in Esther 6:7-13 most likely contributed to this expansion as well.

Similarities between the Joseph story and that of Esther have been noted by ancient readers and modern scholars alike.¹²¹ These include both thematic parallels and linguistic correspondences. One striking correspondence is found in the descriptions of the elevation of Joseph (Genesis 41:41-43) and Mordecai (Esther 6:7-11). In both texts the hero is robed in special garb, he rides a royal horse/carriage, and his special status is

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ See K. Heal, "Reworking the Biblical Text in the Dramatic Dialogue Poems on the Old Testament Patriarch Joseph", in B. ter Haar Romeny (ed.), *The Peshitta: Its Use in Literature and Liturgy* (Leiden, 2006), 96-97. Compare the structural explanation for the Quranic expansion found in M. Cuypers, "Structures rhétoriques dans le Coran: une analyse structurelle de la sourate 'Joseph' et de quelques sourates brèves", *MIDEO* 22 (1995): 177-79. Another possible incentive for a reconciliation scene might be found in the tradition that identifies Joseph's Egyptian master with his father-in-law, distinct in the Hebrew text (Potiphar and Potiphara), but conflated in later tradition; see the Second Temple literature and rabbinic sources cited in Aptowitzer, "Asenath", 262. If Joseph is to marry the daughter of the man who unjustly threw him into prison, one might first expect a reconciliation scene. It is not, however, clear whether this conflation occurred in the Syriac tradition as well. PsB refers to Joseph's wife as the daughter of Potiphar the priest, but this does not necessarily indicate that he meant to merge the two figures; Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 34. The interest of the Syriac tradition in Biblical women generally and in the Sinful Woman of the gospels specifically might have served as an additional source of inspiration for Potiphar's wife's repentance. For the special treatment female Biblical figures receive in Syriac poetry, see S. Ashbrook Harvey, *Song and Memory: Biblical Women in Syriac Tradition* (Milwaukee, 2010).

¹²¹ See *Esther Rabba* 7:7, and S. B. Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes and Structure* (Missoula, 1979), 123-42.

publicly proclaimed. Indeed in Genesis Joseph is also given Pharaoh’s signet ring, but Mordecai too will receive the king’s ring later on in Esther 8:2. As a result of these similarities the two texts were conflated in various ways. Under the influence of Genesis, in *Judean Antiquities* 11.254, Haman suggests that a gold chain (not mentioned in Esther) be placed around the neck of the man the king wishes to honor, while the Septuagint for Esther 6:8 reads “a robe made of linen” as in Genesis 41:42, instead of “a royal garment”.¹²² In PsN, on the other hand, the conflation goes in the other direction. There the fine linen garments of Genesis 41:42 are described as “garments of kings, fine linens and silks,” possibly a reflection of “the royal garments worn by the king” mentioned in Esther 6:8. Likewise, PsB mentions “royal garments” and Narsai refers to “garments of the king’s clothing”.¹²³

Seeing that the two texts were conflated, it would be quite natural for some readers to import the scene which follows this semi-coronation in Esther into the Joseph story. In Esther the public coronation causes Mordecai’s arch-enemy Haman to worry about his own future and consult with his wife (Esther 6:12-13). In the same manner in our Syriac texts Joseph’s rise to power causes Potiphar to fear and to consult with his wife. However, the outcome of this consultation is quite different. While Haman and his wife realize that they are lost, Potiphar and his wife repent and are forgiven by Joseph, forgiveness being a central theme of the Joseph narrative.

| Gen. 41:41-43 | Esther 6:7-13 |
|--|--|
| (41) And Pharaoh said to Joseph: “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt”. (42) Removing | (7) So Haman said to the king: “For the man whom the king wishes to honour, (8) <u>let royal</u> |

¹²² See C. A. Moore, *The Anchor Bible: Esther* (Garden City, 1971), 65, but cf. H. Kahana, *Esther: Juxtaposition of the Septuagint Translation with the Hebrew Text* (Louvain, 2005), 254-55.

¹²³ Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 34; and Narsai, ed. Mingana, 2:282.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph's hand; <u>he arrayed him in garments of fine linen</u>, and put a gold chain around his neck. (43) <u>He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command</u>; and <u>they cried out in front of him</u>: "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt.</p> | <p><u>robes be brought, which the king has worn</u>, and a horse that the king has ridden, with a royal crown on its head. (9) Let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials; <u>let them robe the man whom the king wishes to honour</u>, and let them conduct the man on horseback through the open square of the city, proclaiming before him: "Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king wishes to honour". (10) Then the king said to Haman: "Quickly, take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to the Jew Mordecai who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned" (11) <u>So Haman took the robes and the horse and robed Mordecai and led him riding</u> through the open square of the city, <u>proclaiming</u>: "Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king wishes to honour".</p> <p>(12) Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate, but Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. (13) When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him: "If Mordecai, before whom your downfall has begun, is of the Jewish people, you will not prevail against him, but will surely fall before him".</p> |
|---|--|

Be the source of the notion that Potiphar's wife confessed as it may, the Quran's representation of this scene is akin to the Syriac sources, but with two main differences.¹²⁴ In the Quran the confession occurs not after Joseph's public elevation to office, but rather right before he leaves prison to assume power. Moreover, whereas the Syriac sources use this scene to establish Joseph's generosity and forgiveness, in the Quran it serves to underline his utter innocence and perhaps also to emphasize the sincere repentance of Potiphar's wife.

7.2.10. Joseph's greatness in the world and the lesson for the believers

After Joseph's rise to power is described at some length, the last lines of the first homily of PsN read:

Blessed is he who chose (*da-gbāy[hy]*)¹²⁵ righteous Joseph, made him triumph in the land / and set him as a model and example for all the upright. / So that they be delivered from carnal desires / and inherit the good new life in the kingdom.¹²⁶

The Quran too mentions Joseph's ascension to power (Q 12:54-55), but it does so in general terms and makes no reference to the semi-coronation with all its pomp. Q 12:57, which downplays the importance of reward in this world, suggests that this is an intentional omission:

(56) So We established Joseph in the land, to make his dwelling there wherever he would. We grant Our mercy to whomever We wish and do not cause the reward of the

¹²⁴ Surprisingly, the Quran is not mentioned in the discussion of this motif in Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 73-75. Cf. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 210-11, where the parallels in Ephrem and Ephraem Graecus lead Speyer to consider Christian informants as the source of this tradition. See also Brock, "Joseph and Potiphar's wife", 57.

¹²⁵ Compare the verb *gbā* with *yajtabāka* in Q 12:6.

¹²⁶ PsN, 558.

well-doers to be lost. (57) Yet indeed the reward of the Hereafter is better for those who believe and fear.

Although the verses use typical Quranic language it is noteworthy that in both texts similar homiletic comments appear at the same stage in the story – after Joseph rises to power and before his brothers travel to Egypt in search of food.

7.2.11. Jacob’s impaired eyesight.

In Genesis 48:10, just before Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh towards the end of his life, it is said that the eyes of Israel (*i.e.* Jacob) “were dim with age”. In Q 12:84, however, already after being informed that Benjamin had been imprisoned for stealing, it is said that Jacob “turned away from them and said: ‘Ah, woe is me for Joseph!’ His eyes grew white because of the grief, he being full of suppressed emotion (*wa-byaddat ‘aynāhu mina l-ḥuzni fa-huwa kaẓīm*)”. The exegetes argue whether this refers to excessive crying, to impaired eyesight or to complete blindness.¹²⁷ Support for an understanding that his eyesight was truly damaged is found later when Joseph sends for his father in Q 12:93 and says: “Take this shirt of mine and cast it on my father’s face and he will recover his sight (*ya ‘ti baṣīran*)...” Finally, in Q 12:96 it is said that when the messenger came to Jacob and cast the shirt on his face “forthwith he saw once again (*fa-rtadda baṣīran*)”.

This theme does not appear in Jewish sources. Regarding the loss and recovery of eyesight, Geiger comments that “[Muhammad] was perhaps thinking of Jacob’s loss of sight later on,¹²⁸ or possibly the idea is based on some legend unknown to me”.¹²⁹ In fact,

¹²⁷ See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 18:195-6, and cf. Q 5:83 and Q 9:92.

¹²⁸ *I.e.* Genesis 48:10.

¹²⁹ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 117. The closest parallel in rabbinic sources is the tradition according to which the revival of Jacob’s spirit in Genesis 45:27 alludes to the divine spirit returning to him and his

it seems to stem from a figure of speech found already in the Bible in other contexts and used repeatedly in several Syriac sources to emphasize Jacob's grief.¹³⁰ Thus according to PsB, for example, when Reuben discovers that Joseph has been sold, he laments over his father, saying: "Woe to your old age Jacob for all the days of your life, for your children have broken the staff of your old age and have extinguished the lamp of your light (*šrāgā d-nuhrāk*)".¹³¹ Later when Jacob sees Joseph's bloodstained garment it is said that "the light of his eyes dimmed (*hšek nuhrā d-aynaw*)".¹³² Both Joseph and Benjamin are described as the light of their father's eyes,¹³³ and when Jacob is reunited with Joseph he says: "my eyes were enlightened by seeing you (*nhar 'aynay ba-hzātāk*)" and (describing his previous suffering when they were separated): "the light of my eyes dimmed".¹³⁴ Similar phrases are found in PsN, Balai, Narsai, the dialogue poem between Joseph and Benjamin, Ephraem Graecus, and Romanos.¹³⁵

regaining prophetic power; see the sources listed in Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente*, 72-74 (especially *Genesis Rabba* 91.6). See also Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 219-20, where an interesting parallel in *Tobit* 11:7-15 is noted. In J. Walker, *Bible Characters in the Koran* (Paisley, 1931), 74-75, it is suggested that the blindness is the result of "some confusion" between Jacob and his father Isaac.

¹³⁰ See especially Psalms 13:4; 19:9; 38:11; Proverbs 15:30. See also *Tobit* 10:5; 11:14.

¹³¹ Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 23.

¹³² Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 24. See also *ibid.*, 23, 25, and 26. Similarly, Joseph laments over Jacob saying: "[your sons] darkened the light of your eyes"; Link, *Geschichte*, 11. See already Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 69. Näf notes that unlike the Quran, PsB does not refer to full blindness, but as we have seen the exegetes on Q 12:84 are divided as to whether it refers to excessive crying, to complete blindness or to impaired eyesight.

¹³³ Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 24; Link, *Geschichte*, 20.

¹³⁴ Link, *Geschichte*, 26.

¹³⁵ PsN, 573 ("On account of mourning for Joseph my eyesight has diminished / and for Simeon too I mourn with my own sorrow"); Balai, 285 (where Jacob says to Benjamin: "Come in peace, light of my eyes, / for seeing you has strengthened your father"); Narsai, ed. Mingana, 2:274-75 ("Who extinguished his father's lamp the light of which was beautiful / so that in my grief over him I stumble as if in darkness?"); Brock, *Soghyatha*, 15-16 ("light of my eyes, Joseph"); Ephraem Graecus lines 209-10 (Lash, "Sermon", 13: "May Jacob's eyes / not be darkened again / as he waits to see / my return to him") and 426 (Lash, "Sermon", 23: "I shall die, Joseph, / my light and my support"); Romanos' *De Joseph* 25 (Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos*, 228: Joseph and Benjamin as Jacob's two eyes), and 36 (Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos*, 240: the night of discouragement is driven away from Jacob's eyes; the light of his children is like the twelve hours of daylight). In PsB Joseph is also described as "the staff of his father's old age" (Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 23 and 25). Likewise in Narsai, ed. Mingana, 2:274, Jacob calls Joseph "the staff of my old age". Compare *Tobit* 5:18 where Tobiah's mother calls him "the staff of our hands". The similarity is even more pronounced in the Vulgate version of *Tobit* 5:18 ("the staff of our old age") and 10:5 ("the light of our eyes, the staff of our old age"). Since the Book of *Tobit* draws on the Joseph narrative extensively (see the studies cited in J. A. Fitzmayer, *Tobit* [Berlin, 2003], 35), it is possible that it later influenced retellings of the Joseph story. Interestingly, Jerome claims to have based his translation of *Tobit*

7.2.12. The brothers' reaction to finding their money in their sacks

On the way back from their first journey to Egypt one of the brothers discovers that the money they used to purchase grain has been returned to them. Their reaction is described as follows: “At this they lost heart and turned trembling to one another, saying: ‘What is this that God has done to us?’” (Genesis 42:28). When they arrive at the father’s home in Canaan, they open all their sacks and see bundles of money in them. Again their reaction is negative: “they were dismayed” (Genesis 42:35). In the next chapter the brothers travel to Egypt again intending to return the money, assuming it was an oversight (Genesis 43:12 and 22).

As Speyer has noted, in Q 12:65 they react in a quite contrary manner:

When they opened their things, they found their merchandise, restored to them. “Father”, they said, “what more should we desire? Our merchandise here is restored to us. We shall get provision for our family, guard our brother, and obtain an extra beast’s load -- that is an easy measure.

The brothers make no attempt to return the merchandise to the Egyptians and rather than distressed, they seem overjoyed.¹³⁶

Though I have not found this reaction in my main sources, a parallel in Romanos’ *De Joseph* 24 is noteworthy. There the brothers say to Jacob: “Father, why do you moan? See what joy we have found in our sacks, the price of the grain”.¹³⁷

on an Aramaic source; *ibid.*, 19-21. For a history of the phrase “a staff of old age” (though not including PsB), see D. A. Bertrand, “‘Un bâton de vieillesse’, à propos de *Tobit* 5,23 et 10,4 (*Vulgate*)”, *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 71 (1991): 33-37.

¹³⁶ Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 212-13.

¹³⁷ Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos*, 1:228.

7.2.13. Joseph's reunion with Benjamin

When the brothers finally bring Benjamin to Joseph in Genesis 43 we find the following description:

(29) Then he looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said: "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!" (30) With that, Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother, and he was about to weep. So he went into a private room and wept there.

While in the Biblical narrative Joseph blesses Benjamin ("God be gracious to you, my son!") and later also shows his preference for him by giving him a portion five times greater than that of his brothers (Genesis 43:34), he does not reveal his true identity to him at this stage.¹³⁸

In Q 12:69, on the other hand, we read:

When they entered unto Joseph, he took his brother as his guest (*āwā ilayhi akhāhu*).¹³⁹ He said: "I am your brother, so do not be distressed (*fa-lā tabta'is*) on account of what they have done".¹⁴⁰

Here too the Quran seems to reflect narrative expansions found in post-Biblical Jewish and Christian sources. *Genesis Rabba* 92.5 (see also 93.7) describes how Joseph sits Benjamin by his side since they are both motherless:

¹³⁸See, though, the comment in R. Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York, 1996), 257 ("In addressing him as 'my son', Joseph faithfully maintains his role as Egyptian viceroy, though 'my brother' is hiding in the word he uses. The great medieval Hebrew poet Shmuel Hanagid [eleventh-century Granada] would brilliantly catch this doubleness in a moving elegy to his brother by altering the end of the phrase: 'God be gracious to you, my brother'"). It is this hidden meaning which is fleshed out by the post-Biblical traditions to be discussed.

¹³⁹ A very similar sentence is found in Q 12:99 (concerning Joseph's parents).

¹⁴⁰ Almost identical is Q 11:36 (God consoling Noah). As an utterance to Benjamin its import is not entirely clear; see the interpretations cited in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 18:178.

*With that, Joseph hurried out, because he was overcome with affection for his brother... When they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright etc. He took the cup and pretended to smell. "Let Judah, who is king, sit at the head", he declared, "and Reuben, who is firstborn, sit second". He said: "I have no mother and this youth [Benjamin] has no mother, for his mother died on giving birth to him; therefore let him come and place his head near me". For that reason, the men looked at one another in amazement.*¹⁴¹

This midrash is based on a somewhat artificial reading of Genesis 43:33: "When they were seated before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth, the men looked at one another in amazement". Though the verse makes no mention that Joseph was in charge of the seating arrangements, the rabbis are troubled by the source of the brothers' amazement. Assuming that it must result from what immediately precedes it, they deduce that Joseph sat the brothers down in a seemingly miraculous manner.¹⁴² In truth the amazement must have stemmed from being invited to a meal with the vice-ruler of Egypt.

The same tradition occurs also in later rabbinic sources with slight variations. In the *Tanḥuma* (*Wa-yiggash* 4), for instance, Joseph's reason for seating Benjamin next to him is presented in a more elaborate fashion: "I see that this one had a brother, from whom he is separated, and that he has no mother. I too had a brother, from whom I am separated, and have no mother. Let him come and sit beside me".¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ For a critical text and later parallels, see Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 3:1142-43; ET slightly adapted from Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 2:851-52.

¹⁴² The same theme is found in Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* 37.7, where Joseph seats his brothers "as if according to the cup (*ak d-men esqpā*)". In Mathews and Amar, *Ephrem*, 193, this is translated misleadingly as "as if around his [divining] cup". See also Balai, 205-206; Ephraem Graecus (lines 706-26, Lash, "Sermon", 32).

¹⁴³ ET slightly adapted from Berman, *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu*, 269.

The Syriac sources include a similar scene and emphasize even more the manner in which Joseph consoles his brother. According to PsN, Joseph seats his brothers according to their age (again supposedly divining this knowledge from his cup).¹⁴⁴ When he reaches Benjamin he takes hold of him (*labkēh*) and says to him:

And you Benjamin, who are separated from your maternal brother, / do not be sad (*lā tekre lāk*)¹⁴⁵ for I will be in place of a brother for you. / Since your brother Joseph is lost as you said / I shall today comfort you in your brother's place.¹⁴⁶

Afterwards Benjamin asks Joseph to use his cup and find out what happened to his lost brother. The brothers try to silence Benjamin, but Joseph informs him that his brother is alive and not far away.¹⁴⁷

Two elements not found in Jewish sources are parallel to Q 12:69: Joseph referring to himself as Benjamin's (pseudo) brother and his telling him not to be sad. Here again the Quran seems to have gone one step further by having Joseph reveal his real identity to Benjamin at this early stage in the narrative. Joseph no longer presents himself as a surrogate brother, but rather discloses his true identity to Benjamin. This logical development of the motif avoids the difficulty posed by Joseph's seemingly harsh treatment of his beloved brother Benjamin,¹⁴⁸ but creates tension with the rest of the story which assumes that the brothers are unaware of Joseph's identity.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ PsN, 585-86.

¹⁴⁵ Later Joseph repeats the same message in different words: *lā tet'iq lāk meṭul aḥuk*; PsN, 587.

¹⁴⁶ PsN, 586. Cf. the traditions cited in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 13:241-43.

¹⁴⁷ PsN, 586-87. Cf. Link, *Geschichte*, 15-16 (similar motifs but without the crucial similarities to the Quran). Cf. also Balai, 253-55.

¹⁴⁸ See Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 78.

¹⁴⁹ Two solutions were put forward: either Joseph told Benjamin not to inform his brothers of his identity and made him aware of his plans or, according to Wahb b. Munabbih, Joseph did not really say that he was Benjamin's brother, only that he would fill his deceased brother's place (*innahu lam ya'tarīf lahu bi-l-nisbati wa-lākinnaḥu qāla anā akhūka makāna akhūka l-hāliki*); al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 13:242-43, and al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:461. One wonders whether Wahb was aware of the Syriac tradition.

7.2.14. The punishment proposed by the brothers for the thief

In Genesis 44 the brothers suggest of their own accord that whoever turns out to have stolen the cup should be put to death:

(9) “Should it be found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover, the rest of us will become my lord’s slaves”. (10) He said: “Even so; in accordance with your words, let it be: he with whom it is found shall become my slave, but the rest of you shall go free”.

The response of the steward in v. 10 is somewhat confusing since he begins by seemingly accepting the brothers’ judgment, only to then contradict himself by stating that the guilty party will be made a slave and the rest will be set free. Ancient and modern readers alike have been troubled by this; one approach is to understand the verse as follows: “He replied: ‘Even though what you propose is just, only he who is found to have it shall become my slave, and the rest of you will be exonerated’”.¹⁵⁰

The account in Q 12 seems to reflect another approach. Here the Egyptians ask the brothers what the appropriate punishment should be and they suggest slavery for the thief:

(74) They [=the Egyptians] said: “And what shall be its recompense if you are lying?”

(75) They said [=the brothers]: “This shall be its recompense -- in whoever’s saddlebag the goblet is found, he shall be its recompense”.¹⁵¹ So We recompense the evildoers.

¹⁵⁰ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City, 1964), 331. For a collection of Jewish responses to this problem, see Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 7, tome 6, 1621-22.

¹⁵¹ Though the language is somewhat vague, it seems that the exegetes are correct in understanding the brothers’ answer as referring to slavery. Joseph and the Egyptians do not reject the proposed punishment and Benjamin is indeed detained by Joseph, presumably as a slave (Q 12:76-79).

The fact that the death penalty is not mentioned in the Quranic version of the brothers' response perhaps reflects an attempt to alleviate the tension between the brothers' statement in v. 9 and the steward's reaction in v. 10 of the Biblical account. This omission has a precedent in Josephus (*Judean Antiquities* 2.131) and in two of our Syriac sources. According to Josephus, the brothers suggest that "if someone should be found who had stolen something they should punish all of them".¹⁵² In the same manner, according to Balai, the brothers say to the steward:

We shall place the loads before you / and you will examine them equally. / If your cup is with us / we shall be slaves on its account.¹⁵³

Likewise, we read in PsN:

He [=the steward] said to them: "And if I do find it what shall happen?" / They all said: "We shall all be slaves to your lord".¹⁵⁴

Note that as in the Quran the brothers respond to a question presented to them concerning the punishment.

Whereas PsN and Balai omit mention of death but preserve the idea that all the brothers will be slaves, the Quran brings the brothers' suggestion even closer to the steward's conclusion. Thus the Quran offers a more extreme version of the solution found in the Syriac sources.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² ET in Feldman, *Judean Antiquities Books 1-4*, 169. Feldman's explanation for this omission is different: "Such a statement would seem impetuous and extreme".

¹⁵³ Balai, 219.

¹⁵⁴ PsN, 590.

¹⁵⁵ A partial parallel is found in J. Yahalom, *Liturgical Poems of Šim'on Bar Megas: Critical Edition with Commentary and Introduction* (Jerusalem, 1984), 142 (text) and 42 (discussion) (in Hebrew). In this

7.2.15. “A brother of his has stolen before”

In Genesis 44 the brothers defend Benjamin. In Q 12:77, on the other hand, they (initially) disown him saying “If he steals, a brother of his has stolen before”.¹⁵⁶ A similar motif is found in Jewish and Christian traditions, though again Syriac sources provide the closest parallels.¹⁵⁷

The Biblical text itself already links Benjamin’s alleged theft of the cup with the episode in Genesis 31 in which Rachel steals her father’s idols. As Yair Zakovitch notes, the two stories are bound by many common threads: the stolen objects are used for divination; the thieves are pursued and overtaken; the robbed accuses the thief, saying “why...?”; the suspects, sure of their innocence, proclaim that if found the thief should be killed; a search takes place and its last stop is Rachel/Benjamin; a reconciliation follows. These similarities notwithstanding, several inversions exist: the mother, who stole, is not caught, while her innocent son is caught; Jacob complains about Laban’s suspicions, Joseph about false theft; Rachel will die for her sin, while Benjamin will not die for a sin he did not commit. Zakovitch therefore suggests that through the use of this inverted parallel, Genesis teaches us that Rachel’s act was sinful and that Benjamin pays for it.¹⁵⁸

Rabbinic works spell out the relationship between the two stories. Thus we read in *Genesis Rabba* 92.8:

sixth/seventh-century poem from Byzantine Palestine, Joseph accuses the brothers of stealing the silver cup and they respond by saying that whoever stole it will become a slave.

¹⁵⁶ Was there any basis for this accusation? Several attempts to link it with Joseph’s actions are found in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 13:272-74. According to one interpretation, it refers to Joseph’s stealing and destroying the idol of his maternal grandfather (cf. Genesis 31).

¹⁵⁷ Nāf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 80-83, notes the sources that share this motif, but does not analyze the relationship between them.

¹⁵⁸ Y. Zakovitch, “Through the Looking Glass: Reflections/Inversions of Genesis Stories in the Bible”, *Biblical Interpretation* 1 (1993), 141-43.

And the goblet was found in Benjamin's sack. When the goblet was found they exclaimed to him: "What a thief son of a thief!" To which he retorted: "Have we a he-goat here?"¹⁵⁹ Have we here brothers who sold their brother?"¹⁶⁰

This tradition is unlike the Quran in two ways. In *Genesis Rabba* the accusation is part of a dispute between the brothers and the comparison is to Benjamin's mother, not his brother. Nonetheless, Geiger believed that Q 12:77 was an erroneous version of the passage from *Genesis Rabba*.¹⁶¹

A closer parallel to the Quran is found in Balai's eighth homily.¹⁶² As in *Genesis Rabba* the brothers argue with Benjamin and accuse him of having inherited the craft of theft from his mother.¹⁶³ But here they compare him with Joseph too, also described as a thief. Thus they tell Benjamin: "We are amazed at your father / that he loves the children of Rachel. / What worthy good deeds / did he see in the mother of thieves (*yāldat gannābē*)?"¹⁶⁴ Even stronger is the end of their dispute when they say to Benjamin: "Were your brother with us / we would have brought another cup [with us]", insinuating

¹⁵⁹ Alluding to the goat in whose blood the brothers dipped Joseph's coat.

¹⁶⁰ For the text and later rabbinic parallels, see Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 3:1147; ET slightly adapted from Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 2:854. Joseph is called a "thief son of a thief" in a Byzantine Aramaic Piyyut, though there it is Potiphar's wife who refers to him thus, not his brothers; see M. Sokoloff and J. Yahalom, *Jewish Palestinian Aramaic Poetry from Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem, 1999), 136 (in Hebrew). Interestingly, this is the same poem which includes a scene parallel to the Quranic description of the Egyptian ladies cutting their hands out of amazement at Joseph's beauty.

¹⁶¹ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 115-16. In Garsiel, *Bible, Midrash and Quran*, 112, the shift in the Quran from thieving mother to thieving brother is taken to be intentional. The result of this shift is that the brothers are portrayed as justifying their behavior towards Joseph. In Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 216, it is suggested that Muhammad was referring here, somewhat confusedly, to Jacob stealing Esau's blessing.

¹⁶² Balai, 224-34.

¹⁶³ Balai, 226 (noted in Schapiro, *Die haggadischen Elemente*, 64).

¹⁶⁴ Balai, 225; see also p. 233. Similarly in Ephraem Graecus lines 736-42: "When they saw this, they rent their garments and began with much threatening to accuse and insult both Rachel and Joseph with (sic in Lash's translation) his mother and brother, saying: 'you have become a stumbling block to our father; you and Joseph, Rachel's children. Joseph wanted to be king over us, while now you, his brother, have brought us to shame and disgrace. Are you the children of Rachel who stole her father's idols and said that she had not stolen them?'" ; Lash, "Sermon", 33.

that Joseph too would have stolen a cup from the Egyptians.¹⁶⁵ Later it is related that Joseph's steward informed him of this exchange.¹⁶⁶

In PsB the brothers censure Benjamin after the cup is found in his sack and call him "the son of a thief and the brother of that liar".¹⁶⁷ Later when brought before Joseph, the children of the handmaids maintain their innocence, blaming Benjamin whose mother and brother were both no strangers to falsehood.¹⁶⁸ In PsN theft is not attributed directly to Joseph but is certainly implied. The brothers address Joseph not knowing his true identity and say concerning Benjamin: "He resembles his mother who stole the idols of her father Laban / and his brother Joseph resembled him and was worse than him".¹⁶⁹ The homily then goes on to discuss Joseph's insolence, but the link with Rachel's theft suggests that Joseph too was a type of thief. Interestingly, in PsN and apparently in the Quran too the comparison of Benjamin to Joseph is part of an address to the ruler (=Joseph), not part of an argument between the brothers and Benjamin.

Joseph's response to this comparison is also similar in both traditions. In PsN Joseph embarks on a long speech concerning the moral waywardness of Jacob's family, invoking Jacob's acts of treachery, Reuben's sin with Bilha, Simeon and Levi's destruction of Shechem, Judah's wantonness with Tamar and finally the sale of Joseph by his brothers.¹⁷⁰ In the Quran too Joseph rebukes the brothers, but in few and vague words:¹⁷¹ "You are in a worse state (*antum sharrun makānan*). God knows best concerning what you allege (*taṣifūna*)" (Q 12:77).¹⁷² His words at a later stage of the

¹⁶⁵ Balai, 234.

¹⁶⁶ Balai, 245.

¹⁶⁷ Link, *Geschichte*, 19.

¹⁶⁸ Link, *Geschichte*, 20.

¹⁶⁹ PsN, 593.

¹⁷⁰ PsN, 594-96. A similar speech is found in Balai, 246-53.

¹⁷¹ The exegetes disagree as to whether Joseph actually said this to his brothers or merely thought it in his mind; see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīf al-kabīr*, 18:184-85. The issue concerns the interpretation of the preceding part of the verse: "But Joseph secreted it in his soul and disclosed it not to them, saying:..."

¹⁷² For this verb as referring to lies, see above 7.2.6 on Q 12:18.

story also reflect the chastising found in the Syriac sources: “He said: ‘Do you know what you did to Joseph and his brother when you were ignorant?’” (Q 12:89).

7.2.16. The role of the garment(s) in announcing the good news to Jacob

In the following example both the Syriac sources and the Quran tighten the chiasmic structure of the Biblical narrative by assigning garments a role in announcing the good news to Jacob. In Genesis, after Joseph reveals himself to his brothers he gives them garments and then sends them with various gifts to fetch his father (Genesis 45:21-24). Initially Jacob does not believe that Joseph is alive, but after hearing Joseph’s words and seeing the wagons, he does. Thus we read in Genesis 45:

(26) And they told him: “Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt”. He was stunned; he could not believe them. (27) But when they told him all the words of Joseph that he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. (28) Israel said: “Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die”.

The garments play no part in announcing the news to Jacob. This is reserved for the wagons.

In Q 12, there is no mention of wagons, and a garment has acquired an important, perhaps miraculous role. Here Joseph orders his brothers:

(93) “Go with this shirt of mine and cast it on my father’s face, and he shall recover his sight; then bring me your family all together”. (94) So, when the caravan set forth, their

father said: “Surely [I would say that] I perceive Joseph’s scent,¹⁷³ were it not that you might consider me senile”. (95) They said: “By God, you are certainly in your ancient error”. (96) But when the bearer of good tidings came to him, he cast it on his face, and forthwith he saw once again. He said: “Did I not tell you I know from God what you know not?”¹⁷⁴

Three departures from the Biblical account are of interest here: Joseph sends a garment to his father, it plays a part in delivering the good news to Jacob, and it causes him to regain his eyesight.¹⁷⁵ Again Syriac sources seem to supply the background to these events.

As for Joseph sending a garment to his father, this may reflect the Syriac tradition which follows the reading of the Peshitta to Genesis 45:23. In contrast to the Masora, where Joseph only sends his father donkeys loaded with food and other good things, in the Peshitta he also sends him garments and silver.¹⁷⁶ The two readings differ in one letter (*wāw*) which affects the relationship between Genesis 45:22 and 23 as well as the meaning of the Hebrew *ke-zot*. Compare the two versions:

¹⁷³ Compare Brock, *Soghyatha*, 16, where Joseph’s scent is mentioned twice. First, before he recognizes him, Benjamin states that the king’s scent is like that of Joseph’s (stanza 13). Second, Joseph sends Benjamin with his clothes to Jacob so that Jacob may smell the scent of the one who died and came back to life (stanzas 19-20).

¹⁷⁴ The identity of Jacob’s interlocutors in vv. 94-96 is unclear. The natural candidates would be the brothers (compare vv. 85-86), but they were sent to Egypt in v. 87 and seem to return only in v. 96 or v. 97. See discussion in al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 11:447 and 450.

¹⁷⁵ For Jacob’s loss of eyesight, see the discussion above. For the magical role of Joseph’s shirt, see P. L. Baker, *Islamic Textiles* (London, 1995), 15 (regarding later periods: “Textiles, it was believed, conveyed ‘magical’ powers. *Baraka* (blessing) was passed on by donning a garment of a saintly person, by possessing a fragment of it...”). As Greifenhagen comments regarding the beliefs described by Baker: “These conceptions all relate to the power of Joseph’s shirt to reveal and to heal, even in the absence of its wearer”; Greifenhagen, “The qamīš in Sūrat Yūsuf”, 84.

¹⁷⁶ A similar reading is found in the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Jubilees 43:22 (“and he also sent to his father clothing and money and ten asses which were carrying wheat. And he sent them off”).

| Peshitta | Masora |
|--|---|
| (22) And he gave to each man a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. (23) And to his father he sent <u>such things</u> (<i>hākanā</i>) <u>as well as</u> ten donkeys (<i>w-‘esrā ḥmārin</i>) loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, wine, and provision for his father on the journey. | (22) To each one of them he gave a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. (23) To his father he sent <u>the following</u> (<i>ke-zot</i>): ten donkeys (<i>‘asarah ḥamorim</i>) loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. |

Unsurprisingly, this is picked up in later Syriac sources. In PsB, Joseph sends his father ten suits of clothing. Later Benjamin dresses Jacob in these clothes.¹⁷⁷ In one of the dialogue poems Joseph tells Benjamin to take his clothes to Jacob and inform him that he is alive.¹⁷⁸ According to Balai, Joseph orders his brothers, saying: “A tunic sprinkled with blood / you brought to him from the pasture land. / Magnificent garments from Egypt / you will present to him instead of the tunic”.¹⁷⁹

As for the delivery of the news, according to PsB, when the brothers give Jacob the good news about Joseph, Benjamin shows his father the royal garments in which Joseph has dressed him.¹⁸⁰ In Balai’s account the brothers first use the garments to break the good news to Jacob. They wear their fancy new attire to arouse his curiosity, and when he inquires where they obtained garments fit for kings, they tell him the good news concerning Joseph. Initially, Jacob does not believe them, but he is gradually convinced by the wagons and the memory of the dreams. What fully persuades him, however, is seeing the garments which Benjamin shows him:

¹⁷⁷ Link, *Geschichte*, 24.

¹⁷⁸ Brock, *Soghyatha*, 16.

¹⁷⁹ Balai, 274. In Balai, 278, Joseph sends his father three hundred pieces of silver.

¹⁸⁰ Link, *Geschichte*, 24.

Afterwards they brought before him / the three hundred pieces of silver that he [=Joseph] had sent him, / and the five sets of garments / that his brother Benjamin gave him [=Jacob],¹⁸¹ / and then Jacob believed and was convinced / that Joseph the son of Rachel is alive. / His spirit which had suffered came to rest / and he gave thanks and glorified God. / The old man rose as a mighty one / the ancient one as a youth.¹⁸²

By having the garments convince Jacob that Joseph is alive, these Syriac sources create an attractive symmetry with the beginning of the story, where a garment had played a central part in the attempt to persuade Jacob that his son was dead. The Quran then sharpens this symmetry in three ways: it refers to one garment only and does not mention wagons, it identifies the garment as Joseph's, and it employs the same word for it (*qamīṣ*) as that which describes the garment used in the attempt to deceive Jacob at the beginning of the story (Q 12:18).¹⁸³ Scholars have noted the enhanced symmetry in the Quranic version, but have not been aware that in this the Quran develops a trend already found in the Syriac tradition.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Following Bedjan's text. In a note he considers an emendation which would result in: "that his brother [=Joseph] gave Benjamin". The Peshitta's reading of Genesis 45:23, however, makes such an emendation unnecessary.

¹⁸² Balai, 287-91. The second homily of PsN ends abruptly before we are told what exactly convinced Jacob.

¹⁸³ Both Genesis and the Syriac texts use different words in the two instances. The word *qamīṣ*, which does not occur in the Quran outside Q 12, is used also for the garment of Joseph which is torn by his master's wife from behind and eventually proves his innocence (Q 12:25-28). In this way the Quran leads its audience to compare the roles that the three garments play in the story. A discussion of the clothing motif in Q 12 is found in Afsar, "Plot motifs", 179-85.

¹⁸⁴ For the chiasmic structure of Q 12 generally, see M. Mir, "The Qur'ānic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes, and Characters", *The Muslim World* 76 (1986): 1-3; J. Hämeen-Anttila, "We Will Tell You the Best of Stories': A Study on Surah XII", *Studia Orientalia* 67 (1991): 26-28; and especially Cuypers, "Structures rhétoriques", 134-95. For the structural importance of the garment, see Afsar, "Plot motifs", 185. Another example of enhanced chiasm in the Syriac texts and the Quran, the reconciliation scene between Joseph and Potiphar's wife, was noted above.

7.2.17. The brothers beg Jacob's forgiveness

In Genesis, after Jacob is convinced that Joseph is alive he sets out for Egypt. The brothers do not confess their evil deeds, nor do they beg his forgiveness. In Q 12, on the other hand, one reads:

(97) They said: "Our father, ask forgiveness of our crimes for us; for certainly we have been sinful". (98) He said: "Assuredly I will ask my Lord to forgive you; He is the All-forgiving, the All-compassionate".

A similar scene is found in Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis* 40.4,¹⁸⁵ but an even closer exchange is narrated by Balai. The brothers report that Joseph has forgiven them and ask that his father follow his example. Jacob agrees and adds:

But I also call my God / not to judge you according to what you did. / Let him not avenge through you / the afflictions that my old age endured.¹⁸⁶

The motivation for this scene might be Genesis 50:15-17, where after Jacob's death the brothers beg Joseph's forgiveness, saying: "Your father gave this instruction before he died: 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you'".

Jacob's instruction is not mentioned previously in the Biblical text. As a matter of fact, the Bible never tells us that Jacob ever learned the true circumstances of Joseph's descent to Egypt. It is possible that the brothers are envisaged as having invented this

¹⁸⁵ Ed. Tonneau, 108-109; ET in Mathews and Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 197. There Jacob asks the brothers how Joseph ended up in Egypt. Judah responds by admitting their sin while adding mitigating explanations and begging forgiveness, which Jacob then grants.

¹⁸⁶ Balai, 295-96.

instruction in order to save themselves.¹⁸⁷ Alternatively, if they are to be believed, one needs to assume that Jacob and his children had had such a discussion without it being mentioned in Genesis. The exchange found in Balai and the Quran might be an attempt to supply the background for such a scene.¹⁸⁸ Be that as it may, a Quranic departure from the Biblical text in the form of dialogue yet again has a precedent in the Syriac tradition.

7.2.18. Summary

In sum, we have identified seven features common to the Quran and Syriac sources which are not found in Jewish texts.¹⁸⁹ In seven instances we have seen features common to the Quran and Syriac sources that have counterparts in Jewish texts, but with the Syriac parallels being closer than the the Jewish ones.¹⁹⁰ The other three examples were either attested only in Greek sources or were not all that striking. Nonetheless, they might join the other stronger parallels.

7.3. Literary form

Taken together, two features of Q 12 suggest an affinity with the Syriac poems: the presentation of the Biblical material in a continuous narrative, and the repeated use of dialogue. Whereas rabbinic midrash usually presents its exegesis in the form of discrete comments on the Biblical verses, the Syriac poems and Q 12 both offer an uninterrupted retelling of the story (the former in verse, the latter in rhymed prose). This comparison can only be taken so far, and it touches upon questions of genre that lie beyond the scope

¹⁸⁷ This is the approach of several rabbinic sources as well as medieval Jewish exegetes; see N. Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit (Genesis)* (Jerusalem, 1976), 563-66.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 220; Busse, *Islam, Judaism, and Christianity*, 90. Note that in the Bible the brothers refer to the instruction being given shortly before Jacob's death, whereas the scenes in Balai and the Quran take place immediately after Jacob receives the news that Joseph is alive. See also Balai, 325-26 and 333-34.

¹⁸⁹ See 7.2.3, 7.2.4, 7.2.5, 7.2.9, 7.2.11, 7.2.16, and 7.2.17.

¹⁹⁰ See 7.2.1, 7.2.2, 7.2.6, 7.2.8, 7.2.13, 7.2.14, and 7.2.15.

of the present study. I will therefore limit my observations here to the second feature, the use of dialogue.

Dialogue is an important stylistic feature of the Quran. Pre-Islamic poetry, on the other hand, makes little use of this literary device.¹⁹¹ In this the Quran is akin not only to the Bible, as Mustansir Mir points out,¹⁹² but perhaps more so to later religious poetry and homiletic literature which employ dialogue quite often.¹⁹³ Although the use of dialogue as a literary device is, of course, not limited to the Syriac tradition, my argument is based on the similarity of specific extra-Biblical dialogues in the Quran and the Syriac poems.

As Mir notes, in Q 12 dialogue serves “almost as an organizing principle”.¹⁹⁴ A comparison of the Biblical and Quranic accounts demonstrates that the Quran expands simple Biblical dialogues into more elaborate ones and even adds dialogue to episodes where the Bible had none. Often a similar dialogue is found in the Syriac sources. Since the distinction between motifs and literary form is often artificial, several cases have already been noted in passing above.¹⁹⁵ Two additional examples should suffice.

7.3.1. The dialogue with the steward

The first example is an expansion of a Biblical dialogue. When Joseph’s steward accuses the brothers of stealing the cup we find the following in Genesis 44:4-10:

¹⁹¹ For an overview of dialogue in pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry, see R. C. McKinney, *The Case of Rhyme versus Reason: Ibn al-Rūmī and his Poetics in Context* (Leiden, 2004), 313-15.

¹⁹² See M. Mir, “Dialogue in the Qur’an”, *Religion and Literature* 24 (1992): 1-22 and *id.*, “Dialogues”, *EQ*, 1:534.

¹⁹³ For dialogue as a characteristic feature of fourth to sixth-century poetry and prose homilies in Syriac and Greek, see S. Brock, “From Ephrem to Romanos”, *Studia Patristica* 20 (1989): 141-43. Whereas Brock is inclined to accept the possibility of Syriac influence on the Greek sources, Cameron is hesitant; A. Cameron, “Disputations, Polemical Literature and the Formation of Opinion in the Early Byzantine Period”, in G. J. Reinink and H. L. J. Vanstiphout (eds.), *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East* (Louvain, 1991), 91-108. For dialogue in early *piyyutim* and midrash, see E. Hachohen, “Studies in the Dialogue-Format of Early Eretz-Israel *Piyyutim* and their Sources, in Light of Purim Expansion-*Piyyutim*”, *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 20 (2006): 131-62 (in Hebrew).

¹⁹⁴ Mir, “Dialogues”, 532. See also Hämeen-Anttila, ““We will tell you the best of stories””, 19-21.

¹⁹⁵ See sections 7.2.8, 7.2.9, and 7.2.17.

(4) When they had gone only a short distance from the city, Joseph said to his steward: “Go, follow after the men; and when you overtake them, say to them: ‘Why have you returned evil for good? (5) Is it not from this that my lord drinks? Does he not indeed use it for divination? You have done wrong in doing this’”.

(6) When he overtook them, he repeated these words to them.

(7) They said to him: “Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing! (8) Look, the money that we found at the top of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan; why then would we steal silver or gold from your lord’s house? (9) Should it be found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover, the rest of us will become my lord’s slaves”.

(10) He said: “Even so; in accordance with your words, let it be: he with whom it is found shall become my slave, but the rest of you shall go free”.

Thus the steward speaks twice, the brothers only once. In Q 12:70-75, on the other hand, the dialogue is broken down so that each side speaks three times:

(70) [...] Then a herald proclaimed: “O, [people of] the caravan, you are indeed thieves!”

(71) They said, turning to them: “What is it that you are missing?”

(72) They said: “We are missing the king’s goblet. Whoever brings it shall receive a beast’s¹⁹⁶ load; that I guarantee”.

(73) “By God”, they said, “you know well that we neither came to work corruption in the land nor are we thieves”.

(74) They said: “And what shall be its recompense if you are lying?”

(75) They said: “This shall be its recompense -- in whoever’s saddlebag the goblet is found, he shall be its recompense”.¹⁹⁷ So We recompense the evildoers.

¹⁹⁶ For the translation “beast” rather than “camel”, see the discussion below regarding the word *ba ‘īr*.

A comparison of these verses to their Biblical counterparts has led one scholar to comment on the eloquence of the Quranic dialogue and its superiority to its Biblical counterpart.¹⁹⁸ Again there is a Syriac precedent. A similar, though not identical, developed dialogue is found in PsN:

[...] he [i.e. the steward] shouted, saying: “In return for good you have repaid evil / ... you stole the cup by which the king divines...”

The men answered: “Listen, O steward, and we shall say before you / that we trust God that we shall not be ashamed / ... Approach and search as you please and behold you will learn / and you will not find the cup by us as you said”. /

He said to them: “And if I do find it what shall happen?” /

They all said: “We shall all be slaves to your lord”. /

And again they said to him: “What shall happen to you if you do not find [it]?” /

[He replied:] “...and as for me stone me and I shall die here. / Come let you and I observe and see the truth”.¹⁹⁹

Here too both sides speak three times. Not only do PsN and the Quran add more stages to the dialogue,²⁰⁰ they also include, as we have seen, a question to the brothers regarding the suitable punishment for the thief. Interestingly, the brothers’ reply in both texts contradicts the Bible; whereas in Genesis the brothers suggest death for the thief and

¹⁹⁷ Though the language is somewhat vague, it seems that the exegetes are correct in understanding the brothers’ answer as referring to slavery. Joseph and the Egyptians do not reject the proposed punishment and Benjamin is indeed detained by Joseph, presumably as a slave (Q 12:76-79).

¹⁹⁸ Hämeen-Anttila, “We will tell you the best of stories”, 20 (“This is a fine piece of dialogue, perhaps the best and most lively in the Qur’ān: all lines depend heavily on the previous ones and bring the action forward...”), In note 62 he adds that the dialogue in the Bible is “clearly inferior”.

¹⁹⁹ PsN, 589-90. I translate only enough of each response to demonstrate that the simple Biblical dialogue has been elaborated into a multi-stage one.

²⁰⁰ The same is true to a lesser degree of Balai, 216-19, where the steward and Judah (representing the brothers) both speak twice.

slavery for the rest, in PsN and the Quran it is slavery (for all, or only for the thief, respectively).²⁰¹

7.3.2. Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers

When Joseph finally reveals his true identity, we read the following in Genesis 45:

(3) Joseph said to his brothers: “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. (4) Then Joseph said to his brothers: “Come closer to me”. And they came closer. He said: “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. (5) And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life... (9) Hurry and go up to my father and say to him: ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay...’ (12) And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. (13) You must tell my father how greatly I am honoured in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here”. (14) Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. (15) And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

The Bible emphasizes here that initially the brothers were so overcome by emotion that they could not utter a word. What follows is a monologue of Joseph’s. When the brothers finally do speak we are not told what they said.

In Q 12, however, there is a dialogue:

(89) He said: “Do you know what you did to Joseph and his brother when you were ignorant?”

²⁰¹ See the discussion above (section 7.2.14).

(90) They said: “Are you indeed Joseph?” He said: “I am Joseph and this is my brother. God has indeed been gracious to us. Whoever fears [God] and endures – Surely God does not allow the reward of the good-doers to go to waste”.

(91) They said: “By God, indeed God has preferred you over us and we have certainly been sinful (*la-khāṭi'īna*)”.

(92) He said: “No reproach will be on you today (*lā tathrība 'alaykumu l-yawma*).²⁰² God will forgive you (*yaghfiru llāhu lakum*). He is the most merciful of the merciful.

(93) Go with this shirt of mine and cast it on my father’s face, and he shall recover his sight; then bring me your family all together”.

The addition of such a dialogue is perhaps natural in a dramatic oral recasting of a story. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that a similar dialogue is found in Balai’s ninth homily.²⁰³ There, after Joseph tells them who he is, the brothers are too ashamed and fearful to look him in the face. At first they are not sure that he is indeed Joseph, but in time they are convinced by his profuse weeping. Joseph addresses them again, asking about his father and reassuring his brothers that all that happened was planned by God. Seeing that they are still not at ease, Joseph proceeds to remind Rueben and Judah of their kindness towards him and urges the brothers to go and deliver the good news to Jacob. Then the brothers prostrate themselves before Joseph and finally speak, weeping and begging mercy. Their plea is too long to be quoted in its entirety. A few lines should suffice:

²⁰² The reciters and exegetes debate whether *al-yawma* concludes the preceding sentence or opens the following one; al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 4:336.

²⁰³ Balai, 267-75.

Have pity on us, O member of ours (*haddāman*),²⁰⁴ / and do not abuse the family of your father. / Do not reproach us for having sinned (*da-ḥṭaynan lā te'dol lan*), / and do not call us audacious, / for even if you keep silent concerning us, / your chastising will take vengeance on us. / Indeed you have displayed your kindness, / and yet we are still fearful. / Our crime that we have committed is not small, / and therefore its pain pierces us.²⁰⁵

Joseph responds, telling them not to be frightened (*lā tetrahbun*). He explains that he would do nothing to cause distress to Jacob and adds, paralleling Q 12:93:

A tunic sprinkled with blood / you brought to him from the pasture land. / Magnificent garments from Egypt / you will present to him instead of the tunic.²⁰⁶

Like Q 12:92 and in contrast to Genesis, Balai has Joseph stress that God will forgive the brothers:

Justice that was not obeyed / it is she that will have compassion upon those that did not obey her.²⁰⁷

Several factors might have contributed to the formation of such dialogues: an inference from Joseph's words in Genesis 45:5 ("And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves"), a retrojection of a similar dialogue at a later stage in the story after Jacob dies (Genesis 50:15-21), or a general disposition for dramatic dialogue. Be that as it may, Syriac literature again supplies us with an antecedent for a phenomenon found in the Quran.

²⁰⁴ For *haddāmā* as equivalent to brother, see Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon*, 311 (citing a line from Ephrem's *Hymns against Julian*).

²⁰⁵ Balai, 271-72.

²⁰⁶ Balai, 274.

²⁰⁷ Balai, 274. Justice is personified here as one of God's aspects, equivalent to the Jewish *middat ha-din*.

7.4. Lexical links

I proceed now to the thorny issue of vocabulary. Q 12 displays linguistic similarities to the Syriac sources on several levels; it includes cognates of words found in the Syriac texts, Syriac loanwords, and expressions that seem to have a Syriac substratum. It should be stressed, however, that these correspondences are often the natural result of conveying the same story in two closely related Semitic languages. Therefore they cannot serve as the sole basis for an argument of literary dependence.

7.4.1. Cognates and shared vocabulary

Cognates shared with Syriac are found throughout Q 12, but since many of them exist in other forms of Aramaic (and at times in Hebrew) as well, and since most of them are quite common in Arabic, they are not of enormous significance for my argument.²⁰⁸ At the most they might suggest an Aramaic/Syriac background rather than a Hebrew one. The following are some of the more interesting examples: *al-sayyāra*, “[a group of] travelers”, (Q 12:10, 19),²⁰⁹ *a šīru*, “pressing [wine]”, (Q 12:36),²¹⁰ *al-ṭayr*, “birds”, (Q

²⁰⁸ Compare, for example, Joseph’s account of his dream in the Quran and PsN. In Q 12:4 Joseph reports that he saw “*aḥada ‘ashara kawkaban wa-l-shamsa wa-l-qamara ra’aytuhum lī sājidīna*”. In PsN, 522 (which is no more than a paraphrase of the Peshitta to Genesis 37:9) he sees “*d-šēmšā w-sahrā w-kawkbē ḥda ‘sar sāgdin quḍmay*” (*quḍmay* replaces the *li* of the Peshitta for the sake of the meter). Here the Quran and PsN present what are virtually two versions of the same sentence. But the same is true of the Hebrew of Genesis 37:9. The only word which might suggest a specifically Syriac or Aramaic background is *sājidīn/sāgdin* replacing the Hebrew *mištaḥawīm* (Targum Onqelos also uses *sāgdin* here). The form of the word is also of interest since grammar would require *sājida* to describe several irrational or inanimate objects (see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 13:11). While obviously motivated by the rhyme, this might also reflect the Syriac or Aramaic form.

²⁰⁹ Whereas Biblical Hebrew has no cognate for *al-sayyāra*, various dialects of Aramaic do; see references in E. M. Cook, *A Glossary of Targum Onkelos: According to Alexander Sperber’s Edition* (Leiden, 2008), 282. Genesis 37:25 uses another noun here, but Targum Onqelos, the Peshitta, PsB (Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 21) and Balai, 98, all have *šyārtā* (“caravan”). The word *sayyāra* occurs once more in Q 5:96, where the meaning seems to be “travelers” generally with no connotation of a group.

²¹⁰ The root ʿ-ṣ-r does not denote “pressing” in Hebrew, but does so in various dialects of Aramaic (Cook, *Glossary*, 216) as well as Classical Ethiopic (W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge’ez [Classical Ethiopic]* [Wiesbaden, 1987], 75). Genesis 40:11 employs a different verb here (*wa-eshat*), but the Jewish Targums, the Samaritan Targum, the Peshitta and later Syriac works (PsB [Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 31]; PsN, 545; Balai, 108) all have *‘esrēt*. The verb appears only once more in Q 12:49 (*ya šīrūna*), though there are

12:36 and 41),²¹¹ *simān*, “fat”, (Q 12:43, 46),²¹² and *namīru*,²¹³ “we shall bring food” (only in Q 12:65).²¹⁴

Among words which have no equivalent in the Biblical text, we note *yajtabīka*, “will choose”, (Q 12:6);²¹⁵ *dhi’b*, “a wolf”, (Q 12:13, 14 and 17).²¹⁶

7.4.2. Possible loanwords

Perhaps more relevant are words which have been identified as borrowings from Aramaic or Syriac. Generally, words of Aramaic/Syriac origin form the largest group of loanwords in the Quran and Q 12 is no exception.²¹⁷ However, many of these words occur frequently in the Quran and are probably pre-Islamic borrowings. Here I would like to focus on three words in Q 12 which may suggest an Aramaic/Syriac literary background.

several indications that this refers not to pressing fruit and extracting liquids, but rather to deliverance or rain; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 13:194-98; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 18:151; al-Khaṭīb, *Mu’jam al-qirā’āt*, 4:280-82; Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:2061.

²¹¹ Compare *tayrā* in PsN, 546, as opposed to the Hebrew text (*’op*), Targums (*’opa*), and Peshitta (*ḥaywat kenpā* and *pārāhtā*) to Genesis 40:17 and 19, which employ other words.

²¹² Although the root *š-m-n* exists in Hebrew and Jewish (Palestinian and Babylonian) Aramaic, the Masora and the Targums employ other words to describe the first group of cows in Pharaoh’s dream. The Quranic *simān* is reminiscent of the form *šamminān/šamminātā* found in the Peshitta (Genesis 41:2, 4, 18, 20) and later Syriac works (PsB [Weinberg, *Geschichte*, 32-33]; PsN, 546-49; Balai, 120 and 126-27; Narsai, ed. Mingana, 2:280-81), but also in some manuscripts of the Samaritan Targum (see A. Tal, *The Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch: A Critical Edition* [Tel-Aviv, 1980], 166-71). The only other Quranic occurrence of this adjective, *samīn* in Q 51:26, also seems to reflect a Syriac background; compare Genesis 18:7 where the Hebrew and most Targums refer to a tender and good calf, whereas the Peshitta has a fat and good calf. However, the late Targum Pseudo-Jonathan has a tender and fat calf, so the argument is not conclusive.

²¹³ Variant readings of this verb are *tamīru* in the second person and *numīru* in the fourth form; al-Khaṭīb, *Mu’jam al-qirā’āt*, 4:300-301.

²¹⁴ The root *m-w-r* denotes the supplying of food and provisions in Syriac and Samaritan Aramaic (A. Tal, *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic* [Leiden, 2000], 2:457), but not in Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic. Words from this root render the derivatives of Hebrew *š-b-r* throughout Genesis 41-44 in the Peshitta (and the Samaritan Targum) as well as in Ephrem’s *Commentary on Genesis* 36.2-3 (ed. Tonneau, 101) and Balai, 215.

²¹⁵ Compare with Syriac *gbā*; PsN, 558.

²¹⁶ Compare with the occurrences of Syriac *dēbē* (“wolves”) noted above in our discussion of this theme (section 2.3).

²¹⁷ See *FV passim*. For a statistical breakdown of the loanwords documented in *FV*, see M. R. Zammit, *A Comparative Lexical Study of Qur’ānic Arabic* (Leiden, 2002), 57-60. It should be noted that Q 12 includes also a few words which have been identified as Ethiopic loanwords (*ṣuwā’*, *burhān*, *fāṭir*, *qamīṣ*, none of which are mentioned in the South Arabian dictionaries) and as a result Carter assumes that the Quranic Joseph story is probably derived from an Ethiopian source; M. Carter, “Foreign vocabulary”, in A. Rippin (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’ān* (Malden, 2006), 131 and 135. Pre-Islamic Ethiopic traditions concerning Joseph, insofar as they exist apart for the Bible, have, as far as I know, yet to be studied in this context.

They have been noted in the literature as loanwords, but it has not been pointed out that they occur in the Syriac texts on Joseph as well. They include the word for pit, *jubb*, the word for the animals which the brothers rode, *ba ʿīr*, and the word for measure, *kayl*.

Jubb occurs only twice in the Quran and only in the Joseph story (Q 12:10 and 15). It does not have a plausible Arabic etymology and is most likely a loan from Aramaic/Syriac *gubbā*,²¹⁸ used in the Jewish Targums, Samaritan Targum, Peshitta to Genesis 37, and throughout the Syriac texts on Joseph.²¹⁹

Ba ʿīr occurs only twice in the Quran and again only in the Joseph story (Q 12:65 and 72). The use of Hebrew and Aramaic/Syriac words from the same root, both meaning beasts of burden, in the Joseph story, might suggest that the Quranic word is a loanword, the meaning of which is perhaps not limited to camels as it usually is in Arabic.²²⁰ Although Hebrew *be ʿīr* appears in the Biblical text (and in the Targums) it does so only once (Genesis 45:17). All seven other references to the brothers' riding animals are to donkeys. In the Syriac works, however, donkeys are not mentioned at all and only the word *b ʿirā* is used.²²¹ This makes the connection with the Syriac sources more probable.

Another possible loanword is *kayl*, “measure”, from Syriac *kaylā*,²²² found in Balai.²²³ It occurs ten times in the Quran, six of them in Q 12.²²⁴ Interestingly, the other

²¹⁸ *FV*, 98-99. See, however, Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Geʿez*, 176.

²¹⁹ *Gubbā* is attested in several Aramaic dialects; Cook, *Glossary*, 46.

²²⁰ See R. Dvořák, “Ueber die Fremdwörter im Korān”, *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-historischen Classe der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 109 (1885): 521-25 (refers only to the Hebrew); *FV*, 82 (adds Syriac). Muslim tradition was also aware that the word might have a different meaning in the Quran; Mujāhid glosses it with “donkey” (*ḥimār*), claiming that this is a dialectal usage of the word; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 13:234 and 252-53.

²²¹ See Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis 37.4* (ed. Tonneau, 103); PsB (Link, *Geschichte*, 17-19, 23); Balai, 197, 224, 278, and 284 (where *ḥaywātā* is used); PsN, 588 (Joseph tells his steward: “Fill their loads according to the strength of their beasts of burden”). In the Peshitta the word *b ʿirā* replaces the donkeys in Genesis 43:24 and (according to one manuscript) 44:3, in addition to its use in Genesis 45:17. For *b ʿirā* in various Aramaic dialects, see Cook, *Glossary*, 37.

²²² *FV*, 252, citing S. Fraenkel, *Die Aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen* (Leiden, 1886), 204. Fraenkel adduces examples of early use of the word in Arabic poetry, and notes that it is seldom used in Jewish Aramaic (cf. M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods* [Ramat-Gan, 2002], 575). For the apparently rare *kayil* in one Hebrew *piyyut* of Eleazar ha-Qalir, see E. Ben Yehuda, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew* (Jerusalem, 1948-59), 5:2342.

²²³ See, Balai, 138 and 155.

Quranic occurrences of this word concern the commandment to weigh and measure fairly, and may also be related to the Syriac (or Aramaic) renditions of Biblical verses.²²⁵

My argument, however, is not dependent upon these words being indeed directly borrowed from Syriac. They could have originated from another Aramaic dialect and might have been transmitted via an intermediate language.²²⁶ It is more important to recognize that the Syriac sources and the Quran relate the Joseph story using similar vocabulary. This in itself is not conclusive, but could support other stronger evidence such as the motifs discussed above.

7.4.3. Arabic phrases reflecting a Syriac substratum

Also worthy of mention are two Arabic phrases which might reflect phrases used in the Syriac sources. In the Quran the brothers refer to themselves twice as a *'uṣba*, *i.e.*, a band or group of men. First they complain about their father's preference for Joseph: "When they [=the brothers] said: 'Indeed Joseph and his brother are more beloved of our father than we are, although we are a band (*'uṣba*). Indeed our father is in manifest error'" (Q 12:8).²²⁷ Then they use this fact to reassure Jacob that Joseph will come to no harm under their guard: "They said: 'If wolves eat him although we are a band (*'uṣba*), we are indeed lost'" (Q 12:14).²²⁸

²²⁴ Q 12:59, 60, 63, 65 (twice) and 88. To this should be added the verb *naktal* in Q 12:63.

²²⁵ Compare Q 6:152; 7:85; 17:35; and 26:181 with the Peshitta to Leviticus 19:36 and Deuteronomy 25:14-15.

²²⁶ Note, for example, the existence of *bə'ar* ("ox, bull, horned cattle") and *gəbb* in classical Ethiopic as well as *b'r* and a derivative of the root *k-y-l* meaning "measurement" in Old South Arabian; see Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez*, 84 and 176; J. C. Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic: Sabaean Dialect* (Chico, 1982), 51 and 245.

²²⁷ Their point seems to be that as a band they are more beneficial to Jacob than Joseph and Benjamin. Alternatively, this utterance might be of a more menacing nature: *i.e.*, "Jacob prefers Joseph and his brother over us even though we are significant and could take action against him"; see al-Ṭī, *Majma' al-bayān*, 13:17.

²²⁸ In both cases the brothers seem to be emphasizing either their number or their strength. See also Q 28:176 where it is said of Qārūn: "[...] We had given him treasures such that their keys were too heavy a burden for a band of strong men (*la-tanū'u bi-l-'uṣbati ūlī l-quwwati*)...". The word appears also in Q 24:11, though there the context does not necessitate an emphasis on strength.

There is no such description in the Biblical text; neither have I found an exact equivalent in rabbinic sources.²²⁹ In the Syriac tradition, on the other hand, it is quite common for texts to refer to the brothers as a *guddā*, that is, a band, company, troop.²³⁰ Interestingly, one of the Arabic words used by the tenth-century lexicographer Bar Bahlūl to gloss Syriac *guddā* is *‘uṣba*.²³¹ Likewise, in the Quran and PsN, Joseph is thrown to the bottom of the pit, *ghayābat al-jubb* in Arabic (Q 12:15) and *eštēh d-gubbā* in Syriac.²³² In the Bible only the pit is mentioned.

These last examples might seem trivial, but I believe that it can be shown in both cases that the Syriac usage reflects an interpretive conflation of the Joseph story with other Biblical texts. Since we have already dealt with *ghayābat al-jubb* and Daniel 6:25 above, let us now examine *guddā*. Although it is a common word, I would like to suggest that the use of this Syriac term for Joseph’s brothers derives from a reading of Genesis 49:23 unique to the Peshitta. Genesis 49 contains Jacob’s so called blessings of his children. The language of these blessings tends to be archaic and difficult, and the verses dedicated to Joseph (Genesis 49:22-26) are no exception. Let us compare the Masora and the Peshitta for v. 23 :

| Peshitta | Masora |
|---|---|
| ܪܳܘܳܒܳܗܳܢ ܳܘܳܫܳܒܳܐ ܳܘܳܫܳܘܳܪܳܐܳܝܳܐ ܳܘܳܫܳܘܳܠܳܡܳܐ ܳܘܳܫܳܘܳܠܳܡܳܐ ܳܘܳܫܳܘܳܠܳܡܳܐ ܳܘܳܫܳܘܳܠܳܡܳܐ | וַיְמַרְרֵהוּ וַרְבּוּ וַיִּשְׁטַמְּהוּ בְעֵלְיָ הַצִּיָּים |

²²⁹ The closest parallels I found are *Genesis Rabba* 98.18 (*ba’ale meḥišato*) and Targum Onqelos to Genesis 49:23 (*ba’ale palguteh*, the meaning of which is far from clear). In any case, neither source refers to the brothers as a band separate from Joseph. Moreover, this description did not make its way into the retelling of the story itself.

²³⁰ See PsN, 524 and 585. Balai uses both *guddā* (see, e.g., 12, 15, 18, 24, 45, 49, 54, 157, 160, 167, 168, 170, 173, 182, 193, 223, 290, and 305) and its synonym *si’ tā* (see, e.g., 6, 8, 23, 24, 33, 50, 166, 186, 205, 206, 213, 215, 223, 232, 241, 265, 284, and 285) throughout. Another term used is *kenšā*; PsN, 572, 578, 583, and 602. See also Romanos’ *De Joseph* 5 and 27 (Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos*, 208 and 230), where *choros* is used.

²³¹ Duval, *Lexicon Syriacum auctore Hassano Bar Bahlule*, 1:460. The root ‘-š-b appears also in the Syriac of PsN, 529, describing the love between brothers (*ḥubbā ‘šibā d-baynāt aḥē*), but *ṣhibā* might be a better reading there.

²³² PsN, 526.

The Hebrew text of this verse referring to Joseph is not entirely clear, though it is often translated along the lines of: “The archers (*ba’ale hiššim*) fiercely attacked him; they shot at him and pressed him hard”. Instead of “archers” (literally: “masters of arrows”), the Peshitta reads “masters of troops (*māray guddē*)”, which is glossed in Ephrem’s *Commentary on Genesis* 42.13 as “the heads of the tribes”.²³³ The origin of this Peshitta reading is debated. Weitzman suggests that *guddē* (ܩܘܕܕܐ) is an ancient corruption of the Syriac for arrows, *gērē* (ܩܪܐ). Maori, on the other hand, takes *guddē* to mean “partitions” (based on a different meaning of the word and assuming that the translator understood *hiššim* as *mehiṣōt*).²³⁴ Alternatively, the Peshitta might have in mind verses where the root *h-ṣ-ṣ* seems to denote military divisions.²³⁵ It is also possible that the Peshitta was aware of a Targum tradition similar to that of Onqelos (*ba’ale palguteh*) or the Samaritan (*ms’ny plgym*) and that it understood *palguta/plg* as a faction or division of men.

In any case, it appears likely that this occurrence of *guddā* (in the pl.) in a verse which describes Joseph’s enemies, traditionally understood as his brothers, caused later Syriac authors to refer to them as a *guddā*. It is noteworthy that this is the only occurrence of *guddā* in the Peshitta to Genesis. That the Quran utilizes similar terminology is suggestive.

7.5. The typological function of the story

Many Quranic stories concerning Biblical figures serve a double purpose. On the one hand, they are meant to encourage Muhammad and let him know that final triumph

²³³ Ed. Tonneau, 116; ET in Mathews and Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works*, 207.

²³⁴ See Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament*, 137.

²³⁵ For Proverbs 30:27, see D.W. Thomas, “Notes on Some Passages in the Book of Proverbs”, *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 276-77. More debated is Judges 5:11; see C. F. Burney, *The Book of Judges with Introduction and Notes* (London, 1918), 126, and M. L. Chaney, *ḤDL-II and the Song of Deborah: Textual, Philological, and Sociological Studies in Judges 5, with Special Reference to the Verbal Occurrences of ḤDL in Biblical Hebrew* (Harvard University dissertation, 1976), 169-73.

will be his. On the other hand, his people are to take warning from the fate of earlier unbelievers. On yet another level, these stories serve to establish Muhammad as heir to the Biblical tradition.²³⁶

That the story of Joseph was told with Muhammad and his enemies in mind is evident not only in the explicit comments which follow the story at the very end of the Sura, but also in the way the parallel to Muhammad's experiences affects the presentation.

After Q 12 completes the story of Joseph we read:

(109) We did not send before you other than men We revealed to from the people of the towns. Have they not traveled in the land and beheld how the fate of those before them was? Indeed the abode of the hereafter is better for those who fear [God]. Will you not then understand? (110) Till, when the messengers despaired and thought that they had been lied to (*kudhibū*),²³⁷ Our help came to them and whoever We willed was delivered (*nujjiya*).²³⁸ Our punishment will not be averted from the evil-doing people. (111) Indeed in their narrative (*qaṣaṣihim*)²³⁹ there is a lesson for those possessed of minds. It is not an invented story, but rather a confirmation of what was before it, an elaboration of everything, guidance and mercy to people who believe.

²³⁶ See Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān*, 3-16.

²³⁷ The verse seems to imply that the messengers doubted the truth of the revelations they received. Most exegetes were not willing to accept this, and either took the people rather than the messengers as the subject of "thought", or vocalized the word translated as "had been lied to" (*kudhibū*) differently so that it meant something else. Especially common is the reading *kudhdhibū*, "were counted liars"; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 13:382-99; and al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 4:355-58.

²³⁸ In other readings this verb is read as the first person plural of the imperfect of the second or fourth form (*nunajjī* or *nunjī*). According to these readings the verse should be rendered: "and whomever We will We deliver"; al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 4:358-63 (with yet other readings).

²³⁹ A variant reading is *qiṣaṣihim*, the plural of *qiṣṣa*; al-Khaṭīb, *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, 4:364-65.

That these verses refer specifically to the Joseph story²⁴⁰ is suggested both by their occurrence immediately after it and by the phrasing v. 111 shares with vv. 3 and 7 which introduce the Joseph narrative (“We shall relate to you the best of narratives [*aḥsana al-qaṣaṣi*]...” and “Indeed in Joseph and his brothers there are signs for those who inquire”).²⁴¹

The most striking example of the Joseph story being formulated in light of Muhammad’s experiences is the theological speech upon which Joseph embarks before interpreting his fellow inmates’ dreams, and which, according to some scholars, is the thematic and structural central point of the Sura.²⁴² Joseph says as follows:

(37) [...] I have forsaken the creed of a people who believe not in God and who deny the Hereafter, (38) and have followed the creed of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is not fitting for us to associate anything with God. This is of God’s bounty to us and to mankind, but most men do not give thanks. (39) O fellow prisoners! Are diverse lords better or God, the one, the almighty? (40) What you worship apart from Him are nothing but names you have named, you and your fathers. God has not sent down any authority for them. Judgment belongs only to God. He has commanded that you should worship naught but Him. That is the right religion, but most men do not know.

Unparalleled in Genesis, not relevant to the prisoners’ question,²⁴³ and odd coming from Joseph who never adhered to another religion,²⁴⁴ these words seem very

²⁴⁰ This is held by many exegetes, though some believe the verses refer generally to the stories of earlier prophets; see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-kabīr*, 18:227-28.

²⁴¹ These similarities are noted in A. Neuwirth, “Zur Struktur der Yūsuf-Sure”, in W. Diem and S. Wild (eds.), *Studien aus Arabistik und Semitistik* (Wiesbaden, 1980), 139. According to a non-canonical variant of v. 7 which reads “lesson” (*ibra*) instead of “signs” (*āyāt*), the wording is even closer to that of v. 111; see al-Khaṭīb, *Mu’jam al-qirā’āt*, 4:183.

²⁴² See Neuwirth, “Zur Struktur”, 141; Hämeen-Anttila, “We Will Tell You the Best of Stories”, 27-28; Cuypers, “Structures rhétoriques”, 181-85.

²⁴³ The exegetes are troubled by Joseph’s digression. Thus al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 13:160-61, cites Ibn Jurayj, according to whom Joseph deliberately ignored the dreams, presumably in an attempt to avoid

fitting for Muhammad.²⁴⁵ Indeed several elements of this speech find parallels in other verses addressed to Muhammad's contemporaries.²⁴⁶

Classical exegetes and Western scholars have noted the parallels between the Prophet's tribulations and those of Joseph.²⁴⁷ They understood Joseph as an intended role model for Muhammad and have attempted to flesh out the comparison in more detail.²⁴⁸ What is less often noted is that this kind of use of the story is well known from the Christian typological reading, where Joseph stands for Christ while the brothers stand for the Jews. This was a common approach among Christian authors,²⁴⁹ including PsN, Balai and Narsai, who explicitly note the typological character of the story²⁵⁰ and supply lists of

giving one of them the bad news of his impending death. For other explanations, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 18:136.

²⁴⁴ Exegetes suggest that the word translated as "I have forsaken", *taraktu*, has here its fairly common sense of "I have not adopted". Alternatively, they propose that up until that moment Joseph had not displayed his faith publicly. Therefore when he announced his belief in God this was tantamount to forsaking the Egyptians' creed; see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* 18:137.

²⁴⁵ See Stern, "Muhammad and Joseph", 204, and Hämeen-Anttila, "We Will Tell You the Best of Stories", 32.

²⁴⁶ Compare "Are diverse lords better or God, the one, the almighty?" with Q 27:59 ("Is God better or what they associate [with him]?"), "What you worship apart from him are nothing but names you have named, you and your fathers. God has not sent down any authority for them" with Q 53:23 and Q 7:71 (though there Hūd is admonishing 'Ād), "He has commanded that you should worship naught but Him" with Q 17:23; "That is the right religion" with Q 9:36 and Q 30:30. See also Hämeen-Anttila, "We Will Tell You the Best of Stories", 15-16.

²⁴⁷ There are also indirect links to the Meccan situation. An interesting example concerns the Egyptian reaction to Pharaoh's dreams. Whereas in Genesis 41:8 we are simply told that "there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh", in Q 12:44 the council (*mala'*) describes the Egyptian king's vision as "confused dreams" (*aḍghāth ahlām*). This exact phrase occurs once more in Q 21:5 as a rejoinder of the unbelieving Meccans to Muhammad's revelations; Stern, "Muhammad and Joseph", 202.

²⁴⁸ See, e.g., al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 13:401-402. For Western scholars, see especially, A. H. Jones, "Joseph in the Qur'ān: Dramatic Dialogue, Human Emotion and Prophetic Wisdom", *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981): 41-44 (where both Jacob and Joseph are treated as role models for the Prophet), and Stern, "Muhammad and Joseph". The affinity between Muhammad and Joseph is further emphasized in the *ḥadīth* and *sīra*, where after the conquest of Mecca Muhammad sets the hearts of Quraysh at ease by citing to them the words of his brother Joseph: "No reproach shall be on you today; God will forgive you; He is the most merciful of the merciful" (Q 12:92); see, e.g., Jones, "Joseph", 42. The reference to Joseph as Muhammad's brother, found here and in other contexts (in the story of the heavenly ascension and a statement of the Prophet that he would not have been able to show the restraint that Joseph had shown when imprisoned) further strengthens the link between the two figures. An extreme and, at times, excessive attempt to link the Joseph story with the *sīra* is A.-L. de Prémare, *Joseph et Muhammad: le chapitre 12 du Coran (Etude textuelle)* (Aix-en-Provence, 1989).

²⁴⁹ For a survey, see M. Dulaey, "Joseph le patriarche, figure du Christ", in *Figures de l'Ancien Testament chez les Pères* (Strasbourg, 1989), 83-105.

²⁵⁰ Thus, for example, the story of Joseph is said to be "full of symbols and types of the Son of God"; PsN, 560.

comparisons between Joseph and Jesus.²⁵¹ More importantly one can see, as Kristian Heal notes, how this typology affected the reshaping of the Joseph story.²⁵²

Thus it seems likely that in applying the Joseph story to Muhammad and his enemies, the Quran was following in the path of the Christian tradition which read it as prefiguring Jesus and the Jews.²⁵³ To be sure, typological readings of the Hebrew Bible were not limited to the Syriac tradition or – for that matter – to Christians.²⁵⁴ Nonetheless, in light of the other links examined in this chapter, I suggest that the typological reading of the Joseph story is yet another instance in which the Quran follows the Syriac tradition.²⁵⁵

7.6. Conclusion

In this chapter as in the previous ones I have argued that a combined examination of motifs, literary form, lexical issues, and typological function suggests that a Quranic story, in this case that of Joseph, is closely related to the Syriac tradition. Taken alone,

²⁵¹ See, e.g., PsN, 561-62. Earlier Aphrahat (*Demonstrations* 21.9) had described Joseph as a type of Jesus and listed eighteen similarities between the two figures; ed. Parisot, 1:953-7, and the discussion in Heal, *Tradition*, 86-89.

²⁵² See K. S. Heal, “Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature”, *BYU Studies* 41 (2002): 29-49; *id.*, *Tradition*, 81-110.

²⁵³ In the Quran though, the intended enemies are usually understood as the Meccans, not the Jews. See, however, al-‘Alamī, *Mu’tamar*, 1:31-40, where as a result of an anti-Zionist/anti-Jewish agenda, Joseph’s brothers are compared in detail to both the Meccans and the Jews of Medina.

²⁵⁴ For an unpersuasive attempt to demonstrate that Joseph was envisioned as an archetype of the Qumranic community, see R. A. Kugler, “Joseph at Qumran: The Importance of 4Q372 frg. 1 in Extending a Tradition”, in P.W. Flint *et al.* (eds.), *Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the Septuagint Presented to Eugene Ulrich* (Leiden, 2006), 261-78. For a rabbinic list of comparisons between the fates of Joseph and Zion, see Berman, *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu*, 278-80; J. T. Townsend, *Midrash Tanhuma: Translated into English with Introduction, Indices, and Brief Notes (S. Buber Recension)* (Hoboken, 1989), 1:281-83 (“Everything which happened to Joseph happened to Zion...”).

²⁵⁵ An important study of typology in the Quran is found in M. Zwettler, “A Mantic Manifesto: The Sūra of ‘The Poets’ and the Qur’anic Foundations of Prophetic Authority”, in J. L. Kugel (ed.), *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition* (Ithaca, 1990), 95-109. Zwettler emphasizes that the Quranic typology should not be construed simplistically as Christian, Jewish, or Gnostic influence, but rather as a reflection of a mode of discourse shared by the monotheistic milieu of the sixth and seventh-century Near East (100). Moreover, he notes that the Quranic typology “is not so much like that of the New Testament and early Christian Church... rather, much more like the sort of ‘apocalyptic exegesis’ that was carried on among the Essenes of the Qumrān community...” (102). At least as far as Q 12 is concerned, I am not sure that this second point is true. Recent reflections on typology in the Quran are found in T. Lawson, “Duality, Opposition and Typology in the Qur’an: The Apocalyptic Substrate”, *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 10.2 (2008): 23-49, and Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, 573-80.

some of the parallels may not be fully compelling, but in conjunction they lend each other the power of persuasion.²⁵⁶ In this my approach is analogous to that employed by Syriacists in the tracing of other (Greek) offshoots from the Syriac literary tradition.²⁵⁷

Some conclusions are in order. First, the evidence suggests that the Quran was aware of Christian Syriac traditions concerning Joseph. This seems a simpler explanation for the extent of the parallels than to assume, as Nāf did, that the Quran reflects lost Jewish sources which included similar material. There are of course elements in Q 12 which are not found in the Syriac sources.²⁵⁸ My argument, therefore, is not that the Syriac tradition provides the entire background for the Quranic Joseph story, but that it played a major role in its formation.

Moreover, we cannot truly understand what the Quran is doing without it. What the Quran is trying to achieve only becomes clear when it is set against earlier versions which were current at the time. This study suggests that existing scholarship with its focus on Jewish sources does not provide this background adequately.

²⁵⁶ Cf. F. Leemhuis, "A Koranic Contest Poem in *Sūrat aṣ-Ṣāffāt*?", in G. J. Reinink and H. I. J. Vanstiphout (eds.), *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East* (Louvain, 1991), 165-77. Leemhuis identifies a fragment of debate literature in Q 37 and argues that it reflects yet another example of familiarity with Syriac Christianity. His argument is based on form alone.

²⁵⁷ See, e.g., Brock, "From Ephrem to Romanos", 139-51, where Brock attempts to establish Romanos' dependence on Syriac sources based on similarities not only in metrical and literary form, but also in literary motifs.

²⁵⁸ Noteworthy elements known from rabbinic literature but not found in the Syriac sources include Joseph's initial desire for his master's wife and his change of heart following his Lord's intervention (Q 12:24), the assembly of ladies struck by Joseph's beauty (Q 12:30-34), and Jacob warning his children not to enter the town by one gate (Q 12:67-68). The first two motifs have been dealt with extensively in Kugel, *In Potiphar's House*, 28-65 (the assembly of ladies) and 94-124 (Joseph's change of heart). For the third motif, see Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 115. Also of interest are elements for which we know of no parallel. Noteworthy examples among these are: the scene in which a water-drawer finds Joseph in the well and expresses his amazement (Q 12:19; cf. Genesis 37:28), Joseph's maturing in Q 12:22 (for which see the appendix to this chapter), and the Egyptian scorn for Pharaoh's dream in Q 12:44 (see above). But by far the most dramatic departure from earlier versions concerns Q 12:81-87, where some of the brothers return to inform Jacob of what had happened to Benjamin, only to be sent back to Egypt again. In Genesis 44-45, on the other hand, there is no journey to Canaan between Benjamin's arrest and the revelation of Joseph's true identity. Might the Quranic departure be the result of a conflation of the arrest of Benjamin with that of Simeon in Genesis 42? A full study of all the departures from the Biblical text in Q 12 is needed, and I hope to supply that elsewhere.

8. Conclusions

In the previous chapters I have dealt at some length with four Quranic narratives, arguing that they reflect the Syriac tradition and considering the proper way in which such an argument should be bolstered. In what follows I will offer concluding remarks under three rubrics: historical setting, methodological observations on the study of the Quran, and prospects for future research.

8.1. The historical setting

This dissertation draws upon textual comparisons of the Quran to Jewish and Christian sources. It is argued that the Quranic retellings of Biblical narratives often reflect the Syriac Christian tradition rather than the Jewish one. This raises a question of the historical setting that allowed transmission of Syriac traditions into the community from which the Quran emerged. How, when and where were these traditions transmitted?

I have attempted to the best of my abilities to avoid the issue of transmission throughout the dissertation. In my opinion, considerable preliminary work needs to be done before adequate answers to the questions concerning transmission can be supplied. The textual study of the Quran and the examination of its Jewish and Christian sources must precede historical speculation. While work in this direction has been undertaken in many studies including this dissertation, further endeavors are necessary if the historical reconstruction is to be reliable. Nonetheless, a few cursory remarks on possible venues for the transmission of Christian traditions may be offered.

The text of the Quran itself supplies ample evidence not only that its community was well aware of Christian lore and belief, but also that there was actual interaction between Muslims and Christians. The stories of Mary and Jesus are related at some length, articles of Christian faith are criticized, and Christian practice is commented upon

(Q 57:27). Most interesting are verses that assume social interaction between the Muslim believers and Christians. In Q 5:51-52 the believers are warned not to take the Jews or Christians as allies; this is what those in whose hearts there is sickness do, offering a lame excuse. A more striking example is Q 5:82-83:

(82) You will surely find the most hostile of men to the believers to be the Jews and those who associate [other gods with God] and you will surely find that the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say: “We are Christians”; that, because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud; (83) and when they hear what has been sent down to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize. They say: “Our Lord, we believe; so write us down among the witnesses”.

Here we read of Christians who have amicable relations with the Muslims and listen to Muhammad’s message. Who are they?²⁵⁹

Here I will make do with drawing attention to some relevant secondary studies. Several scholars have studied what the Islamic sources have to say about Christian presence in Mecca and Medina.²⁶⁰ Garnered from the traditional sources are indications of links between Mecca and centers of Christianity such as Abyssinia and Najrān, references to the existence of a Christian cemetery in Mecca, and allusions to Christians residents, both Arab converts and foreign slaves. Such slaves are predominantly of Abyssinian and Byzantine origin, also including Egyptians (the most famous being Maria,

²⁵⁹ The exegetical tradition often identifies these Christians as Abyssinians who interacted with the Prophet and his followers both in Abyssinia and in Arabia, though other less specific interpretations are to be found as well; see McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians*, 204-17.

²⁶⁰ Studies devoted to unearthing Christian presence in Mecca and Medina on the basis of the Muslim tradition include those of Gilliot (for which see chapter 3.1) and the following: Gh. Osman, *The Christians of Late Sixth and Early Seventh Century Mecca and Medina: An Investigation into the Arabic Sources* (Harvard dissertation, 2001); *ead.*, “Pre-Islamic Arab Converts to Christianity in Mecca and Medina: An Investigation into the Arabic Sources”, *The Muslim World* 95 (2005): 67-80; I. Shahīd, “Islam and *Oriens Christianus*: Makka 610-622 AD”, in E. Grypeou *et al.* (eds.), *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* (Leiden, 2006), 9-31 (where the Abyssinian presence in Mecca is emphasized).

the Prophet's slave girl) and Persians. Though the religious affiliations of foreign slaves is not always clear, in some instances at least there is good reason to believe that they were Christians. Most intriguing are the reports that among the deities housed in the Ka'ba were found pictures of Mary and Jesus hanging on a pillar. The Ka'ba itself was said to have been built (by a Byzantine builder) following the conventions of Syrian buildings, presumably a references to churches.

Looking at the Arabian Peninsula as a whole, it can be shown that Christianity had spread throughout it.²⁶¹ Specific regions could be highlighted as probable conduits for Biblical and Christian lore to Mecca: the realm of the Ghassānids with whom the Meccans "had close relations",²⁶² al-Ḥīra in which "all the elements that define Islam's Late Antique heritage were to be found, namely, Christian-Aramaic, Arabic-Bedouin, Jewish, and Persian influences",²⁶³ the region of Bet Qatraye where the presence of Syriac Christianity is attested from the fourth to the ninth century and where there was a

²⁶¹ A recent overview of the scholarship, focusing on the architecture of churches, is found in B. Finster, "Arabia in Late Antiquity: An Outline of the Cultural Situation in the Peninsula at the Time of Muhammad", in *QC*, 61-114. Among the longer historical surveys which are helpful are J. S. Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London, 1979); I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1984); *id.*, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1989); *id.*, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1995-2009); T. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam: Verbreitung und konfessionelle Zugehörigkeit: eine Hinführung* (Louvain, 2007). Of special interest are indications of links between Syriac Christianity and Arabian Christianity; see, for example, A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient* (Louvain, 1958-88), 3:260-72, where we read among other things about clergymen in South Arabia who were trained in Tella and Edessa and the bishop of Najrān who was consecrated by Philoxenos of Mabbug.

²⁶² See, for example, Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 2.2:135-37, where it is suggested that the Quranic Paradise was inspired to some degree by Ghassānid banquets. In his next volume dedicated to the seventh century, Shahid plans to treat at length the close relationship between Mecca and Ghassān.

²⁶³ Most recently see I. Toral-Niehoff, "The 'Ibād of al-Ḥīra: An Arab Christian Community in Late Antique Iraq", in *QC*, 323-347 (quotation from p. 323). For political links between al-Ḥīra and the Hijāz, see M. J. Kister, "Al-Ḥīra: Some Notes on its Relations with Arabia", *Arabica* 15 (1968): 143-69. For a poem attributed to a poet from al-Ḥīra, 'Adī b. Zayd al-'Ibādī (d. ca. 600), and addressing Biblical themes, see Dmitriev, "An Early Christian Arabic Account", 349-87. Though it is attested only in Islamic works, Dmitriev argues for the poem's authenticity and rejects any dependence on its part on the Quran, demonstrating the Syriac background of the story as related in the poem. The importance of studies such as these lies in the "insight into the religious background of the Arabs prior to the Islam" (*ibid.*, 377) which they provide, and in suggesting Pre-Islamic Christian Arabic poetry as one conduit for Syriac lore into the Quranic community.

flurry of Syriac literary activity in the seventh century,²⁶⁴ and Najrān which was the main center of Christianity in South Arabia and which interacted, according to Muslim tradition, with the Prophet and his followers.²⁶⁵ Moving away from the peninsula, contacts with Christians in both Abyssinia and Syria are mentioned in the Islamic sources, and are plausible.

A different yet related issue concerns the form of Christianity with which the Quran was familiar.²⁶⁶ Western scholars have identified various groups of Christians as sources of influence on the Quran, including obscure sects such as the Collyridians and the Nazoraens. Special attention has been given to churches whose scriptural and liturgical language was primarily Syriac. Tor Andrae believed that Muhammad was markedly influenced by the piety of the so-called Nestorian church,²⁶⁷ which reached him through missionaries from Yemen, perhaps at the market of 'Ukāz.²⁶⁸ Other scholars, especially Bowman, emphasized the "debt of Islam" to the Monophysites.²⁶⁹ More recently Griffith and van Bladel have both suggested that specific stories reached the Quran via Monophysite Arabs of the Ghassānid phylarchate and the environs of

²⁶⁴ For the significance of the literary activity in Qatar for the study of the emergence of the Quran, see Tamcke, "Die Hymnen Ephraems des Syrsers", 193-95. Tamcke uses the example of Qatar to argue that knowledge of Syriac literature must have reached Mecca in some form, without positing a direct link between Mecca and the Gulf area. For the literary activity of the seventh century, see S. Brock, "Syriac Writers from Beth Qaṭraye", *ARAM* 11-12 (1999-2000): 85-96, and note 105 in Tamcke's article.

²⁶⁵ I. Shahid, "Najrān", *EF*², 7:871-72.

²⁶⁶ For this issue, see Griffith, "Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'ān'".

²⁶⁷ See for example, Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 62-69 (regarding the sleep of the soul), 94-97 (regarding the fact that celibacy is not an ideal in the Quran), 101-102 (regarding the number of daily prayers), and 103-104 (regarding the stories of the seven sleepers and of Alexander). It remains to be seen how convincing these examples are. The last is especially weak since recent work on these very stories has reached a different conclusion, stressing the fact that these stories were current among Monophysites.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 107. Andrae also acknowledged a later connection with the Monophysite Abyssinian church. This explains, according to him, the Quran's notion that the Trinity consists of God, Jesus and Mary, the attribution to the Christians of the claim that God is the Messiah, and the interest in apocryphal material concerning Mary and Jesus' infancy; *ibid.*, 111.

²⁶⁹ Bowman, "The Debt of Islam". Bowman's article is all over the map, noting all sorts of possible links between the Quran and Syriac Christianity. He does not explain clearly why he chose to highlight the Monophysites. Griffith's presentation of Bowman's opinion is misleading in that he describes it as being founded on the notion that the Quran was aware of the *Diatessaron*. This, however, is never stated by Bowman and makes little sense since this Gospel harmony was familiar to both Monophysites and Diophysites.

Najrān.²⁷⁰ That the very same stories were used by Andrae to argue for a Nestorian origin should at least suggest the need for caution in reaching wide historical claims about the Quran's religious milieu.

The narratives examined in this dissertation do not resolve these issues. Many of the Syriac sources in which we find parallels to the Quran were in fact current among both West-Syriac and East-Syriac circles and often stem from a period before the theological split was firmly established. The content itself of the retellings is usually theologically neutral. It is true that in two instances it is specifically the homilies of Jacob of Serugh which offer striking parallels for Quranic motifs (Satan's plan to strip Adam of his clothing and the father and son building a house together), but these similarities are hardly enough data to identify the Quran's Christian milieu.

On another level, however, the case-studies carried out in this dissertation do teach us something about the transmission of Biblical traditions into the Quranic community. This, however, concerns not the geographical and religious aspects of the route, but rather its literary vehicle. When examining the means through which Biblical traditions were passed, scholars have considered personal contacts (often referred to as informants), texts and more recently even visual sources.²⁷¹ The Syriac sources examined in this dissertation, many of which were composed for public performance, support the

²⁷⁰ Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān", 121; van Bladel, "The *Alexander Legend* in the Qur'ān 18:83-102". Griffith's argument is based on the observation that the Syriac story of the sleepers of Ephesus is attested only in Monophysite sources. Cf. Andrae, "Der Ursprung", 64, where Babai the Great (d. 628), a leading theologian of the Church of the East, is cited as adducing the sleepers as proof for the doctrine of the sleep of the soul. This strongly suggests that the legend was current among non-Monophysites as well. In fact it is attested in Sogdian and must have been brought to that region by Nestorians; see N. Sims-Williams, *The Christian Sogdian Manuscript C2* (Berlin, 1985), 154-57, and S. Brock, "Jacob of Serugh's Poem on the Sleepers of Ephesus", in P. Allen *et al.* (eds.), *"I Sowed Fruits into Hearts"* (Odes Sol. 17:13): *Festschrift for Professor Michael Lattke* (Strathfield, 2007), 13-30. Van Bladel's argument is based on Reinink's analysis of the Alexander Legend as Byzantine propaganda aimed at Monophysites. Van Bladel does, however, entertain another possibility, i.e. that Muhammad's own followers heard the legend, perhaps during their raid on Mu'ta.

²⁷¹ For a recent discussion of the channels of transmission of Christian traditions to the Quranic community, see S. Seppälä, "Reminiscences of Icons in the Qur'an", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22 (2011): 3-21. Seppälä focuses on Mary traditions and emphasizes the possibility that Christian images influenced the Quranic presentation of the material.

intuition of several scholars that a liturgical setting might have supplied a natural venue for transmission of dogmas and stories.²⁷² Take, for example, the comments of Serafim Seppälä in a recent article:

It seems to me that the most natural and the most relevant vehicle for promoting dogmatic ideas in the Christian East has been somewhat neglected in the scholarship. The easiest and the most common way, even up to our times, to grasp doctrinal ideas in the Christian East is to go to a feast. In addition to the standard Christian feasts of the liturgical year, each monastery and village church had its own feast day, that of the saint or event to the honour of which the church was dedicated. These were often carnival-like events that attracted large crowds, including non-Christians, but the liturgy was always the core of the event. At such a feast, one might encounter Marian themes in the liturgical readings and hymns in the church, as well as in other songs performed at the celebration after the liturgy, such as the Syriac dialogue poems. It can be assumed that there would be a festal icon in the central place in the church. It is to be noted that in the sixth century the number of churches dedicated to the Mother of God was increasing rapidly, and new hymns for the feasts were being produced in Greek as well as in Syriac.

One can easily imagine how Arab traders on their way to Mecca would stop off at a village or monastery to be present when the annual feast was being celebrated. They would hear hymns being sung to honour the Virgin Mary, first in the church and then out in the courtyard. At the subsequent feast it would be the most natural thing for the local priest to explain the purpose of the event to guests from outside the area...

²⁷² For the importance of the performance of liturgical and homiletic works in transmitting Biblical traditions, see the works of Gräf, Griffith, and Reynolds, introduced in chapter 3.2. Other studies which make similar arguments, though with little attention to actual examples from the Quran, include Koder, “Möglichkeiten biblischer Glaubensvermittlung” (where all the examples concern the *kontakia* of Romanos); Suermann, “Die syrische Liturgie im Syrisch-palästinensischen Raum”; and Tamcke, “Die Hymnen Ephraems des Syrers”.

Unfortunately, this line of reasoning quickly gets bogged down in the problems of studies on Syriac liturgical texts and their *Sitz im Leben*. Plenty of copies of hymnographic texts are known, but how widely and in what context they were used around 600 AD is an open question. My own estimation is that, if the author of the Qur'an had direct contact with Christian texts, the most likely possibility is that he heard recitation of Syriac hymns related to liturgical feasts, in addition to Gospel readings from Syriac *Qeryana*. This means that, as far as understanding is concerned, he would have been dependent, in general terms, on later explications. From a psychological point of view, such an encounter may even have been the main inspiration behind the Qur'an (leaving aside the question of supernatural inspiration). Indeed, the name of the Qur'an itself seems to be an outcome of such encounters, 'lectionary' being *qeryana* in Syriac.²⁷³

Though Seppälä focuses on Marian themes and their iconic representation, his observations concerning the importance of publicly performed poetry for spreading ideas are supported by my findings which suggest that Old Testament themes reached the Quran in a similar manner.

Hymns and homilies were effective instructional tools at a time when few people owned books. Whereas commentaries were aimed at the scholarly elite, the hymns and homilies were composed for general public performance and participation. In a civic culture which had competing forms of public entertainment, the churches needed to offer instruction in an engaging manner and to minister to a broad populace. The audience participated actively by singing responses to the liturgical poetry and by performing ritual gestures such as standing, kneeling, and prostrating. The performance of these works varied. Whereas the *madrāšē*, the hymns which were structured in verse couplets or in stanzas and were punctuated by a refrain, were often performed by male and female

²⁷³ Seppälä, "Reminiscences of Icons in the Qur'an", 6-7 (underlining mine).

choirs, the *mēmre*, verse homilies which consisted of isosyllabic couplets, were recited by a clerical figure. These works were often performed in the liturgy, at night vigils, feasts and funerals.²⁷⁴

Though we know very little about the performance of Syriac hymnographic and homiletic texts in Arabia, the affinity between them and the Quran as noted in this study suggests that there was significant awareness of them in the Quranic milieu. An interesting historical correlation for this was noted recently by Martin Tamcke. Among the church canons which mandate the presence of female choirs and designate their responsibilities, we find canon 9 of the East Syriac synod of Mar George I convened in 676 in Bet Qaṭraye and attended by bishops from the Arabian Gulf. In that canon the proper behavior expected from the members of such choirs is spelled out, as are their liturgical duties which include the recitation of psalms as well as the performance of hymns on various occasions, including funerals and vigils.²⁷⁵

Though this is only one small piece of historical evidence from another region, it joins the literary study carried out in this dissertation in suggesting that the Quranic milieu acquired much of its knowledge concerning Biblical matters as a result of direct or indirect exposure to the performance of Syriac hymns and homilies. Why the Muslim tradition tells us little about such interaction with Christians must for now remain an open question. Obviously much remains to be done in integrating the historical evidence and the results of the intertextual study of the Quran.

²⁷⁴ In portraying the role of hymns and homilies and their performance I closely follow Ashbrook Harvey, *Song and Memory*, 18-32.

²⁷⁵ Tamcke, "Die Hymnen Ephraems des Syrer", 176. The Syriac text of the canon is found in J. B. Chabot, *Synodicon orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens* (Paris, 1902), 221-22.

8.2. This study's relation to some approaches to the study of the Quran

In this section I will briefly situate my work in relation to some recent trends and developments in Quranic studies, attempting to demonstrate that the study of the sources of the Quran and other approaches to the text are complementary.

8.2.1. The study of the Quran's origins

The tendency of earlier scholarship to envision the Quranic retellings as mainly derivative has been challenged by many contemporary students of the Quran. What is now often stressed, and rightly so, is the literary qualities of these retellings, the ways in which they appropriate earlier material, and their meaning for the Prophet and his followers.²⁷⁶ Yet the excessive suspicion towards the investigation of sources and tracing of origins which often accompanies studies of this kind seems counterproductive.²⁷⁷ A recent comment made in a very different context is germane: "The identification of influences is critical in our attempt to gauge the depth of a thinker's attachment to his milieu. It enables us to transform this milieu from a scenic background into the pulsating world in which the thinker lived".²⁷⁸ Moreover, we cannot truly appreciate what is new and unique in the Quranic retellings until we have a clear idea of the concurrent traditions. This study suggests that existing scholarship with its focus on Jewish sources does not adequately provide this background, and that Syriac sources must be properly intergrated in the setting of the Quran.

Once the Quran's sources are better understood, the study of the mechanisms of appropriation may be advanced. I have touched but briefly on the ways in which the Quran adapted and reshaped its materials. Many factors influenced this process. The

²⁷⁶ For this shift in scholarship, see chapter 3.1, note 6.

²⁷⁷ For a critique of this trend, see Reynolds, "Redeeming the Adam of the Qur'ān", 80-81.

²⁷⁸ S. Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton, 2009), xiii.

omission of Christological materials, the use of formulaic language, the impact of inner-Quranic parallels,²⁷⁹ and the tendency to further develop post-Biblical exegetical readings – to name but a few factors – all deserve separate treatment elsewhere.

8.2.2. The coherence of Suras

Throughout the dissertation I have had recourse to contextual arguments which assume, or at least do not deny, the possibility that large textual units in the Quran display a coherent structure. This assumption is not self-evident. In fact, until the last thirty years or so Western scholarship followed in the footsteps of the classical exegetical tradition in approaching the verses of the Quran in an atomistic manner. The new approach is arguably one of the major breakthroughs of modern scholarship, though it has its origins in medieval times.²⁸⁰

A minority of scholars were then interested in the “science of correlations” (*‘ilm al-munāsabāt*) between the verses and the Suras. According to al-Zarkashī (d. 1391), the first to engage in this field in Baghdad was the Shāfi‘ī faqih Abū Bakr al-Naysābūrī (d. 936), who when teaching would ask: “Why was this verse placed next to that one? According to what logic was this Sura placed next to that one?” Other scholars who displayed an interest in interlinking the verses and Suras of the Quran included, according to al-Zarkashī, the Andalusian Abū Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1148), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.

²⁷⁹ For one example, see the appendix to the chapter on Joseph.

²⁸⁰ Surveys of this approach are found in M. Mir, “The *Sūra* as a Unity: A Twentieth Century Development in Qur’ān Exegesis”, in G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (eds.), *Approaches to the Qur’an* (London, 1993), 211-24; S. M. S. El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur’an: Relevance, Coherence and Structure* (London, 2006), 9-25; Cuyper, *The Banquet*, 493-512; N. Reda, “Holistic Approaches to the Qur’an: A Historical Background”, *Religion Compass* 4/8 (2010): 495-506; M. Campanini, *The Qur’an: Modern Muslim Interpretations* (London, 2011), 84-90. All these studies in turn follow the relevant chapters by al-Zarkashī (*naw’ 2*) and al-Suyūṭī (*naw’ 62*) for the description of medieval approaches.

1209) who often treats such matters in his commentary, and the Andalusian grammarian Abū Ja'far b. al-Zubayr (d. 1308) who dedicated a book to the *munāsaba* of the Suras.²⁸¹

Writing a century after al-Zarkashī, Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī (d. 1480) devotes much of his massive *tafsīr* to these issues.²⁸² Another work which shows a great interest in such matters is al-Suyūṭī's *Qaṭf al-azhār fī kashf al-asrār*.²⁸³ Subsequent authors of commentaries such as Khaṭīb al-Shirbīnī (d. 1569), Abū al-Su'ūd (d. 1574) and al-Ālūsī (d. 1853) are also said to have been interested in the connections between verses and Suras.

But none of these efforts broke away from the atomistic mode of reading the Quran. Rather than study the structure of Suras, the exegetes engaged in a “linear-atomistic” reading of the text, seeking to link successive verses.²⁸⁴ This changes in the twentieth century when a whole series of scholars begin to deal with Suras as a whole, applying an approach which Mir characterizes as “organic-holistic”. These include scholars such as Ashraf 'Alī Thanavī (d. 1943), Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farahī (d. 1930) and his disciple Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (d. 1997),²⁸⁵ Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), 'Izzat Darwaza (d. 1984), Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981), Sa'īd Ḥawwā (d. 1989), and others.

In the West the textual unity of Meccan Suras has been argued for by Irfan Shahīd,²⁸⁶ Pierre Crapon de Caprona,²⁸⁷ Angelika Neuwirth,²⁸⁸ Michel Cuypers,²⁸⁹ and

²⁸¹ Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Zubayr al-Thaqafī, *al-Burhān fī tanāsib suwar al-qur'ān* (Riyadh, 2007).

²⁸² Burhān al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm b. 'Umar al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsib al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* (Hyderabad, 1969-84). See Gilliot, “Kontinuität”, 104-105.

²⁸³ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Qaṭf al-azhār fī kashf al-asrār* (Doha, 1994). Al-Suyūṭī wrote two other works in this field, one devoted to the sequence of the Suras (*Tanāsūq al-durar fī tanāsib al-suwar*) and another dedicated to correlation between the beginnings and endings of Suras (*Marāṣid al-maṭāli' fī tanāsib al-maqāṭi' wa-l- maṭāli'*). Both are in print.

²⁸⁴ The term is coined by Mir to define al-Rāzī's approach; Mir, “The *Sūra* as a Unity”, 212.

²⁸⁵ The interesting theories of al-Farahī and Iṣlāḥī have received a fair amount of attention in the West thanks to the work of Mustansir Mir; M. Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān* (Indianapolis, 1986).

²⁸⁶ I. Shahīd, “A Contribution to Koranic Exegesis”, in G. Makdisi (ed.), *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb* (Leiden, 1965), 563-80; *id.*, “Another Contribution to Koranic Exegesis: The *Sūra* of the Poets (XXVI)”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 14 (1983): 1-21; *id.*, “The *Sūra* of the Poets, Qur'ān XXVI: Final Conclusions”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 35 (2004): 175-220.

²⁸⁷ P. Crapon de Caprona, *Le Coran: aux sources de la parole oraculaire: structure rythmiques des sourates mecquoises* (Paris, 1981).

others.²⁹⁰ More recently several scholars have extended this approach to the longer Medinan Suras: Q 2,²⁹¹ Q 3,²⁹² Q 4,²⁹³ Q 5,²⁹⁴ and Q 33.²⁹⁵

Among the narratives studied in this dissertation, that of Joseph in Q 12 stands out as a coherent Sura and is often treated as the exception which proves the rule, though, as we have seen, coherence can be found also in the Suras in which the other stories appear. Several studies have revealed the careful chiasmic structure of Q 12, but did not notice that in presenting the story in this manner the Quran follows and further develops an earlier trend attested in the Syriac sources.

In this study the investigation of the coherence of Suras figures not as a goal to be demonstrated but rather invoked as an additional hermeneutic tool which may corroborate other evidence. Once coherence is established one may adduce contextual arguments in favor of exegetical readings. Thus in our study of the Cain and Abel story, structural observations suggest that it was understood typologically, and was used against the Jews represented by Cain. This is of interest since the retelling of the story displays several

²⁸⁸ A. Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin, 1981).

²⁸⁹ For an overview of Cuypers' theories and references to his main works, see M. Cuypers, "Rhétorique et structure", in *Dictionnaire du Coran*, 758-64.

²⁹⁰ For an excellent study arguing for the coherence of Q 39 to Q 46 as a group, see I. Dayeh, "Al-Hawāmīm: Intertextuality and Coherence in Meccan Surahs", in *QC*, 461-98.

²⁹¹ Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 201-23; A. H. M. Zahniser, "Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Sūras: *al-Baqara* and *al-Nisā'*", in I. J. Boullata (ed.), *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (Richmond, 2000), 26-55; D. E. Smith, "The Structure of *al-Baqarah*", *The Muslim World* 91 (2001): 121-36; R. K. Farrin, "Surat al-Baqara: A Structural Analysis", *The Muslim World* 100 (2010): 17-32.

²⁹² A. H. M. Zahniser, "The Word of God and the Apostleship of 'Īsā: A Narrative Analysis of Āl-'Imrān (3): 33-62", *JSS* 37 (1991): 77-112; and N. Robinson, "Sūrat Āl 'Imrān and those with the Greatest Claim to Abraham", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6.2 (2004): 1-21.

²⁹³ Zahniser, "Major Transitions"; *id.*, "Sūra as Guidance and Exhortation: The Composition of Sūrat al-Nisā'", in A. Afsaruddin and A. H. M. Zahniser (eds.), *Humanism, Culture & Language in the Near East: Studies in Honor of Georg Krotkoff* (Winona Lake, 1997), 71-85.

²⁹⁴ Robinson, "Hands Outstretched"; Cuypers, *The Banquet*.

²⁹⁵ El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an*, 45-100.

similarities to a set of Syriac sources which also read Cain typologically as standing for the Jews.²⁹⁶

In our study of Adam's Fall in the Quran we were able to explain many of the differences between the three Quranic versions on the basis of their adherence to the style and diction of their respective Suras. This suggests another way of demonstrating the coherence of Suras. This context-sensitive approach is common in the genre of *al-mutashābih al-lafẓī* (for which see below).

Similar reasoning supplied us with an explanation for the relationship between the retellings of the Abraham story in Q 2 and Q 37. I argued that the building of the House by Abraham and Ishmael in Q 2:127 reflects one scene from the events described in Genesis 22 as imagined by post-Biblical readers. This then raised the question why was this not mentioned in the course of Q 37 where the attempted sacrifice of the son is related. My answer was that each Sura retells the parts of the story that support its agenda. In Q 2 the issue is the identity of Muslims as the true heirs of the Abrahamic legacy; therefore the episode that is retold concerns the founding of the Ka'ba by Abraham and Ishmael, father of the Arabs. In Q 37, on the other hand, the issue is God's care for and protection of the righteous; therefore what is of interest is the fact that the son was saved and not sacrificed.

Though attention to the literary aspects of the Quran is often presented as an alternative to old fashioned source hunting, I hope to have demonstrated that attention to the coherence of Suras and tracing the pre-Islamic precedents of Quranic motifs actually complement each other at times.

²⁹⁶ For another instance where structural analysis leads to a typological reading, see Mir, "The *Sūra* as a Unity", 217, with reference to the story of the Israelites' battle against the Philistines (Q 2:243-51). On this, see also Saleh, "What if You Refuse, when Ordered to Fight?"

8.2.3. The study of parallel passages

Another method with roots in the traditional sciences of the Quran which could serve as a useful tool in modern Quranic scholarship concerns the study of parallel passages. The traditional sciences include a genre dedicated to the collection and analysis of nearly identical verses. A common term for this phenomenon is *al-mutashābih al-lafẓī*, to be distinguished from the famous ambiguous verses known as the *mutashābihāt*. Surveys of this genre are found in al-Zarkashī (*naw' 5*) and al-Suyūṭī (*naw' 63* where the term is *al-āyāt al-mushtabihāt*), but the most comprehensive study is found in a recent Saudi dissertation by al-Shithrī.²⁹⁷

Whereas some of the works in this genre are mere reference works meant as mnemonical aids, others attempt to explain the minor variations and differences between parallel verses. The variations treated typically include additions/omissions and changes in the order of words, in the use of the definite article, number, gender, tense, verb forms etc.

Among the works dedicated to the explanations of these differences are those of al-Khaṭīb al-Iskāfī (d. 1030),²⁹⁸ al-Kirmānī (d. after 1107),²⁹⁹ Ibn al-Zubayr al-Gharnāṭī (d. 1308),³⁰⁰ Badr al-Dīn b. Jamā'a (d. 1333),³⁰¹ and Abu Yaḥyā Zakariyā al-Anṣārī (d. 1520).³⁰² This genre left its mark on some of the major works of *tafsīr*, including those of al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), al-Rāzī (d. 1210) and Abū Ḥayyān (d. 1344).

Though many of the explanations given in these works may seem fanciful and artificial to the modern reader, these books are valuable for studying the Quran as

²⁹⁷ Ṣāliḥ b. 'Abd Allāh al-Shithrī, *al-Mutashābih al-lafẓī fī al-qur'ān al-karīm wa-asrāruhu al-balāghiyya* (Medina, 2005).

²⁹⁸ *Durrat al-tanzīl wa-ghurra al-ta'wīl*. On al-Iskāfī, see U. Marzolph, "al-Iskāfī", in J. S. Meisami and P. Starkey (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 1:398. According to E. K. Rowson, "al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī", *EF*, 8:390, the attribution to al-Iskāfī is false and the real author is al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. early eleventh century).

²⁹⁹ *Al-Burhān fī mutashābih al-qur'ān*.

³⁰⁰ *Milāk al-ta'wīl al-qāṭi' bi-dhawī al-ilḥād wa-l-ta'wīl fī tawjīh al-mutashābih al-lafẓ min āy al-tanzīl*.

³⁰¹ *Kashf al-ma'ānī fī al-mutashābih min al-mathānī*.

³⁰² *Faḥ al-raḥmān bi-kashf mā yaltabisu fī al-qur'ān*.

concordances of parallel passages and more particularly for their careful attention to the subtle differences between parallel passages. Their contextual approach is most valuable, in spirit if not in detail, as it may shed light on the ways in which the Quran adapted and reworked its materials. Nonetheless, these works are only rarely referred to in Western Quranic studies.³⁰³

In my study of the Adam story I attempted to explain the differences between the three parallel Quranic accounts and argued that many of the unique aspects of each individual account reflect the vocabulary and themes of its Sura. Whereas I am unaware of any Western study which pursues this line of inquiry systematically, the same type of explanation is characteristic of the *mutashābih* genre (though not with regard to the Adam story). Consider, for example, Ibn al-Zubayr al-Gharnāṭī’s explanation of one of the differences between Q 28:60 and Q 42:36.

| Q 42:36 | Q 28:60 |
|--|--|
| 1) Whatever thing you have been given is the enjoyment of the present life; 2) but what is with God is better and more enduring 3) for those who believe and put their trust | 1) Whatever thing you have been given is the enjoyment of the present life <u>and its adornment (<i>wa-zīnatuhā</i>)</u> ; 2) but what is with God is better (<i>khayrun</i>) and more enduring. 3) Will you not understand? |

³⁰³ Exceptions are J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford, 1977), 212-15; and Dayeh, “Al-Ḥawāmīm”, 470-71 (both referring to Kisā’ī’s book and al-Suyūṭī’s brief survey). Whereas Wansbrough dismisses these works in favor of documentary analysis, Dayeh calls for taking these efforts into consideration when studying the formulae of the Quran. His summary (p. 494) is worthwhile quoting: “This study suggests that quite often the *literary student* of the Qur’an has more to benefit from a critical and resourceful reading of the traditional exegetical literature than from much of modern Qur’anic scholarship. The difference between the two approaches is the difference between the view that the text is a finely interconnected whole, as our quoted exegetes assumed, and the view that it is a patchwork of miscellaneous texts, as most contemporary scholars assume”. See most recently, D. Abo Haggag, *Repetition: A Key to Qur’anic Style, Structure and Meaning* (University of Pennsylvania dissertation, 2010). Pages 7-18 include a short discussion of the medieval genre.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>in their Lord.</p> <p>فَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِّنْ شَيْءٍ فَمَتَّاعِ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى لِّلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ</p> | <p>وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِّنْ شَيْءٍ فَمَتَّاعِ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتِهَا وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ</p> |
|---|--|

The first two lines are almost identical. Though the authors of the *mutashābih* works make much of variations between *wāw* and *fā'*, we can safely ignore this here and focus on a more obvious difference: the occurrence of *wa-zīnatuhā* at the end of the first line of Q 28:60 and its absence from Q 42:36. How is this to be understood? Al-Gharnāṭī offers a compelling contextual answer, noting that Q 28:76-82 proceeds to relate the story of Qārūn (the Biblical Korah), who was given great riches yet failed to behave righteously and was swallowed by the earth. Qārūn, we are told, “went forth unto his people in his adornment (*zīnatihī*)” and thus aroused the envy of those who “desired the present life (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*)” (Q 28:79). These impressionable individuals are rebuked by men of knowledge in the next verse: “Woe upon you! The reward of God is better (*khayrun*) for him who believes, and works righteousness; and none shall receive it except the steadfast” (Q 28:80).

The parallels between Q 28:60 and the Qārūn episode are such that it is clear that the latter is meant as an example of the former. Therefore if Qārūn was known for his *zīna* the general statement which precedes his example includes a reference to *zīna* as well. In Q 42, on the other hand, there is no mention of Qārūn or his *zīna*, and therefore Q 42:36 does not include *zīna*.³⁰⁴

Though the works in the *mutashābih* genre contain valuable observations of this kind, they must be used critically on account of their limitations. First, they are limited in

³⁰⁴ Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Zubayr al-Gharnāṭī, *Milāk al-ta'wīl al-qāṭi' bi-dhawī al-ilḥād wa-l-ta'īl fī tawjīh al-mutashābih al-lafz min āy al-tanzīl* (Beirut, 1983), 2:907-909.

scope in that they do not aim to study all inner-Quranic parallels, only those whose language is close enough to be considered *mutashābih*. That is, near identity in language is a pre-requisite for differences to be studied. Second, most often these works offer extremely clever yet artificial explanations for what seem to be random variations. Thus they are often troubled by the variation between *wāw* and *fā'* and attempt to explain why one context would require a *wāw* and another a *fā'*, though the high occurrence of this variation should suggest that both conjunctions may at times be used interchangeably in the Quran.³⁰⁵

The limitations of this genre notwithstanding, the context-sensitive approach is valuable for explaining the adaptation of Quranic materials, and may shed light on the way that pre-Islamic traditions were remolded in the Quran.

8.2.4. The chronology of the Suras

The dating of the Suras is a major field of study in both Western and traditional Quranic scholarship.³⁰⁶ From among the various reconstructions put forth, that of Nöldeke and his students is often treated as the rule of thumb for establishing the approximate order of the Suras, though not everyone is convinced.³⁰⁷ In Nöldeke's system the Suras are divided into four groups: early Meccan, middle Meccan, late Meccan, and

³⁰⁵ For an attempt to address this issue with regard to the Adam story, see the discussion in Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 214-15.

³⁰⁶ For surveys of the various attempts to establish a relative dating for the Suras, see Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 60-96; and G. Böwering, "Chronology and the Qur'an", *EQ*, 1:316-335. Most recently an innovative contribution to this field has appeared: B. Sadeghi, "The Chronology of the Qur'an: A Stylometric Research Program", *Arabica* 58 (2011): 210-99. Though this article aims to establish a relative chronology in seven phases, the author stresses that "the sequence is valid in an *average* sense only. Deviations from averages, as well as outlier behavior, are typical for phenomena complex enough to merit statistical analysis" (*ibid.*, 284). What this effectively means is that, at least at this stage, the stylometric approach cannot establish a relative chronology between specific passages.

³⁰⁷ A recent and radical example of the skeptical approach is found in Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, 3-22. Reynolds, who is influenced by the work of Wansbrough, links the issue of dating to his larger argument that the Quran should not be read through the lenses of *sīra* and *tafsīr*. He demonstrates how the reading of specific passages in light of the Prophet's life is unfounded, but makes no attempt to explain away the data adduced by Nöldeke and does not account for the very different atmosphere one encounters in the so-called Meccan and Medinan Suras.

Medinan. The justification of this division is in “a convergence of formal, lexical, and thematic considerations, interpreted against a background of a few general assumptions about the life and times of Muhammad”.³⁰⁸

In spite of the importance of this topic, this dissertation barely treats it, simply since it is mostly irrelevant for the project at hand. Of the four case studies examined here, two are from what are considered to be Medinan Suras (Abraham and Ishmael building the Ka’ba in Q 2 and Cain and Abel in Q 5), one is from a Meccan Sura (Joseph in Q 12), and one appears in both Meccan and Medinan Suras (Adam’s fall in Q 2, Q 7 and Q 20). Thus one can say that knowledge of Syriac traditions is attested in both corpuses.

More attention was paid to matters of dating in two instances that concerned the differences between inner-Quranic parallels. Thus I tried to establish a relative chronology for the parallel accounts of Adam’s fall and also used chronology as an explanation for Ishmael’s different roles in the Quran. But here too I was less interested in whether entire Suras hail from Mecca or Medina. The crucial question was the relative dating of the parallel passages; nothing more.

8.3. Prospects for further research

In this dissertation I attempted to shed some light on the largely ignored Syriac background of the Quranic retellings of Old Testament stories. To demonstrate that often the Quran follows Christian recastings of these narratives I examined four such retellings.

³⁰⁸ See the recent defense of Nöldeke’s chronology in N. Sinai, “The Qur’an as Process”, in *QC*, 407-39; the quotation is on p. 416. Though Sinai presents a forceful case for Nöldeke’s dating, I am not sure the issue is settled. The major problem concerns the move from the typological classification, which is itself convincing, to the diachronic interpretation that assumes development and evolution. For the argument to be stronger one would like to see clear demonstrations of dependence between later and earlier texts.

Ideally all the Quranic retellings should be studied in a similar manner and I hope to work toward a more comprehensive coverage in the future.³⁰⁹

This is not, however, the only way in which this study can be developed. One might revisit other aspects of the Quran and examine them in light of Christian texts generally and the Syriac tradition specifically. Although Tor Andrae made great contributions to the study of Quranic eschatology in this context, there is room for this topic to be taken up again, this time with attention to a larger Syriac corpus. Another issue which requires study from this angle concerns the anti-Jewish polemic in the Quran and its links to the (Syriac) Christian tradition. To whet the appetite and illustrate the potential results of such a study let me give a few brief examples.

In comparing the Quran and the Christian homily, Gabriel Reynolds has recently noted the similarity between the anti-Jewish rhetoric of the Quran and the Syriac homiletic tradition. He notes the litany of accusations against the Jews in Q 4:153-57 which is full of Christian themes and observes that both the Quran and the Syriac tradition emphasize Jewish inability to understand God's signs, and more generally dwell on the Jews' misunderstanding of Scripture.³¹⁰ In a separate article he further explored the continuity between the Quranic accusation that Jews engaged in *tahrīf* and Christian polemic.³¹¹ Many more examples may be added to establish the link between the Quran's anti-Jewish polemic and Christian works of the *Adversus Iudaeos* literature, especially those available in Syriac.

Especially striking are the parallels concerning the attitude toward Jewish law. Following the Christian tradition, the Quran describes it as a load and as fetters which

³⁰⁹ Another related avenue for further research concerns the Muslim exegetes' knowledge of Syriac traditions concerning Biblical narratives. To give but one example, in a paper presented at the Hebrew University in 2009 I showed that al-Ṭabarī's commentary (citing Ibn Ishāq) contains long (and garbled) passages from the Peshitta in Arabic translation. A full study of these passages and their relation to early Arabic translations of the Bible should appear in *JSAI* in the near future.

³¹⁰ Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 251.

³¹¹ *Id.*, "On the Qur'anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (*tahrīf*) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic".

will be removed by Muhammad (Q 7:157, cf. Q 2:286),³¹² and it is understood to have been imposed as a consequence of sin (Q 4:160, Q 6:146, and Q 16:118).³¹³ A major Christian argument against Jewish dietary laws is based on the conduct of the patriarchs who did not observe these restrictions. Thus Justin Martyr notes that the meat of all animals was permitted to Noah and was only forbidden in Moses' time as a result of the sin of the golden calf (*Dialogue with Trypho* 20). Likewise Aphrahat in *Demonstrations* 15.3 states that God had allowed Adam and Noah to eat the meat of all animals and birds and did not command them or Abraham and his family for that matter to avoid particular foods. Only in the time of Moses were the dietary restrictions set in place on account of the Jews' adoption of Egyptian worship.³¹⁴

Aphrahat's contention that Adam was allowed to consume meat contradicts the apparent meaning of Genesis 1:29-30, where the diet seems to be strictly vegetarian: "God said: 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food'. And it was

³¹² Building on Matthew 11:28-30, Christian authors present Jesus as loosening the bonds of the law and giving relief from its burden. We find this imagery throughout the third-century *Didascalia Apostolorum* (originally in Greek but preserved in Syriac). One passage should suffice as demonstration of this usage: "And after they had served idols, He rightly set upon them the bond, as they deserved. But therefore you shall not set them upon yourself, for our Savior came for no other reason than to fulfill the Law and to loosen us from the bonds (*asurē*) of the second legislation (*tenyān nāmosā*). For He loosed us from those bonds. And thus He called those who believe in Him and said: 'Come unto me, all you that toil and are laden with heavy burdens (*mawblē yaqqirātā*), and I will give you rest"; A. Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac I*, CSCO 401, SS 175 (Louvain, 1979), 18 (Syriac) and 15 (English).

³¹³ For the Christian background of this idea, see Andrae, "Ursprung", 104; Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 38; Ahrens, "Christliches im Qoran", 158; Sh. Pines, "Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity", *JSAI* 4 (1984): 140-41; and more recently B. M. Wheeler, "Israel and the Torah of Muhammad" in *BaQ*, 82.

³¹⁴ Ed. Parisot, 1:736.

so”. Whatever the explanation may be,³¹⁵ Aphrahat’s main point is clear: until the time of Moses the dietary restrictions did not exist.

The very same argument is found in the Quran, though it is often obscured by the convoluted interpretations put forth by the exegetes. In Q 3:93-95 we read as follows:

(93) All food was lawful to the Children of Israel – save what Israel forbade for himself – before the Torah was sent down. Say: “Bring the Torah and recite it (*fa-’tū bi-l-tawrāti fa-tlūhā*), if you are truthful”. (94) Whoso forges falsehood against God after that, those are the evildoers. (95) Say: “God has spoken the truth; therefore follow the religion of Abraham, a *ḥanīf*, he did not belong to those who associate [other gods with God]”.

The Quran first states that no dietary restrictions (except for one)³¹⁶ existed before the Torah was revealed. Then it concludes that since Abraham did not follow these rules, neither should the Muslims. All that is required is adherence to the *milla* of Abraham, not the Torah of the Jews.³¹⁷ It is with regard to this very point that the Jews are challenged to produce their scripture as damning evidence, since it contains proof that the laws were

³¹⁵ It is possible that in his eagerness to demonstrate that the dietary laws are late, Aphrahat carelessly relied on his (faulty) memory, as Robert Owens suggests; R. J. Owens, *The Genesis and Exodus Citations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage* (Leiden, 1983), 51. Alternatively, Aphrahat may have understood Genesis 1:28 as permitting the consumption of meat. In this verse God says to Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth”. What this dominion over fish and birds would mean in practical terms if they were not to be eaten is entirely unclear, as can be seen from the rabbis’ fanciful interpretations in BT *Sanhedrin* 59b. Whereas some Biblical critics resolve this tension by assuming that the text united two originally disparate traditions (see C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary* [Minneapolis, 1994], 165), Aphrahat may have taken v. 28 to permit meat and v. 29 to permit herbage. See also D. Rokéah, *Justin Martyr and the Jews* (Leiden, 2002), 109-15, where it is argued that Genesis 1:29-30 indeed allows the eating of meat. Although Rokéah’s reading is unconvincing, the arguments he adduces in its favor may shed light on Aphrahat’s motivation. Incidentally, Rokéah is unaware of Aphrahat’s view. The only interpreter he cites along the same lines is the early modern Jewish commentator, S. D. Luzzatto.

³¹⁶ The details of this self-applied restriction are debated. The two main options are that Israel, i.e. Jacob, forbade himself consumption of either the sciatic tendon (cf. Genesis 32:33) or the meat and milk of camels (cf. Leviticus 11:4); see Maghen, *After Hardship Cometh Ease*, 103-22.

³¹⁷ Cf. Q 3:65 (“People of the Book! Why do you dispute concerning Abraham? The Torah was not sent down, neither the Gospel, but after him. What, have you no reason?”).

nonexistent until the time of Moses.³¹⁸ Such challenges are common in Christian sources.³¹⁹

Similar polemics are aimed at the Sabbath which, the Quran stresses, was not included in the *milla* of Abraham. After mentioning the dietary restrictions imposed on the Jews as punishment (Q 16:118), the Quran proceeds to discuss Abraham, saying: “Then We revealed to you: ‘Follow the religion of Abraham, as a *ḥanīf*, he did not belong to those who associate [other gods with God]’” (Q 16:123). The next verse then adds that “the Sabbath was only appointed for those who were at variance thereon (*innamā ju'ila al-sabtu 'alā lladhīna khtalafū fīhi*); surely your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection, as to their differences” (Q 16:124), implying that the Abrahamic religion contained neither dietary restrictions nor Sabbath observance.

Polemics against the Sabbath of course abound among Christian writers. That Abraham and all the generations before Moses knew nothing of the Sabbath is stressed by Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho* 19.5), Tertullian (*Against the Jews* 2.10-3.1), Aphrahat (*Demonstrations* 13.8),³²⁰ and Jacob of Serugh (*Homilies against the Jews* 3, lines 186-232),³²¹ to name but a few. It therefore appears that in arguing that the Sabbath is not part of Abraham’s religion the Quran is repeating a classic Christian argument.

³¹⁸ For this interpretation, see, e.g., al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:413, and al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīf al-kabīr*, 8:146 (third interpretation). Many of the exegetes, however, assume that the challenge concerns Israel’s self-prohibition (see the opinions cited in Maghen, *After Hardship Cometh Ease*, 103-22). This results in much confusion since it is not clear what exactly the point of the debate between the Jews and the Quran is. Are the Jews denying the existence of a ban or do they take issue with the attribution to Jacob, believing that it originated with God?

³¹⁹ See, for example, Narsai’s eighteenth homily *Against the Jews* (ed. Mingana, 1:306), where the poet addresses the Jew (referred to polemically as the son of Abraham): “Bring you books (*aytā sefrayk*) and from them we shall argue against each other / and according to their word shall my word and yours be established...”; Jacob of Serugh’s *Homilies against the Jews* 4, lines 177-78 (ed. Albert, 122): “Come here, O Hebrew, let us read the Books / and seek the Son, whether His images are in their readings”. See also ed. Albert, 46, 50, 52, 58; 104, 126, and 134. For the rhetorical practice of addressing the Jews directly whether or not they were present, see Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews*, 310-12, and note 12 there.

³²⁰ Ed. Parisot, 1:557.

³²¹ Ed. Albert, 98-100. “Examine therefore Abraham who did not observe the Sabbath. / According to you he should be neither a friend [of God] nor a just man” (*ibid.*, 100). Abraham who would never forget his Lord had no need for the Sabbath which was given only to the unjust to remind them of God.

Though the arguments concerning Abraham and the law are common to Christian literature in many languages, Syriac transmission is more than likely. Many more examples of the Quran's adoption of Christian arguments against the Jews could be adduced, but I leave that for a separate study.

8.4. Conclusion

By way of conclusion I would like to cite the last paragraph in Joshua Finkel's review of Karl Ahrens' book concerning the Christian influence on the Quran:

To conclude: both [i.e. Jewish and Christian] influences were undoubtedly at work... But one should refrain from committing himself as to which impulse came first, or as to which influence was preponderant during the Meccan period or any of its subdivisions. To decide on that, nothing less than a comprehensive survey of both Christian and Jewish sources bearing on the Meccan period, with a careful analysis of the data brought to light, could warrant anything approaching proof, and such an exhaustive survey has not been made yet. It is certainly not one's man job, but if a group of scholars would make it their task to treat the entire subject with utmost thoroughness and precision, the problem would come nearer solution. In the meantime, every contribution, however one-sided and incomplete is welcome; by discovering new material and reinterpreting the old, the way is paved for a possible decision in the future. But the individual writer must not attempt too much and must not overstate the case.³²²

Though my interests are different than those of Finkel, I cite this paragraph for two reasons: as an apology for the shortcomings of this dissertation, and as a call for more comprehensive teamwork on these issues. Though Finkel wrote this in the thirties, it is

³²² *The Review of Religion* 1 (1936-37), 72-73.

only in recent years that efforts have been made in this direction.³²³ Hopefully these new projects will lead to a better understanding of the Quran and its milieu.

³²³ Most promising is the *Corpus Coranicum* led by Angelika Neuwirth; see <http://koran.bbaw.de/>

Appendix: a comparison of Q 12 and Q 28

1. Introduction

In this appendix I wish to note the striking parallels between the stories of Joseph in Q 12 and Moses in Q 28. The similarity between the two narratives was the topic of an article by Joseph Rivlin in 1958, but as it was written in Hebrew it has not made much of an impact on Quran scholarship.¹ Here I will present the major parallels following Rivlin, and will offer a different interpretation of the data.² Whereas for Rivlin the Joseph story influenced that of Moses, I will argue that themes and phrases migrated in both directions. This case study is an example of how inner-Quranic parallels affect the development of narratives in the Quran.

2. The parallels

Though neither Sura links Joseph and Moses explicitly, the two stories display similarities in plot and phraseology.³ Moses' mother fears for her son as Jacob fears for Joseph, yet both parents do not lose hope and are ultimately rewarded; Pharaoh persecutes the Israelites as the brothers do Joseph; the brothers fool their father to send Joseph with them so that they might harm him away from Jacob's house, Moses' sister is sent by her mother to follow her brother and see that he is well; Moses is thrown into the sea/Nile⁴ (Q 28:7) just as Joseph is thrown into the pit (Q 12:10); when telling the mother to cast

¹ J. J. Rivlin, "The Story of Joseph and Moses in the Quoran", in S. Bernstein and G. A. Churgin (eds.), *Samuel K. Mirsky Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1958), 209-19 (in Hebrew).

² Unlike Rivlin I will note how unique the parallels are and when relevant will point out Biblical parallels in a more systematic manner.

³ The one verse which does link the two figures explicitly is found in Q 40:36. There a believer from among Pharaoh's people at the time of Moses reminds them that Joseph had previously come to them with clear proofs.

⁴ The meaning of *yamm* is problematic since it replaces three different words in the Bible. In Q 20:29 and Q 28:7 it is the equivalent of the Nile; in Q 7:136, Q 20:78, Q 28:40, and Q 51:40 it stands for the sea; in Q 20:97 it takes the place of the Biblical river (compare Deuteronomy 9:21). Does the Arabic word simply mean "a large body of water" or was it applied intentionally in all these instances to link together various episodes in the life of Moses? I do not know.

Moses into the sea/Nile God consoles her (Q 28:7) as He does Joseph in the pit (Q 12:15); Moses and Joseph both enter an Egyptian household which consists of a husband and wife (Q 28:8-9 and Q 12:21); whereas the husband protects Joseph and the wife harasses him, in Moses' case the roles are reversed;⁵ Pharaoh's wife says of Moses "do not kill him" (Q 28:9) just as one of the brothers says of Joseph (Q 12:10); Moses and Joseph are said to have been given wisdom and knowledge when they matured; Moses and Joseph both repent, the former of killing a man the latter of almost yielding to his mistress' temptations (Q 28:16 and Q 12:53);⁶ Moses and Joseph are both aided by an anonymous individual (someone from the farthest part of the city in Q 28:20 and a member of Potiphar's wife's family in Q 12:26-27);⁷ Moses asks that God save him from the evildoers (Q 28:21) just as Joseph beseeches God to turn the women's guile away from him (Q 12:33); in his exile Moses meets two women (Q 28:23-28) just as Joseph meets two slaves in prison (Q 12:36-42); both instances involve *saqy*; whereas the wife of Joseph's master seeks to seduce him, the Midianite woman behaves bashfully with Moses (Q 28:25);⁸ Joseph asks that the slave he helped remember him but the latter forgets (Q 12:42), whereas Moses is rewarded for helping the women without asking them for anything (Q 28:24-28);⁹ and finally Moses and Joseph come before Pharaoh.

The linguistic similarities are also striking. At times they occur in parallel contexts, at times not. Rather than divide them into two groups as Rivlin did I will list them together following the order of Q 12.

⁵ For Pharaoh's wife as a believer, see also Q 66:11.

⁶ The Bible does not contain this motif in either narrative. If Q 12:53 is taken as the words of Potiphar's wife and not of Joseph then her repentance is well attested in the Syriac tradition; see the chapter on Joseph section 7.2.9.

⁷ See also Q 40:28 where a believer from Pharaoh's family defends Moses using language similar to that of Q 12:26-27.

⁸ Exodus makes no mention of bashfulness. The rabbinic source noted in Rivlin, "The Story of Joseph and Moses", 215, is irrelevant.

⁹ Moses seems to have learned Joseph's lesson, so to speak. Rather than put his trust in man and be disappointed as Joseph was, Moses appeals to God for help (Q 28:24) and receives it via the Midianites.

1) Joseph addresses Jacob twice, saying “O father” (*yā abati*) (Q 12:4, 100) as does the Midianite woman her father (Q 28:26).¹⁰

2) One of the brothers and Pharaoh’s wife both urge not to kill Joseph/Moses:

| Q 28 | Q 12 |
|---|--|
| وَقَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ فِرْعَوْنَ قُرَّتُ عَيْنِي لِي وَلَكَ لَا تَقْتُلُوهُ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَنْفَعَنَا أَوْ نَتَّخِذَهُ وَلَدًا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ {9} | قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِنْهُمْ لَا تَقْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ وَالْقَوْهُ فِي غِيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ يَلْتَقِطُهُ بَعْضُ السَّيَّارَةِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ {10} |

In Genesis 37:21-22 Rueben urges his brothers not to kill Joseph: “(21) But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying: ‘Let us not take his life’. (22) Reuben said to them: ‘Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him’—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father”. Pharaoh’s daughter, on the other hand, says nothing of the sort in Exodus.

3) In both stories we find an imperative to cast the hero into a pit or a body of water:

| Q 28 | Q 12 |
|--|--|
| وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ فَإِذَا حَضَّتْ عَلَيْهِ فَالَّقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا تَحْزَنِي إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ {7} | قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِنْهُمْ لَا تَقْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ وَالْقَوْهُ فِي غِيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ يَلْتَقِطُهُ بَعْضُ السَّيَّارَةِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ {10} |

Whereas Joseph is indeed cast into the pit in Genesis 37:24, in Exodus 2:3 Moses is placed in a basket “among the reeds on the bank of the river”. The omission of the box in which Moses was placed serves to strengthen his likeness to Joseph as does the use of the verb *alqā*. In Q 20:39, on the other hand, the box is mentioned and verb used is *iqdhifthi*. Therefore it seems evident that Q 28 is influenced by Q 12 in this instance.

4) Both Joseph and Moses are “picked up” from where they were cast:

| Q 28 | Q 12 |
|------|------|
|------|------|

¹⁰ This vocative form is also found in Q 19:42, 43, 44, 45 (Abraham to his father), and Q 37:102 (the son to Abraham).

| | |
|--|--|
| فَالْتَقَطَهُ آلُ فِرْعَوْنَ لِيَكُونَ لَهُمْ عَدُوًّا وَحَزَنًا إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ وَجُنُودَهُمَا كَانُوا خَاطِبِينَ {8} | قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِنْهُمْ لَا تَقْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ وَالْقَوْهُ فِي غِيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ يَلْتَقِطُهُ بَعْضُ السَّيَّارَةِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ {10} |
|--|--|

These are the only occurrences of this verb in the Quran. In the Bible different verbs are used in each story.¹¹

- 5) Both Miriam and the brothers try to persuade a grownup in charge to entrust them with the child, using similar language:¹²

| | |
|--|---|
| Q 28 | Q 12 |
| وَحَزَنًا عَلَيْهِ الْمَرَاضِعُ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَقَالَتْ هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ أَهْلِ بَيْتٍ يَكْفُلُونَهُ لَكُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُ نَاصِحُونَ {12} | قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا مَا لَكَ لَا تَأْمَنَّا عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَنَاصِحُونَ {11} |

The similarity in language emphasizes the contrast in intent. Whereas Moses' family truly cared for him, the brothers were planning to get rid of Joseph.

- 6) Jacob's fear for Joseph and Moses' mother's fear for her son are expressed in similar language:

| | |
|---|--|
| Q 28 | Q 12 |
| وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ فَإِذَا خَفْتِ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا تَحْزَينِ وَلَا تَحْزَينِ إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ {7} | قَالَ إِنِّي لَيَحْزُنُنِي أَنْ تَذْهَبُوا بِهِ وَأَخَافُ أَنْ يَأْكُلَهُ الدَّبَّ وَأَنْتُمْ عَنْهُ غَافِلُونَ {13} |

- 7) God's message of consolation to Joseph and Moses' mother is introduced by the verb *awhā*:

| | |
|---|--|
| Q 28 | Q 12 |
| وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ فَإِذَا خَفْتِ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا تَحْزَينِ وَلَا تَحْزَينِ إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ {7} | فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا بِهِ وَأَجْمَعُوا أَنْ يَجْعَلُوهُ فِي غِيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ لَتُنَبِّئَنَّهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَذَا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ {15} |

¹¹ Compare Genesis 37:28 with Exodus 2:5-6.

¹² Similar though not identical language is found in Q 7:21, 68, 79, and Q 28:20.

The same verb is used in Q 20:39 regarding Moses' mother, but there God makes no promise that Moses shall return. In the Biblical account God never converses with the mother. As we have seen, in the Syriac tradition Joseph does receive a divine revelation in the pit. Again the influence of the Joseph Story is evident.

8) The phrase “without being aware” is used twice in both Suras:

| Q 28 | Q 12 |
|--|---|
| <p>وَقَالَتْ امْرَأَتُ فِرْعَوْنَ قُرْتُ عَيْنٍ لِي وَلَكَ لَا تَقْتُلُوهُ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَنْفَعَنَا أَوْ نَتَّخِذَهُ وَلَدًا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ {9}</p> | <p>فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا بِهِ وَأَجْمَعُوا أَنْ يَجْعَلُوهُ فِي غِيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ لَتُنَبِّئَنَّهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَذَا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ {15}</p> |
| <p>وَقَالَتْ لِأُخْتِهِ قُصِّيهِ فَبَصُرَتْ بِهِ عَنْ جُنْبٍ وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ {11}</p> | <p>أَفَأَمِنُوا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمْ غَاشِيَةٌ مِنْ عَذَابِ اللَّهِ أَوْ تَأْتِيَهُمُ السَّاعَةُ بَعْتَةً وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ {107}</p> |

Apart from these four instances the phrase occurs only six more times in the Quran.¹³ In both Q 12:15 and Q 28:9 the phrase hangs slightly loose and it is unclear whether it is the narrator's comment or the end of the reported speech.¹⁴

9) Egyptians seek to adopt them, using the exact same language:

| Q 28 | Q 12 |
|--|---|
| <p>وَقَالَتْ امْرَأَتُ فِرْعَوْنَ قُرْتُ عَيْنٍ لِي وَلَكَ لَا تَقْتُلُوهُ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَنْفَعَنَا أَوْ نَتَّخِذَهُ وَلَدًا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ {9}</p> | <p>وَقَالَ الَّذِي اشْتَرَاهُ مِنْ مِصْرَ لِامْرَأَتِهِ أَكْرِمِي مَثْوَاهُ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَنْفَعَنَا أَوْ نَتَّخِذَهُ وَلَدًا ... {21}</p> |

This phrase occurs only in these two instances in the Quran. It has a Biblical basis in the Moses story (Exodus 2:10), but not in the Joseph narrative.

10) God establishes Joseph and the people of Moses in the land:

| Q 28 | Q 12 |
|--|---|
| <p>وَمُكِّنَّا لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ... (6)</p> | <p>(...) وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ... (21)</p> |

¹³ Q 7:95, Q 26:202, Q 27:18, 50, Q 29:53, Q 43:66.

¹⁴ See discussion in the chapter on Joseph section 7.2.4.

وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ... (56)

This phraseology appears elsewhere in the Quran.¹⁵ Of these three verses, the only one with a clear Biblical parallel is Q 12:56, for which compare Genesis 41:41, 43 (“Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt”).

11) Both Joseph and Moses reach maturity and receive wisdom and knowledge:

| Q 28 | Q 12 |
|---|---|
| وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ <u>وَاسْتَوَىٰ آتَيْنَاهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا</u> | وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ <u>آتَيْنَاهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا</u> |
| وَكَذَلِكَ <u>بَجَزَىٰ الْمُحْسِنِينَ</u> {14} | وَكَذَلِكَ <u>بَجَزَىٰ الْمُحْسِنِينَ</u> {22} |

These are the only two occurrences of this sentence in the Quran. It is a striking parallel and is noted by the authors of the *mutashābih* works, though their interest lies in explaining why the additional verb *istawā* is used only for Moses. Whereas the Bible speaks of Joseph as discerning and wise (Genesis 41:39),¹⁶ it is Moses who is said to have grown up (Exodus 2:10), at exactly the same point in the narrative where Q 28:14 reports this.

12) In both Q 12:23 and Q 28:37 we find the assertion that “Surely the evildoers do not prosper” (إِنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ الظَّالِمُونَ). Joseph says it to Potiphar’s wife, whereas Moses says it to Pharaoh and his men. The exact sentence only occurs two more times in the Quran (Q 6:21 and Q 6:135).

13) In Q 12 the word *khāṭi’in* (“sinners”) occurs three times. Potiphar tells his wife that she is one of the *khāṭi’in* (Q 12:29), and the brothers apply the term to

¹⁵ See Q 6:6 (previous generations), Q 7:10 (humanity), Q 18:84 (Dhū l-Qarnayn), Q 22:41 (believers), and Q 46:26 (previous generations) where the land is not mentioned but is to be understood.

¹⁶ Other figures in the Quran are said to have been given wisdom and knowledge: Lot (Q 21:74), and David and Solomon (Q 21:79). The meaning of *ḥukm* is unclear; see Paret, *Kommentar*, 73 (on Q 3:79). If understood as referring to judgment the references to Moses as judge become relevant; see Exodus 2:14 (“Who made you a ruler and judge over us?”) and recall Moses’ judging the people in the wilderness.

themselves twice (Q 12:91 and 97). In Q 28:8 Moses, Haman, and their troops are said to be *khāṭi'in*. Apart from these instances the active participle occurs only once in the masculine plural (Q 69:37).¹⁷ An indirect Biblical parallel exists only for the brothers' use of the word (Genesis 50:17).

14) Pharaoh asks the women مَا خَطْبُكُمْ (Q 12:51) and Moses asks the Midianite women مَا خَطْبُكُمَا (Q 28:23).¹⁸ Neither conversations exists in the Bible.

15) In both narratives a figure repents or refers to its sinful nature using similar language:

| Q 28 | Q 12 |
|--|---|
| <p>قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي فَاغْفِرْ لِي فَغَفَرَ لَهُ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ {16}</p> | <p>وَمَا أُبْرئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي عَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ {53}</p> |

The vocabulary though is common to the Quran and there is nothing unique about it.

Generally the Quran displays great interest in issues of repentance.

16) Jacob's pact with the brothers and Moses' agreement with his Midianite father in law conclude with an identical sentence:

| Q 28 | Q 12 |
|---|---|
| <p>قَالَ ذَلِكَ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكَ أَيَّمَا الْأَجَلِينَ فَصَيِّتُ فَلَا عُدْوَانَ عَلَيَّ وَاللَّهُ عَلَيَّ مَا نَقُولُ وَكِيلٌ {28}</p> | <p>قَالَ لَنْ أُرْسِلَهُ مَعَكُمْ حَتَّى تُؤْتُوا مِنِّي مَوْثِقًا مِنَ اللَّهِ لَتَأْتُنَّنِي بِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ يُحَاطَ بِكُمْ فَلَمَّا آتَوْهُ مَوْثِقَهُمْ قَالَ اللَّهُ عَلَيَّ مَا نَقُولُ وَكِيلٌ {66}</p> |

The sentence is not attested elsewhere.

¹⁷ The active participle occurs also in the feminine singular: Q 69:9 (though there it refers to the sinful act rather than the sinner), and Q 96:16.

¹⁸ Similar questions are addressed to the angels sent to Abraham (Q 15:57 and Q 51:31) and the Sāmīrī (Q 20:95).

17) The brothers describe their father to Joseph in Q 12:78 as “an old man advanced in years” (شَيْخًا كَبِيرًا). In the very same manner the Midianite women describe their father to Moses in Q 28:23 (شَيْخٌ كَبِيرٌ). But whereas this leads Moses to pity the women, Joseph remains unrelenting. These are the only occurrences of this phrase in the Quran.¹⁹ It has a Biblical parallel in the Joseph story (Genesis 43:27 and 44:20), but not in the Moses narrative.

18) The eyes of both parents are affected by their son’s absence/return.

| Q 28 | Q 12 |
|--|---|
| فَرَدَدْنَاهُ إِلَىٰ أُمِّهِ كَيْ تَقَرَّ عَيْنُهَا وَلَا تَحْزَنَ وَلِتَعْلَمَ أَنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ {13} | وَتَوَلَّىٰ عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسْفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ وَأَبِصَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنْ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ {84} |

The phrase in Q 28 is an idiomatic way of referring to comfort.²⁰ That of Q 12, on the other hand, seems literal. Nonetheless, both refer to the parent’s eyes.

19) In Q 12:99 Joseph greets his father and brothers, saying: “enter Egypt, God-willing, in security (*āminīn*)”. Likewise in Q 28:31 God reassures Moses after his rod turns into a snake, saying: “Advance and do not fear. Indeed you are one of those who are secure (*āminīn*)”. On the one hand, this parallel is not compelling seeing that *āminīn* is not uncommon in Quranic vocabulary. On the other hand, it is interesting that in other passages (outside of Q 28) which describe the transformation of the rod to a snake the word is not used.²¹

¹⁹ *Shaykh* on its own occurs in Q 11:72 (Abraham).

²⁰ It occurs in Q 19:26 (Mary), Q 20:40 (Moses’ mother), Q 25:74 (the believers ask God for it), Q 28:9 (Pharaoh’s wife), Q 32:17 (humanity), and Q 33:51 (the wives of the Prophet) as well. The origin of the idiom is debated; see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 2:2499.

²¹ See Q 7:107/Q 26:33, Q 20:17-21, and Q 27:10.

In addition to sharing themes and diction, both Suras make similar self-referential comments. Both accounts are referred to as a “story” (*qasas*) (Q 12:3 and Q 28:25);²² it is emphasized that they are accurate and are related by God (Q 12:3 and Q 28:2), and that Muhammad was not present when the events took place.²³

| Q 28 | Q 12 |
|--|---|
| <p>وَمَا كُنْتَ بِجَانِبِ الْعَرَبِ إِذْ قَصَبْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ الْأَمْرَ وَمَا كُنْتَ مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ {44}</p> <p>وَلَكِنَّا أَنْشَأْنَا قُرُونًا فَتَطَاوَلَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْعُمُرُ وَمَا كُنْتَ ثَاوِيًا فِي أَهْلِ مَدْيَنَ تَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِنَا وَلَكِنَّا كُنَّا مُرْسِلِينَ {45}</p> <p>وَمَا كُنْتَ بِجَانِبِ الطُّورِ إِذْ نَادَيْنَا وَلَكِن رَحْمَةً مِن رَّبِّكَ لِتُنذِرَ قَوْمًا مَّا أَتَاهُمْ مِن نَّذِيرٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ {46}</p> | <p>ذَٰلِكَ مِن أَنْبَاءِ الْعَتَبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ أَجْمَعُوا أَمْرَهُمْ وَهُمْ يَمْكُرُونَ {102}</p> |

Likewise, at the beginning of both Suras we find an identical sentence:²⁴

| Q 28 | Q 12 |
|--|---|
| <p>طس {1}</p> <p>تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ {2}</p> | <p>الر</p> <p>تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ {1}</p> |

Note that the identical sentence follows three of the (different) mysterious letters.

3. Analysis

How are these parallels to be explained? Their extent is such that recourse to the formulaic nature of the Quran generally is not a sufficient explanation. That there must have been direct influence between the two accounts is evident, but in which direction?

To Rivlin the answer was obvious. Following Nöldeke’s chronology he asserts that Q 12 and Q 28 were both revealed in the third Meccan period shortly one after

²² This word is found also in Q 3:62 (regarding Jesus), Q 7:176, Q 12:111 (regarding the stories of messengers generally), and Q 18:64 (in a different meaning).

²³ Similar assertions are made in Q 3:44 (regarding Mary in language that is very close to Q 12), and Q 11:49 (Noah).

²⁴ The same sentence occurs also in Q 26:2 (following طس as in Q 28 and preceding the Moses story). Compare Q 10:1, Q 13:1, Q 15:1, Q 27:1, and Q 31:2.

another.²⁵ Turning to compose the Moses story soon after having finished the Joseph narrative, Muhammad retold the life of Moses with Joseph in mind. The transfer of motifs and language was made possible thanks to the basic similarity between the two accounts already in their Biblical version.

In the Bible both stories take place in Egypt, involve a separation between a parent and a child, treat sibling relationships (the brothers seek to harm Joseph, whereas Miriam protects Moses); in both the heroes are placed in an odd place (a pit / the Nile), are taken into an Egyptian household (Potiphar / Pharaoh's daughter), end up in Pharaoh's court, depart from the homeland (to Egypt / Midian), and marry the daughter of a priest.

Therefore, argues Rivlin, it was only natural for Muhammad to transfer additional elements from the Joseph account to the Moses story. This observation allows Rivlin to shed light on several intriguing Quranic departures from the Biblical Moses story.

In contrast to Exodus 2:16-22 where Moses meets the seven daughters of Reuel, in Q 28:23-28 Moses meets only two women. Scholars try to explain this deviation in different ways. The smaller number is taken as a mere mistake,²⁶ a correction of a number deemed too high,²⁷ a reflection of Jāhīlī Arab culture and Muhammad's shame at having only daughters,²⁸ or "a literary device paralleling the daughters to all the other major characters of the Moses story in the Quran, such as Moses and Aaron, Moses' mother and sister, or Pharaoh and Haman, who also come in pairs".²⁹ Of all these explanations the

²⁵ See *GdQ*, 1:152-54, where both Suras are listed as deriving from the third Meccan period. Nöldeke treats Q 12 before Q 28, though in the second edition Schwally cautions the readers and reminds them that within each period the order is only approximate. The traditional lists of Meccan Suras all place Q 28 before Q12; see Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 69-73.

²⁶ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 124.

²⁷ Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, 118.

²⁸ Garsiel, *Bible, Midrash and Quran*, 127-28.

²⁹ Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis*, 46. Both Wheeler and Garsiel reject another explanation which they attribute to Speyer mistakenly. According to this view, the number two derives from a conflation with the story of Jacob who marries Rachel and Leah after a meeting at a well. In Jacob's story, however, he meets only one woman, Rachel, at the well.

most convincing is the last one, especially when one notes that the scene in Midian is preceded by Moses' interaction (twice) with two fighting men (Q 28:15-19). Yet Rivlin's insight raises another interesting possibility: that the number of Midianite women Moses meets in exile is derived from the two slaves Joseph interacts with in prison (Q 12:36-42). In that case the number of imprisoned men faithfully reproduces what we read in Genesis 40, where Joseph meets two inmates in prison: the cupbearer and baker.³⁰

Another departure of Q 28 from Exodus may be explained along the same lines. In Exodus 2:7-10 we hear of Pharaoh's daughter taking Moses as her son. In Q 28 this role is filled by Pharaoh's wife. Scholars have explained this as mere confusion on the part of the Quran,³¹ or by recourse to the social conventions in Arabia which would frown upon an unmarried woman raising a child.³² But the influence of Potiphar's wife in Q 12 is a much simpler explanation

In the same manner, the parallel with Joseph may explain why in Q 28 Moses' mother receives a consoling revelation; why Moses is cast into the *yamm* rather than placed in a basket "among the reeds on the bank of the river" (Exodus 2:3); why Pharaoh's daughter urges her father not to kill Moses; why the father of the Midianite women is said to be "an old man advanced in years",³³ and so on.

Though all this supports Rivlin's thesis, other details suggest a more complicated scenario in which both accounts influence each other and grow more and more alike. As we have seen the notion that Joseph might be adopted by Potiphar has no Biblical basis,

³⁰ Rivlin, "The Story of Joseph and Moses", 215.

³¹ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 123.

³² Garsiel, *Bible, Midrash and Quran*, 121.

³³ See, however, *Exodus Rabba* 1 (cited in Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 138) where Jethro's old age is mentioned.

whereas Pharaoh's daughter took Moses as her son in Exodus.³⁴ Likewise the reference to Joseph maturing is unattested in Genesis, but Exodus does refer to Moses growing up.³⁵

Therefore it would seem that originally parallel stories attracted each other and in the course of time grew more and more alike with the result the elements moved from one account to the other. The study of the interaction between parallel accounts is crucial for the understanding of how narratives develop in the Quran. If one wishes to explain why the Quran departs from the Bible it is not enough only to examine Jewish and Christian haggadic traditions or to consider the Quran's historical, social and religious context. One must also consider inner-Quranic dynamics.

³⁴ See, however, the comment of Ephraem Graecus concerning Joseph: "he gave into the care / of Joseph the most virtuous, / as to his own son, / all that he had acquired"; cited in Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 199-200, and noted above in the chapter on Joseph section 7.2.7.

³⁵ Although the Bible states he was seventeen years old, the Quran believes Joseph to have been a young child at the time of his sale (see in the chapter on Joseph section 7.2.3). Though in the chapter we noted that Joseph's young age in the Quran has a precedent in a pre-Islamic representation of the sale of Joseph in carving, one wonders whether the Quranic depiction may also reflect influence of the Moses story.

Abbreviations

| | |
|--------------|--|
| BaQ | Reeves, John C. (ed.). <i>Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality</i> . Leiden, 2003. |
| CSCO | Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium |
| <i>BSOAS</i> | <i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i> |
| BT | Babylonian Talmud |
| ET | English translation |
| <i>FV</i> | Jeffery, Arthur. <i>The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān</i> . Baroda, 1938. |
| <i>GdQ</i> | Nöldeke, Theodor <i>et al.</i> <i>Geschichte des Quran</i> . Leipzig, 1909-38. |
| <i>HUCA</i> | <i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i> |
| <i>JAOS</i> | <i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i> |
| <i>JSAI</i> | <i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i> |
| <i>JSS</i> | <i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i> |
| <i>MGWJ</i> | <i>Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums</i> |
| <i>MIDEO</i> | <i>Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire</i> |
| <i>OTP</i> | Charlesworth, James H. (ed.). <i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Garden City, 1983. |
| PO | Patrologia Orientalis |
| <i>QC</i> | Neuwirth, Angelika <i>et al.</i> (eds.). <i>The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu</i> . Leiden, 2010. |
| <i>QHC</i> | Reynolds, Gabriel S. (ed.) <i>The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context</i> . London, 2008. |
| SS | Scriptores Syri |
| <i>ZDMG</i> | <i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i> |

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