

The Syrian *Gospel of Thomas* and the Syriac Peshitta Bible:

Their Relevance for Qur'ānic Studies¹

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Introduction

Methodology

Qur'ānic divine dialogue model

Anti-Orientalists, often influenced by Edward Said, justifiably insist that the Qur'ān is not “derived” from the Bible. However, some anti-Orientalists exaggerate and go too far when they claim that the Qur'ān is completely independent of or unconnected to the Bible.² For example, it would be an exaggeration to say that Q 12's Joseph story is an exclusively native Arabian version completely independent of earlier Jewish traditions, whether biblical or postbiblical. The Qur'ān is here in fact in dialogue with Jewish traditions and echoes them for the sake of the Qur'ān's Jewish audience.

Not only does the Qur'ān explicitly mention the Torah and Gospel, but God explicitly refers to and cites from them, as for example, from Psalm 37:29, “The righteous shall inherit the land/earth” (צְדִיקִים יִרְשׁוּ-אֶרֶץ), in Q 21:105, “And surely we have prescribed in the Psalms, after the Message [i.e., the Torah], that ‘My righteous servants shall inherit the land/earth’ (الأَرْضَ يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ).³

The Qur'ānic scenario of God citing God's own scripture has parallels throughout the Talmud and other rabbinic literature which depicts God as studying and quoting from God's

¹ Presentation for the Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran conference, *The Qur'ān and the Bible: Comparative Studies*, 2-10 September 2021. I am grateful to my section's moderator and to the general audience for their warm reception of my presentation.

² These exaggerations are arguably founded on the fact that in order to identify Western Orientalists' reifications about the East, Edward Said unavoidably created his own set of reifications about Western Orientalists. Incidentally, Said was from a privileged Protestant family. Future research will have to decide whether this biographical point is relevant for understanding the background of Said's anti-Orientalism. The reason I remind my audience of this biographical detail is that many readers of Said are unaware of it.

³ (All Qur'ānic Arabic citations follow that of tanzil.net, which, as the site explains, follows the “Uthmani Quran text . . . matching the Medina Mushaf.” I follow the site's “Imlaei” or simplified script). The nearby Psalm 37:11, “But the humble shall inherit the land,” is famously cited in Jesus' reported beatitude in Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Q 39:74 interprets this inheritance of the earth as that of the eschatological paradise.

own Torah. Congruent with this, God also famously cites from the Talmud (specifically Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 4:5) in Q 5:32.⁴

From the perspective of theology and scriptural commentary there is no reason at all to deny divine allusions in the Qur'ān to Jewish and Christian scriptures,⁵ whether those be canonical or extracanonical, the latter including texts like the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Protevangelium of James* (echoes of which are found in Q 3 and Q 19), or the *Homilies and Recognitions of Clement* (echoes of which appear in Q 3:71; 79-80),⁶ all of which are most likely of Syrian provenance.

Gospel of Thomas
Syrian Provenance

Although there is some minor disagreement, most scholars agree that the *Gospel of Thomas* is of Syrian provenance.⁷ The text is preserved in Greek fragments and more fully in a Sahidic Coptic translation recovered in the Nag Hammadi library. The *Thomas* gospel is somehow related to a pre-Diatessaronic gospel harmony, so that the *Thomas* gospel must be earlier than ca. pre-150-160 CE, the date of the Diatessaron, Tatian's famous Syriac harmony of the four canonical gospels.⁸

The first modern editors of the *Thomas* gospel divided the text into 114 short sayings of Jesus introduced by the formula "Jesus said." The division into 114 sayings is artificial and was probably done to recall, in an ecumenical spirit, the 114 *sūras* of the Qur'ān. The quick succession of "Jesus said," "Jesus said," "Jesus said," to introduce brief sayings is structurally similar to the often quick succession of short sayings in the Qur'ān, each introduced with the formula "Say." See, for example, the following passage from Q 39:

⁴ Usually overlooked is another divine Talmudic citation made twice in Q 6:12, "He has ordained upon himself mercy" (كَتَبَ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ) and later in Q 6:54, "Your Lord has ordained upon himself mercy" (كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ). This is expanded in a famous *ḥadīth qudsī*, "When God ordained creation, he pledged, prescribing to himself in his book that is deposited with him: 'My mercy prevails over my wrath'" (لَمَّا قَضَى اللَّهُ الْخَلْقَ، كَتَبَ فِي كِتَابِهِ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ، (فَهُوَ مَوْضُوعٌ عِنْدَهُ: إِنَّ رَحْمَتِي تَغْلِبُ غَضَبِي إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَّا قَضَى الْخَلْقَ كَتَبَ عِنْدَهُ فَوْقَ) (عَرَشِهِ إِنَّ رَحْمَتِي سَبَقَتْ غَضَبِي). These are all divine echoes of *Berakhot* 7a: "God says: May it be My will that My mercy will overcome My anger towards Israel for their transgressions, and may My mercy prevail over My other attributes through which Israel is punished, and may I conduct myself toward My children, Israel, with the attribute of mercy, and may I enter before them beyond the letter of the law." William Davidson Talmud: <<https://www.sefaria.org/Berakhot.7a.3?lang=bi>>; accessed 30 Aug. 2021.

⁵ I accordingly disagree with the general tone in Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Implausibility and Probability in Studies of Paleo-Qur'anic Genesis," in Florian Zemmin, Johannes Stephan, Monica Corrado, eds., *Islam in der Moderne, Moderne im Islam: Eine Festschrift für Reinhard Schulze zum 65. Geburtstag* (Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia 119; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018), pp. 15-40.

⁶ I present the Clementine evidence in my in-progress Qur'ān translation and commentary.

⁷ For a recent claim of a *Thomas* provenance in Alexandria, Egypt, see Ian Phillip Brown, "Where Indeed Was the Gospel of Thomas Written? Thomas in Alexandria," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138/2 (2019): pp. 451-472.

⁸ On the pre-Diatessaronic gospel harmony in relation to *Thomas*, see throughout Petri Luomanen, *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels* (Vigiliae Christianae Supplements, 110; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012).

- 8 **Say**, ‘Enjoy yours ingratitude for a little.
You are one of the companions of the Fire.’
9. . . . **Say**, ‘Are those who know and those who do not know equal?’
Only those possessed of understanding are reminded.
10. **Say**, ‘O my servants who believe,
be god-fearing towards your Lord. . . .
11. **Say**, ‘I have been commanded to serve God,
devoting my religion exclusively to Him,
12. And I have been commanded to be the first of those who submit.’
13. **Say**, ‘If I disobey my Lord,
I fear the torment of a mighty day.’
14. **Say**, ‘God I serve, devoting my religion exclusively to Him;
15. So serve what you wish apart from Him.’
- Say**, ‘The losers will be those who lose themselves. . . . (Alan Jones translation)

The introductory formula “said” in *Thomas* and “say” in the Qur’ān is an oracular device, and its repetition is designed to emphasize and heighten the sense of the text’s oracular-prophetic authority.⁹

The *Thomas* gospel announces itself as follows; “These are the secret sayings of the living Jesus, which Judas Thomas wrote down.” Judas Thomas means Judah the Twin, and the suggestion is probably that Judah is the spiritual twin of Jesus. The text continues: “And whoever finds the meaning/interpretation of these sayings will not taste of death.” The allusion is to Adam and Eve, who in the Garden of Eden tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge which caused them to die, first spiritually and then physically. Spiritual death will be removed and replaced with life, not by Jesus’ death on the cross (something the text never mentions, not explicitly at least), but by finding the meaning of Jesus’ secret teaching. According to *Thomas* saying 2, a person must seek the meaning of Jesus’ secret sayings until she or he finds the meaning of the sayings. Each of the 114 sayings of Jesus is expressed in mysterious language, which is done intentionally in order to motivate the student to seek the meaning, which is not at first apparent.

When the student finds the interpretation of the secret sayings, a spiritual state is attained that the *Thomas* gospel calls being “one” or unified (both with God and within oneself by uniting the inner masculine and feminine aspects of the human spirit symbolized by Adam and Eve). This same state of unity the *Thomas* gospel also calls the vision of God, entering the kingdom of God, attaining knowledge and sight of one’s own inner primordial image of light, finding life, entering the spiritual marriage chamber, dwelling in the light, being circumcised in spirit, and so on. Most scholars have not understood that all of these metaphors describe the same spiritual goal, and so these scholars have not recognized the thread that unifies the *Thomas* gospel on a structural level. The *Gospel of Thomas* is not a collection of disparate and unrelated sayings, but a carefully planned text on a thematic level.

⁹ See Devin J. Stewart, “The mysterious letters and other formal features of the Qur’ān in light of Greek and Babylonian oracular texts,” in Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *New Perspectives on the Qur’ān: The Qur’ān in its historical context 2* (London/New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 323-348; here p. 329: “One aspect of the Qur’ānic text that seems odd in comparison with the texts of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament is the frequent use of the introductory *qul*, the singular imperative ‘say’. . . . These imperatives addressed to the Prophet are among many features of the Qur’ān that convey a claim to mantic authority, for they suggest that the text of the revelations is not the Prophet’s own speech.”

The two main branches of Jewish mysticism form the larger background of the *Thomas* gospel.¹⁰ I refer to creation mysticism, which pertains to the mysteries of how God created the universe, and *merkabah* or chariot-throne mysticism, which involves ascending to God's throne and experiencing the vision of God seated thereon. Traditionally this ascent is paradoxically called a descent.

The main concerns or values and ideas of the *Thomas* gospel include the process of scriptural interpretation, self-knowledge, overcoming spiritual division by unity, overcoming time and space, fasting and repenting on Yom Kippur, keeping the Sabbath, the holy spirit as heavenly mother, loving one's human neighbors, following the leadership of James, the brother and successor of Jesus, the student becoming equal to the teacher, the preexistence of the spiritual students, seeing one's own faults instead of criticizing others, nurturing spiritual poverty or humility, concern and care for the poor, condemnation of political rulers, and much more.¹¹

Gospel of Thomas Main Ideas Relevant for Qur'ānic Studies

- 1: Inward-Outward Dyad in Relation to Self-Knowledge
- 2: Union: The Two Become One

In the synoptic gospels the dyad “inward-outward” is present in the trope that the true messiah will appear at the end of world history neither in inner rooms nor out in the desert, neither here nor there (Mark 13; Matthew 24; Luke 17; 21).

This is varied in the *Gospel of Thomas* saying 3 in the statement that the kingdom of God is both inside and outside you (an echo of Deuteronomy 30:11-14), and in *Thomas* saying 113 in the statement that the kingdom of God is visible neither here nor there, but is instead spread out over the earth in an unseen mode. *Thomas* saying 3 reads in full as follows:

Jesus said, “If those who lead you around say to you, ‘See, the kingdom is in the sky,’ then the birds of the sky would enter before you would. If they say to you, ‘It is in the sea,’ [Greek, under the earth] then the fish would enter it before you would. Instead, the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will understand that you are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you will dwell in poverty and you will become that poverty.”¹²

The dyad of the inward and the outward in Abrahamic religious traditions is attested first in Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things (הנסתרות) belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed (הנגלת) belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (RSV)

¹⁰ On this model, see April D. DeConick, *The Original Gospel of Thomas in Translation: With a Commentary and New English Translation of the Complete Gospel* (The Library of New Testament Studies 287; New York/London: T&T Clark, 2007).

¹¹ See Samuel Zinner, *The Gospel of Thomas in Light of Early Jewish, Christian and Islamic Esoteric Trajectories* (London: Matheson Trust, 2010). For a proposed second edition, see: <https://www.academia.edu/29245560/Book_Draft_Gospel_of_Thomas_Esoteric_Trajectories_Draft_of_Proposed_Revised_Corrected_2nd_Edition>; accessed 1 Sept. 2021.

¹² My translation from Coptic and Greek.

The inward and the outward are then later adapted as names of quasi-angelic beings in the earlier authentic portions of the Samaritan *Memar Marqa* (4th cent. CE). In the Mandaeen *Ginza Raba* (*The Great Treasure*) the inward and the outer also become names of quasi-angelic entities. In the Qur’ān, Inward and Outward finally become full-fledged divine epithets or names (Q 57:3).

The contrast between inner and outer resurfaces in another Jesus saying in the *Book of the Rolls* (*Kitāb al-majāll*), a ca. late 800s CE text incorporating or at least informed by some degree of much earlier materials, including the *Gospel of Thomas*:¹³ “We are inside all created things and outside them. We are in all the recondite and hidden things. We are inside and outside the things. None of us comes really into us and none of us goes out of us, because we are both the inside and the outside.”¹⁴ In a nearby passage we read similarly: “We have neither right nor left because we are the right and the left in a strength and power which cannot be seen and comprehended. We have neither exterior nor interior because we are the exterior and the interior.”¹⁵ Cf. *Nahj al-Balāghah* 186: “He is not inside things, and he is not outside things” (لَيْسَ فِي الْأَشْيَاءِ بِوَالِجٍ، وَلَا عَنْهَا بِخَارِجٍ).

According to the *Mashāriq anwār* by 14th century Shia Islamic author Rajab Bursī: “The glorious Lord proclaims in the *’iñjīl*: ‘Know yourself, O human, and know your Lord. Your exterior is for passing away, but I am your interior.’”¹⁶ This is swiftly followed by a citation of an ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib *ḥadīth*: “He who knows his Lord knows himself.” (This basic idea seems presupposed in Q 56:19: “Do not be like those who forgot God, with the result that He caused them to forget themselves”). The parallels in diction and theme with *Thomas* saying 3 are quite striking, since these include self-knowledge in conjunction with the inward-outward dyad (Table 1):

¹³ On a possible Syrian provenance for the *Book of the Rolls*, see Barbara Roggema, “Biblical Exegesis and Interreligious Polemics in The Arabic *Apocalypse of Peter* — *The Book of The Rolls*,” in David Thomas, ed., *The Bible in Arab Christianity* (The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 6; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006), pp. 131–150. See further Grypeou, Emmanouela. “Kitāb al-majāll; Jalayān Buṭrus,” in David Thomas and Barbara Roggema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations 600–1500: A Bibliographical History* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 632–637; idem, “The Re-Written Bible in Arabic: The Paradise Story and its Exegesis in the Arabic *Apocalypse of Peter*,” in David Thomas, ed., *The Bible in Arab Christianity* (History of Muslim-Christian Relations 6; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), pp. 113–130.

¹⁴ A. Mingana, “The *Apocalypse of Peter*,” in *Woodbrooke Studies III* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1931), p. 107.

¹⁵ A. Mingana, “The *Apocalypse of Peter*,” p. 106.

¹⁶ My translation from *Majmu‘a min shi‘r al-shaykh Rajab al-Bursī* (Beirut, n.d.), p. 188.

Table 1

Thomas 3
S. Zinner

Q 57
A. Jones

<p>Jesus said, “If those who lead you around say to you, ‘See, the kingdom is in the sky,’ then the birds of the sky would enter before you would. If they say to you, ‘It is in the sea,’ [Greek, under the earth] then the fish would enter it before you would. Instead, the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will understand that you are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you will dwell in poverty and you will become that poverty.”</p>	<p>3 “He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward. He has knowledge of everything.” 4 [It is] He who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then settled on the Throne. He knows what penetrates into the earth and what comes forth from it and what comes down from heaven and what ascends to it. He is with you wherever you are. God is observer of what you do. 5. His is the sovereignty (mul’ku) of the heavens and the earth.</p>
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Relevant also for *Thomas* saying 3’s inward-outward dyad is Q 41:53: “We shall show them Our signs on the horizons (*l-āfāqi*) and in themselves until it becomes clear to them that it/he is the truth.”

Thomas saying 3 has rightly been called a midrash on Deuteronomy 30:11-14:¹⁷

11 For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too hard for thee, neither is it far off.

12 It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say: ‘Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?’

13 Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say: ‘Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?’

14 But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. (JPS 1917)

Paul famously paraphrases this passage in Romans 10:

6 But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down)

7 or “Who will descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

8 But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach). (RSV)

Not only are both passages from Deuteronomy and Romans echoed in Q 6:35-37, but *Thomas* saying 3 might also be echoed as well (Table 2):

¹⁷ Stevan Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom: Second Edition* (Oregon House, California: Bardic Press, 2005), p. 41.

Table 2

Jewish and Christian Parallels	Q 6 (A. Jones)
<p><i>kabura</i>; cf. Deut 30:11, “For this commandment which I command you this day is not too difficult (<i>niplet</i>) for you.”</p> <p>Cf. Amos 9:2-3: “Though they dig into the nether-world, thence shall My hand take them; and though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down. / And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from My sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them.”</p> <p>Cf. Deuteronomy 30:12,13, “make us to hear it, that we may do it?”</p> <p>Cf. Romans 10:14: “And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?”</p> <p>Romans 10:7 “to bring Christ up from the dead.”</p> <p>Cf. Deuteronomy 30:12, “Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us?”</p> <p>Cf. <i>Thomas</i> 3: “the birds of the sky” and “the fish” “under the earth”</p>	<p>35 If their aversion is difficult/heavy for you (<i>kabura</i>) if you can seek out a tunnel whereby you may penetrate into the inward parts of the earth, or a ladder by which you may ascend into heaven and bring them a sign. . . .</p> <p>36. Only (<i>innamā</i>) those who hear can respond (<i>yastajību</i>);</p> <p>but God will [also] raise the dead, and then they will be returned to Him.</p> <p>37. They say, ‘Why has no sign from His lord been sent down to him?’ Say, ‘God is able to send down a sign, but most of them do not know.’</p> <p>38. There is no beast in the earth nor bird that flies with its wings but they are communities like you.</p>

Two Become One

In between *Thomas* sayings 3 and 113, the inward-outward dyad appears again in *Thomas* saying 22, where we read that the two must become one, and that the inward must be made like the outward and vice versa, the above must be made to be like the below, the male and female must become one, and eyes must replace an eye, hand replace hand, foot replace foot, and image replace image. Only then will one enter the kingdom of God. We have an echo of this in the following *ḥadīth qudsī*: “When I love him I become the hearing by which he hears, the seeing by which he sees, the hand by which he strikes and the foot by which he walks” (فَإِذَا أَحْبَبْتُهُ، كُنْتُ سَمْعَهُ الَّذِي يَسْمَعُ بِهِ، وَبَصَرَهُ الَّذِي يُبْصِرُ بِهِ، وَيَدَهُ الَّتِي يَبْطِشُ بِهَا، وَرِجْلَهُ الَّتِي يَمْشِي بِهَا، (وَإِنْ)).

Thomas saying 22 is developed later in the *Acts of Peter* 38: “Unless you make the things of the right hand as those of the left, and those of the left as those of the right, and those

What strikes one immediately in Q 112 is that each of the *four* lines ends with the letter ڨ, *dāl*, the equivalent of Hebrew ד, *dālet*, both of which occupy the *fourth* position in the *abjad* sequence. *Dālet* is the final letter of the Šema ‘Yisra’el’s opening line in Deuteronomy 6:4. Rabbinic tradition joins the final letter of the Šema ‘Yisra’el’s first word, an ‘*ayin*, to the last letter of the final word, a *dālet*, in order to form the encrypted word ָע (‘*ed*), “witness.”

One must not overlook that the *basmla*+Q 112 *āyāt* 1-4 comprise 19+47 letters=66 letters. 66 is the numerical value of *Allāh*.²¹

Psalm 136

Scholars generally recognize a parallel between Q 55’s repeating 19-letter refrain addressed to a dual audience (humans and jinn), فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ (*fabi-ayyi ālāi rabbikumā tukadhibāni*), “So which of your Lord’s favors will both of you deny?” and Psalm 136’s repeating refrain ָי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ (kiy l’*olam ḥasdo*), “for the faithful lovingkindness of the LORD endures forever.”²² Scholars have overlooked the pertinence of the Peshitta’s translation here of the Hebrew singular חַסְדּוֹ, “his faithful lovingkindness,” with ܬܫܚܘܬܗ, “his mercies/compassions,” a plural of *rahmīn/rahmayyā*. This Syriac noun is cognate to Q 55’s title الرحمن. Moreover, the plural “mercies” in Peshitta Psalm 136 agrees with the plurality of the noun آلَاءِ of Q 55’s refrain فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ. The Psalms Targum and the Septuagint both use singular nouns for Psalm 136’s refrain, טוביה (tūbhā +suffix) and τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ (*to eleos autou*) respectively. We must hasten to add that Aramaic טוב/טובה can be understood not only as an abstract singular, but also as a plural concrete “good things.”²³ However, in Psalm 136 in the Targum, טוב is to be understood as the singular “goodness,” as Cook correctly renders.²⁴

Of special interest is the unusual noun *ālā* (آلاء) in Q 55’s 31 refrains. The singular form of آلاء would seem to be some vocalization of آل (*al* or *āl*), given that the only matching morphological patterns in Qur’ānic vocabulary are the nouns ‘*ab/ ābā*’ (father/fathers) and ‘*ān/ānā*’ (time/times).²⁵ The numerical value of آل would be 31.

As mentioned, with its 31 refrains, Q 55 brings to mind Psalm 136 with its 26 refrains. Psalm 136 is traditionally called the Great Hallel (BT *Pesaḥim* 118a), in contrast to the Egyptian Hallel which comprises Psalms 113-118. Psalm 136’s refrain also occurs five times in the Egyptian Hallel, specifically in Psalm 118:1-4 and v. 29, the final verse. This results in

²¹ I noticed this before learning that Schedl had already noted this numerical feature; see Cl. Schedl, “Probleme der Koranexegese,” *Der Islam* 58/1 (1981): pp. 1-14. I emphasize that I do not see how most of Schedl’s further numerical-based claims could be verified on the basis of a sound methodology.

²² For references, see Angelika Neuwirth, “Two Views of History and Human Future: Qur’ānic and Biblical Renderings of Divine Promises,” *Journal of Quranic Studies* 10/1 (2008): pp. 1-12. Haleem’s arguments against a relationship between Q 55 and Psalm 136 are unconvincing and unnecessary; see Muhammad Abdel Haleem, “The Qur’an Explains Itself: *Sūrat al-Rahmān*,” in idem, *Understanding the Qur’an: Themes and Styles* (London/New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), pp. 158-183.

²³ See the lexicon at: <<http://cal.huc.edu>>.

²⁴ See Edward M. Cook, *The Psalms Targum*: <<http://www.targum.info/pss/ps5.htm>>; accessed 1 Sept. 2021.

²⁵ See Munther Younes, “Q 55,” in Mehdi Azaiez, Gabriel S. Reynolds, Tommaso Tesei, Hamza M. Zafer, eds., *The Qur’an Seminar Commentary / Le Qur’an Seminar: A Collaborative Study of 50 Qur’anic Passages / Commentaire collaboratif de 50 passages coraniques* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), p. 383.

a total of 26+5=31 instances of the refrain in the two Hallel, for a total of 31 verses. Moreover, Psalms 118 and 136 comprise a total of 29+26=55 verses.

The Relevance of the Hebrew Bible (*Vorlage* of the Peshitta)

There are at least two further points of relevance of the Hebrew text of Exodus 34:5-6 for the Qur’ān. The first pertains to the *basmala*. Here I refer to the fact that Exodus 34:6’s divine proclamation יהוה יהוה אל רחום וחנון, YHWH YHWH ’*el raḥum v’ḥannun*, comprises 19 letters, just as does the *basmala*. The internet is overflowing with fantastic delusions about the significance of the number 19 as it pertains to the *basmala*’s 19 letters. All of the internet fantasies remain ignorant of the factual significance of 19 in this regard, namely, the basis in the Hebrew text of Exodus 34:6. The main significance (there are probably others as well) of 19 in both the Torah and the Qur’ān is the divine unity and mercy.

The second point of relevance of the Hebrew text of Exodus 34:5-6 for the Qur’ān is the generally overlooked echo of this Torah passage in Q 96:1 (Table 4):

Table 4

Exodus 34:5	Q 96:1
וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם יְהוָה <i>vayyiqra’ b’ešem YHWH</i>	اقْرَأ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ <i>iq’ra bi-is’ mi rabbika</i>

In the *basmala*, Exodus 34:5-6’s YHWH is echoed with the divine name Allāh, “God,” while in Q 96:1, Exodus 34:5-6’s YHWH is echoed with the divine name Rabb, “Lord.” Q 96:1-2 goes on to relate the creation of Adam, that is, humanity, خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ, *khalāqa l-insāna*; cf. Peshitta Genesis 1:26 *בְּיַד אֱלֹהִים* (’*enāšā*). Genesis 1:27 then uses the verb *bry* (cognate of the Hebrew text’s בָּרָא, *bara*), *וַיַּבְרֵא אֱלֹהִים לְאָדָם*, “And God created Adam/humanity.” The Qur’ān in Q 96:1 thus echoes both Exod 34:5-6 together with Genesis 1:26-27, and the Peshitta in fact also links Exodus 34:5-6 with Genesis 1, specifically Genesis 1:2. The Peshitta makes this link through Exodus 34:6’s *mraḥḥapānā*, which recalls Genesis 1:2’s divine spirit that hovered, *וַיִּמְצָא*, over the primordial waters of chaos. Genesis 1 and Exodus 34:5-6 are also linked by the shared verb קרא (*qara*; verses 5, 8, 13, “and God called”) and its Syriac cognate *ܩܪܐ*, cognate of Q 96:1’s اَقْرَأ.

As I begin drawing my presentation to a conclusion, I want to introduce yet another overlooked feature of Q 96:1 that relates it to the Hebrew text of Genesis 1, namely to the latter’s verb בָּרָא, *bara*, “he created,” which is the exact equivalent of Q 96:1’s verb خَلَقَ. Notice that the equivalent of Hebrew בָּרָא (*bara*) is encrypted in the respective first letters of Q 96:1’s second through fourth words, that is, the letters *bā’-rā’-alif*: اَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ. The subtext’s encrypted sequence is then immediately decrypted by the surtext’s خَلَقَ, which Uri Rubin in his Hebrew translation of the Qur’ān naturally renders in this instance with בָּרָא. Another sign of a tendency towards encryption in Q 96:1 is an overlapping reverse (Left-To-Right) encryption of the letters of the divine name Rabb in the first letters of the *āya*’s second and third words, with the encrypted *rā’* being that of the surtextual رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ: اَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ.

That detecting this encryption in Q 96:1 is an emic result rather than an entic projection can be supported by a few additional Qur’ānic examples of the same technique. In Q 5:12 we encounter the encrypted letter sequence ا - ل - ه - ي - م, which corresponds to the Hebrew letters of אלהים (’*Elohim*), “God.” Keep in mind that the numerical value of ’*Elohim* is 86. Notice in Q 5:12 that the encrypted ه is that of the surtext’s straightforward Arabic semantic equivalent to אלהים, that is, الله. In effect, the surtext’s الله decrypts the subtext’s acronymic ا - ل - ه - ي - م:

ولقد أخذ الله ميثاق بني إسرائيل وبعثنا منهم اثني عشر نقيباً وقال الله إني معكم لأن أقمتم الصلاة وآتيتم الزكاة وآمنتم برسلي وعزرتموهم وأقرضتم الله قرضاً حسناً لأكفرن عنكم سيئاتكم ولأدخلنكم جنات تجري من تحتها الأنهار فمن كفر بعد ذلك منكم فقد ضل سواء السبيل

God took a pledge from the Children of Israel. We made arise among them twelve leaders, and God said, ‘I am with you: if you keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, believe in My messengers and support them, and lend God a good loan, I will wipe out your sins and admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams. Any of you who now ignore this [pledge] will be far from the right path.’ (Haleem, sequence slightly modified)²⁶

For want of time, one more example will have to suffice. In Q 12:100, we notice the encrypted letter sequence ا - د - ن - ي, corresponding to the Hebrew letters of אדני (Adonai) “my Lord,” the main traditional Tetragrammaton substitute in Judaism. That this is not the result of randomness is indicated first by the fact that the encrypted letter sequence ا - د - ن - ي immediately follows the surtextual رَبِّي “my Lord,” which is an exact Arabic semantic equivalent of Hebrew אדני. Second, the numerical value of אדני is 65, and we notice that the final letter of this first instance of رَبِّي is the *āya*’s letter 65, so that the surtext’s divine name Rabb is placed via letter-counts not according to the numerical value of the Arabic word Rabb, but according to the numerical value of its Hebrew semantic equivalent ’Adonai. Third, the final letter of the encrypted sequence, ي, and the final letter of the *āya*’s second instance of رَبِّي, span 65 letters, again congruent with the numerical value of Hebrew ’Adonai. Fourth, the final word involved in the encrypted letter sequence ا - د - ن - ي, that is, يي, is placed 26 words to the *āya*’s end, which is fitting as a hint at the Tetragrammaton (YHWH), whose numerical value is 26, and for which ’Adonai traditionally substitutes:

ورفع أبويه على العرش وخروا له سجداً وقال يا أبت هذا تأويل رؤياي من قبل قد جعلها ربي حقاً وقد أحسن بي إذ أخرجني من السجن وجاء بكم من البدو من بعد أن نزغ الشيطان بيني وإخوتي إن ربي لطيف لما يشاء إنه هو العليم الحكيم

Q 12:100 and took them up to [his] throne. They all bowed down before him and he said, ‘Father, this is the fulfilment of that dream I had long ago. My Lord has made it come true and has been gracious to me – He released me from prison and He brought you here from the desert – after Satan sowed discord between me and my brothers. My Lord is most subtle in achieving what He will; He is the All Knowing, the Truly Wise. (Haleem)

Now let us go back to Q 96 and notice that its sole mention of the divine name Allāh, in *āya* 14, is followed by exactly 86 letters to Q 96’s end.²⁷ Incidentally, notice the acrostic كنفسك, “as (or, according to) yourself/as your soul” in *āyat* 15-19:²⁸

²⁶ Haleem has the sequence, “We made twelve leaders arise among them. . . .”

²⁷ Compare Q 3:26: قل اللهم مالك الملك تؤتي الملك من تشاء وتنزع الملك ممن تشاء وتعز من تشاء وتذل من تشاء: Here the *mīm* of اللهم, which seems intentionally to evoke Hebrew אלהים (numerical value 86), is letter 86 to the *āya*’s end. The next *āya*, 27, contains a letter-total of 86. Note well the *āya* enumeration of Q 3:26, which coincides with the Tetragrammaton’s numerical value.

²⁸ Contextually, this acrostic may hint at Genesis 2:7’s נפש.

ألم يعلم بأن الله يرى 14
كلا لئن لم ينته لنسفعا بالناصية 15
ناصية كاذبة خاطئة 16
فليدع ناديه 17
سندع الزبانية 18
كلا لا تطعه واسجد واقترب 19

Q 96's divine names Rabb and Allāh occur in *āyāt* 1, 3, 8 (Rabb), and 14 (Allāh). The sum of these *āya* enumerations is 1+3+8+14=26, which coincides with the Tetragrammaton's numerical value.

We have in the above instances of encryption what could be described as a Qur'ānic divine dialogue on linguistic and numerical levels with the People of the Book, here specifically with Jews and their sacred text.

Time does not allow me to show how all of the above numerical and letter encryption techniques are found throughout the Hebrew Bible, as well as in the Peshitta translation. I have compiled the body of evidence in a monograph currently circulating among scholars from whom I am awaiting critical feedback.

The phenomenon of scriptural encryption, in any case, brings us back full circle to our presentation's beginning, that is, the *Gospel of Thomas*, which begins on a note of secrecy and the cryptic: "These are the secret/cryptic sayings of the living Jesus." The reader is then exhorted to discover the meaning of the secret sayings, which anticipates saying 3's dyad of the inward and the outward, the hidden and the revealed, which in turn anticipates Q 57:3's divine names, the Inward and the Outward.