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The earliest Islamic creed preserved in the Qur'an states that Muslims 'believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers' and that Muslims should make 'no distinction among any of His messengers' (Q. 2:285). The formulation of this creed has much to do with the introduction of monotheism to Arabia. Although neither scripture nor prophecy was given credence as a paradigm of human interaction with the gods by the pre-Islamic Arabs, they were to become essential elements of the new faith. Thus, much energy and time are devoted in the Qur'an to defending the existence of divinely revealed scriptures and the office of prophecy. This terse creed is used also in polemical retorts with the Jews and Christians who were telling Muslims to 'become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided'. The Muslims are asked to say, 'No, ours is the religion of Abraham, the upright, who did not worship any god besides God. So say: "We believe in God and in what was sent down to us and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, and what was given to Moses, Jesus, and all the prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we devote ourselves to Him"' (Q. 2:135–136). The creed asks Muslims to uphold the truth of the Scripture of Judaism but sees in that commitment no barrier to accepting the Qur'an as Scripture of the same status.

As a matter of faith, then, Muslims are supposed to believe that God sent revelation to humanity. The most important examples given in the Qur'an of such revealed Scriptures are the Torah of Moses (*tawrāt*), the Gospels of Jesus (*injīl*, here the Qur'an gives to Jesus what he never claimed to have), and the Psalms of David (*zābūr*). Many of the arguments in the Qur'an use the existence of these models as evidence for the divine origins of the new Scripture being revealed to the Arabs. Indeed, the nature of the Qur'an as Scripture is understood in the self-presentation of the Qur'an to be the same as that of the Torah and the Gospels.

Attempting to characterise the position of the Qur'an towards the Hebrew Bible is anything but simple. First, it is not clear how much of

the Hebrew Bible the Qur'an has in mind when it refers to 'the book of Moses', the Torah. Although the Qur'an is mainly concerned with Moses and the Patriarchs, it does know of David and Solomon; moreover, the knowledge in the Qur'an of Jewish Scripture is mediated through a midrashic prism. A precise answer to this question, that is, how much of the Torah the Qur'an knows, is thus impossible.[1] To argue, however, that the Qur'an knows of the Bible only what it presents is also indefensible. One could conceive of Muhammad knowing much of the Hebrew Bible yet choosing not to make much of it part of his presentation. There is actually an ambivalence in the Qur'an towards certain periods of Israelite religious history, notably the period of the judges.[2] Whatever was the case, the presentation of biblical material in the Qur'an is done with utter conviction about the veracity of the version being told. There is no hesitation or self-doubt. God is telling Muhammad *the* story (cf. Q. 20:99, 40:78).

Second, there are contradictory, though not irreconcilable, positions expressed in the Qur'an vis-à-vis the authority and authenticity of the Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. There are many instances where these Scriptures are called upon to vindicate Muhammad; they are called 'light and guidance', and their truth is such that they make manifest the truth of the Qur'an. Muhammad pleads with his people to query the 'People of the Book', a phrase invented by the Qur'an. The People of the Book are in a position to vouchsafe for the truth of the prophecy of Muhammad. Yet there are verses where the authenticity of these very Scriptures is called into doubt. The Jews are accused of tampering with their Scripture, corrupting it and violating God's will. How do we understand these statements, and more importantly, how were they understood by successive generations of Muslims?

THE SCRIPTURES OF GOD

Rudi Paret has spoken of the tendency of the Qur'an to standardise (*typisieren*) monotheistic history.[3] Human history is seen as a series of similar prophetic eras: God sends a prophet to a nation to guide it to Him, only to repeat this process again; usually these prophets have Scriptures and miracles to vindicate them. Muhammad is one such prophet in this history. The Meccans, meanwhile, did not regard prophecy as a legitimate phenomenon. The thrust of the arguments in the Qur'an is thus not whether Muhammad is a true or a false prophet, alternatives that presuppose in the first place an acceptance of the notion of prophecy, but whether prophecy itself, which entailed in this case scriptural

authority, is a valid phenomenon. The same attitude held for divinely revealed Scriptures – the Meccans denied the existence of such a thing as revealed books. In defending its claims, the Qur'an raises repeatedly the histories of Judaism (particularly the story of Moses and the Patriarchs) and Christianity (the life of Jesus and his Gospel). What Muhammad is doing has been done before. Moreover, the Qur'an presents Jews and Christians as possessors of knowledge (*dhikr*, *'ilm*) and books (*kitāb*). They had already experienced the prophetic phase that the Arabs were now experiencing, and each already possessed a book. Confused Arabs should ask them about the claims of Muhammad.

Chapter 16 of the Qur'an, *sūrat al-naḥl*, is a good example of the use of Jewish and Christian antecedents to argue for the veracity of Scripture and prophecy. Verse Q. 16:24 records the mockery of the Meccans regarding Scripture: 'When they are asked, "What has your Lord sent down?" they say, "Ancient Fables."' This is an oft-repeated sarcasm levelled by the Meccans against Muhammad's new scripture. It is not divine; it is nothing but fables. Prophecy is defended in Q. 16:36 by reference to the prophetic paradigm of human history: 'We sent a messenger to every community, saying, "Worship God and shun false gods."' Both prophecy and Scripture are again defended in verse Q. 16:43–5, when the Qur'an asks the Meccans to query people of knowledge (*dhikr*): 'All the messengers We sent before you were simply men to whom We had given the Revelation: you people can ask those who have knowledge if you do not know. We sent them with clear signs and scriptures.' There is no doubt that Jews and Christians are denoted by the epithet 'people who have knowledge'. The word *dhikr* ('knowledge', 'scripture') is used extensively in the Qur'an, and it clearly is connected to Scripture and revelation (cf. Q. 21:7 also).

Indeed, many of the arguments presented in another chapter (13) are cemented by the testament of those who 'have been given the Book'. They, meaning those who possess Scripture, are overjoyed with what Muhammad has been receiving from God (Q. 13:36). Those who have the knowledge of the Book are called upon to act as witnesses to the truth of Muhammad's prophethood (Q. 13:43): 'They say, "You have not been sent." Say, "God – and those who have knowledge of the Scripture – are sufficient witness between us."' These instances of calling upon Christians and Jews to step forward to support Muhammad's claims are remarkable in so far as they are not mixed with reservations or qualifications. The tone of the Qur'an towards Jews and Christians would soon harden considerably as Muhammad realised that being a monotheist did not win him any support.

We should not be surprised, however, to see such a positive attitude towards the Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity at the outset of Muhammad's career. The whole message of the Qur'an, as the Qur'an tirelessly repeats, is nothing but a recapitulation of the same essence of the Jewish and Christian faith in Arabic for the Arabs. The Qur'an is to be the Scripture of the Arabs, just as the Torah and the Gospels were the Scripture of the Jews and the Christians, respectively. Drawing an analogy between the history of the Jews and the Christians, on one hand, and the history of Muhammad with his fellow Arabs, on the other, was essential for the claims of the Qur'an. In many ways, Jewish history is pivotal for Muhammad's claims, just as Jewish Scripture is said to be the vindication of the Qur'an. The Qur'an at no point hides or belittles the connection to its Jewish paradigm. Ultimately, the Qur'an saw itself as the continuation of the history of Judaism and Christianity.

The Meccans were not swayed by this affinity. Faced with the parallels Muhammad was drawing between himself and Moses, the Meccans mockingly insisted on a replication of the Mosaic model, a book descending physically from heaven unto Muhammad – this was one among many demands placed on Muhammad to prove his prophetic identity. Neither Muhammad nor the Qur'an could answer to such a challenge because both refused performing miracles as a precondition for faith. The Qur'an, however, insists on calling its verses *āyah* ('signs' or 'miracles'), thus turning the table on the Meccans. Now Scripture itself is taken to be a sign of God. Revelation, a verbal inspiration that prophets proclaimed to their people, is *the* sign from God. In the case of Muhammad, it would be the sufficient sign; he would refuse to perform any of the miracles demanded of him, although the Qur'an does admit that Moses and Jesus performed such deeds – a contradiction that places the Qur'an in an unenviable position. Muhammad's Qur'an is to suffice. Scripture is thus made central in the world of the Qur'an, the sole connection between God and humanity.[4] Moreover, Scripture is both the message (a promise of salvation) and the medium (its very word is miraculous).

There is thus a rather developed notion in the Qur'an of what Scripture is, what it should look like, and what its supposed function is in monotheistic history – what has been called the 'self-referentiality' of the Qur'an.[5] The Qur'an speaks of itself as a Scripture and demands to be treated as one. This understanding of Scripture is projected back onto the Torah and the Gospels, and it determines how the Qur'an understands what the Torah is and what the Gospels are. In this sense, the past is made into the image of what Muhammad was experiencing. There is

a lot of such backward projection in the Qur'an. The life of Moses is seen as a replication of Muhammad's life and the previous Scriptures as earlier Qur'ans. Earlier Scriptures were verbal inspirations to the prophets on hand (i.e., Moses and Jesus), proclaimed to their peoples, and enshrined as books. These books therefore must be scrupulously preserved. To later Muslims, any deviation from this model meant that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures were no longer divine.

Scriptures are also placed at the centre of any religious community. Thus, the Qur'an calls the Torah a 'guidance and light', a book of rules to be followed that guarantees salvation (Q. 4:44), just as it would call the Qur'an. Indeed, the Qur'an reserves much of its poetic language for extolling the potency of Scripture, its effect on believers, its overwhelming cosmic power and its sheer salvific fiat (cf. the famous verse Q. 59:21 'If We had sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled and split apart in its awe of God; and those similitudes – We strike them for men, so that they may reflect'). Obeying the word of the Scriptures becomes a central issue in the Qur'an; the role of the prophet (*nabī*) is equated, if not relegated, to that of a 'messenger' (*rasūl*), a herald of God's will expressed in verbal utterances that convey the divine commands. Finally, Scriptures vindicate each other; thus, the Gospels were sent down to vindicate the Torah (Q. 3:50, 5:46), just as the Qur'an is sent down to vindicate the Gospels and the Torah (Q. 27:76).

THE JUDGEMENT OF THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an, however, regards itself as more than just a vindication of the Torah; it is also a judge and an arbitrator of its authenticity. The Qur'an outlines this position (Q. 5:48) in the following manner:

> We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you. We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God has so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will return to God and He will make clear to you matters you differed about.

This quotation sums up what could be called the 'constructive ambivalence' of the Qur'an towards the Scripture of Judaism and Christianity. The Qur'an acknowledges the status of the Torah, its divine origin, and

its central character: it is a book of guidance and divine command. It is also the law of its nation, the foundation of its life. Coming so late after Christianity and Judaism, Islam could hardly deny the Torah its standing. The Qur'an is, nevertheless, ambivalent about how much authority it wants to accord to the Bible. There are clear statements in the Qur'an that the Torah was a good enough book for the Jews; they should follow it, and God will be pleased with them (Q.5:66–9). As such, there is no abrogation of 'the book of Moses', just a restriction of its efficacy to the Jews. The Qur'an is asking the Jews to believe in Muhammad to the degree that it is confirming their faith, not replacing it. The Qur'an sees the Torah as a book for a nation, which means that other nations have the right to their own books.

One could describe the judgements of the Qur'an on the status of the Torah as situational. The Qur'an can issue a damning judgement if the issue is the denial of Muhammad's prophecy or the truthfulness of the Qur'an. To the degree that the Jews are claiming their Torah is not in agreement with the Qur'an, then either they are hiding the true Scripture or the Scripture they claim to quote is falsified. Repeatedly, the Qur'an claims that Muhammad was foretold in the Scriptures, and the Jews' denial of such a foretelling is a clear sign of the corruption they have brought to God's word.

THE CHARGE OF FALSIFICATION

A major dent in the authority of the Bible is thus the Qur'an's accusation that the Jews have tampered with it. The Qur'an raises this charge repeatedly, using different terms in different contexts. Most prominent among the contentious issues is the foretelling of the coming of Muhammad in the old Scriptures. The Qur'an insists that the coming of Muhammad was foretold in the Torah and the Gospels. Having the pagan Meccans as his enemies was one thing, for Muhammad could always point to Judaism and Christianity as his spiritual brothers; having the Jews mount arguments against his preaching was far more grave. Muhammad could ill afford not to answer. The points of reference are now different. Muhammad was insisting that his message was nothing short of a repetition of the old monotheistic creed, whether Jewish or Christian. He made it a point to urge his Arab opponents to ask the Jews and the Christians about him. Yet the Jews of Medina, Muhammad's new abode after Mecca, were not eager to accept Muhammad as a prophet, let alone the idea that he could bring another Torah. Moreover, there were marked differences between the retelling of biblical stories in the Qur'an and

their counterparts in the Bible. The Jews were eager to point these out. It is in light of this new opposition from the Jews of Medina that the Qur'an insists on the fact that Muhammad is proclaimed in the Torah and that the Jews are hiding this fact. The tone of the Qur'an now hardens, and the Jews are accused of many a crime.

Take, for example, this description of what the enemies of Muhammad were doing with Scripture (Q. 2: 77–9): 'Do they not know that God is well aware of what they conceal and what they reveal? Some of them are uneducated, and know the Scripture only through wishful thinking. They rely on guesswork. So woe to those who write the Scripture with their own hands and then claim, "This is from God", in order to make some small gain. Woe to them for what their hands have written! Woe to them for all that they have earned.' Or his Jewish opponents are said to twist God's word, deliberately changing its meaning (Q. 4:46, 5:13). In verse Q. 6:91, the Qur'an takes aim at both the Meccans and the Jews: 'They have no grasp of God's true measure when they say, "God has sent nothing down to a mere mortal." Say, "Who was it who sent down the Scripture, which Moses brought as a light and a guide to people, which you made into separate sheets, showing some but hiding many?"' The Jews are accused of mispronouncing, hiding, and fabricating new Scripture. This accusation of falsification, known in Arabic as *taḥrīf*, in truth became the prism through which later Muslims understood the status of the Bible. In many ways, the Qur'an poses an almost impossible dilemma here: the Torah is divine; the Torah is corrupted. The status of the Hebrew Bible is ever suspended, and the tension between its divinity and its corruption is never resolved. In this sense, the Qur'an sets the stage for the sustained ambivalence towards the Bible that characterises all subsequent Islamic literatures. Indeed, a Muslim could never be sure what to think of the Bible in so far as any judgement was always fraught with uncertainties.[6]

Yet, even the concept of falsification was not clear to Muslims themselves. There were at least four positions taken by medieval scholars regarding the scope of the falsification of the Torah. The first position held that all the Torah is falsified, and nothing of its original divine form was left. The second maintained that most of the Torah was corrupted. The third opinion, entertained by a majority of scholars, insisted that only a small part of the Torah was corrupted, whilst the fourth camp believed that the Torah was divine, and only the interpretations given to it are corrupted. According to the latter view, the wording of the Torah was still the originally revealed word of God; the Jews simply did not give the correct interpretation.[7] Given these four differing views, an

'Islamic' position towards the Bible can be very difficult to predict; a scholar may espouse any of these positions and defend it. The issue, however, was always the implications that the upholding of each such position would entail.

This ambivalence also was translated into the legal realm, where Muslims were asked to withhold judgement on any particular biblical pericope. They should not reject it for fear it was divine, and they should not accept it for fear it might be corrupted.[8] An example of the complex set of anxieties that confronted Muslim jurists when dealing with the holiness of the Torah can be illustrated from an historical incident in the tenth century that produced a *fatwa* ('religious ruling').[9] Camilla Adnag has studied this *fatwa* and translated it. Here is the problem: a Muslim slave who was owed money by a Jewish merchant asked for the return of his money. The Jewish merchant swore by the Torah that he was unable to pay him at that time. To this oath, the Muslim slave said: 'May God curse the Torah.' This altercation was witnessed by one individual only. Another witness stepped forward saying that he met the slave after the altercation, and the slave said to him that he 'cursed the Torah of the Jews'. The judge presiding over a complaint brought by the Jewish community against the Muslim slave was of the opinion that the slave should be put to death for his blasphemy, but since the punishment was so grave and the situation unclear – did the slave curse *the* Torah or the Torah of the Jews – he decided to consult a jurist (or *mufti*, a customary habit in the Shariah system). The slave meanwhile was languishing in jail awaiting resolution of the matter. The *mufti* rejected the slave's defence of feeble-mindedness or ignorance, on the grounds that he had the capacity to remember his money and ask for it. The issue of what to do with him for cursing the Torah, however, remained uncertain. There was only one witness who saw the altercation and reported that the slave cursed the Torah; the other witness had a different version of the story. Capital punishment required unambiguous, clear testimony from at least two reliable witnesses. After mulling over the matter further, the *mufti* gave this most ambivalent decision:

> I have thus shown you that I am obliged to be ambiguous in the answer I give. If someone is liable to the maximum punishment, i.e. execution, but there is an obstacle which renders the death sentence problematic, this person should not be released from prison, but neither should his prison term be extended if he has spent an appropriate length of time in jail. Moreover, he may be relieved of carrying more chains than he can bear. Perhaps God will show us a

reply concerning this issue that the heart can be at peace with, and that is supported by evidence from God's proof (the Qur'an) and the proof of His Messenger. This is what I hold, and in God is success.[10]

THE POST-QURANIC LITERATURE AND THE BIBLE

The main result of the Qur'an's ambivalence is that the Hebrew Bible never became an official part of the Scripture of the new faith. Relying as much as it did on the Bible, the new religion was nonetheless able to break away from it. However, this shift did not prevent the Bible from being admitted into Islamic religious tradition in a different guise. It is important to point out that even while the Hebrew Bible did not ultimately reach the status of Scripture, biblical lore was nevertheless enshrined as part of the Islamic traditions. The charge of falsification did not prevent Muslims from acquiring the biblical lore that was needed to flesh out the Quranic references to biblical stories. Indeed, a massive cultural and religious acquisition was undertaken by the early generations of Muslims, resulting in a wholesale transference of Jewish lore to Islam. Much of this activity was carried out by converts from Judaism.[11] In this sense, Muslims acquired the complete story, with material from the Hebrew Bible as the basis of that complete story, from Adam to Muhammad. The lore acquired by Muslims was extensive, and it appeared in many forms, as prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) ascribed to Muhammad; as specifically Jewish lore, called in Arabic *isrā'īliyyāt* ('Israelite material'); as biographies of the Patriarchs (the Patriarchs in Islam were considered prophets, and the Arabic name for this genre is 'Tales of the Prophets'); and as part of universal histories written by Muslim historians.[12] In this sense, the Bible was made part of the Islamic tradition, even though its absorption into the tradition is not always readily apparent.

There are two areas where this biblical lore played a major role. The first is in Qur'an commentary literature, and the second is in the genre of Tales of the Prophets. The Qur'an has a substantial amount of material retelling biblical stories – from Adam, Noah, Abraham, the Patriarchs, Moses, David, and Solomon, to the destruction of the Temple. These retellings are referential; that is, they presume a certain familiarity with these stories in advance. Thus, the commentary tradition felt the need to fill in the details omitted in the Qur'an. Again, Jewish converts to Islam played a major role in supplying the material with which commentators sought to fill this void. This material, as might be expected, has had a checkered history of reception, oscillating on the one hand between

complete acceptance and attempts on the other at purging it from the tradition. Yet, because of its intimate connection to a central genre in Islam, it has proved impossible to uproot *isrā'īliyyāt* from the tradition.[13]

The other area where biblical material left its impact is in the genre of Tales of the Prophets. This is a genre of literature that presents human history as salvation history, centred on stories of men whom Islam came to consider prophetic figures. These works usually began with the creation of the world, the story of Adam, Noah, and most of the patriarchal history of the Hebrew Bible, and included also the life of Jesus, all presented as a preamble to the life of Muhammad.[14]

An example of the interaction of the Qur'an, the Hebrew Bible and Islamic literature

Q. 11:69–73 offers an example of how the Qur'an retells biblical stories and how the shadow of the Hebrew Bible informs Muslims' understanding of their Scripture. This is a retelling of the story of the Angels announcing to Abraham the birth of his son Isaac:

> To Abraham, Our messengers brought good news. They said, 'Peace.' He answered, 'Peace', and without delay he brought in a roasted calf. When he saw that their hands did not reach towards the meal, he found this strange and became afraid of them. But they said, 'Do not be afraid. We have been sent against the people of Lot.' His wife was standing nearby and laughed. We gave her good news of Isaac, and after him, of Jacob. She said, 'Alas for me! How am I to bear a child when I am an old woman, and my husband here is an old man? That would be a strange thing!' They said, 'Are you astonished at what God ordains? The grace of God and His blessing be upon you, people of this house! For He is worthy of all praise and glory.'[15]

The biblical and midrashic background of this retelling is unmistakable. Yet, when Muslim exegetes came to interpret this paragraph, they were not bound by the biblical archetype, or at least they found it easy to relegate it to a subordinate position. The wording in Arabic of the text has Sarah laughing *before* she is told that she is going to have a son. This order in the text allowed Muslim commentators the possibility of speculating about other reasons for her laughter (in addition to the fact that she was too old to become pregnant). It is not that they did not know the biblical archetype; rather, the archetype was simply not paramount. Sarah could have laughed for many reasons, and all of these were given, as is typical of the art of medieval interpretation where one meaning was not enough.[16]

If one reads the hundreds of Qur'an commentaries written across the centuries, one might come to the conclusion that the story as told in the Bible is not operative here. Yet this is not the case. The Hebrew Bible, with its ambivalent position in Islam, can make a sudden appearance and be re-integrated into the tradition; it takes only one exegete to decide to go back to the biblical source to change the picture. Such a figure did exist. In the fifteenth century, a Muslim exegete, al-Biqāʿī, decided to use the Bible to interpret the Qur'an – re-positioning the Hebrew Bible as central to understanding of the biblical material in the Qur'an.[17] When interpreting the preceding pericope, he had no doubt about why Sarah was laughing, as he explicitly cites the Hebrew Bible and another Quranic passage (Q. 51:29).[18] All other interpretations are refused. The Hebrew Bible thus has a continuous presence in the Islamic religious imagination.

This example highlights another important aspect of the position of the Hebrew Bible in Islam. Despite the forgoing comments on Jewish lore, the Hebrew Bible was never appropriated as such; to Muslims, it remained a Scripture in Hebrew (or its official rabbinic or Karaite Arabic translation), and thus in the custody of the Jews. While Muslims were able to have access to it (because Jewish populations in the central Muslim lands were remarkably literate), Muslims were always cognizant that this was the Scripture of another faith. Its use in Islam had to be negotiated away from Judaism. Muslims knew that they could issue a judgement against the Bible itself, but they were not foolish enough to think that this judgement would carry weight with the faithful. The Bible in this sense, as a text belonging to the Jews, was never appropriated; it had its custodians, the Jews themselves. Muslims could attack it, but to do so in a credible manner, they had to contend with its Jewish custodians.

POLEMICAL ANTI-BIBLE LITERATURE

One of the most sustained engagements Muslims have had with the Hebrew Bible was in polemical treatises written against the Jews. Here all the scholarship of medieval Islam was brought to bear on the Hebrew Bible, and a systematic dismantling of the text was carried out. The legacy of this interaction with the Hebrew Bible has been studied extensively.[19] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh believes that since Muslims did not uphold the sanctity of the Hebrew Bible, they brought 'an almost scholarly critical study' to the Old Testament, as well as to the New Testament. She has also suggested that 'Muslim Bible criticism drew heavily on pre-Islamic

pagan, Christian, Gnostic, and other sources, and later may have been transmitted – through both Jewish and Christian mediators – to early modern Bible criticism.'[20] This assessment highlights the sophistication that medieval Muslim polemicists brought to their study of the Bible.

Lazarus-Yafeh identifies four arguments that Muslims used against the Bible: falsification (*taḥrīf*), abrogation (*naskh*), lack of reliable transmission of the text (*tawātur*), and novel biblical exegesis.[21] The first two were already used in the Qur'an. The third, the nature of the transmission of the Torah, was developed later after a theory of 'universal transmission' was developed by Muslim theologians. The fourth category, advancing novel interpretations of the Hebrew Bible, was mainly used to prove that the Torah already predicted the coming of Muhammad.

The Iberian Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) was the first to offer a systematic presentation of the corruptions in the Hebrew Bible to prove the charge of falsification that the Qur'an raised.[22] His main arguments have been grouped by Lazarus-Yafeh into three categories: chronological and geographical inaccuracies, theological impossibilities and preposterous behaviour. For each of these categories Ibn Ḥazm supplies a long list of examples. The story of Joseph, he insists, shows such chronological inconsistencies that it cannot be true on its own or composed by God. He also points out the anthropomorphic passages in the Torah to highlight its theological faults. Other theological issues that he raises are the sins of the prophets: cheating Jacob, incestuous Lot, and lying Abraham. These were all blasphemous accusations against holy men that cannot have been true. Finally, the instances of fornication that filled the biblical account of Israelite history were too unsettling for Ibn Ḥazm. The list he brandishes is long, and he is full of indignation that such lies can have been levelled against a genealogy God chose to bless.[23]

The belief that there was a lack of a reliable transmission history for the Bible came to play a major role in anti-Jewish polemics. Unlike the Muslims, Ibn Ḥazm insisted, Jews could not offer clear evidence showing that the Bible was transmitted faithfully, and that tampering and collusion to corrupt the text had been avoided. Ibn Ḥazm transferred this criterion from native Muslim scholarship, where it was used to assess the veracity of the Muslims' own religious tradition. Muslims had devised a theoretical model for transmitting historical information and texts, explaining how texts are preserved and how they are corrupted. Highest in the methods of transmission of a text was 'universal transmission', or what is known in Arabic as *tawātur*. This is transmission of a text from one generation to the other such that a text could not become

corrupted, because its transmission has been witnessed and (done) by all. This stringent condition has only been met by the Qur'ān and very few other prophetic traditions. The Torah was not transmitted in this fashion, Ibn Ḥazm insisted. Wars, exile, and destruction of the Temple all point to the impossibility of an unbroken chain of transmission of the Torah.[24] Muslim polemicists highlighted the role played by Ezra in reconstituting the Hebrew Bible. Ibn Ḥazm, Lazarus-Yafeh writes, 'was the first to make Ezra into a wicked scoundrel who intentionally corrupted the Scriptures', thus raising 'the general Islamic argument against the Bible to an essentially higher level of systematic textual criticism'.[25]

THE BIBLE REHABILITATED

It would be safe to state that the Bible, apart from a small window of time early on in the history of Islam, had a tangential relationship to the Islamic religious tradition. Yet, as has been shown, this statement also needs to be qualified because biblical influences in fact continued to be abundant. Moreover, Muslims cultivated an intimate polemical knowledge of the Bible. The fact that the Bible was not part of the Scripture of Islam, or part of the curriculum of its theological training, did not mean that intellectuals and religious scholars could not access it. The presence of an active Jewish community in the central Muslim lands (Arabia, Persia and Turkey) meant that copies of the Hebrew Bible (in their official Arabic translations) were accessible. Periodical Jewish conversion to Islam meant that specialised knowledge could be codified in polemical treatises – since many converts wrote polemical treatises against their previous faith. Yet the ambivalence inherent in the Islamic position vis-à-vis the Bible meant that the ordinarily negative tones of this polemic could be overturned, permitting a more positive appreciation of the Bible that was always latent in the Islamic religious imagination.

In 1457, a Muslim exegete residing in Cairo, al-Biqāʿī, embarked on the composition of a massive new Qur'an commentary. By then the genre was almost 800 years old, and a revolutionary work was unexpected. For reasons that remain mysterious, however, al-Biqāʿī decided to re-admit the Hebrew Bible as the proof-text for interpreting biblical material in the Qur'an. He thus turned his back on the Islamicised biblical lore that was by then the only available source to explicate the biblical material in the Qur'an and instead made a daring return to the biblical sources. Moreover, al-Biqāʿī, whom I have called a Muslim Hebraist, was using a rabbinically trained Jewish friend to help him navigate the Hebrew Bible.

He managed to use three Arabic Bible versions: the rabbinic translation by Saadia Gaon, a Karaite translation (by Yafet ben Eli?), and an Arabic Christian version of the Septuagint.[26] When in doubt, he compared the Arabic version to the Hebrew original with the help of his informant. He moreover kept his extensive citations in the original Judeo-Arabic register, thus refusing the temptation to Islamise the phraseology of the Hebrew Bible (it was customary to 'Quranise' the language of the Bible). Nothing of this sort had been seen before. It is not that biblical material was not admitted into Islam, for, as stated earlier, the biblical material in the religious Islamic tradition is extensive. But it was always admitted through mediation: re-phrased, re-told and never attributed to the Hebrew Bible as the Jewish Hebrew Bible.

So unusual was al-Biqāʿī's practice that soon a controversy erupted as to whether it was Islamic and legal to quote the Bible in order to interpret the Qur'an. This was a major theological controversy, and al-Biqāʿī felt compelled to write an apologia in defence of his practice.[27] This apologia preserves the most extensive known debate in Islam about the status of the Bible. Polemicist that he was, al-Biqāʿī also solicited the opinions of the major intellectuals, judges, and scholars of the city – who were his friends. We thus have an extensive amount of material on the issue of the Scriptures of other religions and their status in Islam. Al-Biqāʿī stood his ground and fearlessly defended the sanctity of the Hebrew Bible but also, more importantly, a Muslim's right to use it in a religious context.

The major argument that al-Biqāʿī employed to rehabilitate the Hebrew Bible was not that it was uncorrupted, for he did believe that a very small part was falsified. Rather, being in a position to judge the Hebrew Bible, al-Biqāʿī argued that a Muslim scholar should be able to use it. Using the Qur'an as a criterion to ferret out the falsified from the genuine in the Hebrew Bible, a Muslim should go ahead and use any part of the Bible, as long as his readers are warned in the case of corrupt material. Indeed, al-Biqāʿī goes a step further. Even when unable to assess the pericope in question, a Muslim should go ahead and use it for edification and exhortation. In other words, the Hebrew Bible should receive the benefit of the doubt, al-Biqāʿī insists. Since it is the word of God, then it is worthy of use in religious context.

This rather accommodating view of the Hebrew Bible is not unusual; it must be remembered that there was always one camp of Muslim intellectuals who upheld the sanctity of the Hebrew Bible. Yet, even when so valued, the Hebrew Bible remained outside the parameters of Islamic education; holding a high opinion of the Hebrew Bible usually did not

translate into any meaningful interaction with the text. Here is where al-Biqāʿī was radically innovative. He insisted on using the Hebrew Bible in the most sacred of Islamic literatures, Qur'anic commentaries.[28] He quoted copiously from the Torah as well as from the Prophets and the Writings in the Hebrew Bible. He knew what to look for and what to quote. He exhibited a knowledge of the intricacies of the Hebrew Bible which remains unique among the medieval scholars of Islam. Finally, this affinity for the Hebrew Bible came at a cultural moment when Muslim lands were not occupied or under threat from Europe – before humanism and before the Hebrew Bible became a classical work of literature in secular modernity. This was an Islamic development which was the result of religious factors intrinsic to the long history of Islamic religious tradition.

THE MODERN PERIOD

The modern history of the Hebrew Bible in Muslim countries has yet to be studied systematically, and what follows simply highlights what I consider to be significant elements of a yet-to-be told story. The increased influence of Europe upon Muslim societies during the past two centuries, whether through trade, colonisation, missionary activity, or educational outreach, meant that Muslims were exposed to more aggressive methods of encountering the Hebrew Bible (now usually as the 'Old Testament', regarded as part of the Christian Bible). Anti-Qur'an polemical literature proliferated, and many Muslims felt besieged, although 'higher criticism' was a boon for Muslim polemicists, and Muslims showed remarkable awareness of the modern literature on the Bible, especially the Muslims of India.

In contrast to this negative re-encounter with the Hebrew Bible, the nascent nationalisms of the Muslim world were invested in making the religious minorities of their countries feel part of their respective nations. This entailed a celebration of unity, with the concomitant acceptance of the Scripture of Judaism and Christianity as part of the national heritage. The Bible was on its way to becoming a classic in the Muslim world. Soon intellectuals would not be caught without having read the Bible, even though Muslims were not in the habit of reading it.

One still finds the old positions surviving, if not dominating, in most of the population (e.g., the Bible has been falsified). But new factors have made for radical developments. Not least is the wide availability of the Bible. In the Muslim world, all the mass-produced Bibles are Christian Bibles, which means that Muslims are reading the Hebrew

Bible as part of Christian Scripture. Any educated individual now has access to the Bible. Far more significant is the fact that, especially in the Arab World, the new nineteenth-century American Protestant translation of the Bible into Arabic was of immense cultural significance far beyond the numerical percentage of Christians in the native population. To quote a famous nineteenth-century statement, 'the Arabic language was Christianized.' Since the new Protestant translation owes much to Saadia Gaon's Arabic translation – much more than is admitted – the Judeo-Arabic of the Hebrew Bible translation was far more influential than Christian-inflected Arabic. Modern Standard Arabic owes much to the Protestant translation, which revolutionised modern Arabic. The Bible was thus enshrined as part of the modern Arabic sensibility and became an essential component of the Arabic renaissance. Indeed, since many of the modern Arab poets were Christians, and since their Arabic was highly shaped by the new translation, modern Arabic is infused with biblical language. The presence of Arabs in the new state of Israel also meant that one now had native speakers of Hebrew who are Arabs. Mahmoud Darwish, one of the most famous modern Arab writers, spoke and read Hebrew as a native tongue and publicly admitted the influence of the Hebrew Bible on his poetry.

In the religious sphere, the Muslims started to publish the medieval polemical literature on the Hebrew Bible. Meanwhile, they also developed new polemical strategies against the Bible, most significantly the deployment of the findings of h gher criticism, to cast doubt on the integrity of the Hebrew Bible.[29] But there were also more serious attempts to come to terms with the Bible as Scripture. Indeed, in the nineteenth century we witness the first attempt by a Muslim to give a full commentary on the Bible. Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–98) was a Muslim Indian intellectual who witnessed an increasingly bitter polemical war between Muslims and Christian missionaries in India. Part of his response to this charged atmosphere was an attempt to come to terms with the origins of the Christian faith through a thorough investigation of the Bible. The first section of his project was a commentary on the Hebrew Bible.[30] He confirmed the integrity of the text of the Hebrew Bible, insisting on its prophetic origins and rejecting the common understanding of the notion of *taḥrīf* ('falsification'). He also attempted to answer the question of 'how should Muslims understand their belief in prophetic revelation so that full justice be done to the superiority of the Qur'ānic revelation and the truths of pre-Islamic revelations at the same time?'[31] The answers of Sayyid Ahmad Khan betray an honest attempt to keep a coherent Islamic outlook while according the Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity

their religious validity. In this regard, he is continuing an old Islamic question: How is the Qur'an divine in light of the precedence of the Hebrew Bible?

NOTES

1 All translations of the Qur'an are from M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Oxford University Press, 2004). The classical study on the parallels between the Bible and the Qur'an is Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Hildesheim, Germany: G. Olms, 1988, reprint of 1931 ed.).

2 See Walid A. Saleh, 'What if You Refuse, When Ordered to Fight? King Saul (Ṭālūt) in the Qur'ān and Post-Quranic Literature', in *Saul in Story and Tradition*, ed. by Carl S. Ehrlich (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 261–83.

3 Rudi Paret, *Mohammed und der Koran* (Stuttgart, Germany: W. Kohlhammer, 1991), 99.

4 On the Qur'an as the end of a long process of development of the notion of Scripture in the Near East, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'Scripture as Form and Concept: Their Emergence for the Western World', in *Rethinking Scripture*, ed. by Miriam Levering (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 29–57.

5 See the articles in *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'ān*, ed. by Stefan Wild (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 2006).

6 This ambivalence is also reflected in the prophetic *hadith* literature; see M. J. Kister, 'Ḥaddithū 'an banī isrā'īla wa-lā ḥaraja: A Study of an Early Tradition', *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): 215–39.

7 On these positions, see Walid A. Saleh, 'A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist: Al-Biqā'ī and His Defense of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qur'ān', *Speculum* 83 (2008): 629–54, 649.

8 On this formulation, the suspension of judgement on the Bible, see ibid., 646.

9 See Camilla Adang, 'A Fourth/Tenth Century Tunisian Muftī on the Sanctity of the Torah of Moses', in *The Intertwined Worlds of Islam: Essays in Memory of Hava Lazarus-Yafeh* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2002): vii–xxxiv.

10 Ibid., xvi.

11 See Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

12 An example of this literature with an extensive bibliography is Roberto Tottoli, *The Stories of the Prophets by Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī: Edited with an Introduction and Notes* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2003). See also Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (University of Chicago Press, 1993).

13 For bibliography, see John C. Reeves, ed., *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

14 For an example in English of this literature, see *Lives of the Prophets as Recounted by al-Thaʿlabī*, trans. and annotated by William M. Brinner (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2002).
15 See Speyer, *Erzählungen*, 147–51. See also the works of Tottoli, *Stories of the Prophets*.
16 See S. P. Stetkevych, 'Sarah and the Hyena: Laughter, Menstruation, and the Genesis of a Double-Entendre', *History of Religion* 35 (1996): 13, 41.
17 On this exegete, see Walid A. Saleh, 'A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist', *Speculum* 83(3) (2008): 629–54.
18 See al-Biqāʿī, *Naẓm al-durar* (India, 1976), v. 9:331.
19 See Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), and, more recently, Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1996).
20 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, xi.
21 Ibid., 19.
22 The literature on Ibn Ḥazm is immense; there is the classic work by M. Asin Palacios, *Abenházam de Córdoba y su historia critica de las ideas religiosas*, 5 vols. (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1927–32). See also Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 59–69, where more literature is cited.
23 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 34.
24 Ibid., 41–7.
25 Ibid., 68.
26 See Walid A. Saleh, ' "Sublime in its Style, Exquisite in its Tenderness": The Hebrew Bible Quotations in al-Biqāʿī's Qur'ān Commentary', in *Adaptations and Innovations*, ed. by Y. Tzvi Langermann and Josef Stern (Paris: Peeters, 2007), 333–4.
27 See now the treatise and the history of the controversy, Walid A. Saleh, *In Defence of the Bible: A Critical Edition and an Introduction to al-Biqāʿī's Bible Treatise* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2008).
28 For the Hebrew Bible quotations in his Qur'an commentary, see Saleh, '"Sublime in its Style."'
29 For an example of such a method, see Mohammad Abu-Hamdiyyah, *The Qur'ān: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000).
30 On the life and works of Khan, see Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1978).
31 Ibid., 85.

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